



Pham Minh Chau

We tried many times to escape from Vietnam. My husband had been a soldier with the South. The new government put him in gaol once. I was 18 and at university when the South fell in 1975. I was not allowed to finish my studies or to work. Later I worked as a primary teacher for six years. I also worked as something like a buyer and seller of second hand goods. But there was no future there, my family was not accepted by the government.

We were desperate to escape. Once we got on a boat, but after only two hours out at sea the conditions got too dangerous so we turned back. My husband and oldest daughter got out eventually in 1986. I would have been on the boat too but I gave birth to our second daughter three days after he left. Eventually he reached Malaysia, he got a message to a relative in Perth and after one month I heard they were OK. He was accepted as a refugee in Australia and got a home in the Derby St flats. He now works as a cabinetmaker.

I made it to Australia and settled in Kensington with him in 1990. I found the culture was different to that back home. People did not talk as much, they lived behind their closed doors. Though there are very friendly old people around us now.

In Vietnam the church was open all the time and you could see the priest whenever you wanted. Of course it was hard to communicate with people in general. I thought it was strange that some people only go to church at Christmas and Easter. It was important for us to go every week. Sometimes too I think people are not as polite as

we were back home.

I am a bit shy so I do not get involved in very much, but I was on the Parish Council at Holy Rosary for a few meetings, but I found it hard to pick up what people were saying.

Sr Helen was important for us in joining in with the parish.

As regards Australian culture I have taught my children that it is OK to fit in with somethings that Australians do, but there are other things that they shouldn't.

The two youngest children are still at Holy Rosary. I went to a Catholic school back in Vietnam too.

Vietnamese Catholics take a Christian name that they use for special occasions. St Therese's is the name I took, and it is my second daughter's name too. When her relics were out here earlier this year I went to pray with them both at Keilor Downs and Kew. She was a young female saint and so I pray to her for my daughters, that they are kept safe and good. I ask her for many things.

When we grow old, when my young boy is ready, my husband and I think we will go and live in Vietnam, in Saigon. Though many people in Vietnam now only live for money, we do not want to be lonely in our old age. We had an aunty out here who was very lonely and stayed in her house all the time. It will be easier to communicate over there.



From Left: Le-Pham Phuong-Nghi, Pham Minh Thu, Le-Pham Y Nhi, Le-Pham Y Anh, Le-Pham Phuong-Nhan, Pham Minh Chau and Le Quang Dung