

"A BOOK TO BREAK YOUR HEART AND HEAL IT."

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GLEN PARK

Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *The Sympathizer*

THE BEST WE COULD DO



AN ILLUSTRATED MEMOIR

THI BUI

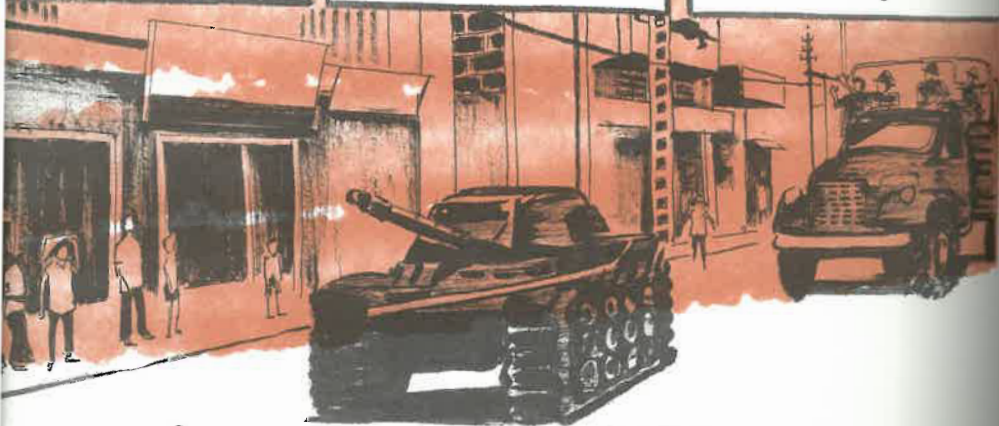
The American version of this story is one of myth with Vietnamese war, corruption, and ineptitude...



...South Vietnamese soldiers abandoning their uniforms in the street...



...Americans crying at their wasted efforts to save a country not worth saving.



... Communist forces entered Sai Gon without a fight, and no blood was shed.

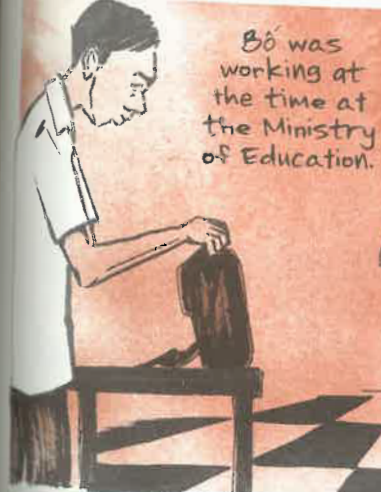
Perhaps Dương Văn Minh's surrender saved my life.

For one week, the radio played a repeating loop of announcements about various Communist victories in battle.



And then...

CRACKLE
ALL GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES ARE TO REPORT TO WORK TOMORROW MORNING.



Bố was working at the time at the Ministry of Education.

Mã was a teacher at the local high school.

Mã, why are you wearing PAJAMAS and not your Áo DÀI?



I don't want to stand out.

Mind your sister and your great-grandma.



I still don't get why Mã can't dress up.

Because they could arrest her and take her AWAY, that's why!





Treating their own people like criminals, no wonder people hated them!



Aren't you being too extreme?

They were just trying to protect the city.



But you didn't like that general either!

No.



Wait. Does he hate the general or is he defending him?

Did he like Communism or not?



Hmm...
...was this the SAME general in that famous 'Saigon Execution' photo?



The contradiction in my father's stories troubled me for a long time.

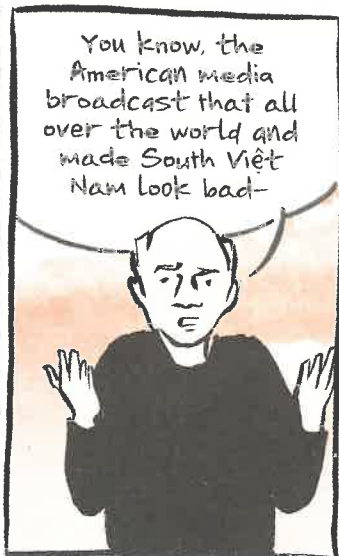


But so did the oversimplifications and stereotypes in American versions of the Vietnam War.

GOOD GUYS



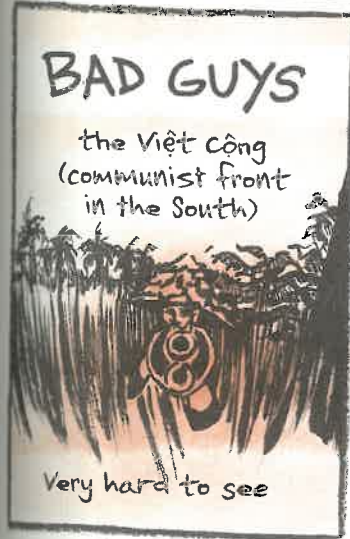
one where he shoots a Việt cong prisoner? Yes.



You know, the American media broadcast that all over the world and made South Việt Nam look bad-



-but no one talks about how that same Việt cong, just hours before, had murdered an entire family in their home!



BAD GUYS

the Việt cong (communist front in the South)

Very hard to see



SOUTH THE VIETNAMESE

Bar girls and hookers

Corrupt leaders

Kids looking for handouts

Small effete men

Papa-san

(American man)

was surprised to learn that Eddie Adams, the American photographer who won a Pulitzer Prize in 1969 for that famous picture, didn't think he deserved it.



Like my father, he knew the context of the shooting.



"Saigon Execution" is credited with turning popular opinion in America against the war.

I think a lot of Americans forget that for the Vietnamese...



Regretting the damage that his photograph did to the general...



and that it was absent from the photograph itself.



...Adams located him many years later in America.

the war continued,



whether America was involved or not.



the former general, like my parents and so many immigrants, as in a state fallen from grace-



-working behind the counter in a pizzeria in Virginia.



For my parents, there was a rocket that barely missed their house...



...and killed a neighbor...



...best friends and students killed in combat...



quent periods of separation...



Hà Tiên is too dangerous. Take the kids back to Sài Gòn.

...the constant stress of money...

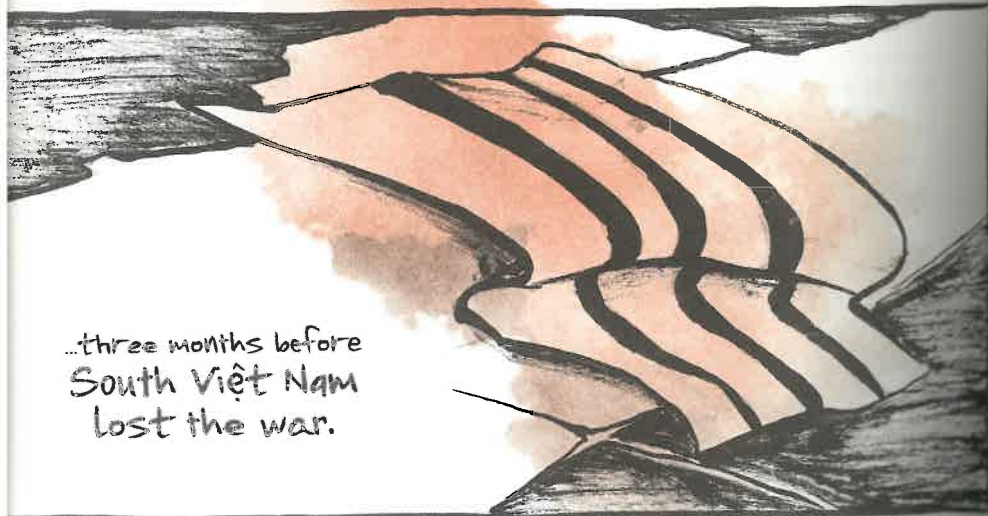


...the baby
at died in
ne womb...



...and then my arrival...

...three months before
South Việt Nam
lost the war.



HEROES AND LOSERS

There is no single story of that day, April 30, 1975.



In Việt Nam today, among the victors, it is called **LIBERATION DAY.**



Overseas, among expats like my parents, it is remembered as **THE DAY WE LOST OUR COUNTRY.**

This is the image that most people know of the fall of Sài Gòn.



This is what it was like for my parents.

JANUARY 1975



How's the baby?

A dream. She sleeps, wakes up to eat, and then goes right back to sleep again!

THE NORTH VIETNAMESE HAVE TAKEN BAN ME THUOT.

THE SOUTH IS WITHDRAWING FROM THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS. RESIDENTS ARE ADVISED TO VACUATE IMMEDIATELY.

MARCH 1975



Help, sir!

Please, sir, we've lost our homes.

People from the Central Highlands flooded into the city, sleeping in the streets.

APRIL 1975

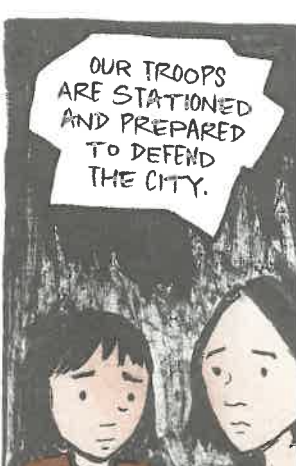
PRESIDENT THIEU HAS FLED THE COUNTRY.



IN CAMBODIA, THE COMMUNIST KHMER ROUGE HAVE TAKEN THE CAPITAL AND FORCED RESIDENTS INTO LABOR CAMPS.



COMMUNIST FORCES ARE APPROACHING SAI GON.



OUR TROOPS ARE STATIONED AND PREPARED TO DEFEND THE CITY.



CRACKLE

VICE PRESIDENT HUONG HAS RESIGNED.

LEAVING THE OFFICE TO GENERAL DUONG VAN MINH.



The 1968 massacre in Hue was still on our minds.

People said Sài Gòn would become a sea of BLOOD.

We can't run with a three-month-old BABY!

My parents packed bags anyway...

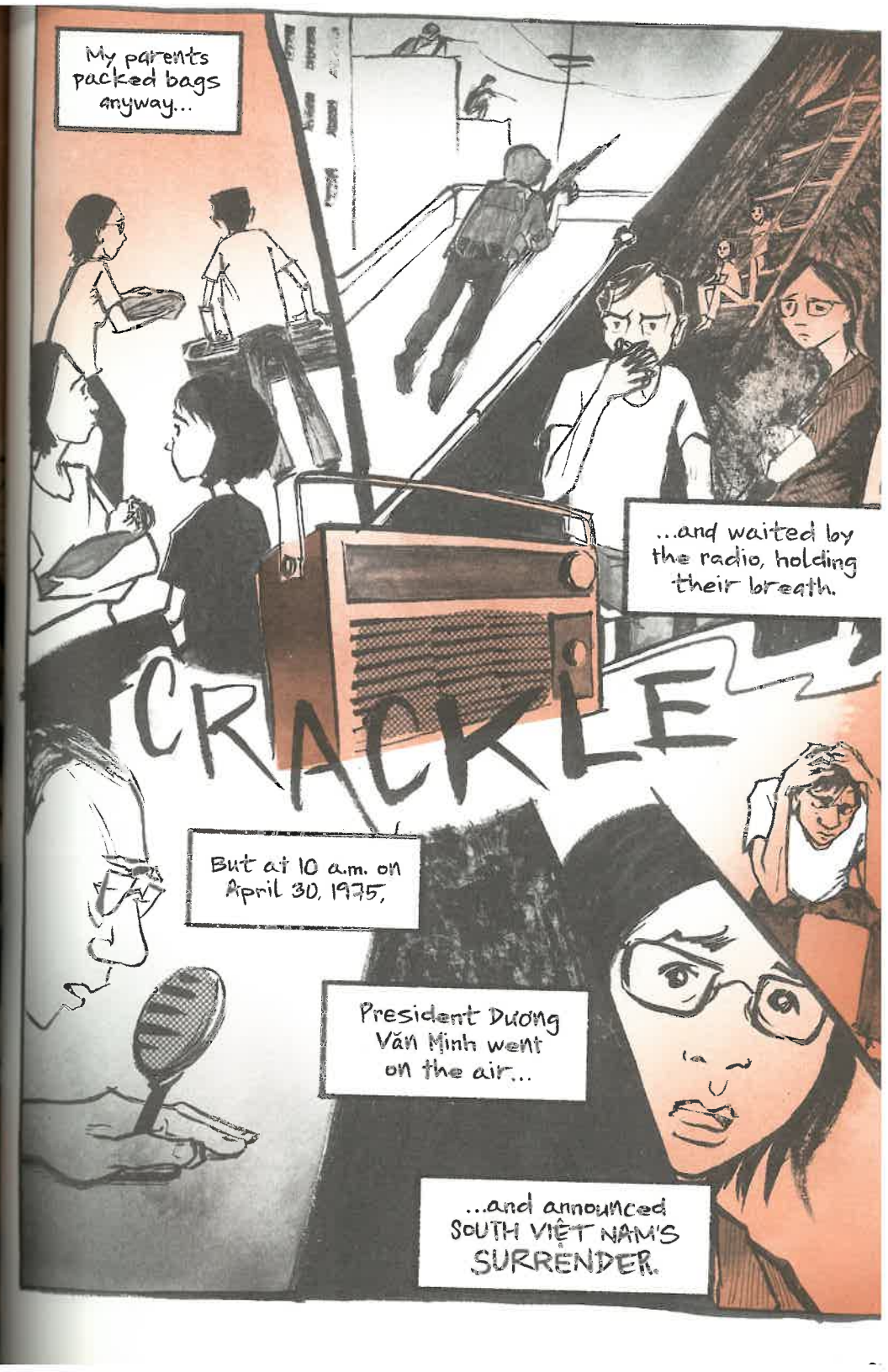
...and waited by the radio, holding their breath.

But at 10 a.m. on April 30, 1975,

President Dương Văn Minh went on the air...

...and announced SOUTH VIET NAM'S SURRENDER.

CRACKLE



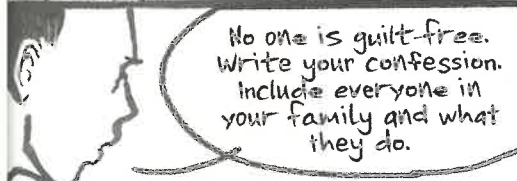
At work-



We need you to explain how this ministry works.
Are you some kind of spy?

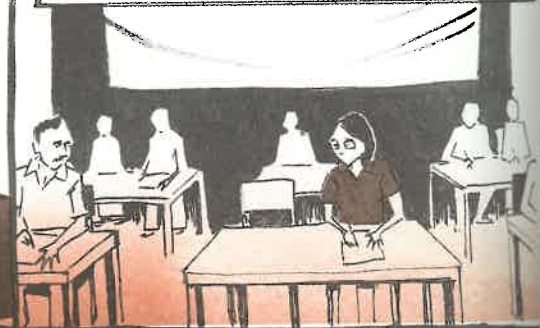


You'll be learning a new curriculum to teach.



No one is guilt-free. Write your confession. Include everyone in your family and what they do.

Over the next months, people disappeared. No one could be sure whether they were in prison or had managed to flee the country.



Bô's grandmother was always worried.

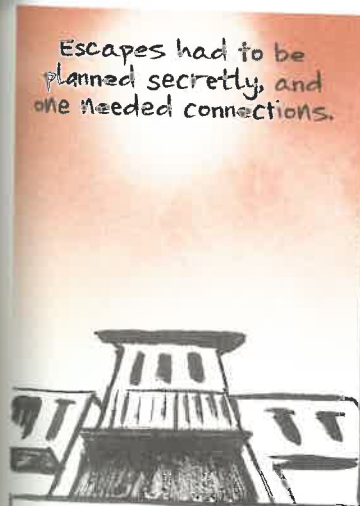
My parents began to talk of escape.



Don't forget what they did during the LAND REFORMS!



My friend Thu knows someone who has a boat.



Escapes had to be planned secretly, and one needed connections.



Trip's off. I'm so sorry, Na



The boat owner got caught.



You're still breast-feeding her.



I have to. Milk costs four times what it used to



There's something else that worries me.



Our next-door neighbor is spying on us.



He mentioned might be getting paid a visit so