

"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

Where did your grandparents fit into the big picture?



We had lived under French domination for a hundred years.



"There were many people like them who had gotten used to living with the French."



"A new regime that was both NATIONALIST and COMMUNIST, they had to KILL all those people who were friends of the French."



"The communists, they called those things SACRIFICES."



And you called them Grandmother and Grandfather.

Every casualty in war is someone's grandmother, grandfather, mother, father, brother, sister, child, lover.



In the decade of the First Indochina War, while my parents were still children learning their place in the world...

...an estimated 94,000 French soldiers died trying to reclaim France's colony.

Three to four times as many Vietnamese died fighting them or running away from them.



This was the human cost of ending France's colonial rule in Southeast Asia...



...and winning Viet Nam's independence.



"But the month I spent in the communist North had a very different effect on me."



"It was true that the Việt Minh had won independence by winning the WAR."



"But the new society I dreamed of didn't EXIST."



"Here there was no freedom of thought, no allowance for individuality."



"I was fourteen. Sài Gòn represented a whole new world of possibility to me."



"Who would choose a world that had become so narrow, so poor and gray?"



"The land reforms had already begun—"



"—wait, what were the land reforms?"



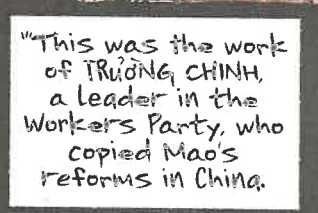
"They were a process of reorganizing the Society."



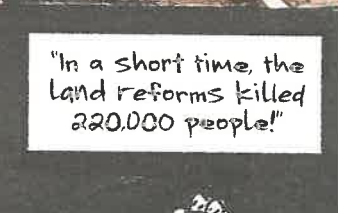
"They began to weed out all the landowners..."



"...and killed them, or beat and tortured them."



"This was the work of TRUONG CHINH, a leader in the Workers Party, who copied Mao's reforms in China."



"In a short time, the land reforms killed 220,000 people!"

"When the land reform came to Lôi Động, all the property that belonged to my grandmother was seized."



"If we had been there, we would have been killed."



"I said good-bye to my father, letting him think I'd join him soon."



"But in my gut, I'd already said good-bye to him forever."



"As soon as I got home, my grandfather and I started packing."