

START

EMILY

Vinh, why do so many people call the city Saigon? The official name is Ho Chi Minh City, isn't it?

VINH

Yes. The name is Ho Chi Minh City, but when we talk among ourselves we call it Saigon.

(VINH looks around to see if anyone might be listening.)

I am going to be honest with you. We don't like to acknowledge our government. Life has not been good for us under communist rule. We who lived through the war do not like to honor Ho Chi Minh. When you look around Saigon, you can see there is a lot of money. The government and the people who work for the government are rich, but the majority of the people are poor.

(VINH points across the street.)

Across the street is the American Embassy.

EMILY

Why are there so many people lined up outside?

VINH

These people line up every day to get visas to go to America. They have to wait until their number is called, and they don't know what day that will be. Some people show up every day for a month or more before it is their turn.

(EMILY raises her phone to take a picture but VINH stops her)

No Emily! Do not take a picture — we will get in trouble. The government does not want to show how many people want to go to America.

(EMILY puts her phone down and VINH points to a building in the distance)

See the hotel over there, the one that is taller than the others? That is the Pittman building where a helicopter evacuated the last of the American personnel at the end of the war, in 1975.

EMILY

I thought the helicopter left from the roof of the American Embassy?

VINH

(Laughing)

My American travelers all say the same thing — it is not true.

(More seriously)

Look at the pictures of that evacuation and you will see that building there. The Americans were avoiding the many South Vietnamese that were waiting at the Embassy. Those who had helped the American army would be punished by the new government — they wanted to be airlifted along with the Americans. Helicopters evacuated all the people they could from the Embassy, but the very last helicopter left from that building over there. One heroic American helped Vietnamese load on the last helicopter along with the Americans, but more waited and no helicopter came for them. Hundreds of South Vietnamese citizens were killed by the Communist

VINH(CONT)

government after the Americans left. *(Beat)* We will now go to the historic Hotel Continental. We can get a cold drink.

(VINH exits.)

EMILY

(Aside to the audience)

Vinh wanted to tell me all about the American journalists that hung out here during the war. I just wanted a beer. — Whew, I needed one.

(VINH enters with two bottles, one beer and one soda. He carries them to a table, and looks around to see who might be watching them. After EMILY seats herself at the table, VINH sits down and speaks in a hush.)

VINH

We have to be careful what we say. I never know when I am being watched. If they think I am saying something to you against the government I could lose my guide license.

EMILY

I have to tell you, Vinh, it's upsetting to hear the war called "the American War". We Americans all think our country was here to help you.

VINH

We have been at war for centuries. First we fought the Japanese, and then for a time we were fighting France for control of our country. In 1954 we defeated France and a **temporary** division of Vietnam was put in place by the Geneva Convention. It was not our idea to divide our country. The North was taken over by the communists and led by Ho Chi Minh. Some of the people in the North escaped to South Vietnam to be with their families, but some did not. The division of our country was not good, and Ho Chi Minh wanted to unite the people again. It was the Americans who wanted the division of Vietnam continued in order to stop the communists — not everyone was happy to have them here.

CRAIG

"The people we are fighting for aren't even willing to cooperate with us. There are Vietnamese women who clean our hooches during the day, and carry bombs for the Vietcong at night. My hooch maid is VC — they keep tabs on her."

VINH

The majority of the country believed the communists would help us win independence from the Americans and from the government in South Vietnam just as they had helped us win independence from the French in 1954. The end of the war meant that the killing would stop.

(VINH looks around the room again and speaks in a hush.)

Three million Vietnamese died during the American War — two million of them were civilians. We wanted no more killing.

END