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7 May 2017
The Touch

...In that touch, I see Jim as a five-year-old boy in Vietnam; a child who was named after and worshipped his father, a retired American Soldier. Jim's father, Major James Foxley, Sr. had spent years in Vietnam, advising the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (South) in its fight against the communist-backed People's Army of Vietnam (North). While serving there, Major James Foxley, Sr., became enamored of the verdant, lush Vietnamese countryside and its polite, exquisite people. He decided to stay there and married a beautiful, young Vietnamese girl named Linda Nguyen². But the war, and America's support ended in 1975, bringing death and destruction to Saigon, where Jim was growing up. That was a year of change for young Jim. Not only would death and destruction affect his country and force him to flee to the United States, it would touch him personally as well. His father died of a heart attack just before the fall of Saigon.

In Jim's touch, I see Jim in 1976. Although he came with his mother, grandmother and three sisters to America by aircraft, I see his small face among two million boat people from Vietnam and Cambodia who floated in small watercraft over 12,000 miles of ocean to reach American shores. I see Jim and his family move into a small Southern New Jersey town called Maple Shade where a stone memorial stands at the end of Main Street honoring the war dead.

According to the website of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund three young men from Maple Shade, New Jersey lost their lives during the Vietnam conflict, all between 1967 to 1970. In 1970, the town census was 16,464; Maple Shade was a very small town where people knew each other. The three young men, all born between 1945 and '47, would have attended the same high school. Perhaps the dead Soldiers had written home and told their friends and families about their impressions of the Vietnam War and its people. The dead Soldiers may have mentioned that U.S. Soldiers called the enemy North Vietnamese "gooks," that the Vietnamese people ate rice on the dirt floors of their huts, or that it was hard to discern between friend and foe because they all "looked alike." Along with information from letters home from the front, people in Maple Shade would have gotten information about the Vietnam War and Vietnamese people from watching the nightly news. They would start to see more and more footage about Vietnamese refugees.

Disclaimer: Except for my own, I have changed the names of the non-famous people in the above account.

Excerpt - Pending publication