NYTimes MAY 5 1975

Reminders

By Anthony Lewis

SALT LAKE CITY—In the distance the new church office building, a characterless white shaft, loomed over the pioneer baroque of the Mormon Temple. We are talking about the Mormon values of thrift and self-reliance—essentially unchanged since Brigham Young saw the great valley and said "This is the place"—when the waitress came to take the orders for lunch.

She was a young Asian woman, delicate, wide-eyed, with a soft accented voice and a manner so timid that she seemed almost frightened. And when she was asked, it turned out that she was frightened: for her family in Saigon.

"My dad could be killed right away," she said. "He was the head of the ——— Department in the Government. The Communists know everyone who worked for the Government, and they have a list of everyone who had more than $6,000 in a bank account.

"I telephoned my father four days before the Communists came to Saigon. He said the family were trying to get out. He brought all the right papers to the American Embassy, but a man there asked him for $10,000."

An American asked for the money? "Yes, I was surprised, too, but I told him to pay.

"Two days later I telephoned again, and there was no answer. It was 4 o'clock in the morning there, and no answer. I just pray that they had already left. But I have heard nothing."

Nguyen Thi Ha, as we can call her, is one of nine children, all girls. A few years ago her father's "American supervisor," as she put it, a man from Casper, Wyo., arranged for her oldest sister and her to go to a junior college in Casper. She moved to the University of Utah, where she is studying chemical engineering.

Why was she so afraid of the Communists?

"On television I saw downtown in Hanoi, and the women were all dressed the same, like in China. And an American major here, who was 12 years in Vietnam, told me the other day that in Phan Rang the Communists killed 3,000 people."

Then, in the way it so often happens in conversation with Vietnamese, she said she had family on the other side.

"I was born in Hanoi," she said, "in 1949. In 1964 the family moved South. My dad's Buddhist, my mom's Catholic, they were afraid of Communists. You know our grandparents are still in North Vietnam. We used to be able to send small cards to them, but that stopped.

"If the Communists don't kill my dad, he wouldn't want to leave. It's his country, he's worked there all his life. Here he would have to start everything from the beginning. But if they would kill him. . . ."

Her eyes blinked back tears. She said she knew a Vietnamese man in Salt Lake City whose wife had just made it out of Saigon—by paying $4,000 to someone in the American Embassy.

"People got out by friends or influence or money," she said. There was no detectable bitterness in her voice.

In Nguyen Thi Ha's story are the confusions, moral and political, that confront us Americans at the end of our Vietnam adventure. Did the deserving people get out of Saigon before the fall? Were those who got out really in danger? Might they have a

ABROAD AT HOME

better life in their own country, even under the Communists? Can they adjust in America?

Traveling across the United States, one feels doubts and resentments about the Vietnamese refugees everywhere. A Chicago Tribune headline says, "Exiles Airlift: It's Who You Know, or Are." In San Francisco a U.S. official is quoted as saying that 5,000 of the refugees may be "hired killers" from the C.I.A.'s Phoenix program. There are stories about refugees laden with gold and jewels.

Well, it is undoubtedly true that not all the refugees are sympathetic characters. Many bribed or bulled their way to the refugee camps. And, yes, the refugees are entering this country at a difficult time. But the short answer is that what happened in South Vietnam was our responsibility right down to the end, and we must bear it. William L. Colby and his colleagues enlisted those Vietnamese in the Phoenix program to kill suspected Communists among their countrymen. We built the jails and trained the jailers. And at the end it was the contemptible decision of our high officials to delay the evacuation that caused much of the disastrous confusion over who got out, and how.

Settling the refugees will cost less than we spent this fiscal year on the futile policy of sending arms to a South Vietnam that could not stand on its own. In the long run many of the refugees may want to return to Vietnam. But that must be their choice, and it can come only after a difficult transition in Saigon. For us to force the choice now would be a final American shame in Vietnam. We shall have to live with the reminders, encountered all over this country, of Nguyen Thi Ha and others like her.