



Thought Leadership Corner

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Thoughts on Doing Good this Season

Bell-bottoms, big hair, the BeeGees, and lava lamps—the 70’s! It was a time of cultural explosion when no one would judge you for having a pet rock in America. For my family, it was a more grim reality. For over a decade, my family shed blood and worked to build a fledgling democracy in South Vietnam. But as North Vietnamese tanks rolled and soldiers encircled Saigon in April of 1975, my father’s family took to the fire-plumed skies while my mother’s family took to the unforgiving seas. Days later, after the last yellow and red-striped flag of the South Vietnam Republic was pulled down, our country of South Vietnam was erased. Hundreds of thousands fleeing were swallowed by the sea. Those left behind were imprisoned in concentration camps. My parents became refugees—because anywhere else was safer than home.

At a time when many Americans wanted nothing more to do with Vietnam (and with refugees like my family serving as constant reminders of the war), then-President Ford resisted anti-refugee sentiments and established the Special Interagency Task Force for Indochina Refugees to resettle 130,000 Vietnam War refugees. When my father first resettled in Arkansas and my mother in Kansas, there were no pet rocks or lava lamps waiting for them. But dozens of amazing resettlement organizations came to aid refugee families like my own with the promise that life would be safer and better.

When I learned that New American Pathways needed help finding gifts for refugee families, my thoughts traveled to my own family’s resettlement almost 43 years ago. Through the Georgia Asian Pacific American Bar Association and with the help of dear friends and my law firm Finnegan, Henderson, Farabow, Garrett & Dunner, LLP, we gathered toys, winter clothes, and hygiene products to make this holiday a good one for families.

As the child of Vietnam War refugees and as an American, the refugee story is a personal one. To me, giving isn’t just a way to help those less fortunate—it’s also an act of recognizing and affirming another’s full humanity. During this holiday, my hope is that we remember that refugees are smart, quirky, funny, and have faults like the rest of us. They have crushes, heartbreaks, dreams for the future, and have the agency to pursue those dreams.

In giving, my hope is that if you see someone doing good, you may want to do good too. And if we encourage each other to do good, we can create a lasting ripple effect that can touch lives for years to come. Who knows? Maybe another child of refugees will be inspired 43 years later.