Finding a New Life in *The Best We Could Do*

*The Best We Could Do* is a graphic novel book written by Thi Bui, a refugee who became an immigrant to America. Thi Bui and her family escaped from Vietnam in 1978 with other people in a fishing boat trying to find a better future in America. Thi Bui was three years old when she immigrated to United States with her family. She did not even know what was going on. It is a great graphic novel because it teaches us about Vietnamese immigrants and refugees and how people risked their life to arrive to America. I loved this novel because I learned some of the conditions in which refugees lived in while seeking asylum and how the war forced Vietnamese people to immigrate to America. One of the things that most impacted me was how children did not know what was happening; they just were victims of the Vietnamese War. *The Best We Could Do* shows us the difficulties of be an immigrant and refugee and how no future in Vietnam forced Bui's family to make a difficult journey to America. They become refugees where they lived difficult times in the asylum and it was hard to fit in their new homeland in which Bui grew up feeling that she had lost her home country.

Bui in *The Best We Could Do* shows us that after the Vietnam War her father felt that there was no a future for him and his family. He says, “There’s no future here. Even my kids won’t be able to get more than a sixth-grade education” (Bui 222). Bui shows us that her father felt depressed when he look that there was not a future in Vietnam and his children could not get a higher education. He felt that the war had caused a lot of damage in his country and his family
were in danger with the new type of government. One article states, “Political and economic
instability under the new communist government led to a migration unprecedented in Vietnam”
(Wikipedia). After the war of Vietnam in 1975, Vietnamese people faced a lot of changes in
their country with the new communist government, and it was getting harder to survive because
the economy got worse and worse. Bui’s parents at that time were facing a hard economic
situation. There were times that they did not even have money to buy food. When Bui’s father
looked at himself in this situation, he felt that he and his family did not have a future in Vietnam.
The war caused so much damage in Vietnam that lead Bo and his family to escape.

*The Best We Could Do* show us a difficult journey that Bui and her family made to could
arrive to Malaysia. One article states, “Bui was three years old when she, her parents, and her
siblings left South Vietnam by boat and eventually made their way to the United States”
(Oatman). Bui was a little girl that did not even know what was going on when she left her
home country with her family trying to find a better future. Bui shows us on page 236 an
illustration in which we can appreciate in the left top panel a black and white background. Bui is
lying down on her mother’s shoulder. Ma and Bui are illustrated in white and black colors. We
can see how Ma and Bui looked so tired and sad. The black color that Bui used to illustrate this
image transmit to us sadness and the hard moments that Bui and her family faced during their
journey, but on the other hand, I feel the white color that she use represent hope for them, to find
a better life after a long journey. They made a long
journey to arrive to Malaysia in the inside bottom of
the fishing boat. Everybody was so tired but Ma
looked more tired than anybody else. Ma says, “On
the third day-Oof!” (Bui 250). Ma expresses to us how she already felt so tired on the third day.
She was eight months pregnant when she escaped with her family in the fishing boat in which there was not enough room to move because there was many people in the boat. We can see how people was sitting so close one next to the other to be able to fit in the boat. Ma was walking between them (Bui 250). Escape to Malaysia was the best option that Bui’s family found and they became refugees in America.

Bui shows us the difficulties of being a refugee in America with her family and thousands of Vietnamese people. She says, “A refugee camp is a bottleneck of people seeking a new home” (Bui 268). Bui express to us how the camp for refugees was a place for people who were trying to find a new home to start a new life in which they could have a better future. We can see on page 268 on the top panel an orange and black background with many tent around in which Vietnamese refugees lived during they were in the asylum. Bui’s family and her mother’s brother and family shared one tent in which they lived until they could find a new home. Natalie says, “There were a lot of lines in this book that stuck me, being a daughter of Vietnamese refugees” (Bui, Natalie). Natalie express to us that she found out that being a daughter of refugee parents was not easy because they went through a lot of struggles, and Bui was a little girl when she had to became a refugee with her sisters and parents in which, “Daily life was not easy” (Bui 274). Bui express to us how their daily life while seeking asylum was not easy. Although they were far away from Vietnam, they still faced many struggles; they had to go to the ditches dug to get water, had to boil their water to can drink it, had to go to the dwindling forest around the camp to get wood to can boil their water and cook their own food, and they did not have a proper restroom in the camp. Bui’s father always took her and her sister to the dwindling forest to use it as restroom. Could you imagine yourselves living in this situation? Being a refugee was not easy but it was not the only struggle that she had to face also she had a difficult time trying to fit in.
In addition to the difficulties of being a refugee, Bui shows us that it is hard to fit into a new homeland with a new society. She says, “We probably embarrassed them with our fresh-off-the-boat appearance” (Bui 285). Bui expresses how she felt that embarrassed her cousins with their appearance of Vietnamese refugees when they arrive to her aunt’s house in Chicago and her cousins did not look at them so well. It made her feel that did not fit in. She says, “When I was a kid it was hard to not fit in. The simple things that you just don’t want to have happen to you as a kid” (Oatman). Bui in this article expresses to us that it was hard to fit in. She shows it in the bottom panel of page 285. On page 285 we can see how Bui and her sisters are in the front yard of her aunt’s house and one of her cousin is sitting at one side of the stairs looking to them. Bich is sitting on the stairs. She is holding a box of cereals with her left hand during she was eating cereals with her right hand. Her cousin said to her, “Don’t be such a REFUGEE! Eat it in a bowl with some MILK!” (Bui 285). For Bui it was one of many things that she and her sister had to face to could fit into their new society that was different; in which there was different people, culture, language, values, etc. from Vietnam. For them was hard to fit in and even more difficult it was when people called them refugees just by the way they eat. For us our culture looks normal but for other people our culture might look as something abnormal, and it was what happen to Bich, for her it was normal to eat cereals from the box but for her cousin it was not normal. Bui and her sister like other immigrants experienced a hard time fitting in but one of the things that always made Bui’s life more difficult was the feeling that she had lost a country.

Bui shows us that growing up in a new homeland always made her feel that she had lost her home country. She always felt the necessity to fill that hole in her life. She says, “And that if I could see Viet Nam as a real place, and not a symbol of something lost…” (Bui 36). Bui
showed us how she was trying to see Vietnam as a real country in which there was life. She wanted to see Vietnam as something alive and not only as a symbol or something lost in her life that made her feel incomplete. She says, “I always imagine there’s a hole in my chest the shape of Vietnam. And there were times that the displacement felt like the wind blowing through” (Oatman). In this article Bui explains to us how she felt incomplete and on page 36 she showed us how she Imaging herself, in an orange and white background we can see Bui’s body with a hole in her chest that goes through her back with the shape of Vietnam. Through this image we can see how Bui felt incomplete like if she was a puzzle, and she only need a small piece to fill that hole in her chest to be able to have a full life in which she would not felt Vietnam as something lost. She says, “I grew up with a sense of loss a country that should have been mine but wasn’t” (Oatman). Bui expressed to us how she grew up feeling that had lost a country that never belonged to her. She only was a part of Vietnam because born in it. She had to learn to see Vietnam as a real country and not as something lost, to can fill that hole in her life that made she felt incomplete.

Being an immigrant is not easy but it is more difficult when you were a refugee and lived difficult moments in the asylum. Bui’s father felt that there was not a future in Vietnam, so he decided to escape from Vietnam to Malaysia facing a difficult journey with his family and later on become refugees in America. For Bui and her sister being an immigrant and refugee was difficult because they had a hard time fitting into their new society and Bui grew up feeling that had lost a country. Bui teach us that people who immigrate to this country is for one reason and most of the times they come here trying to find a better life that they could not get in their home country. She shows us that migrate to a new country and be a refugee it is not easy because there a lot of struggles that people have to face. Being an immigrant it is difficult because we have to
go through a whole process of assimilation in which we have to assimilate our new life in a new country. A country that will become our home country and we will become a small part of our origin country.
Work Cited


