|  |
| --- |
| Lyn and Thang were of Vietnamese extraction. As classmates of mine, I often found them in the lunch area together. Both were sister and brother. It could not be mistaken either, as the two shared a close resemblance. We hardly ever spent time in playful amusement. The three of us talked about our school subjects instead. I had not that inclination to study per se. My short attention span prevented me.  Lyn and Thang on the other hand, seemed to enjoy learning. I think it had to do with their culture. Most Asians take education very seriously. If one excels, it is regarded as a sense of honor to the others. Lyn and Thang’s parents were of this mind. Following school, I sometimes walked with my consorts. We would ambulate to their residence. My friends did not live far from Elizabeth. They stayed about a half mile distance from her. There were two ways to get to their place. I normally frequented the shortest route.  I walked down Coldwater Canyon Avenue to Vose St. Turning right, I proceeded to Alcove. I then headed left to Barbra Ann. It was here I entered an alleyway. This narrow passage would lead to Lyn and Thang's neighborhood. I soon came to their domicile. Leaving, I walked back in the same direction. I recall many evenings strolling home. I was frequently absorbed in thought. The quietude of dusk always seemed serene. It made me ponder quite occasionally. I remember the aromatic scent of gardenia blossoms. It pervaded the air.  The aroma was more noticeable in some areas than others. It also produced a soothing effect on me. I had day dreamed not infrequently. White and yellow gardenia flowers slightly slanted; the appearance of their incline as if in a gentle slumber, mystified me. The subtle folds of each were saturated in a soft moonlight. There pedals seemed of brilliant texture. Fleshy veins of nerves woven into strands of vitality—delicately tinted—afresh with blooms. The shrubs that bear them were neatly lined side by side.  Many residents placed these in front of their homes. I would come to Bassest St.; before long, Coldwater Canyon Av. I finally returned to the Coldwater Canyon Apartment Building. Often, I repaired to Lyn and Thang's residence alone. I was quickly en route no sooner had school ended. My companions were with me on few occasions however. The days together, we walked with other elementary students. It was many of us in large numbers.  At Barbra Ann we crossed the alley. The indecent side of the city would come into sight. On the left and right stood chain locked fences. Behind these were concrete walls with graffiti sprawled across them. Gangs spray painted the designation of their turf. Many times rival factions insulted each other. Neighborhood alleyways were a scene of obscenities. My classmates' and I saw profanity of every word imagined. It was vulgar, it was unseemly; it was Los Angeles.  We emerged from the opposite end. Nearby could be seen a maple tree. It especially appeared beautiful during fall. Its leaves bedazzled me. There sugar brown foliage seemed a subtle intricacy. Yellow shades were interspersed among red tones. The appearance was awesome. The tree seemed ablaze with intensity of color. I recollect a light wind blew as the lamina rustled. It showed a blissful season.  Stepping forth, my friends and I came to the street of their residence. On one side there were apartments. Each consisted of two story units. Across from these small brick homes sat a space apart. We walked around a narrow curve. Lyn and Thang's place could be seen to the left. Finally we had come to where they stayed. It was an apartment similar to the ones passed prior. Lyn and Thang would go inside a few minutes. They returned only to go back in an hour later. They never stayed outdoors long; the reason being, their strict religion forbade them.  My friends told me of the Vietnamese tradition. It was one commonly known as Buddhism. The custom had been around for centuries. My schoolmates' parents paid homage to an ancient teacher. He was one whom many Asians believed existed. Siddhartha Gautama Buddha, as the last name suggest, founded the religion. He lived somewhere during the first and second centuries. His birthplace was in Lumbuni India. He died in the city of Kushinager which is a day's travel from his place of origin.  The exact date of his demise is uncertain. Some speculate he may have died in 486 to 483 B.C.E. The word Buddha means awakened or enlightened one. The import of his message was to practice a life of abstinence and meditation. Through this state one can achieve nirvana. There is an antiquated account given of Siddhartha. It of course originated in India. The story explains how he was initially a prince. His father... the king of his domain... attempted to shield his son from the outside world. He did this by keeping him within palace walls.  However, overcome with curiosity, the prince desired to see beyond his royal confines. He asked his own personal charioteer to take him on a series of rides. It was to be through the countryside. During the Buddha's journeys he encountered three individuals. The first one was an aged man, second a sickly one, and third a corpse. The stark realities of old age, disease, and death caused the prince to become depressed. It was not long before a fourth person appeared. He was a wandering ascetic.  At Siddhartha's request, his charioteer disclosed to him how he renounced material possessions. It was this act that released the man from suffering and death. Eventually, the noble ruler decided to think on his experiences. After much reflection, he chose to live an abstemious existence as well. He desired to stop aging; he gave up his wealth and traversed the country. Siddhartha taught people his method of gaining enlightenment; hence Buddhism began.  Lyn and Thang's parents revered their pedagogic guide. Daily they paid devotion to one who was considered an immortal figure. My guess is that they stood before a representation of Buddha while humming and chanting. I am not sure of how the ritual was done however. Lyn and Thang's parents eventually stopped me from coming around. It happened on one particular afternoon. Thang and I were walking to his place. Lyn had not been present with us. I asked him about his religion. I was inquisitive to know.  Thang told me what he understood it to be, or rather what his body of beliefs were as a central point of the Vietnamese custom. I also shared religious tenants I learned. My mother had instilled biblical principles in my brothers and me. She told us of those men of antiquity. The most dominate subject we heard was the Exodus narrative. Therefore, I repeated to Thang what I acquired at my mother's lap. Arriving at his place, Thang quickly walked inside. He usually stayed within a few minutes. He remained much longer this time.  Finally, my schoolmate appeared again. He came out with his parents sentiments relayed by him. “My mother and father don't want you to come back again”, he said. I was confused from the suddenness. “Why” I remember asking. “Because you are a Christian”. Thang then turned and walked back inside. The door closed subsequently. I felt a sense of rejection surge over me. I left that day with a lot of questions.  Elizabeth's mother prevented me interacting with her daughter; the reason being, I was simply black. I somewhat comprehended this harsh reality. Lyn and Thang's parents’ dismissal of me left a mark of obscurity. It was a mystery I could not yet fathom. By adulthood, I could rationalize the motive behind their behavior. I believe my classmates' parents did not want them exposed to Church doctrine. Most Vietnamese likely judged Christianity as corrupt. This attitude might have stemmed back to the Vietnamese War.  I read somewhere there were certain catholic clergy not to mention religious order—the society of Jesus, which instigated this historical conflict. During the 16thcentury, Jesuit missionaries sought conversion of the inhabitants of Asia. The Island of Vietnam was one such place offered the gospel message. At first, proselyzation succeeded slowly. By the 20thcentury however, it met with greater success.  Vietnam was eventually divided into two political rival states: the north and south. The latter had a population made up mostly of Catholics. As for the former, a large percentage was Buddhist. Both became embroiled in a civil war. The President of South Vietnam was Dinh Diem. He initiated a series of repressive acts. They were aimed to prevent Buddhists freedom of worship. It has been speculated that Diem was an avowed Catholic. He intended to unify the whole island under that religion.  Buddhists living in the southern region was harassed daily. Many led mass demonstrations only to be refused audience. Violence finally erupted when nine Buddhists were gunned down. Meanwhile, the northern regime retaliated. Ho Chi Minh, its President, ordered Catholics to be beaten and dragged on buses. Buddhists burned Catholic villages. Large numbers of Christians fled to the south. Minh's objective was to unite Vietnam under the native religion.  Shortly after, the United States entered the war. Many in our country considered it an aimless conflict. However, the struggle may have been one of religious ideology. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) initiated going to war. It was first purposed to the Executive branch. The CIA was founded by William Donovan. Supposingly, he belonged to a secret society called The Knights of Malta. It was also a military order during the Middle Ages. The Catholic Church enlisted it to fight what is known as the Crusades. In 1947 Harriet Truman signed the National Security Act. It was a bill that basically incorporated the CIA into the American Government.  Few authors hold the belief that this entity has roots in Catholicism. It is assumed the organization serves as a tool to achieve world dominion. The Society of Jesus in particular is thought to be its founders. Behind this persuasion is the historical interpretation. The conclusion ultimately is that the Jesuits' control the Central Intelligence Agency. There comes to be much evidence based on this conviction. However, the details should be reserved for a different type of work.  What is a noteworthy fact is that the Vietnam War was also called Spell’s War. Cardinal Spellman, the 43rd Archbishop of New York, held holy office. He went on numerous occasions to the war front. He encouraged The United States soldiers. The commander of the American forces was General Westmoreland. He claimed himself to be an avowed Roman Catholic. Cardinal Spellman oversaw the war in conjunction with him.  At the start, it appeared there were catholic ties throughout this engagement. As stated before, Diem attempted to make Catholicism the national religion. The United States seem to back him to this end. It is well known our country severed friendly relations with the Northern region. There was instead affinity made with the Southern Government. War crimes were supposingly committed by the latter regime under cover of this correlation.  It was reported Diem allowed catholic priests to start their own armies...the purpose for this... to initiate a program of atrocities through massacre and forced conversions. Buddhists were murdered for believing contrary to catholic dogmas. There are many questions that loom in one's mind. First, what were the intentions of these catholic leaders? Is it possible they fomented war for religious reasons? It is debatable. As for the United States was it controlled by a secret order—the Jesuit backed CIA? It would seem a stretch of the imagination.  President Eisenhower's words are very significant in this case. He once stated, “Our country is being controlled by a foreign enemy”. May that foe be catholic fanatics in government? Individuals with an agenda to spread principles opposed to free institutions? Hence, ultimately catholic clergy whom are keepers of the Vatican? There is no way to know for certain.  I did not see Lyn and Thang anymore. I still walked to their neighborhood. Other classmates' stayed in that area. There was Maria, Carol, Marcos, and many others. The vicinity had a large part of Hispanics. I found myself in company with that group the most. It was here I attended my first Mexican party. A young woman decided to celebrate her daughter's birthday. The party was held above from where Lyn and Thang stayed. They did not come as only I knew the reason why. I recall there were food, music, and games.  The one providing the entertainment allowed kids free access inside her apartment. They ran in and out without complaint. Many remained downstairs frolicking. At the height of the party there was donkey suspended in the air. It had material of papier mache. It is commonly called a piñata. Inside this object were hidden fruits, candies, and small gifts. The fabricated paper donkey had been designed to be open by force. As it split, the contents within would fall on the ground.  Initially, the birthday girl's mother blind folded her. She placed a stick in her hand. The child swung, attempting to hit the donkey. She made contact occasionally. The piñata swung back and forth. It still did not break. Finally, the girl gave up. She passed the stick to someone behind her. Girls and boys had taken turns striking the donkey. At last, there was a breach. The treats inside had come to be extracted. Kids scrambled to pick up what was all on the ground.  As the day waned, the crowds of children lessen. They slowly disappeared into their places. The sun blazed brightly in its sphere. It appeared like a circular mirage. I could see this orb of light sliding through an elusive sky. In the distance it hung upon the vast nothingness, staring as though it was across the heavens—its intensity like the penetrating gaze of a Jealous God. Finally, the large ball of fire glided down an opalescent horizon. It slipped into an ocean of twilight. The remaining children withdrew inside. Night had fully settled in. All was completely silent.  I had come to this neighborhood many days. I watched more than a thousand sunsets from this area. It was pitch dark when I began my walk home. I made my way through the alleyway. Looking back in hindsight this was dangerous. I could have been harmed as a child. There were many unstable individuals roaming the streets. At the time my naiveté would not let me see danger. I only wanted to be with friends. There was no thought of the consequences.  I think at this juncture in my life, I began to show signs of defiance. I constantly kept my mother worried. I usually made it in at nine in the late evening. She never liked when I came in past six o clock pm. My mother feared for my safety quite frequently. Yet there was no way she had knowledge of my whereabouts.  It was not due to negligence as some probably will assume. My mother had always showed a great solicitude towards her sons. My brothers and I often found this to be the case. She may have made some mistakes. However, there is no parent who has not made a least one. Furthermore, my mother did all those things worthy of her role. I can never remember a time she slighted me. I manifested rebellious characteristics because of some deep seated issue.  As a child, I felt something missing in my life. I had an insatiable desire to be accepted. I sensed a continual rejection. Already I had been from Elizabeth's mother. Lyn and Thang's parents repulsed me. I somehow felt stigmatized. I felt a premonition of what was to come; I anticipated my reality. My emotions were not yet defined however. Still, I was harassed by feelings of being unwanted. I could not explain the emptiness I felt at times. There were no words to articulate my childish fear. It seemed unfathomable, dreary, and unwelcome. Through the years it would all unfold.  Bottom of Form  Top of Form  Bottom of Form |