

“Finding Home Again”

After raising their four children in France for 14 years, my parents decided to move their family to the U.S. in 1990. They had growing concerns about the lack of educational and professional opportunities in France and felt the U.S. would provide us with a better future. With no job lead and no English language skills, my parents took this leap of faith counting on the support of their American relatives. With this decision, my family left all that we had known.

During our first year in the U.S., we lived with an uncle and his family for a short time. Things started to look up when my parents secured part-time jobs, my father as a janitor and my mother as a food service packaging worker. They also began attending GED classes in the evenings to improve their language skills. My siblings and I were placed in ESL classes together at school. We quickly figured a way to communicate with our new teacher and new friends – by using a French & English dictionary.

Eventually, we moved out of our uncle’s house to a home in the Frogtown neighborhood of St. Paul. That same month, we bought our first car, a used light blue Nissan car that fit the six of us. During our first winter in the U.S., we learned that our little car took longer than usual to warm up. In order to help my father see through the windows, my brother and I took turns scraping the frost build-up inside the car.

Despite the struggles that came with our financial realities and language barriers, my parents also found ways to fill our hearts with joy. I remember the summer nights when my father gathered us together for a midnight road trip to pick up my mother from her 2<sup>nd</sup> shift job. Before we would take off, he would pop in our favorite Hmong singer Bee Vang’s tape. Even though none of us could carry a full conversation in Hmong with our parents, we could not wait to show off our singing talent. My father would smile and beam with pride as we sang in Hmong. It must have encouraged him to hear and see how much we tried to live up to his expectations.

Growing up, I didn’t think I could relate to my parents’ refugee and immigration journey from Laos to France. But as I reflect on that time in our lives, when we left France, I can see that our family’s love is the one consistent thing that gave each one of us the courage and hope to face the uncertainty that comes with leaving a place you called home.