



# Hope for the Children of War: Viet Nam 1971-1975

*Bach-Thuy Le-Thi*

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## **Hope for the Children of War: Viet Nam 1971-1975** Bach-Thuy Le-Thi

As the war in Viet Nam neared its end, thousands of children were left in the orphanages around the country. Many were of mixed race, which was considered a disgraceful heritage; they faced lives of abuse and servitude if the communists succeeded. In addition, children around the country were suffering from heart conditions that required medical treatment only available in other countries. Le-Thi Bach-Thuy grew up in Viet Nam during World War II and the years and wars that followed. She became a social worker with Partners Aiding Children Today, helping pediatric heart patients obtain care in the United States. She also worked with Friends of Children of Viet Nam (FCVN), helping with the documentation and placement of orphans with new families abroad. She adopted two children of her own while helping raise her sisters' families and care for her mother. Her second adopted child, a son, joined her family in March 1975; just weeks later she put him on the historic World Airways flight that brought 57 orphans to the United States and inspired the creation of Operation Babylift. That program went on to rescue another 3,300 orphans within just a few short weeks. With no foreseeable means of escape herself, Bach-Thuy stayed in Saigon helping care for the orphans streaming into FCVN Center and finding ways to get her daughter, nieces, and nephews to safety in the United States. As more and more cities surrendered to the communists, she feared being left behind when her American colleagues were evacuated. She would be viewed as an enemy by the North Vietnamese and likely imprisoned or killed for her work sending children out of the country. Thanks to the help of her friends, she was able to escape just days before Saigon fell. Yet her story does not end there. Her life and work in America continued to focus on assisting and supporting Vietnamese refugees as they adjusted to their new lives, helping them learn new trades and get their papers in order. The 40th anniversary of Operation Babylift in April 2015 has brought new attention to this forgotten piece of Vietnamese and American history, and Le-Thi Bach-Thuy's story is an amazing, emotional, personal account of life in Viet Nam in those years. Her life, work, and spirit are indomitable.

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