



A recipe for welcome

*Practice hospitality ungrudgingly
to one another. (1 Peter 4:9, RSV)*

She escaped Saigon, found a home in Ohio and today teaches Sunday school in Texas.

BY KATHRYN HAUEISEN

VIETNAMESE DUMPLINGS

Ingredients

1 pack of 50 Wonton wrappers (can be round or square; if frozen, thaw beforehand)

Filling

1 cup clear bean noodle (pre-soak in warm water 1 hour)
1/4 cup black fungus (sold in Asian markets; pre-soak in warm water 1 hour)
2 pounds ground pork
6 tablespoons fish sauce
3 tablespoons sugar
1 tablespoon ground pepper
1/4 cup shredded carrots
1 tablespoon garlic powder
1 tablespoon salt

Dipping Sauce

1/8 cup warmed soy sauce
1 tablespoon sugar
1 teaspoon vinegar

Steps

Drain noodles and fungus, squeezing out the water. Mince the black fungus. Chop the bean noodles to a 1-inch length. Mix all the filling ingredients in a large bowl. Peel apart the wonton wrappers.

Using a small teaspoon, place meat filling in the center of each wrapper. Fold each wrapper in half over the filling, pinching the edges together to seal. (One way is to fold the edges like a fan.) Cook the dumplings by steaming for 15 minutes in a steamer.

Note: Uncooked, filled dumplings can be stored in the freezer for up to 3 months. Cooked dumplings can be added to a light soup broth. They can also be eaten plain or with the dipping sauce. For a crispier treat, use 1-2 tablespoons of vegetable oil to lightly pan-fry the dumplings.

HOURS BEFORE SAIGON FELL in April 1975, Eva Nguyen's family crowded into the last C-130 cargo plane to airlift people out as the North Vietnamese approached the city. For her parents and older brothers, the rescue brought feelings of grief, fear and relief. For 5-year-old Eva, flying with her parents, her five siblings and 450 other refugees and U.S. personnel was exciting. Yet the Nguyens were leaving other family members behind, without knowing if they would ever see them again.

Before their departure, Eva's father flew helicopters to rescue wounded soldiers from the battlefield. Eva's mother had insisted the family leave, joining more than 45,000 people in fleeing Saigon right before its fall. After a short stay at Wake Island military base, Eva's family joined hundreds of other refugees at Fort Chaffee in Arkansas. Eva remembers living in military barracks.

In the spring of 1975, the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service staff grew from four to a hundred, working with social service organizations across the U.S. Within six months, they had resettled some 16,000 people. Eva and her family were among them. Clintonville Lutheran Church in Columbus, Ohio,

agreed to sponsor the Nguyen family, who flew to central Ohio in July 1975.

"Many members showed up at the airport to greet us," Eva remembers. "We called Frieda 'Tresemer Grandma.' She was a retired teacher and tutored us in English. I got my American name 'Eva' from another woman in the congregation who helped us. My first impression of the United States was that the country [was] full of salt-of-the-earth type of kind and generous people. They were the sort of quiet people who

keep our country moving."

Kenneth Cahill, current council president at Clintonville Lutheran, was a teenager when the congregation welcomed the Nguyens. "They came to all the church potlucks and brought Vietnamese dishes," he says, adding that the family's children were extremely well behaved and polite.

Eva remembers some things being difficult. "My mother grieved the loss of her Cao Dai temple in Vietnam," she said. "She grew up where the religion, a mix of Buddhism, Christianity, Taoism

and Confucianism, started in 1926. My grandfather was killed at the temple during the 1968 Tet Offensive."

Eva's mother would set out things in their apartment that reminded her of the temple. "The congregation never tried to dissuade her from having elements of her religion in our home," Eva says. "I really appreciated how the people of the congregation didn't try to proselytize us, but just helped us in many ways. Our family's religion was very different from the Lutheran tradition, but that did not matter to these people."

Kenneth remembers that the congregation helped the Nyugens with housing. "We put the family up in a two-bedroom apartment above a store a couple of blocks from the church," he says. "It was a very modest home for such a large family. It must have been especially difficult for Mr. and Mrs. Nguyen. At first, [Mr. Nyugen] had to go to work doing yard work, and it was very hot that summer."

Although Mr. Nyugen had been a pilot in Vietnam, "my father never flew again after we left Saigon," Eva says. Her mother, a teacher by training, ended up doing clerical work. "They often stayed in their bedroom, listening to Vietnamese music," Eva remembers. "They must have been so homesick, with no hope of ever

going back. They lost their country, their jobs and had to leave other family behind."

Resettling in the U.S. was also a huge adjustment for Eva and her siblings, aged 2 to 9 when they arrived in Columbus. "However, we had each other for company, and before long, we also had other youth at church," Eva says. "We all attended Sunday school, went through confirmation and participated in all the church youth activities."

Eva learned later that their family members who stayed behind suffered terribly. "Men went to re-education camps, where torture was common," she says. "Women were left to raise their children on their own. The

Communists raided the homes of those who left, taking whatever they wanted. Others in our family came to the States in the 1990s, but I fared far better than my cousins because my mother convinced my father to leave."

Ruth Cahill, Kenneth's mother, used her kitchen skills to help Eva's family adjust. "She taught me and my sisters how to make apple pies," Eva remembers. "I taught my daughters how to make her recipe, so I'm passing her legacy on to my family. [Ruth's] husband, Vern Cahill, was dean of The Ohio State University Agriculture Department, but they were just

APPLE PIE

Ingredients

9-inch pie shell, unbaked

Filling

4 large Granny Smith apples
peeled and sliced

1 cup sugar

1/3 cup flour

1 teaspoon cinnamon

1/3 cup whipping cream

Topping

1 cup sugar

1 1/2 cups flour

2/3 cups butter or
margarine

Steps

For the filling, mix together the sugar, flour and cinnamon. Place sliced apples in a large bowl, add cinnamon-sugar-flour mixture, then pour the coated apple slices into the shell. Pour whipping cream over the apple mixture.

Combine topping in food processor or by hand using a pastry blender or a table knife until crumbled. Place topping over the apple slices and pat gently.

Bake at 350 degrees for 40 minutes, or until juice begins to bubble through topping.

simple folks who went out of their way to be kind to us.”

According to Kenneth, it was important to his mother that the relationship with Mrs. Nguyen be mutual. “My mother did teach Gwen how to bake apple pies, but she also wanted [Gwen] to teach [her] how to make Vietnamese dishes. That started a recipe swap that continued for many years.”

All the Nguyen children attended Sunday school when Donna Clawson taught at Clintonville Lutheran. “Because of her, I now teach Sunday school at my church in Houston,” Eva says. “Mrs. Clawson taught me how to teach. We take for granted so many simple, everyday interactions, without realizing the long-term impact they might have on someone else’s life. Those little actions demonstrate love and grace in concrete ways. They really make a difference.”

The kindness “Grandma” Tresemer showed Eva’s family was far from little. She even named the family in her will. “With that inheritance, my parents made a down payment on our own home near the church,” Eva says.

The congregation’s long-term commitment to the family enabled all six Nguyen children to graduate from The Ohio State University. Two of Eva’s siblings became doctors. “When my brother came to Houston to establish his medical practice, I followed him and met my husband, who is also one of the ‘75ers.” That’s what we call people who left

[Vietnam] that year. His family experienced the same overwhelming kindness from Americans who helped [them as my family did].”

Eventually Eva’s parents and most of her other family also moved to Houston, where Eva still lives. Today she is a member

at Messiah Lutheran Church in Houston. You can listen to her tell her story at <https://bradotto.net/faith-journeys-podcast/> (type “Eva Nguyen” into the “Speaker” search bar). ❧

YOU CAN HELP TODAY’S REFUGEES

Refugees today need help too. Kristin Witte, LIRS Director of Outreach, offers some ways that you, your Women of the ELCA unit and your congregation can make a difference now:

- Engage in this work and help change the future for refugees through advocacy at the national and international level. The system is badly broken.
- Talk with refugees and organizations that help refugees to learn about their situation and their search for safety, security and shelter.
- Co-sponsor a refugee family in your community, and help with housing, tutoring and other needs through an LIRS national affiliate.
- Become foster parents or support those fostering an unaccompanied minor refugee. Minors, who often are fleeing trafficking and violence, likely need trauma care, case management and child support.

Although names and countries of origin change, today’s refugees still need to find hope and help from a nurturing congregation, just as Eva and her family did when they fled Saigon some 50 years ago. Kristin reminds us: “We have witnessed over and over the amazing contributions refugees make; but we are compelled, as people of faith, to help because they have intrinsic dignity and value. We need to stop vilifying people who need help and focus on their strengths and perseverance in protecting their families.” ❧