

Thang Lian

Age: 18, Grade: 12

School Name: East Kentwood High School, Kentwood, MI

Educator: Le Tran

Category: Poetry

Just 1055 Miles

iii. *Slap!* His hands stung.

“Are you stupid?! Why did you scream?!”

Petrified, I dug my fingernails
into Mother’s arms, gritting my teeth
and pushing back a tidal wave of tears.

“Do not touch my son!” Mother’s words
spewed out like venom.

“Your son,” he pointed, “could have killed us all!”

Dreadful silence.

For the first time, my eyes darted
back and forth:
a pastor,
a family,
and children.

Hot shame poured over me like molten lava.
“He’s just a child,” Mother whispered sharply.

“Keep moving.”

Under the guise of darkness,
our feet shuffled decisively, apprehensively.
Every now and then, the Man beckoned us
to stop.

Border patrols.

Wrapped in the Thailand heat,
bodies heaving,
we moved like stray cats
playing a game of hide-and-go-seek.

In this version,
we hid from terrible people
who could take away our lives.
For a taste of freedom,
we played this game.

During the day,

with scorched lungs,
cracked lips,
and bleeding feet,
we walked in groups,
hiding behind bushes.

During the night,
we tip-toed
while our bodies
sagged weakly
and our steps lagged laboriously.

“1055 miles,” Mother reassured,
“that’s all it takes. From Thailand
to Malaysia... we’re almost there.”

But rumors spread,
like annoying flies my Mother said.
I listened to stories
about families getting captured,
tortured, and killed.
Mother pinched me, “Don’t listen! Just walk!”

So I drowned out the rumors,
and fixated my eyes upon the horizon.
Just 1055 more miles,
until we reach our Promised Land