



## Shower of Bullets: Hien Vo

2017, Acrylic on wood, 22 ¾ " w by 8" h

**Collaborative team:** David Feinberg and Beth Andrews, with contributions from Storyteller Hien Vo; and from artists Michelle Englund, Kimchi Hoang, Jennifer Hensel, Kristin Anton, Sima Shahriar, Paula Leiter-Pergament, Sara Feinberg, Julia Breidenbach, Jane Bollweg, and Annie Nickell.

Tears flowed from Hien Vo's eyes as she retold her family's attempted escape on a small fishing boat overflowing with 80 people. She was five years old and terrified. She remembers being given sleeping pills, along with the other children, so that they would not cry out at night which might alert the military police of the small boat's whereabouts. One night, she abruptly awoke to machine guns attacking the boat. She peeked out from under her mother's arm. As she did, she remembers feeling a bullet's intense heat as it grazed her back. She saw arms and legs flying as people were dying. The man steering the boat was killed, leaving the boat to spin out of control. The military police kept shooting and screaming for the boat to stop. One brave man ran to grab the controls. His arm was shot off, as he stopped the boat; and then the machine gun bullets ceased. Her saddest memory was of a little boy. His head lying on his father's lap - a gaping hole in his back from a gunshot. The child kept pleading over and over: "Are we going to the hospital?" His father replied - holding his hand over the boy's wound - "In 10 minutes, in 10 minutes."

The boy died in his father's arms. Later, Hien Vo found a piece of the boy's flesh stuck to her arm. Everyone on the boat was put in prison; and the guards beat their captain every night. She can remember hearing him yowling and screaming. They didn't beat the children - they just didn't give them any food. She would go around the prison with a container asking the other prisoners if they would share their rations. She remembers the Thai prisoners were generous with her and shared their food. One day, Hien Vo's father, who was part of a rebellious group in 1975, was separated from the family by the government to do hard labor in the jungle. The family heard nothing of him for a long time.

Then, one morning, the family heard he was alive and learned of his whereabouts. Her mother sent him family pictures. Every day he would look at these pictures, motivating him to escape. Finally, he fled from the fields into the jungle and hid underneath the leaves to evade the guards. Eventually, he met an old couple who knew he was a prisoner and helped him to safety. Knowing the schedule of the guards, they helped him escape by hiding him under a pile of wood. He eventually made it to Saigon with help from the family. To this day, Hien Vo cannot close the narrow pantry door in her kitchen because it reminds her of the narrow cell where her father was imprisoned. He carries scars of his time in prison because his legs are severely impaired.

Watch the Video documentary on Youtube:

[https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCZVGchtPc-LmgceAhw1\\_ifg/videos?disable\\_polymer=1](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCZVGchtPc-LmgceAhw1_ifg/videos?disable_polymer=1)