

# CHILDREN OF VIET-NAM



A STORYBOOK FOR CHILDREN

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# CHILDREN OF VIET-NAM

## Foreword to Parents

This book is one of our small attempts to build a bridge of communication between the two peoples of Viet-Nam and the United States, particularly the two peoples' children. We hope it will be treated as both a storybook and coloring book for boys and girls of any age, but with special attention perhaps to the 7 - 10 year olds. The poems in this book were written by children in Viet-Nam during a children's poetry and arts contest held during the 1969-1970 school year.

For several decades, the children of Viet-Nam have been living amidst a very cruel war. For some, there has never been the experience of a home, or a family, but rather only a wretched wandering from refugee camp to refugee camp. For them, the war often means no parents. The war means starvation and sickness. The war means suffering and breathless cries for help. It means desperation.

For others, the war means learning a capability for grim endurance. The war means going to school in bunkers, having lost the wonderful chance to watch the flying clouds and listen to the wind's whisper... It means dreaming of the day American bombing will stop, and never threaten again,

...of the day children everywhere can all go to school,

...of the day children can all fly kites,

...of the day children can ride buffaloes, playing the flutes,

...of the day children can all plant new trees,

...of the day all Vietnamese and Americans can meet each other in a spirit of friendship and reconciliation.

# The Water Buffalo Friend

Nobody knows how old the Vietnamese water buffalo is. It is said that some of the earliest Vietnamese thousands of years ago worked in the fields with their buffaloes.

Even today the buffalo is very important in the life of the Vietnamese. It draws the farmer's plow. Farming has always been hard work. The Vietnamese farmer, his wife and the buffalo toil from dawn until sunset during the season of planting rice. The rice must be planted in the fields that are under water. But first the soil under the water must be loosened by the buffalo and the plow.

Splish, splash, slosh, slosh -- the buffalo pulls the plow through the muddy water. Splish, splash, slosh, slosh, slosh -- the farmer follows behind, calling to the buffalo, "Nghé ngộ, mau lên! Hurry up, buffalo, hurry!" The water buffalo likes to be in the water.

Sometimes the buffalo is used to pull the farmer's cart loaded down with rice straw. The children love to ride on the cart. But most fun of all is riding on the back of the water buffalo. It is always the job of the boys and girls to take the buffalo to pasture. On the way to the field the buffalo-boy or the buffalo-girl, as they call themselves, rides on the buffalo's back. This is a happy time for the children.

They sit on the gentle buffalo's back and play their flute or sing folk songs. Sometimes the children repeat the folk-sayings they have learned in school:

"O, my buffalo, listen to me, my dear buffalo,  
My buffalo goes to the field, my buffalo plows with me,  
Plowing and harvesting, it's the farmer's business,  
I'm here, you there, who should complain of his pain."



# The Story of Liên



Liên is a Vietnamese girl. She is now seven years old. Her name means "lotus flower." Her older sister's name, Lan, means "orchid." Her older brothers are called Bình, which means "peace," and Zũng, which means "courage."

All the people in the village are hard-working farmers.

Every morning, Liên's family, including the grandparents, gets up with the sun. After finishing their breakfast of rice soup with raw sugar, Liên's parents go to work in the fields. Many other villagers have come to work together with them. The children call the adults "Aunt" and "Uncle."

Liên, Lan, Bình and Zũng also have their chores to do on the farm. Already we can hear Liên's voice in the back yard:

"Tooc, tooc, tooc ... little chicks! Come and eat! Tooc, tooc, tooc...!"

Her little hands sprinkle the grain on the ground and the chickens hurriedly run towards Liên, calling to one another: "Tooc, tooc, tooc...! Peep, peep, peep!"



Lan joins her little sister working in the yard. First, she sweeps off the fallen leaves. Then she starts weeding the kitchen garden. She says to Liên: "Would you and Zũng like to join us at school this afternoon? We will have lots of fun!"

Meanwhile, Bình has left for Mrs. Nhàn's house. Mrs. Nhàn lives alone since her husband died and her two sons were killed in the war. She raises chickens and sells eggs and chicks for a living. Every morning Bình helps to take the chickens up to the village field. Around noon, Bình joins his sister to go

to school. Today he has taken the family water buffalo to school. He will leave the buffalo outside the school to pasture while he studies about farming and first-aid.

In the afternoon, Zũng and Liên come to school and they all enjoy singing together. In the late afternoon they walk home. Zũng is riding on the buffalo's back, playing flute. They all stop by the field to round up Mrs. Nhàn's chickens. Mrs. Nhàn then gives Bình a small banana tree, and he carries it home. Liên is helping to carry Bình's hoe and book. Lan is carrying on her shoulder a lot of green vegetables to feed the pigs.



## The Lights of My School

The sky is spinning with stars,  
my school is bright with lights.  
Every single little lamp  
brightens the page of our lessons.

The school yard is under the moonlight,  
and the classrooms are all bright;  
every single little lamp joins together  
to make a great golden light.

From all the village roads,  
the bright little lamps,  
aiming towards my school,  
light the way to school.

O, Mr. Star in the sky,  
have you also reviewed your lessons,  
since you are glittering,  
since your eyes are sparkling?

The south wind blows coolly,  
carrying the rice fragrance from the  
field,  
shaking the lights gently;  
and the citation of reviewed lessons  
lingers in the evening mist.

The high sky with stars  
that appear and disappear;  
my school flowers with lights,  
every single lamp, a little star,  
my school, a fairy river.

-- Hoàng-Quốc-Nam

## Going to School

Liên and her friends like to go to school. They love to learn how to read and write and count. Lan writes about the village river flowing through the school back yard. Bình writes about the rains which fall on the mountains standing so big and still at the end of the village. They want to learn to count the many coconut trees around the village pond, and to measure out rice seeds for planting the next harvest.

Children who love to learn make their parents very happy. Parents often say:

"The smarter the children are,  
the more luck the family has!"

This is a Vietnamese saying from long ago.

Going to school is such fun! Every day Liên calls to her friends in the village and they walk to school together. Liên and her friends each carry their own notebook, sometimes a schoolbag, and an ink pot.

Every day, along the road to school, they always watch the plants, flowers and trees grow and change. They see many butterflies soaring back and forth among the flowers. And here is a banana tree with a big stem which is already showing some little green bananas.

One day, being careless, Liên tripped and fell down. Everybody said to her: "You should be more careful!" and then they helped her get up. Lien was not hurt, but her notebook was smeared with ink!



## Catching Rats

In the city, rats are dangerous because they spread disease. In the countryside, rats and insects are also very bad for rice plants and growing vegetables.

Taking advice from their parents, Lan, Binh and Zũng join the other children in the village in a regular effort to catch rats and insects before they eat much of the people's rice and vegetables, or spread sickness around.

One night, Lan and her two brothers went to the fields to place traps. She

held a lamp to light their way, for the moon was sleeping that night. Zũng used his net to catch the many moths that flew around the lamp. Binh carried a big can of spray to use around the pond and on mud puddles, so there would be no mosquitoes.

Hurrah! When they got home, they told Liên of all the animals they had caught. They told her that they bravely tied the hands of each rat and insect together. Of course, Liên was very proud of her brothers and sister. She asked if next time she could join them.



## Planting Trees

In Viet-Nam we have a custom which started in 1959. At that time Uncle HỒ (HỒ-Chí-Minh) proposed to the people that we should all plant trees at Tết, the beginning of the lunar or moon year. This New Year's custom helps us grow trees that we need for lumber, firewood, food and shade. But planting trees also means that we are happy to see new life -- especially as the New Year begins.

In our group, we have six people. Hup! We are on our way. Bình and Lan carry the two hoes. Their friends carry the young banana tree and the water bucket. A boy named Hân pushes the cart filled with dirt. And little Bé follows behind, fanning with the little banana leaf to try to keep everybody cool.

We love to eat the banana fruit. But we also eat the banana leaf stems chopped up as a salad.

## Banana Tree

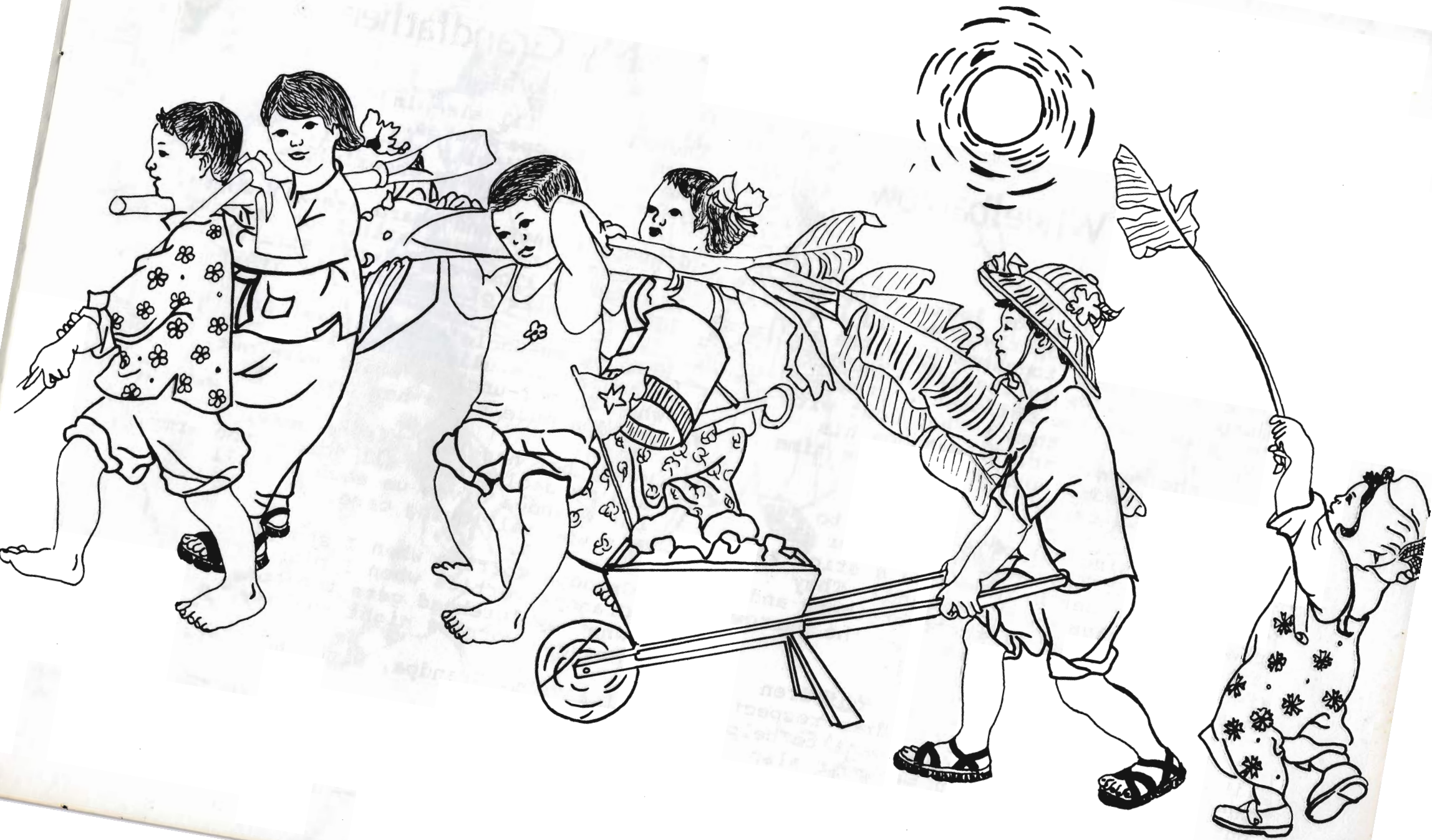
The banana tree has eight pretty leaves; each time the wind blows, some pretty leaves rustle.

Last year, I was still too little, a piece of banana leaf rolled into a cone to blow as a horn. This year I have grown up, from morning till evening I water the tree, I catch the worms.

O, banana tree, how many stems have you borne?

The banana tree says she has a big one, and, "This stem can feed you for the whole day, each banana is as big as your wrist..." Listening to her, I remember my Grandma's words, when sending these bananas to Daddy, tell him: "These bananas are home grown."

-- Nguyễn-Thanh-Vân  
Age 8



# My Grandfather

## Making a Wheelbarrow

Making a wheelbarrow looks easy, but it has to be done properly. Mr. Tú and his children gather together with their neighboring friends in the front yard. Mr. Tú's father, the children's grandfather, also joins them to help out with planing the wood. Mr. Tú watches his children learn and work at the same time with a pleased smile.

Nũ is using her physics book to see if some of her lessons are good for the job. She and her brother use a stick to draw their plans on the ground. They want to figure out if their brothers and sister are correctly balancing the barrow on the wheel.

In Viet-Nam, parents and children like to work together. Children respect their parents very much and want to help. But good parents, of course, must also respect the children.

The sun is still sleeping,  
when my Grandpa awakes.  
The stove's red with charcoal,  
the tea kettle sings cheerfully.

Grandpa's hair and beard are all white.  
Still he sits sewing stitch by stitch,  
his sewing lines are always straight,  
like his life of some seventy years.

When cadre-uncle's shirt was torn,  
Grandpa carefully mended it;  
when farmer-uncle's shirt wore out,  
Grandpa made him a new one.

My father has long passed away,  
and my uncles have all joined the army,  
but Grandpa gives us each and all  
his special loving care.

Grandpa worries when I study,  
Grandpa worries when I play,  
when my forehead gets too hot,  
Grandpa worries night and day.

I love my Grandpa, with shoulders so  
curved,  
I wish the Americans would leave,  
so my uncles could return,  
and Grandpa no longer grieve.

-- Nguyễn Hồng Kiên





## Making Straw Hats

Here is a picture of a family making hats together. The older brothers and sisters are helping to make hats for everybody -- especially the little children.

Harvest time, when the ripened rice is cut, is a very busy time for Vietnamese families. After the rice has been cut and brought home, it is pounded until the grains of rice fall off the stalk. Most of the stalks are then thrown onto a haystack to be used later. Some of the straw will be used for building walls or repairing roofs on houses. Some of it will be burned in cooking fires.

But what the children like most to do is to turn the straw into sturdy hats. First, they twist the straw into a braid. Then, they wind the braid around in a spiral. Finally, they sew the braids together to make a straw hat with a wide brim.

The hats are good for keeping off the rain and for keeping out the bright sunshine. But the straw hats are also good to have on in case a bomb explodes nearby, sending a shower of dangerous rocks and dirt into the air.



## The Fishing Family

The Trần family lives in a fishing village near the seashore. People in the village call them "Uncle" and "Aunt" Hai. They have three daughters and one son.

Every morning Uncle Hai gets up and goes fishing before the sun rises. He rows or sails his boat offshore a mile or two. Then, he throws his fishing net down into the water and waits for the fish to swim into his net. Small fish are easier to catch because their heads get caught in the net. It is harder to catch the big fish. He must pull the net up quickly around them. Sometimes he is lucky and catches a lot.

Often, when Aunt Hai is not busy with mending the fishing net, or the family's clothes, she likes to join her husband. Together they certainly catch more

fish. And when a lot of boats work together they do the best of all.

Fishing is one of the Vietnamese people's ways of making a living. People catch fish to make "nước mắm," which is the fish sauce that we eat with rice. Some fish are dried and preserved with salt, to be eaten much later. Some fish are taken inland to be sold in other towns.

The Trần children are still too young to go fishing with their parents. But they like to join them in the late afternoon, when their parents pull the boat on the shore. They like to help carry the fish home. Even the youngest, Hoa, wants to help carry a lobster which is hanging from her hand.



## The Highland People

Children of highland people live high up in the mountains away from the seashore and wet rice fields. They live in many small groups, each with its own language, customs and style of clothing. But they are part of the one country of Viet-Nam.

The mountains are covered with thick forests. The mountain people often burn and clear out the forests to grow corn and beans and build their villages. Yet, surrounding those villages are big trees -- a lot of trees -- and people cut them to make lumber. Here, this big elephant is pulling a log from the forest. Soon it will be loaded onto a truck and taken to a sawmill.

But many of these trees have pieces of metal in them from the American bombs that were dropped and which exploded all over. If the log has metal pieces in it, the saw cannot cut into the lumber. The metal pieces will break the saw's teeth.

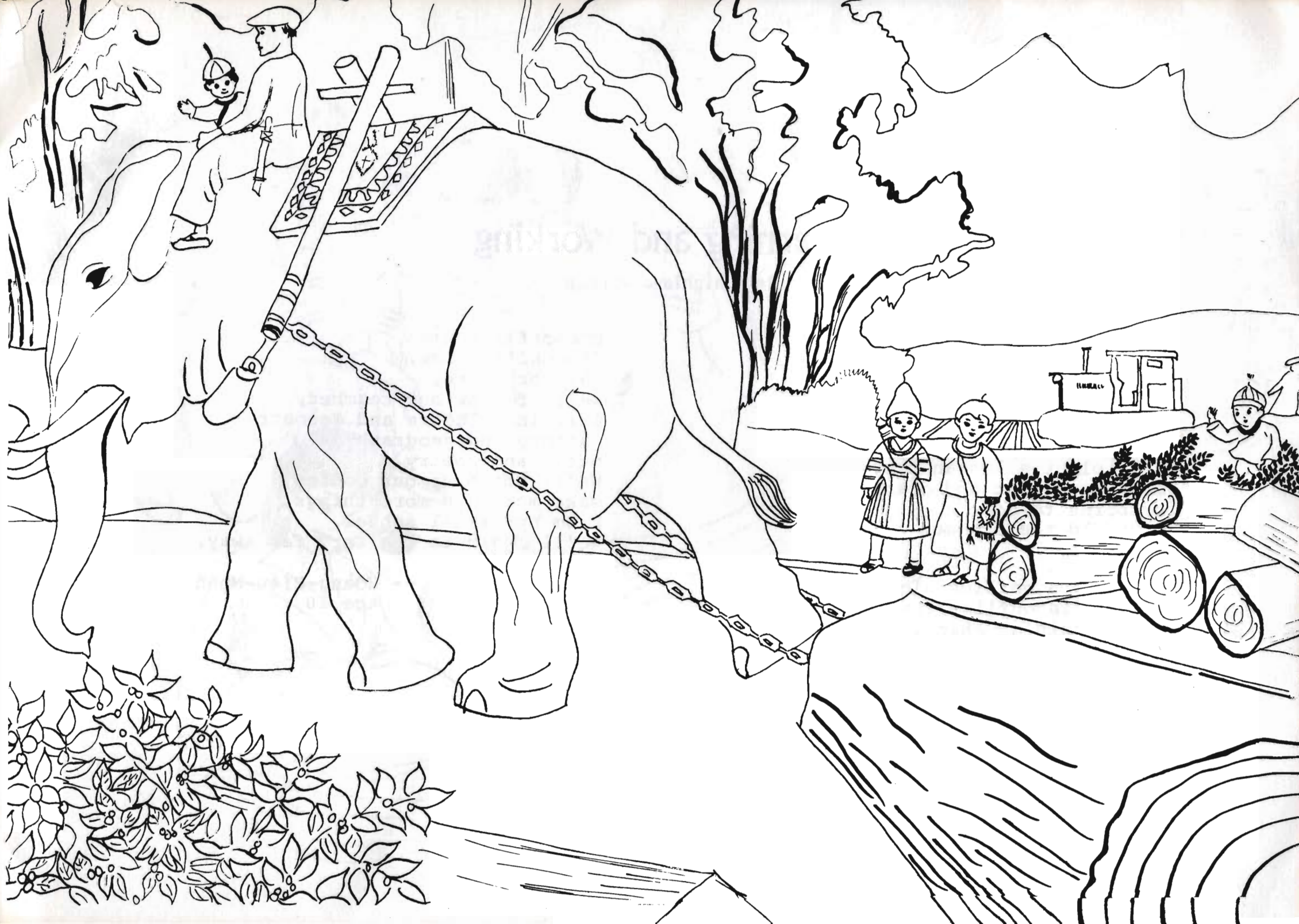
The children by the roadside are watching their lucky friend who gets a ride with his father on the elephant!

## Working in the Fields

Zig zag, zig zag, zig zag,  
rice carried through the gorge,  
water carried up the slopes;  
in the fields, we hoe,  
sowing the green beans.  
The green beans now grow all over the  
field,  
this New Year together, how many rice  
cakes we'll make!

We plant corn  
on the mountain sides.  
In a few months to come,  
the corn all green as a forest.  
The corn now brought home,  
all the pigs and chicks are overjoyed.  
Everyone is warm and full,  
together the village is bustling with  
JOY!

Bề-thi-Minh-Hoa  
A Vietnamese minority child  
Age 9



# Learning and Working

in a highland village

Dragonflies high,  
dragonflies low,  
we'll fill the bomb holes,  
clean up the trash,  
clear the ball field,  
widen the road.  
We'll plant a longan tree,  
grow grapefruit and oranges,  
for birds to come  
and build their homes.

Dragonflies high,  
dragonflies low,  
rain or shine,  
a new school we'll build.  
Chopping bamboo and carrying sand,  
baking bricks and firing lime,  
we'll mix mortar and  
learn to be a bricklayer.  
We'll saw, we'll carve,  
we'll cut, we'll plane,  
and learn to be a carpenter.

Dragonflies high,  
dragonflies low,  
rain or shine,  
we'll follow our teacher,  
learning algebra and geometry,  
history and geography,  
music and poetry.  
We'll build up our bodies,  
make more and more things.  
From our small school,  
we'll learn to see far, far away.

-- Hoàng-Hiếu-Nhân  
Age 10





# Greeting the Heroes

The Vietnamese people have been fighting for many, many years against foreign invaders. They have been fighting for their freedom and independence. Those who fight feel joy even though they know they might have to sacrifice their lives. They know that to fight for freedom is to save the lives of their children. Before being killed by the French colonialists, one of our heroes said:

"As long as grass continues to grow in our soil, there will be people fighting against the invaders."

Those who are liberation fighters are dearly loved by the people, and especially by the children. We remember them as we do uncles and aunts who have many stories to tell and are almost always gone far from home. When they come home, they bring such smiles to our mothers' faces. They bring a cheerful laugh to the children's voices...

When they return home, they are truly our loving aunts and uncles. We will offer them the best fruits, the prettiest flowers, the gayest songs, the happiest dances to welcome them home.

# Dancing

I'm dancing  
so the fields stay green,  
I'm dancing  
so new plants are seen,  
I'm dancing  
so the army shows might,  
I'm dancing  
so even bees start to fight,  
I'm dancing  
so forests are made,  
I'm dancing  
so palm trees give shade,  
I'm dancing  
so the enemy will be gone,  
I'm dancing  
so Uncle Hồ lives on...

-- Đỗ-Ngọc-Thông  
Age 8

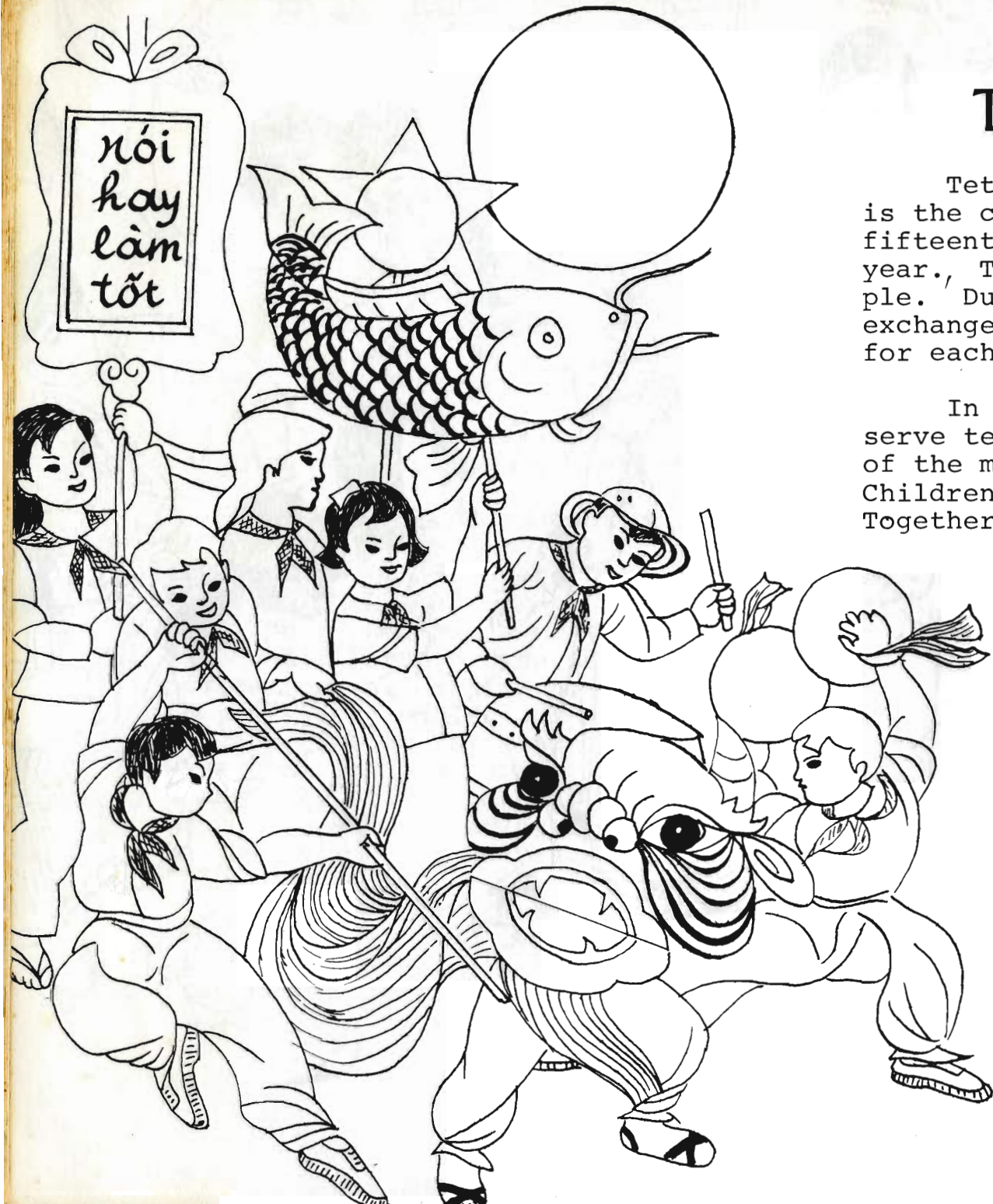


# The Mid-Autumn Festival

Tet Trung-thu, the mid-autumn festival, is the celebration of the full moon of the fifteenth day of the eighth month of the lunar year. The full moon always brings joy to people. During that night, young men and women exchange their songs expressing their feelings for each other, accompanied by chord drums.

In celebrating the full moon, people serve tea and cakes shaped like the round face of the moon -- moon cakes or mid-autumn cakes. Children have their Lion Dance with lanterns. Together they dance and sing to celebrate the moon. Every child has one lantern, and people say that the mid-autumn festival is the festival of lanterns. Sometime before Tet Trung-thu, people at the market display moon cakes, candies and colorful papers and bamboo sticks -- supplies for making lanterns. Children like to make their own lanterns, and sometimes whoever makes the best one will get some prize at the Lantern Contest.

After the celebration, under the moonlight in the garden, children surround their parents or grandparents to watch the full moon and listen to the stories and legends of Viet-Nam.







In mid-autumn of 1945, right after Viet-Nam won its independence from the French, Ho Chi Minh sent a letter to many thousands of Vietnamese children. It was the first time he had called himself "Uncle Ho".

"My dear children,

"Today is the mid-autumn festival. Your parents have bought you lanterns, tambourines, firecrackers, flowers and lots of other toys as well. You are as happy as can be!

"... You are rejoicing, and your Uncle Ho rejoices with you. Guess why. First, because I love you very much. Second, because last year, at this same mid-autumn festival, our country was still living under oppression and you, my children, were still little slaves, whereas this year Viet-Nam has won back its freedom and you have become the young masters of an independent nation.

"Today, enjoy yourselves as much as you like. Tomorrow, I hope you will give your minds to your studies. Do you all know how to read and write? Those who do not know should learn...

"Next mid-autumn festival we shall organize parties both for the children and the old. What do you think of that?

"This year I have no present for you. I just send you my loving kisses."

Your Uncle HỒ

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