

My Vietnamese and American Heritage: Tet and Nerf Guns

By Xander Mann

I almost never feel Vietnamese, I mostly feel like I am an American. I talk like an American, I act like an American, I want Nerf guns like an American, I want to play video games like an American. If I felt Vietnamese, I would speak Vietnamese, but my very first language was English, so I learned the English way and traditions.

I remember little about Vietnam. I know I was in an orphanage with my two triplet brothers, but I don't remember much else. My adoptive parents showed me a video about us in the orphanage. In the video we were on a caretaker's lap playing with boxes and toy drumsticks, and sometimes we would hit each other on the head. Whenever I watch the video I feel sad because being there wasn't fun; we just sat on the floor looking around, with no one caring about us.

For me, becoming Vietnamese American meant getting adopted by a good family and moving to America, being home schooled, and having Lego City and Technic toys, which are all very satisfying things. My mom's cooking is awesome, and she makes good pho ga and spring rolls, so I can keep in touch with my Vietnamese side.

The only time I feel truly Vietnamese is when we go to a Buddhist monastery in Palo Alto for Tet. The banquet is organized by families that adopted Vietnamese children. Tet is my favorite celebration, because we eat exquisite Vietnamese food and get to hang out with kids that all look like us. After we wish each other, "Chuc Mung Nam Moi," which means Happy New Year in Vietnamese, we eat yummy vegetarian soup with carrots, noodles, vegetable broth, cilantro and bean sprouts. Then we dive into the other courses. They have lemongrass tofu, and egg rolls that are crunchy on the outside, with rice, veggies and fried onions inside. There's a platter piled high with noodles with tofu (but I skip the tofu.) For desert they bring colorful coconut jelly. Tet is supposed to be peaceful, but we go wild, running around the monastery and parking lot and playing tag, hide and seek, and catch the robber.

Although I have a good family, I am sometimes curious about my birth mother. I hope to go to Vietnam one day and find her. I would like to learn Vietnamese so I could talk to her and tell her about my life. I would also like if my mom and dad adopted another Vietnamese boy because then we would have equal teams for Nerf wars, and have more fun. When I grow up I may want to adopt a child from the exact same place where I was born. If I adopted a boy, I would teach him the Vietnamese language and the Tet tradition. Then, when he turns 10, I would buy him a lot of Nerf guns for the American tradition.