

 **Author's Note** 

Finding Papa is based on the real-life journey that my mother and I braved from Vietnam to America in 1983 to reunite with my father. My father had left the country, hoping to find a better opportunity in America to support his family. Along this terrifying journey, we met people who helped us get one step closer to my father. A Nedlloyd Dutch shipping vessel saved my mother and me after we drifted on the ocean for days with little food and drink. The vessel dropped us off at a refugee camp in Singapore, where the American Red Cross helped reunite our family using letters that my father had written to us.

Our family's story is part of a much larger one. When the Vietnam War ended in 1975, thousands of people, referred to as the "boat people," fled the country on boats to escape the political and economic hardships of that time. Their journeys were often met by pirates, storms, and starvation. Some stories ended at sea, while others were the beginning of a new life, but every story is one of unyielding hope and courage.

 **Artist's Note** 

To be a survivor is to live with a powerful, sometimes overwhelming mixture of gratitude and grief. In 1978, when I was three, my parents packed me into the cargo hold of a riverboat in Cần Thơ, Việt Nam, and set out to sea, along with my two older sisters and my little brother, who was still in the womb. There were forty people (including my brother) aboard a little round-bottomed boat that had no business being on the open sea. The only person who knew how to drive a boat or navigate at sea became incapacitated on the first night, and after others floundered, my father stepped up into the role of pilot until we landed on the shore of Malaysia three days later. My mother gave birth just outside the refugee camp, in the village midwife's hut. Thanks to my parents' bravery and resourcefulness, along with a miraculous alignment of circumstances, we all survived and made it to our destination: America.

Now that I am older, I have a better understanding of just how hard that journey was. I still grieve the people and lives that were lost. I am grateful to have stories and art as a place to put that understanding, and to share it with you. Angela's story reminds me of Mister Rogers's advice to look for the helpers in hard times, and I think that is very wise counsel.