



## Refugee from Vietnam

Carol Lam spoke at the Treynor Optimist Club meeting on September 5. The Communists took over Vietnam in 1975 and she left in 1976. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Vietnam area was conquered and became part of Indochina. In the 1955 Geneva Convention it was divided into North and South.

On April 30, 1975 the Vietnam War ended. Saigon was changed to Ho Chi Minh City. The communists controlled all businesses. Before the war, Carol's father and uncle exported rice. They also imported fertilizer from the United States and textiles from China and Japan.

Carol said that there was no freedom after the Communists took over. There was always a guard watching the house. Her husband and her lived a different place every night.

For boat people there were two choices, survive or die. She and her family left in 1976 at midnight. They got on a fishing boat that held 25 people. The hiding place was below deck. It was 39 years ago, but Carol still remembers that the plan was very scary. First they made the guard drunk. They took no luggage only three pants and three shirts, all black. They gave valium to her son, age 2, to keep him quiet. They had no water.

The boat took them to a Panama ship. In Singapore, if you didn't speak Chinese, the UN would send you back. They didn't eat for 4-5 days.

When they boarded the Panama ship, Carol fell into the ocean. She had to swim for two hours in the cold water before being rescued. She was 29 at the time. The ship sailed to Malaysia, then back to Singapore.

The US Embassy visited her family on the ship. The first question they ask you is if you have relatives in the United States. She had a sister living in Glenwood. They took her to the YMCA, then gave her a Visa to the United States. They were at the YMCA for a month. On Jan 13, 1977 she came to the United States.

Carol had a sister in Glenwood who helped her family. She worked in Glen Haven Nursing Home where she learned to read and write English. After six months she went to work at Bethany. In 1979 she went to Jenny Edmundson to work as a CNA.

Carol's sister came to the U.S. in 1963. Her husband went to IWCC and became a welder. He died in 1988. Carol became a U.S. citizen in 1982. She speaks six languages.