

Nguyen Thuong Kham Thien

The year was 1971, and I was living in Hanoi. The day began like any other, but after coming home from work, it quickly changed into a day of exciting possibilities when the distinctive sound of U.S. bombers filled the air. As the bombers released their payload, the sky was filled with thick black smoke. Naturally, I was in panic, but at the same time I was also very happy. I thought that the Americans or perhaps even the South Vietnamese Army had come to liberate us. We had been waiting and waiting and hoping that some day we would be free. Unfortunately, that day would never come. Then on April 30, 1980 I was involved in an unsuccessful *coup de'tat*. As a result, I was arrested along with my fellow conspirators. I was imprisoned for ten years, and then put on house arrest for five years. During the time of my house arrest, I escaped to Cambodia by crossing the border on foot. To provide myself an income and to make ends meet, I sculpted small statues from clay or any other available materials.

Reflections on the Interview

By Nancy Bui

The interview was in Vietnamese. The translation was quite difficult because Mr. Nguyen was living in the North until 1992. Although I myself was also born in North Vietnam, I actually grew up in the South. Therefore, many times I had to translate from North Vietnamese to South Vietnamese before translating it to English. Mr. Nguyen Thuong Kham Thien's life story is fascinating. He lived through many circumstances, yet he has a remarkable dignity, and love for art. Through his story, I was able get a better understanding of how ordinary North Vietnamese people felt about the Vietnam War.