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Uproot a tree and replant it. Chances are very high that the tree will have difficulty surviving. If you do the equivalent to a human, the poor person will have the same problem. Yet he could usually overcome it. Though this may have some physiological implications, it is also a matter of will. A person fights both physically and mentally. He never gives up, because by doing so he renounces all chances of a victory. In my case, leaving Vietnam and coming to the U.S. is the equivalence of being uprooted and replanted some place else. In the course of this painful change, I learned that the secret to successfully achieving a goal is tenacity.

At the beginning of my journey, I observed and admired the tenacious quality in my parents. All I could remember in the early stages of our escape is that occasionally I was taken out of the city, only to return the next day. Later, I learned that those were the unsuccessful attempts to escape from communism. Eleven times my family tried; eleven times we were swindled. Eleven times we risked imprisonment, yet eleven times we were lucky. Our family resources were being exhausted at an astonishing rate. Family heirlooms were exchanged for the hope of freedom. The next time could have been the last, but we did not quit. We invested everything in the twelfth attempt. Looking back, I realize that it would have been so easy to quit during any step of the way. Repeated failures could have discouraged us, but we kept on trying. Finally, we were lucky. The people were honest. We thought that we had succeeded.

However, a great ocean still separated us from freedom. Storms with towering waves tossed our small boat about indifferently. A well-equipped vessel would have had problems dealing with such a storm; but we had only a high school world map and Boy Scout compass as navigation tools. Later, even these were taken by pirates. Our food and water supplies became practically nonexistent in the last few days of our journey. Getting lost at sea did not do much for morale. Nevertheless, we held onto our goal though it would have been easier to resign our fate to the currents. With determination, we conquered the elements, and arrived safely at the refugee camp.

When we reached the U.S., new problems surfaced. I had dealt with thirst and hunger on the boat, but humiliation requires an extra something. I entered the third grade with practically no understanding of the English language. At school, I was not well received. The other students looked down at me because of my inability to speak English well. I can still remember the times in spelling class when the teacher went down the list: "Who has one wrong? . . . Two wrong? . . . Thirty wrong . . ." I would always be the last to raise my hand, and the only one to receive zeros on these assignments. Instead of giving up, I became more determined to conquer my problems, both in and out of the classroom.

By the second semester, my hard work was paying off. On the playground, I was making new friends. In the classroom, I was making new friends. The door was finally opened for me, but it took a lot of effort. There were times that I wanted to stay home, times that

I did not want to face another day of humiliation, and times that I wished we were back in Vietnam. But I remembered my parents' example: They did not quit when the situation seemed hopeless. My journey to the U.S. has taught me a valuable lesson: "Winners never quit, and quitters never win." I have applied this lesson to solve my problems in adapting to a new environment, and I expect this attitude to help me overcome those problems I may encounter in the future.