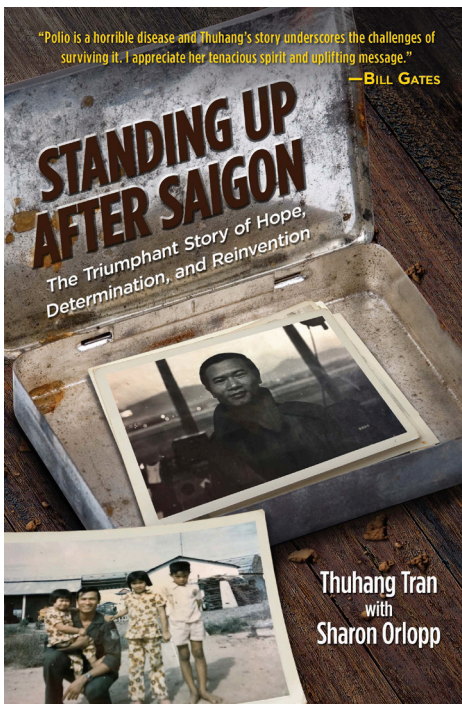


STANDING UP AFTER SAIGON

The Triumphant Story of Hope, Determination, and Reinvention

The Power of Story: One Civilian's Experience of Triumph Over Polio, the Fall of Saigon, and the Reinvention of Herself



Dallas, TX—*Standing up after Saigon: The Triumphant Story of Hope, Determination, and Reinvention* is the incredible memoir of Thuhang Tran as told by author Sharon Orlopp. With a scarcity of personal, civilian memoirs from Vietnam at this time, this story provides a unique window into a particular era in history.

Born in Saigon near the end of the Vietnam War, Thuhang was two-and-a-half years old when she contracted polio, which left her legs partially paralyzed. Orlopp recounts how Thuhang's parents and siblings cared for her and sacrificed to get her the treatment that would enable her to walk again. But their efforts were disrupted when communists invaded South Vietnam and her father, Chinh, an air traffic controller in the South Vietnam Air Force, was lost in evacuations and presumed dead.

In this inspirational biography, Sharon Orlopp gives life to the voice of the underserved and presents the deeper message of awareness for a specific segment of the population that few have had the opportunity to hear.

"Thuhang's infectious, positive energy captivated me immediately. After listening to her mesmerizing story, I was spellbound and told her she needed to write a book about her life journey," says Orlopp. "I strongly believe in the power of story to change our perspectives about people who are different than us. Touching the heart changes behaviors. Stories have the power to persuade and influence in a way that can't be done with statistics and data. *Standing Up After Saigon* is a powerful reminder that against overwhelming odds, humans can prevail. Thuhang's journey is a gift of courage, hope, perseverance, and family love."

Thuhang hopes to inspire those who "feel invisible, under-appreciated, under-utilized, made fun of, disrespected, and not valued. I hope my journey as a person who is an immigrant and differently abled will build bridges, encourage cultural understanding and give inspiration for treating all people with dignity, respect, and inclusion."

To learn more about Thuhang Tran's triumphant story, visit www.StandingUpAfterSaigon.com.

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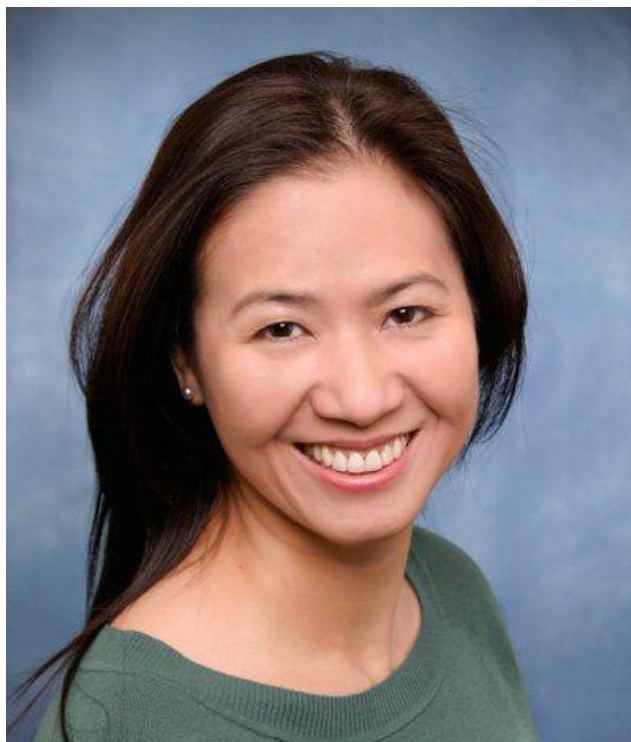
Sharon Orlopp

Sharon Orlopp is an expert on everyday inclusion. As the Global Chief Diversity Officer and Senior Vice President of Human Resources for Walmart, she created unique experiential immersion trips to teach others about different cultures. As an author, editor, and speaker, she is passionate about building a world where every person is valued and included. Sharon believes in the transformative power of personal stories to touch the heart, which in turn changes behavior.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Thuhang Tran

Thuhang Tran was born in Saigon and developed polio as a toddler. When Saigon fell in 1975, her father narrowly escaped to the US and left his family behind. Later, the family was told that he had been killed in a helicopter crash. It took almost fifteen years for Thuhang's family to be reunited. When Thuhang immigrated to America, she had surgery and intense physical therapy that enabled her to stand upright after crawling and squatting on the floor for seventeen years. She went on to start her new life by learning English, graduating from college, and working at several Fortune 500 companies in Information Technology. Several years ago, she focused her energy on helping orphaned and disabled children in Vietnam. Her future goals include creating a nonprofit organization to help disabled children in Vietnam.



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Q & A with Sharon Orlopp



How did you meet Thuhang and later become involved with this book project?

When I worked at Walmart as a senior leader, I created annual mentoring circles where I mentored twenty-five people from different countries, backgrounds, races, religions, etc. I held these mentoring circles for about ten years and hoped to create a ripple effect where each of my mentees would welcome others into the company.

I retired from Walmart in May 2015 and moved to Phoenix. About a year later (May 2016), one of my mentees, Hua Wang, sent me a text and mentioned that I should meet Thuhang Tran the next time I visited Bentonville, Arkansas. Hua did not say much about Thuhang's personal story.

In November 2016, I was visiting Arkansas and met Thuhang for a cup of coffee and listened in amazement to her incredible life story. After she shared her powerful odyssey, I mentioned that she needed to write a book about her story. Thuhang responded that she was looking for someone to help her write the story. I eagerly said I would help her with it.

From that point forward, we talked weekly and put together the project plan and timeline. And we began writing the book.

What motivated you to chronicle this remarkable true story?

There were several factors that motivated me to write Thuhang's remarkable story: it embodies a universal story of hope and determination that prevails against incredible odds, and it demonstrates the resilience of the human spirit. There is a powerful element of family love, particularly the bond between a father and a daughter. Her story highlights how grit, determination, and continual personal reinvention can enable success. Thuhang represents many aspects of diversity: Vietnamese, immigrant, disabled, and a woman. Diversity is woven into the fabric of America; it is what makes our country great. It is timely due to current events and rhetoric about immigrants and refugees. There is current interest in Vietnam as seen in Mark Bowden's recently published book, *Hue 1968: A Turning Point of the American War in Vietnam*, as well as documentaries about Vietnam by Ken Burns and Rory Kennedy.



What were some of the more difficult chapters to write and why?

Thuhang and her father, Chinh, invited me into their home for many days and allowed me to ask probing, continual questions that brought up difficult memories and caused nightmares. I felt terrible that I kept asking questions for clarity and accuracy. The difficulty was compounded because the time I spent in their home was the last week in April, which is the anniversary of the fall of Saigon and the anniversary of the death of Richie Tran.

One chapter that was challenging to write about was Thuhang and her family building a shelter and surviving the bombings on April 29 and 30, 1975. Also, I rewrote a chapter seven times about Chinh escaping on April 30, 1975, and leaving his family behind. Finally, researching and writing the chapter about Richie Tran's death at age nineteen, the day before his high school prom, caused me great distress. I had to go for a very long walk after learning the horrid details. Thuhang and her family had been through so many difficult circumstances, and just when life seemed to be going smoothly, tragedy struck again in a brutal fashion.

How would you describe your writing style, and how does that fit with the way Thuhang's story needed to be told?

My writing style is straightforward storytelling. Thuhang's story is so compelling that it doesn't need a lot of extraneous details or flowery language. The guts of her story are incredible. There are three key story arcs or acts.

Act One includes the fall of Saigon, the erroneous death announcement about Chinh, and the first five years of life under communist rule. Thuhang's polio is mentioned in Act One but we eliminated the details of the polio situation because the primary focus of Act One is the fall of Saigon and the impact on her family.

Act Two focuses on the family learning Chinh is alive and the lengthy reunification efforts. It also expounds on abysmal life in Vietnam with the plight of boat people and the conflict with Cambodia. It invites the readers to learn what Chinh's life in America was like during the fifteen years of family separation.

In Act Three, the family is reunited and the highlight is Thuhang's surgery. There isn't necessarily a rosy, fairytale ending to this story. Chinh's marriage doesn't survive, and his grandson dies an untimely death. However, the story demonstrates the power of hope, determination, and personal reinvention because Thuhang learns English, obtains her college degree, and works at several Fortune 500 companies.

Q & A with Sharon Orlopp (cont.)

How is *Standing Up After Saigon* unique from other books in the same genre?

What makes *Standing Up After Saigon* so unique is the scarcity of memoirs from Vietnam. There are very few personal memoirs from North or South Vietnam. Very few Americans or other nationalities know what life was like in Vietnam once the Americans left in 1973 or once the communists conquered Saigon in 1975. The US cut off relations with Vietnam for twenty years—from 1975 until 1995.



There are quite a few military memoirs from Vietnam but only a handful of personal civilian memoirs.

Why do you feel compelled to share these particular kinds of stories? What is it about them that resonates deeply with you?

I strongly believe in the power of story. I also believe that we change our perspectives about people who are different than us through the personal relationships we develop and nurture. Touching the heart changes behaviors. Compelling stories touch the heart in a way that changes our cognitive skills and the way we look at the world. Stories have the power to persuade and influence in a way that can't be done with statistics and data.

Who is the ideal reader for this book? And what is the most significant message of *Standing Up After Saigon*?

Ideal readers for this book include: memoir enthusiasts, women—particularly those who like stories of empowerment, hope, and overcoming obstacles—Vietnamese and Asian/Pacific Islander communities, history lovers, veterans, and people with disabilities.

The most significant message in the book is the power of hope. With hope, you have everything. Without hope, you have nothing.



Q & A with Thuhang Tran

Why did you feel Sharon would be an ideal writer for your life story?

When we met, I felt like I had known Sharon for a long time. Sharon has a unique personality and character, and I have never met anyone like her. She is positive, has an open mind, and is straightforward like me. She listened intently to my story and understood me, so I was comfortable sharing the details of my life with her.

Sharon believed my story was fascinating and asked whether I had thought about writing a book. People were always telling me to write a book about my life story, but I had not yet found the right person to help me. Sharon eagerly offered and I accepted. We have become great partners!

Were there any parts of this book that were especially hard to express or dictate? Which parts and why?

It was difficult to express what it was like living under communism. We experienced mistreatment, poverty, and lack of freedom, all while living in fear each day. There weren't enough words to convey this dark time in Vietnamese history.

It was also hard to talk about when I left Vietnam and moved to the United States. I faced many challenges: a different culture, went through surgery, learned how to walk, learned a new language, had intensive physical therapy, and rebuilt a relationship with my father.

Another difficult event to write about was when my nephew, Richie, died a few months before his high school graduation. His future was bright but was tragically cut short.

How do you think *Standing Up After Saigon* can be helpful to others who can relate or those who might just need to understand experiences outside their own?

Everyone in life has experienced struggles and challenges, but I believe how we handle it is up to us. *Standing Up After Saigon* describes the many challenges from my past. This memoir can encourage others when they've hit rock bottom. Building hope, focus, and determination were the keys to my moving forward. With a willingness to find solutions, I put negative things aside and worked to change my mindset.



Where did you find the strength and hope to persevere through the difficult years, and where can others find that same hope?

My strength came over time. Over the years people treated me badly, looked down on me because I crawled on the ground, and viewed me as a burden on society. I didn't become angry at them but instead determined that I would excel and hoped someday to change their mindset about disabled people.

Whenever I have gone through a tough time, I have continued to hope, believing that I would get through it. For example, when we thought Dad died in a helicopter crash and held a funeral for him without his body, I still hoped and prayed that he might be alive somewhere. Five years later we found out he was alive!

How is your life different today than when you first came to America?

I can't imagine what my life would be like if I was still living in Vietnam. Since then my life has transformed tremendously, and I have gone from being doubtful and insecure to becoming a self-confident and skilled computer technologist. I have also learned to stand upright, walk, and drive. Though formerly ill and distant, I am now a happier, healthier, and friendlier person.

How is the close relationship you share with your father detailed in the book and what does that relationship look like today?

Our relationship gets stronger with each year. We get along very well, and I am happy that my dad has been blessed with good health. I hope to live with him for many years to come.

In modern America, where polio is nearly eradicated and few have seen the effects of it, how do you feel this book can be eye-opening? And in what way do you hope readers will be changed after reading it?

It's eye-opening to the younger generation who doesn't understand that even though we have advanced medicine and technology, polio still exists. People are always surprised when they find out I had been infected with polio. I have shared how I overcome day-to-day challenges and hope my condition will bring awareness of the impact of polio.

What do you hope people will gain by reading your story?

Personally, I hope that by sharing my life experiences, I will give my nieces and nephews the ability to understand more about what their parents and grandparents have been through. I hope they will better appreciate what they have.

I also want readers to gain a new perspective when reading about my struggles. I want to encourage people not to judge others. When you see a differently abled person, don't be afraid to offer help. Treat them with love, patience, understanding, and grace. I hope my story will provide comfort and inspiration.



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What people are saying...

“This book will captivate—and humble—anyone whose parents or grandparents suffered to reach this country and realize its promise. Few had it tougher than Thuhang, who spent her childhood crawling on her stomach due to crippling polio. She survived to make it from war-ravaged Vietnam to start a new life in America. The story of Thuhang’s struggles and ultimate triumph helps us understand how America’s immigrant heritage made it the greatest country on Earth and why it is so wrong to disdain and malign those immigrants of today who wish to help make our country even greater.”

—Jose Villarreal

Senior advisor and partner of Akin Gump; Chairman of US Mexico Foundation; political strategist and immigration reform advocate

“Sharon Orlopp has beautifully written Thuhang Tran’s story. Sharon has accurately captured the history of this brave, tenacious little lady and what Vietnamese families went through after the fall of Saigon. My respect for the South Vietnamese is even greater after reading *Standing Up After Saigon*. This is a one-of-a-kind book. Every veteran, as well as all of America, will want to hug Thuhang and say, ‘Way to go, sweetheart—we love you.’”

—Bob Ford

Author, *Black Cat 2-7*, Vietnam helicopter pilot; CEO, Okeene Milling Company

“*Standing Up After Saigon* enforces in us the powerful lessons of perseverance. Tran’s riveting personal story of strength and courage to overcome life’s insurmountable obstacles reminds us that the immigrant perspective fuels one’s human capacity to see opportunities others don’t, do what others won’t, and keep pushing when prudence says quit.”

—Glenn Llopis

Founder, Center for Hispanic Leadership; author of *The Innovation Mentality*

“Thuhang Tran’s firsthand account of daily life in Vietnam once Saigon fell is extraordinary. She faced ongoing challenges of polio, poverty, famine, Communist economic programs, and family separation with grit, perseverance, and hope. Her riveting odyssey demonstrates the universal lesson of personal triumph despite unrelenting odds.”

—Bernie Milano

President, KPMG Foundation; creator, PhD Project, a nonprofit organization

“*Standing Up After Saigon* is an engaging, authentic, well-written story that is both personal and significant for providing geopolitical context from the perspective of a Vietnamese family. This is a rare resource for readers interested in a story of resilience and personal courage and for readers who want to understand more about this era in Vietnam and America’s shared history.”

—Claudia Kennedy

First female three-star general in the US Army, retired in 2000 after thirty-one years of military service; author, *Generally Speaking*

“In today’s world, filled with so many challenges—be it personal, cultural, environmental, or political—we all need stories of perseverance, unification, and family. This is a book of hope for peace, using our daily struggles to make us stronger. You realize that, at our core, we must continue to believe in something that is bigger than who we are and beyond our current difficult environment. This is a story of all of the above and one that inspires the soul to continue to strive and dream beyond today’s circumstance. Embrace the diversity of life, the meaning of hope, and the light that continues to burn in each of us as you turn the pages.”

—Rollin Ford

Retired EVP and CAO, Walmart

“Fascinating story of survival and achievement with an outstanding demonstration of love, determination, and personal reinvention. A must read.”

—Dr. Mohammad Bhuiyan

Professor of entrepreneurship, Tuskegee University; US Congressional candidate

“An invaluable sociological resource that recounts what life was like under the Viet Cong. This storied life in book form encourages us to continually seek new perspectives and expand our understanding—especially when it seems we are faced with insurmountable odds. Both a solemn reminder and inspiring account of humanity and perseverance, Thuhang’s story reminds us of our innate human ability to dream, hope, and do whatever it takes to flourish.”

—Kevin Turner

Retired COO, Microsoft

“Sharon Orlopp and Thuhang Tran have written what will soon be an international classic. *Standing Up After Saigon* is about the triumph of the human spirit and the power of one woman’s determination and leadership to thrive. Read it.”

—Nell Merlino

Creator, *Take Our Daughters to Work Day*; author, activist, speaker, and consultant focused on empowering girls and women

“The book is a riveting depiction of the struggles and hardships experienced by many immigrants as they navigate rigid immigration policies, and also exposes the realities of being a person with a disability in the developing world. Sharon Orlopp does a phenomenal job of telling a compassionate story of overcoming the odds despite tragedy that leaves us with a sense of optimism in knowing that, with the love and support of family, anything is possible.”

—Rohini Anand

Chief diversity officer, Sodexo; Board Member for National Organization on Disability board

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SYNOPSIS

In this incredible true story of familial love and triumph through adversity, Thuhang Tran and Sharon Orlopp document decades in the lives of Thuhang and her father, Chinh Tran. Thuhang was born in 1970 in Saigon, near the end of the Vietnam War. She contracted polio as a toddler, and though her family sacrificed much to seek treatment, their efforts were halted by the fall of Saigon. Chinh was an air traffic controller in the South Vietnam Air Force at the time and was lost in the evacuations from Saigon, separated from Thuhang and the rest of his family and presumed dead. This powerful memoir follows Thuhang and her father Chinh through their respective struggles, from Thuhang's battle with polio and the impact of her father's absence to Chinh's immigration to the United States and his desperate fifteen-year mission to be reunited with his family. Thuhang has remained hopeful and resilient through all the seemingly impossible hurdles she's faced, and lives today to tell her story and inspire those around her to find strength through perseverance.

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