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My Comfort Zone

Under the hotter-than-blue blazing sun, my grandparents' home, their *nhà*, stands firmly in the middle of a rare green space in the heart of Bien Hoa City – an important industrial area in southern Vietnam. Tropical monsoon winds carrying heat gently blow through the yard, and a choir of sparrows sings in the Indian almond trees, all contributing to create a melodious song that relaxes my soul. In the yard, the grass feels soft beneath my feet, like a feathery carpet. My grandmother's love of nature clearly shows in the yard in front of the house. Peach blossoms, yellow apricot flowers, chrysanthemums, and sunflowers bloom in vibrant clusters every spring, especially during the Tet holiday. The little yard is surrounded by a metal fence like a giant protective guardian for a precious treasure. The fence is decorated with popular ornamental plants and my grandparents' favorite fruit trees, such as kumquat, guava, and *barringtonia acutangula*. In the afternoon, leaves rustling and dancing in the gentle breeze give a comforting ambience to a quiet space.

The house stands as a testament to the passage of time; it is a treasure trove where every corner holds memories waiting to be discovered. The house is a one-story with an L-shaped structure, which was built with concrete and brick. With a bright orange, multi-tiered roof and an open-air courtyard, my grandparents' house retains many characteristics of antiquated Vietnamese architecture. The house exudes an aura of the timeless beauty of ancient designs. The faded light yellow paint hints at a rich history with memories that seem to whisper stories of generations past. The orange tiled roof amidst the blue, cloudless sky makes the house stand out even more. Whenever I enter the house, my sense of smell is awakened by a combination of childhood scents: the warm, earthy smell of wooden-made interiors and the aromatic scent of traditional Vietnamese food. My grandmother's signature dishes include *thịt kho măng* (Vietnamese braised pork with

bamboo shoots), and *canh chua* (sweet and sour soup) that have contributed to my wonderful childhood. The floor of the house is paved with square tiles that have simple but unique patterns. The house has few decorations as my grandparents like orderliness and minimalism. Therefore, the house's furniture is primarily necessary everyday items. Despite the simplicity of the furniture, the walls are an archive of family memories like a slow-motion movie. Photographs are neatly lined up on the textured wall along with light stains of time, capturing moments of joy and celebration. Alongside the photos are walnut shelves that overflow with books and textbooks that have been kept for decades. Inside the books, pages are yellowed with age, their deckled edges frayed like a favorite shirt that has been worn until its color has faded. The scent that rises from the pages is like a bouquet of memories, a heady mix of dust, ink, and the moldy scent of older times.

The house always gives me a sense of emotional healing, I feel protected every time I am embraced by the peaceful atmosphere of the house. Recently, I have not been able to visit my grandparents because of the geographical distance. Leaving my home country with the passion for self-development and pursuing a career forced me to step out of my comfort zone and leave behind precious family moments. Despite many arduous challenges, the thought of my grandparents' house motivates me to keep trying because I know there are people there who will always support me. Regardless of where I live, their *nhà* will always be my comfort zone filled with beautiful childhood memories.