

Eidelstedt – A new home

Phung Nguyen and Lien Dam grew up in Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City), South Vietnam. The violent unification of North and South Vietnam in 1975 and its consequences triggered a long-lasting wave of refugees; between 1979 and 1986, approximately 1.5 million people fled across the sea as so-called boat people. Phung and Lien Nguyen also decided to leave Vietnam in 1980.

Escape from Vietnam

Their first destination was the USA, as friends and family already lived there. Through Phung's former colleagues, the couple got a place on a boat – this usually cost more than \$2,000 (a monthly salary was about \$40). However, Phung didn't have to pay for the crossing for himself, his wife, and two young children – he had learned navigation from his brother, so he was assigned as navigator for the crossing. After two and a half days at sea, they and fourteen other people were picked up by a ship belonging to the German aid organization Cap Anamur, which was used to rescue Vietnamese boat people, and taken to Singapore. There, they could choose whether to go to the USA or Germany. Germany had agreed to accept a contingent of Vietnamese refugees.



On the boat “Cap Anamur”, 1980.
Photo: Privately owned by the Nguyen family.

The first Years in Germany



After living in Friedland and Norddeich, the couple and 25 other refugees were offered the opportunity to move to the small town of Friesoythe in Lower Saxony. There, they received a great deal of support from the authorities and volunteers, with whom Phung and Lien Nguyen learned German every day. Both found work, and their third child was born here in 1982. The family lived in a predominantly Catholic environment – although Phung and Lien are Buddhists, they had their children baptized as Catholics. The couple also took on guardianship of three unaccompanied Vietnamese minors who had come to Germany with them.

The Nguyen family with caregiver Jürgen Höpfner in Friesoythe.
Photo: Friesoyther Nachrichten/Nordwest-Zeitung, December 11, 1980

Life in Hamburg

After a few years, however, the couple longed for life in a larger city, with better jobs and schools for their children. In 1986, Phung got a job at the Valvo factory in Hamburg-Lokstedt and moved to Eidelstedt. His family followed six months later. Lien took a job at Block House. In 1996, the couple built a house with a garden a few streets away from their former apartment – they still live there today and feel very comfortable in their neighborhood.



Phung and Lien Nguyen in front of their house in Eidelstedt, 2024.

Photo: Wolfgang Wallach, Mobile Geschichtswerkstatt Eidelstedt.

Important Commemoration

In 2024, a section of Halskestraße in Hamburg-Billbrook was renamed Châu-und-Lân-Straße – in memory of the young Vietnamese refugees Nguyễn Ngọc Châu and Đỗ Anh Lân, who were murdered in a right-wing terrorist arson attack in the refugee shelter at Halskestraße 72 in 1980. Both had come to Hamburg that same year through the Boat People Reception Program.

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Aşır Özek was born in eastern Turkey in 1971. His father moved to Germany as a "guest worker" in 1973, shortly before the recruitment ban came into force. Aşır only arrived in Hamburg in 1989 and learned German in a so-called "foreigners' class" at school, then trained as a plumber.

Aşır Özek as a musician with his bağlama (long-necked lute).
Photo: n.y., privately owned by the Özek family

Alevi Culture and Tradition

Aşır Özek began playing the bağlama (long-necked lute) and singing folk songs at an early age. He writes poetry and literature, trained hundreds of students, founded a 40-member "women's choir" at the Alevi Cultural Center, and composes his own music. As an Alevi, Aşır, like many other Alevis in Turkey, experienced discrimination and oppression; in Germany, he feels well accepted. He wants to pass on his Alevi culture and traditions to future generations, including through his music.

A cultural café in Eidelstedt?



Aşır and Türkan Özek at „Café steedt“.
Photo: n.y., privately owned of the Özek family

His wife, Türkan, who is also the daughter of a Turkish "guest worker," was born in Germany in 1974 and trained as a hotel manager. Together they run "Café steedt" in the cultural center in Eidelstedt. They make a good team, and their three daughters also play an important role. They also organize concerts here and are in the process of developing the place into a cultural café and a meeting place.

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