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## Community voices – transcript – OH 250/3

### Sister Elizabeth Nghia

1994

Interviewer: Helen Chryssides

South Australian Women's Suffrage Centenary Project:  
An Oral History of Women's Political Activity

*Extract of an Oral History in which she describes her reasons for fleeing Vietnam in 1976 and her escape on a small fishing boat.*

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... the situation of Vietnam then very difficult. We have no social benefit. Nobody have any funding, nobody have any benefit like the Australian government now. Whatever we got we survive then. We have to working hard every day. If we not working and then we have nothing to eat and everybody, adult and children, have to working together to survive.

After the hand over of our orphanage, because all of my brothers already escape on the last day of Saigon because they was in the army, my family became a situation of danger for that reason. And my father, the one who was in the prison for many years under the communist regime in the North Vietnam, and he advise myself need to get away, and my family helping me to escape from Vietnam to Australia, and that is my story.

### How did you escape from Vietnam?

I was in a very small fishing boat with another thirty-one people.

### None of them were your relations?

No, no. And I didn't know them before either. This is the arrangement my family, and I just step into the boat and we gone.

### When did you go?

They have planned - - -. [break in recording] The day was the 7 of June 1976.

### How long were you in the boat?

I was on the boat about two weeks. But our preparation for the journey only about four days because we [were to lose our compass EN]. We planned. I didn't know what to do, where to go, but the group of the people planned to go either to Thailand or Malaysia. But in the middle of the way we - - -. Only about a few hours after we left Vung Tau one of the communist police saw our boat and they chasing us. And when the people cry. The sailor was so nervous, and all of us so nervous because they shooting follow us, he was lost his compass.

### The compass?

The compass, right, and we have nowhere. We didn't know where to go. We go backward or forward, we didn't know. But they just ran. The boat was just running. And after four days we didn't know where we were and we ran out with food, with petrol and with water everything - and everybody was so worried and so upset. We don't know what to do. After four days we have only a very little of everything. We give for two children - for two young children - and for the people who are on duty, have enough energy to go further. But after the next few days the same. We run out everything and every day long we were so worry. We discussed together of it - definite we are going to die. And in that boat only myself as the Catholic person, and all the non-Catholic, and they say, "Sister, the reason we let you go with us into this boat, because you are Catholic nun and we are sure God will look after you".

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