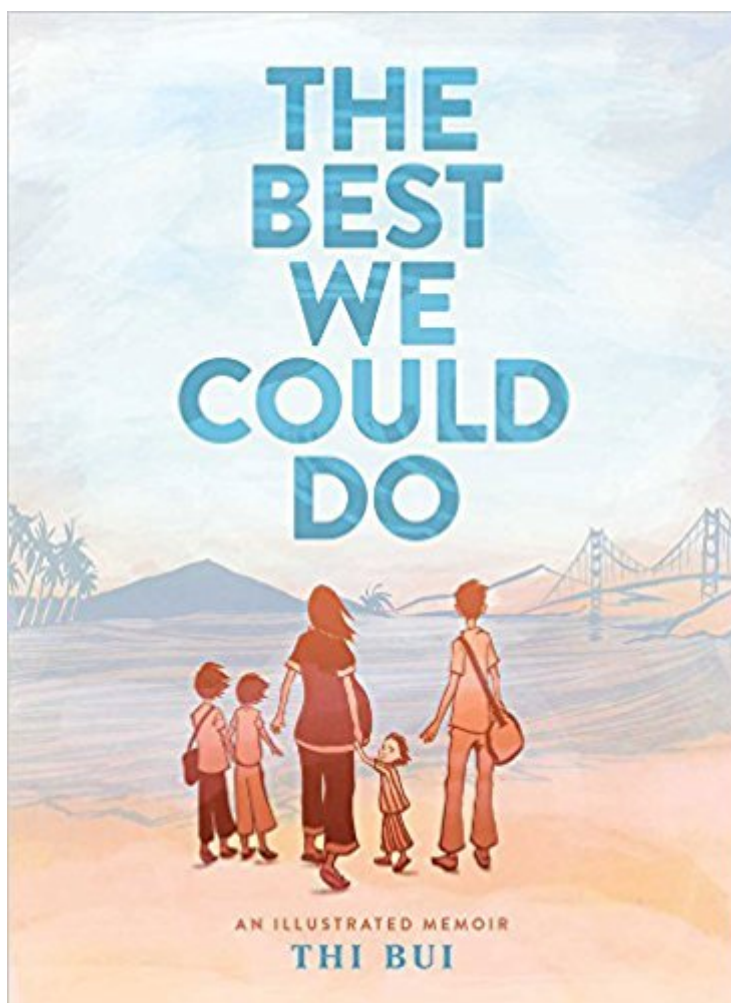


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# The Best We Could Do: An Illustrated Memoir



## Synopsis

National bestseller ABA Indies Introduce Winter / Spring 2017 Selection Barnes & Noble Discover Great New Writers Spring 2017 Selection An intimate and poignant graphic novel portraying one family's journey from war-torn Vietnam, from debut author Thi Bui. This beautifully illustrated and emotional story is an evocative memoir about the search for a better future and a longing for the past. Exploring the anguish of immigration and the lasting effects that displacement has on a child and her family, Bui documents the story of her family's daring escape after the fall of South Vietnam in the 1970s, and the difficulties they faced building new lives for themselves. At the heart of Bui's story is a universal struggle: While adjusting to life as a first-time mother, she ultimately discovers what it means to be a parent—the endless sacrifices, the unnoticed gestures, and the depths of unspoken love. Despite how impossible it seems to take on the simultaneous roles of both parent and child, Bui pushes through. With haunting, poetic writing and breathtaking art, she examines the strength of family, the importance of identity, and the meaning of home. In what Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist Viet Thanh Nguyen calls "a book to break your heart and heal it," *The Best We Could Do* brings to life Thi Bui's journey of understanding, and provides inspiration to all of those who search for a better future while longing for a simpler past.

## Book Information

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Best Sellers Rank: #5,603 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #2 in Books > Comics & Graphic Novels > Graphic Novels > Educational & Nonfiction #6 in Books > Comics & Graphic Novels > Graphic Novels > Historical & Biographical Fiction #16 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Social Sciences > Emigration & Immigration

## Customer Reviews

"A powerful and intimate look at the modern immigrant experience in America." (ICv2)Thi

Bui's stark, compelling memoir is about an ordinary family, but her story delivers the painful truth that most Vietnamese of the 20th century know in an utterly personal fashion—that history is found in the marrow of one's bones, ready to be passed on through blood, through generations, through feelings. A book to break your heart and heal it. (Viet Thanh Nguyen Pulitzer Prize winning novelist)

“With great mastery of writing and drawing, Thi Bui shows the consequences of war lasting from generation to generation. The *Best We Could Do* honors Vietnam the way Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* honors Iran. And it's fun to read too.” (Maxine Hong Kingston author of *The Fifth Book of Peace* and *I Love a Broad Margin to My Life*)

“The *Best We Could Do* lands with the force of a blow and the strength of a mountain. Thi Bui offers an all-too-rarely-seen Vietnamese perspective on our war there, and a view of Vietnamese history that makes this book essential reading for anyone who seeks to go deep into this subject. At once intimate and sweeping in its portrayal of human experience, *The Best We Could Do* made me weep.” (Leela Corman author and illustrator of *Unterzakhn*)

“The *Best We Could Do* burns back the dead skin of public War memory. Underneath is the raw flesh of another kind of war story—of mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, brutally intimate and intimately brutal. This book is a must-read.” (Lawrence-Minh Băf i Davis *The Asian American Literary Review*, curator for the Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center)

“Devastating and luminous.” (Tom Hart author and illustrator of the #1 New York Times bestseller *Rosalie Lightning: A Graphic Memoir*)

“This bold, brutal book is the new calligraphy—an exquisite marriage of alphabet and imagery. Each sentence, each scene, and each story breaks down a country, a family, and a father. Then, frame by frame, with artistic vigor and monastic devotion, Thi Bui rebuilds a world in which guilt conquers grief and gratitude becomes not only a guide, but our new Deity. *The Best We Could Do* teaches us how to say no to fear and yes to truth.” (Fae Myenne Ng author of *Bone*, a PEN/Faulkner Award Finalist, *Steer Toward Rock*, winner of the American Book Award)

“Thi Bui's book took my breath away. In a time of continuing refugee crisis, its message is necessary. *The Best We Could Do* expands one family's personal story into a global, historic context, while condensing generations of war in Vietnam to intimate and human proportions. Beautiful and powerful.” (Craig Thompson author and illustrator of *Blankets* and *Habibi*)

“By knowing our parents' story we come to a better understanding of who we are; by living our own version of their story, that understanding is even deeper and more illuminating. In *The Best We Could Do*, Thi's exploration of becoming a mother in the shadow of her own parents' history is Thi drawing her past to write her future. It's a story that

I

as a child turned parent myself

found emotional, introspective, and a cautionary tale of what we pass to our next generation.

(GB Tran author and illustrator of Vietnamerica: A Family's Journey)

Thi Bui's The Best We Could Do is a nuanced, multilayered tribute to a family that has lost as much as it has gained. Bui interprets her family's demons with generosity and compassion, and she is keen to understand how the roots of trauma and conflict can grow decades later, thousands of miles away. Infused with Vietnam's tumultuous history, Bui's memoir reflects her family's experience against the larger context of war, poverty, and dislocation, and then pulls back, showing how these heavy matters affect life at home in the quieter days that follow. The Best We Could Do is a beautiful, affecting union of memoir and illustration.

(Cecily Wong author of Diamond Head: A Novel)

"The Best We Could Do is a story of massive, sweeping scale told through quiet moments of complex emotion and intimacy. Thi Bui paints the portrait of a single family across three generations, as many continents, and thousands of panels without one false stroke of the brush. Her penetrating examination of family and identity is at once unsentimental and deeply felt, familiar and unlike any other graphic novel you have read. Comics don't get much better than The Best We could Do." (Jake Wyatt author and illustrator of Necropolis and Ms. Marvel)"Be prepared to take your heart on an emotional roller-coaster journey with this thought-provoking account that completely satisfies as the story comes full circle. Highly recommended for teens and adults; an excellent choice for book clubs." (Library Journal online (starred review))"She does not spare her loved ones criticism or linger needlessly on their flaws. Likewise she refuses to flatten the twists and turns of their histories into neat, linear narratives. She embraces the whole of it. In this mélange of comedy and tragedy, family love and brokenness, she finds beauty." (Publishers Weekly (starred review))"One of the most anticipated graphic memoirs of 2017 is debut author Thi Bui's The Best We Could Do, an illustrated memoir about her family's journey from South Vietnam in the 1970s, her experience of first-time motherhood, and how places really do shape one's identity." (Bustle)"Bonus: The entire memoir is illustrated." (The Huffington Post)"In creatively telling a complicated story with the kind of feeling words alone rarely relay, The Best We Could Do does the very best that comics can do. This is a necessary, ever-timely story to share far and wide." (Booklist, starred review)"Timely and poignant." (Entertainment Weekly)"When Bui began work on The Best We Could Do in 2005, she couldn't have predicted the significance it would hold when it was released in 2017, but now that it's here, it feels like one of the first great works of socially relevant comics art of the Trump era. Bui presents that saga in a way that is narratively

intricate, intellectually fastidious, and visually stunning. (Vulture) "Bui worked on the book for years, but its arrival feels urgent amid today's travel bans and growing refugee crisis. (The Boston Globe) "Gorgeously illustrated | (Teen Vogue) "It's a deeply personal tale, but universal in so many ways, filled with familiar struggles and joys that so many of us will relate to. You need to read this book. (PEN America) "A moving, visually stimulating account of the author's personal story and an insightful look at the refugee experience, juxtaposed against Vietnam's turbulent history. (Shelf Awareness, starred review) "Like Art Spiegelman's masterpiece, Maus, Bui's memoir elicits complex emotions from understated pen-and-ink drawings. (The San Francisco Chronicle) "A nuanced and heartfelt immigrant tale, brought to true life through beautiful and brilliant illustration. On top of that, it's an especially poignant read from the vantage point of 2017. (Refinery29) "The story, both deeply personal and historically illuminating, will devastate and inspire you on many levels. (The Mary Sue) "Bui's minimalist approach ensures readers can't gloss over the harsh realities of her family's immigrant experience, but it also forces us to recognize the universal struggles and triumphs that all families experience. Fans of Marjane Satrapi's Persepolis will not want to miss this incredibly relevant work. (Bookpage) "This book is beautiful. It is personally meditative while also deeply informative, telling the history that lives in one family's bones while spanning multiple nations, borders, and generations. (Boing Boing) "A crucial exploration of the refugee experience in this era of expressly unconstitutional efforts to halt immigration into the United States. (Hyperallergic) "her story offers readers a particular insight into the life of a family fleeing violence and fear in a time of political upheaval • a reminder of the micro consequences of macro political actions. (Paste Magazine) "It has all the hallmarks of a book that will be regarded as a pioneer in both form and content. (TruthDig) "In this graphic novel, every image looks like the characters are being gently blown away, or else in perfect stillness | It's a touching memoir. (The Coveteur) "The Best We Could Do is a moving memoir and corrective to Trump-era xenophobia. (The Comics Bulletin) "the storytelling of Thi Bui is very strong. (ICv2) "haunting writing and breathtaking art | (Gambit Weekly) "Thematically rich and complex, melding together grief and hope, the personal and the political, the familial and the national, The Best We Could Do is an important, wise, and loving

book. (The Comics Journal)"The Best We Could Do is a deeply American story, tapping into the national myth, however illusory, of freedom in new beginnings. (Hyphen Magazine)

Thi Bui was born in Vietnam and immigrated to the United States as a child. She studied art and law and thought about becoming a civil rights lawyer, but became a public school teacher instead. Bui lives in Berkeley, California, with her son, her husband, and her mother. The Best We Could Do is her debut graphic novel.

A beautiful, enlightening picture-prose poem of what it is like to be a Vietnamese immigrant.

This is a vivid and engaging personal story of war and migration.

It was really hard to read on my kindle because the writing was so small and I couldn't zoom in.

Great!

Good read and has given me historical perspective of the 2 wars Vietnam has gone through before it's independence. Everything is drawn and it leaves a calming feeling that my parent's history as a refugee will not be forgotten. Loved it

Once I started reading this beautiful little book I really had trouble putting it down.

It's a heartfelt graphic novel whose artwork flows easily along the pages. You get going and by the time you look up at the clock it's way past bedtime, and you're already halfway through. At least that was my experience. I am including a few photos of artwork in this book because I think it's necessary to display the delicate hand that the artist uses to express the complicated emotions found in this book. (I can't include photos in this Goodreads review... please see my blog for the full review with artwork ... <https://lostinagoodbook.wordpress.com/2017/03/07/resist-the-best-we-could-do-thi-bui/>) Thi Bui is a young woman who about to have her first child. Becoming a parent is frightening. Being introduced to this brand new person inspires so much love, tempered with the weight of incredible responsibility. She reaches back to her own experience as a child and to the difficult relationships she has with both her mother and father. She and her family were refugee immigrants to America after the Vietnam War ended. She was very small at the time and doesn't

remember much. She knows her parents carry the weight of those harrowing experiences and the years before they left their motherland. She hopes by understanding her parents better she can gain more confidence in her ability to parent her own child. As you can see in the artwork, the author's skill in expressing the subtle emotions at play in her parents' story is wonderful to see. It took a while for me to realize that her mother and father are actually lying beside one another. She is on a bed and he is on the floor. The "ditch" between the panels creates a distance and the space between them speaks volumes. They are both committed to protecting their children, and running from Vietnam, but also separate. When I came to this page it was stunning. There were the real people behind the "story" that has been playing out on the pages. It is a good reminder that every immigrant story is about real people | frightened, hopeful, determined people. We owe them our assistance and care. "There but for the grace of God go I" as the saying goes. How is it possible to look in the eyes of those people and refuse to help them as they flee hunger, fear and death? Books like *The Best We Could Do* remind us why it is important to relate immigrant stories. It is vital to give platforms to #ownvoices so that they can express their stories. In that way we are reminded, what use is the freedom we cherish if we will not use it to help others? I am thankful to the publisher for sending me this book, and I have been very careful not to damage it while reading since I really want to use it for a giveaway. I hope you will enjoy it as much as I did. Song for this book: Carry That Weight by The Beatles Disclaimer: I received this book free from the publisher.

Over the past few years, I've read a lot of books that were profound, evocative, and embedded themselves in me emotionally (most recently it was *"Between the World and Me"*). But this book actually made me cry, like ugly-cry. This book is beautifully illustrated (it recalls the style of *"Blankets"* by Craig Thompson), a bit sparse stylistically for its own effect. It touches on the darkest parts of what it means to survive, not just as an immigrant, but from our own trauma, experienced or passed down to the next generation. It speaks of redemptions, but carefully navigates that line of profundity without overwrought sentimentalism. I would lend this book to everyone if I wasn't afraid of never getting it back.

This was my first graphic novel and I absolutely loved it. I think it meant even more to me because I also am a child of immigrants. While my parents didn't experience the same type of conflict at the time they left their home country, there are things that I think all immigrants and children of

immigrants can relate to. This book really spoke to me and even helped me see my own parents in a new way! It's an honest story that is beautifully illustrated, written, and presented. I would 100% recommend this book to anyone and everyone!

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