

A bit of family far from home



BY AN TRAN

Tôi cần con dao lớn hơn.” (Translation: “I need the larger knife.”)

When I heard this, I stopped and turned. The three ladies behind me at the bakery at All Saints, Sherbourne Street, were engaged in something complex involving knives and dough. But that wasn't what caught my attention.

My family lives far away, out in western Canada, and I don't hear Vietnamese spoken every day anymore. My sister-in-law told me that Vietnamese sounded like music to her, and when we all talked it was like a beautiful choir. But now it's just me here in Toronto, solo.

So to hear that music again, where I least expected it, made me stop. Their conversation revolved around how to get the most communion wafers out of a piece of dough. It was the most mundane conversation in the

world, but for me it was like finding a piece of home.

I stood nearby and stared at them for a bit. They kept baking. When they spoke English, they were somewhat slow, hesitant and halting, but when they spoke Vietnamese, they sounded confident, quick and cheerful.

When they paused, I said “Why are there different sizes of cookies, aunt?”

They all looked at me in shock, and I repeated my question.

Then they all smiled broadly, laughed and started talking very fast. (There really isn't a word for communion wafer in Vietnamese, so we use that catch-all word, “banh,” which means any pastry or baked good.) The communion wafers could be ordered in different sizes and the bakery only needed a day's notice for an order, they explained. They were all very happy to be baking, and they explained to me what they were doing. The bakery manager (I had heard her called Sue, but perhaps her name was Xuân—“spring” in Vietnamese) told me how they were all ex-

cited to be baking twice a week.

I could hear that the conversations around us had stopped or were quieter as we got louder and more excited. Before I left, the bakery manager insisted that I had to see the bread dough. She explained the baking process very quickly, but I really didn't understand how it worked. I was just happy to hear her voice.

As I was leaving, I said goodbye to the three ladies in the proper, respectful Vietnamese way my parents had taught me. One of them reached out like she wanted to touch me, but remembering her flour-covered hands, stopped.

The bakery manager smiled and said, “You must come back to see us. We really want you to come back to see us.” In a FaithWorks ministry in Toronto, as far from Vietnam as you can get, I had found family.

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