



STUDIO OCHENTA ORIGINAL TRANSCRIPT

MIJA (ESPAÑOL) – 205: Uyen and the jade flower

[00:06]

Hi, I'm Mija, Mija means my daughter in Spanish, and this podcast is about my family, those who are like the ones who are long gone and those who are still dreaming.

[00:22]

Here's what you need to know about when she smiles all the time, she has a soft voice and she loves to sing. Uyen is my grandmother.

[00:34]

Here we go. Ten minutes to tell her story.

[00:47]

Imagine a few wooden houses with dirt paths to go from one to the other and all around yellowed rice fields ready to harvest. This is Vietnam in the 1940s. In the middle of the city, there is a house made of colored bricks at the window. We see a young woman.

[01:12]

She's straightening her long black hair in front of the bathroom mirror and she puts a jade flower in her hair. This is Uyen, she's 15 years old, she runs down into the living room and as she does every morning, there was her rice soup along with a fried doughnut.

[01:37]

Then she hops on her bike and heads for school, she likes to ride at full speed between the rice fields, greeting the farmers wearing non-la hats. As she crosses the village, she comes across vendors and foot with their baskets full of fruit. Seeing her biking through town. You might think she's carefree. But for a few years now, Vietnam has been fighting for its independence from

France. On the radio, the news hour disturbing. And soon, the tensions between the north and the south will plunge the country even more into chaos.

[02:38]

A few years later, Uyen works in the family jewelry store alongside her father, but the only ones who come by are soldiers looking to buy a piece of jewelry to get engaged to their sweethearts before going to war.

[02:55]

And one day, while she's rearranging the jewelry in the shop window, another soldier. "Hello!" This one has a Chinese accent. The Chinese army had recently sent thousands of soldiers to Vietnam to help in the war effort. This man, tall and straight as a pole is Rui. He walks into the shop and sees her long hair attached with a single jade flower every night.

[03:29]

She is speechless, then looks at him and asks, "Can I help you?"

[03:36]

He comes to his senses and then says, Yes, I've come to repair my medallion, please. She smiles at him and the man smiles back at her. It's as if they knew each other in another life and recognized each other that day. They get married right away and move in together.

[04:02]

But the war continues. And a few days after the wedding, Rui must leave again. Uyen moves into a new house and opens a general store on the ground floor. She lives there by herself. But soon the house fills up. The next time, Rui is on leave. He comes home to find women, has given birth to their first child. After that, every time he returns, there are more children in the house.

[04:51]

In total, they have nine children, five boys and four girls, including Hien, my mom.

[05:09]

In between tours of duty, Rui helps run the shop as he waits for his next mission. Each time he leaves, he puts back his uniform and prepares his suitcase. The children all line up for him in front of the shop to say goodbye. To Uyen, he entrusts his buddha medallion, the one she repaired the day they met. "Keep it for now to protect you until I come back." Before he gets into the military truck, Uyen always takes his face in her hands and looks him in the eyes and counts five seconds, one, two, three, four, five.

[05:51]

And she closes her eyes to immortalize this image of him.

[06:11]

But there comes a time when Rui can no longer come back, he's lying in the middle of a rice field, looking up at the sky, he sees the image of Uyen in his mind's eye and counts: 1,2,3,4,5 and closes his eyes forever.

[06:53]

Years pass since the moment Rui left this world, the war continues and the situation continues to get worse. Until one day and her parents decide to leave the country with her children. It was difficult, but everyone always kept hope for better days as they traveled from refugee camp to refugee camp. She always found a jade flower to put in her hair.

[07:27]

And then, France. When they arrive, she holds the hand of her daughter, Hien, who wears Rui's Buddha medallion around her neck. There in Paris, and their new life begins. Uyen has been living in France for more than 30 years. She had a hard time adjusting at first, but they would be reunited.

[07:55]

Men and women like to cook Vietnamese dishes for the whole family singing in the kitchen. Uyen discovers karaoke in France and loves singing the Asian grannies in the neighborhood, a jade flower in her hair.

[08:23]

When she picks us up from school, she teaches us to say 'hello, grandma' in Vietnamese, she answers us by holding our faces in her hands with a smile, staring at us for five seconds: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.

[08:43]

While she counts, all we can do is look at all the wrinkles at the corners of her eyes. Today, Uyen has been reunited with her handsome chinese soldier. They smile at us side by side on the altar of the ancestors, and we pay tribute to them both every year.

[09:51]

This episode was produced by Studio Ochenta. Our Executive Producer is Lory Martinez. Our Associate Producer is Melanie Hong. Story by Melanie Hong. Sound design by Lory Martinez. Artist: Tiffanie Delune. Theme: Gabriel Dalmasso Follow us on twitter and instagram @mijapodcast, m-i-j-a podcast. If you liked the show, you should tell a friend about it and leave us a few stars on apple podcasts in the meantime. See you next time!

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