

HER ALTITUDE

LINDA
LINH ĐAI

***Growing Beneath
Before Rising
Above***

THE BAMBOO WITHIN HER

EDITORIALS



I have often reflected on how different our starting points can be.

Growing up, I was fortunate. Education was never a question in my family. It was expected, supported, and protected. I didn't have to fight for the right to stay in school. But around me, many did.

I remember friends who had to stop studying too early. Some left school to support their families. Others stepped into marriage before they had the chance to fully discover who they could become.

That is why, in this issue, Linda's story stays with me. Her journey is not simply one of success, it is one of determination. A path she had to find, step by step, sometimes without certainty, and at times without support. She did not follow a clear road, rather she created one. That is what it makes her story powerful.

While opportunity is not equally given, the story is a reminder for us that the human spirit has its own way to charge forward.

With love,

Lai Phan

Founder, Her Altitude | Unlimited You

PROFILE

LINDA LINH ĐÀI



Linda is a senior business leader with over 15 years of experience across retail, F&B, manufacturing, and corporate transformation. She currently serves as Vice President of Human Capital & Legal Affairs at Viet Uc Group, where she leads the integration of people strategy, legal governance, and organisational growth.

Linda's career reflects a unique progression from HR leadership into full business operations. She previously held roles as Chief Operating Officer and Human Resources Director at Nguyễn Kim (Central Retail Vietnam), where she played a key role in transforming a large-scale organisation of 17,000 employees from a family-run business into a more structured corporate model. Her work spans organisational development, culture transformation, operational performance, and cross-functional leadership.

Earlier in her career, Linda built HR systems from the ground up in fast-growing environments, including F&B startup brands such as Quán Ụt Ụt and BiaCraft, supporting their rapid expansion and investment readiness. She also brings strong expertise in labour compliance, compensation & benefits, and workforce strategy across multi-location retail and manufacturing businesses.

In parallel, Linda is the Founder of DAILINH Enterprise Management Consulting, providing advisory services in HR, payroll, labour compliance, and regulatory frameworks for businesses in Vietnam.

Linda is known for her human-centered leadership approach, believing that sustainable business success is built on culture, integrity, and people. She combines strategic thinking with hands-on execution, and is driven by a commitment to building organisations where individuals can grow, contribute, and thrive.



Linda was born after seven years of waiting, in a small village in Northern Vietnam. In those days, that kind of waiting was not easy. For a woman, being married for years without a child was not just personal, it became public. It invited questions, judgments, and endless whispers behind her back. Every gathering, every passing comment, carried an unspoken weight: *What is wrong? Why hasn't she had a child?*

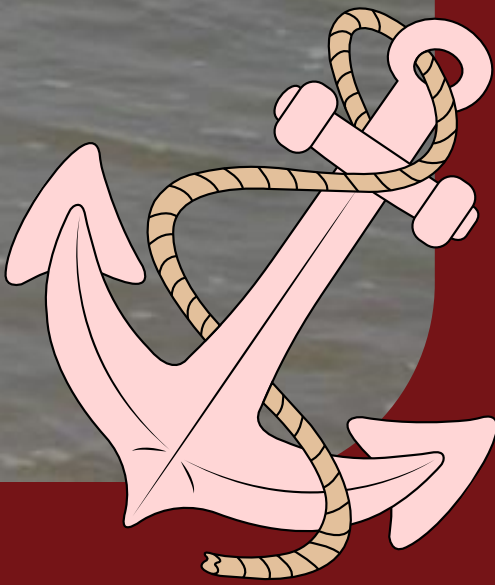
The pressure did not need to be loud to be heavy. It sat on her mother's shoulders, day after day, year after year. From family expectations, from society's standards, from the silent comparisons with others who had already become mothers. Seven years of that weight.

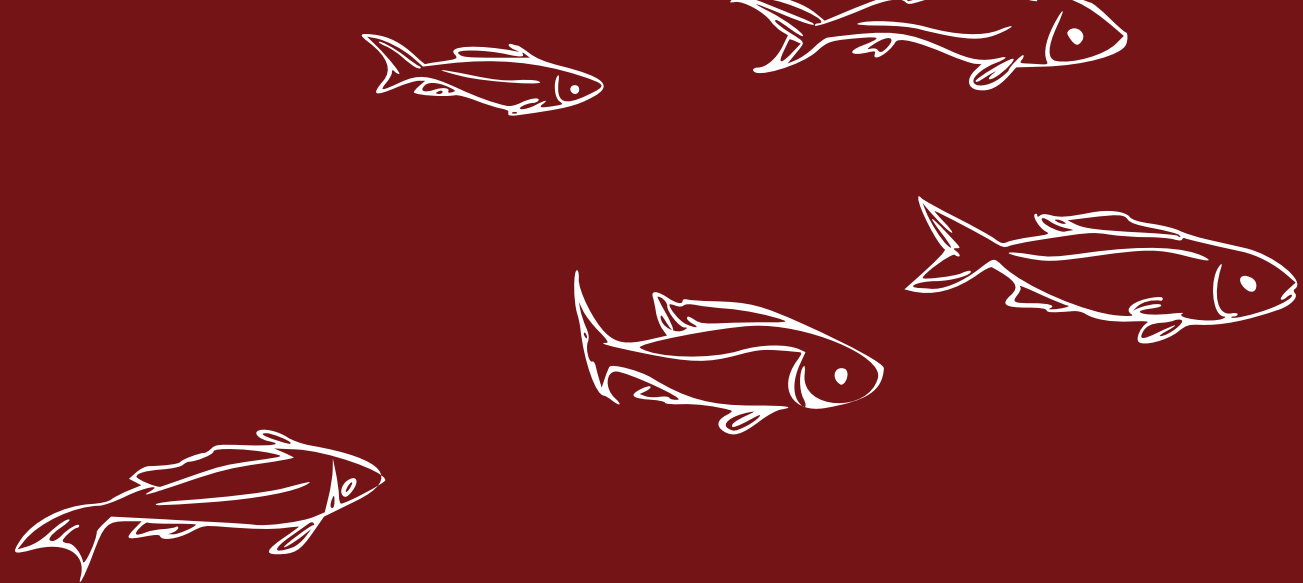
So when Linda was finally born, she was more than a child. She was a gift, she lifted something that her parents had been carried for too long. She brought relief, dignity, and a quiet sense of restoration back into her parents' life.

Life, however, did not soften after that. Her parents did whatever they could to keep the family going. There was no fixed role, no stable path, only the constant need to adapt. Her father moved from building furniture to working as a laborer, to selling food in the market. Being in the survival mode required him to be flexible with the variety. Linda, as a kid, watched him closely.

She saw how he showed up in the world, steady, reliable, known by many. Wherever he went, people greeted him, trusted him. He spoke simply, but he kept his word. Even when money was tight, even when it would have been easier to delay or avoid, he chose integrity.

WHAT BUILT HER





In a village where some families struggled to have enough to eat, he slowly built a house. Not all at once, but piece by piece – planning ahead, saving, making, fixing. It was one big house in the small village, a proof that progress could be created, even in constraint. From him, Linda absorbed something she would carry for life:

You don't wait for conditions to change. You build forward, step by step.

Her mother carried a different kind of strength. A practical and grounded person who was clear about what life required, especially for a woman in her time. She saw the world not much about possibility, but as reality, one that needed to be navigated carefully, safely.

By the time Linda was 12, she was already working alongside her in the market selling food.



At first, it was simply helping. But very quickly, Linda found her own way. She noticed things, patterns like which customers came early, which families had events, and people, who needed flexibility, who valued reliability. She started managing deliveries, going door to door, remembering details, and served them to their needs. Slowly, customers began to ask for her for the services and goods. Without being taught, she was building relationships within the small local circles, and knew that connection is an important part in running business.

At a young age, she was already moving beyond the village. She rode bicycles 20 to 30 kilometres to nearby towns, often joining her father. In those trips, she saw her father meet new partners, build new connections, be recognised for his ability and value he already established in her village. She realised life was bigger than where she was born, only if she was willing to move beyond it.

She didn't yet know the influence of those trips to her choices later, but something inside her already formed and decided what mattered. At 8 or 9 years old, when her teacher asked what the students wanted to become, the answers were familiar – teacher, doctor, police. What Linda shared made the whole class burst into laughter, because it was very different and because it was beyond the imagination of the classmates, she wanted to work in diplomacy. Linda was very sure her herself:

"Because if I can communicate and influence, I can connect people and help many others."



WHAT SHE BUILT

After finishing Grade 9, Linda faced her first real turning point where, without her own voice, her life could have gone in a very different direction.

As the high school entrance exam approached, her mother told her she had studied enough: "You're a girl. You can learn a trade, get married, and that will be your life."

It wasn't said harshly. It was said with certainty, the kind shaped by experience, by what had always been. This time, Linda resisted. A clash between two ways of seeing the world, one grounded in reality, the other reaching for possibility.

They went back and forth, more than once, before finally agreeing on a deal: If Linda achieved a high enough score, she could continue to high school, specifically a public school, where the cost was manageable. If not, she would follow her mother's path. There was no middle ground. So Linda did the only thing she could, she pushed herself.

The night before the results, she was unable to sleep with the uncertainty. She didn't know what the outcome would be, it felt like flipping a coin, and while waiting for it to land, she already knew which side she was hoping for:

"This is my life. I need to complete what I started."

When the results came out, her father heard the news before she did. When she returned home from the market, he told her she had failed. In that moment, everything collapsed. She cried without holding back, the weight of effort, hope, and fear all breaking at once. Then he revealed the truth: She had passed.

The tears didn't stop, only this time, they came from relief. Beneath that moment was something deeper: her father knew the road ahead would not be easy, but both he and her mother chose to support her.

High school became a different kind of test. She didn't just study, she worked. Taking a job as a waitress in a noodle shop, she helped ease the burden on her family. At the same time, she stepped into leadership, becoming a class leader, just like her father had been.

It was a lot but she saw it as part of her path - building, step by step, her discipline, her independence, and her ability to stand on her own.

Time passed and when she graduated, she ranked among the top students, expected to secure a place at university. One more time, the reality returned. Her family could no longer support her education.

Linda found herself at the edge of two worlds: What was given to her and what she would have to create on her own.



CONNECTION CREATES OPPORTUNITY

Holding onto the hope of education after hearing the truth from her parents, Linda still applied for university and took the exams, choosing Law, without knowing if she would ever have the chance to pursue it.

In the meantime, her father asked his sister in Long An province, who was working at a restaurant, to take Linda in. It might give her another path, one where she could stand on her own, work, earn, and figure out the rest.

The journey from the North to the South took three days and two nights by train. She carried more than a small bag. She carried uncertainty, responsibility, and the weight of a dream that felt out of reach.

Sitting on the train with her younger sister beside her, watching her struggle with severe motion sickness, Linda couldn't hold back her tears – for herself, and for her sister. It was the first time she truly felt the distance, not from the physical length, but from the life she thought she was going to have.

When they arrived in Long An on 21 July 2004, Linda officially stepped into a new life. She began working as a waitress, but she didn't stay still. After a few months, with her earnings, she bought a bicycle, and built a new routine: working in the morning, studying in the evening. She learned English. She learned computer skills. She did not know exactly where they would lead her, but she knew she would need them one day.





Eight months later, something unexpected happened.

One evening at the restaurant, a man came in for dinner. He was visiting family in Long An. He noticed Linda, something about her felt different. He spoke to her, listened to her story, and then asked a simple question: "If you want to study, why don't you move to Ho Chi Minh City?"

Linda hesitated. She didn't know anyone there. She had no idea where to start. But he kindly offered to help, passing her CV through a connection at a Japanese company. Linda took the chance in good faith. Two days later, she was invited to an interview.

With no savings, she asked her employer for an advance on her salary, took a day off, and travelled from Long An to Ho Chi Minh City for the interview. She passed and got the job.

As she had expected, moving to Ho Chi Minh City was not easy. Her family and relatives did not want her to leave. But Linda chose to move forward.

At first, everything was unfamiliar. She didn't know where to live, until she met a group of girls from Long An during the group interview.

They barely knew each other, but they decided to live together. They became her first community. They worked together, lived together, and supported each other.

It took Linda a few months to adapt. Once she found her footing, she returned to study while working. She enrolled in Finance and Accounting, not because it was her dream, but because she saw it as a foundation.

"If you understand numbers, you understand how a company works."

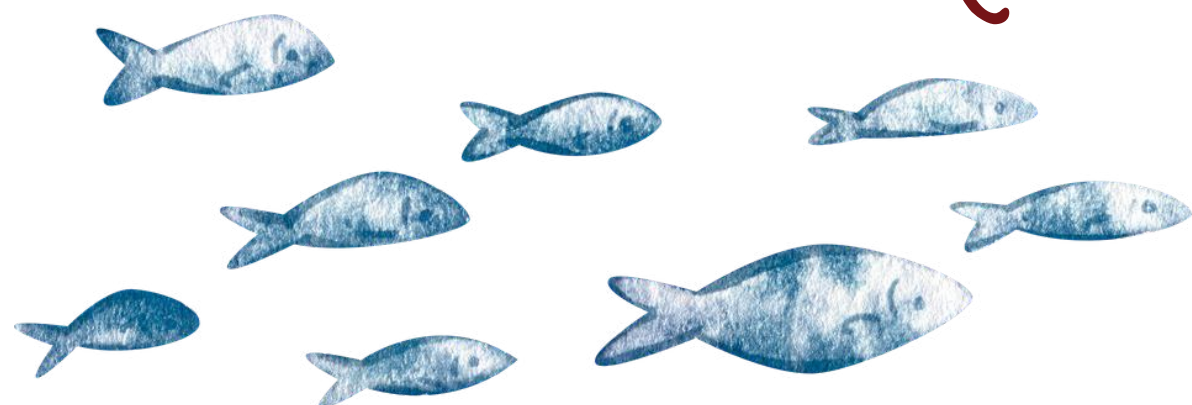


The routine was not new to her, only the intensity and place were. She worked shifts during the day, studied at night, and sometimes switched schedules with friends to cover night shifts. They supported each other so everyone could keep learning.

She completed her degree in two years and eight months. And she knew she didn't do it alone.

Looking back, Linda realised something important: if she had not shared her situation with that stranger in the restaurant, none of this might have happened.

If you don't say what you want, no one will know.



If you don't open up, opportunities cannot find you.



Her journey continued to prove this belief:

A stranger on a flight connected her to a company owner, where she got her first accounting job.

A friend from class introduced her to an HR opportunity.

A colleague later supported her growth into leadership.

Different people. Different moments. Each one opened a door she could not have opened alone.

Having watched how her father built relationships, and now experiencing connection from the receiving end, Linda came to understand that connection matters, but kindness is what creates connection. Since then she made her way of living, her personal brand to be kind, and to show up fully.



YES TO Challenges

“Can you do it?”

The type of questions that Linda received from many interviews when they saw her profile was something else different from what the job was needed. She never hesitated to answer “Yes, I can.” It wasn’t confidence built on experience, it was a belief that she would find a way.

This happened when she first secured her HR role in her career, without formally done the job before. Within a week in the role, Linda was handling everything on her own. The systems were outdated, the processes unclear, and the expectations high. She managed insurance paperwork, navigated complex administrative requirements, and even handled visa applications for the founder and his son. There was no formal training, no structured onboarding, but she found her own way to make it work. She reached out to people, asked questions, learned from anyone willing to share. At the same time, she continued her studies, working toward her Chief Accountant certification. For Linda, learning was never separate from doing, it happened in parallel, through action.

As she moved into a new opportunity in a garment company, this time she took the role in Compensation and Benefits. It wasn’t just a step forward financially, it was a shift into a new environment where she would be challenged in a different way. Her new boss did not make thing easy for her, rather creating space for Linda to grow on her own. She had to improve her English while managing the workload without others to step in to help.

She still remembers the words from her boss:



If you want to grow, you must do it yourself.

It was uncomfortable, and at times, frustrating, but it pushed Linda to stretch beyond what she thought she could do. After two years, the company was sold to a new owner. Before leaving, her boss made sure to tell the incoming leadership one thing, which stayed long with her after: “Linda is someone you should keep.”

Under the new leadership, Linda was given opportunities to work across different functions. She didn’t limit herself to one role. She learned broadly, stepped into new responsibilities, and built capability across the organisation. By the age of 24, she was leading a team of 1,000 employees.

She didn’t arrive there by chasing titles. She arrived there by consistently showing up, learning fast, and taking “Yes, I can” as her commitment to own her development.



STAY TRUTH TO THE CORE VALUE

Over time, the factory environment, once full of learning, started to feel repetitive for Linda. The cycle was predictable and she knew she had grown out of the environment. So she made another difficult decision to leave, not once, but three times.

Each time, her boss tried to retain her, offering higher salary, more responsibility, better conditions. But Linda understood something important: growth is not always about staying longer, or earning more. Sometimes, it is about knowing when it is time to move on.



Within 16 months, the company secured investment from Mekong Capital. The business grew rapidly, from a single restaurant to multiple locations within a short period of time. Linda took on both HR and government relations, working hands-on in building the organisation from the ground up.

Then COVID hit. Like many businesses, they faced uncertainty and pressure. But with strong foundations and the right support, they survived.

However, for Linda, this period brought her more clarity, that she was ready for something bigger.



She left, but not by closing doors. She promised that if they ever needed her, she would come back to support. She kept that promise, and even years later, the relationships remained.

Her journey made a turn into a different space: service, retail, and eventually startup environment where she met the founder of Quán Ụt Ụt and BiaCraft. As she listened to his vision, and read the book he gifted her "Delivering Happiness" (Tony Hsieh), Linda began to understand not just the business, but the dream behind it, and so she joined him to help grow the business.



Despite the risks during the pandemic, she made the decision to exit and find her ladder with Central Group. During the process, she was asked to provide a reference, and she surprised them by giving them her current boss's contact. Answer the question from interviewers why she did so, she just simply shared:

*"Because I value integrity.
I don't leave without
being transparent."*

That moment said more about her than anything on her CV. She was offered the role of Senior HR Director at Nguyen Kim, part of Central Group, overseeing a workforce of 2,500 employees. At just 32 years old, she became one of the youngest Senior Directors within a 17,000-employee organisation.

When she joined, the company was in transition, from a family-run business into a more structured corporate model. The systems could be changed, but the real challenge was people. Many had been there for over a decade. They were loyal, experienced, and used to a certain way of working. Linda knew that pushing change would not work. So she started somewhere else, built trust before alignment.

She asked: *What is in it for you, and what is in it for the organisation?*

Within weeks, she sat down with leadership to map out priorities and opportunities. She moved quickly, but thoughtfully. Her ability to adapt and deliver was recognised early, she passed probation within weeks and received a salary adjustment.

Then the second wave of COVID hit again, at a much larger scale. This time, Her CEO was overseas and the whole operations were under pressure. Decisions had to be made fast, Linda stepped in without any hesitation. She worked from early morning until late into the night, coordinating responses, managing teams, and ensuring the business continued to operate.

She was holding the organization together on the ground, and found ways for it to continue growing. During a time when many businesses struggled, Nguyen Kim not only survived, but performed. That period became one of the defining moments in her career.

After that, she was given the opportunity to expand beyond HR, stepping into operational roles and working closely with experts across supply chain, logistics, and planning. Over time, she moved into a Head of Operations position, overseeing multiple functions across the business. She had moved from managing people to running operations. While the growth appeared to be satisfying, the real test emerged with the change in leadership and the different approach, one that focused heavily on numbers, with less emphasis on people. For a person who believed that business is built on people, the approach no longer reflected her personal values. She could have easily stayed, performed well in powerful position, but Linda chose to leave.



She stayed true to her value, her way of living and leading: Being kind – that is what makes people stay, support, and believe in you.

Linda has never needed a title to lead. She leads by ownership, seeing the business as her own, making decisions from that place of responsibility.

When she joined VUG, she started with a conversation. Not about the role, but about direction, values, and long-term vision. She was clear with the founder about how she works, and equally clear about where she wanted to grow. She has always approached every role with the same mindset:



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*Do your best,
as if you may not
have the chance to
do it again.*

She started in September 2024, and only in three months, the decision was made for her to step into the next level, to be the President.

For Linda, leadership has never been about putting herself first. Because when you put yourself first, things don't work for long. But when you put the team first, things move, people grow, and the organisation follows.



Motherhood and the vulnerability



After marriage, during her first pregnancy, her father came to visit her in Ho Chi Minh City. Linda was so happy and she didn't know it would be the last time she could see him.

He passed away in an accident a few months after she had her first daughter. Something inside her felt like it had lost its ground when she received the news. She had a deep, irreversible feeling that she had not spent enough time with him.

She was a new mother, carrying grief, responsibility, and uncertainty all at once, while life at home became heavier. It became too much to hold. Linda found herself at a point where she had to make a choice - not between right and wrong, but between staying and continuing to break, or stepping away and starting again. She chose to start again, when her baby was only a year old. On the same day she received the divorce papers, she also left her job. There was no clear plan, no safety net, only a determination to rebuild, from the beginning.

Since then, everything she did - from work, to decisions, to the way she showed up - was anchored in one thing: Creating a life where her child could feel safe.

With her second child, motherhood felt different, not easier but clearer. She saw how difficult it was for women to become mothers while navigating expectations, careers, and the pressure to "manage it all." She saw how often women felt they had to choose, between family and work, between stability and growth. And she chose not to stay silent.

In her work, she supported women who faced similar situations - young mothers unsure of what to do, women afraid of becoming mothers because of what it might cost them. She stood beside them, guided them, and sometimes simply listened. Because she had been there.

*When life becomes too
heavy, don't stay silent.
Speak, ask, and let
people help.
Because strength is not
about doing everything
alone.*



Looking back, motherhood was Linda's turning point, to realise and embrace the vulnerability:

No matter what happens, be at peace with what you choose.

Be fully present with it, whether it lasts for a short time or a long time, so you don't have to live with "what if." Because time does not come back.

There will always be a light at the end of the tunnel. As long as you keep trying, every hardship, every challenge, is just part of the journey you are meant to walk.

Mentoring and social activity



Linda and her first year at VUG as Vice President Human Capital & Legal Affairs

THE STRENGTH OF

Bamboo

There was a time when Linda didn't know where her life would go. She only knew she had to keep moving.

The younger Linda carried uncertainty, responsibility, and a strong determination she couldn't always fully explain. She said yes to opportunities even when they were unfamiliar, made decisions without knowing the outcome, and learned by doing. Step by step, she built herself.

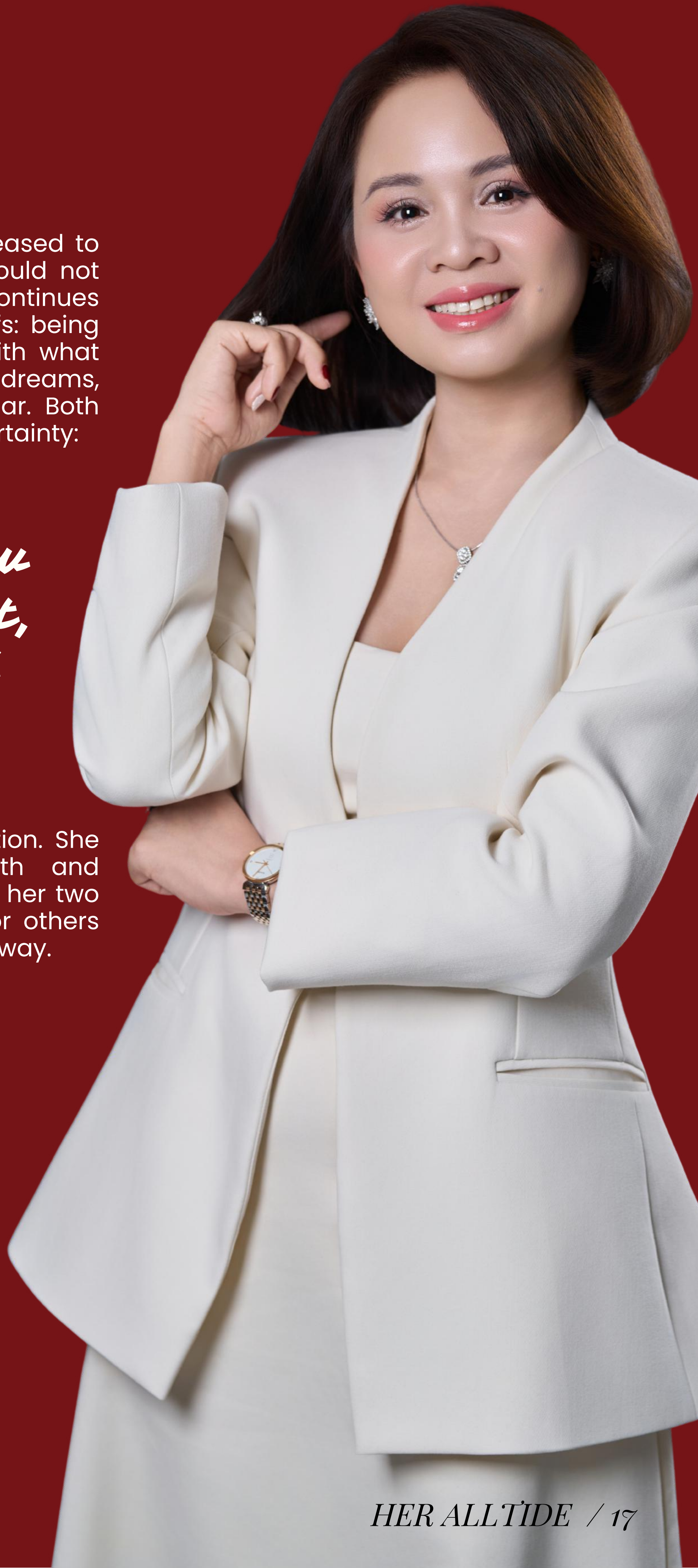
Back then, she often thought about the bamboo. In her village, bamboo takes years to grow beneath the surface, building its roots, unseen. And then one day, it rises, strong and steady. Linda saw herself in that.

For a long time, it felt like she was still beneath the ground - learning, enduring, preparing. Not everything was visible. Not everything made sense. But she kept going, trusting that the foundation she was building would hold her.

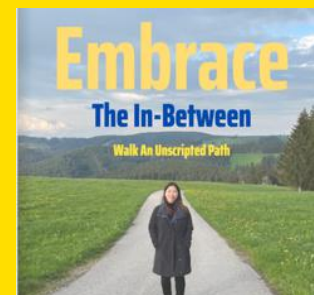
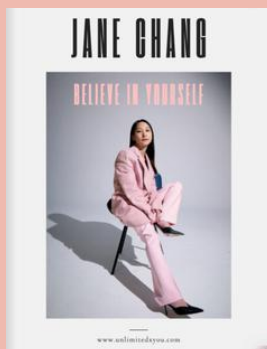
That younger Linda would be pleased to know that the Linda of today would not change anything. Instead, she continues to live with the same core beliefs: being kind to people, being present with what she wants, and speaking her dreams, even when they are not yet clear. Both versions of her share one deep certainty:

No matter how hard things get, she will find a way.

Looking ahead, Linda sees direction. She continues to grow in strength and independence, creating value for her two daughters, for her family, and for others who may need support along the way.



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