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Lepers and Lunacy : An American in Vietnam today : A Novel

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LEPERS AND LUNACY:
AN AMERICAN IN VIETNAM
TODAY

AN AMERICAN IN
VIETNAM TODAY

A NOVEL

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KENNETH J.
HERRMANN, JR.

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*To those who understand
that a typhoon
is tranquil beauty.*

INTRODUCTION

America first sent me to Vietnam in 1968. My wife sent me back thirty years later. The visit opened a Pandora's box. It resulted in me leaving my family, friends, and predictable comfort in Upstate New York for Danang, Vietnam, with a view toward possibly not leaving the place where once I helped kill people.

Some thought I was crazy. Others thought I suffered from severe PTSD. Still others were as confused about this as I was. There might have been a few who thought this a noble effort.

This book details my odyssey, but it is much more. It is an effort to communicate what Vietnam is today. It is an effort to describe how Americans continue to affect that nation and its people.

My views are different from much of what has been written. I do not claim to know the answers to questions about the complexity of Vietnam any more than I claim to understand what drives me to be here in this unique place or what will become of me. It is as it was the first time I swallowed a still-beating cobra's heart at a dinner in Danang. The symbolism was both obvious and unknowable.

I began the first study abroad program of its kind in Vietnam for American university students in 1999. My personal journey became linked with a program that sends U.S. students for three or four months at a time to Danang to study and to provide services to the poor. This journey began thirty years before this program with killing in a valley.

There was a night in December 1968 that represents the horror of what was. Hiep Duc Valley is a broad area southwest of Danang, bordered by high, rugged mountains and a river. It is filled with rice paddies, small hamlets, and thick jungle. The mountains are steep and hide adjacent valleys that are just as forbidding in combat as they are beautiful during periods of peace.

I was with an Infantry platoon that night in 1968. We had spent the day moving from hamlet to hamlet in the valley, gathering information about enemy troop movements. That night was quiet and tense. We gathered in a circle to wait for dawn. There was no moon, and the darkness was so thick it was difficult to see the man next to you. Some slept a nervous sleep. Others stood guard, alert for the slightest movement or sound. The silence was suddenly broken by a howling scream of pain.

Everyone jumped to alert. The screams continued from someone in the darkness, someone in the distance, someone experiencing a hell that frightened us all. It went on unabated for what was about an hour and seemed an eternity. Then, the silence returned. The chills continued to run down my spine, accentuated by the quiet. The tension was such that I thought I would vomit. No one moved. We barely breathed.

When dawn came, we moved slowly toward the sound of the screaming the night before. The smell was dank and moist. The mosquitoes were hungry. We moved hesitantly but steadily through razor sharp elephant grass and wound our way toward a small clearing. The platoon spread out to encircle the clearing.

We walked into a trampled down area splattered with blood to find a man or what was a man. He had been skinned and slaughtered. The former soldier's face was one of frozen

anguish. He stared at us from the agony that no human should experience. No one spoke. We merely trembled. There was no indication on which side of the conflict he had fought or which side had slaughtered him or why. His misery represented the war, not a particular flag.

The war continued after that night with other atrocities. The war itself was an atrocity. Those I helped kill I thought would have killed me if it had been to their benefit. It would have been easy for them. In fact, I did not know how easy until I returned to that place many years later. Then, I discovered the enemy actually chose, consciously chose to let me live. This contributed in some strange way to the realization that I had never left Vietnam at all.

The experience in the war was not just an episode from which I should go on. Post-war adjustment and all this involved was just an illusion waiting for a return home. My endless reading, writing, and teaching; my frequent visits and other activities relevant to Vietnam during the intervening years were a bridge between the fantasy and the reality of that nation. The return brought all of this into an unanticipated focus with an unanticipated consequence, both for others and for me.

Vietnam has both changed and stayed the same over the years. Most of the students who participated in the SUNY Brockport Vietnam Program were born long after this city and the surrounding mountains and valleys were drenched in the blood that now haunts the place. Most of the people in Vietnam were also born after the war ended. The war museums are only busy with children on school trips or foreign tourists. Often they are empty places with reminders of a war that few discuss. One high-level government official told me, "We try to put the past behind us, but it is not always easy. The results of the war are all around us."

The educational program is not about the war. It is about a country. It is not about destruction. It is about building bridges between people divided by history. Its effect on me was opening doors I had closed many years before. However, it was not just the program. It was the people of Danang who opened these doors. Once I walked through them I realized that while I was never a POW during the war, I may have become a prisoner during peace in Vietnam. I was not sure I wanted to be released. I was sure that something was hinting that real freedom might be found here. This was a difficult journey.

This controversial odyssey may begin with a mere college program but involves redefining oneself. The marketing flyers for this program say it is, "Not your average study abroad program." This proved an incredible understatement.

Dr. John Perry, Director, International Education, SUNY Brockport, took the leadership and the creative risk in developing this program, an action others in higher education would have found much too risky. His tolerance of me and his willingness to be on the cutting edge of international education with such a unique program speak volumes about him and his staff. None of us, especially my family, ever anticipated what would happen because of the program.

A chairperson of an academic department at the university opposed establishing this program by saying, "I don't think we should have any program in Vietnam. It's just a backward, dirty country that killed over 58,000 Americans." John ignored this attitude and took a chance on the program. There is a financial risk to such innovation, and universities, whether public or private, are businesses that respond to the bottom line. He was willing to look at the quality of what might be accomplished. This is unusual. That did not mean that finances were ignored. It was required that the program

support itself through student tuition and costs by the end of the initial three year period.

The State University of New York at Brockport's Vietnam Program is an extraordinary study abroad program. The students study courses that give them an understanding of Vietnam, help them develop skills in interacting with the Vietnamese, and provide them with an opportunity to help the poor. Most learn even more about themselves. There is an incredible prospect to learn from lepers, street children, those who live in a garbage dump, the poor in the mountains, the elderly in a nursing home, Agent Orange victims, and orphans. These are better educators than professors are.

There are three terms each year, and different groups of students are in Vietnam all year. This is in Danang, often called "The Capital of Central Vietnam", a place economic investment and tourism sometime seem to have overlooked.

Danang presents special challenges to foreigners. I spent most of my time in a rural valley and very little time in this city during war. I recall a place filled with Americans, the constant roar of jet fighters, and swarms of Huey helicopters taking off and landing. It now provides wonderful rewards for those willing to look beyond the bumpy streets, inconsistent electricity, holes in the sidewalks, poverty, high humidity, and occasional typhoons.

Danang is filled with the sounds of music, children's laughter, constant chatter, and the thousands of motorbikes that weave in and out of chaotic traffic. The air is a mix of sea breeze, the scents of flowers and exotic foods, and, of course, traffic fumes. The city provides insight into the character and richness of culture and tradition in a nation whose peace has been won at a terrifically high price. It provides a life changing opportunity for the adventuresome. It's done that for me, but

less from a spirit of adventure and more from a feeling that I died thirty-five miles southwest of that seaport in the late 1960s and curiously was born in the late 1990s.

I went back to Vietnam in 1998 to revisit the scene where my little corner of the war took place. Less than two years later, the educational program began. A year and a half later, I moved there with a view toward possibly not leaving. I had to decide whether or not living there would help me to accomplish finishing the job of helping people that I had begun many years before. I was prepared to spend the rest of my life in Vietnam if this would accomplish this mission. I knew it might involve possibly sacrificing career, friends, and family. It was a mixture of personal insight, professional challenge, guilt, love, and wonder that resulted in this odd series of events. Near the place I felt I had died, I found life again. This discovery came at an unanticipated cost.

The personal and professional processes were not simple. This may be interesting to those intrigued with the possibility of rewriting both personal and professional history. It has taught important lessons that result in questions that are at least that important. This may be helpful to those interested in this rich culture with almost limitless potential that has been sadly frustrated by the very history that created it.

The journey described here is more than that of a returning war veteran. It includes such examples as Americans today who endanger aid to lepers, even though the lepers' struggle for existence is both heroic and tragic; the candid view from the Vietnamese of the behavior of Americans in Vietnam's developing approach to their country; the conflicting but potentially harmonizing forces that directly impact both America and Vietnam; and cautions about necessary business and other ventures in Vietnam by foreigners.

This is a perspective of Vietnam the reader may find helpful. It certainly is different from that which they have heard elsewhere. I have no claim to know all the answers; merely frank views that may generate healthier questions than Americans have been asking. My personal issues and experience simply reflect the broader issues affecting Americans in Vietnam today.

This book provides some insight into Vietnam, various opinions and views held by Vietnamese about Americans today, approaches that may be useful to involvement in that nation, a critique of the role our institutions play today in relation to the country, and a rather risky expose of my own unusual experience. Some who kindly shared ideas about this book as it developed urged me to stand naked for the reader. Well, naked I am. While it is not always a pretty sight, it is honest and, I admit, somewhat uncomfortable.

My hope is this will benefit Vietnam. The book is admittedly biased. While there is much talk today of building bridges between Vietnam and America, this book suggests the bridges be built cooperatively but with the Vietnamese controlling the project. It also suggests that approaching the project without both a willingness to take personal risks and to engage professional innovation will result in a bridge so weak that it presents danger for those who walk in either direction. The collapse of this bridge would be disastrous for millions of Vietnamese.

1.

PREPARING FOR VIETNAM

“What is our innocence,
what is our guilt? All are
naked, none is safe.”

- Marianne Moore, *What are Years?*

It may seem an unusual place to prepare to go to fight a war in Asia, but Buffalo's Irish neighborhood was a good place to grow-up. The Sisters of Mercy used it to beat knuckles and instill a faith built on guilt. Sister Mary Makesbloodflow taught us about Christian mercy and God's love through this use of drill sergeant techniques. The neighbors used the Southside to preserve traditions in the shadow of two steel plants. My family just did what most did. They bought a house; had me pull weeds from the lawn; bounced me off walls when I failed Arithmetic tests; enjoyed sports; participated in church social events; and lived a predictable way of life. My friends and I spent hours after seeing a John Wayne movie, playing soldiers while we pointed our sticks and shot imaginary bullets. Sometimes we died dozens of times, but we were always home for dinner on time. There was never any blood.

My mother came from Winburne PA, a tiny strip-mining town in central Pennsylvania. My father came from Buffalo, the Southside. Mom was a nurse who eventually became a second-grade teacher. Dad worked as a milkman, steelworker, US Mail letter carrier, insurance salesperson, and New York State Lottery inspector.

They met when she was in nursing school in Buffalo, fell in love, and alienated her family. Dad was a Catholic, Irish unbending type with a hint of German orthodoxy. Mom was a Presbyterian, anti-beer and anti-smoking type family. Dad's family would never allow a marriage with a heathen. She converted to Catholicism, and her family never forgave my father. They always disliked each other, Dad and his in-laws.

I was conceived in 1942 and born in 1943. Betty, my only sibling, was eight at the time. When Mom carried me, Dad was drafted to go fight the Nazis. Mom had a nervous breakdown, gave birth to me, and spent a brief stay in a psychiatric facility. It was very difficult for her. Her husband had been sent to France. Her brother had been killed in the war in Europe, and we had very little money.

Dad spent most of his time in France in a hospital trying to get out of the Army. He developed cluster headaches, the excruciating type, during that time. Finally, the war ended, Dad came home, and Mom seemed better. She started smoking and remained (with Dad) a chain smoker until she died a few years ago in her eighties. Dad died a few years before her.

The earliest memory I have is when I was two. That was Dad's homecoming. I recall the excitement and preparations. We had no money and were staying with his mother who had come from Ireland. Well, in the door came Dad in uniform. Everyone cheered, cried, and hugged. I stood there, half afraid. He smiled and picked me up, hugged me and did the same with Betty. There was what seemed a huge, wooden crate he had with him, and my uncles helped him open it. Gifts! He said he had candy for me, and I was very excited. He dug down in the crate and found a small bag, opened it, and handed me a piece of hard candy. I put it in my mouth and spit it out. He instantly took a swing at me. I flew across the room and

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bounced off the wall, crying. He was furious. Seems the candy had been packed with soap. Somebody pointed that out to him. He laughed. I sat on the floor crying, and the homecoming celebration continued.

He was drunk; in fact, although he did not always show it, he was drunk much of the time. It eventually killed him in the early 1990s. Aside from our relationship, he was a good man. The headaches plagued him all of his life. I remember the times I hid in my bedroom while he moaned and vomited from the pain. No doctors seemed able to help him.

Childhood was spent in the Irish ghetto; yes, with flying nuns. Child abuse did not surface as a social issue for years after I grew up. My Dad wanted me to be a ballplayer. I could never catch the ball. He would tell me to play catch in the backyard, and I, of course, would agree. He would throw, and I would miss. As this ritual went on, I would begin to cry. He would get angrier and throw harder, until he eventually bounced the ball off my head or chest, and I would cry more. Then, he would walk away in disgust. Patience was not his strong suit.

School began, and I could not learn. All the other kids could look at the chalkboard and recite. I could not. The nuns would just rap my knuckles. I would not cry. I did find that I could occupy my time, having fun. It was good fun; girl's hair in my inkwell, notes to pass, slyly eat candy and develop ways not to be caught. I even devised ways to sneak out of the room when I was taught by older nuns and sneak back in without ever being caught. Howdy Doody and TV, football playing in empty lots, playing soldier—all of this occupied my time.

In fifth grade, the school tested all the students' eyes. The nurse called my mother because I was fooling around, and they could not test my eyes. I refused to read the big "E" on

the chart. Into the medical office my furious mother came. As only my luck would have it, she taught in my school. I stopped smiling and knew the slap alongside the head was coming. It did, and I tried to read the chart but could not. That evening we were in the doctor's office. He tested my eyes. I was blind with 20/400 in one eye and 20/450 in the other. The next day I was wearing glasses. Two weeks later, I was reading everything. In one month, the school changed my IQ from 98 to 139. However, I still could not catch a baseball.

Much of what went on at home centered on my fear of beatings, Dad drinking with his Knights of Columbus friends, or church activities. We went to Lake Erie beaches, visited Mom's family in Pennsylvania (where I once chopped down my grandfather's favorite cherry tree when I was ten), and had backyard barbecues. Since home was crazy for me, I spent much time at St Martin's Roman Catholic Church in youth activities. The priests were a healthy alternative for me. One of them, Fr. Paul Ayoub, became my psychological father. He made me editor of a youth newsletter, *The Martin-Y*. It was distributed after mass on Sundays and contained articles about youth dances, sports, and other local news. This was fun but on occasion a little controversial. I wrote an article satirizing the Irish once, and the congregation boycotted the newsletter for weeks. The priests were concerned. I was delighted. Mom and Dad thought it was a stupid thing for me to do.

School was not easy for me. I received very high grades with little or no effort in all subjects, except Math. I had an Arithmetic learning disability and still do. Calculators were not available to me, and I just could not do it, no matter how hard I tried. Bringing home report cards always brought home shouts of fury and dented walls. It was horrible. Dad always reminded me of how much he worked to achieve his high

school diploma during the Great Depression. He ignored all the good grades and zoomed right in to the Math failure. I found out after he died, by the way, that he never went beyond 10th grade. He wanted more for me.

In the 8th grade, a Passionist priest came to visit the parish. I was an altar boy and served mass for him. He seemed like a great person. I liked his black cassock with a plastic badge of a heart and cross. He gave me literature about his religious order, and the next stage of my life began.

After 8th grade, at the age of 14, I left Buffalo for Dunkirk, NY and entered the monastery as a seminarian. It was the first time away from home or my grandparents' home. It was very frightening. The rules began the second day. No talking, except from 8:00 PM to 8:30 PM in a recreation room. Wake up and file to the chapel periodically every night to chant orders. Attend mass daily, say the rosary daily, meditate during free time, study, attend classes in the morning, learn sign language to communicate at meals, etc.

The second week we attended a three-day novena given by an ancient monk who sat near the altar in the chapel. No light, except a spotlight on him. He read religious texts endlessly. Over and over, he read from St Alphonsis Ligouri about how evil we all were and how we would die and maggots would consume our evil bodies. Really. I would shiver in fear and pray to God and Mary and any saint who might listen to help me avoid sin. I had to get to heaven in order not to burn forever in hell. This went on from September to November 1957. In November, I had had enough and wanted to go home. Home was even better than my life that seemed stuck in the Middle Ages.

Fun was not allowed in the monastery. I found no place to talk, except the bathroom. I really conversed with the

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urinal and even sang a few songs to a mirror. When I would be heard, it was off to scrub floors for hours of penance. Going to Confession daily was also a problem. I had to have sins to confess so I just repeated them from day to day. Not honoring my father and mother came easily. I always confessed that. That, of course, meant spending endless hours in prayers as penance.

Finally, I called my parents. They came with Fr Ayoub. They demanded I stay. He interceded and said, "Get him out of this crazy place." He was the priest, and every South Buffalo person did what the priest said to do. I went home in December. I felt like I was escaping prison. The deal was that I would attend a Catholic high school the next semester and a Catholic seminary in Buffalo from then on where I would live at home and attend classes, like an average school. I told my parents when I was at St Martin's I would become a priest, and a priest it would be.

It began in January 1958 and was not an average school. I spent three years of high school and two years of college at the Diocesan Preparatory High School. We wore black suits and ties and white shirts every day and took a normal high school curriculum with the addition of Greek, Latin, and Theology/Philosophy. My grades were great, except for Math. That, of course, meant summer school for Math every summer.

We had fun as the elite in the Church, farted when possible during choir practice, sneaked smoking, went to movies, played cards, got drunk, and argued politics and theology. There was no dating. I made it a practice to buy girly magazines and "sublimate". Confession was spicier than in the monastery. Catholic girls liked seminarians. I only lusted in my thoughts, however. I still feared the maggots and hell fire. I lost that fear years ago.

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This was the time the Church began to open up under Pope John XXIII. English was introduced into the liturgy and seminaries became more liberal places. I enjoyed the freedom of thought and got into trouble all the time with this.

I once wrote a paper comparing Tropic of Cancer with St Matthew's Gospel. They nearly threw me out over that. It was all so intellectual.

In 1963, I finished the first two years of college at the Prep Seminary. Then, it would have been off to the major seminary for the second six years before ordination. I decided against that. I knew they would eventually throw me out for my liberal views, and I had had enough of the intellectual, social, and intellectual constraints. Besides, it really seemed to me that many of the men I saw going on were misfits who stayed because it was safe and great status in the Church in days when priests were Gods in the communities in which we grew up.

Leaving was not an easy decision. I went to a Trappist monastery in Kentucky to make the decision. When I left, I still was not sure. It was New Year's Eve 1962. My sister Betty was a great woman and still is. She had married Bob. Bob's father was manager of the new Pittsburgh Hilton. My parents, Betty, Bob, and his parents were all at the hotel for New Year's Eve. I stopped there. On the way from my room to their suite, I got off the elevator and returned to my room. I walked into the dark room, opened the window, and decided I would not leave the room until I had made up my mind. I prayed, cried, and sat on the floor for hours. Then, a feeling of peace. I would leave the seminary and do something about what I had been taught, rather than do nothing and preach it to others. I also left the room to go to the suite, no longer being sure there was a God. It did not seem to matter.

My parents were upset. The seminary rector was upset. Fr Ayoub was upset. I quit and stayed at home.

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Catholic schools were hiring ex-seminarians without degrees to teach school, and the standards were flexible in those days. I took a job teaching 7th grade at St Monica's School in Buffalo. The school was next to the stockyards and chemical plants. The windows would have to be closed in the mornings or the smell would make me vomit. The kids were poor. The school had no resources but the teachers. The first day I arrived to teach, my car was pelted with eggs. Hell, they had not even met me yet.

The first class encountered a boy who played echo. "Good morning. My name is Mr. Herrmann," I said. It echoed. I ignored him until the tenth echo. Then, I picked him up, took him to the hall outside the classroom door, and hung him from a coat hook where he dangled for a few minutes. There was a knock on my door. The principal called me into the hall and asked that I release the dangling student. "Mr. Herrmann, we cannot hang students in school." I let him go, but nobody echoed again.

I loved that place, and the students loved me. I took them on field trips on Saturdays to Niagara Falls, parks, libraries, etc. I drove an old Nash Rambler with four doors. Only one worked. I could pile fourteen children in the wreck, and off we would go. After a few months, they were borrowing records and books from a public library. Some liked Beethoven. A number of them wrote better poetry than I. I began a track team and bought a stopwatch at a pawnshop as our equipment. We went to all the school system track meets and never even came close to winning a race. It was great.

At the end of the first year teaching, I was asked to accompany a group of US university students to Bogotá, Colombia. Their organization, the Association for International Development, needed a teacher to go with the students. Off I

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went in June and stayed until September 1964. While there, I taught English at a girl's high school, Colegio Canada, and volunteered to work with a young woman from near Rochester, NY. Marie was a nursing student in Buffalo. She and I worked at a very small prison for girls between the ages of twelve and sixteen.

The girls had been arrested for prostitution and had been given indeterminate sentences. They arrived, had their heads shaved, and were given brown sackcloth dresses. The prison had one elderly soldier with an old rifle who sat outside the door of this one story building that from the outside was indistinguishable from any other building on this side street in old Bogotá.

Inside, the place had a small open space surrounded by a room used as bedrooms for the 16 girls, a room used for nothing, a small kitchen, an office for the part-time director, and a bathroom. The open patio area served as a place for the girls to sit on the floor against the wall. They had no toys, activities, books, paper, pens, etc. They were allowed no visitors. There was no programming of any kind. The day we arrived, we were given pillows. I asked, "What are these for?" The director said, "All the girls have venereal diseases. Use these when you sit on a chair so you won't catch one of the diseases." I gave the pillow to a girl who did not have one on her bed. I never caught a disease.

I wrote home about the prison, and my father had the K of C send boxes of pens, crayons, paper, chalk, toothbrushes, soap, candy, etc. Marie and I began a school for the girls in the room that had served no purpose. She taught them hygiene. I taught them how to write and read. We played games with the girls, and conned the two women who worked in the kitchen to teach the girls how to cook. It was exhausting but rewarding work.

The girls were never allowed out of the prison, and my efforts to convince the director to arrange a field trip were useless. The woman did not care. She was not mean or brutal to the girls. She just did not care.

One day while walking to the prison, Marie and I noticed a huge gathering of bands, thousands of school children, and dozens of soldiers who filled the Plaza De Bolivar, the main square of the city. I asked a soldier what was happening, and he told me it was an annual event when the school children of the district serenaded the Minister of Education. I asked if we could get closer and said we were from America. The soldier escorted us through the throng and up the steps of the Presidential Palace to a place of honor next to the Minister himself. Apparently, the soldier thought we were from the U.S. Embassy. The ceremonies ended, and we shook hands with all at the dignitaries' table in front of the entrance to the Presidential Palace. I looked at Marie and said, "Let's go inside and get a bus to take the kids on a field trip." "They will shoot us," she said.

During my work in Bogotá, the Castro financed revolution was in full swing. Banks were blown up at night. Soldiers were everywhere. People were very cautious. In fact, I had been fired from my teaching at Colegio Canada because parents complained when I spoke with the students about the prison or some of the poor barrios in the city. I had made a friend of Padre Camillo Torres, a Jesuit priest who eventually went to the hills to join the revolution. Access to the Presidential Palace was very restricted. We were dignitaries now. I just took Marie's hand, walked past guards who snapped to attention as we passed, and wandered the halls until we saw an office marked "El Presidente". In the door, we strolled. I told the woman at the desk we were just invited guests of the Minister

of Education and we needed a bus to take the girls from a local prison on a field trip.

The next day a bus filled with children was escorted by soldiers from the prison to a friend's coffee plantation. The girls had a great time.

A young girl in the prison gave birth to a baby boy. She asked me to be the godfather, and I accepted. We went to the Cathedral for the baptism with the other girls and had a quiet party at the prison afterwards. The soldiers came one day and took the baby. No one seemed to know why or where the baby went. The rumor was they used the infant as a method of interrogating one of the young mother's relatives who was suspected of being a member of the leftist guerillas. They were said to have tossed the baby in the air to use as target practice. The prison director shrugged her shoulders when I asked her. I left the next week and never heard from the people there again. Letters were never answered.

I returned to teaching when I arrived home. The salary of \$3,700 per year was not as enjoyable as the work. My car's heater broke one day in a snowstorm, and I could not afford to get it fixed. During that time, I was a seminarian in normal clothes. I also began to date Marie. There was no sex. Having this outside of marriage may have been a fantasy, but actually engaging in this went against my religious grain. We went out a few times, until she had me meet her parents. That meant more to me than might have been intended. I stopped seeing her. She was the first woman I had dated. I guess I was more than awkward.

During this time, I was a night student at Canisius College. When I returned from Colombia in September 1964, I became active in the Goldwater presidential bid, chairing

Youth for Goldwater in Buffalo. This was a flirtation

with the man's individual responsibility and less government control speeches. I came to find out it merely meant, "Leave me alone while I rip off the other guy, accumulate my own wealth, and fuck everybody else in the world. If they don't like it, let them try to fuck me, and I'll nuke 'em." I, then, took all the Marxist courses from the most liberal Jesuits at Canisius and recalled my existentialist bent and fancied myself a Marxist. It was easy in the sixties—until I was drafted.

I went to teach and discussed my gloomy poverty with another teacher. She told me the Erie County Department of Social Services was hiring Child Welfare Caseworkers for \$5,300 per year, a veritable fortune to me. She said I would qualify, and I went home sick. Actually, I went to that agency. They interviewed me on the spot and offered me a job as a Foster Care Caseworker. I said, "What is a Foster Care Caseworker?" They said, "You will service children in foster care or in institutions." I asked, "What is foster care?" I really had no idea. They referred me to the public library.

Three weeks later in February 1967, I left teaching and became a caseworker. I had read three books on the subject and had become an avid fan of "East Side West Side" on TV, the only TV show ever that showed social workers as solid characters who worked hard to make things better. I recall Ed Asner turning over tables in righteous anger.

When I left teaching, some of the students cried. I did, too. I also continued the Saturday field trips on my own after becoming a caseworker. Leaving teaching gave me more income, opened a door to an exciting career that would become more than casework, and ended my draft deferment as a teacher. I never thought of that. I did when my draft notice came in the mail. That meant I would appeal it.

Off to the draft board I went. After fifteen minutes, out of

the office door of the draft board I walked, blushing. On July 3rd, I reported to serve my country. The Military Induction Center in Buffalo was my first stop. We filled out forms, completed questionnaires, and we're lined up in a large room. They had us count-off in threes. They asked the number threes to step forward, and these walked off to another room. We were told they had just received the honor of joining the U.S. Marine Corps. I was a number two, raised my right hand with all the other number ones and twos, and swore allegiance to my country. I had just joined the U.S. Army, with reluctance.

The second stop was boarding an airplane for Fort Dix, New Jersey. We were carried in a bus from McGuire Air Base. When the bus arrived, we were greeted by shouting cadre who assigned us to a barracks. I walked into the dormitory style room and threw my bag on a bunk bed. There was a crowd of cheering men at the end of the large room who surrounded someone. When I walked down to see what the cheers were about, I saw a naked man, bent over, holding a cigarette lighter next to his rear end. He would fart and light the expelled gas. The others would shout with joy and amazement. I thought, "This is it for the next two years of my life." Thus, went my symbolic introduction to military life.

When I left for military service, I also left temporarily a girlfriend who came into my life in March 1967. Kathleen was actually the first woman I had dated, after Marie. I was introduced to her by a fellow caseworker. She was also a caseworker. Kathleen was a pretty blonde, a smart dresser, and rather quiet but with a fiery temper. I took her temper as a sign of strength, not a reason to be concerned at all. She and I seemed to like each other quickly, and she was my first sexual experience. That may have been a mistake since sex signaled commitment to me.

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We had been out to dinner, went for a ride, and ended up in the back seat of my car on the side of a country road. It was less than an auspicious occasion. I do not think either of us knew what we were doing. I certainly did not. We hesitated, kissed, and fumbled about. I was not even sure sex had happened. Saying I was nervous falls short of the feeling I had. This was not the romantic erotica of fantasy. It was made worse when the quiet of the back road where we were parked was broken by the knocking on the car window by a police officer. "Enough of this, fella. Get out of here! Don't ever come back here!" he shouted. A romantic landmark it was not. She and I laughed about this on the way. The laughter was more nervousness and embarrassment. I have never driven on that road since.

We continued to date; dinners, movies, that sort of thing. There was little time spent just talking and getting to know each other. We did discuss politics and the news, work and the children we tried to help, and our own families. Mostly, my mind was on the fact that I was about to go into the Army.

While I completed training, there were periodic visits home and a thirty-day leave before I left for Vietnam. The visits were spent on dates, my drinking, and with friends. Our circle of friends all centered on socializing with beer and whiskey. It seemed that achieving the drinking age at eighteen was a goal for many at the time. Once this was achieved, we had to prove it was worth waiting for.

Kathleen and I avoided being alone, except for brief sexual encounters. There were even trysts in her living room, ten feet from her mother's bedroom while the woman slept. No more police officers knocked on my car window.

The subject of Vietnam was never discussed when we were together. Odd that it was avoided. The fear of leaving

for a war and the controversy about serving in the military at the time might have been exactly why we should have spent endless hours discussing the subject. These were exactly the reasons we did not even mention it, and much was avoided between us.

When I left for Vietnam, my family and Kathleen saw me off at the Buffalo Airport. My last stop before leaving for Asia was at Fort Lewis, Washington. This was a massive military installation that saw leaving and returning troops. It was a chaotic complex where we were merely moved from place to place. It was all a blur.

Kathleen and I continued to correspond. She sent cookies and pipe tobacco. I merely fantasized about what it would have been like to be with her and wrote love letters. My letters were filled with how much I missed her and how much I loved her. They were the same as a few of my fellow soldiers wrote to girlfriends. We shared them and helped each other make them more flowery. It was a way to pass the time. We shared life and death, my fellow soldiers. Why not share our love lives? I did not write much about battle and loss. Her letters talked about her brothers and daily events.

I returned home from the war in May 1969. The return was a hurried affair at the same Fort Lewis from which I had left. Hundreds of us were returning on flights that landed one after the other. Other flights were taking off just as frequently with troops going to war. They marched the disgruntled soldiers to auditoriums where they had us strip. Hundreds of naked men were lined up, as doctors and medics walked down the lines, giving each man a cursory physical exam. We were herded into other lines where they confiscated materials from our luggage and issued a new uniform, handed us medals from an assortment of bins, and had us sit in rooms as we were told

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that we had served our country well, had veterans' benefits explained, and were asked to re-enlist in the Army. We were then issued plane tickets, put on buses for the Seattle-Tacoma Airport, and we bid a fond adieu. It took merely a matter of hours from arrival from the jungles of war to waiting for a flight to Buffalo. It was surreal.

Kathleen and my family were at the Buffalo Airport when I arrived. We all hugged, and one of my nephews asked me a question. "What was it like in the war?" My brother-in-law joked, "We don't want to hear about that." He laughed. I did not answer the question, and I did not laugh.

Kathleen and I were engaged shortly after I returned. I did think I loved her, and I am sure she felt the same. The preparations for the marriage saw constant battles between her and her mother about the size of the wedding, colors, flowers, food, drinks, music, church, wedding party, and reception. I merely avoided the fray.

The first year of marriage saw infrequent sex and little communication. Kathleen always seemed to be angry with me but never wanted to discuss the reasons why. The increasing tension at home usually saw one of us sleeping alone on the living room couch.

I brought up the possibility of our going to counseling together. Kathleen refused even to consider this step. I decided to see a Gestalt therapist myself. Gestalt was attractive to my way of thinking. Much of it was summed up in the therapy's prayer that talked about living up to one's own expectations and not another's.

One Saturday I sat in the therapist's office facing an empty chair. "Look at your adolescent self in that chair," the therapist suggested. "Now tell it what you want it to do." I looked, thought, and said, "I want you to join me." "The therapist

laughed and shouted at me, "What the hell are you saying? You are an adolescent." It was trendy for Gestalt therapists to be outrageous in those days. Shouting was "in" It did not matter what was fashionable. He was correct. I was an adolescent, and a confused one at that. The therapy helped me to let go of much anger that had built up for so many years.

The therapy did not help my marriage. I talked to a friend of my wife and me who merely suggested patience. She was an ex-nun. I still had some of the seminary in me. I waited.

The years went by, and I focused on my work; first, as a caseworker. This was followed by two years in graduate school. While I was in school, I took time to write a book about my experiences as a caseworker. This was a rare book about child abuse in the middle 1970s. After graduation, I spent a year as a family therapist in an institution for delinquent youth; then, as Director of a Child Welfare agency; and, then, as a college professor. I enjoyed all these positions. They were challenging and fun. Kathleen moved from job to job, too. She went to nursing school and began to work for a school; then, a state prison. The relationship continued without change.

Kathleen and I avoided discussing anything that might cause tension. We both worked, and friends occasionally visited or we went out with them. This was a happy crew, and we did enjoy ourselves with them. The silence returned on the drives home. It was a relationship without much intimacy. I had learned to accept what my Irish Catholic mentors had taught me during childhood. Just accept what the marriage is. Irish Catholics were to use sex to have children. That is all. Kathleen did not want to get pregnant. What God had joined together.

Kathleen and I both worked with children. We did share this concern, and we were able to talk about that. The

discussions turned to adopting, and we agreed to adopt a child from South Korea.

In 1980, an adorable three-year old boy named Aaron became our first son. He was frightened when we went to New York City to greet his plane. He was so frightened that he stared at us and was rigid when we picked him up. On the flight home, he relaxed more when we gave him a teddy bear.

Aaron and I spent countless hours together. He and I marched about the house, played with toy cars, and developed Korean-English word games to help him with his new language. He had a lot of anger from various traumas in Korea and never completely resolved all of these, but I loved him even more for what he had survived. People had mistreated him before he came to America. I was sure this could be resolved with love. He experienced night terrors for six months. It was rare he would sleep for more than two hours without waking in screams and rage. I would hold him, and Kathleen would sleep. She was put off by his anger, and she seemed annoyed that he took more readily to me than she. Her hurt and disappointment were obvious. "He loves you more than he loves me," she shouted one day.

The next year Kathleen made it clear that she wanted a baby. We adopted another child from South Korea, Gabe, age six months. She found it much easier to bond with Gabe. He was a cute little baby, and he and Aaron seemed to get along well for a while. After six months, however, Gabe began to walk, and Aaron refused to share his toys with his brother.

Kathleen found them quite a handful, and they were. There were calls at work when she would rant about the boys emptying her purse or refusing to listen to her. I would leave work early and return home. Eventually, this, too, became acceptable routine. I took the boys to work with me whenever this was possible.

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Then, I saw the pictures of three children in an adoption magazine. This little sibling group was in an orphanage in Seoul. The adoption agency asked people to consider adopting all three so they would not be split up. Their picture haunted me for weeks. I showed it to Kathleen and smiled. "You want us to adopt them all?" she asked, incredulously. The situation at home with two boys was not going well. Why I wanted to add three more was probably proof that I was an adolescent. However, we began the process of adopting the trio of little orphans. I could not allow them to be sent all over the globe to different families. Somehow, we would make this work.

Ruth, age three, Rachele, age five, and Mark, age ten, all arrived in 1983. They were active and cohesive to the point of excluding everyone else. The three would horde food in their rooms for each other and would play exclusive of the other two children. This was reasonable, given their time in an orphanage and travel from Korea to a completely new world. They were excited as well as frightened. The trio was fascinated by television, supermarkets, and our neighborhood. The local school was a little overwhelming, but teachers were understanding and helpful. It took little time before each of the five children made many friends. Ruth was a feisty little person. Rachele controlled by her silence. Mark tried to be the father but had his own issues. He was the older brother, and Korean culture dictated responsibilities. He did a good job protecting his little sisters. He also was ten years old and was entering a new world with a new language, new food, and new relationships. Mark was a brave little boy.

The initial period was chaotic, and it drove Kathy into depression. On Christmas Day 1985, before the adoption was finalized, Kathleen called me into the kitchen after the children had opened their presents. "Ken, I have one gift for

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you," she said. "I want a divorce." My answer even shocked me. I merely said, "OK." She said she would reconsider if we would send the children back to Korea. I could never do what she asked. Her mind was made up.

The next six months were terrible at home. Dishes were tossed in my direction without warning. I would find the children alone when I would return from work. Kathleen had decided to stop any contribution to the family or household. She ignored the children and me. It was as if we were not there at all, except to be targets for sneers or thrown objects. She stayed until the divorce was granted and left me an empty house and five children in June.

The day after we received the divorce decree from the court, the moving van arrived at our home. I watched as Kathleen directed the men who busily emptied room after room. We had agreed on which furniture she would take with her. Somehow, this meant little that day. Room after room was emptied and loaded on the truck. I was stunned but did not object. Furniture meant nothing that day. The beginning of a new era did.

When she and the movers had left, even the children's dressers with their clothes had been taken. We still had a couple of pieces of living room furniture, an old table and chairs, a desk, and beds. She also left the bedroom furniture we had purchased when we were married. It was very heavy and would have cost her more to move. On her way out of the house, she took each of the two phones and smashed them on the floor. I just watched.

I waited with a neighbor for the children's return from school that day. We sat on the steps of the front porch. I said, "This is going to be difficult. I'm not sure what the kids will do. Hell, she took everything. How do I handle this?"

He advised to let things be. "Just respond to what they do, Ken," he said. When the school bus pulled up, he tapped my shoulder and walked home across the driveway.

The kids jumped off the bus, the way they always did. They looked at me and seemed to realize things were different. The five of them walked over and sat next to me on the steps. "Mom moved today. Things are a little different inside," I said. "Let's go look." They followed me into the house. "Wow," Aaron said, "The place is empty. Can we ride our bikes in here?" I nodded, and a few minutes later, five bicycles were skidding from room to room with laughing children. "Just respond to what they do," my neighbor had said. I made dinner, and, then, we went shopping for clothes. They seemed delighted.

The empty house merely gave them more room to play. It also gave us less tension and more peace.

I never regretted the children. The adoption as a single parent was finalized for the three children, and I also kept the other two. If the five children who stayed with me after the divorce really had a role in ending this marriage, I will always be grateful to them. I know I have always felt guilty putting them through this.

A clinical psychologist I saw for therapy after the divorce suggested the marriage was based on neither of us being satisfied, an unmet need for parental nurturing neither of us ever had, and my need to help others avoid what I had experienced. He also suggested that the marriage was a means for me to escape the memories of the war. He was probably right, but he never mentioned my adolescence.

The children are now all in their twenties. Mark is a professional human service worker. Rachele is married, has my first grandchild, and works in finance. Aaron lives in New York City and is employed in sales. Ruth is in college. Gabe

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works in food service and is pursuing his education. I am proud of them all.

I continued teaching at the university after the divorce, struggled with childcare, and occasionally dated. Even with the challenges of single parenting, those were good years. The kids and I took frequent trips to parks and the zoo. There were five school lunches to make each morning, five bikes to assemble at Christmas, and credit card-busting school clothes shopping sprees. Overnight visits with my children's friends usually meant we had eight or nine children during weekends. My cooking improved, housekeeping chores became well-planned and well-executed military operations, and school vacations with easily bored children became routine. However, it was not that simple.

It was a happy struggle raising all five alone, but a struggle indeed. There were childcare problems and all that goes with the role. There were many times all five followed me to classes at the university and sat in the back of the room, playing, while my teaching continued. There were meetings in New York City for my advocacy activities, and the children would stay with friends there while I was off trying to change the world. I found a babysitter whose flexibility, understanding, and willingness to be paid late helped the five children and me survive those years, even if the children did not like her cooking.

The first trip back to Vietnam came twelve years after the divorce. It was not my idea. It was my second wife's. Kathy urged me to do this.

She experienced my seeing a VC walk across our bedroom, the restless and nightmare filled nights, my angry confrontations with people in authority, and my impatience with injustice. She witnessed me sleeping when I would crawl

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around in bed, avoiding enemy fire. She saw my reaction of fear when on occasion I would see a VC walk by the foot of the bed before I would go to sleep. She saw my anger when the courts or government agencies would infringe on peoples' rights or would refuse to provide effective help. She saw this anger when judges would ask me to leave their chambers after I would lose my temper when I thought decisions hurt those who sought help or when social agencies would ban me from their offices after I refused to accept bureaucrats' seeming ineptitude. She saw me lead a group of military veterans in a march on a Veterans Affairs facility when the VA did all it could do to end certain services in one small community. Kathy was always involved in these efforts. She was usually the voice of reason. She did not want to help me with a cause this time. She wanted to help me.

I met this flaxen-haired Irish beauty in 1992. I was spending time when I was not parenting or at the university, helping a Vietnam veterans' counseling center try to survive. That was the one that led to the march. Kathy was ending a troubled marriage. I was doing my best to raise five children as a single parent.

Kathy called me once for a problem she was having, and we met through that phone call. Since she was enrolled as a student at SUNY Brockport, we met again. Something clicked between us. She was attractive and had a real zest for life that had taken the form of advocacy for people who needed her energy. Kathy had been a nurse who had fought for the rights of her patients, and she volunteered to help people having problems with social agencies. We shared the same concerns, the same goals for ourselves, and a similar sense of humor.

The relationship between the professor and the student became a love affair between a single parent with five children

and a woman with one son. While she was involved in her divorce, we moved in together. She brought her four-year old son Joseph. We laughed, shared all we could, and were married about one year later.

Our marriage ceremony was held under a rented tent in the backyard of our home. It was a wonderful event that took place during one of the heaviest rainstorms of the summer in August 1993. We laughed, as our guests seemed to slowly sink into the mud. We still wonder if some of them might be under the grass.

The next year, SUNY Brockport instituted a regulation forbidding such a relationship. While it had nothing to do with our specific relationship, Kathy and I jokingly called it "The Herrmann Regulation".

My five children tested Kathy's role repeatedly. They were not used to a mother, especially not one with an Irish temper who gave of her love so readily. My wife's stubborn qualities served her well in the early years of our marriage. We spent what seemed like endless hours sharing ideas and thoughts. The children were not sure she would stay and only begrudgingly allowed her into their lives. Into their lives, she stormed with laughter and purpose. She is a strong woman, and she was about to make them love her. Love her they eventually did. Her son Joey was also an outsider, but he, too, eventually established himself.

My first wife practically disappeared but did have sporadic contact with Gabe. Kathy even made it a point to talk with her when there was a phone call. Kathy is the type of woman who can go to the store and can tell you the life story of a grocery store clerk after checking out. There are social animals, and, then, there is Kathy.

Several years later, James Thomas was born in 1997, a

total surprise to both of us since this little handsome boy was born after she and I had decided that six children were enough. She had a tubal ligation. Kathy's doctor spotted Jimmy when she suspected she might be pregnant several days after surgery. She came home from the doctor's office and showed me a sonogram. "Do you know what this is?" she asked. I looked at it and said, "Sure it's a baby. Whose?" She smiled, and I nearly fainted.

We were both excited about this, but I was apprehensive. I had become aware of the dangers of Agent Orange. I had been exposed to this in Vietnam. The pregnancy was difficult for Kathy. She was sick every day. I worried about what would happen. Nine months later, there were seven children. Jimmy was not another victim. He was a healthy, happy baby whose only handicap was that he looked like his father. All of the children were totally taken by Jimmy. He became the center of the family, and he maintains this position.

Jimmy is my only birth child. He and the other children were all the same to me. He was as wonderful as the other Herrmann kids were. It made no difference if, as one of my kids said, "Babies come into families through Mommy's tummy or by an airplane."

My five adopted children, one step-son, and one birth son have helped create a busy world at home and a family filled with what is not unusual in large families. There were soccer games to try to attend, endless school events, band and sports practice, school sports games, many birthdays, and endless bills to pay on a professor's salary. Kathy worked as a social worker for a while to help with the bills, but the children needed her at home. We agreed she become a full-time homemaker. It resulted in less chaos and more peace.

Kathy's family was also large. Her father was disabled in

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the Korean War, and she understood the difficulties Vietnam veterans were having. My nightmares were no surprise to her. She also became as involved as I did in my work and activities. She saw a value in my returning to Vietnam because she loved me. Neither of us knew how this would eventually change our relationship. I had no idea how this would change me.

2.
RETURNING A VET TO VIETNAM
FOREVER

“No bitterness: our ancestors did it.
They were only ignorant and hopeful, they wanted
Freedom but wealth too.”
- Robinson Jeffers, *Ave Caesar*

I returned to Vietnam in 1998 to the valley thirty-five miles south west of Danang, a lifetime since leaving. It was a sabbatical semester intended to complete research and partially used for some self-examination. Kathy urged me to go back. This visit involved an exercise in exorcism, a return to Vietnam where I had served with an infantry unit for a year in the late 1960s. Like so many other Vietnam vets, I had been haunted by the experience. The haunting was well-known to those who knew me.

I went back to Vietnam, but I had reservations. I did not know what this would begin and the effect this would have on my family and so many others. I did know I was afraid to face the place. I might have been more frightened if I had known the results of this first return visit, and my wife might not have urged me to go at all. Neither of us planned for what happened.

I traveled with two friends, Larry Fuchs and Geoff Davis. Larry was a retired mail carrier who was wounded in the war when he was a truck driver and hit a mine. Geoff worked with

computers and had served in the same valley as I, but we had never met during the war. Both were good friends of Kathy and me. Both shared my anxiety about going back.

My memories were of fighting, despair, homesickness, and willful destruction. There were also other memories. I remembered arriving at a large U.S. military installation in Chu Lai and drinking everything with alcohol. No bathrooms or toilets existed near the bars. Someone had planted into the ground cylindrical tubes that had been used for mortars. These were euphemistically called, "Piss Tubes". The first night using such a spot of convenience next to an equally inebriated friend, he was tapped on the shoulder by another soldier. My friend turned and answered the man's question about directions to some place. I remember laughing because my friend had liberally sprinkled the other soldier, not having stopped urinating when he turned around. Such was the humor of recently arrived replacement troops.

This same friend with the reckless urine contracted Malaria while he was on LZ West. His face was covered with perspiration, as his body shook with fever. He smiled broadly, however, when he was taken by helicopter to Danang to be sent to Japan for treatment. "I'm going home, brother," he tried to shout in a rather weak voice. A month or so later, he climbed off the helicopter on LZ West. There was no smile when he said, "Fuck it. I got better." He stayed for the entire year. He did go on R & R. He went to Bangkok and brought back a photograph of himself and fifteen women. He explained, "I hired fifteen prostitutes and spent the entire time with all fifteen." His smile had returned, but he still seemed weak. It was not the Malaria.

Larry, Geoff, and I were apprehensive about our landing again in Vietnam. The blast of heat we felt when we left the

Vietnam Airlines flight that had taken us to Ho Chi Minh City was déjà vu from the late 1960s. The next two weeks were spent staying close to hotels, loyally following our tourist guide, and revisiting the places where we had served. We were also amazed at the positive changes we saw in a country that once meant only death and despair to each of us.

Both of these friends supported me the morning I first revisited Hiep Duc. When I walked into the village where I had lived for a year when I was in my 20s, I did not recognize it at all. Decades of jungle growth and the absence of the smell of recently sprayed defoliants (but there was a tin smell in the air I was told was dioxin and an off-green to the foliage for the same reason), napalm, and bombs had allowed nature to hide the ravages of war. I knew this was my old village when I saw the familiar riverbanks; the small knoll where I lived in a culvert, sandbagged hole; and the surrounding mountains on which so much American and Vietnamese blood had been shed. This was the place that local myth taught was filled with the unsettled spirits of the thousands who had died liberating their nation.

Hiep Duc was variously referred to as “Death Valley,” a resettlement village, Indian country, and a pacification project. The American troops were there to block the Liberation forces when they moved past mountains and through the valley to attack coastal cities about thirty miles away. I was just another draftee with an MOS that did not fit in my assigned unit who was given a non-related job to do. I was trained to operate a Radio Teletype machine, assigned to an infantry unit without such equipment, and sent to operate radios at night in the battalion operation center at a place called “LZ West”. LZ West was a hill about 435 meters high, about a two-hour ride into the mountains west of Danang. It was good I was sent to a unit without the equipment the U.S. Army trained me to operate.

My training was at Fort Gordon, Georgia. I rarely attended training, and did not have the slightest idea how to operate this equipment.

After Basic Training at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, I went back to Fort Dix and completed radio school. My training took twice as long as it should have. I discovered that not passing an examination on Fridays meant repeating the week's training. This did not interfere with a weekend pass that usually meant a trip to close-by New York City. I was in no rush to leave Fort Dix. Imagine my surprise when my name was announced as having passed all my tests when I knew all the answers I had given were incorrect.

My next stop in final training before Vietnam was Signal School at Fort Gordon, Georgia. Upon arrival, I noticed no regular Army sergeants overseeing the trainees. I also noticed that these responsibilities had been assigned to certain trainees. My company had four platoons. The person overseeing all four was a trainee like me. I asked him what his duties entailed. He made out the duty roster, decided who would do what, and pretty much used his time as he wished while making sure the company commanding officer was bothered by nothing. I asked the trainee how he obtained his assignment. He told me the trainee who held the position before him had recommended him. He was to leave in about one week. I asked if he liked beer. He smiled, and we drank a lot over the next week.

I was assigned his job when he left and missed the opportunity to learn the duties the Army wanted me to learn. I was much too busy eating food in the mess hall at night while the company was training.

A few months after arriving at LZ West, I began to prepare to live in a village where displaced people were to be resettled in their ancestral land. I was to liaise between the

South Vietnamese forces in the village and the 196th Light Infantry Brigade. I was neither trained nor sure of what that meant. I just did it, I think. The beginning of this assignment reflected the enigma of this war.

As we were beginning the resettlement village, a unit of American Army engineers had the job of completing a road to the location. I spent one night with them, surrounded by armored personnel carriers and bulldozers. The next morning an old man came to my interpreter. He cried and spoke nervously. Next to him was a little girl, about ten. She stood slouched over, sadly looking at the ground. My interpreter told me the old man was the child's grandfather. The man wanted something done. He claimed the girl had been raped the night before by two American soldiers in our group. I spoke with the grandfather through my interpreter and did the same with the girl. She pointed to two of the engineers and began to cry. The unit's Captain asked what the commotion was all about. I told him, and he said, "Just tell them to get out of here. It's all crap. Nobody did anything to her. They just want money. These people get paid when they make these claims." My interpreter whispered to me, "She says the soldiers took pictures of the rape." I asked her to show me where it happened, and she led us to a tent made from a poncho liner. I rummaged through a pack in the tent and handed the Captain two Polaroid photographs showing the two smiling soldiers raping the child. The Captain shouted, "It means nothing. I told you to send them away." I was enraged and shouted back, "What the hell are you saying? They raped this kid and took pictures of it. I have to live with these people. No way in hell are you covering up this." I was a lowly Sergeant arguing with a Captain but did not care. Finally, I told him I would call the report in to my battalion Colonel. "OK. OK," the Captain

said. He went to his radio operator and called someone. A half hour later, a helicopter arrived with two M.P.s who arrested the rapists. The Captain actually seemed unconcerned and went back to work as the helicopter flew away and the girl and her grandfather wandered off through the jungle growth. I have always wondered what happened to those two rapists. I have wondered more about what happened over the years to the little girl.

The first time I returned to Tan An, the name of the village location today, I asked many questions of the local residents in an attempt to get answers to questions about my experience there. Did anyone still live there who was here during the war? Did anyone remember when the people who were relocated came here? I had even brought a picture of myself in the village during the war. It was a long shot, but I needed to know answers to questions I had not even formulated. A small crowd of curious people formed around us. Tan An was not exactly a place used to visitors or tourists.

From the crowd came a man who smiled and spoke softly to my interpreter, a semi-competent tour guide hired from the U.S. company who had arranged the trip. The guide brought the smiling man to me and explained that the man's name was Le Quang Ngu. Ngu, he said, remembered me from when I had been there during the days that haunted my memory.

The man had been sixteen when I was there before, one of the many people who sought shelter from the constant battles fought around us at the time. While I did not recall him at all, I was overwhelmed with emotion. He was there when I was there.

He had been there when starving people picked up small grains of rice from the dirt and ate roots and drank dirty water in an effort to stay alive. He was there when a little girl

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whose skull on the back of her head had been blown off by some weapon actually walked into the village. I carried her to a waiting helicopter to be taken to Danang. She stared at me with glazed eyes and looked into my soul. This was one of the few times I cried during the war. He was there when we carried what seemed like a constant flow of children with advanced malaria to helicopters to be taken to Danang for treatment that would probably be too late. He was there when we sent a small group of fifteen lepers who had been hiding in the valley to Danang to be moved to a leper colony I would come to know well many years later. He was there when so much horror and hell had become a daily routine and I had fantasized that the village was a safe haven from those who shot at each other outside the few acres we had "pacified." He was also there when Tam (my South Vietnamese Army interpreter whom I recently discovered was VC) and I would get drunk, sing Beatle songs, and dump hundreds of cans of C-rations into smoke black cooking pots to feed the local people. Now he was there when I returned thirty years later. He recalled me from the many US soldiers he had seen by my ever-present pipe, glasses, and (as he said) my loud laugh. He was polite. He did not refer to my male pattern baldness.

I am not sure if he knew about the day I test fired my .45 pistol. I had used my M-16 regularly but also carried a pistol. That I had never used. It seemed to make sense that I find out if it worked, in the event it would be needed. I walked to the river, followed by a group of ten children. Pointing the gun in the air, I squeezed the trigger. It fired, and the children and I watched a slow moving bullet tumble through the air and fall ten feet in front of us. The children broke into laughter. I was embarrassed, returned to the hill, cleaned my pistol for the first time, and was reminded that I was not John Wayne. I never fired the pistol again, but I kept it clean.

Ngu was tired looking, a man who had experienced the war as a youth, re-education camps as a young adult, and the difficult life in the mountains of Central Vietnam since. His view of life seemed simple and practical. His concerns, as I came to find out, were solely about the future welfare of his three children.

His wife sells various items at a roadside stand at the market at Hiep Duc. Both parents clearly love their children. Meeting him was a reminder that the past is still the present. Coming to know him as a friend became a reminder that I had never left Hiep Duc in 1969 at all and that I probably never would. I had just pretended it was history.

The history was worth sharing with the U.S. students. They might carry away from a visit with Ngu some understanding of Vietnam the war and Vietnam the country. When visiting students ask Ngu about his family, he and his wife proudly present their children. The students share his grief when he describes the loss of his mother during the war. "She was at a VC hospital across the valley when the Americans bombed it. We could not find any of her body to bury her properly. Her spirit wanders this valley in sadness forever." They will know more about the war than Hollywood wants them to know and certainly more than their high school teachers taught.

Ngu's weary eyes reflect the difficulties of his own history and the richness of the mountain region. He clearly loves his country. His narrative for the students describes when "the American puppets came to Hiep Duc". There is a twinkle in his eyes as he says this and looks at me. I suppose I was once a puppet master. We share a smile of reminiscence and hold hands.

Ngu did not know about many things I did at Hiep Duc. He did not know about the blue helicopter that landed every

Friday to drop off a mysterious group of Americans who looked every bit the part of the movie warrior with their weapons, extra ammunition, heavy packs, and hardened faces. This was Air America, the CIA air force. I never asked who the men were who walked west from my hill. They never returned to my location, and I presumed they were on their way to Laos.

The blue Huey helicopter's door gunners were curious about what I was doing in this distant village. I told them, and they must have taken pity on me. After their first drop off, they came each Friday with more men who walked west and with a case of beer and a fifth of Jim Beam bourbon for me. I always welcomed these secret visitors.

All of this experience in the late 1960s somehow led to what happened in January 2001. That was when some Vietnam veterans saw the healing ritual I did as a traitorous act. That also was when Rick Bradshaw became the first Vietnam veteran whose ashes were returned to the mountains and rivers of Vietnam.

There was an unusual ceremony that occurred at a military cemetery in Vietnam on January 19, 2001 (to be repeated later that year) as a part of the educational program. Was it for personal forgiveness for what was done in the war that I was doing this? Forgiveness for what? I just did what over three million Americans did for about twenty years. Maybe, it was just being polite. That seemed to make some sense. Nevertheless, it was more. Their government had asked me to do this, and my friend in the valley where I had once lived had relayed the request. I could have politely declined, but that still would have been suspect.

An official in Hanoi told me about one group of visiting veterans who even refused to enter such a place. Their government escort asked that they go into a military cemetery.

The American veterans refused. The guide told them with a patient smile, "We fought in the same war and all suffered because of it. There is a difference, however. You came to kill my family. I fought to defend them."

What I was about to do made me wonder whether I had lost sight of history or if I had finally found reason in history? I was not sure. I was preoccupied with the seeming madness of it all.

The weather was appropriate with a misty rain and fog. It seemed rather suitable for not only what I was officially about to do but also for what would follow. The government officials did not know about the second part of the agenda. In fact, not even my staff knew about it. Both had their risks. Both had to be done.

We had driven for more than an hour, deeper into the mountains on rough roads. The van was filled with students and staff. We lapsed into quiet as we approached our destination. The jungle village in the valley finally lay ahead of us. Que Son's market place was filled with fruits, flowers, and sundry sellers. They stooped behind their small displays of goods and created a colorful mural of Vietnamese conical straw hats and gaily-colored clothes, a stark difference from the worn and dirty black pajamas of so many years before. It was usually a more bustling site for the remote district headquarters. Today was quieter than usual. It might have been the rain.

The cemetery we approached was rather rundown but somehow noble with its liberation monument and raised concrete graves painted in yellow and red, jutting in a uniform design inside the faded yellow walls and rusty gates. There were about ten weathered graves, filled no doubt with the remains of those who might have welcomed me to die in their place thirty years before. These were the district's unknown soldiers, some

said to have been buried alive by American troops. It was ironic that I would place flowers in their honor and burn incense to their spirits today in order to honor soldiers who had fought for their beliefs. I was nervous and just wanted to get on with the ceremony. It seemed the right thing to do. I knew not everyone would agree, and I later came to find this was the fact.

Hate mail from American veterans followed a newspaper article that detailed the event. A former Marine who served as a VFW Commander in Rochester, NY called me a "traitor to my country who insults all those who fought for freedom". He added, "It's too bad we didn't kill more of them during the war."

I did not know then that this type of hate mail would balance with a love affair with a place and its people. The letter helped me to clarify for myself the importance of putting the war behind us. Too many seemed unable to accept peace and understanding. Too many were still filled with hatred from the war.

We stood waiting for the local Peoples' Committee officials for a few minutes. There was a little uneasy laughter and small talk but mostly silence and nervous pacing in front of the roadside stands that waited for customers who did not come.

I spent this time recalling the week I had spent at this place in 1968. It had been filled with noise and gunfire, smoke, and chaos. I had learned to live in a village and to interact with local troops. It was an uneasy feeling that came back to me, the same nervousness I had felt in 1968.

When the officials arrived, we all walked across the mud road and into the cemetery. Some of the officials were too young to have seen the war; others were certainly veterans. We had brought a yellow and red flower display on a small easel.

The flowers seemed a mixture of funeral and wedding; not that this created any conflict in symbolism for those who have been to both. The officials joined the staff and students. I held the flowers, and we walked in an attempted solemn but somewhat clumsy manner toward the monument in the center of the graves. I knew what I wanted to do but nothing at all about protocol or how to do it. Members of my staff gave each of us incense that we burned. My hands trembled and my knees were weak as I bowed before the graves to honor the spirits of those who haunted the place, and haunted it seemed. Each, in turn, did the same. I could smell the death in the air, the same smell that hung heavy after a firefight, that rancid heavy odor that clings to you. Then, the speech.

I had spent hours writing this very brief speech before leaving America to avoid translation misinterpretations or anything that might be offensive. (See Appendix A for text.)

It only took a few minutes. I made an effort not to let the paper on which it was written shake. The anxiety made me feel weak in the suffocating heat and humidity as I spoke to the local officials, a few curious bystanders, and the students and the staff members who had come for the occasion. There was stillness that seemed to hold hands with the mist and fog. The weather seemed almost contrived for the events of the day. When I finished, the silence was almost deafening. It was as if I were back in the jungles of the war, waiting for some slight sound that would alert me to the presence of the enemy slowly crawling toward me. I tensed and looked around. The others were turning to leave.

We were done and off to do more. I felt a resignation bordering on defiance that what I was doing was right, but it all seemed surreal and uncanny. My head was swimming, and I wondered if I would pass out. There were ghosts of

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VC scurrying through the brush; twisted, stone like faces of sappers found dead in perimeter wire from the night before's frenzy of small arms fire, grenades, and claymore mine explosions. There were body bags with buddies being hauled on to helicopters for a tragic farewell when no one spoke. These ghosts from the past haunted this place and seemed to stand staring at us, passing judgment at what was being done. I somehow heard them murmur approval. It might have been my own conscience. I, however, knew there was little distance between them and me. I, too, was able to look at myself with an odd detachment. What was this veteran doing here? Why was it so quiet now? Where were the booming noises, shouts of panic, and the smell of napalm? Peace had changed this place, but not completely. It was all rather eerie. So much had changed. So much was the same.

The next stop was at a second liberation monument a mile from the first. This was a large monument topped by a green stone statue of soldier, wife, and child—all pointing upward in the glory of victory. The small hill was littered with large black boulders. Someone spray painted one of the rocks in English, "Forget Me Not." A few carved stone murals detailed American planes being shot down, soldiers killing families, and local Liberation militia shooting at helicopters. This had once been called LZ Ross. It served as a base for a battalion of the 196th Light Infantry Brigade. I had only visited this military base once during the war. The monument was built on the spot the American infantry unit had its aid station. Once it served as a center for what were seen as invading troops. Now it served as a symbol of Vietnamese independence.

We again laid flowers and burned incense. There was a feeling of relief that there was no speech. The relief did not stop my hands from shaking. The monument was on the very

spot Americans had died defending a small hill and each other. The flowers were as much for them as for their enemy. Then, we were back in the van and driving to the unannounced activity that would create a symbolic harmony to the day. This actually began with a phone call several months before.

Pat Bradshaw, a former student who had graduated from the college about fifteen years earlier, phoned me. She chatted about the program I directed for the university in Vietnam and, then, seemed to stammer as she shared the real reason for the call. "Ken, I don't know if this is out of line, but you might be able to help my family. My husband Rick was a Nam vet. He died last summer from a heart attack. It was a total shock, unexpected. However, you might know that he was a writer. He wrote a play about the war, a few articles, and some poems. When the kids and I were sorting through his papers, we came across a poem he had written. In the poem, he asked that after his death he wanted his ashes scattered in Vietnam. He loved the country. We loved him, and we'd like to honor his wishes." She paused, took a deep breath, and added, "Do you know how this can be done?" To say it was a curious request would have been putting it mildly. I had never heard of such a thing. Most of the discussion about vets and Vietnam had to do with finding remains and bringing them home. There had been no talk about returning vets' remains to Vietnam. "Pat, let me look into this for you. I'll get back to you."

What followed was an inquiry to a State Department official at our Embassy in Hanoi about how such an arrangement could be made and a response that there was no policy since nobody was aware of such a request before. I was referred to the Vietnam Embassy in Washington. It seemed to me that would probably not answer Pat's question and might just begin a rather frustrating series of bureaucratic referrals

and tangled red tape that would end with no answer at all to the family's unique request. Colleagues advised me not to honor the request. "It will just jeopardize the program," one advised. There were a number of conversations with Par and, finally, a decision that I would spread the ashes myself during an upcoming visit. How could I not? The day we paid honor to the former enemy was also to be the day we would honor one of our own.

The van drove toward the site of the old refugee village of Hiep Duc, now called Tan An in the district of Hiep Duc. It was a small hamlet of tiny wooden houses shaded by jungle foliage and bordering the Thu Bon River. The Song Thu Bon was sometimes a raging torrent that caused devastating floods during some monsoon seasons and a steady flow of muddy water that provided fish for the village of Tan An during the rest of the year. The monsoons ended the month before our arrival.

The light rain had been heavier the night before, and the road to Que Son was not good. The road to Tan An, however, was much worse. Skidding through deep pools of water and hubcap high mud elicited some shouts of praise for the driver who navigated the road as a skilled pilot might dangerous waters. The van slowly stopped in front of a small shack like house in the center of perhaps twenty other homes that spoke of the remoteness and the poverty of Tan An. From a small, plank house, came a smiling man in his middle forties. He waved and I left the van to join him. We shook hands and hugged, as old friends might. I suppose we were old friends, even though I had only met him a little more than two years before. Le Quang Ngu and the group spoke for a while. Then, we walked toward the river.

My students, staff, and I walked and slipped down a rather

steep red mud incline to the rocky banks of the Thu Bon River. The muddy water ran slowly, and a small fishing boat drifted by with a single oarsman standing on its keel. Mountains and thick jungle growth encircled the area. It was intensely quiet. I walked to a few rocks jutting out of the water on the riverbank and removed a small red cloth pouch from my pocket. "This is it, Rick," I said quietly. The two staff members seemed in some odd way to sense what was about to happen. They bowed their heads in silence. The students watched with a few local villagers from the incline and joined the silence. My hands shook as I took Rick's poem from my other pocket. I held it in my hands and read it aloud.

MULLMOMENTS

by

Rick Bradshaw

When one day I die
I want my ashes to be dropped
Into the mountain winds
Of the Highlands of Vietnam

From there, my soul
Will see the beauty of the world
And the monsoons will wash
My spirit to the terraced gardens
Of the hillsides
And to the lush river valleys

I will live forever
In the seed of the land
And come out sometimes

In the petals of a forest flower
Or grow up into the tallest arms
Of the strongest trees

Oh God...I will watch all things
That follow after me
In a place
I cannot remove...from my heart.

I read the poem, opened the pouch, and scattered Rick's ashes on the water. "God speed, brother. Rest in peace." Rick had returned to the home he had found during the war, a place I knew I also had never really left.

Standing there looking at the mountains and the river, the spirit of Kevin Burke from Anita, Iowa, a friend who could not wait until he joined combat, seemed next to me. It was not too many weeks after entering combat before his bullet-riddled body was shipped home in a body bag. George Reynolds, Jr. from Oneonta, New York was there, too. He was a kid who should never have been sent to Vietnam. He was much too innocent. Everyone liked him. We often wrote letters for him to his girlfriend and helped him through some tough emotional moments during his year in the war. George burned to death when his helicopter was shot down in the valley, as he was on his way home. So many others. I could see them all slowly emerge from the midst and throw their arms around Rick Bradshaw. The men silently and slowly disappeared into the valley with Pat's husband. He had come home to rest with his friends.

I turned after a few minutes and saw my staff and students wiping away tears. The villagers looked somber. Americans and Vietnamese shared the emotions of Rick Bradshaw's ashes

joining the rivers and mountains of Vietnam. It was an honor helping to fulfill his wishes. It was an unusual and healing moment both for all who were there and his family. We drove away and quietly dealt with the emotions of the day. I could still smell the death. I thought about the war, friends carried on to helicopters, starving villagers, and my first visit to Hiep Duc after the war. I thought about the widows of the men buried at Que Son and Pat Bradshaw and her children.

I first lived in this village about thirty years before. I was twenty-five, a draftee, and a rather reluctant warrior. The Army assigned me to be a liaison and advisor in the village. My responsibilities were to coordinate security and to help resettle about 2,500 people who had fled fighting in this end of the valley that had been the scene of constant and bloody battle for years. They called it "pacification." I initially called it a scary place to be. It had an odd effect on me at the time, and I felt strangely more secure among the villagers and the two hundred soldiers from the Saigon government than I did with my own infantry unit. The dug out ground under a six-foot metal culvert and sandbags I called my home in those days was enough for me. The kindness of the resettled people in the village seemed at odds with their plight. I drew strength from that. I knew when I left in 1969 that I had not really left at all and spent the intervening years denying those feelings.

The university educational program the American students experience includes no gifts of beer and bourbon, but it is an unexpected and unique life-changing semester. This is a multi-month exploration that began with my return to Vietnam, an article I published about the return, an inquiry by my college about beginning a study abroad program, and the acceptance of my proposal. All of this was a whirlwind few months, resulting in the unanticipated acceptance of the

proposal. What followed was an interesting feasibility stage, one that was a curious balance of program development, international development, and personal change. I will explain this in detail later. This all came from a curious mix of personal and professional commitment. It also had an unexpected personal cost for my family and me.

One cannot separate the effect Vietnam has on a personal psyche from doing business in an ancient land filled with dragons and history. This complex approach to doing business, developing programs, or engaging cooperative community development necessitates integrating self with professional responsibilities. Vietnam demands this in its usual testing of sincerity, distrust of foreigners' motives, and its requirement that professional business be based on personal trust. There is little chance for success if one attempts to preserve a personal secrecy separate from what one wants to accomplish in Vietnam.

Both formal and casual business encounters explore your age, marital status and condition, likes and dislikes, etc. This also includes your response to humor, confrontation, conflict, etc. There is a certain testing of cultural mastery, knowledge of history and tradition, and personal genuineness. Fail these tests and your prospects for success are minimal. You will be an unknowing source or potential source of help to the Vietnamese, but there will be no real mutuality. In fact, this may lead to confusion and frustration. Your goals will be different and will not be something all parties in the venture seek to meet.

The agenda will be a series of agendas. Some of these will be explicit; others implicit; still others filled with intrigue. This is similar to when teenagers and parents often think they are outsmarting each other in a maddening series of interactions

in which both are attempting to survive. It is best to avoid this type of semi-psychotic behavior in professional activities in Vietnam. Once immersed in this maelstrom of interactions, it is difficult to emerge with any credibility. Losing focus might quickly become losing face, and that is the end of the game. Therefore, it is necessary not to outsmart those with whom you negotiate but rather to allow the process to follow what may be its natural course. This might take an unusual course.

I met with Hoang Hoanh, my counterpart with the Vietnamese government, in February 2000, just before Tet. Hoanh called the meeting to negotiate a few sensitive issues in a contract revision we had been trying to finish with mutual satisfaction. I was told we would eat goat meat and drink beer during the meeting. I asked the significance of this and was told that because it was before Tet, whoever drank the most beer would "win" the negotiations. I smiled and drew on my Irish-German genes for the 8:00 AM meeting. The meeting went well. Hoanh slid from his seat and held tentatively to the table, shook my hand, and agreed to my requests. I had one more beer and wished him a Happy New Year, returned to my office, and had beer with lunch. Hoanh missed work the next day because he was sick. The sensitive issues had been resolved.

Yin and yang are at the basis of this constant shifting in an elusive attempt to achieve harmony and balance. Although the blend of Buddhism, Confucianism, ancestor worship, and ancient myth make up the unique practice of religious belief, culture, and tradition in Vietnam, the influence of the concept of yin and yang as forces producing balance is just as important. The yin is the emotional; the yang is the cognitive. The yin is the impulsive; the yang is the planned. The yin is the collaborative; the yang is the competitive. When one takes

prominence in interactions, there is the lack of balance and harmony. This will not result in a benevolent outcome. This, therefore, requires readjusting.

The concept of yin and yang pervade Vietnamese culture, traditions, history, and politics. This principle is interwoven in business meetings, negotiations, personal conversations, and throughout relationships in what may seem an unconscious use of self. It may be as simple or as complex as yin being the female and yang the male.

As my visits to Vietnam increased, I was not aware that I had begun to embrace the concepts of yin and yang and the odd mix of religions and philosophies that define Vietnam. I also was not aware that I had begun to live this way of looking at life.

My communications at home became curt and short in reaction to issues that were important but began to seem unimportant to me. Disagreements among children, decisions about planning for the future, so many routine issues that once Kathy and I saw as significant began to lose their importance for me. I often did not attempt to explain myself and felt I was being clear when I did. It seemed to me I was not being heard.

My wife and children did not understand these changes any more than I did. I did not see the changes. I only knew I was becoming more frustrated in a world that had no logic, only events. My work seemed to determine what I did. The program in Vietnam took all of my time and became more important to me beyond even my family. I became easily irritated with the small hassles of daily life. This was not fair to either Kathy or the children. It is amazing that they seemed to support the work I was doing. My changes in looking at the world, even the world of my family, seemed to change my

perspective. I could no longer understand why the people in my life were concerned over what they could not change, that which seemed determined by fate. It seemed useless for me to discuss this. I tried but felt only frustration. We seemed to be thinking in different directions.

They understandably needed to vent, plan, and ask for feelings and opinions. I began to withdraw. They began to get angry. None of us understood what was happening, least of all me. It seemed we could only agree that something was different. Much of what happened to me is what happens in Vietnam, but I was not Vietnamese.

One American diplomat shared about Vietnam, "What the agreement is now might not be the same in two hours." The agreement is for the moment and may be a guide for future interactions. Then, again, it might not. Interpreting the intent is no less difficult than understanding the smile of another who glances away when you notice. This fleeting glance might mean little. It might have much meaning. The smile creates a certain balance; the feelings that produce the smile are balanced by the social discipline not to be flirtatious or to display affections publicly.

The customs, of course, are more complex. They include such important factors as conciliation, patience, sentimentalism, and the all-important responsibility for the next generation. Each of these is infused in personal and professional interactions. The yin and yang seem the controlling factors. After engaging this process the first time in a business meeting to develop our program in Danang, however, I remembered a less charming example from my past.

In March 1969, displaced families were being moved rapidly into the village at Hiep Duc. Hundreds were arriving daily from their temporary stay at Tam Ky, a headquarters

city on the coast. Others were herded up by U.S. troops from surrounding villages and hamlets and were taken by helicopters or were walked to us. This created a noisy, almost maddening turmoil. We were always short of everything, and no adequate preparation could have been made. Amid all of this was heavy fighting throughout the valley. This fighting produced enemy POWs. If the fighting was closer to us than a U.S. base, the POWs were dropped off at Hiep Duc, to be picked up later for a flight to Danang where they would be interrogated.

The village was technically run not by the U.S. Army but by the Saigon regime Army. My memory is hazy about many things that took place during the war. Time and trauma do damage to that we would like to recall. They do not filter out what we would like to forget. The man in charge of the village was a lieutenant in the South Vietnamese Army. The passing years make some names difficult to recall, but I think his name was Thanh.

Lt. Thanh was a wiry, sinister-looking soldier. I never saw him smile. Most of his time was spent in a sandbagged bunker he had his men construct. It was about twenty feet from my small, metal-culvert covered hole. Thanh and I did not like each other. When I remember him, I feel a chill down my spine similar to that when I was his neighbor.

POWs first would be taken to me. My interpreter and I would interrogate them in an attempt to locate any enemy units that might be close to us. We were not gentle and kind during these interrogations. There was no permanent harm, but what we did was more than the yang to balance the yin of caring for the villagers. I have no pride in these memories. Lt. Thanh was another matter.

If we could not get a helicopter to take a POW out of Hiep Duc and the man would have to spend the night, Lt. Thanh

would get to keep the POW and do his own interrogation. I have vivid memories of begging and shouting on the radio to get a chopper to take out the prisoners. When my pleading did not work, my memories are of the prisoners screaming, moaning, and being silent. The next morning a bloody mass of what was once a human being would be dragged by Thanh's men and tossed in the river. Thanh would look at me watching them each time. His eyes were piercing. It was the closest I ever saw him grin. It was the closest up to that point I had come to killing a man.

It never made me feel like John Wayne. The yin and the yang may be painful and dramatic. This still causes nightmares. These are filled with the chaotic drama of battle, the tense expectations while waiting for the enemy, or the torture of soldiers who merely fought to liberate their own country from those they saw as invaders. There is no harmony at night when memories like these intrude.

The personal consequences go far beyond haunting memories. When attempting to define how others experience life, remaining objective is not my forte. Curious by nature, what Vietnam involved became curious and curiouser. Soon that which had always been productive in relationships, my personal and worldview, and approach to decision-making became less productive. Vietnam has the potential to redefine that which it encounters and even those it welcomes into its borders.

3.

THE MYTHS OF POWs AND THE COMMUNIST THREAT

‘Heaven and earth could not show themselves lenient.’
-Nguyen Trai, Proclamation *Following a Victory over the
Chinese*, 1498

How does one integrate the personal into the professional? How might this be advantageous, and why is not doing so likely to result in a failure to achieve goals? How is this congruent with generally accepted models of development? Why does this necessitate re-inventing the approach to development planning and implementation if Vietnam is to be the chosen arena? How do we rectify the myths that exist about Vietnam with its reality?

Productive and constructive personal interactions necessitate self-awareness. Exploring personal history and understanding what influences have resulted in what we have become and might become facilitate self-awareness. This self-awareness should lead to knowing how this is presented to others and how you are seen.

The Irish nuns who flew in and out of my life served to oppress, not liberate. They threatened endless barbecues in hell not only for unacceptable behavior but also for even thinking about unacceptable behavior. They also worked diligently to instill ways of thinking and models for conduct. Their approach was not dramatically different from that used by present day cults or fundamentalist, controlling religions.

The efforts by these nuns to instill ways of thinking and models for conduct formed a social foundation from which guilt, ideals, altruism, and faith played major roles. The techniques of instruction were endless memorization and recitation, violence and the threat of violence. They accented the acceptance of place and dedication to a higher purpose formulated by a loving but vengeful God to whom we are indebted. They were successful with not only me but also the millions of other children who believed they were members of the "one true religion" who held a certain relationship with God that no other people could enjoy.

We even collected pennies to "adopt pagan children." This meant that we supported missionaries who were "helping" children in third world countries by activities that replaced customs, traditions, and identities with that the missionaries saw as a moral directive from God Himself through Popes and flying nuns. If our pennies were donated, children in these lands might be baptized and could then die and go to heaven. If they were not baptized, they would go to limbo, a decent and eternal resort but a place God would never visit. Well, we could not let that happen. We donated tons of pennies.

This was supposed to justify the primary role of teaching a belief system imposed by Western countries, rather than the maintenance of customs and traditions in countries like Vietnam, even more ancient than flying nuns.

The French, of course, did all possible to replace the unique heritage of Confucianism, Buddhism, ancestor worship, and exciting and fascinating myths with the regulated doctrines of Catholicism that were more often a front for political and social control of the occupied nation. The Protestant missionaries did the same. Their political counterparts from other nations supported the cause and were quick to oppress, exploit, and

victimize the Vietnamese whom they saw as less a people with a rich identity and more a source of cheap, exploitable labor and resources that apparently God saw as rightfully stolen by occupying foreigners, often guided by religious fervor. This, of course, was not attempting to fulfill God's expectations. It was attempting to meet bankers' expectations and tax collectors' demands. It is called "imperialism".

The war that first brought me to Vietnam was no different. The religious doctrine was Capitalism. The Popes were Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon. The baptism ritual was engaging the phony elections in Saigon in which the chosen would be elected while they served at the sufferance of the political Popes who had them killed by the CIA if they engaged in heretical behavior. Not much difference between this war and the Inquisition.

The pacification work and resettlement efforts at Hiep Duc were not merely part of a strategy to fight a war in an untested and illogical manner in a country unwilling to play the game the American way. These efforts actually exemplified a political and economic missionary agenda. The agenda, however, never understood those who attended the event. The madness was that we really knew the strategy would not work, and we did it anyway. Millions of Vietnamese; over 58,000 Americans; and thousands of troops from South Korea, Thailand, Australia, and other countries lost their lives. Millions from all sides continue to suffer the effects, and we still struggle with what it all means. The results are sadly intriguing.

Ngu, the friend from Hiep Duc, has a seventeen-year-old daughter who wrote me a letter in 1999. She said, "My mother and grandmother told me what the French and Americans did to my country. I always hated them, until I met you. I think bad people can't laugh like you."

What the oppressive hundred plus years of Vietnamese interaction with the West has resulted in is a distrust of institutions and international groups whose promises are rarely fulfilled or perhaps only partially fulfilled. These are ignored with tolerance and patience in preference to personal trust between individuals. This trust takes time, sincerity, effort, flexibility, and a willingness to examine, re-examine, and re-examine again one's values, skills, and knowledge base. The danger and the benefit of this process is not only that it will affect one's professional agenda but also that it may change who and what a person is.

Self-awareness in this context necessitates a willingness to travel to the other side of the world and to allow Vietnam to change you to some degree, even if this is merely broadening consciousness. America and others tried to impose themselves and their systems on Vietnam, at a brutal and horrendous cost to many nations. This imposition was not merely an intellectual, academic exercise in policy formulation. It was a series of events as real as a rice paddy at dawn.

Just before Christmas 1968, I was with an infantry squad. We walked at night and finally set up a night logger, a secure place where we would wait for daylight. The night was quiet. At dawn, we looked across a series of rice paddies on one side of the tiny clearing where we had slept. Walking across a dike toward us were the black clothed figures of a group of ten VC. Their weapons were slung over their shoulders, and they looked very tired. We readied ourselves and waited. When they were nearly in our location, the squad opened up on the VC with automatic weapons fire. Some VC fell immediately. Others ran in the other direction to escape. One ran directly toward us. M-16 rounds pounded his arm, and it dangled loosely as it hung by a ligament. He was an old man who ran past me. I turned

and chased him. As I closed in, I jumped and tackled him. He lay under me, panting, and staring in terror. The blood gushed from his wound, and his arm fell off. Minutes later a helicopter arrived. None of our squad was injured. We loaded the wounded VC. When the old man was aboard, I handed him his arm. One of the men in the squad shouted, "Merry Christmas, mother fucker." I thought I would pass out. This, too, was policy making.

Some still follow the failed model of force, now under the guise of humanitarianism. It has not worked, and it will never work. Vietnam knows its needs, and it knows what it must have to meet those needs. It is a tragic delusion under which some come to Vietnam to "help" when that "help" seems a concocted method of imposing one's will on those seen as somehow backward or ignorant. The need for help is genuine. The need for freedom from the donor to use this help is equally valid. The kindly visitors who think they understand Vietnam better than the Vietnamese will find smiles, agreement, and a façade of acceptance.

Some say, "Nothing changes. The West sends its missionaries with their mission to change, not to support Vietnam." There are few more ignorant than those who think they know what is best for others. Their zeal to impose, however well intended, may actually obviate learning that could have resulted in being productive and building personal trust that otherwise could have led to effective efforts from which all would gain.

Self-awareness results in the conscious use of self. It requires an examination and assessment of one's values and use of self interpersonally. American's values may be rooted in the Judeo-Christian ethic. Their standards for appropriate interaction seem generally based on European standards.

Vietnam has a number of Christians and a history of occupation and colonization by Europeans. The Vietnamese are familiar with Judeo-Christian values and manners and behavior rooted in European standards.

Vietnam's values and standards of interaction are uniquely Vietnamese. They are different from those in the West. They also are much older than Western values and standards. The influences of Buddhism, Confucianism, ancestor worship, and other factors determine thought process, communication, values, manners, interpersonal behavior, and all other aspects of life. In addition, modern influences, influences from other cultures in the Southeast Asian region and China, influences from Communism, and influences from past invaders affect what the Vietnamese do and that to which they aspire. In some ways, this is very confusing to the Western mind. In other ways, the acceptance and valuing of such distinctions allows the differences to build bridges by themselves, rather than actively imposing Western values and social standards. To do otherwise, is just an act of rudeness and will result in frustration in interaction.

Unknowingly, I had begun to value the Vietnamese way of thinking and doing, as it applied in my life. My family saw this as withdrawal. I no longer had an opinion to share in the things that mattered to them. There were no random thoughts to throw out, and I felt angry with myself about this. The hours I had spent at the computer in my office at home, finishing concrete tasks, now became hours of soul searching. My thoughts turned to the war, the needs of the Vietnamese people, my fascination with that people's culture and tradition, and their unique way of defining themselves and looking at the world around them.

I was well on the way to become a student in the very

program I had started and directed. It may be redundant to say those who interacted with me became increasingly frustrated. I eventually accepted things the way they were. Frustration became only a moment, gone in a second. I had begun to let go. This does not mean I discounted their frustrations. I just had no answers for them. I had no answers for myself. I was not sure what was happening to me. To bring issues up again and again only increased their dissatisfaction and served to clarify for me the differences between Western and Vietnamese ways of being. What had been effective before no longer worked.

The models used to transact business internationally, transculturally, and between varied populations have been applied with varying results in Vietnam. The same is true when looking at the experience of international education and various development activities. The approach used by such foreigners in Vietnam has been variously successful since *doi moi* (the Vietnam government decision in the late 1980s to open the economy and to loosen social controls to some degree) was implemented, the U.S. embargo ended, and Vietnam and the U.S. implemented diplomatic relations in 1997.

The role of America in Vietnam during the post-war years has been controlled by its continuing fear of Communism and by the POW-MIA issue. After the end of Communism in the Soviet Union and the Eastern Block nations, Americans lost their fear of world political competition between Communist and Capitalist nations. Americans politicians in the tradition of Senator Jessie Helms, however, still fear Communism. The Conservative Right in American politics still uses "socialism" as a justification for opposing any government funded programs not to their liking.

The U.S. continues to impose an embargo on Cuba while the anti-Castro politicians highlight Cuba's Communism,

ignoring its progress in health care and education, as well as its friendly relations with the rest of the world. These same politicians tout the poverty in Cuba as being a result of Communism. They neglect to factor in America's successful effort to create this poverty by doing all it can to block Cuba from joining economic globalization.

The reluctance to actively engage the Socialist Republic of Vietnam was and continues to be affected by the fiction of world domination efforts by present day Communist countries. It is difficult to believe that Vietnam's Communist government has designs on dominating any other nation. Is there some real belief that Vietnam will invade America from the west and Cuba will invade from the south? Imagine future Americans being forced to eat a Cuban food with *nuoc mam* sauce.

With all of this, it is curious that America and China trade freely, openly, and with a mutuality rarely seen in other economic relationships. Yet, China is the largest Communist nation in the world and was long before the Vietnam War.

The history of the last eighty-five years saw the development of and the demise of Communism as a worldwide political threat to Capitalism. The forms Communism took in different nations may have varied, but each was modeled on the Marxist economic theory. Each sought an alternative to a society built on profit seen as greed. The present fact that the richest 200 people in the world make more income than the combined incomes of the poorest 2,000,000,000 people in the world would be abhorrent to Marx and those who worked to implement his theories.

The rise of the Soviet Union was seen as a threat by many and a source of hope by many. The Soviets dominated half of Europe and a variety of other nations. They did this by force. Those days are gone. China also was seen as an equal threat

by many. They, in fact, actually invaded Vietnam, following the Vietnam War, and were driven out by the Vietnamese military. All of these complex dominations and invasions were not merely because of political ideologies; they also involved centuries' old animosities and territorial disputes.

Communism now is an alternative form of government to the many forms of Capitalism that exist in non-Communist countries. It is still controversial and is still condemned and feared by many who survived the Cold War. Difference is often seen as threatening.

I recall when I was a child in school, having to practice drills that were meant to protect us in the event of a nuclear missile attack from the Soviet Union. We did not know that Soviet children practiced the same drills. Many of my generation still harbor a certain fear of political difference and disbelief that Communism might actually be a welcome form of government in any nation. Communism actually has modernized, stabilized, and benefited Vietnam as no other form of government in its past has ever done. There have been unfortunate consequences, but there are also unfortunate consequences of Capitalism. Vietnam has learned from past mistakes and readily admits to these.

This has not been as important a problem to some in relationship building and cooperation as the POW-MIA issue. Those American POWs returned by Vietnam in 1973 did not end the tension caused by information published daily in the American press. Once these men were returned, there was public clamor about finding the over 2,000 remaining missing soldiers. The hundreds of thousands of missing on the other side's forces were inconsequential to America. This variable was not inconsequential to Vietnam.

There are still a couple of dozen unaccounted for

Americans, according to Dennis Harter, former Deputy Chief of Mission at the American Embassy in Hanoi, that are active files in the work of a Joint Task Force of Americans and Vietnamese who work as archeological experts, sifting dirt and mapping possible sites where an American casualty might be reported by a villager. The other Americans who are still listed as missing will never have their remains sent home. Harter has worked for various American agencies and the Department of State, dating back to the early 1960s. He notes these missing soldiers were in airplanes blown up over Laos or the South China Sea. He also told me, "Some were missing at particular locations where verified reports make it clear there could be no remains, or, at least, no remains that are recoverable because of the heavy bombing that occurred at such locations." This was similar to what happened to Ngu's mother. Some bombing was so heavy during the war that bodies would actually vaporize.

The issue remains politically volatile in America. The President must issue a periodic report on efforts to find the missing. Congress never considers any legislation involving Vietnam without extensive discussion of the POW-MIA factor. Millions of dollars that might be better spent are used daily to search for the remains of those who will never be found. Those lost in action in any conflict should always be honored for their sacrifice, and all possible efforts should be made to bring them home. All possible efforts to bring home the remains of Americans from Vietnam have been made.

The present efforts are largely a result of a continuing "urban legend." Hollywood movies depict fictional accounts of still imprisoned Americans in hidden jungle POW camps. Some Vietnam veterans report "authenticated live sightings" that they claim are covered up by their own government. Organizations are scattered over the Internet that claim

Americans have been held since the war. There is absolutely no evidence that any of these reports are valid. It may be shocking for some, but "Rambo" was fiction.

The POW issue has even given birth to a difficult to understand trend for men in America who were not POWs to claim they were. There are even individuals and organizations that expose such frauds. This phenomenon is probably a result of the Hollywood films that depict the fiction of live POWs in a heroic manner such that some gain an odd status by assuming the role. One man I knew served in Vietnam with the U.S. Army as a freight barge operator. He claimed to have been a POW, among other outlandish military feats. The man was exposed publicly. Few cared.

The POW-MIA issue has resulted in many such unusual situations. Unfortunately these serve not to honor those who were POWs but merely to maintain the fiction as possibly real.

American officials in Vietnam support the conclusion that the POW-MIA issue should now achieve closure. It is not that we should forget; rather, we should let these men rest. Those who perpetuate the myth that some are still alive perpetrate a cruel hoax on the families of these men, and they bring dishonor on the memories of the missing themselves.

1995 was the twentieth anniversary of the end of the war. I organized a vigil at SUNY Brockport on April 30. All of the names on The Wall were solemnly read. Many Vietnam War veterans displayed their pictures and various items they had from the war. Documentaries played throughout the weekend, twenty-four hours a day until all the names were read. It was an emotional event. Kathy and a group of women attended not only to support us but also to provide support to former war protesters who came, listened, experienced guilt, and broke down crying.

A college student attached himself to the event and spent the entire weekend with the veterans. His father was a U.S. Navy pilot who was lost over the South China Sea. The student shared that he never knew his father but always thought of him as a hero. He also told us that his mother would seem to come to peace with her loss until another news story or another movie aired that hinted at POWs or MIAs still being held captive in Vietnam. The young man expressed his anger over this, "I know my father died over the ocean. My family wants him to rest. It just resurrects empty hopes when these things are reported, and it really hurts my mother. We would like to come to some peace with this. I don't know why people are so insensitive. Why do they claim these men are still alive?"

It does not seem reasonable to use a baseless fear of a socialist form of government or the POW fiction perpetrated by those who too often find solace in groundless melodrama to form international policy. The reality of politics, however, demands that even these factors must be acknowledged when entertaining involvement in Vietnam.

Faith is often a much more powerful force than truth. Since it has no basis in empirical evidence, it neither can be proven nor disproved. It certainly cannot be ignored, but it cannot be allowed to control by becoming one of the crucial factors of business or program development. Some are willing to ignore all factual evidence and information just because they "know" better. They, of course, are usually those who know nothing at all.

This issue of faith was also playing itself out in my own life. I no longer attempted to respond to the increasing frustrations with my family's attempts to communicate with me. I sat, listened, accepted, and did not try to answer. I did not ask what they wanted or try to help them in the ways

advice or suggestion could. It was not that I did not want to; I did not think I could. Eventually, arguments did begin.

Kathy was shouting for my attention, and I was focused on Asia. She needed me to talk with one of the children over a minor issue, and I was on the phone to Vietnam. She needed to be hugged, and I wrote emails to Vietnam. She needed me to listen, and I listened to a student or staff member in Danang who was having a problem. Kathy was understandably frustrated by the changes she had seen in me. She felt that the strong relationship we had enjoyed began to fall apart. I did not have the words or the time to explain to her how deeply I cared. My response seemed a sort of faith-based response without religion. I had no answers to give her; she had to find them for herself. I simply foolishly believed she could. I had left her alone with this, and this was unfair. I knew this but still worked toward achieving the goals I had in Vietnam.

Goals in a family or a business are crucial to the outcomes. Both fixed and flexible goals are important in such efforts in Vietnam. Understanding that all sides of an effort do not always share the same goals and that personal and professional goals will equally influence the functioning of a program will help if one wishes to remain and prosper in the complexities of Vietnamese society.

The goals in my home life became even more confused as I traveled back and forth to Vietnam to run the study abroad program. Working to strengthen my marriage did not take the position it might have. During the passing months, my relationship with my wife was a central concern. The relationship became more confusing and more painful, especially for her. We spoke less. Going out for dinner became less common. Family gatherings became an inconvenience for me.

The goals for all parties who labor to produce something of value in Vietnam need not be the same, but they must be mutually understood and must be such that they will result in the outcome that produces the purpose of the endeavor. Our program in Vietnam has the goal of providing quality international education for American students in Danang, Vietnam. Our Vietnamese partner organization has the goal of improving the quality of life in Danang. Our community service sites have the goal of improving services to their clients. Our instructors have the goal of earning an income. The goals are the outcome of a process from which they are compatible and mutually supportive.

When I was at Hiep Duc during the war, a Saigon regime physician visited from Danang once each week. He provided medical care to those who were in desperate need of such attention. When he would leave, he would invariably take with him a child who was severely injured or very ill and orphaned. The little girl who wandered into the village one day missing some of her skull from some explosion was the last he took to Danang. He explained, "This must be the last I take with me. You see, I take them all home. My wife will kill me if I keep doing this." It was rumored he was VC. There was no conflict in goals in what he did.

The process of negotiating may be arduous, will probably result in some errors of judgment, or may even produce some conflict. The process becomes easier with mutual understanding and trust. Errors accepted and dealt with openly will be resolved to everyone's satisfaction, at least temporarily. Conflict should avoid the expression of anger or the humiliation of anyone involved. This could be a major mistake, unless you want the effort to fail. All of this becomes easier when the focus of all involved persons and organizations is clearly on achieving the

goals, maintaining the personal and professional relationships involved, and working purposely toward easily attained objectives along the way that lead to goal attainment. If this focus is lost, it is probable that the effort will be unsuccessful, and this lack of success will result in mere blame for the lack of success. The process is not an easy one.

The program in Danang had no students for the Fall semester 2000. I was concerned that the program would fold. My wife and I endlessly discussed the implications, searching for answers. Kathy was my best supporter.

If my staff in Danang were not working, they could not be paid. They would not receive unemployment insurance benefits in Vietnam. The team was excellent, and I could not afford to lose them. Months had been spent developing trust and understanding between both the government and the program and between the staff and myself.

This staff was incredibly willing to assist the American students through daily life in Vietnam. They provided support and understanding as students progressed from thinking in linear and logical terms to opening themselves up to what Vietnam is—a being.

My wife describes what she terms her Western way of thinking as linear and a Vietnamese way of thinking as falling into an abyss. One attempts to guide life. The other allows life to be the guide. This has made sense to me.

Using Western logic, the solution to having no students was clear. The Fall semester would be used for intensive staff training. None of us knew that this also would open an abyss.

Major changes are taking place in the dynamic nation of Vietnam. Some are obvious to any interested observer. Some are subtler and less obvious, but they are just as important to the success of personal and professional involvement in that nation

if one is to achieve harmony and balance in process (which you must) and avoid frustrating failure with a premature end to their efforts (which will happen without harmony and balance).

The socialist government does not live up to the myth of Communism often held by Westerners. The government is dealing with a host of realities and is nationalist in nature. Ho Chi Minh was a product as much of socialist ideological belief as the multi-century quest for independence held by the Vietnamese people. Communism has been a means toward an end, not the end itself. This struggle has been both rewarding and disappointing for Vietnam. There is an effort to preserve the socialist state while entertaining economic globalization realities and the cooperation that this requires. The effort is to preserve the Communist Party, the Marxist-Leninist philosophy, a socialist economic and political system, and the unique culture of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and its people within the practical demands of a global economy.

It was decided that the Program Administrator in Vietnam would come to America for training during the semester no students were sent to Danang. The rest of the staff would receive daily English language instruction in Danang. This would produce unanticipated results.

Vietnam may be one of the few Communist nations that was established as such by the will of the people. It was not imposed by the Soviet Union or China. There is no large-scale civil unrest, and none is anticipated in the near future. This is a stable political system. Transitions in political leaders result in no disruption. There are even members of the National Assembly who are not members of the Communist Party.

Understanding this is crucial to the success of American investment (whether business, humanitarian, or educational) in

Vietnam. It is just as important to avoid planning or behavior that might be interpreted as controlling or attempting to change the present economic, political, or social systems that exist in Vietnam. Not only does such active or attitudinal behavior involve basic lack of manners, it also will ensure failure of any development effort. Such non-productive behavior on the part of foreigners in Vietnam has a history that is filled with their dishonesty. The Vietnamese are experts in spotting dishonesty and duplicity. Their cautiousness may appear to be paranoid, but it is based in experience.

Cautiousness even extends into regulations affecting movement or travel in Vietnam. No one, Vietnamese or foreigner, has total freedom of movement. Security concerns regulate where people go and where people stay. The police are assigned the task of enforcing these restrictions. Tourists are often unaware that the hotels notify the police with the information about who stays there and what they are doing. Trips from city to city without notifying the authorities result in explaining things to those responsible for security. This practice is rooted in the nation's experience not merely during the war when spies and informers were everywhere but also after the war when large portions of the population were relocated with resulting economic and social problems.

The relocation did not produce the calm and economic advantages sought. The policy was abandoned. The regulation and monitoring of movement, however, is still the practice. In fact, having overnight guests means notifying the authorities. Caution can sometimes become control.

A friend flew from one city in Vietnam to another to help friends in a family crisis. She did not notify the authorities of the trip. A few days after she returned she was invited to meet with the police. They inquired about the nature and

particulars of her trip. There were numerous other meetings with the police during the following months.

Whenever the students and I visit my friend at Hiep Duc, he also is invited to meet with the police who inquire about what happened during the visit. This still happens after many such trips to Hiep Duc, even though we always receive official permission before each visit to the village and are usually accompanied by a government official.

The eleven layers of police agencies provide employment for Vietnamese, somewhat confused communication between government agencies, security for the nation, and control of the people. In America, control takes the form that parallels truth or consequence, right or wrong, win or lose. Some tend to see themselves controlling fate.

Nguyen Thi My Hoa, our Program Administrator, traveled to New York for the month of October 2000 for training at SUNY Brockport. That was an introduction of Vietnam to my family that had important consequences. It was distinct in some ways and similar in others to the interaction of Americans with that nation. It, too, was an example of fate.

The Vietnam War was a macrocosm of imperialistic behavior by America and other nations, which was not dramatically distinct from the failed French attempt to make Vietnam something other than it was capable of or willing to become. It was a continuation of the attempts by foreigners to exploit the land and people of Vietnam to benefit the foreigners and the exploiting nations who usually presented to the world lofty goals of religious, economic, or political salvation. These had tragic consequences.

The Chinese slaughtered countless people. The French exploited and both starved to death and slaughtered millions. The Japanese inflicted chaos and occupation. The Americans

conducted a war that dehumanized and massacred millions of Vietnamese while it contaminated natural resources with dioxin and left a legacy of millions of disabled children, cancer, and debilitating problems.

The microcosm of my work at Hiep Duc was an excellent example of what appeared to me at the time to be well intentioned and logical. The reality was that these efforts were predestined to fail because they were conceived in the context of American experience and logic, obviated popular involvement, and utilized inappropriate partners who shared only the image of working with shared goals. The effort was nothing more than one nation presuming it knew more about how another nation should live. The Vietnamese, of course, defeated America. Then, the United States inflicted a cruel embargo on Vietnam that merely increased the number of graves for the Vietnamese and their children. All of this was rooted in dishonesty. The Vietnamese indeed are experts in identifying dishonesty. This is a survival skill that serves them well.

This survival skill demands both professional and personal genuineness by those who are sincere in attempting to enter constructive relationships with Vietnamese, especially professionals and government officials. Genuineness requires clear self-awareness; openness to difference as a valued variable; and, once again, willingness to, at least, entertain changing one's own perspective.

My wife and children shared my excitement about the prospect of My Hoa coming. I was excited at the prospect of all that could be gained for the program. Plans for providing training in course development, evaluation, and other related skills were made for My Hoa's arrival. My wife had seen what she described as the physical toll attempting to eat very

different diets had had on me. Diets are very different between Vietnam and America, and the effects had me literally and figuratively coming and going in the first few days of my arrival in either country during each of my several trips each year. It takes a body time to adjust.

Kathy searched out Vietnamese recipes, stores for supplies, and ways to integrate My Hoa's expressed desire to eat American food in America with the knowledge of what I went through each time I went to or returned from Vietnam. My Hoa responded positively to Kathy's genuine efforts. In spite of these efforts, American foods are heavy, and Vietnamese foods are not. My Hoa not only ate what Kathy prepared, she did so with a genuine smile of appreciation. I do not think any of us knew the physical toll this took, and she would never tell us.

Genuineness without empathy is deceit. Empathy is the ability to both understand the feelings and experience of another and to be able to communicate this to the other. It is not sympathy, and it certainly is not pity. It requires an admiration and respect for others and the roles they play. My work in Hiep Duc in 1968 and 1969 drew from me the need to understand myself, be myself, interact with respect, admire the humanity of those who lived in the village, and feel both their pain and their ability to still value life. Their strength in adversity became a shared existence among a U.S. soldier, Saigon government troops, and local people. This was within the context of my mission, the mission of other occupying troops, the mission of those who fought to liberate, and the local people who wanted to survive the conflict. It was not a uniquely noble effort, merely a common human one.

The approach I am suggesting has served to raise more questions than answers and an endless search for answers that results in merely more questions. The questions are more

important than the answers. They serve to create a climate for growth and change; instead of the restraints that happen when one protects and preserves what they only think they know. Avoiding past mistakes through present openness allows the potential for future growth.

Change provides this potential for growth. Attempting to avoid change guarantees a lack of progress and success. Trying to avoid the struggle that is concomitant with change is still a form of change that may result in entropy. Presenting the façade of change is just as counterproductive as doing nothing.

After My Hoa's arrival, trying to maintain that nothing had changed at home was impossible. She and I were always on the run, trying to keep an extremely hectic schedule. I had spent months feeling lost, lost in a society that I was not sure I still understood, one for which I lacked patience. Any attempts to explain this to myself or to those I loved resulted in more shared confusion.

The Vietnamese are an understanding, open, and friendly people. Errors of manners and judgment are excused when a person admits their ignorance. A self-effacing approach is more welcome than attempting to hide not knowing what is acceptable and what is unacceptable. This honest approach of admitting "I don't know what to do" will elicit more acceptance when it is followed by a sincere attempt to do what is all right.

Self-deprecating humor is always useful. A self-congratulatory attitude is not. The Vietnamese respect those seen as honest and disrespect those who seek merely personal gain and ambition.

This was reflected in the interaction between My Hoa and me during her visit. It also exhibits a bit of cultural difference. These differences became jokes between us. In America if one is

told one looks nice, the response is, "Thanks." In Vietnam, such praise makes the other uncomfortable. They might respond, "I do not." Self-deprecating humor became a humorous way to deal with this cultural difference. My male pattern baldness took on a myriad of jokes between us. My wife and children lacked the understanding of what was going on, and I did not notice the effects this was having in my home.

It is helpful to understand the attitude one must overcome if working in Vietnam. There is a reputation that must be changed. Americans are seen around the world as bullies. This reputation is reflected in an interesting anecdote about what happened to the money Vietnam's government had in American banks when the war ended.

The funds of the Saigon regime became those of the new government. All nations are required to settle debts they have with each other. In 1975, the U.S. government froze all assets that had been deposited by the Saigon regime that rightly then belonged to the new government. This was to ensure Hanoi paid Saigon's debts.

The American claims by citizens, companies, and our government on this money included kitchen appliances, automobiles, loans made to the Saigon regime by the U.S. government, and American government property. They agreed to negotiate the claims made on this money. There were no negotiations for the millions of Vietnamese slaughtered in the war, the villages and cities destroyed, or those who still suffered from the war. We laid claims for toaster ovens and TV sets.

America's Foreign Claims Settlement Commission found that the Vietnamese had about \$33,000,000 more in their accounts than was needed to pay private citizens' claims. The American and Vietnam's governments resolved real estate claims by trading parcels in Saigon for what our government

needed in Hanoi for diplomatic missions. Their government received \$15,000,000 of the original assets. The negotiations continued, and Vietnam finally agreed to pay the United States several million dollars more than had been previously settled, to be paid over twenty years. In the closing days of the U.S. Congress in 2000, it created the Educational Trust. This will use \$5,000,000 of this debt payment by the Vietnamese to fund scholarships for selected Vietnamese students to pursue university studies.

The U.S. diplomat who shared this story saw this as an indication of kindness and goodwill on the part of the American government. This is Vietnam's money. I wonder why we cannot trust the Vietnamese to decide on their own priorities, especially during a time of serious social and economic problems. It strikes me that we invaded Vietnam, wreaked havoc on the land and people, and they will pay us for some costs incurred, with interest. All nations are required to settle debts they have with each other. What do we still owe the Vietnamese?

Some American bullying is an attempt to impose their will on others, and the American government has a lengthy history of doing just that. Some of this is for corporate and personal gain and ambition. Flaunting wealth and muscle wins no friends, establishes no successful relationships, and produces only frustration and conflict. There is no harmony or balance that emanates from the imposition of one's will over another. Cooperation in process is successful when no involved party to the interaction maintains supremacy in all activities. This may be difficult for those who are used to "money speaks" or "I have an offer you can't refuse" or a similar approach to program or business development. This includes those who expect the Vietnamese to accept the American as an expert merely

because of the American version of success or a prior record of accomplishments in America or elsewhere.

The Vietnamese are aware that Capitalist business is usually concerned only with maximizing profit, often at the expense of those who earn that profit for them. Vietnam may collaborate in business ventures but expects not to be exploited in the process. After all, their political system is built on the premise that they will free the proletariat from exploitation. This sometimes takes on a desperate presentation.

This was reflected in a meeting I had with Ngo Quang Vinh, Director of The People's Committee of Danang's Foreign Affairs Department. Vinh is a straightforward and experienced administrator who works hard to interest foreigners in business development in Danang. He asked me if I would be willing to meet with the Mayor of Pittsburgh when he was scheduled to visit the city to initiate a Sister City arrangement. Vinh thought that I as an American committed to Danang and its people might be able to influence the Mayor to do more for the city than establish a symbolic relationship. I agreed to do this, but I also discussed with Vinh how Danang would have to do much more than educate the visitor on Danang's problems and needs. American executives and politicians usually expect to receive much more than they give, and they only give to receive. Vinh agreed with this but seemed confused about why anyone would seek to establish a business that would not have as primary goals establishing jobs, strengthening an economy, and meeting social needs.

Goal formulation, goal oriented activities, honesty, genuineness, empathy, cooperation, openness to change, and an understanding of the various political and government systems in the nation are key to bring any business, humanitarian, and educational program in Vietnam. Nothing guarantees

acceptance or success in establishing programs, but ignoring these factors may guarantee failure. An unwillingness to learn from the Vietnamese is a tragic mistake. An inability to see the world through the eyes of the Vietnamese merely creates confusion. Discounting them because of their different form of government or the belief they are holding Americans captive in a secret prison somewhere is foolish.

I had spent what seemed like endless months in America attempting to find a balance between thinking in a linear fashion and falling into the abyss. I found it increasingly difficult to think in a linear manner, except at work when it was required. This was a learned skill. What had been merely frustrating now became impossible. My Hoa's presence in my home served not only to illustrate that to me but to my family, as well. The jokes between her and me were perceived by my wife as flirting. They might have been, but I perceived them as finally being understood. The sense of release that I was not mad was enormous. I could communicate with someone, and I could be understood. Once again, my home was filled with laughter. What I did not know then was that I had become a prisoner in my own home.

4.

AMERICA'S ROLE IN CREATING DEATH
IN VIETNAM TODAY

"I wonder if my poor common people has been happy or not."

- Minh Menh, *Eulogy of Mid-autumn Shining Moon*

I was not a very skilled warrior during the war. The first time under fire, I was with a rifle platoon near the village. There was the sound of something flying quickly by my right ear, followed by the shouts of "Sniper!" I fell to the ground and lay there while others' M-16s on full automatic blasted the trees and brush. Then, silence. "Man, you almost bought it," a grunt said. The round had missed me by less than an inch. I can still hear the sound.

Imagine giving this reluctant warrior the responsibility for the health, safety, and welfare of about 2,000 people who were malnourished, frightened, wounded, and ridden with malaria and other diseases. That was Hiep Duc in 1968-1969. All of this was in the context of war, a war that saw almost daily mortar shelling, snipers, or firefights. Imagine having absolutely no idea what to do in such a position and flying by the seat of your pants. My ignorance in this position was never acknowledged. The U.S. Army told me I knew what to do and was doing a good job. I agreed.

There was a presumption all of us knew more than the Vietnamese. This pompous and self-righteous attitude actually made us think the plan was successful. They gave me a Bronze

Star and the Saigon government gave me a Cross of Gallantry, and I was sent home. One month later, the entire valley exploded in furious battle with devastating results. Hundreds were killed in some of the fiercest fighting of the war. The effort to pacify resulted in no peace at all. Thinking of this results in wondering who was assigned my M-16 and .45 pistol when I left, and if he, too, went home; then, who received the weapons from him. Yet, the experience there taught me a number of lessons.

If one comes to learn in Vietnam, they might also be able to teach through their learning. If one comes to teach in Vietnam, no one will learn. The foolishness of Hiep Duc and similar disasters in the late 1960s have apparently not taught America anything at all. The war itself is touted as a lesson for changing U.S. military strategy. This may be, but it has not affected America's behavior or attitude toward other nations. Some Vietnamese are particularly sensitive to this.

Trinh Thanh Sau is the Chief of Staff for the General Secretariat of a government organization in Danang. He was born in Que Son and joined the National Liberation Front (VC) when he was sixteen years old. He fought in that valley when I was there during the war. He told me his older brother was a VC who actually lived in my village when I was there. Sau mentioned that his brother liked my food. It is a consuming feeling to understand how much has changed over the years when friends were once bitter enemies. Sau and I both understand that feeling.

Sau has security responsibilities for the government in Danang and the region. He is a well-connected government official who is also a high-ranking member of the Communist Party. Sau has been meeting Americans who come to Vietnam for seven years and has formed some interesting opinions. It is

difficult to elicit critical comments from such officials about Americans when they speak with Americans. Sau is not always as tactful as his colleagues are, and he is a truthful man.

He told me, "It is difficult to forget the war. I can't forget the days when Americans killed many kids and old people. Some like Americans, but some do not because of the past. At the end of the war, the Americans went home. The Vietnamese just continued to suffer because of what America did. I know it was the American government that did these things, not all the American people. Some of you tried to stop the war. We, however, are still suffering."

I asked him how he thinks Americans are presenting themselves in Vietnam now. Sau made some intriguing points. "Vietnam has put the war aside to accomplish national reconstruction. It is important that we make friends from all countries in the world. We try not to forget but to look forward to the future. Some American veterans who think about the past want to help Vietnam, some people like you. Many Americans still oppose what we are doing in our country, like in the Central Highlands. You know about this."

He referred to a situation near the city of Dalat in spring 2001. Some ethnic minority farmers blocked a road to protest economic conditions. The government put an end to this quickly, but the incident received brief world press attention. There is some information about other incidents, dating back several years. Internet web sites in the United States representative of the group that has caused such problems commanded much attention and claimed this was a major uprising of oppressed people in the Central Highlands. No evidence at all supports this exaggerated claim. Some reports say the protesters were imprisoned briefly; others say the protesters were funded by Vietnamese in America and fled to Cambodia to escape arrest

for insurrection. There is much evidence to support this claim. Sau believes this account. "Americans should not interfere in our internal affairs. Most who come here do not, but we have to be careful. Most of them respect our customs and our politics, but they do not always seem to understand us."

He made an important point when he added, "There are some in our government who are tired of empty promises. I have seen many Americans come with promises who never fulfill these promises. There are some organizations we now respectfully decline to meet with. They have been coming for five years and promise to build roads, provide medicine, and help in many ways. But, nothing happens. Many seem to have no understanding of Vietnam. There also are Vietnamese in America who fear coming back here but would like to. They fear the Communist government and are given erroneous information about what it would be like for them here."

Sau, then, spoke about solutions. "We like your program because your American students will return to their country and will tell about their experiences in Vietnam. Those they tell will tell others. Maybe, Vietnam will be better understood." He ended with, "You are a good friend of Vietnam because you don't lie to us. We need more friends who understand us and are willing to help. I personally feel one enemy is too much. One-thousand friends are too few."

My Hoa left New York at the end of October 2000. Suddenly, my home became silent. The sense of isolation I felt grew. My wife noticed this. I still did not know the joking between My Hoa and myself had been perceived as flirting. I also did not know at the time that others thought my feelings of isolation were grieving over My Hoa's departure. I did feel sad when she left. Battles at home began to take a new turn.

There seems to be an opinion by many that economic

poverty in Vietnam reflects a lack of knowledge, a shortage of industrious workers, or indifference by the government to the needs of its people. Nothing could be further from the truth, and attempting to reduce these complex issues to such a simplistic inference is insulting to both the people and the government of Vietnam. In fact, this conclusion defies all logic.

There is much poverty in Vietnam. This is not because of a lack of knowledge by the Vietnamese. They know serious poverty exists. They are well aware of the sting of malnutrition, empty clinics, schools without teachers or books, street children, pollution, tuberculosis, malaria, Agent Orange, and leprosy. They know much more than what the American students from SUNY Brockport see and try to help in some small way. The officials are aware that the government is using all available resources to ameliorate these conditions. Government administrators and functionaries spend considerable time trying to convince foreign organizations to help, foreign businesses to invest, and foreign governments to share resources. These conditions result not because of a lack of knowledge but simply from a lack of money. Sufficient funds to overcome these conditions in Vietnam cannot be generated by the Vietnamese government alone.

This poverty is also seen as a challenge. The Vietnamese use everything to overcome social challenges. Souvenirs bought by tourists are often made from articles found in trash. After the end of the war, remnants of American aircraft and bombs found along the Ho Chi Minh Trail were gathered, sold to Japan, and used to make automobiles for Americans to buy. It is probable that many Americans who fought in the war bought cars made from downed American airplanes. I wonder how many Vietnam War veterans in America who purchased such

cars knew the source of metal. Pagodas constructed recently are often decorated with green glass from discarded Heineken Beer bottles and brown glass from Tiger Beer bottles. Tiny strips of land along sidewalks are used to grow vegetables or herbs. What much of the world sees as waste and loss is seen as potential and gain in Vietnam. Nothing is wasted.

Whether seen as problems or opportunity, historical circumstances and decisions by America and other nations were principle causative factors of the difficult conditions in Vietnam. There also have been problems with corruption and failed policies in Vietnam, but their government has admitted this and is taking measures to correct past mistakes. An examination of the behavior of government officials results in seeing them as no more inefficient or corrupt than government officials or politicians in America, except most in both countries have the welfare of their people high on their agendas.

Unfortunately, the welfare of the Vietnamese is not a priority for America. This is difficult to understand. One example is the Agent Orange issue.

America sprayed Agent Orange on large areas of Vietnam during the war. This was dioxin, one of the deadliest chemicals known to man. Developed by DOW Chemical, it was intended to defoliate areas where the Liberation Army troops would hide. We sprayed millions of gallons of this on such foliage and also the people who were in such localities, Americans and Vietnamese alike. The results were tactically questionable and biologically destructive. The insidious nature of dioxin continues to be devastating.

I remember the fixed wing aircraft and helicopters that sprayed dioxin in our valley during the war. As I recall, two planes flew slowly down the length of the valley. I was with a rifle platoon as the rain from the planes misted over us and left

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a residue on the plants, trees, ground, and us. It smelled like a chemical, a rather petroleum, odd odor. I just ignored the stuff, and the men just shrugged at the annoyance. It was just another inconvenience, like mosquitoes, sweat, and bad tasting water. "It don't mean nuthin" was the common response to such things. Nobody gave it a second thought. After all, our government was doing this to help us.

American Vietnam War veterans experience much higher than average rates of cancers, chronic chlorachne, diabetes, and a host of other medical problems because of their exposure to Agent Orange while serving in the military during the war. Their children are also affected. Rates of stillbirth, prematurity, spina bifida, and other childhood physical disorders are higher than the general population when the fathers were exposed to Agent Orange. This was a major concern when Kathy was pregnant.

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs pays compensation and provides medical care for many of these victims, the victims of what the American government did during the war to its own. The Vietnamese, however, have not been compensated by the responsible government for exposure during the war, and the effects are even more serious than those suffered by the American soldiers and their families.

Areas of Vietnam as far from each other as Bien Hoa in the very south and Quang Nam in the central part of the country experience severe rates of cancer, birth defects, childhood disorders, dermatological disorders, liver and kidney disorders, and a variety of medical conditions directly related to the amount of dioxin sprayed on them and their villages during the war. They continue to grow food, eat vegetation, drink the water, and live in highly contaminated land. This is a situation that if it existed in America the U.S. government

would assume the cost and responsibility to relocate families, decontaminate the land, rebuild dwellings, and compensate the victims. Dow Chemical would be forced to assume some of this cost.

Vietnam somehow is seen as different. Dow had the information about the dangers of dioxin and its effects when it sold the chemical for use as a defoliant during the war. It knew about how toxic dioxin was as early as the 1940s. It also had the large amount of money it was paid for the production of this chemical to spray in Vietnam. Profits, once again, were more important than the innocent lives for future generations affected by this action. None of these profits are being used in Vietnam to right a wrong that can never be justified.

The American government stopped spraying Agent Orange in Vietnam after it found that DOW Chemical had completed additional research in 1969 that affirmed the danger of dioxin. America stopped two years after this. There is no information about why the spraying continued for two more years.

Vietnam repeatedly asks the U.S. government for compensation for Agent Orange victims. The American Embassy in Hanoi announced on 3 July 2001 both that a pilot study would be completed by American and Vietnamese scientists to screen soil samples for dioxin in Vietnam and that a scientific conference to discuss the results might be held in Vietnam in April 2002 to discuss Agent Orange.

A study by Hatfield Consultants, Ltd., a Canadian research firm, has documented the toxicity of the land and in animal fat where the chemical was sprayed. A Vietnamese study has done the same. A World Health Organization study in 1988 found significantly higher levels of dioxin in Vietnamese in sprayed areas. Even a study completed by American scientists has found dangerous levels of dioxin in the blood of many Vietnamese.

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The American government has refused to accept these studies. The research it has completed in America has led it to compensate its own victims, those who served in the U.S. forces during the war. It seems to doubt similar effects on the Vietnamese who still live in contaminated areas. I have spent time with these victims in Danang. They wonder about America's seeming inability to recognize their plight, but they do not hate.

The major researcher in this issue in Vietnam is Dr. Trinh Van Bao, Head of the Department of Medical Biology and Genetics at the Hanoi Medical College. Dr. Bao has studied the effects of Agent Orange on his fellow citizens for many years. He told me during a field research stop in Danang, "There are many more than the 1,000,000 victims that have been identified. We know about the areas that were sprayed, and we are now looking at areas that were not. In these, Agent Orange was stored and loaded on planes." His latest study began in 2000. He notes that it is not merely Agent Orange or dioxin that is the problem. "The Americans sprayed and dumped many kinds of chemicals, and we are also looking at the effects of these."

Dr. Bao states that all the disorders identified by the U.S. government as caused by or connected to dioxin are found to be prevalent among Agent Orange victims in Vietnam. He added, "There are more than these, and we are documenting this."

I was with Dr. Bao when he examined a fifteen-year-old boy with one arm. The boy developed cancerous tumors on his right arm when he was ten. The arm quickly turned purple, and the tumors enlarged. Surgery could not correct this, and the tumors spread to his shoulder and back. Eventually the arm had to be amputated. His shoulder and back are now

covered with purple skin and tumors. The boy is one of many whose parents' exposure to Agent Orange resulted in his pain.

Dr. Bao notes that genetically altered DNA will result in this being passed from generation to generation. Many families who were exposed who gave birth to babies with severe physical problems now choose abortion for future pregnancies. Agent Orange has ended the continued family line for many. Dr. Bao hopes America will assume some responsibility to help these victims.

I drove outside the city proper of Danang to a district that is primarily agricultural. Accompanying me were My Hoa and Nguyen Thi Hien, the Chief of Section Social Worker for the Danang Red Cross Chapter. Ms. Hien helps deliver services to Agent Orange victims in Danang. Limited resources and occasional visits by "expert doctors" that only rarely result in some assistance frustrate her. She notes, "There has been help from people who come from Canada and Belgium. We know there are more than 5,400 Agent Orange victims in Danang. The government does not release the national figures."

An article in the *Boston Globe* on 25 April 2000 was entered into the *Congressional Record* by Congressman Bernard Sanders of Vermont. The article reviewed the work of Dr. Le Cao Dai, the Director of the Agent Orange Victims Fund of the Vietnam Red Cross. The research found in 1998 that about 1,000,000 Vietnamese suffer the effects of America's use of chemical warfare from when it sprayed 11,000,000 gallons of Agent Orange on about 18% of Vietnam during the war. Dr. Cau noted that about 15% of those who have been born with birth defects resulting from this have died. Not all have.

Ta Minh Tung is a ten-year-old boy. His brother Ta Minh Huy is eleven. Their father was a VC in the Central Highlands during the war. He fought in areas saturated with Agent

Orange. His sons were both born with brittle bone disorder, spina bifida, and other disorders. Each boy is now about two feet tall. They use an occasional word or two, respond to others, and live on a floor mat in their living room, with their curved legs wrapped around themselves. Huy and Tung are victims of Agent Orange who did not die. Huy also has a large tumor that protrudes from his chest. Both boys have small tumors about the head.

When I visited them, they stared at me and smiled. Their mother talks about crying at their birth and the difficulty in maintaining the family on her husband's salary as a driver. They receive \$3.24 monthly compensation from the Department of Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs. The mother told me she is not angry at America. She said, "I'm not sure about my family's future. I would like to see America care about my kids. I'm not angry with Americans, however. What happened is just fate." They live in a small house built with Canadian funds. The house is hidden from Danang by a large, weathered concrete wall that surrounds the Danang Plastic Company. The wall blocks out the sun.

Hien and My Hoa also accompanied me to a small home outside of Danang. Inside the door was Nguyen Giao. This thirty nine year old is the father of three girls, ages 20, 17, and 10. He lies on a mat, unable to walk. His entire body is covered with tumors the size of golf balls. Large soccer ball sized tumors hang from his legs and chest. His bowed arms and legs looked like skeletons. Giao is another victim of Agent Orange.

When he was a child, his family lived less than one mile from a military base in Danang. He remembers helicopters spraying the area. The spray killed all the fish. One day he ate some potatoes that had just been sprayed. Small tumors began

to grow on his body shortly thereafter. Many of his friends died within months or a few years after the time he developed the small tumors. In 1980, his massive tumors appeared. He has not walked in ten years and suffers constant pain, headaches, and fevers. Giao does not see a doctor anymore because it costs too much. Sometimes his wife buys painkillers to try to help him. He receives \$3.04 each month from his government. Their neighbors help them a little. His wife grows rice and vegetables and cleans houses and clothes to add to the family income. She also worries about her husband and children. "He doesn't eat much now. He often just lets his food sit in a bowl on the floor, but he can still feed himself if he wants to."

Giao's daughters also have developed small tumors. Each also has fevers, headaches, dizziness, and sight problems. No one else in his family has ever had such problems. Giao said, "It all began with my eating a potato and drinking water that had been sprayed." I asked him what he would like to say to the Americans who caused this. He paused for a moment that seemed much longer and stared intensely at me. He said softly, "I don't blame the Americans. I think it is my fate. If they can help my daughters, I hope they will." He lay down from his crouching position and continued staring at me. I looked away.

These victims have not done what Westerners might, blame the Americans for what happened to them and to the million or more others in similar circumstances. They would see this as misdirected and useless anger. They attribute this to fate, an inevitable force that leads them to their destiny. This not only provides them with an explanation of why this happened but also allows them to feel some peace without living with an inner rage that accomplishes nothing but more pain.

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I spoke with Hien and asked if the Red Cross could help the three girls. She told me she would have volunteers take the children to the hospital to be tested. She also said, "These families and thousands of others have no history of any of these problems before exposure to Agent Orange. All have been tested for dioxin, and the tests indicate they were exposed. They also all lived in areas that were heavily sprayed by the Americans."

Hien told me that the Red Cross has begun an orphan program to help some of the children whose parents have died because of Agent Orange. The organization is also beginning a childcare program with volunteers in the rural area to help adult victims who must tend their rice fields during the day and have no one to watch their children, many of whom are disabled.

The numbers of victims and the severity of their symptoms are staggering. One family's grandfather was VC and was sprayed. His son was born with tumors. His grandson was born with tumors. It is obvious that this legacy will haunt Vietnam for generations. One wonders why it does not haunt the conscience of America.

Vietnam struggles in a frustrating attempt to help its citizens. Funds are short for any government activity in Vietnam, and it announced in June 2001 that it would begin to pay some of these victims of American chemical warfare between two cents and twenty-three cents per day. Vietnamese victims will receive less than what it costs the U.S. government for postage to send compensation checks to American victims. That is all their government can afford. Think of that the next time you see Dow Chemical ads on TV that cost hundreds of thousands of dollars each. Think of the two cents they will not help pay to the victims of their dioxin. Think of Dow

Chemical's corporate motto "Living. Improved Daily"; then, think of the dying and disabled children who cough up blood in the rural mountains of Vietnam.

The Vietnamese are a forgiving people who would attribute this situation more to fate rather than ascribing blame to a company or a government. This is the nature of Vietnam. They even would encourage DOW Chemical to invest in Vietnam. It would be a welcome partner in present and future economic growth. That, of course, does not change the reality that there are more than one million people affected by Agent Orange in Vietnam. Many are children who were born after what the Americans bequeathed to the Vietnamese.

The use of chemical warfare by America has created an insidious and long lasting legacy that continues to harm the Vietnamese. Aside from dioxin, in July 2001, a cache of tons of CS gas, another toxic chemical, was discovered in the central province of Binh Dinh. When the Americans troops left, they just left the gas in fifty-gallon drums. The neglect in this behavior did not only occur in Vietnam.

I recall finding fifty-gallon drums of Agent Orange that the government stored in an old, non-secure shed at the Iroquois Wildlife Preserve in Upstate New York in the early 1990s. One of these drums had rusted and had drained into the ground. A newspaper reporter in Batavia, New York wrote an article about this. Government teams arrived at the scene, removed the remaining Agent Orange, and destroyed the shed.

My work on the program found me immersed in the twists and turns the program was taking. I also was increasingly irritated by the difference in contrasts as to what was seen as important at home when I saw the daily pain and suffering in Danang. The faces of Agent Orange victims, still smiling

through their torture, still willing to hope and live with that hope, were in stark contrast to my wife's and family's needs of solving what were daily irritations. I did understand this. They did not see what I was seeing. Our realities were becoming different.

There is an image of Vietnam as a quiet Southeast Asian nation on the coast of the South China Sea, populated by a slow moving agricultural population who till rice paddies and practice exotic traditions while speaking a lyrical, multi-tonal language. Many are not aware of the industrious nature of its people.

The Vietnamese labor in a productive, almost driven manner in order to provide for their families, their communities, and their nation. They work hours no U.S. labor union would tolerate and for wages that barely meet subsistence income levels. When supplies and equipment are available, modern buildings, paved roads, and the cities' physical infrastructures are built in astoundingly short time.

A new four-story building had its frame and four concrete floors poured next door to my home in Danang. They used no modern machinery and completed mixing the cement and passing it up the structure in assembly line fashion with shovels by a swarm of active, noisy workers in about twenty-four straight hours of hard work in 97 degree and humid heat. The entire modern building was completed and occupied in two months.

Their universities also graduate educated, knowledgeable, and skilled individuals quite capable of tackling the demands of technology and modern production methodologies. The workweek is six days, often seven.

There was once the practice of having a "Socialist Day" in Danang. On that day, everyone in Danang volunteered to clean

streets, work on beautification projects, repair sidewalks, etc. Everyone contributed to the improvement of the community. The practice ended when the city found it was a problem for businesses to close for that day.

The in-roads and the time spent building the program took on a life of its own. It also took over my life. Perhaps, it is more accurate to say that I gave the program my life. I now spent all my time doing what I had to do as a professor or working on the program. Emails and faxes flew back and forth constantly across the ocean. Looking back, it was only partly necessary. Much of this activity was the need to connect with something that had an important meaning to me. I had begun to understand what it takes to do business and how to accomplish tasks in Vietnam. The yin and yang forces were becoming obvious. My home life was being destroyed with a wrecking ball, and both my wife and me were being hit.

Americans pity those who collect cans and bottles. In Vietnam, collecting cans and bottles is an honorable job that produces both an income and community improvement. Used cement bags at construction sites are collected and neatly bundled for such people. Used plastic water bottles are often discarded by tourists. People wander through tourist sites to collect these for recycling and income. Some things at home were being recycled, too, but this was less than productive.

Culture, traditions, and holidays have great significance in Vietnam. They celebrate most aspects of life. One of the jokes between My Hoa and me during her visit to America was the effort to create holidays in my country, not to celebrate important aspects of life but rather to make money. An ecard site on the Internet had a list of funny holidays. In October, it lists Match Day. This fit with our discussion. With not a second thought, I sent My Hoa a Match Day card. The card

told her, "I find you striking." I did not try to hide this, nor did My Hoa. Kathy heard her comment on receiving an email from me and began to search for answers. Because of my silence and preoccupation with work, she looked through all of my computer files to try to understand what was happening. I had no answers for her, but she needed to find them. She felt she was losing her husband and friend. Neither of us was sure what the questions were. It seemed innocent enough to me. It did not to my wife. Our discussions took on a more heated tone, to say the least.

There are no more productive or hardworking persons than Vietnamese. What they lack is the equipment and support needed to advance their economy and sufficient international corporate investment necessary to be a full-fledged member of the global economy.

The World Bank and many other nations have been helpful. Trade between the U.S. and Vietnam has struggled merely to assume normal trade relations. The Vietnamese purchase large quantities of American products in their stores and markets. Americans are hard pressed to find any Vietnamese products on the shelves of their stores. Once again, it is Orwellian "We are all equal, but we are more equal than you are." The U.S. is neither a leading trade partner of nor a leading investor in Vietnam. Singapore, Australia, Korea, Japan, and other nations top that list. America is missing an opportunity to nurture adequately a lucrative future leading trade partner, and this is unfortunate for both nations.

Herb Cochran runs the American Chamber of Commerce from a small hotel room in The New World Hotel in Ho Chi Minh City. Many American corporate or related offices are little bigger than this. He is a frustrated veteran of American corporate involvement over the past few years in Vietnam and

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is becoming disillusioned. He told me that the present situation is "not good". "People are taking money out of Vietnam. It's becoming difficult even to raise money for the Chamber. I used to fax our requests for money to U.S. companies, and the money would be sent over. Now I send faxes and faxes with a faint hope funding might be found."

Americans and other foreign corporations are finding making a fast profit in a nation like Vietnam that thinks about long-term success less attractive than they might. This results in hesitancy in investing.

This too cautious attitude of American business unconscionably ignores a nation willing to cooperate, a plethora of skilled and educated labor, an abundance of natural resources, and a central location that could command attention for East Asia and the Asian-Pacific region. All of this is available for cooperative ventures in a nation where English is quickly becoming a second language. It appears that American corporate activity may be just as irrational as the American government's activities have been, as they relate to Vietnam. This will probably change when corporations realize that the profit they can make in the long run in Vietnam will make patience worthwhile.

Patience at home had run out. My wife was convinced I was having an affair. I was tired of trying to convince her I was not. I finally gave up the fight. She did not. Her tenaciousness was understandable, and I knew it. I withdrew further. My efforts to find grant funding for the program were increased. There was nothing I could do to explain that ecard that would not increase Kathy's conviction that I was having an affair. Many of the prior arguments, she said, had involved her inability to make me laugh. She connected the ecard with the joking during My Hoa's stay in New York, my seemingly

more relaxed behavior during My Hoa's visit, and my further withdrawal after she had left for Vietnam. Her conclusion was that if I was not having an affair, I wanted to have one. Nothing I could say or do would convince her otherwise. Looking back, I suppose she was correct. It, at the time, was an affair with a nation. Try explaining to your wife you are having an affair with 80,000,000 people.

Some corporations do seem to love Vietnam. Ford Motor Company has two hundred and fifty employees in the country. It sold about 2,000 vehicles in 2001. This is not an impressive number, but Ford has no plans to leave. Vietnam is the only nation where Ford outsells Toyota. What a marketing slogan!

The development of business ventures is necessary if employment is to provide the wherewithal for the Vietnamese to have the capital to improve their own nation's economy. Some foreign corporations have been welcomed with great applause, only to be reexamined after their operations began.

My wife had not only supported and encouraged my work with the program; most of her input had been invaluable. She remained in America while I flew halfway around the world for weeks at a time, several times each year. This was not easy for her, with kids ranging from three to twenty-seven years old. This is not easy when partners get along. Impossible when trust is becoming invisible. I no longer was able to trust her, especially with the continued search of my computer files on a daily basis and her refusal to believe what I would try to say about my changed feelings and behavior. We were both beginning to re-examine our marriage. Arguments began and ended with her telling me that if I was unhappy with our marriage or I wanted something or someone else, she would let me go without a fight. She made her point clear, staying in a marriage where one partner wanted something else made no

sense. It would only make everyone miserable. She also told me not to bother staying if it was only out of a sense of commitment. Finally, Kathy said that no one has the right to determine that their sense of commitment was enough to fulfill her in a marriage. She wanted love, companionship, and friendship. She did not feel it existed any more in our relationship. I could understand how my behavior had communicated this to her. I, however, was unable to control this. I was not sure I wanted to control this.

Nike in Ho Chi Minh City received much national and international press attention when their use of child labor and deplorable working conditions were exposed. They improved their behavior. Factories from South Korea increased their workers' salaries in their toy and shoe factories in Danang from \$21.00 to \$68.00 monthly when the exploitation became obvious and workers questioned working for wages that were not enough to feed their children. These wages still should be embarrassing for corporations that make millions in profit, but they are tolerated when the only other option is unemployment. One can only imagine how this situation must grate on the consciences of those who fought to end the exploitation of the proletariat.

There is the impression that Vietnam's government is indifferent to the needs of its people. News reports of corruption and bribery are common. Stories told by travelers about payoffs and bribes are legion. Warnings about this fill Internet travel sites. The living conditions for government leaders are better than that experienced by the very poor. Many leaders wear suits and ties while many poor wear threadbare rags. This is the image, and there is some truth to this image. There also is some myth to the image.

I suppose this impression parallels my wife's view of my

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love affair with a country, culture, and philosophy. What she saw as indifference was nothing more than my accepting that I could do nothing about how she chose to see things or interpret behavior. There were elements of her "truth" that took on enormous, mythical proportions.

The press reports of corruption follow the arrest and prosecution of officials and others involved in such illegal activities. The government's actions to end this are reported. In effect, cleaning up government might be the more accurate way to report these events. Corruption exists in Vietnam. It also exists in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Paris, London, and elsewhere.

There also was a common practice of payoffs at every move from airports at the port of entry through one's visit and until one passed through the official check before leaving. Visitors do not experience most of this now, but this type of onerous behavior is just as common in Vietnam as it is in America. One difference is that the police usually levy and collect fines for legal infractions. The officers' annual salary is about \$650.00. Many seem to live a lifestyle that magically reflects much more income. This happens in America, but it is not legal. It is not any more legal in Vietnam. It is still routine in both countries.

Two incidents are representative. The students' Program House in Danang is on a busy thoroughfare near the airport. The program's office and the living quarters for the students are in this house. A truck double-parked in front one morning. A traffic police officer took the driver down the street and negotiated a fine. The driver paid him \$1.35. On another occasion, the program's driver was taking students to Ho Chi Minh City. He made a wrong turn in the chaotic traffic in this huge city of 8,000,000 and drove down a one-way street

in the wrong direction. The police stopped him. He was told the fine would be two cases of beer. The driver offered \$10.12. The officer said it was not enough, and the driver said, "I'm from Danang. This is the price for two cases of beer there." The officer responded, "You're in Ho Ch Minh City. Beer costs more here. Besides, I drink Heineken." The driver gave him \$16.89, and drove away. Months later the same situation was repeated. That time, our driver proudly reported only being fined one case of beer.

Observers often hold the observed to a higher standard than they accept for themselves.

Sometimes what is observed is misunderstood. While this had become a developing theme in my marriage, it also was reflected in Vietnam's society. More examples might make this clear.

The police go to companies and homes to collect fees each year for police protection. Companies might pay about \$17.00 annually; homeowners might pay about 90 cents. Some might see this as payoffs to the local police. It is actually a tax. In the United States, I lived in a town that had a tax for fire protection. There is little difference, except the police in Danang are efficient. In addition, there is no tax or fee for fire protection in the community.

Numbers may be a sign of good luck or bad luck in Vietnam. People pay the police for a motorbike license plate whose numbers add up to nine or ten, a lucky number, instead of a number like three, an unlucky number. In the United States, custom plates cost more, too. I suppose it is a question about who receives the payment.

The leaders and some bureaucrats do enjoy a lifestyle with more material wealth than those who are poor. I wonder if foreign visitors would understand negotiating with foreign

professionals without Western suits and ties. It, however, is true that many officials enjoy a lifestyle far beyond that reflected by their salaries. Informal payments to leaders dates back centuries in Vietnam. There is a traditional practice of paying a fee for a service.

Homes and offices are often as symbolic as the rest of Vietnam's communication. I direct a small study abroad program in Danang. Much of our work is supporting a few local service agencies in a minimal way, given our source of funds for this part of our effort (often by small private donations or university expense money). The local authorities helped me find a home to rent, separate from the program. It was a five-story office building with ten rooms, steel doors and security gates throughout, and a resounding echo in each of its concrete rooms. It served as offices for a small trading company that went bankrupt the month before I rented the place. I was not allowed to use the top two floors (that arrangement would make property taxes less expensive, I was told). The university required that I rent a house separate from the students. I presume, you may have gathered, they were afraid that I would create a hostile learning environment. They told me, "Your rent would be less expensive than an attorney's fee." I have a tendency to speak rather frankly, and some students do not appreciate this. Others might find me a bit confrontive.

My neighbors are a colorful and friendly group. Two doors away from me is a family of husband, wife, and three daughters. The three girls are six, eight, and eight months. Every morning, noon, and evening when I leave my home, the two older girls and their mother are outside. The girls squeal with delight and call me. They enjoy their baby sister who laughs and waves excitedly when she sees me. (I have often thought very small children and animals liked me. It is when

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they reach the age of rationality that I have problems.) I always walk over, the mother hands me her happy baby, and I hug the little one. They all laugh and thank me. It is now nearly a ritual.

There is Mr. Hai. He is a double amputee from the war. He waves each day from his wheelchair, and I buy state lottery tickets from him. We shake hands, and he smiles, too.

Mr. Pepsi is an employee of a café next door. He received this name from me. When I first met him, he wore a Pepsi-Cola shirt. I did not know that when I jokingly asked him if his name was Mr. Pepsi that it would result in his now always wearing Pepsi shirts and being called this by almost everyone. He burned his foot and had no medicine for the second-degree burn. I bought it for him, and he would greet me each day with the kissing of two of his fingers to let me know it felt better. Then, he would show me his decreasing blister. Mr. Pepsi parks motor bikes and cleans at the café. He sweeps in front of my house, too. He often stares in my front door. Sometimes I invite him in for water. Sometimes I close the security gate. It depends on how I respond to a Peeping Tom that day.

This also was reflected in my marriage. Some days I invited Kathy in. Other days I closed the security gate. I am sure this was as confusing for her as it still is for me.

The neighborhood has many street cafes. Such places always attract shoeshine boys. These are rather smart-alecky and persistent street children who ring my doorbell and run away (an annoying prank that I used to do, too, when I was a kid). They also enjoy having a struggling conversation in English and my clumsy Vietnamese. I often sit in front of my house, give them crackers and water, and watch traffic while we try to communicate.

The neighborhood in Danang has many street vendors:

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elderly women with conical hats and shoulder poles who shout, "Fruit, fruit", as they walk through their neighborhood; others who carry large boards with sundry items attached for sale; the lottery sellers who compete with Mr. Hai when he falls asleep in his wheel chair; a man with a cyclo and an ice chilled box and whistle music who sells ice cream; cyclo drivers with popcorn popping in a heated plastic box; vegetable vendors; and shrimp sellers. The place is a bevy of activity. My landlord and landlady usually sit next door and shake my hand when I come home. They often spend their day with other old people or neighbors, gossiping. There are beggars who smile at the occasional 5,000-dong (34 cents) contribution. They often change hats with a friend and return in a few minutes, presuming you will think they are someone different. It never works, and they leave laughing.

This is a happy crew in which everyone has a role to play and seems to enjoy the predictability of their neighborhood. They seem to know who is OK and who is not, what is expected, and how to do it.

The purposes of my renting this particular home were both to have a place to stay while I directed the SUNY Brockport Vietnam Program and to present to visitors from America who would stop by an image of stability and permanence in a community where foreigners have inquired about establishing businesses or other programs but have rarely stayed. Appearance is important in Vietnam. The reverse is sometimes humorous.

Many Vietnamese are puzzled and laugh at Western tourists, especially youth, who visit Vietnam and dress with cut-off jeans, raggedy shirts, and old footwear. The Vietnamese wonder why people with enough money to travel so far and buy so many souvenirs at inflated prices would dress like

beggars. In some settings, such dress might be seen as having little respect for the places being visited or the hosts. The trick is knowing when to wear a tie for a meeting. Best to take a chance and wear one. One can never show too much respect.

One could wear a life jacket instead of a tie. During the heavy rains of August 2001, my home leaked, and each room filled with several inches of water. Everything in Vietnam is relevant.

Development in Vietnam by foreigners in partnership with the Vietnamese is easier when trust is established. As mentioned before, trust is crucial. It is necessary that the myths be exploded if this is to happen.

The Vietnamese people are among the most productive and ingenious in the world. They alone are responsible for the amazing progress that nation has made in a relatively brief time, in spite of the empty promises or the refusal of other peoples in the world to interact fairly and justly with Vietnam. This nation has overcome and survived wars, natural disasters, and global economic calamities with only its people as its dependable resource. It holds incredible promise as it struggles to advance into the new millennium, and advance it will in a productive partnership with American business, humanitarian agencies, and educational institutions or without them. Many other nations are actively involved in a variety of ventures with Vietnam. Both Vietnam and America will suffer without such a partnership. The views of the Vietnamese about this situation are interesting and revealing. One of those with opinions is the Chairman of the Fatherland Front. The Chairman is a powerful figure in government.

His office is in a white building near the Han River in Danang. It is a remnant of when the city was a significant French colony. It is one of those government buildings with

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character that once served as a French residence. You enter after climbing the few stairs, past the potted foliage, and enter a large room with decorated plaster ceilings from the late 1800s or early 1900s when such workmanship was appreciated. The room is now the typical reception room in which visitors normally are greeted by officials. Its lacquered tables and high back, royal purple padded, wooden chairs are carefully arranged. The room is impressive. The protocol is that equals sit across from each other. Not to do so will result in a polite suggestion you move to another chair. It was in this room at the Fatherland Front Headquarters, a government organization responsible for mass organizations (i.e. charities, NGOs, social activities, etc.), that Nguyen Dinh An suggested that the two very different cultures and the history of confrontation between Vietnam and America might only be bridged by personal trust and resulting behavior.

Chairman An is an honest, respected, and beloved leader in Vietnam. He ran the VC propaganda apparatus during the war from the basement of the U.S. Marine Officers' Barracks without ever being discovered. He talks about hearing the U.S. officers walking and talking above him and his staff. Crafty is one word to describe him. Purposeful, professional, and effective are better words. He is a wise man with extensive experience, beginning as a professor of literature. He also has a sense of humor.

One evening in a restaurant, he asked if our program's students were enjoying Vietnamese food. I told him they were. "I understand they are also eating French fries," he said. "Yes," I said, "but French fries are Vietnamese." He looked puzzled, and I clarified, "This is because the Vietnamese fried the French in the war and named a food after this." He smiled and said, "Ah, then, we must also serve American fries." The humor might be biting but is never intended to offend.

His suggestion that cultural differences and past history will stand in the way of progress between our nations without personal trust was illustrated by his story of a U.S. Navy physician and a South Vietnamese Army physician who worked together during the war. The Saigon regime doctor was actually a Viet Cong. The U.S. doctor found out, and both worked together secretly to treat seriously wounded VC, as well as the American wounded. After the end of the war in 1975, the American returned. The two had an emotional reunion and told others about what they had done. The American, then, continued to provide medical care with his friend from the war. Some might see this as humanitarian. Others may see this as treason. Chairman An saw this as an exceptional example of people merely helping people in need because of need. He might have sited the Hippocratic Oath, rather than the rules of war and nationalistic patriotism.

Chairman An explained that not all American people are considered bad or CIA operatives. However, he cautioned that trust is not built on words. It is built on behavior. The Vietnamese, he noted, do like the American people, but they have learned to be cautious about promises. "The Vietnamese people are waiting for the action of the Americans," he smiled.

History may be rewritten with a much more suitable conclusion if America is willing to respect the Vietnamese perspective when entering Vietnam today. The question is whether Americans are willing to take the risk that after entering Vietnam they may not be able to leave. This is not a nation that one can easily leave once its people, land, and traditions find their way into your heart, if you allow that to happen. This requires going beyond the impressions tourists bring home: Vietnam is exotic, quaint, beautiful, and

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hardworking. It is also cautious, underdeveloped, and lacks enough traffic signals, the latest cars, and color cable TV. This begins with an understanding of the place and, then, an ensuing permission for a relationship with a country begins. The cost of this is never factored into corporate or university accounts. The cost of this is to find what I earlier referred to as life altering. The two doctors during the war began by exercising compassion, sharing skills, and ignoring the distractions of flags and uniforms. They ended by saving lives on both sides of the war. The two discovered humanity more powerful than napalm and cluster bombs.

This humanity still exists in Vietnam. It changes people. It changes all the rules. One may never be the same once they open their hearts to what Vietnam really is. This is the real risk, and it is a risk worth taking.

5.

THE VIETNAMESE VIEW OF LIFE
AND THE UGLY AMERICAN

“Let’s be good friends like bamboo and plum-tree,
United for one hundred years.”

- Song of Central Vietnam, *To the Beloved*

What do the Vietnamese see when they look at life? How does this influence what the foreigner experiences? Can this be understood and shared by Vietnamese and foreigners willing to make the effort to understand and change in the process? What, then, are the potential effects of such insight? Insight without resulting action is rather useless. America also deals with this issue within its own borders.

Cultural diversity courses in American higher education purport to help students understand and develop certain competencies when interacting with various peoples. The historical experience in America and the political and human nature of the importance of cultural diversity education is a controversial one. Political correctness is one aspect of this educational effort. Underscoring all of this is the attempt to help individuals achieve certain sensitivity for others. It is actually an indirect result of the Civil Rights struggle from the late 1950s to today. While it includes various minority groups, its major emphasis appears to be the interaction of various ethnic groups.

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Text books are written and published by the thousands to provide a base from which students may examine their attitude and behavior, the traditions of various groups, the oppressive nature of discrimination that results from prejudice, and approaches which may lead to improved treatment of various populations in America. Sometimes that even highlights the rich nature of diverse cultures. The texts also often group various populations (African, Asian, Hispanic, Native American, etc.). Some might even mention the Vietnamese. This is rare.

When discussing the Vietnamese, these college courses usually commit the same crimes of stereotyping they say they are attempting to end. This is true of all the groups discussed, but this is a book about Vietnam.

Knowing what we are taught may help us to understand why we do what we do. It may not be that important since we are presuming students are taught, learn, and use their learning. I studied Classical Greek and Latin in school. The only Greek I can remember is from the sordid attempt to learn words or phrases Plato might have used to curse his lazy students. Latin is helpful in understanding a few college mottos, lines of esoteric poetry, or bathroom graffiti in Catholic seminaries. My decades of teaching college students who seem to experience amnesia from one course to the next also help place the importance of college courses in a certain context of "sometimes valuable" and "sometimes not." Therefore, it is an erroneous conclusion to presume that what American students are taught about the Vietnamese will result in ending prejudice, discrimination, and erroneous or hurtful interaction.

A brief review of materials that are used to teach cultural diversity leads to the simple conclusion that American students are taught nothing at all about the Vietnamese.

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This population is usually not even mentioned. If they are, they are grouped with "Asians". Americans seem to think that there is no difference among Vietnamese, Chinese, Japanese, Laotian, Cambodian, Tibetan, Korean, etc. The texts paint the picture of close patriarchal families who practice some form of Buddhist or Confucian religion, eat lots of rice, use chop sticks, immigrated from poor circumstances, succeed in business or education in America, and tend to group themselves in various Asian ghettos in cities. In other words, those who study such things are taught to stereotype, a mortal sin among cultural diversity advocates, as it should be.

The unique qualities of each group are neglected. The stark differences between individual families are also neglected. Some are much more traditional than others. Some practice such rituals like eating vegetarian food one day each month. Others practice this twice or several days each month. Some ignore this all together. Some arrange their children's marriages. Others would never do this. Within cultural diversity, there is much diversity. There are themes that define a people. We often fail to recognize these because we do not look for them.

The texts tend to practice an odd xenophobic American education ritual. They look at Vietnamese-Americans and not at the Vietnamese in Vietnam or the essence of the Vietnamese that seems to persist, regardless of where they live. Some Anthropology texts might glance at Vietnam, but the glance is fleeting.

Texts that include content on Asia usually examine Chinese or Japanese cultures. History texts still see Vietnam as a war, and this is all too often a brief examination of the war from an exclusively American perspective. Americans tend not to talk much about wars they lose. Finally, the texts

uniformly fail to help students to see the world through the eyes and hearts of any population, let alone the Vietnamese. The approach too often used is a presumption that what we see is what they are. What we see, of course, is what we choose to see. It says more about us than others, and others will know that. This is an example of what Albert Einstein termed an "optical delusion", with a dash of projection.

It is difficult to constructively engage another person if one cannot see what the person sees, feel what the person feels, and experience the various systems that impact on them the way the person experiences them. If this is ignored, we speak at people not with them; we look at others and they at us (like a human diversity zoo visit); and trusting relationships become mere functional relationships limited by discrete tasks.

The love I had for my wife did not disappear during this period. I do know we each retreated into concrete tasks. There was no meaningful conversation. We lived in a zoo, playing both animal and keeper. I designed fliers to recruit students for the program, worked with the staff in Danang to get permission to broaden our services to the poor, negotiated revised agreements with government officials in Vietnam, and still taught my courses at the college. Kathy shopped, volunteered in the community with the local fire department's rescue squad, helped the children navigate boyfriend or girlfriend relationships, and kept our ship afloat.

My reentry into Vietnam was through Central Vietnam. This is a place filled with memories and new challenges for me. The word "love" is not too strong a word to describe how I feel about this place and its people. Yet, I have a family in America. My wife, one birth son, a stepson, and five adopted children have always been at the mercy of what I do. What I do is to tackle social causes.

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My history of working in Colombia, leading an international children's rights organization, and various advocacy efforts have always interfered with family life. Faced with choices, I usually decided the family had a certain stability and security. Those others I was trying to help did not. The family was sacrificed. It was never intentional cruelty, but cruelty it may have been. These choices produced their own level of guilt. The old nuns were effective. There are all kinds of guilt. The Irish Catholic flavor is among the strongest. The choices were always out of feelings that I really had no choice at all.

Justice, in my own logic, dictated what I would do. But, justice for whom? At what cost? I knew what was happening at home. It was not that I was oblivious to this. Yet, the program seemed too urgent, too important. I did not think my family would be lost in the process. In fact, although it might have been a rationalization, I thought they were part of the process, that they understood the importance of what was being done. They probably did. They, however, had their own needs. I was not meeting those needs. Kathy was.

During the 1980s, I was President of the American Chapter of Defense for Children International, a Swiss-based children's rights movement that tackled children's issues few if anyone engaged. One of those issues was the international trafficking of children for sexual purposes. This was sexual child abuse for a profit that victimized children in some of the worst ways imaginable. In the course of this work, we hired Michael Jupp, a British professional, as our Executive Director. Mike and I began to publicize the extent of the problem in America and the connections between America and other nations regarding child pornography, child prostitution, and child sexual slavery. We worked with a U.S. Senate committee, various police agencies, and UNICEF.

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I was commissioned by UNICEF to author their first study on the issue. This required more than the usual academic research. We called it "field research". This meant sometimes working with police departments, investigative reporters, convicts in U.S. prisons, and even the victims themselves.

Mike and I once traveled to Allentown, Pennsylvania for such work and spent a week with a member of the city's vice squad. We were looking at an alleged head of a child sex ring whom we were told by a convict in a state prison had been transporting children across the country for prostitution and pornography.

We drove by the man's home one morning, and I noticed a for sale sign on the lawn. I stopped the car and walked to the man who was standing in front of his home. We spoke for a few minutes, and I returned to the car. "Mike, I told the man I was from out of state, noticed the sign, and would like to look at the home with my British brother-in-law. You are now my brother-in-law." He said, "You bloody fool. You will get us killed."

We saw what we needed to see and were not killed. Mike refused to do this again with me. This work, too, took its toll on my family.

Initially, approaching Vietnam was no different. Neglecting my family had been seen as a temporary necessity. I had always known it would change. Now I was not sure.

As I resurrected an ability to see the world through Vietnam's eyes, I began to feel both the joys and the tears of the Vietnamese. I was subject to the systems that exist in Vietnam. I was able to see clearer not only that which existed in Danang but also to find myself inextricably part of the fabric of the community.

Danang is a seductive place. The past heroism is reflected

in the present brave efforts to rebuild the nation. The closeness of the people is not merely a symptom of the socialist commitment; it is also an attitude rooted in a tradition and customs.

My family slowly redefined itself for me as being more than Kathy, Mark, Aaron, Rachele, Ruth, Gabe, Joey, and Jimmy. It became a nation and people about whom few outside of its borders cared, and my family knew about the changes that were happening. As I approached the Vietnamese, I withdrew from my home. I became less able to see my world the way I had before. The fascination became not as much an obsession as it became making choices and effecting changes that consciously I had not previously entertained. My wife pointed out that this was just a period of denial. She might have been correct. I only knew I did not want to return to linear thinking and choices defined by the culture in which I had grown up, the culture that sent me to war.

When I had left Vietnam in 1969, I swore I would never return. When I walked on the airplane to leave Vietnam in 1969, I was sure we would be shot down. I was not the only one feeling this way. There was a tense silence among the soldiers who sat in the seats on that Pan-Am airliner. A cheer erupted when we had left Vietnam's airspace. We were safe. We were going home. We had survived the hell known as the Vietnam War. They served airplane food steak.

Over time, I realized it was not a nation I had fled at all. It was a war. I had never left the nation at all. It had stayed with me, but even I was not aware of this. My family did not know Vietnam, except through stories, movies, fellow veterans who were close friends, and my own moods and nightmares. Because so much of me had never left Vietnam, I suppose they never really knew much of me. How could they? I did not

know much of myself. I had spent countless hours providing psychotherapy and advocacy services for Vietnam veterans who suffered with PTSD. They were seen at a counseling center and in my home. They called when they needed help at all hours of the day and night. I never refused them. Others called when veterans were about to commit suicide, and off I went without hesitation to take away a gun or convince a brother vet that a brief stay in a hospital was a better choice than leaving a family to grieve for another victim of the war's aftermath. Because they were brothers, I told myself, I could not charge them for my services. I wondered if the real reason for this was that I was helping myself as much as I was them. I was paying a price for this. It was all part of the inevitability of my return to what I had never left.

I went back in 1998 and found myself waiting. Ensuing visits made it clear to me that I would have to decide whether I would join that part of me or take it back to America. I could not hide this from myself, but it was puzzling. Any willingness even to entertain becoming a part of a different culture is puzzling.

Understanding a culture in some depth can result in assimilating that culture. I had jumped into that ocean of personal change, partly because of my own history. The ocean is filled with beautiful islands, but it is also littered with the wreckage of personal ships that ran aground. There are sharks in that sea.

The Vietnamese themselves have been partially defined by history. This history of heroism and sacrifice is reflected in its literature; art; music; and its reputation, especially in America. Its history is more than its long road to reunification and independence on April 30, 1975. It is also a history not merely rooted in 4,000 years of names, dates, and events. It

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is a dynamic process of self-identification and an actualization of deeply rooted hopes and dreams that have not yet been achieved. This is a nation that has learned from history and now works to avoid past mistakes.

Vietnam is a nation of people, defined by Communism as dedicated to justice and the welfare for the masses. When meeting with my students, a member of the People's Committee in Danang pointedly described this as, "A government of the people, for the people, and by the people."

This political system, although uniquely nationalist, is based on the classic Marxist directive that the exploitation of the proletariat must not be tolerated and that socialism is the means to the end of exploitation and the sharing of wealth in order to improve the lives of all Vietnamese. The Marxist focus is historically and ideologically on the means of production. This ideological definition understands that the masses are comprised of about 80,000,000 individuals. These individuals have fascinating views not merely of Vietnam but also of the Americans who now consider involvement at a time in history far different than when these foreigners first came here. They also consider involvement at a period of history when there is little civil unrest, no real risk of political instability, smooth transitions between government leaders, a partial relaxing of what were once perceived by foreigners as onerous restrictions on personal freedoms, and a new flexibility within an ancient cultural system. It is also a time of exigent social need.

The entry of peace time visits by foreigners, an increased use of the Internet (although within a national firewall that restricts some access), travel within and outside Vietnam by its citizens (although still monitored by the police), and a general improvement in personal purchasing power (with the development of a market economy) have all contributed to

what former POW Pete Peterson, America's first Ambassador to Vietnam since the war ended, told me is "The best the Vietnamese have had it in 4,000 years." However debatable this view might be, there is still much to be done. The people of Khanh Son, three miles from Danang, know what this means.

Bui Thi Thu Ha is a cute eleven-year-old girl who lives in Khanh Son, Danang's one square mile garbage dump. She is small for her age, dresses in torn and filthy clothes, and has the tired eyes of those who live there. She wanders through the twenty-foot deep piles of garbage, searching for plastic her parents might sell. The smell at this place is overpowering. The surrounding foliage is brown and brittle from the toxic substances in the garbage. The place is deadly quiet. Ha sadly told me about how she wishes she could just play and go to school. "I don't cry any more. I'm just not happy," she said. She attends a street children's school for one hour each day, six days each week. This program provides her with lunch while she is there. Many children from Khanh Son attend that program for six hours of school each week and one meal each day, except on Sunday.

Ha's parents lived in a rural village until seven years ago. They had no employment and came to Danang from the mountain village of Hoa Son to find work and a future. Their frustration eventually led them to the garbage dump. They and hundreds of others sort through the putrid waste in 100-degree humid heat under the blazing sun to find enough to earn about \$147.00 each year, not enough for even a subsistence living. Bui Van Ha, the thirty-eight year old father, describes the fever and headaches his daughter and he and his wife always have. "It never goes away. We are always sick, but we never see a doctor. How would we pay for this?" He is a sad

and weary man who looks much older than he is. "We came to Danang to work, to be happier. We are not happier here, but we have nowhere to go. My family sleeps in the garbage piles, and we work from dawn until it gets too dark to find plastic. I have had a dream to get a small house and a shop, but I know it won't happen. There is no way out. I'd like people to know about our unhappiness and misery." I told him I understood many people in the government were trying to help the people at Khanh Son. He just looked at me with a hauntingly blank stare and said nothing.

That stare affected how I interacted with others. It communicated ghosts that haunted me in America, beckoned me to Vietnam, and taunt me daily. My family found it difficult to see these ghosts; yet, they surrounded me.

Pham Thi Hoa, age nine, and her sister Pham Thi Choi, age fifteen, also live in the Khanh Son dump with their thirty-nine year old mother. Their mother picks through the garbage all day with a headache and arthritis-riddled body weighing her down. The girls help and make about the same amount little Ha's family makes. These girls also attend school for one hour each day, six days a week. Their father became ill and died eight years ago. They live with their elderly grandparents on the edge of the dump. The grandparents are too sick to work. Hoa and Choi are the third generation of the Pham family to be born and grow up in the garbage dump. They are the third generation to live with constant fevers and headaches. They presume they will be the third generation to die there. Choi told me, "I think I'm happy, but it is difficult here. There are so many mosquitoes, and I'm always sick. Are there kids who live somewhere who are not sick all the time?" Her world always has been the huge garbage piles. When asked about her future, she shrugs her shoulders and looks at the ground.

The most striking thing about the place is not the oppressive smell; rather, it is that the children of the garbage dump have no dreams.

I gave up dealing with the battles at home. I no longer even heard them. I could not, not after being where I had been and meeting the people I had come to know with an intimacy I had not known existed.

Vietnam does have the potential to help these children hope. Poverty, inadequate schools, disease, a failing or undeveloped physical infrastructure, a lack of jobs, continued civil controls, sustained attempts to control access to information, and the distrust of difference do place restraints on what might become an economic power house in Asia. The controls and distrust are as much a fear of domination by America and other nations as a controversial means to preserve what was earned by costly and bloody decades spent thwarting the exploitation of other nations.

One of my students expressed a concern that progress guided by non-Vietnamese influences may result in an economic and cultural amalgam that will make Vietnam indistinguishable from other nations. His concern was that the cure for social ills might kill the patient.

Jeremy Procida is a perceptive student from New York. He brought an intellectual curiosity to his semester in Danang with our program. His concern about the potential of the effects of change does not negate the efforts and the vigilance of the government of Vietnam. This is one of the reasons progress is tentatively approached. The casual observer might not see this amid the dynamic new construction and the billboards advertising Western products. Casual observers do not see Khanh Son. They also might miss seeing other significant aspects of life in Vietnam.

When I first rented a home in Danang with the assistance of city government officials, there was the question of my safety. Danang is much safer than living in the larger cities of Ho Chi Minh City or Hanoi (and most cities in America), but it is a place like all others in the world. Crime happens everywhere. So-called experts can establish reputations. As an example, one travel book about Vietnam warns that Danang is a dangerous city because the author stayed there once and had something stolen from his hotel room. I have never heard of that happening to any one I know, but the ill-conceived warning went out because of one person's experience. I do not know if anyone places any credence in the author's opinions, but I hope he does no damage to Danang's reputation.

The incidence of violent crime in America is much higher than anywhere in Vietnam. A friend and I were discussing social violence one day at lunch. I asked how often people in Danang are murdered. She looked surprised and said, "I'm not sure. Maybe, every couple of years. How often in America?" I said, "Many murders are reported every day." She was shocked.

Scott Weinhold was a friend and Public Affairs Officer at the U.S. Consulate in Ho Chi Minh City. He has since left Vietnam for another assignment. Scott once shared with me in his office in Ho Chi Minh City his bewilderment that Americans think Vietnam is a violent country. "The reputation is not deserved. Most of the police don't carry weapons, and no one seems to own a gun. There is some hunting, however, for game in a few areas protected for this in the country. What amazes me is how the government has controlled weapons, especially since just across the border in Cambodia many people still carry M-16s and AK-47s." It is amazing. I recall the 1960s in Vietnam when guns were everywhere. The NRA

will respond that the Communist government has deprived people of their right to carry arms. No such right exists in most countries. The result in Vietnam is the rarity of murder. The right in America is a partial explanation for the highest incidence of violence in the developed world.

The point of the security for my home brought up by the authorities was also a means of control and caution. A neighbor reported to the authorities who would visit me in my home. This in a place where I was apparently trusted, and I trusted. All parties jointly recognized the limits of this trust.

Americans at home are observed by American authorities when their behavior appears to present a threat to the welfare of others or they appear to be involved in criminal behavior. I was observed in Vietnam for similar reasons.

As an American who came to Vietnam to begin an unusual educational program, my altruistic motives were difficult to accept. After all, Americans destroyed, contained, and restricted Vietnam's effort to secure independence, freedom, and prosperity for decades. We have only reestablished diplomatic relations for a few years.

I suppose I was observed at home for the same reasons. My wife also felt a threat to the welfare of our home in America. The question was whether the threat was from Vietnam, myself, or both.

Foreigners have been playing the aggressor role in Vietnam for thousands of years. They sometimes came under a humanitarian pretext. Keeping a close eye on them seems reasonable, even if it is somewhat uncomfortable for the foreigner. There is still a fear of the CIA by some in government in Vietnam.

Provincial and city officials have been warned to be wary of possible CIA activity. The CIA, of course, is only effective

in Hollywood movies, but it has a vicious history in Vietnam (not including the beer and bourbon they used to give me, of course). It does not seem an actual threat today, but a cautious approach by Vietnam is reasonable. While not determined by history, the Vietnamese do remember the beginning role of control written about in the 1950s by Eugene Burdick and William J. Lederer in The Ugly American and Graham Greene in The Quiet American.

I spoke directly to the Chairman of the Danang Union of Friendship Organizations, a government organization charged with inviting joint educational and social endeavors by foreign institutions or governments, about the monitoring of my visitors. This organization was the partner for our program in Danang. We spoke indirectly about observing Vietnamese laws in Vietnam, registering overnight visitors with the police, and trust. I had broken no laws and had no overnight visitors. He agreed and added that I was trusted because I had done for Danang what I said I would. He asked if I would greet a friend of his from the Danang People's Committee (ruling body for the government) and become his friend. I agreed to spend time with his friend but asked, "Will we be monitored?" The response was a smile and handshake. We understood each other better and smiled. A deal had been made. The monitoring stopped.

The deal being made and the ending of the monitoring were not the only outcomes. The trust between not only a Vietnamese official and me had been strengthened through both understanding and mutual respect but also between me and others who were aware of what had been discussed. He knew I had accepted a balance based on insight, trust, and honesty. He also knew that the manner in which I had approached this was not combative or demanding but rather

was inquisitive and open. This was not contrived. He would have seen through that. I found that I had become more able to see through a fog of cultural confusion with some clarity. This was merely one more piece of evidence that I might be accepted into the community, guardedly accepted, but accepted.

This developing acceptance pulled me closer to Vietnam but also served to distance me more from my family. Contacts with my wife become increasingly strained during this development. Our emails were more curt and phone calls tense. This was confusing for both of us. While I was moving toward something, I was also moving away from something. I saw myself doing nothing to create this, and, therefore, felt powerless to control it. I reminded myself that this was my job. I was just doing what I was paid to do. It was merely a small American university program in Danang, nothing more. That is what I told myself.

The "nothing more" perspective was confused by being in Danang. I was invited to international functions that helped me to see that more was happening than I thought. The same people were always at such events. Wearing suits and ties and sitting in the same chairs at all of these events were the same small group of people: a Laotian, Russian, Australian, Thai, and me the American.

Danang lacked the broad international presence of thousands of foreigners and foreign dignitaries. There was just this small core of people. None of us was fluent in Vietnamese, and we all sat seemingly with rap attention while long speeches were delivered by local officials having little knowledge of what was being said. This may have been an event celebrating the opening of foreign language classes, another commemorating twenty-five years of diplomatic relations with Thailand, or similar events. The TV cameras were always there. They

always showed the foreign delegation that listened, smiled, and applauded what probably were well-crafted speeches.

I was just an American professor who directed a small program in Danang, but I was the "American". My role represented more and was seen by Danang as symbolic of what might become many Americans who might also love this country and might open themselves to change.

The Vietnamese with whom I associated were never intrusive, but they were inquisitive. They were also sensitive to who and what I was becoming. They knew I was beginning to change. I think they understood the cost of this change, but we never discussed it. The process just developed.

There are situations where this cautious approach to foreign involvement and activity has both a foundation in fact but also results in what might be seen by the Vietnamese authorities as a necessary but uncomfortable rejection of valuable help by foreigners. The reality of preserving what is, at these times, confronts the risk of disharmony. The government sees this disharmony as the possibility of foreign domination.

There are occasions that the behavior of Americans when faced with the apparent needs of some in Vietnam comes face-to-face with the issue of Vietnam's sovereignty and security, won with the loss of life numbering in the millions. The American reaction is all too often to want to take charge of what they see in Vietnam. This sometimes seems to be an attitude that the visitors can do things better and faster than those being visited can. The result may be to cause more harm to the people these visitors purport to help. A quick read of The Ugly American reminds us this is not a new behavior. Americans often ignore the political and social context with simplistic solutions, sometimes because these foreigners clumsily approach intervention in a style that reflects a water

buffalo in a china shop. The results are potentially tragic for those they think they are helping.

A visiting physician from Ohio joined the students and me while visiting several programs we service. One was a small, out of the way nursing home. My purpose was to convince him to secure assistance for the people in the nursing home. When he realized three of the elderly women in this twenty-eight person residence run by Catholic nuns under the control of the state were Buddhist, he told the nun administrator he would be happy to help. He would build a room for the Buddhists to worship because the others used a Catholic chapel. The roof leaks, medicine is very hard to come by, what food they do not grow for themselves is difficult to purchase, clothing is very worn, and other activities are non-existent. The visiting American was politely thanked and no agreement was pursued. As we drove away, he said, "I can't believe they don't have a temple or pagoda or something for the three Buddhists there." I said nothing.

I also said nothing later that day when I took him to an orphanage. He spoke in a very dramatic way to the nurse in the orphanage's clinic after she said their most common illness there was sore throats. He waved his arms and nearly shouted, "Give the children penicillin, as much penicillin as you can. You must do this!" The nurse smiled and thanked him for the instruction. I left wondering if he knew they had no penicillin or how he thought the nurse would know if a child were allergic to the drug. It did not matter; he was still obsessing about providing a place of worship at the nursing home for the three Buddhist women.

Another example is the Hoa Van Village, a leper colony near Danang. It sits in a cove of the South China Sea, accessible only by a forty-five minute ride in a small fishing boat or an

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arduous mountain trail from the Hai Van Pass. There has been much progress in eradicating leprosy in Vietnam. The debilitating disease still exists, and it affects whole families. Hoa Van is one source of help in Central Vietnam.

About three hundred people live in the village. Only eighty-eight of them suffer with leprosy. The others are their family members, the schoolteacher, and a police officer.

This small village is in a breathtakingly beautiful location, isolated by a beach and the sea on one-side and steep jungle mountains on the other sides. No roads lead here. The first time I visited the leper colony I was told there was only one way to get to the village. We drove to the Hai Van Pass, a mountain separating Danang and Hue, walked down a steep jungle trail, followed a railroad track, walked down another trail, and followed the beach until we reached the village. Walking there was not easy. Getting out was another problem. I am not an Olympian. The climb up the trail in the heat might have been difficult when I first came to Vietnam in the 1960s. It was nearly impossible in 2000. I was relieved when I stumbled out of the foliage and saw the road. I was very upset when I returned to Danang that day, expressing concern about bringing supplies in the future for the lepers. I told the man who arranged the trip, "I don't know what we can do. I really don't think I can climb that trail again." "Oh," he said, "That's not a problem. We can rent a fishing boat for about \$15.00." I looked at him wide-eyed and said, "What? You told me the trail was the only way to get there." He responded, "I just wanted to save you money. You can walk for free." All visits since the first have been by boat.

Hoa Van is quiet, tropical, and peaceful. The small concrete buildings include homes, a clinic, community room, and two tiny school buildings. These weathered structures reflect the

inhabitants whose friendliness is common throughout the region and whose shyness when meeting strangers is to be expected, given the nature of the village. The lack of eyes, chins, arms, legs, fingers, ears, and other deformities that result from the ravages of the disease create an embarrassment for the people who struggle daily to survive. They fish and grow vegetables and rice for their shared nutritional needs. Their smiles and welcome should create an embarrassment for those who visit who might be unable to see the strength and fortitude of these people in spite of their physical appearance.

I wanted to share in their strength and fortitude. My relationships in Vietnam became a shared blend of strength, hope, and a sense of community. It became clear we shared a war as people, not just enemies. Rick Bradshaw's ashes joined with those from all sides of the war. Lepers lived a disease worse than death, but it gave them a value for life few outside the place understood. They would understand what was happening to me. They would understand a war and a more complex peace.

I spent as much time there as the government would allow me and came to know Nguyen Van Xung. This sixty-four year old man developed leprosy in 1973. He has lost most of his nose and ears and has stumps for fingers. Xung moved into this village in 1974. He now brings an energetic and happy approach to his duties as the Vice-Chairman of the Fatherland Front. The assistance we bring brought us together. There is more to this, however. There is genuine human caring.

When terrorists attacked the United States in September 2001, Xung whose body has been devastated by leprosy took me aside one day. He said, "I feel very sad today after hearing about the tragedy in America. Please accept my sympathy for your country. I hope you lost no one you know, and I hope your

people will recover well from this terrible event." Sympathy for America from a man in a small leper colony in Vietnam.

Xung sat on a wooden bench under a tree near the beach one afternoon with me. It was a quiet place with palm trees, sand, and an occasional lizard. He pointed out, "We are not different, you and I. We share a love for the village, and we both have gray hair." He describes the village as a "small society". There were times I felt a member of that society.

Hoang Yen is seventy-five years old and is another fascinating villager. He is a very thin and wasted but rather energetic man who has lost his fingers and toes to leprosy. He is unable to walk and spends his days sitting on the mat that covers his plank bed. In 1999, his eyesight worsened. A foreign medical organization offered him eye surgery, and the operation was performed in Danang. Yen had no follow up care and is now blind. He seems full of life, but I have noticed he seems more tired over the many months I have come to know him.

He spends his time writing poetry. "The poems take me where I wish to go," says this Poet of the Lepers. He has been published in Vietnam, and the autographed copy of his book of poems, "Bitterness and Hope," is one of my prized possessions. Yen's smile and warm greeting makes it easy to see past the ravages of his disease. Each time I meet with him I am struck by his quiet wisdom and his kindness. He wrote the following:

KENNETH J. HERRMANN, JR.

Immortal Golden Words

(To Quang Nam-Danang Charity Association)

“Our society is no longer unjust
if we know how to live mercifully.”

The words spoken by a kindly man, a vagrant named
Raoul Foullereau.

He held conferences and lectured all over the world,
Turned mortal weapons into important equipment benefiting
Our life.

Then millions of children over the world are no longer
starving.

Millions of leprosy patients no longer live separately in
Jungles.

He also told the heads of all states to give him weapons
And bombers.

He would turn them into hospitals, schools, and
Orphanages.

He also called for assistance for leper patients..

Come and visit them with love and sympathy.

Don't worry when you have no gift.

Come with love and wild flowers on the sidewalk.

They will recognize that they are loved.

They will be glad and burst into tears in happiness.

What Raoul Foullereau said is always eternally correct.

Love will always remain in our hearts

And the ballad for human beings is love stays forever.

- 10 July 1996.

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Yen was diagnosed with leprosy in 1950 when he lived about thirty miles south of Danang in the village of Dien Ban, Quang Nam Province. He was sent to a leper colony in the Central Highlands. In 1968, the present leper village where he lives was opened. Hoa Van was first called The Garden of Hope and Happiness, an interesting name for a place where a dreadful disease that in all societies around the world has evoked revulsion in people and has resulted in the sick being banished and shunned. The name became Hoa Van Village in 1975. Until that year, the village received assistance from many foreigners, according to Yen.

The Liberation in 1975 resulted in all of Vietnam, including this leper colony, sharing the devastating results of the war. The people ate roots and a little rice for five years after the end of the war to stay alive. The Japanese sent them some medicine.

Yen recollects these times with painful memories of starvation but also as a time when the lepers came together as a family and helped each other. He is emphatic that the village is not a hospital but a community. Since those days, he says, there are occasional aid organizations that help the people. He wishes the assistance would be greater. "There was a group of Americans who promised our children scholarships last year. They left and returned. The people were very excited. They quickly became very sad when the Americans told them they could not raise the money for promised scholarships. Then, the Americans left." Yen added, "One of our young people received a government scholarship for the university. We were all very proud of him. He did quite well and earned a degree as an Electrician. However, nobody would hire him because he was from here. He returned and will live here forever with all of us." The young man did contact My Hoa who took on the task of finding him employment in Danang. He might yet be able to live outside the leper colony.

KENNETH J. HERRMANN, JR.

Yen describes the village as a family. "We all share here. The poor help the poorer. We are safe here. When any of us need to go to a hospital, we are carried up the mountain to the road and are taken temporarily to a hospital in Danang. No one wants to do that because the other patients and visitors there are afraid of us. Outside Hoa Van we are homeless."

Yen asked that people in the world be told about leprosy in order that they no longer be afraid of lepers. He said, "People might learn from the tradition of the leper colony. This tradition is that everyone shares." He wrote:

Love and Reality

I have no idea who you are, my benefactors
I get to know you through my poems
Yes, the ocean is immense but has two edges
Love, however, is boundless
How incredible and miraculous love is!
Love has magic powers—healing wounds
Comforting broken hearts
And bringing little spring to many unfortunate people

Hoa Van—a beautiful isolated village down the hill
Suffering from bitterness and tiresome
Writhing with abominable aftereffects of leprosy
Old prejudice has strangled numerous hearts

As a human being, we all have brains and hearts
With dreams, happiness, and sorrow
Fate, however, has thrown us to an "adverse current":
How can we find a life preserver?

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Foreigners interested in assisting have occasionally visited Hoa Van. East Meets West Foundation built a small clinic building. World Vision built one of the two tiny schools. The Assembly of God from Australia supplied toys for the schools. Others have made promises that the villagers know will not be honored, but the lepers still smile and thank the potential benefactors.

Our program first visited in January 2000. The students brought food, school supplies, and medicine. They learn more from shaking hands with people who have no fingers than they do from any university course. Rather than uncomfortable, I have always found such handshakes more meaningful than what others do daily in a routine manner of greeting. Expressions of friendship in Hoa Van are genuine.

At the time of our second visit, Xung greeted us at the beach and expressed some surprise. He said, "You've come back." I responded that I had told him we would return. He said, "I know, but everyone says they will return. No one does."

It was also ironic that this was the place to which I had sent the lepers from Hiep Duc many years before. All had died years before our visits began. We continue to go there every other month.

The Mid-Autumn Festival is a children's festival. Xung asked me during a visit early in September 2001 to consider bringing candy and cookies for the children. "We would like the children to dance and sing on that day like all the children in Vietnam. We did that and also brought a unicorn costume for the festival dance. This was more than a learning experience for our students. It was a poignant mixture of sadness and joy from which students learned much about the human condition. Dancing and laughing with children in a leper colony does much for the soul.

The families affected by leprosy are sent to live in this isolated village. Not all the people have leprosy, but all live in a poor family with a leper. They are an amazing people. Yen is an advocate for understanding his extended family, as are the children.

I was there recently and was playing Vietnamese-English word games with the children. They would say something in Vietnamese, and I would say it in English. The first to make a mistake and use the other language would lose the game. The children do not often smile there, but they laugh with wonderful glee when played with. I asked a ten-year old boy with a broad smile and big brown eyes how long he and his family had been in the colony. "I don't know," he said. "I was born here." I asked if he had been to Danang, the short boat ride away. He answered, "Where is Danang?" That is when I realized what his future and the future of the other little children would be. Yen's story of the university graduate merely reinforced this reality. It also reinforced what my presence as a token American might mean. It gave some hope.

Visitors to this place are moved by the obvious needs but seem to forget these people after they have left. I do not understand how they cope with the haunting memories, but I presume they are more objective and professional than I am. The visits by our students have been a relationship building effort through the delivery of medicine and other identified supplies. Building a bridge of friendship across the bay from Danang is difficult. To build one from America merely means it takes longer. The visit in June 2001 was different and helped us understand that even this place is not immune from international policies and political struggles.

Our students visit this village at least six times each year. Each time they bring antibiotics, hydrogen peroxide, bandages,

cotton swabs, food, and gifts for the school or the children. The teacher asked that we consider bringing a tape cassette player and tapes for the twenty children in their small primary school. "I'd like to teach them songs with music, like is done with little children in schools. It's just that we can't afford a tape player and the tapes," the teacher said. We spent \$20.00 and gave the school music. They were delighted.

The government assists the lepers and their families as best it can; however, the yearly medical team visits that do not always happen and the periodic supplies that are delivered cannot meet the serious needs these people have. The lepers receive 27 cents each day in disability payments from the government. Hoa Van Village is seen as just another community problem that suffers from the lack of resources in Vietnam. We were asked by the medical care person at the village in June 2001 to consider increasing the amount of medicine we bring. He told us they now have no other source of such medical supplies other than our students. This was rather disconcerting, especially since this visit was difficult to have approved by the authorities.

The police accompanied us during this visit, and there was talk of delaying or ending our visits, regardless of the needs we had met. This was the result of what was becoming an all too common story. Americans had visited there shortly before our students made their June trip. The visitors' activities and behavior nearly ended efforts to help these helpless people.

A group of Americans visited Hoa Van Village in early 2001. They expressed concern for the welfare of the inhabitants. It is reported that a Protestant minister shared his seeming outrage over the inadequate assistance given by the government and offered to assist the village. The suggestion was that he would financially support the village if it would

petition the government to declare its independence from the local authorities. Americans offered help on the contingency that the political structure and government authority of a place in Vietnam be altered to meet the demands of Americans. This displayed more than a twinge of *déjà vu* in the minds of a government twenty-six years after the end of a war in which Americans did the same thing. It was another reminder that the Ugly American still exists.

I listened to the story in disbelief and was shocked and embarrassed that fellow Americans might be so blatantly insensitive. I should not have been surprised. Such behavior and such a demanding attitude would this time result in increased suffering for those already in desperate need. The Americans also unknowingly shook a long earned tentative trust our program had worked hard to establish with local officials. It took many meetings with government officials to reestablish this trust in order that we could continue to help. The American's behavior reflected lunacy. Perhaps, they were merely unaware of the reality of Vietnam and did not follow the axiom that when a person does not know what to say, they should say nothing.

When is the last time you invited people to your home again when during their first visit they tried to force you to rearrange your furniture and made it clear they would continue to interfere in your domestic sovereignty in the future? It would be worse if they also had killed your family thirty years before.

This insensitivity added to the increased need for our help. It also increased my own concern about what was happening to me in the process of coming to grips with Vietnam. I felt drawn to the lepers almost as family. My own family read about these activities in my emails and wondered if they might

find themselves replaced by the people of Hoa Van. It was not that they did not share my concerns. They did, but they also knew the time I spent in Vietnam was not time spent with them. I did not discuss this with them; rather, I searched for ways to help the lepers.

Westerners need not merely accept Vietnam's choice of government and appreciate their need to be useful. They also need to see the nation and its people through the eyes of the Vietnamese. The Vietnamese will choose to incorporate behaviors and present differences from the West that it wishes to accept; not those the West thinks are best for Vietnam. The West might use this reality to the advantage of all during interactions between developed and developing nations.

Those who do this may find it increasingly difficult to use this skill and to avoid actually becoming the role they play. I am not suggesting avoiding seeing Vietnam as the Vietnamese see it. I am merely pointing out that you can become part of the place, and it can become part of you.

An explanation of how Americans might effectively relate to Vietnam is not very complex or difficult. A man in Danang shared his opinion. Do Ba Dat is a translator and scholar in Central Vietnam. He also has served as an instructor for the SUNY Brockport Vietnam Program. He met his first American when he was nine. This was a scholar, not a U.S. soldier.

When queried about how Americans might be more productive in relating to Vietnamese, Dat hesitated to answer. He did not want to offend and answered that Americans should interact more with individuals and less as institutions. The person-to-person approach he suggested is the only solution to building constructive interaction. He shared that the nature or the condition of Vietnam may be troubling to

some Americans. He said, "When they see Vietnam, they will either love it or hate it."

Dat elaborated with endless historical allusions and finally said, "Americans come to Vietnam to undo what they did. Out of guilt they spend money." He seemed rather sad when he agreed that this may be true for some but that time is moving on, and this source of money will end soon.

A number of U.S. military veterans' did organize foundations or organizations to provide aid to Vietnam. These began during the late 1990s when the doors opened between America and Vietnam. The SUNY Brockport Vietnam Program could arguably be seen as one such program; however, guilt was not the motivating factor. Much of the involvement of former enemies is reflected in the words of Thomas Fowler, the disillusioned English journalist in The Quiet American, when he spoke for the West after seeing what was beginning in the 1950s in Vietnam, "I wish there was someone to whom I could say that I was sorry."

Many aid efforts began to disappear slowly after initial visits by American veterans who received remarkable media attention. Clinics and schools were built with funds from such groups. Some of these buildings are still bustling centers. Some are empty buildings, awaiting further aid to buy supplies or fund staff. The Vietnamese have learned not to ask American private organizations for on going aid or assistance but rather to request assistance in specific projects. There is a better chance of obtaining funding this way. Americans rarely stay with long-term programs and seem enamored of themselves when their names are affixed to the traditional plaque on a building. Yet, there is no doubt that such contributions are intended to help a people in desperate need of help, and this help is necessary.

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A two-story clinic was built by an American organization at My Lai to serve the people of that famous community. No provision was made to staff or supply the facility. The government was not able to provide medical staff and medical supplies. Therefore, it remains empty. This is not to diminish an important contribution, but an empty school building or clinic may be a source of frustration. Empty buildings are empty promises. This is not dramatically different from the empty office buildings built in 1997 in response to a predicted economic boom. I find these buildings ghostly monuments to false economic predictions. When driving by one of these in Ho Chi Minh City with a government official at one time, I noticed him look at the empty building with a rather melancholy stare.

Dat spoke with frustration when he said that even some of the programs that might be helpful seem almost inadequate by design. An example he talked about is the Fulbright Scholarship Program offered by the American government. When first offered, no Vietnamese over forty years old could apply; thus, culling out the qualified and the experienced. He suggested that such programs should respond to their purpose, rather than their regulation.

Dat noted that Americans often seem unable to grasp the indirect method of Vietnamese communication and expect the direct communication used in America. This even though the Vietnamese are more direct than most of their Asian neighbors. He smiled when he spoke of Americans' lack of patience and their need for immediate return on investment. He suggested they understand the patience and orientation toward long-term objectives that comprise the basis of Vietnamese agreements. "Some day we will fill those clinics and office buildings," he said.

Dat illustrated his points in the style used by most Vietnamese scholars. He spoke of the wish that Vietnamese could engage constructive relationships with Americans, aside from the tourists who hide in resorts as they pretend they are seeing Vietnam and the government or other representative of U.S. institutions who come with a specific pre-defined mission.

He smiled when he described the lovely beaches in Danang and how he and his relatives would walk these beaches early each morning. He frowned when he described the first resort hotel built at China Beach, the Furama Resort Hotel, and how the hotel's security guards no longer allow the local people to use the portion of the beach in front of the hotel. "They chased away the Vietnamese from the Vietnamese beach."

Dat placed this in historical context. He said, "Bui Vinh was the first Vietnamese to visit America. He went there in the 1860s and met with Lincoln or Grant, I am not sure. He was eager to learn from Americans but received no support. He made two such visits and left disillusioned. Ho Chi Minh sent letters to the U.S. State Department, offering to ally with you. He received no response. The letters were said to be lost. Today Vietnam still wants to talk but gets no feedback. We are not heard. If governments will talk, this is good, but talking is not enough. America just talks. It does not seem to listen. If individuals will listen, it might get better."

Dat reflected a moment and added, "The first American to visit Danang was in 1832. His boat arrived in the bay and sat there for two months. Tu Duc, the king, wondered why the American came to Danang since he did not respond to requests to meet with the Vietnamese. Then, the boat sailed away, and the American died shortly after on his way back to America. The lost opportunities go back to 1832." Dat might also have

been referring to the brief study tours sponsored by American universities, visits by tourists, or the brief trips by American politicians or business representatives that are filled exclusively with scheduled meetings with Vietnamese counterparts. He said, "The future of Vietnam is that it will improve as a unique blend of socialism and capitalism. I don't know how that will work, but I do know it will be a stronger Vietnam and the life for my young son will be better than it is now." He added hopefully, "The poverty in Vietnam will become much less than it is today."

Americans do not hear the pain of the lepers or poor our students and the Vietnamese try to help, the Agent Orange victims whose anguish results from America's use of chemical warfare, the nation that screams its need for assistance to overcome the poverty we caused by war and embargo. We talk endlessly, but we have not listened since we first visited in 1832. Again, we seem to define "sharing" as being listened to, not listening. America seems to anchor its ship and sail away without seizing the opportunity to be taught by other cultures. One result, of course, is a loss of respect. Vietnam is one of those countries where most Americans are taller than the locals are, and the constant rhetoric and dictates luckily often go over the heads of the Vietnamese. It is useful to listen rather than talk and to listen not merely to words but also to what the Vietnamese feel.

The concept of yin and yang, as described earlier, is a significant variable in how the Vietnamese look at themselves and others. Other crucial determinants of behavior are equally important when understanding Vietnam's culture and its resulting influences on relationships, personal or professional. The role of fate is important. People are subject to the process of fate that will determine what destiny they will eventually

achieve. Fate is not something people may control, but it may present certain opportunities that can be rejected or ignored.

A person's destiny may be achieved productively by allowing fate to be actualized. Fate, however, may bring joy or sorrow. Some see the dictates of social structure, family role righteousness, duty, and obligation as somehow threatened by fate. Vietnamese poetry and literature often speak to the sad results of these dictates taking prominence over a lost opportunity in relationships because of the need to adhere to the control of others. This, of course, has obvious national and international implications, too.

The Buddhist self-refinement is often subject to rigid Confucian social rules. The effort to create predictability sometimes causes the lack of predictability. On the other hand, people are seen as being in a transitional state in which one's place is significant and how a person plays their assigned role is both important and insignificant at the same time. The Western concept that everyone can become anything they want is not always relevant when we factor in fate, destiny, yin and yang, place, and social dictates.

This also includes not blaming individuals for outcomes. It was not the American soldier who should be blamed for a person not having a family because of war. Rather, it is fate. Fate is responsible; therefore, American veterans and former VC can establish friendships. When the victims of America's chemical warfare told me they had no animosity for America and blamed fate, my Western mind wanted to scream for vengeance on their behalf. They would not have joined me.

The Vietnamese also have a wonderful sense of humor. Buddhism is the majority religion. Vegetarian days, religious rites and festivals, and other practices are important. I asked a friend who is Buddhist after he swatted a mosquito, "I thought

Buddhists honored all life. What happened to the Buddhists who valued the lives of mosquitoes?" The answer was, "Those Buddhists all died from malaria."

The Vietnamese tend not to wallow in self-pity or allow themselves to be eaten up by unending bitterness. This allows them to focus on the present and not to become enmeshed in the past. Attempting to analyze and rectify the past with the present may have value. It also is sometimes seen as a useless, harmful, and humiliating process. Just accept what was. Energy might best be spent living in the only reality that exists, the present.

This view allows them to look at the future with patience, to sacrifice, and to move forward from what many in the West would find totally disabling circumstances. The reality is seen as determined by fate.

There are two examples of this. Friends in Vietnam introduced me to their two young daughters. The man and woman are instructors at a university. While they each have relatives living in Canada and the United States, their roots are deeply embedded in Central Vietnam. They also obviously love their two beautiful children. During dinner one evening, the mother, however, said, "We love the children, but we have been very unfortunate. We are sad that we have no son." The daughters, then, smiled.

My Hoa is an intelligent and very competent professional. She holds two university degrees and is well respected by the Danang community. While talking with a group at the Women's Center at SUNY Brockport during her visit to the university, she responded to a question about the status of women in Vietnam, a country that has a Lady Buddha. "There is no gender discrimination in Vietnam. Men and women are treated the same."

My Hoa is the only woman to hold a position like hers in Danang but refuses to walk in front of me when entering a doorway, as is culturally required in Vietnam. She tells me it is because I am an old man. Well, her words are, "Because you are an old, fat man." I presume this is not an accurate rationale but humor. She is well aware of the subservient role most women play in a marriage and of the changing character of her nation.

The law guarantees gender equality. The culture requires the wife to obey her husband. There is no equality in marriages in Vietnam. Roles are prescribed by tradition. Most seem to accept these roles and required behavior. She also seems committed to the value of the family and the community being more important than the value of the individual. She is aware of the rebellious nature of many Vietnamese often to assert themselves—within limits. Her views are commonly held.

Given the Vietnamese perspective of reality, these two examples make perfect sense. Any perceived contradiction is in the logic of the West, not in the thinking or behavior of the Vietnamese. These may make some in the West who are committed to gender equality uncomfortable, and contradictions may seem obvious to them. There is no contradiction at all in the minds of the Vietnamese. This holds the key to seeing the world through the eyes of the Vietnamese.

My fascination with apparent contradictions not being contradictory, the ability of a people to establish a thought process grounded in balance, and the acceptance of fate and destiny drew me even more toward not merely the needs of this nation but also the spirit of the Vietnamese. They represented an alternative to what the West offered. There were flowers

that bloomed here that did not in America. There was an integration with nature that I had never discovered before coming back to Vietnam.

This attraction, I was told by Kathy, distanced me from those in America. More importantly, it distanced me from her and the family. She became more persistent in attempting to communicate with me. I tried to explain, but all the words said little. It was difficult to explain what I was trying to understand. I found myself between cultures but moving toward Vietnam in a manner that seemed determined by fate. Relationships, events, and circumstances all seemed to lead me in this direction. However, I knew I made the decisions that affected my behavior.

6.

THE SUNY BROCKPORT VIETNAM
PROGRAM

“For us like any other fugitive,
Like the numberless flowers that cannot number
And all the beasts that need not remember,
It is today in which we live.
So many try to say Not Now,
So many have forgotten how
To say I Am, and would be
Lost, if they could, in history.”
- W.H. Auden, *Another Time*.

The demonstration of fate in our lives provides the drama of human theater. It cannot be anticipated, but it helps us to live in the present. It guides us through unnavigable waters that often threaten to drown us in memories, unresolved experiences, and that which shapes who we are. What we do is neither personal nor professional. It is just what we do and who we are. Sometimes it comes on us unexpectedly. It requires a trust in what fate has in store for us. What we often think we are doing surprises us when we find we are really doing something else. Fate frequently follows strange twists and turns. Just when we think we have it all figured out, we realize we do not.

The development of the SUNY Brockport Vietnam Program is a curious example of not only program development

in Vietnam but also of fate and that which changes us. It has done that for students. It has done that for many others, including myself. It came unannounced and was certainly not a result of years of tedious academic planning. Some might say it happened by chance. Others might talk about destiny.

Melisa Wolfanger joined the program at age 20, a student from a rural village in Upstate New York. She celebrated her 21st birthday in Danang, surrounded by the program staff and Vietnamese friends. She wrote several months after she had returned to her small town in America, "I cried last night because I missed all of you in Danang. You have all changed my life, and I want to thank you for this. I wish I could be there now." Melisa's four months in Vietnam was her first experience abroad. She missed her boyfriend and her family while she was in Danang, but she talked about her new family being the people of Danang. She had opened herself to Vietnam, and it changed her life forever, a refrain heard from most of the students who participated during the first two years of the program. This began because a colleague of mine had an idea after reading the newspaper.

My return visit to Central Vietnam in 1998 was an act of exorcism. There was curiosity to satisfy, and there were nightmares to settle. There were devils to purge. It was just a two-week visit as a military veteran turned tourist. Two other veterans and I took the opportunity to support each other through an experience not unusual any more. Many vets have returned for the same purpose. We were not unusual either. We drank lots of beer, reminisced, stayed in expensive hotels, and revisited the places we knew during the war. My return was detailed earlier; theirs was just as dramatic.

After I returned to America, I wrote an invited op-ed article for the Rochester Democrat and Chronicle about our

return. The lengthy article with pictures appeared on a Sunday. That afternoon Ray Duncan, a Professor of Political Science at SUNY Brockport, called. He said he liked the article and asked if I had ever thought about developing a program for the college in Vietnam. I was rather surprised, and told him I had not had a positive response before when trying to interest them in cooperating with my efforts when I was President of an international children's rights organization during the 1980s or other related activities when I proposed innovative involvement.

Ray said, "Paul Yu is making some creative changes, and John Perry is always open to new ideas. Why not draft a proposal, and I'll make an appointment with John." Paul Yu was the new College President. He had taken the college by storm with physical and program changes. John Perry was the Director of International Education at the college and ran the largest and most resourceful study abroad program in the State University of New York.

I sat down that evening and drafted a proposal. I, then, shared this with Kathy. It detailed the Vietnam Project. This proposed sending students to Danang to study for a semester (three terms each year) and also facilitating a resource that would provide interested faculty in teaching or engaging research in Vietnam. I suggested distance-learning partnerships with Vietnam.

Ray reviewed this four-page proposal on Monday. He liked it. The next day I met with Ray, John, and members of the International Education staff. After forty-five minutes, the proposal was accepted. The program had begun. I was overwhelmed. Frankly, I did not think it would be approved.

The beginning was finding out how to begin. I merely had a concept, not a program at all. I once had run a program

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in Central Vietnam, but the rules had changed over the previous decades. My first program required landmines weapons emplacements, air strikes, medivac helicopters, and hundreds of cases of C-rations. Times had changed faster than I had. The first step, therefore, was to learn the new rules. I searched for what might have been done more recently in this area of Vietnam.

The next couple of months were spent devouring thousands of Internet sites, everything I could find in print that related to Vietnam, and contacting anybody who was connected with any international effort in Central Vietnam. The reading material was filled with contradictions and efforts by travel agencies to convince potential customers to visit "Where the war took place". Others tried to describe Vietnam and its culture in the context of a guided tour. Some offered consultation advice for businesses interested in establishing themselves in Vietnam. Others advised against using consultants who sell such advice. The U.S. Embassy was very helpful in providing whatever information I needed. Prof. Tom Mace at Camosun College in British Columbia was initially a most valuable person. Tom began a Business Education Certificate Program with Danang University, and his advice was important. His contacts were so.

Danang University referred me to the Danang Union of Friendship Organizations, usually referred to as the "Friendship Union". This government agency was charged with meeting with foreign organizations, especially NGOs, for the purpose of improving the lives of people in Danang. Similar agencies functioned throughout the nation, coordinated by the Vietnam-USA Society in Hanoi. The Friendship Union was as active with Thailand, Laos, Japan, France, and other nations as with America.

Chairman An of the Fatherland Front also served as Chairman of the Friendship Union. His Vice-Chairman was Hoang Hoanh, an interesting individual who was to become my counterpart in what would become a partnership in a fascinating relationship that reflected all that is good and all that is confusing in American-Vietnamese relations. This became clear as the program developed.

Arrangements with SUNY Brockport for the beginning of the program's feasibility stage were completed in fall 1998. I left for Vietnam on February 6, 1999 to begin the first visit to explore the viability of the program in Danang. The next two weeks in Danang were busy with meetings, proposals, counter-proposals, and negotiations. Each meeting was arranged by the Friendship Union.

Preparation had involved countless hours discussing the proposal with those who had experience in Danang, a few contacts in Danang, and colleagues at SUNY Brockport. Additional hours had involved recollecting Vietnamese business manners and protocol from the late 1960s and learning anything that might help me: appropriate seating protocol (sit across from your counterpart and sit when he does), the multiple meanings of smiles (humor, irritation, fear, friendship, etc.), the value of self-effacing humor and when it is useful, the avoidance of humor at another's expense, the masking of anger, the use of symbolic language in making a point, and the countless other bits and pieces that make up appropriate business etiquette in Vietnam.

There have been countless times I poked fun at my weight, addiction to smoking a pipe, beer drinking, hair loss, and odd tie. Just do not sit with your legs crossed, and you do not have to worry about pointing the bottom of your foot at anybody. Wait to speak until given verbal or non-verbal

permission. Learn to use an interpreter effectively. Progress at the pace set by your host.

Preparation is the key to effective communication. The substance can get lost quickly when conducting business without regard for how business must be conducted. I was not ready for Vietnamese officials to serve beer at morning meetings, but it seemed a pleasant touch. I was also not ready for nor aware that I was playing out a personal agenda that would lead me to decide whether or not to live in Danang.

The initial stays in Danang were at the Furama Resort, the first five-star hotel in Central Vietnam. It is located at the old China Beach. Their community image in preserving their beach for tourists was referred to earlier in my discussion with Mr. Dat. It is a beautiful hotel but with little Vietnamese cuisine and few reminders that a guest is in Vietnam, except for the staff and some decor. The two Germans in charge and the French Food and Beverage Manager run a tight ship to please foreign tourist families who come mainly from Europe, Japan, and Australia or the government officials from various countries who stay there. The staff finds their employers strict and demanding, but they also like their salaries. Tightly guarded, it is quite secure.

The security actually created isolation from the locals on Son Tay Peninsula in Danang. While there was no reminder of the thousands of U.S. soldiers who once used the beach, there also was little reminder of the poverty that surrounded the Furama. This was in the tradition of five-star hotels. They charged \$6.00 for a bottle of local beer, about the price for a case of such beer in Danang. A three-day stay cost the equivalent of a year's salary for some who worked there. I stayed there three times during my visits and never returned after one incident in September 1999.

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I stayed there during the Mid-Autumn Festival in September 1999. Children outside the gate were preparing for the Unicorn Dance, an important part of the festival activities. The eight foot long unicorn costume that was draped over them gyrated as they danced about the road. I walked near them, and they danced about me. I joined in the dance, and we all laughed. However, without warning a group of security guards ran to what had become an international dance and chased away the children. The guards smiled at me and stood off to observe that the children did not return. I was embarrassed and angry, sulked back into the fantasy island of a hotel, and vowed to spend my time in the future in Vietnam, not tourist haven isolation. The inappropriateness of how to manage foreigners and celebrations also was turned on its head during the war.

This reminded me of an officer who was my boss at Hiep Duc when I served there. I was away from the village, and he made one of his rare visits. It was Easter Sunday, and he organized an Easter egg hunt for the villagers. We came close to beating the hell out of each other when I returned. Starving and wounded victims of hellish war in their valley were gathered together and told to find gaily-colored eggs. This when I could never get eggs to feed my people. "You really are an asshole," I told him. "These people don't need some idiot like you making them play kids' games when their kids need the food you hide and, and, then, you make them look for it." He told me I should mind my own business, remember his rank, and flew off in a helicopter. I looked at him grinning as he took off, and I stayed in a village whose people wondered if we were all as crazy as the officer seemed to them.

I remember spending the next day with local officials, helping the people with sanitation. They used to go to the

bathroom anywhere. We had the people agree to use one side of my hill for this purpose. Later that week, General Stillwell came to inspect the village. I intended to have his helicopter land on that side of the hill. The rotors on a helicopter create a terrific updraft. I recall him in his pressed uniform and shining boots dodging what flew into the helicopter and waving in a frenzy. The helicopter hovered above the ground for a minute or two in a storm of feces, and, then, flew away quickly. They never landed and never came back. In fact, they never said goodbye. I thought, at the time, that I wished my boss had been on that helicopter.

The first meeting was at the Friendship Union. The place is located in the central part of the city, surrounded by busy market stalls, street sellers hawking various items, small shops of every description, a steady stream of motor bike traffic, and women wearing straw conical hats who carry long poles with baskets on both ends filled with fruit. A large metal gate separates the three story concrete box like building from the street. It is a purely functional building with no ornamentation, similar to most buildings built in the last twenty years. The busy staff darts about in rather cramped quarters, and two outdated computers are clearly overused in the entranceway office. The computers are not unlike most machines in Vietnam. It is common to see forty-year-old trucks left by the Americans still used productively with an odd assortment of engines jutting out of the front of the vehicles. The nuns who operate the nursing home serviced by our students make rice noodles for sale to keep the home operational. The rice noodle machine is powered by a RotoTiller engine.

I was greeted warmly at the Friendship Union and was patiently listened to as I described what I thought our program might have to offer. Chairman An and Vice-Chairman Hoanh

only seemed slightly confused when I responded to their question, "What do you want the American students to learn in their studies here?" with "What Danang wants them to learn." The two of them began to talk with each other. When they returned to the agenda (there is always an agenda), they seemed slightly more guarded. After this first meeting, I asked the woman who was my assigned interpreter what the two had talked about after our exchange about what the students would be taught. She said she did not know. I found out later that my answer was not believed. I was told, "Americans always know what they want to learn. Telling us you want us to teach what we want the students to learn was unusual." They just did not believe me. I also knew I had come to learn. A part of me was there because I wanted to open myself to Vietnam and its people.

Several other meetings were held at the Friendship Union during this visit. They were interspersed with meetings at Danang's two universities and a variety of other agencies.

Duy Tan University is private, a "people-founded" institution but with curricula approved by the Ministry of Education and Training. This approval is crucial in Vietnam. A law school in Ho Chi Minh City once saw its students protest changes in what was to be taught mandated by the state. The students staged a sit down protest. They refused to leave the building and held a vote to decide if the protest should continue. Soldiers and police dressed as students joined in the vote. The protest ended after the vote.

The state closely oversees what is taught, similar to the Board of Trustees at SUNY mandating a certain basic curriculum for all SUNY students. The clever vote packing at the law school was similar to the number of deceased voters who cast ballots in American elections.

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Private does not mean autonomous in Vietnam. It just gives non-state facilities the right to form to supplement a need for higher education not able to be met by the government. The few private universities are also an alternative for students who cannot pass the entrance exams for state universities but can pay the higher tuition costs.

Duy Tan shared with me many requests for their students, faculty, and administrators. They had little to offer our students. After the initial meeting, one of their administrators handed me a letter for our college President, requesting an invitation to visit SUNY Brockport with Brockport, of course, assuming the cost. Partnership meant our helping them and appreciating the privilege. This was neither greed nor a misunderstanding, merely an indication of the exigent need that existed and the intense desire to improve what it was they had to offer their students and community. Danang University presented itself differently.

Danang University's present President was Vice-President in 1999 when I met with him. He has a PhD from the University of Minsk and is fluent in Russian. He was one of many who had prepared for a long, productive relationship with the Soviet Union. The end of that dream came with the demise of the Soviet's Communist system. Sitting with an American educator and negotiating possible partnership arrangements with Americans was not on his agenda at one time. He was not about to reject such involvement, but he always had the distinct impression that he preferred borscht instead of American fast food.

Both universities had accepted Fulbright Scholars to lecture. Both saw the visitors leave after students were being overcharged to attend lectures. Both had visions of a future in international education, but both seemed to avoid the

reality that only about .75% of U.S. students who study abroad go to all Southeast Asian nations combined, and few go to Vietnam. That is less than 1,000 each year for the entire region (calculated from Nepal, south, throughout Vietnam, Cambodia, Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, etc.). This did not make them competitive, given the fact that well over 100,000 U.S. students study elsewhere in the world.

Each of these universities, however, is filled to capacity, as are all in Vietnam. There is a thirst for knowledge and the skills necessary to guarantee a career. Because of this, the universities seem to think that foreign students are just as interested in attending Danang University and Duy Tan University. They unfortunately are mistaken.

Americans tend to be Europe-oriented. They always have been. Asia may be exotic and intriguing, but Vietnam is halfway around the globe. It has an image that unfortunately does not adequately reflect what it is.

Danang University was more professional than Duy Tan and seemed to have a clearer sense of what we wanted to establish in Danang. No matter how clearer might have been their understanding, communication was clouded by cultural differences in approaching education.

University courses in America are as varied in style as there are professors. In Vietnam, the teaching approach is fairly uniform, and differences are not readily apparent between courses. College teachers lecture, test, and grade. The students are often confused about how final grades are decided and about what is appropriate to be taught in a course. Questions and discussions in a classroom are not very common. The students stand when the instructor enters the room, sit when they are given permission, and complain about lousy teaching only by not returning to class. The assertiveness of American students in universities is not common in Vietnam.

My discussions at both universities resulted in proposing courses that would help the students learn about Vietnam's language, culture, history, and their political system. In addition, the students would provide services to the poor in the community. This last course was not unusual in America.

Experiential education has been around for decades and is a common and rather uncomplicated way for students to learn. Not so in Vietnam. Neither university seemed able to grasp the concept.

The Vice-President at Danang University asked me to clarify what this would involve. I described how students would learn by providing services in the community; that this would be structured in such a manner that they would learn at least as much about Vietnam as they might sitting in a classroom. I also explained that this would be a vehicle for integrating classroom learning from their other four courses into activities. The response was a smile and, "I understand. Danang University can provide this for your students. The American students can talk with the Vietnamese students after each class. That's how they will learn. They will help the Vietnamese students to improve their English." This was not quite what I had in mind.

Meetings over the past years after establishing our program have found it impossible to explain experiential education to this university. This is odd, given the Socialist Day arrangement by the government at one time in order to teach a commitment to group and community as distinct from the American commitment to the individual. It seemed to work for a nation but could not be understood by a university. What I proposed was rather alien in this world. Strange since the Vietnamese performed kind acts in the community rather routinely, and foreigners were engaging community

development activities in most places in Vietnam. Making the connection between education and this action seemed difficult.

The final visit to an institution of higher learning was certainly unusual. The Danang City School of Politics served to teach Marxism-Leninism-Ho Chi Minhism to government or military people who were to be promoted to higher ranks. The school was situated in a compound not far from China Beach, surrounded by walls and gates. My first visit was with the administration.

I was ushered into a rather small reception room with one wall covered in red cloth and silhouetting a white bust of Ho Chi Minh. The man who took me to that room identified himself as the school's Vice-Headmaster. He told me the Headmaster had been delayed but would join us in a few minutes. He offered me a cigarette with a broad smile, but I declined saying, "Thanks, but I only smoke a pipe." He nodded knowingly. I, then, asked if I could smoke. He said, "No, no smoking in this room."

The man wrote a note on a small paper and slid it across the table. It read, "Were you in the old army?" The "old army" referred to the U.S. Army. I nodded and wrote I was and returned it to him. He, then, looked at me as his smile broadened even more and asked, "Did you enjoy your year at Hiep Duc?" I actually felt a chill at the question. I had not shared my service experience during this visit with anyone. They had done their homework.

The ensuing meeting went well. The Headmaster was delighted to teach American students about Vietnam's Communist system. When he was delighted, so was his staff.

This meeting with political educators reminded me of the work I did to prepare for the coming of the displaced

people to Hiep Duc in the late 1960s. I was briefly assigned the responsibilities for psychological operations. That meant that I became the disk jockey for the valley. I carried a thirty-pound speaker system on my back and a cassette recorder in my pack. My interpreter and I took a list of enemy troops' names and spoke to them about why they should surrender. In between these pleas, we played Vietnamese love songs that were supposed to make the enemy homesick. If we broke the morale of the local enemy, the theory went, the more likely the village would survive.

During a few firefights, we played these songs and read the names. The music did not seem to have any effect on the fights at all. It did have an effect that we could measure at least once. We sat on a hill, played tunes, and begged the enemy to surrender for a straight twenty-four hours. U.S. troops were shocked to see thirty VC holding their weapons in the air and surrendering the next day. I never knew if they could not stand the music we chose and surrendering seemed the only way to stop us from playing it or if we actually broke their morale.

There were other occasions when we did this alone at night in fifteen-minute intervals, waited an hour, and crawled to a different location to broadcast again. Those were eerie experiences. That was especially true one night when a small patrol of VC walked just in front of us during one of our breaks. The echo in the valley made it difficult to locate us, but those VC are still the stuff of nightmares. The School of Politics approaches education and propaganda in a more sophisticated manner with a more acceptable purpose. They might even have had time to eat, drink, and have fun. There was some of this during the time I was engaging psychological warfare.

After propagandizing, I would return to either LZ West or Hiep Duc for a night or two. One night, during a heavy

monsoon rain, I sat in a bunker on LZ West with a few other soldiers. A box from home had arrived, and I was cutting a sausage with my field knife. At that moment, a heavy barrage of mortars and rockets hit us. The shock sent my knife through the sausage and half my hand. We had been drinking a fair amount of beer. I quickly seized my hand, and we all set off for the aid station amid the booms and explosions that were everywhere. I remember entering the aid station and passing out. I never knew if that was because of the loss of blood or the intake of alcohol. I do recall coming back to life with stitches holding my hand together. The hand, by the way, became very infected. A couple of weeks later, I had the wound cleaned and repaired by a physician in a back street clinic in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, while I was on R & R. The doctor asked me, "What butcher stitched your hand for you?"

There were many other meetings during the planning stage of the program. Most were at sites where students would provide services to children, the sick, and the elderly. Small adorable orphans looked out windows and surrounded me when I would walk inside. Their broad smiles and giggles hid their sadness. Doctors shared their clinics with a mixed air of pride at the work they were doing and an embarrassment at the lack of modern equipment to do the job. The elderly shuffled busily to greet me in a facility hidden away on a back street in a society that prides itself on families taking care of parents and grandparents. Street children looked quizzically at me from faces older than their years as the physician who cares for them mended scrapes and took blood pressure. "Ninety percent of them have TB," he said. "I'm afraid of what will happen when HIV takes hold." The needs were far beyond what our students could resolve, but the opportunity to learn while helping was exciting, even though this help was very small.

The final meeting during this initial stage was with the Danang Youth Union, the name of the former Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth League. The Union held a variety of events for youth and engaged service activities, such as food distribution. It played a major role in instilling patriotism in youth. There was some discussion about the requested service activities for the students who would participate in our program and apparent confusion about American students working with the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth League. We agreed to consider joint involvement. The concept was so uncanny that I like it.

The final meeting with the Friendship Union summarized the more than two weeks of meetings. It ended with an agreement that I would return. There was also the signing of statements of intent to pursue the possible establishing of the program.

The study in manners and business etiquette was productive. The whirlwind schedule was not anticipated. There was pressure from the authorities to move quickly to finalize an agreement, and this was not anticipated. It seemed the caution I had been told to expect in such interactions was not present at all. I was wrong. It took a few months to digest the visit.

The meetings were focused on the business of my proposal, but they were filled with the exchange of personal information, as well. Each person with whom I met was as curious about me and my family as the proposal. I returned the questions, in turn. This is the routine in professional interactions in Vietnam. I found this to be the fact even in diplomatic circles. I treated their questions as mere exchanges of information, but they were important to relationship building.

The preparation for this visit had come at a price that only became clear much later. My family was being neglected.

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Vietnam was replacing them as a priority. All of my time was spent working on the developing program or my other job responsibilities.

An official in Danang suggested I contact Le Van Bang, Vietnam's Ambassador to the United States. The advice was that Ambassador Bang's support would open doors in Vietnam. After my return, I sent a letter to the Embassy of Vietnam. There was a quick response, and I flew to Washington in May for the meeting.

It was a cold and rainy morning at The Vietnam Veterans Memorial, the most frequently visited attraction in Washington, built by funds raised by Vietnam War veterans. My itinerary took me to Washington five hours before my meeting at the Embassy. I decided to spend time with some friends whose names are on the shiny back granite that attracts tourists and draws war veterans. I spoke with the ghosts and wondered what they would think about the mission I was developing. Then, I walked to the Embassy. Spending a day at The Wall and, then, with the Ambassador of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam seemed ironic, but it was little more than an example of yin and yang.

The Embassy of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam is in a small suite of rooms on the fourth floor of a small office building on a side street. A visitor rings a doorbell and is admitted to an office that resembles a doctor's waiting room. The receptionist was more concerned with sorting the morning mail than my arrival. In a few minutes, I was ushered into a small conference room where the Ambassador waited. Bang was part of the initial UN delegation and became the first representative to America after diplomatic relations were reestablished.

He was friendly and shared his hope that the SUNY Brockport program would be successful. "Vietnam needs

much more involvement with American universities, and you will be the first to have a program in Danang. This is very important. I'll do anything I can to help."

He spent more time talking about his sons who were attending George Washington University. He was quite proud of them. We also talked about the war. He said, "Ambassador Peterson and I talk a lot about those days. He's a great man you know. He spent six years as a POW after his plane was shot down. I was in the National Guard in Hanoi at the time. Peterson and I often joke that he spent the war making holes in Hanoi, and I spent the war filling them in."

The Ambassador agreed to write a letter endorsing our program, and I was about to leave when he said, "Stay a while. We should be friends." I sat down, and we talked about family and experiences. He also shared a vast fund of jokes. At one point he said, "I understand President Clinton is very busy today." I said, "I presume he is. I understand he is dealing with many problems in Kosovo." The Ambassador shook his head and smiled. "Oh, no" he said, "I hear he is interviewing a new group of interns at the White House." I was surprised at that and said, "Mr. Ambassador, you can't say things like that." He grinned and whispered, "I know." We both laughed. It was a long meeting. We did like each other.

The effort to receive an endorsement from Ambassador Peterson was different. Letters to our Embassy in Hanoi resulted in a response that said he endorses no programs in Vietnam by Americans, a State Department policy. I sent him an email that said I could understand such a policy but he merely wanted a quotable statement that he supported civilian involvement. I ended the letter by saying, "I'm just an Army of Vietnam vet who thinks he might have some idea of what he is doing. This request is just one vet to another, asking that you

write a sentence saying the program might be OK." At 5:00 AM the next day, my fax machine received a wonderful letter that supported our effort in glowing terms. It seems good men represented both nations.

The next visit to Danang was in the fall of 1999. This followed dozens of faxes, emails, and phone calls. Many nights were spent communicating. My insomnia served me well during this period in adjusting to Vietnam being twelve hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time.

The developing program involved all my time that was not spent teaching and completing the faculty responsibilities I carried. My family, of course, continued to suffer from neglect. They always had when I tackled some all-consuming cause. It happened while I wrote my first two books about child victimization, developed a child abuse program, ran a Vietnam veterans' counseling program, engaged work to combat sexual trafficking in children, and a host of other causes over the years. I felt unable to walk away from these victims about whom few seemed to care. Their needs did consume me.

My family usually shared in these concerns, just not the time I spent on them. We all grew to care more deeply about people. How was I to know this would be different?

September 1999 was the return to Vietnam to complete arrangements for the first group of students. These two weeks were filled with meetings, interviewing candidates for program positions, renting a building for the offices for the staff and housing for students, and purchasing everything from a stove to chairs to computers to a van. The countless hours of preparation before this visit were now beginning to see a program actually take shape in tangible forms.

Agreements were signed, and staff was hired. The last day of this visit was spent finalizing all that could be arranged

at this point. I left exhausted and excited at the now actual probability that the program would begin when I would bring the first group to Danang in January 2000, the 25th anniversary year of the end of the war. The activities reminded me of the past.

The furious activities that occurred at Hiep Duc before the people were moved there were not intrinsically different from establishing what was necessary to establish this program. Goals were established. Basic tactics within a strategy were developed. The logistical arrangements were similar. Mutual understanding between peoples was as crucial.

The thoughts of similarities often occupied me during this visit. Differences also fascinated me. There was an absence of military might and destruction. The cause seemed less controversial. My own views, however, were no longer those of the twenty-five year old soldier. This made the process less clear and the goals more complex. No one issued orders. This time I was convinced the cause was just and that it made sense.

The first group of students arrived on January 17, 2000, with much fanfare. This was the only program of its kind in Vietnam and the only American university program in Danang. The symbolism of its beginning date was important to the Vietnamese and to the American diplomats who came from Hanoi to welcome the students and this new symbol of American presence in Danang. Dinners and welcoming events with extensive media coverage took their toll on the students who not only felt they were under a spotlight; they were. The local officials placed restrictions on movement and on visitors to the students' program house. A 9:00 PM curfew was imposed. The students were welcome, but trust had to be earned.

This had a tiring effect on students who had been informed about what to expect. Being told and experiencing

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are two different things. The students who found this an interesting learning experience were those who used it as such. They opened themselves to the process. The students who complained had come with the mistaken notion they were on vacation and closed themselves to the experience.

I am no expert on study abroad programs but understand student behavior like this happens in any country. In Vietnam, especially in Danang, it took on more intense proportions. The students' perception of what they saw as corrupt practices fed this intensity and resulted in an unanticipated return in March 2000.

The students assisted in teaching English to students at the Friendship Union. Their students paid for this, but they paid more than the expenses warranted. Purchases by the program were controlled, and costs seemed to reflect an increase over the actual cost of certain items. These, when added to the restrictions that were justified by the authorities as concerns for students' health, produced a tinderbox of unrest. It was actually less of a crisis than it appeared from America, and my visit in March resolved these issues, at least, to my satisfaction. Student complaints, however, resulted in the Friendship Union firing our original Program Administrator and threatening the jobs of our other employees. We were prepared to follow the lead of other international programs that had not been successful in Danang. I could not let that happen. Officials in Danang were just as purposeful.

The resolution of these problems took a few sensitive meetings with Hoang Hoanh and Chairman An. The process was always a focus on understanding each other, resolving misunderstandings, accepting differences, and achieving the goal of strengthening the program. We were all careful not to have anybody lose face.

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Another agreement was drafted that clarified practices. Exorbitant fees for English class students ended, but the classes were continued for future semesters. The cost of items decreased. What had resulted in other programs suggested by other nations not getting off the ground in Danang had served through resolution and stubbornness (on both sides) to actually improve our program.

No such practices occurred again. If anything, future students received a more open welcoming and enjoyed more freedom of movement than the Vietnamese themselves. My own relationship with the authorities was also strengthened, and we developed more mutual respect. Those early days are referred to by local authorities as "a period of minor adjustment". This does not mean there were no more tests of "trust" or "the need to strengthen friendship".

It was also agreed after losing our first Program Administrator for "security" reasons that My Hoa would be promoted from her position as Program Secretary to the leadership position. This was not only an advancement for her but was also a demonstration of commitment to the rhetoric of Vietnam's National Assembly that has voiced a commitment to support advancing women to an equal status with men in that nation.

The March 2000 visit clarified the limits of this testing and served to define roles and how they might be performed. As it was said, "We know what is appropriate." Even so, this would be tested periodically, often in unusual ways. Hoanh is a much more complex man than this exchange might indicate.

Hoang Hoanh is a short, stocky man in his fifties. He is my direct partner in Danang and serves as the Vice-Chairman of the Danang Union of Friendship Organizations, better known as the "Friendship Union". He also has a reputation in

Danang among the Vietnamese as a deal maker. Hoanh or his wife own several houses in the city. He is much too dedicated to involve himself in outright corrupt practices, however.

Hoanh is well connected and influential. He is a stern administrator who makes it clear to his subordinates that he is in charge, even in cooperative ventures. "Cooperative" usually means he will attempt to control. Some of this is a result of anger over one of the behaviors of foreign companies that establish themselves in Vietnam. He told me, "Some of these companies who employ Vietnamese people give them no freedom at all. They do not trust them and only control them to make a profit." His difficulty in trusting foreigners may have been a reaction to being distrusted himself.

This difficulty in trusting was certainly reflected in our experience through our program. The first arrangement for our students to help teach English found the local students paying an exorbitant fee, as I mentioned. We were only to find out about because our students saw the money being collected. When I began to examine this, Hoanh and an official in the government tourism office who helped organize the classes had a hasty meeting, and tensions increased for a time.

There were other incidents, now referred to as "minor adjustment problems". Our staff sometimes returned from meetings with him, trembling and close to tears. Our first Program Administrator was only fired, as I mentioned earlier, after Hoanh decided the reason was the man neglected to include all information about relatives living in Canada on the job application form. He was a "security risk". This after I refused to agree to fire the administrator who was not easily intimidated when it appeared he merely refused to kowtow to Hoanh's demands. Once the word "security" is raised in Vietnam, negotiating ends. Hoanh did agree not to

black list the man so my ex-administrator could seek further employment. He has a benevolent side.

Our program house, we found, was actually Hoanh's house. We paid more than twice the going rate for rent. This was not merely the exercise of supply and demand economics. His view of our program staff was interesting. His demand for employee loyalty reflected his belief that they were his employees, not "our employees". He was usually friendly, smiling, businesslike, and firm. We had pleasant meals together and attended many productive meetings, as a result of which the people of Danang did benefit. While I liked him, his version of cooperation and trust were, rightly or wrongly, what often resulted in foreign groups passing on Danang in favor of Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, or avoiding Vietnam altogether. The seeming conflicts between what he would say and what he would do were often spiced with what I saw as needless and he saw as necessary secrets and intrigue.

Hoanh was in his position of power partly because of Chairman An. An liked his protégé and protected him. They had both served in important positions in Quang Nam-Danang Province before the two political entities were separated in the late 1990s. They also presented an interesting balance. They did what they did to help in the development of Danang and Vietnam.

How Hoanh did this reflected the tradition of the mandarins who were paid for services and grew richer as their territory improved. They and Hoanh were genuinely concerned about their people's welfare. It was just that they grew richer faster than everyone else did. As their riches accumulated, their power increased and their ability to help others improved. Their reputations also became more complex. A program like ours could not choose its Vietnamese partner. If we were to

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succeed in Danang, we would have to learn how to work with many different persons.

Hoanh was born into a rich family in Quang Nam Province, fought for the liberation, and made his contribution to Central Vietnam. Hoanh told me many times that he appreciates the assistance Americans give to Vietnam. He, like many other officials, differentiates between the U.S. government that he sees as attempting to control the world and the Americans whom he sees as genuinely concerned about others. However, he lists "good guests" as Vietnam veterans, people from NGOs, educators, and American politicians who visit Danang. These he describes as "people of goodwill". The politicians, he seems to fail to notice, are the U.S. government he describes as attempting to control the world.

Hoanh is typical of some Vietnamese officials who hold a rather bureaucratic role primarily because more important government leaders in their region protect them. He was a student funded by his family who attended a university in Saigon during the early stages of the war. Hoanh joined a student movement in the second year of study not because he was a Marxist but because he opposed American occupation. He left the university and joined the VC. Hoanh was assigned to work as a staff member of a cadre that established schools in liberated areas in Central Vietnam. Since these areas changed hands many times during the war, he moved frequently. His group of nine dwindled to two with the death of the rest. Hoanh's fortune was that he survived the war. He has forgotten neither his sacrifices nor the reasons for victory.

During the war, he studied the thought of Ho Chi Minh and became an active member of the socialist cause. He sometimes reflects on the political group study in which he and his comrades engaged while serving the Liberation in the rural

mountains. At the end of the war, he moved through various government jobs. In 1994, he was given the job he now holds.

Hoanh sees *doi moi* as a flexible interpretation of socialism in a nation in transition. He avoids discussing the political implications for socialism in this transition and refers those interested to the College of Politics for such a sensitive and some still think dangerous topic of discussion. This is not a person who will take risks in examining what he sees best left to the guardians of Communist ideology. He graduated from that college in 1976, after studying politics and economics.

The central political and economic decisions that affect the country, Hoanh sees as socialism. They are an indication of a practical response to the urgent need of Vietnam to engage what the rest of the world is doing. It is interesting that he and other officials I have met see this economic development as a means to strengthen socialism, not to adapt to Capitalism at all. They see socialism as being assisted by Capitalism.

Hoanh sees no corruption in Danang. The views he shared with me about pay-offs and bribes and the creative use of funds all indicated his conviction that this would be occur in any country. He avoids direct questions about the subject and shows more than a bit of irritation when he thinks comments might hint that his behavior possibly is even indirectly questioned.

Officials who personally benefit from corrupt practices have sometimes been arrested for the harm they do to Vietnam. Some have been executed. He is merely concerned that Vietnam ultimately benefits. This may be seen by some as unfortunate, unfortunate because it serves to present the foreigner who wants to help Vietnam a confusing and difficult arena in which many choose not to help.

Taking this seeming contradiction too seriously removes the reality from the relationship. There is more than one

agenda operating all the time. That is the challenge in such arrangements. Some might find his perspective and behavior a fascinating test of skill and understanding. Most officials in Vietnam in Danang or elsewhere will make foreigners' involvement a productive experience but without the special diversion so colorful a character provides.

Mr. Hoanh and Mr. Sau took me out for two dinners in July 2001. "We want you to benefit from food you can only eat in Vietnam. Each will help you." The first meal was in a small restaurant in a winding alley near the program house. It was a meal of cobra.

This six foot long snake was killed at the table with a knife. Its heart was carefully removed and gingerly placed in a bowl in front of me. My hosts smiled and asked me to swallow the still-beating heart. I have never eaten anything that was still alive. The sight of the small cobra heart still beating in my bowl did not exactly excite my appetite. After a few moments of telling silence, the waiters in the restaurant wandered to our table. A small crowd stood looking at me. I sat looking at the beating heart and took another drink of beer. I thought, "I can do this, and I can do this with a smile." I lifted the bowl and swallowed. It beat all the way down. The crowd cheered and toasted me. The toasts were not with beer. They were with the blood and bile of the cobra.

The next meal was both whole swallows and cookoos, heads and all. Exotic as they were, the cobra heart meal could not be topped. Mr. Hoanh still talks about my having two hearts. Developing and maintaining professional relationships in Vietnam does require tolerance and flexibility. Even meals require interpretation. The cobra was significant.

The significance was not lost even when problems had to be resolved. Mr. Hoanh once called a meeting with the

program's students and My Hoa. The meeting was to thank the students for their participation in assisting in teaching English in Danang for the semester. I asked why I was not invited to attend a meeting at which the program was to be thanked. She said she was told it was not necessary. This was not an oversight. It was testing control of the program. I responded to this with a memorandum that questioned whether our students could continue to teach in the following semesters. The reaction to this was an invitation to a family dinner at Hoanh's home the next afternoon. It was a pleasant meal with much alcohol (a requirement at many gatherings) and toasts with an alcoholic drink made with wine and cobra. The symbolism was obvious. We had made amends and regained some harmony and balance.

The program continues to meet mutual needs. Danang has its "American program". SUNY has its unique study abroad program. The Vietnamese people in Danang have an opportunity to interact with Americans in a way they normally would not. The places the students provide services have an exciting resource in the students. The American students have an opportunity to grow and learn in a unique educational experience in a place too many Americans still identify with a war.

It is satisfying to see the daily interaction and the development of friendships between American and Vietnamese young adults, all of whom were born after the war. The walls of history that separate people do not exist for them, and any reservation by others who still struggle with understanding the war is puzzling for them. The opportunities to enjoy friendship have only the obstacles of language and culture. These are much less stressful for them to overcome and are not dramatically different for them than such things are between

any two peoples. The resolution of these is tackled with laughter.

One student was so overwhelmed with the uniqueness of Vietnam that she asked, "How do they make milk here?" The Vietnamese she asked pointed out the window at a cow grazing next door. She blushed.

A student enthusiastically asked on a drive in the rural areas near Danang, "What do they grow in those rice paddies?"

A student from Iowa joked about opening a Karaoke café in the program house reception room. She stood and shouted out a song until she saw a crowd of neighbors laughing outside the open window next to her.

Laughter, however, is not always the reaction to studying in Vietnam. The SUNY Brockport Vietnam Program, as rewarding as it may be, is a difficult program. Students take their classroom courses in the mornings, provide community services during the afternoons, and assist in teaching English during several evenings each week. Some community service may take place on weekends, and educational trips often are given on weekends. The adjustment of American students to Vietnam is a demanding and difficult experience in itself.

This adjustment was made easier by the six person program staff. My Hoa was the leader of an incredibly dedicated and insightful group of Vietnamese who took on the task of educating, parenting, and caring for American university students who were dealing with a unique educational program. The staff understood the mistakes in etiquette and the homesickness the students occasionally experienced.

Some of the students find it difficult to adjust to living in a society where the culture, political system, and living conditions are dramatically different from their own. Americans not only

question but also might even reject monitored mobility, regulated speech, certain expectations about manners, and even the different diet. Vietnamese cuisine is among the best food in the world but does not include cheeseburgers and pizza. One of the students just refused to use chopsticks. Another refused to believe that he could not go anywhere he pleased in Vietnam without approval from the authorities, even when told by the authorities. Another felt she had come with more knowledge of the nation than her instructors had. Still another seemed oblivious to the effect her insensitive comments about Communism had on the Vietnamese around her.

These are not unusual examples (with translation, of course) for teachers in any nation to recount about students in any course or educational program. Most of the students came more open to the process of learning and benefited from the immersion in a country with a unique way of seeing reality and a distinctive approach to life.

One student, in addition to her time consuming schedule, volunteered to work with disabled children at a local school. A few tutored English for new friends. One saved money after she returned to America and sent money to buy a bicycle and other gifts for neighborhood children. Others used the program bicycles to wander about Danang daily not only to experience the city but also to make new friends, especially when the bicycles would break down. They grew during their semester in Danang because of their experience.

Leaving to go home was always difficult for the students. The students from one semester were at the Danang airport preparing to leave. They were surrounded by the program staff members, a few friends they had made, and a group of children they had helped during their stay. All were crying, students and Vietnamese, when there was a clap of thunder and

the skies opened up with a heavy rain. One of the American students remarked at that moment, "When you leave Danang, even the heavens cry."

My Hoa visited SUNY Brockport for one month of training in October 2000. I did not know how earth shaking that visit would become. She brought with her a marble plaque as a gift from the Friendship Union. Etched on the plaque was a picture of Chairman An and me signing the program agreement. My Hoa said, "Mr. Hoanh wanted me to tell you that stone is very strong and will last forever." This statement has become more than it was intended to be.

We might hope a program that accomplishes what this one does could last forever, but we all knew this was not possible. Stone is a good symbol of a long lasting relationship, but it cannot represent the essence of a professional relationship that is inextricably linked with personal change.

The students changed during their experience. The more open they were, the more they benefited. I also changed. My family was not oblivious to this.

When I returned from one of my trips with students to Danang in February 2001, my wife remarked that something was different about me. This was echoed by my department Chair at SUNY Brockport. I knew this was true, but I did not know what was happening.

When preparing to leave at the end of each of the many visits I had made to Vietnam, I always had mixed feelings. While a part of me was hesitant to leave Danang, another part could not wait to return home to America. February 2001 was different. I did not want to leave. The night before leaving, I was sitting outside our program house, attempting to understand these emotions. A boy about four years old whom I had not seen before stood at a distance, looking at me. He

slowly approached and smiled. The child reached out, stroked my beard, leaned over, and kissed my cheek. Then, he waved and walked away. I wiped away a tear and knew something did not want me to leave Vietnam. Where was my home?

I fought these feelings after my return. They made no sense to me. My family was in America. We were a relatively happy crew, living in a tiny hamlet near Buffalo. My career was fully developed and secure. I had two mortgages, sizeable credit card bills, and every financial reason any American could have not to entertain any change in income. I also had a three year old, older children, and a wife who loved me and supported my work, even when she and the children were not the focus of my activities. Kathy was concerned, and I was confused.

The ensuing months were spent discussing this with anyone who would listen. I bored them all, but I needed some clarification for myself. I had always found answers in weighing others' opinions. My wife and I spent months of tension-filled and emotional hours, as she tried to find her place in all of this and some answers about what I was going to do. I just did not know. I did know that I needed to understand why I seemed ready to move to Danang.

I felt interrogated, and Kathy felt lost. I could not help her with this and tried to shout to her and the world, "I don't know what is happening. All I know is that I have to go back to Nam." I tried to avoid her and the constant questions I could not answer. It was not that I did not understand the implications for her and the children. These occupied me constantly. I told her this. All I had to offer her was more confusion. I could not answer questions for her when I had no answers for myself. Home became hell for both of us.

Exploring options always seemed a reasonable method of solving dilemmas. I could avoid feelings by intellectualizing

with the best academics. It drove others as crazy as it did me. I met with John Perry to do this, not only because he was in charge of international programs at the college but also because I respected his opinion. I had thought about retiring and moving to Danang to find some way of continuing to reinforce the bridge we had been building and to help the people we were helping.

John suggested I not take the drastic step of retiring but, instead, move to Vietnam as Resident Director for two semesters. This would strengthen our program and would afford me the opportunity to sort through what was happening to me. I accepted the offer and returned to Danang in May 2001 with plans to make my decision about the future before the end of December.

My wife was convinced she would never see me again. Still, she encouraged me to go. She said that I should go because I had never really returned. Her only fear was she would not be able to say goodbye. My children saw me leaving on another trip for work. Some of my friends thought the move was just another of my causes; others realized the enormity of this. My colleagues merely wanted to know who would get my office and who would have to teach my courses. I was excited about the possibilities. I did plan to return in August for two weeks and December to assess what had happened during the two semesters. This had to be resolved in some way.

In July, my wife came to Danang with two of the children. That cancelled my plans to visit America in August, but it also opened the door to encounters between the two of us about what I would do. Nighttime arguments probably entertained my neighbors who surely wished their English understanding had been better. There were what seemed like continual examinations and discussions of this same issue by the both of

us. I tried to explain that the decision did not seem to be mine at all. She tried to explain she understood that. We were both arguing the same thing. Words were just not adequate.

Events and relationships seemed to dictate what was happening. The college was not excited about funding my work beyond December, and this raised uncertainty. A decision to stay, therefore, might require retiring and finding employment that would continue my work in Danang. Yet, the decision did not depend on money.

Children and their needs are crucial to any family decision. This was my wife's first visit to Vietnam, and her experience was not an average vacation. She saw the tourist sites. She also worked alongside the students at the leper colony and garbage dump. She came to know my neighbors and the program staff. She met government officials with whom I had exchanged fire during the war. She experienced the smells and heat of Danang.

We had decisions to make, and no matter how hard I tried, I was less than helpful. She had entered what had become my world, and I did not know how to handle this. The children enjoyed this unique several weeks in Vietnam. The question was whether or not it would make sense for the family to move to Danang. The lack of adequate schools, the high levels of dioxin, their being novelties in Danang which had so few foreigners, and other factors resulted in agreement that it would not be responsible to move them from their friends and neighborhood half way around the world to join their father's madness.

I might have been expected to encourage them to stay with me, but I could not do that. Night after night during their visit, this tore at me. The needs of my wife and the children and my love for them and theirs for me were always

compared to what I might do in Vietnam. The culture I had left was always compared to the culture I had joined. Even this developing book manuscript became a shared means of examination of what was happening. This painful process ended with Kathy leaving me this letter:

Dear Ken,

I have tried to tell you I do understand, and I agree with all that I can feel being done. I try to convey to you I do understand that this is an opening, not a closing or even a beginning or an ending. The closest I can come to explaining this is calling it a continuum. The effects and impacts are enormous, not just tangibly but in the spectrums available only to the heart. Not hearts, Ken, heart. The one that all humans have the potential to be..... Ken, I know my tears frustrate you, you take them as some kind of pain. They are simply a releasing of the pressures of my heart. I can't explain my heart—it feels too many things.....So, you do what ever can be done and even if it only means something for a moment, that moment is there and that changes—you, the other person, whomever, something was changed and made a difference. The fruits of labors are not always apparent in the answers that we see or perceive, as I said to you before, Ken, I see people sway toward you on the street—pulled to something inside of you and inside of them, too—smiles in passing that don't require any acknowledgment from you—it is simply a recognition of a shared heart—and for that second, that heart is known, to someone somewhere. That IS what I see in you, hold and cherish of you and encourage—hopefully in all of us. So, let my tears be, just be. If you are there when they fall and you can just hold me, do so. There is movement in that too. So, do we

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know what tomorrow holds, if and if or if—nope. That is good too; otherwise, maybe we just wouldn't be doing anything, what would be the point?

Always and all ways,

Kathy

PS Most of all, I hope you find it for yourself.

She told me this in a goodbye letter, and she left Vietnam in August 2001. Her plans were to meet with a lawyer to discuss our options. After Kathy and the kids left, I was straightening out the kitchen and found a jotting from her thoughts. She is a prolific poet. Kathy is an unusual person who has found central meanings in events. Some might find her mix as a mother, nurse, social worker, poet, and wife peculiar. Most recognize her as a thoughtful and insightful woman. Her note may have been for me. It read, "It's not being faithful to one or the other but, rather, a matter of not being unfaithful to either."

Not many women would have tolerated their husband having a love affair with 80,000,000 people. I did not know what to do about this conflict, but I did know even the thought of ending the affair made me wonder about whether or not the ending would merely make me miserable. A decision either way would cause harm. Was it obligation that made it difficult for me to decide to leave America? Was it irresponsible? Was the guilt the nuns had implanted in my brain when I was a child making a simple decision more complicated? They were the Sisters of Mercy. Where was the mercy? I do know there were nights alone during this struggle of decision when I laughed at myself for my own inability to see the obvious.

I returned to my daily routine in Danang. An hour after

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Kathy had left, I met with a little girl whom we were helping with medical care for a seizure disorder to discuss with her and her mother the girl having begun second grade in school the day before. Her mother cried with joy.

I wondered about what I had lost and what I had gained. I had no answer. There are no priorities in this situation. There are just things to do and no time to discuss them. To many, this may appear irrational. I suppose it is. This entails losses and gains. The yin and the yang. It is all a blend of tears and smiles. It is Vietnam.

The agreement may have been etched in stone. Nothing else was.

7.

A LEGLESS VET AND THE FUTURE OF
VIETNAM

“Wisdom comes from ignorance.”

- Anonymous, *“Words to be Engraved on One’s Seat”*

Vietnam’s past haunts the nation. It may be seen in the experience of one man who lost his legs in the war, an intriguing man whose history is in some ways the history of modern Vietnam, or it may be seen in the hesitation in forming national policy changes that are necessary if Vietnam accepts global interdependence.

The haunting past, however, cannot hide the fact that Vietnam is changing. These changes may have a dramatic impact on this nation, far greater than the wars of the 20th century. A hotel manager in Danang suggested that those who want to see Vietnam must do so in the next ten years. He suggested that it will disappear in economic and social change in the coming decade. This may be taken as a promise of growth and improvement, or it may signal the end of the unique presentation of a people and a society. It might also foretell a worsening of social conditions.

The inevitability of globalization and its concomitant effects on society do not mean that the special identity carried by Vietnam’s people will diminish to the point of meaninglessness. That which is at the core of Vietnam and its people, however difficult it may be to identify, seems oblivious to external influence or internal readjustments. I am not.

These core identity factors include nationalism, philosophical/religious beliefs and practices, and cultural pride. There, of course, are other (perhaps, endless) important factors. Family, village, and traditional practices are major ones. These are the expression of core identity factors but also are subject to changes from within and from without.

The Confusion rules for family structure and behavior are observably and, often in a glaring way, changing in the metropolitan life of such places as Ho Chi Minh City. They are elsewhere, too, but often in more subtle ways. Growing affluence, non-Vietnamese influences, employment schedules, two-parent working families, marriages, other relationships between Vietnamese and foreigners, and the increased influx of information identified earlier are contributing to changes in the ways families function and the interaction of family members. This observation made me wonder about the influence I and others like me might have on Vietnam.

One of our American students met a woman who was a Vietnamese university student during his semester in our program. While this was a daily occurrence, it became an unusual situation. They continued to correspond after he had left. He visited Danang a couple of times during the following year. In July 2001, I represented his father and My Hoa represented his mother at the traditional and elaborate Engagement Ceremony that took place at the young woman's family home. The staff and students represented the alumnus' family. The party that follows such ceremonies for the two families took place at my home in Danang.

The woman's father, at first, had refused to permit any relationship with a foreigner. He finally relented, and the happy couple began the integration of two cultures and two peoples through their love, a relationship that represented

the changes that are becoming more acceptable in Vietnam. I suppose it was a further example of the unusual nature of the SUNY Brockport Vietnam Program.

It made me think about this yin and yang process and its effect on my own family. Love both brings cultures and relationships together and causes separations. It was separating me from my family while it was drawing me to a nation.

The emphasis on education and the value placed on university education expose Vietnamese youth to alternatives not previously entertained. A similar honoring of education throughout much of the history of Vietnam was because of the value placed on literature, philosophy, and the internal value of Vietnam or its immediate neighbors (especially China). This scholarship was focused on self-improvement or the refinement of long-held and cherished beliefs.

The age of information technology, the ability to travel between nations quickly, the common travel for study and business, the introduction of not only foreigners but also foreign ideas and foreign cultural standards now influence the roles education plays in Vietnam. There is a need for youth to engage these influences and to interact constructively with these influences. They cannot just be ignored. Yet, conflicts between what was and what might be still exist.

I met a woman between Danang and Hue who reflects these conflicts. She was one of the countless numbers of women who sell souvenirs and post cards to try to earn a subsistence income. The woman was about twenty-five and wore old clothes and a straw conical hat. She wandered from person to person selling her wares.

The woman was fluent in English. She graduated from the university in Hue with a degree in English and quickly found a job as a secretary and a career with a foreign company in that

city. While working, she met a man, fell in love, and married. Then, as is still traditional for many, she moved in with her husband's family for three years to care for his mother. Her role was basically that of a servant.

The man and his mother required that she resign from her job and end her career with the company. After one year, she was told to return to work. Her old job was gone, and comparable employment could not be found. Her mother-in-law had friends who sold post cards and found the woman this job. It also afforded her the flexibility she needed to care for her mother-in-law.

"I must do this," she explained with a sad look. "Now I am pregnant. My child might have a different future." Then, she walked away to convince another customer to buy a souvenir or post card for twenty-five cents.

Although sad with what appears to be her destiny, she accepts this. Fate is seen as responsible for what she has become. She does not blame her husband or his mother. Like the Agent Orange victims, she blames fate.

The balance between the welfare of individuals within both the traditional and contemporary contexts of the welfare of society can often lead to confusion in what once was seen as the reliable valuing of family stability, even during war and past social disruption. The role of family as the source of identity does not need to change. The manner in which this is performed is changing. Attempting to resist this change may be seen as attempting to avoid the inevitable.

Systems theory provides for both maintenance and the healthy acceptance of change. It recognizes that change is constant, inevitable, and dynamic. Vietnam is not immune to this. Nobody is. Neither am I.

Village life was once as predictable as family. It provided

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the context for family. When the context changes in society, the content either cooperates or resists; however, the context is always evolving. The content will also change. Thus, there is a need for continual readjustment.

Villages changed political structure with the advent of the Communist government. Social structure has changed with urbanization; the introduction of public works projects and new industries; and the availability of electricity and telecommunications, even in rural mountain villages.

People are exposed to options never before known. Options result in people making choices that either threaten or preserve a previously predictable world in a manner that preserves the cultural standards that have served the Vietnamese well. I wondered if my choice to stay or leave would serve anyone well. I was no longer sure what standards I was using or what the options really meant.

Truong Van Tuan is my Program Secretary in Danang. He has been a member of the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth League for years and energetically approaches learning and challenges. He has earned university degrees and almost intuitively picks up new skills. Tuan is unabashedly conservative and also follows his Buddhist heritage faithfully. He recognizes not merely the need to preserve culture but also to support education for the generations that follow. He graduated from high school in 1992. He and some of his classmates support scholarship programs for others at this high school. They donate some of their limited income not merely to support individuals but also to improve the quality of their community and the future of their nation.

Traditional practices are either easily preserved or difficult to preserve in this state of social adjustment. Practices during holidays and festivals are generally maintained, but this is

not always possible when family members must work or are unable to travel. The traditional three year grieving period for a woman after the death of a husband before being able to remarry often is still observed. Grieving periods after a family member's death are often adjusted for employment.

Arranged marriages are becoming less common, but marriages for many often are primarily still between two families, not merely two persons. This, of course, is the opposite of what is the usual practice in America. Canceling a planned wedding may cause the parents to lose face, to experience serious embarrassment. After marriage, the couple is usually able to make their own decisions, apart from the parents. This is not always the case. Many stay in such marriages to please their parents. Yet, once married, the bride's allegiance changes from her own parents and family to those of her husband and his family. Since obligation to parents and family is at the root of Vietnamese culture, any change in related traditions is a major shift in relationships.

Not all marriages are happy, filled with love, and successful. About 20% of marriages end in divorce, many because of reasons similar to what leads to divorce in America. These are similar to what ended my first marriage. After divorce, it is often difficult for the woman to remarry because of the value many men place on virginity at marriage. Some of this is also changing, as the rate of divorce increases and it becomes increasingly socially acceptable. Associated practices, such as the bride moving into the groom's family's home, are increasingly ignored. As can be seen with the woman I met between Danang and Hue, the traditional approach to marriage still exists between families for many.

Simple manners between parents and children seem less strict. As a friend told me, "When I was a kid in school about

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ten years ago, I would have to stand in front of my parents, cross my arms across my chest, and bow low. This was showing respect. I did this every morning before I left for school and every afternoon when I would return from school. Kids don't do that much any more. I'm not sure all parents know when their kids leave and when they come home." He was not happy about this change.

This is not a society losing its identity or even seeing its heritage sacrificed on the altar of modernity. It is merely a society like all societies that are readjusting to a world from which it knows it cannot hide. There are consequences to any level of global interaction. There is more than interaction, and the interdependence of economies is necessitating a certain integration. This involves much more than trade, the movement of factories across national borders, and international banking. It has ramifications far beyond the impact of the IMF and the World Bank.

Children born in Vietnam today will know much of what will not change. However, much that they will experience when they become adults and what their children will know will be dissimilar from what their parents knew and once presumed was destined to exist for another 4,000 years. This is understandable in an age when the world increases its knowledge and the communication of this knowledge at a speed never anticipated even a few years ago.

These changes also are of concern to the government of Vietnam. 28 June 2001 was the first Vietnamese Family Day, a new annual festival established to bring people's attention to family values and the importance of family in Vietnamese culture and tradition. It seemed more than ironic that the festival began the year I had left my family.

There is more public discussion permitted about differing

views of economics and the political system. Religious freedom is enjoyed when it does not interfere with the state. Some religious groups persist in trying to convert new members. Others refuse to follow state regulations. These groups are subject to state investigation. One Buddhist sect persists in such activities. A monk from this sect burned himself to death in Danang in September 2001 as a protest. There is a history in Vietnam of religions forming armies and overthrowing or trying to overthrow governments; thus, the government control. However, temples and churches are still filled with worshippers.

Western music is heard everywhere. Rock stars and movie stars idolized in America and Europe are equally idolized by Vietnamese youth. There has been a dual pricing system in Vietnam that has charged foreigners more for everything from airplane tickets to hotel rooms. This is beginning to end. Other changes are inevitable.

Within this climate of change is the world of politics. In the United States, there is competition for investment in states and communities. Politicians are often reelected based on their ability to entice corporations to relocate to their communities in order to create jobs and to strengthen the economic base of the community. Vietnam has made great strides forward economically since the war and *doi moi*. There are communities that seem to be left behind in such progress. Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City have made great progress. The aluminum and glass office buildings bear witness to this progress, even if some have been empty for some time. Other cities and areas of Vietnam reflect a different story.

Many rural areas of Vietnam now have electricity, roads, and often even telephones and televisions. For those of us who remember the 1960s, this is unbelievable progress. The

reality is that most of the population of Vietnam is employed in agriculture. They are still using water buffalo to grow rice. They are still impoverished and in need of schools and clinics. Hiep Duc District now has about 60,000 people in its remote valley and hills. Only thirty of its youth have attended the university. Few of them return to a valley with no jobs and little prospect for any economic development. The poverty in the cities is obvious to those who look for it, but the beggars will find you if you miss it. The Khanh Son garbage dump still continues to provide a depressing existence for the victims of the extreme poverty. It and other places are home for children who have no dreams.

As the two large cities in Vietnam have at least tripled their populations since the war and have begun economic development, others wait for this to happen. Hanoi is in the north. Ho Chi Minh City is in the south. Danang sits four hundred miles between them both. This capital of Central Vietnam seems to have been neglected in the efforts of Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City to engage in economic development. This has not been acknowledged by any official with whom I have spoken in Vietnam.

During a meeting with the leader of the Vietnam-USA Society in Hanoi, the agency that directs all similar organizations throughout Vietnam that partner with foreign organizations like our university, I was asked if I would relocate our program from Danang to Hanoi. I was told that we would receive preferential treatment in being given any permit we wished and support not available in Danang. I politely refused and noted that we were committed to staying in Danang. After the meeting, I was told I was the first to refuse such an offer. Danang is the victim of seeming competition among cities and provinces throughout Vietnam. It is not the only victim of this, but the effect is apparent to even the casual observer.

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Danang is representative of what has happened during the unequal development of Vietnam. It and Quang Nam Province were one political entity until the late 1990s. They, then, were separated. Quang Nam, one of the poorest provinces in the country, was seen by some as inhibiting the development of Danang, a city with a population variably estimated between 300,000 and 800,000. Yet, Quang Nam includes the city of Hoi An, a popular tourist attraction and ancient Chinese port town.

Danang was the scene of the initial infusion of U.S. troops when the war escalated in the middle 1960s. It was an important seaside and trading city for hundreds of years. Its port was improved with the American military presence, and the airport that was built has the potential to be one of the largest in Asia. However, the excellent port lacks the busy frenzy of most in Asia, and the airport has just begun to accept a few international flights weekly.

The French have been assisting in developing and maintaining a water supply that is chlorinated but not potable. Problems with this water supply are periodic. In June 2001, salt water backed into the water source, and only 60% of the city's residents had relatively safe water. Bottled water supplies were at a premium. No massive aluminum or glass office buildings are to be found in Danang. The tallest hotel has ten floors.

There are few foreign corporations with a presence, and our's is the only American educational program in the city. Two universities are providing an excellent resource for both the city and the region. The Danang People's Committee and other government agencies work diligently to meet the needs of their community, with too few assets other than the industrious and friendly people of Danang. My presence as the token American seemed to have some importance in keeping

hope alive. I was also an occasional resource as an intermediary in guiding those interested in doing business in Danang.

I met with Nguyen Hoang Long, one of the three Vice-Chairmen of the Danang People's Committee, the ruling body of the city. Vice-Chairman Long is a pleasant fifty-seven year old political leader who was a high school teacher and Chairman of the Department of Education in Danang. He has served in his leadership position since 1994.

Long chooses his words carefully and speaks about friendship and understanding, as all leaders in Vietnam do when interacting with foreigners. He also reflects the honesty of Vietnamese leaders in answering questions and sharing his own views. Long and I have met frequently, only once formally when I met with officials when proposing our program in Danang in 1999.

During one informal discussion two years later, he spoke clearly about Vietnam and Americans. He also shared that he thinks competition is too strong a word. "There is no real competition between different places in Vietnam. Different cities and provinces like to attract projects and business. It is merely the law of supply and demand." This Capitalist economic rule referred to by a Communist leader may sound more enigmatic than it is. Long continued, "Capitalism develops as it exploits. Socialism does not. It opposes such exploitation. The process of economic growth in Vietnam today has the support of the people. We are still entering a market economy, and this requires certain adjustments and patience. We understand the risks."

He used an interesting metaphor. "The war now is economic. It's a different kind of war. The economy is our present battlefield. Each country has its own way of waging this war. Our concern is developing our country. We know

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the challenges and sacrifice of war better than any nation. We will do what we have to do to develop our country. We are committed to a market economy, and we have no fear of American business." Long added, "I hope America will help Vietnam have a good economy. Americans were once uninvited guests. They are now invited. We have only had diplomatic relations with your country for a few years. It may be too early for American corporations to make large investments here. They will, in time. We want to avoid any war, even an economic one. The essence of our government is to avoid any exploitation, but in the transitional economic period in which we find ourselves, we must tolerate some exploitation. Our government will certainly control and limit this."

He alluded to the trade agreement between the United States and Vietnam. "There have been problems with the agreement. When that is approved, our relationship will improve even more." The agreement merely creates a normal trade relationship between the two countries. This has never existed. Vietnamese markets and stores are filled with products made in America. American stores rarely have any products made in Vietnam. Long was aware of this inequity and confidently expressed his hope this lack of balance will end soon.

Long has extensive experience interacting with Americans and has visited the United States twice. He has accepted delegations from American NGOs, religious groups, business representatives, politicians, and government officials. He noted, "There are angels and devils in all countries."

His response to warnings from the government in Hanoi to beware of possible CIA activity was, "We merely have to be cautious. America has interfered in countries around the world. We are not afraid. Our caution is normal." Long expressed the

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same cautiousness regarding the activities of any Americans in Vietnam. This balanced his praise of the Americans he has met who come to help Vietnam and who appreciate cultural differences.

He did not fight in the war but taught school and attended the university during the conflict. He was candid in explaining, "I was not a soldier and cannot fully understand the experience of people who were in that situation who lost families. It is not easy for them to forget. We put the past behind us and focus on the present and future. That does not mean we forget the past. We learn from the past and avoid past mistakes. History is preparation for the future. We were victims of the war. We will not be victims again. We paid too much in the past." It was clear from Long that he believes Vietnam has the confidence to win this economic war. International events sometimes confuse this situation.

When terrorists attacked America on 11 September 2001, the Vietnamese government and its people did not hesitate to express their sympathy and support. A leper at Hoa Van Leper Village shared his sympathy with me. Government officials came to see me to express their concern and support. The program staff was very concerned about the welfare of the families and friends of those who were murdered by the terrorists. The news media in Vietnam also took a tact that saw Americans as undeserving victims. This, of course, is a nation that understands the cost of being attacked.

All of this occurred during a time that the U.S. House of Representatives had passed a bill as a condition of normal trade relations between the two nations and the opportunity for future aid for Vietnam. The bill that was passed was known as the Vietnam Human Rights Act.

The Vietnam Human Rights Act sought to impose

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American human rights standards on Vietnam. It would have allowed them to receive U.S. aid or trade with America only if they changed their laws, regulations, and practices. This was a blatant use of economic weapons to control another nation and its people.

A local government official in Danang asked me if I would express my opinion by writing an article about this legislation. I accepted the invitation. The next week the article was run in most newspapers in Vietnam and was followed by an interview on Voice of Vietnam, the government worldwide radio broadcast.

I pointed out in my statements that the politicians who proposed this legislation represented large constituencies of those who oppose anything the government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam does. I also stated that America might better applaud the progress Vietnam had made rather than condemn the problems it still faces.

The U.S. Senate finally ratified the trade bill without the so-called human rights restrictions in October 2001.

The fall of 2001 was a time of tragedy in America and for all Americans. It was difficult not to be with my family at this time, and I received countless communications that expressed fear and horror at what had happened and over what might happen. I did feel rather helpless, being exactly halfway around the world. My phone bill was huge, with calls made to Kathy. My emails were constant, when I could access the usually unstable Internet connection in Danang. The program's students felt equally stressed but also felt safe in Danang. Their new friends expressed understanding and support.

Vietnam was teaching America another lesson that my nation seemed to ignore. That nation had been victimized by American policy and force for decades, yet it offered its

support and concern for the American people. This was not merely expected diplomatic verbiage; it was genuine interest for the welfare of my people and the pain they were suffering. This outpouring of support was at the very time the U.S. government was turning its powerful economic guns on Vietnam and might better have approved normalized trade and given economic aid to secure a more firm friendship with a poor nation wanting to be our friend. Somehow, America seemed to find it difficult to take this opportunity. Washington preferred to slap the hands extended in friendship. Vietnam had become used to America doing this. It still was unable to understand the rejection.

Long's Assistant, Vo Van Thang, supports the Vice-Chairman's views. He went to America to earn his master's degree at Cornell University and returned to use this experience to engage the growth of Vietnam in an energetic and productive manner. Thang, by the way, earned a degree in Asian Studies at Cornell. I once mentioned that his choice of degrees was interesting and must have been less than difficult. He smiled.

His experience in America is valuable in a nation struggling to win its next war. The strategy is one of purposeful friendship. Thang translated for Long, "Our two countries are far apart. We have different cultures and, therefore, we see things differently. We have different political systems. Yet, our two countries just want to have peace and the opportunity to live well. I would like Americans to remember the words of Ho Chi Minh, 'Those in four oceans are all our friends.'"

There are foreign organizations that do support individual efforts to improve the quality of life. The Assembly of God World Relief from Australia implements specific programs for cleft palate operations and burn victims' medical care and

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other worthwhile activities when donors fund such activities. East Meets West Foundation from San Francisco builds an occasional clinic or school when their funding sources help. There are other organizations that do what they can to help with specific projects. The French fund a Street Children's Program.

All of this work is useful and praiseworthy. The many who live at the city dump and search for materials to sell benefit from rice given to them by such organizations. The poor who hold the potential of the region in their hands benefit. Not all of this activity, however, improves the status of Danang in the present economic competition that exists in Vietnam.

This beautiful city with an ancient history and incredible potential for development and prosperity is an apparent victim of far too few resources being reserved by its country's larger cities. Those are the traditional capitals of what were once North and South Vietnam. Danang hopes to compete by drawing tourists to its beautiful beaches and its two museums. The tourist books on Vietnam suggest it be used as a place to temporarily stay while visiting Hoi An, an ancient seaport and tourist Mecca fifteen miles south.

Central planning has long been an essential tool in socialist governments. Planning for the needs of almost 80,000,000 within the realities of Vietnam is quite a task. With the reintroduction of private enterprise and associated reforms still in progress, the difficult task becomes even more complex. It is probably understandable that there is this competition.

Vietnam has a record of accomplishments that has brought a nation from an endemic level of poverty to a stage of hope in the possibility of actual prosperity. If the government's past record of success keeps pace with present and future challenges, the inequity between provinces and cities might no

longer display such stark differences. This can be accomplished if developed nations participate with the goal of helping Vietnam rather than merely the self-aggrandizement that often epitomizes foreign investment. Altruistically driven foreign policy? Perhaps.

Sometimes we have to remind ourselves that foreign policy and national policy have effects on those who do not sit in conference rooms to negotiate. These are the people we have to remember when such agreements with macro-level ramifications are being completed. I began again to look at the people my decision to stay might affect and how they have affected me.

One of these is a military veteran in my neighborhood in Danang. He might be seen as just another combat veteran in a wheel chair. They live in all nations. His name is Nguyen Quang Hai. He is sixty-six years old but looks much older. He wears a floppy, old Army bush hat with a broad brim and a worn gray short-sleeved shirt. His short pants barely cover the two stumps with ghosts of legs lost in the war. When asked about his legs, his face distorts in anguish and he moans, "American." Scars on his hands and a serious hearing problem bear further witness to his experience.

His downcast look becomes a smile, and he stops his ever-present stare at the busy Danang traffic when we meet each day. Hai sells lottery tickets that cost 3,000 dong each (\$1.00 is worth about 14,700 Vietnamese dong). When I buy my daily lottery tickets, he shakes my hand and says, "Number one!" This was a verbal salute left over from America's occupation of his country. We usually stumble about in a shared frustration as we attempt to communicate each day, but communicate we do. Smiles always communicate. We survived the same war in the same general area at the same time. Neither of us volunteered.

Hai lives with his two sons in Danang. Both make a subsistence income as construction workers and survive from day to day with their wives and children. Hai was drafted into service and became a lieutenant with the Saigon regime's army. He lost his legs at Duc Pho in 1968 when mortared by the Viet Cong. Hai describes the day with tears. "It was very quiet, and we were very careful; then, the mortars and rifle fire began. We had walked into an ambush. I felt a terrible pain, fell, and saw most of my legs were gone. I'm not sure what happened then, but I remember men screaming and much confusion." He was taken out of battle by a U.S. helicopter and was eventually returned to his family, unable to work.

In 1975, Hai was not sent to a reeducation camp because of his disability. The former soldiers who fought alongside Americans were sent to these camps. Others who went to the camps had worked for the Americans or the Saigon regime. The estimates about the number who were kept in such facilities are uncertain. One estimate is that one of every twenty Vietnamese was kept for months or many years. I have spoken to many who experienced these camps. They were released once the state decided they were no longer a threat to civil and political stability and were committed to the success of the socialist state.

None of these former prisoners would discuss in detail their experience. One described his time there as "hard". Some speak of hunger and hard work. While this practice by the government at the end of the war was questioned by many, it was an alternative to what many thought would be a slaughter of those who opposed "the will of the people". The rumored bloodbath was feared by many who supported the Saigon regime and the Americans. It never happened.

In spite of his not having to be reeducated, Hai and his

family had many problems. They lived in abject poverty. He received no military pension because he fought the war on the losing side. In 1980, however, he was allowed to take a job selling lottery tickets, his occupation since then. He earns about 12,000 dong or 81 cents each day. He smiles when he remembers a customer who won the lottery and used some of the winnings to buy him the wheel chair he still uses.

A motorbike hit Hai shortly after I met him. The driver was forced by the police to pay for Hai's medical care while he was in the hospital. The police are sometimes also judge and jury. When the payments stopped, Hai had to pay 20,000 dong each week for medication, a fee he could not afford. I paid a small price by assuming this cost for the incredible smile I received as a reward from this fellow combat veteran. He served in a different army, but it was the same war. It would be a small price to pay for friendship between nations to assist those like Hai. Money is a small price to pay for friendship.

Hai is one of about 80,000,000 Vietnamese who do all they can to survive. Survive they will. Those who have the ability to help but choose not to would be well served to remember Hai. Most do not. He is a good man who asks for nothing. He is exactly why we must do what we can to help Vietnam. Governments engage diplomacy, negotiate agreements, and posture for votes and attention. Hai sits in his wheelchair in 99-degree heat, stares at traffic, remembers the terrible day so many years ago when he lost his legs, and sells lottery tickets to eat each day.

I first visited Vietnam from May 1968 to May 1969. That year in the U.S. Army planted the seeds that lay dormant for decades until my return in 1998. The seeds began to sprout that year and grew rapidly. The flowers in Danang seemed to envelop a spirit that was entranced not merely with the

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physical beauty of the place but also its tentative but inviting welcome. It was an awakening of a love for a place and people I did not know could exist, the discovery of a spirit that seemed somehow aware that it had captured my soul.

I did nothing to make this happen but did open myself to the process. This was not easy for me, was puzzling, and required giving up the controls I usually use in both personal and professional interactions. This was not only an opportunity to recover what was lost so many years ago but also to explore the essence of what had forced me to engage social change in so many causes in so many places.

I had spent thirty years described by my colleagues as "driven" in my work. Nothing seemed to me as important as those whose causes I tried to champion did. The victims of injustice seemed the heroes to me.

After moving to Vietnam, the cause of these heroic victims seems just as important (maybe, more so); however, I am no longer "driven". Instead, I have found a feeling of personal peace I thought I might never know. This is not some nirvana or illusion. It is a sense of balance and acceptance I have never known. The concern for others has not diminished at all. The use of self makes more sense. The focus has improved. Personal and professional limits are more easily understood, if not always acceptable. This is not a state of contentment, far from it.

Complex emotions tear at my heart every day, as do the emotions of my family and those I care about in Danang. Rather, it might be understood better as a mind dusting. The cobwebs have been swept away. This is not an escape from reality, merely redefining reality. Perhaps, it finally is discovering reality in a land that once seemed unreal. Vice-Chairman Long said, "Americans come to Vietnam. Some learn about its culture and traditions. When they listen, they learn."

He is an educator and knows learning results in growth and change. Even the word "educate" means to lead out, to lead out of ignorance. He may have been saying more than he realized when he spoke about people who come to Vietnam learning when they are willing to listen.

This growth and change process is complex, and the personal peace and focus to be found are not without its price. My four-year-old son Jimmy asked me a question when he, his brother Joey, and Kathy were leaving me and were on the way to the airport in Danang. They were returning to America at the end of their visit to Vietnam. His mother and I had spent weeks trading blows about my decision to stay or return. "Daddy, will you be home for Christmas?" The question brought tears to my eyes. Jimmy always found "Vietnam" difficult to pronounce. He called it "Me 'n Mom". He never found it difficult to hold on to my heart.

My journey was not merely a spiritual search. It clearly was much more, but at what price? Was this worth the cost both to my family and to me? Answers to options often come by chance. Unfortunately, they do not always clarify. Sometimes they confuse even more.

A group of the program's students spent a few hours at a seminar in my home in Danang one afternoon. The next day they were to meet with two women in Danang who lost their husband or sons during the war, called "Hero Mothers" in Vietnam. This is an annual event in that nation. People visit these mothers once each year, give them gifts, and spend time talking with them. As part of the preparation for this, the students watched the documentary "Regret to Inform" and had the opportunity to discuss it. Barbara Sonneborn's documentary is about her trip to the place where her husband died in Vietnam (Que Son, the place I had honored war dead

in January 2001) and the effect the war had on other women, American and Vietnamese who lost family members in the war.

I shared the peace to be strengthened that was discussed in the documentary was not just the avoidance of war but also an inner peace that we might bring to others. That inner peace comes not from withdrawing from others or others' pain but rather from joining with these; in fact, rushing toward their pain.

The students did visit the Hero Mothers. Many people visit these women on Memorial Day in Vietnam. The Friendship Union arranged for us to visit women no one else visits. It was a long ride to these homes.

The first mother was a ninety-year-old woman who lost her only son in 1967. She was a near skeleton, lying on a board in a small home belonging to her relatives. She could not hear me but stared with a slight smile as I talked with her and held her arm. We left a gift to help pay for her medical care.

The second was an eighty-nine year old woman who lost both her husband and her only son. This was a rather active woman with a mouth full of betel nut. She also listened intensely as I bowed my head and asked her to understand the concern we have for her and the respect we have for her sacrifice. I thought my comments were appropriate. When I finished, there was a moment of silence. Then, the woman said, "I couldn't hear him."

One of our students prepared a short message she wanted to read. The student began to read the message about her always having had difficulty understanding what her father who was a Vietnam veteran had experienced and now gaining an admiration also for what the Vietnamese had experienced. She stumbled on her words and burst into tears.

The Hero Mother stood with effort. Her relatives objected and asked her to sit. She glared at them and told them to listen. She said, "I once hated Americans for killing my husband and son. Too many years have passed for me to continue hating. There has been too much pain. It is now time to love each other as friends." I remembered the letter I received from Ngu's daughter with a similar message and wondered why governments could not understand such simple logic. It appears to make sense in any language.

When the students were leaving my home the night they attended the seminar to prepare to meet the Hero Mothers, a little girl was having a seizure at my front door. My Hoa and I provided some care. She was one of many children I had seen in the neighborhood, but I had not noticed anything unusual about her.

Tran Thi Hong Kieu was thirteen and looked more like eight years old. Kieu's mother explained that the child had a high fever and a coma with malaria when she was ten. Since then, she had experienced recurrent seizures, sometimes nine or ten each day. Kieu had little memory, stopped going to school when she was ten, could not write, and liked playing in water. She could read but could not understand what she read. She had a smile that lights the world and loved holding on to your arm and staring at your face.

The malaria that began the child's problems occurred when they were living in the Central Highlands. They left because of the rumored civil unrest funded by some Americans and moved to Danang. Her husband repairs bicycles, and they care for their six children. They had also cared for her mother until the elderly woman's death in 2000. They pay about \$5.40 each month for a small place to live.

She took Kieu to a hospital several months before I met

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them when the girl's condition worsened. East Meets West Foundation offered to spend about \$250.00 for the child's treatment. The hospital explained they were not sure they could help the girl. The foundation, then, said it would pay nothing. The mother used cheap, ineffective medicines when she could afford them. Her income was less than 80 cents each day, selling items on the street. Her husband usually made about the same.

I had our program van take her and her daughter home and arranged for the next day to take her to the Thanh Khe Clinic where our students provide services. I was sure we could pay the money needed for her care.

The clinic arranged for an evaluation, various tests, and a CAT scan. They first thought she had a brain tumor. Further tests ruled this out, and she was diagnosed with serious epilepsy resulting from malaria. The clinic and I cooperated in seeing Kieu would receive on going medical care and medication for the foreseeable future. The cost for all of this treatment was \$100.00 because of the relationship between our program and the clinic. Two weeks after beginning treatment, Kieu experienced two days without a seizure, the first in years. Eventually, the seizures were controlled. The doctors also reported she was finally gaining weight.

I came across the child and her mother three weeks later. Kieu rushed up and hugged me. Her mother smiled with tears in her eyes.

Eventually, we helped Kieu to enroll in a government school for the disabled. The program students were with the girl the first day she attended classes and heard her say, "I want to stay here. I love this school." It was very emotional. Kieu was just one child among millions. It was one success that might not have altered the future of Vietnam, but it did affect the future of one child.

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Kieu and her mother became occasional visitors to my home, just to let me know all was going well. Kathy and the children met Kieu.

One moves toward human challenges, not away from them. Ours is an educational program. This was a good lesson for the students.

All of this might end for me. I am inconsequential to Vietnam, but the decision does hold some consequence for that nation. It needs the commitment of foreigners if it is to make a relatively successful renewal. It needs the respect and support it gets from the few who join its ranks to help it accomplish what it needs to accomplish.

The personal cost of this is extreme, but so are the problems of Vietnam. Perhaps, individuals must pay an extreme price to do what must be done for these people.

The war may have contributed to all of this. It seems to me that the year during the war was insignificant to my attraction to Vietnam. I am not sure why, but what has happened to me probably would have happened anyway.

FINAL COMMENTS

"The great hive of humanity is breaking open with a great beating of wings and filling itself with new pollen and new nectar."

-Huy An, *"A Greeting to All Peoples"*

As we approached Hiep Duc in June 2001, we drove in an old white jeep. I sat in the back with My Hoa. Mr. Sau and my Program Secretary sat in the front. It was the usual long, bumpy ride on an oppressively hot and humid day. I looked ahead and saw the village. "We're here," I said. My secretary turned and looked at me. "Welcome home," he said.

The words were totally unexpected, and I fell back in my seat. "Welcome home" is a special phrase used in America to thank Vietnam War veterans for serving their country. When those in America who did not serve in the military greet a Vietnam veteran with this, the veteran is always overwhelmed.

The treatment of Vietnam veterans by many after they returned from the war left many of these men and women emotionally and physically devastated. Most of them were only nineteen years old when they fought the war. One month they were playing basketball and clumsily dating. The next they were trained to go to war. Soon they were crossing rice paddies, dodging rifle fire and mortars, and making life and

death decisions that in their worst nightmares they never envisioned having to make. When they might better have been deciding which college to attend, they were making split-second decisions about which people to kill, how to wash the blood of their friends off their own face, or how to survive one more night in hell. They often found it difficult to fit back into the society they had left to go fight a war nobody, except for American politicians, American corporations who profited from the war, and others who believed what they were told by the American government wanted.

After their return, they too often hid the fact that they had served in the war and too often refused to discuss their experience. They were not welcomed home. Many developed PTSD, and many continue in therapy to help them with this disorder.

Many veterans from the Liberation army also suffer PTSD. They suffered the same combat trauma as Americans, and often worse trauma. Two psychiatrists at a psychiatric hospital in Danang described for me their individual and group psychotherapy services and support groups for such victims of the war. This sounded similar to the services given American veterans. One difference between the two sides was that the Liberation forces were already home.

The returning American troops were stereotyped as violent and somehow damaged goods. I had experienced this, and, I suppose, I was evidence of this stereotype.

When I was drafted, I was a caseworker for a public foster care agency. Two weeks after returning home in May 1969, I went back to work at this social agency. The first day seemed as though I had never left. It seemed I had gone home one day, slept through the night, and returned to work the next morning. The war had just been a nightmare one night. There was a reminder of reality that first day.

I was escorted to the office where I was to be assigned. There were five other caseworkers in the room. One of the men said to me, "I understand you just got back from Vietnam." I nodded. He asked, "How many babies did you kill there?" It was like flipping a switch. I pulled him from his chair and began beating him. Others in the office pulled me off the man. I know I was more frightened of myself than he was of me. This violence never happened again. In fact, it had never happened before that incident. That was a typical "Welcome home."

A number of years after this, I was helping a number of Vietnam veterans near Buffalo who were trying to keep their local counseling center open. Funding from the Department of Veterans Affairs had stopped. Efforts to find private funding were fruitless. This effort received a lot of local media attention. My mother asked me during this period, "What is it with Vietnam veterans? Your father went to war, too. He never needed all this counseling. In those days, men went off to defend their country, came home, and raised their families. They weren't always whining. Why don't the Vietnam veterans just get over it? You were there, and it never bothers you." I attempted to answer but thought about what it was like playing catch in the backyard when I was a kid. The obvious never meant much in my family.

Now I was welcomed home by a Vietnamese; in fact, by a man who had lost two uncles who served as VC during the war. This was at the very place I had served so many years before. I was a bit shaken and was not sure how to respond but said, "Thank you."

America, too, might properly be embarrassed during these early years of reconciliation with Vietnam. Some hide their awkwardness with a rather blustery behavior. Others use humor. Some just refuse to participate. It might be more

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productive merely to own responsibility for what we have done and to avoid the mistakes of the past.

Are we really condemned to repeat history when we forget it? If so, it would be to our benefit to look closely at what has happened in Vietnam. It is to our benefit to experience reality through the thoughts and emotions of the people we once said we sought to liberate but ended up trying to dominate. No one dominates the Vietnamese, but we ignored history. Now is a moment when we have an opportunity to avoid repeating what happened in the past and to avoid using corporate balance sheets, as we did the M-16, to do this.

Because no one dominates the Vietnamese, real friendship and cooperation will have results that will benefit both nations. The yin and yang of history might produce harmony or might repeat the world-altering mistake from the past. We can make these choices.

In 1969, I was an uninvited and unwelcome visitor to Vietnam. Today I have to conclude that I am still in some ways an unwelcome visitor. It is not what the Vietnamese do that makes me feel unwelcome. The reception is different than it was. The words and flags have changed. There are even some who would like to welcome me, and they do in so many ways. I, however, am a foreigner, and foreigners are invaders, regardless of their purpose in that nation. This has been difficult for me to understand. It is just as difficult to admit.

It somehow does not matter what I do or how I do it. I still bring an unwanted influence to Vietnam and its people. Even the love I have for this place and its people represents an invasion of custom and tradition. It would require the Vietnamese to reject to some degree what and who they are to accept this love. It may be that this people can accept the less entangled friendship easier than the complications of love.

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I do not want that to happen, but it will happen as the nation becomes more involved in the global economy and the use of information technology. It may not be fair, but it is inevitable. Fate plays an obvious role in this.

I know these complexities create a situation in which I am truly alone in deciding how to use myself and what I will do. I created this circumstance. Much like loving one person, I have to do whatever I can to understand and act on that understanding for the benefit of that person.

I wonder how to walk away from Hiep Duc, Khanh Son, Mr. Hai, Hoa Van Leprosy Village, little Kieu, the Agent Orange victims, and the other people and places who have become so important to me.

The predictability of life in America was once comfortable. It now seems so shallow and trivial when compared with the reality of Vietnam. This does not trivialize the freedom and economic success of the United States. It does not minimize the genuine caring and generosity of Americans. It does recognize a rich source of diversity beyond our shores that we might better learn from and admire than reject offhand.

In August 2001, I was invited to attend a dance concert in Danang. An American group called "Kids First" was the first such group to perform in many years in Danang. These youth danced with Vietnamese youth. Each performed alone and with each other. The Americans danced to 1940s and 1950s jazz music, and the Vietnamese danced to thousand year old colorful folk music filled with symbolism. The conflict in depth, grace, and meaning was apparent to all. Chairman An and I represented Vietnam and America in signing a peace banner in front of the five hundred Danang youth who attended. Probably no one noticed my pushing too hard with the pen and tearing the banner. I am not a sophisticated dignitary.

The purpose of the concert was to bring together two cultures. The two cultures were jarringly different. One was confrontive and spiced with gymnastics, as they danced to cacophony. The other was happy, subtle, and seductive; as they danced to a whimsical melody. The concert was symbolic of a new age. The comparison of the frenzied jitterbug and a confrontive flirtatiousness with a charming and delicate dance celebrating harvests and family was both obvious and symbolic.

I wondered about what effect this new friendship with America would have on the substantive culture of Vietnam. This friendship is sought after by the Vietnamese for reasons I have described. My hope is it will not assign the dragon or harvest dances to history.

The youth dance concert did not have to remind me that I have a family in America. My family had just left for America. Should I return to them, to the life that was? Should I reject what I have become? Could I return and use what I have learned to help others? Would it be better for everyone that I stay? The dances personified the dilemma. This was not an easy decision. I wonder about my selfishness in all of this, and I wonder how much of this really is a decision over which I have total control or no control at all.

Aside from my personal role, changes are happening and will continue whether other foreigners like me come to Vietnam or not. This is inevitable.

The speed and direction of this change might determine the fate of this nation and its proud people. This speed and direction may be controlled. The inevitability of change cannot. The role of Americans in this process may partially decide the direction of this change, but it will require assuming responsibility for what we have done to this nation and its

people. They still live with the results of our chemical warfare, a needless war, the ensuing embargo, and our unbelievable attitude that they should do what we say.

The history of Vietnam is in some ways seen both as a series of invasions for thousands of years and the effects of these invasions. Although this is rather simplistic, these have always brought influences; some minor, some major, some cosmetic. All have contributed to what Vietnam is today.

What will happen now and in the future will happen in context. The context is a broad one. It will always include the past, even with the effort of the Vietnamese to focus on the present and the future. In a nation of ancestor worship and constant reminders of the war, maintaining this focus is sometimes difficult.

My own activity is rather insignificantly a part of this. I am only one person who plays a minor role in all of this. The playing of this role involves the uncertainty of so much that has changed in my life because of this place and its people. This involves an acceptance of a sort of aloneness. That feeling dates back to the war at Hiep Duc.

It was during the mornings there that I felt loneliness. The old village was coming to life at dawn. Most places in Vietnam today hear the roosters call about that time, even in the cities. A dog might bark. The streets and beaches are filled with people exercising.

When I was first at Hiep Duc, mornings were more like the moving of a shroud. I would be clearing my eyes from another long, mostly sleepless night. There was always some suspicious movement in the outlying area. Women, children, and the elderly would emerge from their plank and thatch houses. The smoke from small cooking fires would begin in a smothering way to hang over the hush of the enclave. An

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occasional South Vietnamese trooper would wander back from the sanitation side of the hill, hitching up his pants. I would search through a half-empty C-ration box for a packet of instant coffee, fill a metal cup with water, tear off a small piece of C4 explosive, and light it to heat the water. After this, I would check my M-16, as if sweat from the night before might have broken it.

A few small children would begin to wander toward me, looking for food. I would give them the remainder of the Cs, and they would run home. The mornings were always the same. There also was the sound of occasional rifle fire in the valley, sometimes much more, and sometimes much closer. I, at least, was at those times aware of others. It was usually quiet.

I wrestled with my thoughts at night in that valley. It was always different in the dark. Vigilance was part of the night. I would look carefully for any movement; listen for any unusual sound. The childhood fear of the dark assumed huge proportions. The goblins here were real and often used the cover of darkness to wreak havoc. It did not take much to make my heart race and muscles tighten, as instinct took control. I knew that the Vietnamese soldiers on the hill shared this. I was glad they did. It was in the morning that I shared nothing with anyone, aside from food. I sometimes had the fancy I was the only American fighting the war. The other hundreds of thousands often did not exist in my mind.

There are times I now think that way in Danang. In many ways, no one is alone there. The city is a noisy place with its thousands of motorbikes. The sounds of Vietnamese music and animated voices, however, provide a reassurance. These sounds are at the same time unusual and often unintelligible. That creates an odd feeling of being alone in a crowd, a felt alienation.

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This seems rather fitting, given the tendency in Vietnam to focus between life and death, sound and silence, heaven and earth. Between these states and places, we are alone with ourselves. Between my family and this nation, I am alone. The people in Danang know my name and face. They know what I do. We smile and greet each other wherever I go in that place.

I am still in between two worlds. The one world is predictable and responsible. My roles are clear. The other is surprising with a sense of urgency. Each is filled with people I love. Each provides a sense of fulfillment, support, and caring. Each deserves my total involvement and dedication.

When I was introduced at the dance concert, there was a murmur and applause. It is not I; it is what I seem to represent in Danang, a city in need of hope that others in the world care.

John Perry reminds me on occasion that our program is a study abroad program, not an international development organization. He is correct, but the Vietnamese see the presence of the State University of New York in Danang as international development. They see the presence of any foreign effort by individuals or organizations in Vietnam as development. The willingness to continue such a program is recognized as an accomplished by the government officials in Danang, and they are proud of this. Ending the program will be seen by SUNY as merely a supply and demand issue. Some programs come, and some programs go. Danang will see it as further evidence of the frustration of their effort to develop a city and a nation. I will see this as a tragic missed opportunity.

The Buddhist, Confucian, ancestor worship, and myth mixture of the Vietnamese belief system is much like this. The political aspect of the society is a part of this. Communism

provides a vehicle for political cohesiveness and identification. It has provided this for some of Vietnam for over fifty years and all of Vietnam for less than thirty years. There neither has been enough time to know its effects both on the redefinition of the Vietnamese people or the spiritual and social development that took 4,000 years to come into being.

Literature throughout its history has retained a fatalistic theme in which forces other than one's own will determine how a person will arrive at a certain destiny. I have come to experience that. The force of Communism also might be seen as the contemporary version of this.

The group exists for the welfare of the group, the state. The individual exists to be a member of the group. One's own will is of value only as it serves this political will. This yang is balanced by the yin, a yearning for self-actualization and happiness. Factors external to ourselves place us in the context where our self-actualization is restrained by the ill-defined will of the masses.

This is Vietnam today. Its heart and soul are the same as they were in Hiep Duc during the war. The flags and rhetoric are different. The politics are different. The spiritual and cultural themes are the same.

The consistent themes that seek to preserve this are the reasons Communism easily continues. The Vietnamese have restrained their individuality to meet the needs of family and village within their traditional belief system for countless generations, long before Ho Chi Minh and Communism. Their family and village have in many ways become the Socialist Republic of Vietnam today.

Americans are welcome to this village and may associate with this family. They can never become a full-fledged member, and they might have to leave their own world to take such a

tentative role. My own family might also lose in this process. They might also gain.

This is difficult for me because I am an American. Americans all have ancestors, too. Most came from Europe, Asia, Africa, or elsewhere. One becomes a full-fledged member of American society by action and choice. Some ethnic groups have difficulty integrating and assimilating themselves into the culture, but their history is different from what happened in Vietnam. Vietnam is not the proverbial melting pot of ethnic groups that America is by some social definitions.

My own history became inextricably linked with Vietnam at some point during the war. I am not sure exactly when that happened. There are still nights I talk alone as if I am interrogating myself. These monologues might be attempts to find lost memories of the war, information hidden in an odd amnesia. They are usually efforts to sort through my thoughts about love for my family and my love for Danang. These times are spent wrestling with ideas and emotions. I blush at myself during these times because the self-talks seem an embarrassing melodrama.

The struggle finds some peace in Danang, but the internal war has not disappeared. The madness is not simply guilt or a personal history. It is something else, something more complicated. I do not claim to understand it.

The cost to my family while I decided how to deal with Vietnam does tear at me, but I am not sure I had any choice. I wonder why I would leave my family in America. I wonder why Vietnam has drawn me into its culture and why the attraction is stronger than anything I had known before moving here. The change I see because of my program's presence, however, usually removes any doubt about the good that is being done here.

I suppose I will continue to look for whatever that something else might be, but I suggested earlier that the questions are more important. Some of these have been shared in this book. Others will probably never be asked in a way that they make any sense at all. Vietnam will not leave me, and I do not want it to leave it. I cannot leave my family, and Vietnam does not want to let go.

When my family left in August, I felt sick and could not eat. After working for a few hours, I slept for the rest of the day and engaged in one of those all-night monologues. The next day it continued. I had to reach a decision by December. By December, I thought, I might really be insane. It was not the mosquitoes, heat and humidity, or the looming aloneness. It was the between-ness.

I could not live with the uncertainty and the conflict this created for others and me. This did not seem fair either to my family or to the Vietnamese. It was not a choice I was making. It, too, had been made for me. I accepted this as fate.

When I left Hiep Duc in 1969, the work was not finished. The work in Danang also is not finished. The small circle of people who benefit from my staying here might justify staying. The small family at home might not. There was a certain ambivalence about foreigners in Danang, but I had grown to accept that. Funding seemed about to end, but I had been able to salvage programs in the past. Retiring from SUNY and continuing this work in some form was both inviting and uncomfortable. Achieving a balance between these yin and yang influences seemed dependent merely on making a choice.

I began to make arrangements to accomplish all that could be accomplished before December to ensure the work would continue, the bridge would be strong enough to support traffic in both directions. My wife had always supported the work I

had done in this program. Regardless of the problems in our relationship because of this work, she and a few others began to look for funding for the work begun here. She and I do love each other, and we share a concern for Danang. I began to meet with American corporations in Vietnam to seek support.

My Hoa was aware of this dilemma. She asked to talk with me one day. She told me that Kathy loved me deeply. She urged me to consider returning to America. She said, "Maybe, you can be just as helpful to Danang when you are in America. Maybe, more helpful." I asked if she believed this, and all she said was, "Your family loves you. You should be with them." I asked if she really believed the work I had begun could be continued from America, and she just looked away.

The phone calls between Kathy and me continued to explore both the decision and her goodbye letter when she had left in August. Sometimes the conversations were mutually supportive and sometimes they were heated. Sometimes we said the same things but did not hear each other. We did love each other, and I knew she understood both the value of my work and the problem it posed. She, too, had feelings and a life to lead.

There would be uncertainty for me in Vietnam or America. I hoped the small part of the bridge I helped build could be strengthened. How this would happen I did not know.

The evening of the Vietnamese-American dance concert I returned to my home. The rains were heavy, and the streets had begun to flood. The thunder and lightning were very dramatic. As I approached the door, I noticed something small hidden under a blanket. It was shivering, and I carefully lifted the blanket. My Hoa was with me and said, "What is it?" Peeking out was a small two-year old boy, trembling in the rain.

She went off to find his mother. I gave him a bottle

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of water and took him in from the rain to dry. I remember thinking that there are just too many little children trembling in the rain to walk away. If I stay, I might be able to help one more. I also remember thinking that I have a little boy in America.

I have done none of this work alone. The work that has been done has been in professional partnership between Vietnam and America. It has also been done in a personal partnership with people in Danang whom I have come to love and respect.

The child in the rain could be found in many places in the world, but I do not know them. I know him. Was even this fate speaking to me with the fear in a small child's eyes on a stormy night that had been spent with my Vietnamese friend and colleague at a concert that celebrated two cultures? Fate, perhaps. It may not have been very logical, but its very lack of logic began to make sense to me. This is Vietnam.

Was this all madness? I suppose, but I wonder what will happen tomorrow both to Vietnam and myself. The future? The world will change in one second. Imagine what can happen over time.

APPENDIX A
MESSAGE AT THE LIBERATION MONUMENT IN
QUANG NAM PROVINCE
-19 JANUARY 2001 -

I wish to convey my appreciation to the officials and citizens of this area of Quang Nam Province and those from Danang for welcoming me to this important and impressive symbol of Vietnam's national liberation. I understand the significance of this event, and I am grateful for this welcome so many years after I first came to this beautiful and important location in Vietnam.

It is an honor to pay tribute to the many whose courage, vision, and dream of peace and independence are represented by this Liberation Monument. I know their selfless and generous spirits smile as they see the fruits of their sacrifice have become the reality of a strong and dynamic Vietnam, a reality the world has come to recognize and respect. This valley has seen the heroic sacrifice of countless persons over many centuries. It has witnessed bravery difficult to understand fully, except by those who lived it. The mountains and rivers of this most beautiful land hold stories that are timeless. Bao Ninh reminds us that each person who is memorialized in a place like this also "...carried in his heart a separate war which in many ways was totally different, despite our common cause. We had different memories of people we'd known and of the war itself, and we had different destinies in the post-war years."

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He reminds us of the present when he writes, "...we are living the most beautiful lives we could ever have hoped for, because it is a life of peace."

It is this peace that has brought me back to Vietnam many times. It is this peace that has brought the youth of two peoples together in the SUNY Brockport Vietnam Program, a cooperative effort with the Danang Union of Friendship Organizations. This unique program is intended to provide a study abroad opportunity for American students and to build bridges of friendship and cooperation between two nations. It is more than this. That becomes clear when the youth of two peoples join together in harmony and learning, when former adversaries share a mission of reconciliation, when smiles replace the tears of the past, and when birth replaces death. This program will not undo the past, but it can in some small and symbolic way help build a future. After all, this program is the product of both Vietnamese patriots and American guests, a product of education and helping in a shared endeavor.

Our students have been privileged to study the glory of your history, the richness of your culture, the genius of your political system, and the beauty of your language. They also have assisted in the birth of a child, comforted at the time of death in a family, cared for the elderly, helped children in need, fed the hungry, and cared for the sick. These experiences have been gifts from your people to our youth. From this may develop a beautiful mural in action that portrays mutuality replacing adversity. This is a period of renewal and a time for righting past wrongs.

It is time that the glory of the sacrifice of so many in this now peaceful valley be recognized by an American, even if this American first came to Que Son and Hiep Duc when the world was a far different place than it is now. I'm not a

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very important man, and I am honored and humbled to do this today. I respectfully come here because of esteem for those represented by this monument, those whose courage was known to me, and the many families affected forever by what happened here. I've also come here to share hope where hope was once not commonly held. This is an opportunity to seek a balance between the past and the present, between lost relationships and new friendships, and between our diversity and that which we have in common.

Most Vietnamese were born after the sacrifices that took place in this valley. They enjoy peace, a developing society, and the potential to enhance the independence, freedom, and prosperity that were once goals and are now reality. Huy Can in 1969 aptly describes 2001 with: "The great hive of humanity is breaking open with a great beating of wings and filling itself with new pollen and new nectar." The youth of this community may change the world, just as those represented by this monument changed the world.

I look over this valley and remember what once was a very difficult period of time for both of our peoples. Singing birds, lush foliage, peaceful quiet, and smiling children have replaced fear, tears, and pain. This year the profound wisdom of the snake and its dedication to achieving its goal may be models as we patiently and with renewed purpose seek ways to enrich the lives of all within an atmosphere of continued cooperation and peace.

I honor the spirits of all who once lived here. I thank each of you for sharing your love of Vietnam.

Thank you.

THE AUTHOR

Ken Herrmann, Jr. is an Associate Professor of Social Work at the State University of New York at Brockport. He served with the 4th/31st/196th Light Infantry Brigade in Vietnam from May 1968 to May 1969. He is the President and Executive Director of an NGO in Vietnam, the Danang/Quang Nam Fund, Inc. and the Director of the SUNY Brockport Vietnam Program.

Ken has published numerous articles, book reviews, commissioned studies, and book chapters. His first two books I Hope My Daddy Dies, Mister and I'm Nobody's Child exposed the horrors of child abuse and the inadequacy of foster care in America. Long a social activist, he also has provided services in several countries and for a variety of victimized, exploited, and victimized populations. He has been a guest on hundreds of television and radio programs around the world and frequently lectures for professional, community, and other organizations.

KEN HERRMANN, JR., a Vietnam War veteran, has written a book about Vietnam, *Lepers and Lunacy: An American in Vietnam Today* that is a unique and fascinating account of a war veteran who returned to Vietnam, only to discover that he had never really left. It is a gripping and true story of a both personal and professional struggle. This book gives new meaning to the old adage; "Those who invade Vietnam never leave."

Lepers and Lunacy: An American in Vietnam Today provides a useful and sometimes controversial analysis of Vietnam's culture, present economy, and politics. This is a unique perspective on the present relationship between Vietnam and America. The book not only takes the reader into the author's life but into several lives, including the lives of lepers, families who live in a garbage dump, and many other wonderful people.

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