

UPDATE

Bi-monthly Membership Newsletter Reporting on US - Vietnamese Current Events and Culture
Issue 3 May/June 2000



Mission Statement: GSVA is committed to promoting positive relationships and mutual understanding between the people of Greater Seattle and the people of Viet Nam. We will accomplish this by promoting contact and cooperation in the areas of education, humanitarian work, trade and the arts.

**THE GREATER SEATTLE
VIET NAM ASSOCIATION**

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GSVA Projects in Progress

By Beth Whitman

After several visits to Viet Nam in 1999, the board of GSVA made various in-country contacts with non-governmental agencies that have helped us implement projects throughout Viet Nam. Our contacts came through recommendations from Ambassador Peterson's office, as well as from individuals in Seattle and in Viet Nam. Funds will be utilized from our September '99 fundraising event, as well as from the generosity of individual donations independent of the fundraiser. We gratefully thank all of our supporters for their help in making these projects happen!

Da Nang Street Children Protection Center

The Street Children Protection Center is located in the city of Da Nang, in Central Viet Nam. This non-governmental agency supports five "families." Approximately 30 street children between the ages of 5-18 live within each home. The children are provided clothing, food, healthcare, and education and training in professional skills.

Two of the five homes, in which the children live, are in terrible disrepair and in desperate need of improved drainage systems and roofs. The Greater Seattle Viet Nam Association is happy to be providing a new roof for one of the homes to help better the lives of these unfortunate children.

Water Wells

GSVA will begin a pilot program, providing two water wells in remote areas of Viet Nam. In regions, such as hill tribe villages, fresh water is scarce. Streams, used for cooking and bathing, are often polluted and are the same source water buffalo and other farm animals use for drinking and bathing. We hope to improve the health of the villagers by providing fresh water to areas that have previously had no access to it. A simple \$150 water well can significantly improve the lives and health of an entire village. We will be working with the Ha Noi International Women's Committee on this project.

Viet Nam Opera/Ballet Theatre Exchange

Two interns from the Viet Nam Opera/Ballet Theatre in Ha Noi will be in Seattle during the summer of 2000, as part of a Ford Foundation Grant. These two interns will be spending two months with the Northwest Asian American Theatre learning administrative, marketing and production skills. Members of GSVA will help these interns acclimate to the Seattle area and to life in the United States.

Continued on page 2

CORPORATE MEMBERS' CORNER**THE PORT OF SEATTLE**

The Port of Seattle, established by the voters of King County in 1911, develops and maintains facilities to expedite commerce and transportation through Seattle's marine harbors and Seattle-Tacoma International Airport. These activities fuel the economic growth that benefits King County citizens. Five commissioners, elected at large by King County voters, determine Port policy. An executive director oversees daily operations.

The Port of Seattle is the largest seaport in the Pacific Northwest and among the world's largest container gateways. Seattle-Tacoma International Airport is the region's primary transportation link. The Port also owns and operates Fishermen's Terminal, base of the North Pacific fishing fleet; Shilshole Bay Marina, a full-service pleasure-boating marina and sail-racing hub of Puget Sound, and Bell Harbor, an international conference center. The Port's Central Waterfront is homeport for a burgeoning cruise industry.

In 1999 the Port conducted more than \$31 million in two-way trade with Viet Nam. Major exports were animal feeds, paper, industrial equipment, electrical/electronic equipment and parts, and grains and cereals. Major imports from Viet Nam were footwear, wearing apparel, frozen fish, unpowered hand tools, china, pottery and ceramic products.

P. O. Box 1209
Seattle, WA 98111
(206) 728-3000
www.portseattle.org

GSVA Projects in Progress*Continued from page 1***Scholarships**

GSVA will be providing scholarships to in-need students in our sister city, Hai Phong, as well as to students in Nang Ren, a remote area in the Province of Bac Lieu, one of the southern most areas of Viet Nam. The purpose of the scholarships is to encourage these young children to continue their education.

If you are interested in supporting any of these projects or would like further information, please contact us at 206-322-1178 or gsvawausa@aol.com.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- GSVA periodically has openings on its Board of Directors. If you're interested in applying for a future Board position, please send a resume and letter of interest to: GSVA, PO Box 23282, Seattle, WA 98102.

- The Washington State University and Viet Nam National Economics University offers a cooperative MBA program. For more information, visit <http://ibi.cbe.wsu.edu/homepage/graduate/neumba.htm>.

*** UP & COMING EVENTS *****June 8:** *GSVA Business Breakfast.*

Co-sponsored by the Trade Development Alliance of Greater Seattle. Davis Smith, Director and CEO of International Negotiations, Inc. will be speaking. His firm has been involved in shipping fertilizer and sugar to Viet Nam since 1993.

For more information, call Son Michael Pham at 425-836-5354 or Sally Schultz at 206-935-4918.

July 8: *Families with Children from Viet Nam adoption group.*

This will be a social event and will include meeting a Vietnamese language teacher. The group will meet from 3-5 p.m. at the Shoreline Library Meeting Room. RSVP Lea Ann at leaannk@nwlink.com or 425-489-2828.

July 28-30: *Khac Chi Ensemble.*

This husband & wife duo honors Vietnamese musical tradition by performing ancient melodies with original arrangements. They will play songs from all regions of Viet Nam. The duo will be performing at the World music, arts and dance festival (WOMAD). More information can be found at www.womadusa.org.

August 5: *Families with Children from Viet Nam adoption group* will be meeting at the Seattle Asian Art Museum. Admission to the museum is free. 10:30 a.m. For more information, contact Lea Ann at leaannk@nwlink.com or 425-489-2828.**August 24-28:** *Families with Children from Viet Nam adoption group* is organizing a family camp out at Cougar Rock at Mt. Rainier. For more information, call Roseanne at 206-861-8310.**November 5:** GSVA will be hosting "Adoption Night." This promises to be an informative and inspiring event. Speakers include our own "Angel of Saigon," Betty Tisdale; Lea Ann Kaplan from Families with Children from Viet Nam; Dave Prasnik, from Americans Adopting Orphans, and Cathy Gentino, single parent. 3-5 p.m. Location to be announced. Contact Teri Conti at 206-276-2119 or Gary Johnson at 206-233-8560.

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**A WARM WELCOME TO OUR
NEW MEMBERS:**

- International Negotiations, Inc.
Corporate Member
- Joseph Manh Nguyen

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

A special thanks to Maurice Baxter for his financial donation.

- Ideas for articles may be submitted to Teri Conti at P.O. Box 27545, Seattle, WA 98125 or at: angelheart2@earthlink.net.

On U.S.-Vietnam Relations

By Son Michael Pham

Ambassador Douglas "Pete" Peterson made a brief visit to Seattle on Friday, May 12, 2000 on his way back to Ha Noi, Viet Nam. His stop here was the last of a US trip marking the 25th Anniversary of the end of the Viet Nam War.

Ambassador Peterson's only public appearance in Seattle was a luncheon at the Harbor Club Seattle. The event was co-sponsored by the Washington Council on International Trade, the Trade Development Alliance of Greater Seattle and the Greater Seattle Viet Nam Association.

Ambassador Peterson addressed a sold-out audience on current US-Viet Nam relations. He also spoke about the outlook for US trade expansion with Viet Nam, dependant on signing the bilateral trade agreement between the two nations.

The Greater Seattle Viet Nam Association made a special presentation to Ambassador Peterson for his significant assistance in furthering better understanding and friendly relations among the peoples of Viet Nam and the US. GSVa recognized and honored Ambassador Peterson by welcoming him as an honorary member of our Advisory Council.

Prior to the luncheon event, Ambassador Peterson met privately with members of the board of GSVa and the Advisory Council, including Congressman Jim McDermott, Commissioner Paige Miller of the Port of Seattle and William Stafford, President of the Trade Development Alliance of Greater Seattle. It was an opportunity for GSVa to brief Ambassador Peterson on the 2000 Work Plan and for the group to exchange information on the upcoming hearing in Congress for the trade status between the two countries. Other GSVa Advisory Council members who joined the group at the luncheon were Port of Seattle Commissioner Pat Davis, our host and President of the Washington Council on International Trade, and Jan Drago from the Seattle City Council.

During his one day stop in Seattle, Ambassador Peterson also met with Mayor Paul Schell, the Boeing Company and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

In 1997, Ambassador Peterson became America's first post-war Ambassador to Viet Nam. At that time he was a Congressman from Florida serving on the House Appropriations Committee and specializing in health, national defense and international relations. His 26 years in the US Air Force include distinguished combat service in Viet Nam, where he was a POW for six and a half years.

ADVERTISING RATES:

- Artwork must be black and white and camera ready. Original artwork, laser copies, a diskette or business card can be submitted.

- Questions: Call Teri at (206) 276-2119 or email her at: angelheart2@earthlink.net

NUMBER OF ISSUES	RATE	DEADLINES FOR ARTWORK:	
1	\$ 60	Jan/Feb	January 17
2	\$ 120	Mar/Apr	March 17
3	\$ 171	May/June	May 17
4	\$ 219	July/Aug	July 14
5	\$ 259	Sept/Oct	September 16
6	\$ 287	Nov/Dec	November 16

Viet Nam Revisited for the First Time

By Liz Stevens aka Vu Thi Thuy Van

My name is Liz Stevens and I'm from the An Lac Orphanage. My birth name is Vu Thi Thuy Van. I was adopted and moved to New York when I was 14 months old, three years prior to the "baby lift." I made my "journey of a lifetime," (as my mom likes to call it), at the end of November 1999, when I went back to Viet Nam. I went to fulfill a promise I had made to myself and to my heritage when I was 5 years old, on the day I found out that Madame Ngai had passed away.

I gathered all the information and medications I needed for the trip, bought a backpack and began the search for "my roots" and "identity." I even made a few calls to find the channels needed to locate my birth mother and father. Once I arrived in Viet Nam, I discovered the search for my birth parents was futile. As I mentioned to friends and family back home: "If I can't haggle with a 70 year old woman for a piece of pineapple, I'm not gonna get anywhere with the government."

I gained so much more than I could have hoped for, in spite of my loss. Instead of focusing all my energy into looking for one or two people, I found myself learning everything I could about the social and economic rules that govern Viet Nam today. Most important, I was able to dispel the fabrications I let build up over the years about how awful it was to be an orphan from the war, and I became ready to let go of the images and beliefs embedded in my mind about myself and my heritage. You see, from a very young age I had believed that the war was all about hate, and therefore, it must have been impossible for me to have been conceived in love. This belief shaded my self-image and affected the perspective I held about my origin.

I had no idea the country was so overrun with tourists. For me, the memories lingered over war photos and articles. They were horrific and frightening. As a youngster, I had built a mental wall about Viet Nam that started breaking down four years ago while attending a monthly support group in the Bay area called "Sankofa." We are all adults who have been adopted into inter-racial families. I was particularly impacted one night by a statement a fellow member made about everyone having a stumbling block that keeps them from being happy. I realized, that evening, that my perceptions of Viet Nam were holding me hostage; if I hadn't, I would be still be putting my life on hold today.

In Viet Nam, I spoke intimately to everyone, from tourists, (enjoying the exchange rate), tour guides, (one gave all the tourists a very candid editorial on the effects of Viagra in Viet Nam), ex-pats, bar staff, cyclo drivers, homeless children, relief workers, viet-kieu, staff at orphanages and orphans. I loved all the insightful, truthful information.

There were two experiences that changed my life while in Viet Nam:

One was forging a relationship with the Hoi An Orphanage, which I heard about through The Lonely Planet guidebook. Everyone there was so kind to me. When I first visited, I got so overwhelmed I had to leave. I cried for hours and didn't return for three days. When I did return the staff was completely over-accommodating. They didn't hold it against me, and let me come back as often as I wanted. I held infants and children, changed diapers, (okay, maybe not a lot), massaged children, practiced English with them, and continued to heal.

The second event was a reunion dinner with approximately 20 adults from the An Lac Orphanage. This, in itself, led to much healing, as I reconnected



Young Liz with Madame Ngai at the An Lac Orphanage

with my godmother, Betty Tisdale, whom I had not seen or talked with for over 22 years. I contacted Betty, prior to my trip, to find out, among other things, how I might establish contact with my birth parents. Betty was an incredible resource, providing me with a wealth of information, including the name and whereabouts of Mai, an An Lac orphan who acted as a liaison for many of the other orphans from An Lac. It was Mai who arranged the reunion.

I had only expected six or seven people to attend. I was overwhelmed and felt honored that they would take time out of their busy schedules to dine with me. They brought photos from An Lac, filled me in on history and were truly incredible people. I even got to meet some of their children. I had the utmost respect for them. They had all moved on with their lives, were true survivors and considered each other family. None of the An Lac adults were in deviant professions, nor did they fulfill the stereotyped images I had perceived. None were prostitutes, home-

less, disheveled or beggars in Army fatigues, (like a character out of an Oliver Stone film). They were all, individually, the most beautiful people I have encountered in a very long time.

I felt selfish for lamenting about my past when I should be doing more with my life now. Like all Vietnamese, they asked about America and shared some of their fantasies about life in the US. Some of the visions had a ring of truth: they believed they could enjoy material possessions, if willing to work hard for them; that they could have larger houses and borrow money from a bank. They found it difficult to understand that not everyone is wealthy, and that the money we make in the US often corresponds to our cost of living. It was important to me to be truthful and not encourage myths. I said that because the exchange rate is good, and because I made sure I saved every cent I could for six months, I was finally able to travel about Viet Nam. I told them there are opportunities in the US, but not everyone is rich. I told them if I lived as I did, as a Vietnamese citizen, I would be lower class. I explained I didn't have a job, I don't own property, and I don't have a car. I also told them that if they ever have the opportunity to come to the US, they should be aware of the racism and xenophobia that exists here, and that no matter how good or bad the communities that they could move to are, there will be an emotional strain.



Liz at the Hoi An Orphanage during her first trip back to Viet Nam

When I returned to the US, I finally got on a plane and visited Betty for about a week. I poured over photos, (including a couple she had of me), picked her brain about the history of An Lac, met others from the orphanage, and hung with her daughters. The visit with Betty helped complete my trip. It was during that visit I realized that everything is relative to chance: I was 14 months old when I was put on a plane to meet and become part of the lives of the Stevens'. They asked for a girl so they could have a sister for Sheila (little did she know what a strong personality I'd have). I was healthy, I was the right age, and there were so many children . . . I was chosen.

I've come home with a new perspective of Viet Nam and the United States, and found similarities I hadn't been aware of before: that people are struggling to

be comfortable, no matter where they live; want space for themselves; they want to enjoy life and relax; and be devoted to their families. That, in essence, we all want to experience the good qualities life has to offer. I also realized that social and family ties are invisible reigns you love to hate and hate to love.

I've become humble and accepting, and can see things so much more clearly now. In many ways this trip has been a Rites of Passage. In Viet Nam, I finally felt like I was truly acknowledged, 100%, for being born and starting out my life as Vu Thi Thuy Van. I shed the feeling of being an object that started out abandoned, and then bought. I've always known, and have prided the fact, that my life began Vietnamese. My life did not start because of my adoption...that was a circumstance I could not control. I got my validation.

I now possess a greater understanding and appreciation for what I have: that the racism and classism I experience in the US is a small price to pay for the opportunities I have, and that I have a responsibility to the An Lac adults and others I met on my trip. I no longer have to place blame on anyone or anything for the bad things I experienced, and have learned to be grateful for the good. I no longer have to ask: "Who am I?" "What is my culture?" and "What if . . ."

I will never be mistaken for "100% Vietnamese."

I will never be the poster child for an "American."

I know I am a productive human being. I will always remember where it is I come from and the circumstances that brought me where I am today, physically and emotionally. I am glad to be. I no longer need to shout from the rooftops just so I can hear myself... and it's okay for a stranger not to know my history when I walk down the street, smile and say "hello."



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THE GREATER SEATTLE VIET NAM ASSOCIATION



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