

The Greater Seattle Viet Nam Association



UPDATE

Year End 2004

Winner of 2000 Seattle's Sister Cities Award

Dave Dean

Seattle - Hai Phong Sister City

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DARE TO DREAM

For orphans and physically disabled people in Vietnam, it takes a lot of courage to have a dream. For many in Vietnam, learning a trade, drinking clean water, having a wheelchair, a Braille book, or a chance for an education seem like outlandish dreams. It is in these areas that the Greater Seattle Vietnam Association is having a tremendously positive impact. We are doing projects that make a difference for many people, especially orphans and the disabled, throughout Vietnam. Our HumaniTour program ties all of these efforts together and gives participants a chance not only to see the wonder and beauty of Vietnam, but also make a difference in many lives along the way. Our latest HumaniTour of 19 people returned in November and we are ready to share the experience and begin planning next year's trip.

Please join us at the Tamarind Tree Restaurant on Wednesday January 26, 2005 for a sumptuous Vietnamese dinner and learn more about our HumaniTour program and the many projects that GSVA is involved in. Everyone who has been on a HumaniTour trip and anyone who has any interest in joining us on a future trip is especially invited. For all of our members and corporate sponsors it is the one time each year when we can meet, eat, talk and plan for the future. We are planning a few surprises for this dinner so please come.

We will have the entire Tamarind Tree Restaurant to ourselves. Tamarind Tree is a new, up scale, very beautiful restaurant in the Asian Plaza at 1036 South Jackson (206-860-1404) near 12th and Jackson. Unlike most places in the International District, there is ample parking. The food and décor are truly outstanding. Owner-Chef Tam Nguyen will prepare a six course, sit down dinner for us and will discuss the menu and his cooking techniques. This introduction will bring you back to Tamarind Tree to try Chef Tam's many unusual menu selections.

Cost of the dinner is \$55.00 per person; with all of the proceed goes to support our work in Vietnam. Please make your reservation (form is enclosed) soon, seating is limited. If you are interested in sponsorship information, or donating raffle prizes to this event, please contact us at (206) 322-1178 or via email info@seattlevietnam.org.



DARE TO DREAM

11 years old Nguyen Thanh Thanh, one of the 200 orphans in the Go Vap Orphanage in Saigon (photo taken November 2004)

Adoption ... You Can Help

Jonathan & Thanh Rhim

To Whom It May Concern:

My wife Thanh and I are writing to you to express our deep desire to adopt a child from Vietnam and to convey our frustration regarding the apparent impasse in the negotiations that would reestablish adoptions between the United States and Vietnam. We would like to share with you some of our personal experiences from our trip last year to Vietnam, Thanh's native land, where we had the opportunity to visit several orphanages.

Our visits to the orphanages made a deep and lasting impression on us and strengthened our already strong resolve to adopt from Vietnam. The children, needless to say, were adorable. They were so happy with even the simplest things that we brought them. Their faces filled with delight as we passed out pencils, crackers and M&M's. Their smiles and enthusiasm were infectious and brought us a joy that is difficult to convey in words.

And yet, despite the best efforts of those overseeing the orphanages, the children lived in difficult conditions. They had roughly the equivalent of \$.30 per day for food, and were fed primarily rice and vegetables. We could see that they were smaller than other Vietnamese children. The food budget was carefully accounted for so as not to waste anything.

Things we take for granted were absent or in scarce supply. The director proudly pointed to the new shoes and backpacks the children had recently received; items greatly needed for their long walk to school. The living conditions were quite meager, with no heat for protection against the cold winters. There were few toys and little outdoor play equipment.

Seeing these conditions did not surprise us. We knew that Vietnam is a poor country with limited resources. Yet to see and experience the things firsthand really brought home the reality of the situation and made us that more committed to helping in any way that we could, however small. Although the number of children in need was at times overwhelming, we were resolved to at least help one through adoption.

Despite the difficult conditions they faced, the wonderful spirit of these children was irrepressible – we could see it in their glowing faces and hear it in their shouts of joy. Although they clearly were loved by the orphanage staff, these children deserved the nurturing and attention of two loving parents. It broke our hearts that we could not take all of them home with us. Even more frustrating to us was knowing that there were other loving couples in the United States like us who deeply desired to adopt these children, but under the current circumstances could not.

Our observations are in no way meant to be disrespectful to the Vietnamese government or to the orphanage staff. They are doing a wonderful job given the number of children in need and the limited resources they have. In fact, we were impressed with the level of care that could be given in a system overwhelmed by the number of children in need. In every orphanage we visited, we felt the love that the staff had for the children. Their hard work and dedication were an inspiration.

We have almost completed the paperwork for adoption, and although there are many opportunities for adoption abroad, we are committed to Vietnam. In part this is because Vietnam is Thanh's native land, but even more we are committed because of the experience we had during our visit. At one point during our visit, the director pointed to a girl and told us that she had in fact been matched with parents from the United States, but was not able to leave before the deadline stopping adoptions from Vietnam. Every time a Western couple like ourselves came to visit the orphanage, we were told, this little girl thought that this might be her adopted parents. Hearing this broke our hearts.

It has been difficult accepting the fact that we cannot have our own children. This is beyond anybody's control. But resolution of the current impasse is something that can be controlled and every effort should be made to bring about a quick resolution. We are aware of the irregularities that brought about the cessation of adoptions from Vietnam and we commend our government's decision to suspend

adoption until proper procedures and regulations could be established that would prevent any exploitation of Vietnamese children in the future. And yet we have seen the required changes made and have seen other countries, convinced their efficacy, reestablish their own adoption programs with Vietnam. We are frustrated as to why resumption of adoptions with the United States has taken so long.

I am sure there are many other couples in the United States who feel as we do. In 2002, as in every year since 1999, there were over 700 children adopted from Vietnam. During our visit, it was sad to realize that some of the children we saw might have already been with families had things been resolved sooner. The current cessation of adoptions, although appropriate when implemented, has created a backlog of Vietnamese children eligible for adoption abroad and has stressed the already limited resources of those providing care for them. In addition, sad to say, the older these children get, the less likely they are to become adopted. With the existence of couples like us committed to providing loving homes for these needy children and with the resources to do so, making adoptions from Vietnam possible immediately is simply the right thing to do. We implore you to do everything possible to bring about resolution of this impasse as soon as possible.

Sincerely yours,

Jonathan and Thanh Rhim

Note: I urge you to write to your legislators asking for their help in reestablishing the adoption agreement between the two countries. You can also write to the Department of State office involved with this issue (we would appreciate receiving copies of your letters):

Maura Harty, Assistant Secretary
Bureau of Consular Affairs
U.S. Department of States
2201 C. Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Updated progress of the negotiations between the two countries can be viewed on the website of the Joint Council on International Children's Services (www.jcics.org/vietnam).

Son Michael Pham, GSAV Co-President

HUMANITOUR 2004

As the EVA Airlines plane was landing in Hanoi after the long trip from Seattle I keep wondering what the North of the country and its people would be like. I have been to Viet Nam many times but only spent one night in Hanoi changing planes in the past. I was not disappointed as the people were very friendly, caring, and engaging. During our two week stay in Viet Nam the 19 of us would visit four orphanages, a blind school, an ethnic minority mountain village and other establishments supporting disadvantaged children. We brought computers, washers, dryers, pens, toothbrushes, books, duffel bags of clothing and love for the children.

We would all meet and fall in love with Ha, a medical student in Saigon, who is being supported by The Greater Seattle Viet Nam Association, who joined us in the North and Southern parts of the country. Her smile and friendliness captivated us all. She added 19 grandmothers and grandfathers to her family as we all melted under her charm. I was especially blessed to spend a day with Duong, a 7-year-old boy from the Go Vap orphanage. His smile and energy mast the 8-inch scar down the middle of his chest from open-heart surgery 2 years ago and his unusable right hand. We tackled a buffet lunch together, rode on elevators and escalators, his first time and now a favorite of his, played video games, ate ice cream, and read a book. He spoke no English but could communicate through the universal language of children. As we past out candies to all of the children Duong would stuff his considerable number of pockets full. He would then go to the other children to be sure they had enough candy and give his up if need be. For a young man who has been through more than a lifetime of challenges at age 7, he is incredibly caring for other people. My life will never be the same.

We would spend time in the north, central and southern parts of the country. We visited some of the most beautiful places on earth. Ha Long Bay, mountains with a view into neighboring Laos, rivers, emperors citadels, ancient cities, modern metropolises and visited Vietnamese homes.

My first trip to Viet Nam was 38 years ago with the United States Marine Corps. In a coincidence we

landed at Hue on the 10th of November, the Marine Corps 229th birthday that is always celebrated by Marines no matter where they are in the world. This stirred up some mixed emotions to be in this famous Tet offensive city on this day. Our little group sang happy birthday to Bill Stuart, another Marine and I, which was appreciated more than they knew.

The next day, the 11th of November, Veterans Day, we left Hue for the old DMZ. As we moved onto Route 9 at Dong Ha to make our way to the famous Khe Sanh Combat Base in the mountains for a tour of the museum we passed other famous battle sites such as Leatherneck Square, Con Tien, Camp Carroll, the Rockpile, LZ Stud, and the Razorback. I could not help but think of those Americans who did not come back including my Commanding Officer while I was there. I am sure that Steve Mariotti, an Army veteran of Viet Nam, who was with us marveled as I did at the quite beauty of this land that was once in such turmoil. Our mission this time was very much different.

The 19 people on our tour came from all walks of life, backgrounds, disciplines, experiences, political persuasions, and ages but had one thing in common, the caring for others and especially children. It was a common tome by the members of our group during the tour that we were getting more out of this than the children as we all grew in our understanding of how we could make a difference and how this experience was changing our lives.

This was my 10th trip to Viet Nam and it was special. The combination of working with the children, seeing the wondrous beauty of the country and its people, the outstanding food, and of course the shopping will be forever indelibly etched in my mind. If you have an opportunity to go on a future Humanitour please do, you will not be disappointed and it will change your life.

Dick Hunter

More stories and photos from the Humanitour 2004 will be in the next issue. To receive additional information or to reserve your placán the 6th Humanitour in November 2005, please contact Son Michael Pham at info@humanitours.org or 425-868-5284.



THANK YOU

CÁM ON

GSVA Membership and YOU

Your 2005 membership is now due. Now more than ever we need your membership to continue the work of GSVA. Each newsletter brings you information on the many projects we support in Vietnam and Greater Seattle. None of these projects costs a great deal, but each one has enormous impact on many people. Clean water for the Go Vap Orphanage, new clothing and school supplies for hundreds of children in Vietnam, vocational training equipment for the Thanh Xuan Peace Village, Helmets for Kids in partnership with the Asia Injury Prevention Foundation, wheelchairs and medical supplies, the Teaching English program in Saigon — these are only a few of the projects that have benefited by your membership contributions. So please take a few minutes and send in membership dues for 2004. Special thanks to those who have already done so:

Ben Field-Corporate Level Member
Peggy Levison
Sean and Sandi Tisdale
Bill and Barbara Tochiura-Dunbar
Frank Dean

Our 2005 Board Meetings are planned for each month. The location and times are not yet set. You are most welcome to attend any of these meetings and get involved with GSVA in any way your schedule and interests allow. If you are interested in attending a Board Meeting, please give Board Co-President Dick Hunter a call at (206) 322-1178.

Your annual membership dues pay for the expenses to produce and get this newsletter to you. Without paid staff, our association relies 100% on financial support from individuals and businesses through membership dues and donations.

If you did not receive your dues invoice, please contact us at (206) 322-1178 or email info@seattlevietnam.org.

Making A Difference YOU CAN HELP US Making A Difference ... Support our projects in Viet Nam

- ♥ Contribute to our Teaching English program at orphanages in Viet Nam.
- ♥ Contribute to our scholarship program for disadvantage students.
- ♥ Donate school supplies for children in remote rural villages.
- ♥ Donate computer or electronic equipment (in good condition) to our orphanages.
- ♥ Donate airline mileage.
- ♥ Become a member of GSVA.

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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

***** REMEMBER TO SEND IN YOUR MEMBERSHIP DUES *****

A Nonprofit Volunteer Organization

JOIN US !

Become a member of the Greater Seattle Viet Nam Association. Your membership helps support our events, programs, projects and services of the Association.

Membership Benefits:

- ✓ Receive our newsletter to stay informed about happenings pertaining to Viet Nam.
- ✓ Contribute and participate in GSVA projects in the U.S and in Viet Nam.
- ✓ Excellent opportunities to network with community and business leaders in the U.S and Viet Nam through our business events.
- ✓ Opportunity to increase your international business contacts.

- ✓ Viet Nam related resources in the areas of education, the arts, trade, and humanitarian work.

MEMBERSHIP DUES

- () \$25 Individual / Friend of the Association
- () \$50 Family Membership
- () \$100 Organizational / Company Membership
- () \$500 Corporate Partner
- () \$1,000 Executive Partner

GSVA is a nonprofit 501 (c)(3) organization. Donations are tax-deductible to the extent permitted by the law.

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Name

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