

Winds of Peace

Newsletter for Madison Friends' Projects in Viet Nam
April/May 2001



Issue #7

Going Back

by Mike Boehm

When I arrive in Viet Nam, I spend most of my time in Ha Noi when I am not working on our projects in Bac Giang and Quang Ngai provinces. For the last five years I have stayed at the Especen (short for Esperanto Education Center) Hotel #4 on Trung Yen Street in Ha Noi. *Street* is actually an exaggeration—Trung Yen is more an alley than a street. But narrow as it is, it gets an incredible amount of traffic. Vendors, bicycles, motorcycles, and even mini trucks stream through all day long.

Because I have been staying there for so many years, I've become a member of the community. The first day I arrived in February this year, I unpacked my bags and then went across the alley to Mr. Chin's for a beer. Neighbors immediately came up and began telling me some of the things that had happened since I left last year. Mrs. Nguyet told me that her son Lan and his wife, at whose wedding I played my violin last year, now have a baby girl.

Life starts early on the street. Those neighbors who have soup stalls start setting up before dawn. By the time I wake up, activity is at maximum. I wake up to birds singing in their cages, motorcycle traffic below me, and a vendor rhythmically chopping a piece of meat into hamburger. Other vendors walk past singing out about their wares: "*Banh mi nong moi*" (Hot fresh bread); "*Ai muon an khoai nuong?*" (Who wants to eat sweet potato?); or simply a long drawn out "*Pho*" (Soup). I know it's time for me to get up, and so I go across the alley to Mr. Chin's for *cafe sua*—coffee with condensed milk. While I wake up with my *cafe sua*, the Vietnamese are waking up with bowls of *pho*—Vietnamese soup.

Mrs. Phuong, the manager of my hotel and my good friend, laughingly told me what had happened just a few days before. Paul, the Australian who has been living at the Especen for the last three years, had gotten into an argument with his live-in Vietnamese girlfriend and proceeded to flush all her clothes down the toilet. It took the plumbers hours to hook all the clothes out of the toilet. She just shook her head and laughingly said, "*Dien nang*" (Heavy crazy). Pretty soon, though, the news has been told and life on the street goes on with me being just one more component.

If I don't have any meetings or other work for the day, I usually spend a couple of hours just watching the street. It's hard to describe the continuous activity. Right now as I write this, I listen to Mr. Chin reading a comic book to his eight-year-old son Thang. A few feet away, old women with blackened teeth and traditional clothes chat while young women stroll by with their painted on jeans and four-inch platform shoes. Across the alley, a young man checks his hair in a motorcycle mirror. Next to him I watch Mrs. Phuong removing gray hairs from Mrs. Giao's head. She looks over at me and, pointing to Mrs. Giao, she laughs, saying, "*Old woman,*" which gets a playful slap from Mrs. Giao. A constant stream of vendors walks past, carrying unimaginable loads on their poles and baskets. They are selling everything possible: fruit, meat, snails, fish, shrimp, tofu, vegetables, plastic ware, clothing, and soup that is heated on portable coal-fired stoves also carried in a basket. Other vendors come past on bicycles and motorcycles selling live chickens and ducks, motorcycle parts, anything that will bring in a few dollars.

By noon, the activity slows down for an hour or so as people rest for a while. Around three in the afternoon Mrs. Hien, Mr. Chin's sister-in-law, starts setting up her stall. She has developed a snack of deep-fried batter with hot peppers that is very popular with high school kids, mostly high school girls. So from mid-afternoon into the evening there is an additional group of people crowding the alley.

As the sun sets, the traffic eases up. Then parents come outside and stroll up and down the alley with infants in their arms. Small children stream past in high decibel flocks playing their made-up games. By ten at night all the stalls are closed down, the children are home, and the street is quiet again.

Being here in Viet Nam for months at a time is stressful and lonely, so I appreciate the friendships I have made here and the concern for me expressed by these friends. It has been made very clear to me that if I want to buy something I am to tell Mrs. Phuong or someone from the neighborhood, and they will get it for me at the Vietnamese price. If I am sick, they bring medicine for me. And, of course, no one is happy or even understands why I am still

single, so there are the occasional efforts to "introduce" me to a woman that someone knows is looking for a husband. The neighbors tell my visiting Vietnamese friends that they consider me to be Vietnamese.

I have valued my relationship with my friends here, but I have also taken these relationships for granted, not realizing that I had my own obligations toward them. This was brought home to me when I returned to Ha Noi this time. Young Ms. Ly was angry with me for a month. I didn't understand what I had done to offend her, until finally Mrs. Phuong told me that she was angry because I had not brought a gift from Madison for her. It is a Vietnamese custom that if someone travels far away for a long period of time, they must bring back gifts for their family and friends. And as Ms. Ly's "Vietnamese" friend, I had hurt her by not bringing some small gift for her. We have repaired our friendship, and I have also learned a lesson.

This is just a glimpse of life on my street. It becomes very wearing at times, and I long for the quiet of Madison. Yet when I return to Madison, the streets there seem lifeless, and it's not long before I find myself missing the activity on my street in Ha Noi and all my friends who live there.

Winds of Peace

Newsletter for Madison Friends' Projects in Viet Nam
"The people of Viet Nam are looking forward to the winds of peace blowing from America."

Mike Boehm, Project Co-ordinator
Phan Van Do, Project Assistant in Viet Nam
Terri Smith, Newsletter Design

For this newsletter to fulfill its potential we need your feedback. Please send any letters, questions, or written contributions to:

Winds of Peace c/o Mike Boehm
 2312 E. Johnson St., Madison, WI 53704
Phone: 608-244-9505
Fax: 608-255-1800
e-mail: vapp@igc.org

Visit our web site on the Internet at:

www.mylaipeacepark.com

A Celebration of Life!

The Boy from the Ditch Reunited in My Lai with his Rescuers

When Hugh Thompson and Larry Colburn returned to My Lai this past March to attend the ceremonies for the My Lai Peace Park and the My Lai Primary School, they were reunited with Do Hoa (Do Ba was his name as a child), whom they had rescued from the ditch full of bodies during the massacre in 1968. Both Hugh and Larry said they had been worried about the boy for 33 years wondering what had happened to him, wondering if he was even alive.

In 1998, when Hugh and Larry had come to Viet Nam to attend the ceremonies for the 30th anniversary of the massacre at My Lai, they found out through the Vietnamese newspaper *Thanh Nien* that Do Hoa was still alive but was serving an eight year prison sentence for stealing electrical wire. (See story in *Winds of Peace, Issue #5.*)

This year we knew Do Hoa was out of prison, but we didn't know where he was. So Mr. Phan Van Do, our project partner in Viet Nam, began the search by contacting the Son My (My Lai) commune People's Committee, the Son Tinh district People's Committee, the My Lai Women's Union and other local organizations to find out if they knew where he was. The commune People's Committee knew about the boy, but only that he had survived the massacre. They said he had no close relatives and had left the commune long ago.

The only lead left for Do was the three-year-old story in *Thanh Nien* newspaper. Do called Mr. Thanh Thao, the renowned poet and journalist and the Quang Ngai representative for *Thanh Nien*. Thao gave him the phone number for the Editor-in-Chief for *Thanh Nien*. The Editor promised to help, but after not hearing from him for a few days Do began calling him again many times. Finally, the Editor assigned Mr. Dzung to try to find Do Hoa. At this point time was running out, with only a week left before Hugh and Larry arrived in Viet Nam. Days later, Dzung called Do and said he had found Do Hoa.

In 1998 *Thanh Nien* newspaper found Do Hoa in prison and ran the story about him. Immediately after reading the story, Mr. Kieu Xuan Long, the Director of Thai Vi Company, called the newspaper and said he would give Do Hoa job training, a job, and a place to live, which he did after Do Hoa got out of jail in 1999. (See letter from Mr. Long on page 4.)

Long is a good man; Do later called him later a man of "strong human feelings." So when Do called to tell him that Hugh and Larry would shortly be returning to My Lai and wanted very much to see the "boy" again, Long was immediately moved by the idea of bringing Do Hoa back to My Lai. Do told Long that he was concerned about Do Hoa's mental and emotional health and asked if Long would accompany Do Hoa to My Lai. Long agreed not only because he was concerned about Do Hoa, but also because he wanted to see My Lai for himself. He promised Do he would take care of everything. Still, Do was not leaving anything to chance. The day before Hugh and Larry flew from Sai Gon to Da Nang, Do called Long again. Long assured Do that he had already bought the tickets. Do described the bus we would all be traveling in from Da Nang to Quang Ngai city and told Long to wait by the bus for the rest of us.

When Do arrived in Da Nang, he saw three Vietnamese he had not met before standing by the bus and met, for the first time, Do

Hoa, Long, and the Vice-Director of the company. Hugh and Larry were already on the bus when Do brought Do Hoa on board. There was a very emotional, tearful reunion between Hugh, Larry and the "boy" they had worried about for 33 years.

By coincidence, Hugh and Larry were on the same flight as Do Hoa but neither knew the other. In fact, Do Hoa was seated next to Connor, Larry's eight-year-old son, and Do Hoa was playing with him during the flight, not knowing who he was. When Do Hoa (who was also eight-years-old when he was rescued from the ditch) found out Connor was Larry's son, he formally asked permission from Connor to be his older brother. Connor accepted. This was the first of many profound, emotional connections for them, and in fact, began the creation of a new family for Do Hoa, because both Hugh and Larry told him that he now has two fathers.

The three days that Do Hoa was with Hugh and Larry and their family and friends, they were seldom out of sight or touch of each other. These three days were filled with emotion for them. Certainly there was sadness for them from being reminded of the massacre, but also joy at being reunited. There were many tears when Do Hoa left for Sai Gon with Long three days later. Mr. Long tearfully parted with these words, "*Though we live in two different countries, our hearts are beating in the same rhythm, the rhythm of humanity.*"

Do Hoa has a tragic personal history to overcome. There are no therapy programs, no social service programs like we have here in the U.S. to help someone like Do Hoa recover. In Viet Nam the family helps a troubled family member, but Do Hoa lost his family 33 years ago. If Mr. Long had not taken Do Hoa under his care when he was released from prison, it's almost certain he would have returned to crime and would be back in jail. Meeting Hugh and Larry again and meeting Lisa and Connor has given Do Hoa the best chance he has to recover because he has a family again. He is not so hopelessly alone anymore. He knows that, finally, after all these years, he is loved.

Mr. Long's Letter of Support for Do Hoa

Reprinted from Vietnamese newspaper *Thanh Nien*
March 16, 1998

Letter to the Editor

To: *Thanh Nien*

Dear the sisters and brothers at *Thanh Nien*,

As I have expressed my thoughts to you over the phone after I read the article by Huong Ly and Thanh Thao about H. Thompson - an American pilot who bravely fought against the crime of his comrades in My Lai - Son My on March 16, I am keeping my words by writing this letter to confirm with you the following:

1. I have a burning wish to ask the authority to consider an amnesty for the little boy Do Ba of 1968, now Do Hoa, 39, who once broke the law and is serving his term at camp K. 30 Dong Nai, so that Do Hoa can attend the 30th anniversary of the Son My (My Lai) massacre and join his savior, H. Thompson.

2. We are a Mechanic Refrigerants manufacturer, and are based in Ho Chi Minh City, Cu Chi, and Duc Hoa (Long An). We would like to employ Do Hoa as soon as he is released, without any binding conditions.

We guarantee that Do Hoa will have:

- A place to live, and clothing supplies.
- Employment at our factory with a salary, social insurance and health insurance equivalent to that of a technician.
- If Do Hoa does not have the necessary skills, we will offer him adequate training.
- If Do Hoa has not finished high school, we will support his study.

However, during his time living and working with us, if Do Hoa will find any better opportunities for himself, or for any other reasons, he has full rights to choose his place of work and of residence according to his will.

The deep impression that we have of him is not a 39 year-old Do Hoa, but the image of a tiny body wiggling under a heap of dead and bloody corpses, which touched the heart of the kind American pilot, H. Thompson, and compelled him to dig through those dead bodies to pick a skinny, little Vietnamese baby out of death.

We would like to ask *Thanh Nien* to help us realize our wish of making a small contribution to the fates of those who, as journalist Thanh Thao put it rightly and movingly in *Thanh Nien*, March 13, 1998, "are haunted by the massacre until now."

We are only readers of *Thanh Nien* who want to respond to Thanh Thao's calling: "His life was once saved by a kind-hearted American, but to truly give him a living so that he can be a normal citizen, and an honest working person, we need sincere hands that reach out to him with love."

We would like to thank *Thanh Nien*, and journalists Huong Ly and Thanh Thao.

I guarantee the above are from my own will, and I ensure that they will be completely realized.

On behalf of Thai Vi Mechanic Refrigerants manufacturer,
Xuan Long

Do Hoa Writes to his Fathers

With the caring support of Kieu Xuan Long and being reunited with Hugh and Larry, for the first time now in more than 30 years, Do Hoa has some hope that a future exists for him. As Do Hoa's fathers, Hugh and Larry sent an e-mail to him asking how they could help him. Did he need a motorcycle, for example? Do Hoa wrote back:

Dear my Dad,

I got your mail, I am very happy when I know you and yours are very well.

Now, I have been working at Mr. Long's THAI VI Company. I am a worker with salary 40 USD/month.

I have a motor bike. It's bought by my Company to working. I send thanks a lot for your help.

I live stay in my company because I have not a house so that I want to buy a small house and marry. But I have not enough money, yet. If you could help me some money to do.

Sometime I feel very sad to live alone because I have not Parents and no wife and no children.

I send best greeting to my Dad, Larry and Connor, Lisa.

My cousin helps me write this.

Your son,
Do Ba

Hugh and Larry are committed to funding a small house for Do Hoa. If you would like to help please contact Larry Colburn at 201 Red Gate Terrace, Canton, GA 30115.

Reflections on a Celebration of Life

A group of Americans traveled to Viet Nam for the “Celebration of Life” to dedicate the new My Lai Peace Park on March 16, 2001, the 33rd anniversary of the My Lai Massacre.

Included in the group were representatives of the Madison Friends, sponsors of projects in Viet Nam; Viet Nam veterans, including Hugh Thompson and Larry Colburn; others who were drawn to the ceremonies in remembrance of My Lai; and one, from Ireland, who arrived by chance.

Afterwards, Mike asked everyone to send him thoughts and impressions of their experiences. In this special issue we are pleased to include a variety of articles, some in the form of letters, along with photos taken by some of the people who were in My Lai on March 16 and 17, 2001.

Letter from Hugh Thompson

Mike,
Great Job!

When you are back at My Lai, please do not forget the art work for the school here in Louisiana and also the art work for Connor’s school in Georgia.

Thanks, Hugh

P.S. I would love to write about my experiences there at My Lai, but words are not my best point, if I have a best point. Meeting with Do Ba was a great moment in my life, one of the happiest moments in my life. It is beyond words to try to explain my feelings, but I sincerely thank you and Mr. Do for making all of this possible. I know it has taken a lot of time, effort, and hard work. Mike, keep up the great work you are doing. Some day and some how you will receive great rewards for all your help.

Your friend, Hugh

My Vietnam Experiences

by James Lund

First of all I was amazed at the work Mr. Do and Mike Boehm have done. They are incredibly dedicated to these projects.

My Lai beaches were wonderful. Louise and I swam delightfully in the ocean, in warm water.

In My Lai itself, the school dedication in 85° heat was almost oppressive. My Lai Peace Park dedication was spectacular. And the annual ceremony at the My Lai shrine was impressive.

We planted trees everywhere in My Lai, at several different sites. We worked with American Vets, Quakers, and local people, all working together to beautify the parks.

On a warm and rainy day, we went to visit Bac Giang Peace Park, 30 miles north of Ha Noi. Rainy weather didn’t spoil the visit to the peace park. The kids and all the people were beautiful and cordial and happy.

Some people referred to me as being “Buddha”, which means being a happy and well-respected person and also quite chubby in the stomach area. They would smile as they patted my tummy.

Numerous U.S. vets returned to give support to the restoration of a war-torn country. I was impressed with their numbers and their favorable attitude towards the Vietnamese people. One vet, a bartender in New York City, even helped to build a library for a community, spending \$3,000 of his own money.

I could go on and on, as so many things were going on each day. I could literally write a book on this 12 day excursion to this recovering far-eastern country.

After seeing the Peace Park in My Lai, I think to myself that there is hope for peace in Ireland

by Brendan Jones

Hi Mike,

Just thought I would drop you a few lines to thank you for your kindness and friendship that you showed me during my stay in Vietnam. I don't know if I told you or not, but I was meant to go to China this year, not Vietnam. This came about because of a mix-up in tickets in Bangkok, so I decided to come to Vietnam instead.

After spending 5 days in Ha Noi, I decided to head south to Da Nang. Coming to Vietnam was the start of a sequence of events that were to occur until I reached Sai Gon. On my first day in Da Nang I was sitting in a bar having a cool beer, looking at my map of Central Vietnam, when I noticed that I had come too far south for the D.M.Z., and that it was 3 hours by train back north. Sitting across from me was an American who introduced himself as Don Unrau. We got chatting, and he asked me if I remembered the My Lai massacre back in '68. I was 20 when this occurred and I remember the revulsion I felt. I ended up protesting outside the American Embassy in Dublin against the war in Vietnam. Anyway as the "Troubles" got worse in Ireland, My Lai went to the back of my mind until Don brought it back to me. He told me of the two-day ceremony at My Lai and that maybe I would like to come to it.

On the morning of 3/16/01 I arrived in Quang Ngai too late for the official ceremony at My Lai. Later that evening I met Don, and he introduced me to you. You very kindly arranged with the Vietnamese official that I could join your official party. Although I was a stranger, everybody made me feel most welcome. What I did not realize was the mixed emotions I was to experience over the next 24 hours.

The next morning, bright and early, we set off by bus to a school. Fine, I thought, it's nice to visit the local school and show support. But this was not just any school. This was the children's school that you and the Madison Friends had built. What a truly wonderful and marvelous sight to see this—phase one of the school—being officially opened. It is completely enclosed by a magnificent wall—modern, clean, toilets of the highest standard for pupils and staff, and, of course, the classrooms themselves. Absolutely great. What an achievement.

It must have been very gratifying for you to see the result of your endeavors come to fruition. The happy, smiling faces of the children and the recognition in the faces of the teachers and officials for everything that you have done for them was wonderful to see. Out of a senseless war comes the beginning of the future for these children and generations to come. Be proud of yourselves and your endeavors. You deserve it.

After the tree planting ceremony, I was on a high, and I headed off to the My Lai memorial park on my own. I could not believe what I was seeing as I walked around the park and, later, as I viewed exhibits and photos in the museum. I said to myself, "How could soldiers of the United States of America commit these horrendous crimes?" Mike, I am not ashamed to say that I cried and cried at what I was seeing and reading. And out of that madness were Hugh Thompson and Larry Colburn (whom I had the pleasure to meet), Glenn Andreotta, R.I.P., and Danny Millians who are great heroes, and most of all great human beings. May their lives always be full and joyful.

After that, I went to the Peace Park. The park, with all the trees

newly planted by your party as a sort of reunification park, is a wonderful idea. Mike, you asked me what the park meant to me and as I think back now and remember the workers from the paddy fields eating their meal under one of the trees, I think to myself that there is hope for peace in Ireland.

After that we met up again on the beach at My Lai (My Khe), and I said to you guys that since it was St. Patrick's Day, we should all have a drink. Whereupon you whipped out your violin and proceeded to play a couple of jigs for me. I thought that was the *craic* and loads of fun. Thank you again.

As you know, Gil and I traveled by train the next day to Sai Gon. We got a 2 berth compartment, and guess who was in the compartment with us? On the cover of the *Acadiana Profile* Special Report (an article written about the helicopter crew and the villagers they rescued during the massacre) is a photo of Hugh and Larry with a woman named Pham Thi Nhung. The person in the carriage with us was her 63-year-old sister, who was 32 at the time of the massacre, and is also a survivor. According to her, she was in the village at the time and was herded out of it when Hugh rescued them.

I wish you and the Madison Friends every success in the future and that without doubt your project at My Lai is a tremendous achievement.

*May you all have happy and fruitful lives.
May the road rise up to meet you.*

Yours, Brendan Jones

37a, Convent Road, Dalkey, County Dublin, Ireland

Thoughts on the Vietnamese Trip

By Louise Lund

My trip kept coming back to 8 year old boys.

The first was the boy in the book, *Four Hours in My Lai*, which I read on the airplane trip to Viet Nam. This eight-year-old boy died in his father's arms, and his father's reaction was, "This is God's vengeance for what I did." The father had been one of the participants in the infamous My Lai Massacre years earlier. That set the tone for the rest of the extremely interesting book, which outlined the events of that terrible day in clear, frightening detail.

The second little boy was the boy in the book who was pulled alive out of the ditch full of dead bodies surrounding the village of My Lai, on March 16, 1968. Three men— who landed their helicopter between Calley and the other soldiers performing the massacre and the few remaining, intended victims— were able to get a few survivors to safety by calling in other helicopters large enough to airlift them out. As they were taking off again, they spotted movement, and upon landing and checking, found one more person alive, a very small 8-year-old boy. When we came to visit My Lai this year, the boy (now close to 40) had been found and flown up from Saigon—on the very same plane as his rescuers, although none of them were aware of it. Two of the three crewmen who made the rescue, Hugh Thompson and Larry Colburn, survived the war. They were the heroes of the programs of events commemorating the massacre. They and the boy were seldom parted during the rest of their time together.

The third 8-year-old boy was Connor, the son of the airman, Larry. He, along with Larry's wife, accompanied the group on the trip. In his charming face, smile, and demeanor, this child represented all the best in the form of a goodwill ambassador—a face of friendship and the future. Wherever he went and whatever he did, he drew small boys to him. Without a mutual language, they successfully played soccer, climbed and jumped over sand banks, built sand castles on the beach, and generally had a great, small boy time. When his father asked him how he talked with the boys who spoke no English, Connor only looked surprised. What a silly question. Small boys don't need words to communicate.

The ceremony at the actual My Lai site was the most moving for me and brought me to tears. There were plaques bearing the names and ages of those in each home who had been slaughtered,

showing that very young children and older grandparents were massacred, along with every other living thing in the town. What a terrible blot on the American image—making the war we had protested from the start only prove our worst nightmares were real. The site had a huge statue of commemoration, plus a mosaic wall, which depicted the village in flames. If we had doubted any of it, the museum located right there on the grounds had the vivid pictures of the victims—before and after they were murdered. Such a terrible tragedy!

But it made me feel better about our trying to rebuild something with a share of goodwill to offset, in a minute way, the horrors the war brought. The ceremony with all the teachers and children, celebrating the opening of the school Quakers had funded, was a delight. And the Peace Park, dedicated too as part of these events, seems like a great place for picnics, etc. Everywhere we went we were also invited to plant trees, and we all were a bit sore from the planting, but we were happy to see the beauty emerge, which enhanced the park and school.

The general feelings about the trip were in vignettes:

The 15-hour trip from L.A. to Hong Kong almost did us in. If Jim hadn't found an adorable Chinese baby, traveling along with his Mom, in serious need of being walked around and around the airplane, it would have been hard to find excuses to exercise. (She met Jim in the airport and turned to the baby and said, "Say goodbye to your uncle.")

Hong Kong and Kowloon were amazing. The view of the harbor from the hotel window literally took my breath away. Except for the constant rain, we had a great visit—museums, parks, trips on the two story buses, trying to eat with chopsticks, and the sampan tour of the harbor. The efficient, clean, quick forms of public transit amazed us too. And the mystery of all the Phillipinos (as we found out upon inquiry) spending Sunday in the sheltered entries to all the mass transit terminals, sitting and "picnicking" and enjoying friendships and a day off.

Ha Noi's traffic amazed us all! The moving sea of small motorbikes, bicycles, and every form of wheeled vehicle, was awesome. We were always convinced there would in a moment be a crash of unbelievable proportions, but we saw only one minor accident in 3 days. It was a treat to go from there to the first peace park and see how it is coming along, and visit with friendly visitors all around.

The hotel in Ha Noi was much too elegant for any I had been led to expect. There were bellboys and a swimming pool and a fancy restaurant on the top floor—and people who did our laundry even!! And the air-conditioned bus we drove around in, with cool beverages and curtains in the windows and lace on the backs of the seats, was also far, far more elegant than I expected.

I did really enjoy visiting the homes and workshops of the recipients of the women's loan fund. Then, of course, we can't forget Mike at the shrimp farm, up to his chest in oozing mud and water after having tried to manage one of those totally round boats all by himself (and the delightful laughter of the women watching us)!

The hard work that goes into brooms, preparing manioc, and growing shrimp left us with the good feeling that maybe we've helped a few people who really can use it. And then there was the beautiful smile—our reward—when Joe and I told a member of the council that she looked like our niece, Patsy. She had been far too serious and sober until then. Such beautiful people they are!

Our last dinner there, in the restaurant, was one we've told many about...trying to eat unfamiliar food in an unfamiliar setting without benefit of language led to much merriment on the part of our hosts.

I guess my most moving moment, though, was giving a hug to one of the few survivors of the massacre! It affected me more than I could have guessed. Also, it meant so much to me to have the unexpected and very enlightening treat of traveling with the soldiers who had fought in Viet Nam, hearing their personal, moving stories, and how their lives had been affected. There were memories from this trip that will last a lifetime.

Journal Reflections

by Ken Dawe

Dear Mike

I want to thank you for doing the work. All the work of putting together the events that made it possible for hopeful and peace-loving people like myself to “Celebrate Life” at Quang Ngai Province...in such a meaningful way. I know that you had help. Mr. Do deserves a written “thank you” from me too, but this one goes out to you alone.

A park dedicated to celebrating the peace between people of Vietnam, America, and all the rest of the world is a healing counterpoint to the sadness (even despair) that I cannot help but feel when visiting this particular part of Vietnam. The park is needed and will be enjoyed by people for many generations.

As you may recall, I was “volunteered” into the role of combat infantryman at the exact time the massacre was carried out in 1968. I was assigned to a rifle company that operated approximately 30 miles south of My Lai. Though my unit did not commit atrocities on the scale of My Lai, I saw my countrymen— at the direction of our “leaders” — perform many acts of brutal and unprovoked terrorism on civilians. To say that those experiences, and knowing of the awful business at My Lai, left me doubting American moral superiority would be a gross understatement. That disillusionment has profoundly affected every part of my thinking and decision-making since that time. People with issues like mine are especially grateful for occasions that help us move away from the cynicism that blocks our growth and personal peace of mind. Each of the activities that you and the Madison Quakers invited me to join last March 16th and 17th moved me closer to letting loose of my anger and sadness.

I don’t know just what you had in mind when you asked for written “thoughts/experiences while in Vietnam,” so I decided to send you some excerpts from the journal I kept during the visit.

16th March—Son My Memorial Ceremonies

The Americans arrived at the Memorial just in time to make a grand arrival. We were a little slow getting away from our hotels, so we basically filed off the bus and into the (near) ready-and-waiting crowd gathered at the base of the statue. Though it was early in the morning, the sun was already burning down with intensity on the assemblage of Vietnamese dignitaries, local citizens, and approximately 150 school children. As I walked along with the American contingent towards the statue, I felt a vague sense of gladness creep over me. I couldn’t really identify what had set that feeling off, especially since it is such a somber place, but awhile later its origin became clear. I felt good because I was *finally certain* that I was on the *right* side of American involvement in Vietnam.

I was surrounded by very special Americans, the Madison Quakers, who had come to build more and better bridges with the people of a culture I have always respected (even back when I was instructed to hate them). This was a group of Americans that earned the stature of “special” in my thinking by having cared enough about humanity to work for peace as far back as the time of U.S. military involvement in Vietnam— and to be persisting at it to this very day. Back while many of us were caught in the confusion of the war, these people were taking higher-order actions. All in spite of knowing that they would be held in contempt by many persons and institutions that had lost so much of their humanity to the fear and hate of the day. The Madison Quakers were doing things way back then to help *all* the victims of the war-making, so

that there would be some ground for peace to grow on whenever the fighting ended.

Of course, the presence of the helicopter flight crew of Hugh Thompson and Larry Colburn also contributed to my feeling that I was where I needed to be. That crew showed exceptional courage. The actions they took probably had much to do with stopping the cowardly and counterproductive slaughter of civilians in My Lai on that fateful day. I knew that I was in the presence of people that would stimulate my own “better side”, and it felt good.

On the bus ride from Da Nang to Quang Ngai City the afternoon before, we all got to hear about and meet Do Ba. What positive news it was to know that the little boy that Glenn Andreotta had retrieved from the pile of bodies back in 1968 was alive and back among us. We didn’t get any details of how he was able to make his way in life over all the intervening years, but anyone that had experienced emotional and life-transforming physical trauma like he suffered at the age of eight, must have had a very tough go of it. When I asked Mr. Do exactly why he was imprisoned for so many years, he told me that in addition to having been caught stealing the copper wire, it was determined that he was also “homeless and hopeless.” I know I can only guess at the load that the man must carry.

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Do Ba seemed very calm at the ceremonies, but it was clear that even though he was being honored and fussed over, he had a need to hold tightly to Larry or Larry's eight year-old son, Conner. He seemed to be in (or nearly in) physical contact with one or the other of the two at nearly all times. I never saw any outward appearance of emotion from the man, but an episode that Larry related later suggested how intense parts of the day had been for him. Larry said that Do Ba had gone off to look around the site of his home village after the ceremony was over. He came back and found Larry talking to some people. Though it seemed totally out of character for Do Ba to assert himself so aggressively, he pulled Larry away from the conversation and steered him over to what he had found. It was, of course, the grave markers of his immediate family members. Larry said it was a very intense and powerful moment. Again, I can only imagine...

After speeches were made, individuals and groups to be specially honored were brought forward and introduced. Special wreaths with people's names and affiliations were solemnly presented as each group came to the front. Overall, the proceedings seemed pleasant but kind of neutral to me...until the end. Though I had been occasionally envisioning the horrors of 3/16/68 during all the pageantry, they were just fleeting snapshots. No great emotion was stirred...until the P.A. filled the air with about as mournful a dirge as I have ever heard—at least as mournful a thing as I had ever been exposed to while I was as vulnerable as that place can make me. The sound quality was awful...lots of static crackling and feedback came over the speakers, but I was hit hard with a lump that quickly moved from down in my chest to a place high in my throat. The feelings it caused brought me some real clarity on how much sadness lays unresolved inside of me. A few tears leaked out even though I was abruptly distracted from my feelings when I looked up and saw that some film crew had their camera focused directly on me. I remember being glad that it was such a hot sunny day so that I could justify having my sunglasses on. I was barely pulling myself back up from that when Mike was asked to play his violin. The first piece he played was pleasant to listen to, but then he played "Taps." If it hadn't been so short, I'm sure it would have set me off again. ...There's still so much sadness and confusion over all that crap that happened so long ago...

Winds of Peace

After it was all over, people drifted off in different directions. Conversations were friendly and cordial, but I (and Paul) decided to go wander around the grounds of the memorial area. Before long the school kids were playing in and around the bunkers, and, as usually happens when groups of Vietnamese kids encounter westerners (especially westerners with cameras), any sort of seriousness breaks down and joy and laughter take its place. We took our pictures and played the little games and by the time it was time to get back on the bus, Paul and I (and everyone else) were all back in high spirits.

March 16th –My Lai Peace Park Dedication

From the Son My Memorial, we went directly to the site of the new My Lai Peace Park. Bright red and gold banners were strung off the corners of the new 2-story gazebo. Ponds had been dug on both sides of the access road and were filled with water (up to the natural water table I was told). Many lotus plants had been brought in and planted in those ponds. The grounds had only recently been bulldozed into the final landscaping so things were pretty barren and colorless. The shiny-new gazebo looked kind of odd out in the middle of things, but by the time we moved on to the beach to relax, a ribbon had been cut, brief speeches gave credits and thanks, many (40?) trees were in the ground and Americans had gotten into the dirt with the Vietnamese farmers. It was a good housewarming and looked a lot more like a park when we left.

While I don't begin to know what those local farmers think of the idea of having a Peace Park in their neighborhood, I think that about any interactions done for reasons other than profit making is bound to be good for preventing "us and them" thinking for everyone involved. It seems to me that nothing could ever do as much towards ensuring that people won't be lead into the notion that they need to make war over "differences" as having planted something together.

March 16th –My Khe Beach

After the business at the Peace Park was completed, we all enjoyed an afternoon at the local beach. Members of the group got to talk and get better acquainted with each other and reflect on all the events of the day. We feasted on good seafood and drank cool drinks while we processed a busy and eventful day.

The addition of Larry and Lisa Colburn's son to the group proved to be of very great value. Connor Colburn is the same general age as many of the kids that were at the Memorial and at the Peace Park dedication. One probably couldn't find a kid more open to diving into whatever is happening. He played with any and all that he came into contact with, and while he was greatly outnumbered

People worked pretty hard for an hour or two at putting the trees into pre-dug holes, before everyone retreated to the shade and cool (er) breezes found in the gazebo. A few people even sat in the shade of one of the larger of the newly planted trees and had their lunch. I particularly enjoyed the times when the work required a joint effort between Vietnamese and Americans— times when we needed to lift a particularly heavy tree or to support the tree at a desired angle while others put dirt into the hole or tamped it or whatever was needed. It gave an opportunity to really interact and even do a little brainstorming together.

We couldn't communicate with language, but working out simple problems together felt good. It also gave me a chance to show that I have done some physical work in my life and am not afraid to put my back into a heavy task. And that I have no fear of getting dirty if the role requires it. It was good to show that I can laugh at myself whenever some clumsiness on my part is revealed, and that while I may not have the stamina that the Vietnamese farmers have, I'm not completely weak either. I kept on working until the trees that needed to be put into the ground had been planted. I had the feeling that both Westerners and Vietnamese were more at ease with being in each other's presence as we all stood in the gazebo's shade afterwards. There are huge differences in dress and lifestyles to overcome before we could feel like we *really* know each other, but digging in the dirt together has to be about as direct a route to commonality as people might ever find.

by kids that spoke a language he had never even heard before, the give and take was as good as kids of that age ever manage. He shared his stuff with them, and I think the Vietnamese kids gave things to him. They played games that Connor had played before and probably some that he hadn't. There was a little bit of roughhousing, but nobody ever got angry or past the point where the issue couldn't be dropped. The boy could have (should have) given lessons in statesmanship to certain American politicians that I could name. At the very least, I am certain that his interactions with the local kids gave the visit from the Americans more significance to the younger generation.

The fact that Connor is the same age now as Do Ba was when Hugh and Larry rescued him made me pay special attention to how kids of that age act and think. It put more of a face— a reality, on the tragedy that was endured by Do Ba. To think of Connor Colburn suddenly left without mother, father, or any living relative – not only left alone and having no home to go to, but also having to live with the images of the violent murders of all the people that made up his life – impossibly cruel. I think the fact that Do Ba has survived at all is a great testimony to the amazing resilience that seems to typify the Vietnamese. They will never be suppressed.

When a Trip Becomes a Journey

by Susan Kummer

A trip to Viet Nam. We knew it was a rare opportunity. A chance to see first hand the projects we had been supporting. A way to take a closer look at a chapter of history that shaped us and our society. Little did we know how much we would learn or how much it would come to mean to us. Nor did we fully realize until we started talking with people before leaving, just how much baggage people are still carrying 30 years later.

But hour-by-hour, sight-by-sight, person-by-person, and-story-by-story, we began to get the picture. This trip was going to be traveled on many levels.

Whether you track it by miles, hours, or by cultural differences, it's a long way to Viet Nam. This is a country that is humming with life—along the roads, in the rice paddies, and in the city streets. Summoning the courage to cross a street against a constant stream of vendors, bikes, and scooters, is one's first test. Negotiating the sights and smells of the market is another. But everywhere, the Vietnamese were friendly, curious and welcoming. After a couple days of immersion, we managed to sleep past 4 a.m. when the non-stop honking begins for the day.

For the better part of a week we were on the go from early morning until evening. Many of the people we traveled with had experienced the war first-hand. Soldiers, pilots, helicopter crew, pacifists, interpreters, and victims—all were deeply touched by a war that still haunts us. Time has healed most physical wounds, but the human psyche seems to be another matter. As one vet put it, "It's a question of how long you can run. Eventually it catches up with you, and you've got to come to terms with it."

As we talked, we were traveling down Route 1—a narrow two-lane road that is the main north-south highway in Viet Nam. You can see a lot from a bus. Children sandwiched between their parents on a scooter, dozing off or reading a book. Women bending over for endless hours tending their rice or scooping water into their fields from irrigation ditches. School girls in long white silk uniforms riding bikes three abreast, chatting nonchalantly. Every imaginable thing—from chickens, pigs, eggs, and house wares to wardrobes and plywood—being transported by bike, scooter or cyclo. But along this stretch of Route 1 between Da Nang and

Quang Ngai, those who had seen this country before were seeing many other scenes. Hugh Thompson pointed out the window and said, "We grew up over there—real fast!" As experiences were shared, the war became real in ways that were never possible to grasp through the media. It became chillingly clear why lives were shattered.

Meanwhile, we were also witnessing an incredible reunion. Several hours earlier Hugh Thompson and Larry Coburn had been reunited with Do Hoa, the eight-year-old boy they saved from the ditch in My Lai in 1968. Hugs and tears of joy were irrepressible. Do Hoa, who lost his family in the massacre, had just become a big brother to Connor, Larry's eight-year old son. Do Hoa's expressive eyes revealed both the sadness he has lived with and his overwhelming happiness at suddenly being part of a family again. Somewhere along Route 1, as our bus dodged people, potholes, and rice spread out to dry, it became apparent that this trip was really a journey—a journey of the heart.

The remarkable thing about traveling together—attending the 33rd anniversary at the My Lai Memorial, dedicating the My Lai Peace Park and new school building, planting trees, visiting women who were receiving loan funds, and sharing our stories—was that no matter what our roles during the war, we clearly had found common ground. As Hugh put it, "War sure changes things, but it solves nothing." Surrounded by smiling children and appreciative adults, we were part of a new history in the making. These profound experiences have the potential of replacing the tragic history in our memories.

Some of these healing moments are worth describing. After the dedication of the school, as children crowded around to get colorful friendship bracelets woven by children and adults in Madison, one of the teachers asked a graduate student traveling with us who speaks Vietnamese if the bracelets had special meaning or magic. Kate responded, "Yes, they represent friendship." To which the teacher inquired, "But will they ward off evil spirits?" Kate paused just for a moment, and then said, "Yes, of course!"

It was hot, and the air humid, the morning we dedicated the Peace Park. After the ribbon cutting, everyone headed out into the sun to plant trees along the road and around the hill where the pagoda rises above the rice paddies. Enthusiastically, tree after tree was lifted into place and dirt shoveled in around it. The sun, however, was taking its toll, and there was universal appreciation for the Vietnamese who had dug the holes ahead of time. One tree already had a bird's nest nestled in its branches. And just minutes after being planted, a palm was sought out for lunchtime shade by a family who had been working nearby. The promise of this place was already unfolding.

After the "official" part of the trip was over, we were having breakfast in the coastal town of Hoi An when the waiter recognized Mike. He came over and asked if he was the helicopter pilot from My Lai. After a brief exchange, the waiter remembered excitedly that Mike was the violinist in the film, *Sound of the Violin*. He was obviously touched both by the film and by meeting Mike. A few minutes later, Mike returned with his fiddle and played the *Ashoken Farewell* and *Taps*—touching a few more with its hauntingly beautiful message—a language needing no translation. It reminded me what Hugh asked the first day on the bus, addressing those from the Friends Meeting who support Mike's work, "Do you realize what you have in Mike?"

Mike, himself, frequently speaks of the dedicated work of his Vietnamese counterpart, Do, and how critical he is to the success of our projects. Do wore a hat with the word "RISK" on it. It seemed to sum up so much about those who came on this trip and about the commitment that Mike, Do, and the Madison Quakers are making here. It also captures the essential spirit of the Vietnamese. They are survivors because they have risked it all. And so, too, the vets who are finding the courage to face what haunts them.

A lot of things came together on this trip, but still it is a journey that has only begun. It is a journey in which we must find and regain

the pieces of our humanity that were lost or damaged by the war. By some odd coincidence, a few days before we left Viet Nam, I discovered some notes I jotted down over a year ago when I was about to walk a labyrinth for the first time. Long since forgotten, they seemed to be written for this moment in time, for this path we are on:

Labyrinths are to walk in times of joy, in times of sorrow, and when we are seeking hope . . .

As we walk back out on the same path that brought us in, we are granted the power to act.

I want to thank my fellow travelers. It was a precious gift to share this time together.--Susan Kummer

The Store Keeper's Pagoda

by Mike Boehm

In September, 1997, Nguyen Ngoc Hung and I visited the Vietnamese-American Peace Park located about 30 miles north of Ha Noi. On the way back to Ha Noi we were talking about the difficulties in raising funds for the park and our other projects in Viet Nam, so Hung suggested we stop at the Store Keeper's Pagoda. Den Ba Chua Kho, or the Temple (Den) to the Storehouse (Kho) Princess (Ba Chua) is located in Co Me village, on the outskirts of Bac Ninh city, Bac Ninh province, about halfway between Ha Noi and the Vietnamese-American Peace Park.

As the legend goes, "Princess Kho" was a simple peasant girl from the region, who caught the eye of a Ly king. After he married her, she brought to his attention the large number of uncultivated fields in her home region as a result of the ongoing war against the Chinese. She asked the king's permission to return home and set up agricultural ventures

With a great natural talent for management, she set up 72 farms in the region which all became prosperous and helped to fill the national grain stores. She put prisoners of war to work on some of these plantations. The Princess was also entrusted with the task of superintending the national food stores. She ably performed these duties during the Song dynasty (Chinese) invasion of Viet Nam in the 11th century. Without her grain stores, the famous Vietnamese general Ly Thuong Kiet might not have been able to triumphantly push back the Song at the Nhu Nguyet river (near the temple) in 1076. After this decisive battle, the Princess continued to effectively manage the national grain treasury and the region continued to prosper.

Nobody knows the real name of the Princess, but after her death the villagers built a temple in her honor as a token of their gratitude. Succeeding dynasties enlarged the temple and continued to honor her. Unfortunately, the temple itself was destroyed under the Nguyen dynasty, so the current structure dates to the 19th century. It has been renovated many times since this major reconstruction.*

Since 1997 I have visited the Store Keeper's Pagoda every year. Visiting with me this year were Madison Friends Joe Elder, Sue and Todd Kummer, and Louise and Jim Lund. This year, as usual, the compound of the Store Keeper's Pagoda was filled with Vietnamese people who gave offerings and prayed to the Store Keeper for success in obtaining money for themselves or their children for new homes, schooling, etc. Vendors have expressed surprise in the past at seeing foreigners visit the pagoda and then seeing them pray for money for people not in their immediate family.

The avenue leading to the pagoda is lined with vendors competing for the business of visitors. They sell imitation gold leaf, gold coins and other representations of money including photocopies of U.S. \$100 bills. These bills have written on them in Vietnamese the words "Bank of the Underworld." In each stall is one person, a man usually, who has a "request" form for the Store Keeper written in Chinese. On this form the supplicant writes, vertically, his or her name and address.

After filling out the "request" form, we took the form with a carefully chosen selection of \$100 bills, gold coins, etc. into the pagoda and burned incense and prayed to the Store Keeper for a "loan" from her for the projects we have in Viet Nam. At each place

we burned incense, we would leave the "money" sit for a bit and then move to the next site. At the end of our visit, we were given the offering of money to take back with us to Madison.

When I returned home this year I burned last years offering and replaced it with this years offering. I don't think I am especially superstitious but I do like seeing the "money" – the \$100 bills, gold coins, gold leaf – sitting on the shelf above my filing cabinets. It gives me a strong visual link to Viet Nam and encouragement to keep exploring new avenues for funding of our projects.

*Thanks to Kate Jellema for finding information on the legend of Princess Kho.

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Who is Solidarity Truckers, Inc?

Solidarity Truckers is a recently acquired 1990 diesel truck with a twenty-four foot box, and a handful of long time, non-paid, dedicated activists that have been working with Latin American and Caribbean solidarity groups (see <http://www.cae.wisc.edu/~mmagee/med>).

*Bob Abplanalp has worked with Central American projects since 1981 and is co-director of Nicaragua Medical Alliance (NMA). He has driven buses and trucks thousands of miles for the Chicago Food Bank, NMA and Pastors for Peace caravans to Chiapas, Mexico, Central America and Cuba.

*Peggy Hopson-Valdes is a former staffer of Pastors for Peace. Having worked with P4P for more than a decade, she has participated in and formulated numerous caravans to Cuba, Mexico and Central America. She is also a veteran of the Venceremos Brigades to Cuba.

*Jack Oswald works with the Chicago Friends of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade and is a long time community organizer and labor activist.

*Ned Powell is a Fulbright scholar, driver on numerous Pastors for Peace caravans, active with groups trying to end the blockade of Cuba, veteran of the Venceremos Brigades to Cuba, member of Community Action on Latin America, and is a former steamfitter and Wobbly.

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