



Let me provide some personal background before reaching the substance of article as well as my requests for your readers.

My name is Luong Thi Gia Hoa Ryan. I am a daughter of my First Motherland, Viet Nam. I was the oldest of 12 children. I have four brothers and seven sisters. My Mother was from the South of Viet Nam. My Father was from the North just outside Ha Noi. I was born in the South and grew up in the center of Viet Nam. So I call "all" Viet Nam as my home. My father named me after the small town where he was born, namely, "Gia Hoa." My father gave me so much wisdom through his sayings. For example, he said, "When you eat the fruit, remember who planted it." Another time, he told us children, "When you are drinking the water, never forget where it's coming from."

My parents were always very generous, especially to people in need, which included many people who had to go to the South. My parents would provide the poor with food, and assistance, and even a little money, despite the fact that we were not that rich. We children also learned about the value of hard work. When I was only eight years old, I learned how to have a "business." My neighbor's son helped me. I went to the train station early in the morning to sell bakery which we had made. Later on I continued to make foods and sell these. Of course, all the money went to our Mother who carefully managed household finances and always seemed able to set aside some emergency money.

As the oldest child, I of course helped with all the others. My Mom always had a new baby each year to take care of. So I became the "mom" for the others. I always helped them with their school lessons. In fact, if I remember correctly, I even had to do my brother's homework. He got the credit, I got the headaches as well as knowledge to carry through my life.

In school our family also had to learn how to take care of ourselves. I remember there were these two other kids—a brother and sister—who always were harassing, threatening, and hitting us. They did this because we were of the north. They would laugh and make fun of us. So one afternoon, my brother Van and I followed them. Van said we need to teach them a lesson. We ran along one side of the train station building and waited until they came along the other side. Then we jumped out and surprised them. We taught them a "physical lesson" and they never bothered us again.

These are thus some of the seeds my parents planted that blossomed into wondrous fruit. Let me also tell about the water I have drunk. My parents gave us a good model for taking care of children. She taught us life's lessons from the beginning. As the oldest of twelve, it is my duty to be a second mother to all my brothers and sisters, and my nieces and nephews. I teach them to stand tall, talk straight, and above all to respect yourself, your heritage, your family, all our elders, and your country. My father too had his words of wisdom that we children learned well.

So why do I recount all these early childhood experiences. Because these lessons helped all of us later, including the virtue of working hard, respecting our elders, and preserving their wisdom. It is these values which I have tried to remember and apply in life, which includes all the jobs and positions I have held, the businesses I owned and managed, and the charitable work carried out by the Foundation I established which is called, "The Friendship Foundation of American-Vietnamese." My parents had taught us how we should always help others, especially those in great need, including from poor rural areas. These are also the values I want our youth to learn, especially through the Vietnamese Cultural garden we are creating on Dr. Martin Luther King Boulevard near Cleveland's magnificent Art Museum. These lessons it is especially appropriate to

recognize now as we celebrate the Twenty-Fifth anniversary of the Friendship Foundation. Let me discuss my early encounters with employment. Already I mentioned how I worked from when I was very young to earn money. I was now only sixteen years old. Other young women at this age were already married and had children. But I wanted to obtain a full-time job with the Americans who had come to Viet Nam in the mid 1960's. Many Vietnamese were seeking such employment. I told my parents, "I want to apply for these jobs." I talked to a girl friend of mine who told me how to apply. I bravely walked across the park and into an Officers' Club in the city of Nha Trang during the non-business hours. Here I was, only 16, and not that old looking, although I was tall for a Vietnamese individual.

I walked past the guard and asked for whoever was in charge. I was told to sit down and wait. I waited for half an hour until the lady-in-charge lady came back from the market.

"You want a job?" she asked.
"Yes," I replied.
"What kind?" she asked, her eyes questioning my capability. "There were only two jobs available: housemaid or bar tending."
"Maybe bar tending."
One older sergeant just looked at me and appeared negative toward my request. But a young NCO said, "Oh, sergeant, give her a chance."

"She has to learn all about tending bar and learn the drinks," the older one explained, "and what about speaking English?"
"Let's see," said the younger one. He placed several beverages on the bar top. He mixed up some beer and pop. Then he told me, "This is Coke, this is orange, this is RC cola, and cream soda. This is Pabst beer, this is Budweiser beer. This is Hamm's."

Then he waited a minute. He played the part of a customer and asked me to identify each beverage as he held it up. I called off each one correctly.

"See?" he told his partner NCO, "she can remember what she learns."
Little did he know that I may not have known that much English then, but I could read the labels on the beverages.

"Okay," said the senior sergeant, "she can start on probation. But if she cannot learn English, we cannot use her."

So I went home and my brother helped me practice some phrases over and over. Four days later I return to the Officers' Club. I greeted them and waved. "Hi Johnny, Hi Sergeant. How are you today?"

"See," exclaimed Johnny excitedly, "she knows English. She knows English. She has learned."
That was about the extent of what I knew then, although of course I picked up much more English as the weeks went on. They would let me go for English classes while they all went off to see the night time movie. So I worked there in the evenings, then also at the NCO clubs, and my main job I got later was as a secretary at the soldiers' pay office. Eventually I took various courses taught by the US army, including in Saigon, and I wound up as an interpreter for the US government, as well as the supervisor for some two hundred Vietnamese workers around the base.

Later when I left for US, I gave my job to my sister. I want to sum up what I learned from Viet Nam as I decided to come to America in 1971. I begin by urging all of us to pay tribute to our parents, especially our Mothers. We may think of them as living in tiny universes within their households and taking care of the family. But this is the most important universe of all. Here is where our Mothers influence us children and prepare us for later life. Here is where we learn about love and truth and hard work. We need to talk to our



Ryan 越南華僑,她 1971 年代表越南政府到美國做訪問。她求他們在沒有成為美國公民之前絕對不能依賴美國。
Ryan 出生於一個良好家庭,父親是個商人,他有兄弟姐妹 12 人,她是老大,她說:她的一生很感謝父親,他的父親給她足夠的自由,在越南像她這樣的女孩,13 歲家庭就讓你出嫁結婚,但她沒有,她接受最好的教育,現在她在越南最窮的地方開設學校。她的一句話:人要對自己有信心... 浦瑛

還有她將自己在越南的家人和朋友 40 多人帶到美國來,她要求他們在沒有成為美國公民之前絕對不能依賴美國。
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own children, telling them both the positives and negatives about this world. Our children need to know where they come from. They need to know about their language, culture, and customs so they in turn can pass these on to their children. They need to realize the hundred Vietnamese generations that have gone before them. In all of my work in America from 1971 to present, I tell our community these ideals. These also motivate me in my work to build a Vietnamese Cultural garden and these especially inspire our choice of the center statue of a

my only activity.
In 1993, after returning to America from my first trip back to Viet Nam in twenty years, I decided to start a humanitarian foundation to help people, in both Indochina and America. Our mission was "to build bridges of friendship between the people of Viet Nam and people of other countries including the United States." I recruited others including many Vietnam veterans to help carry out this dream. During the past twenty years, our organization of the Friendship Founda-

tion of American-Vietnamese has sponsored over eleven hundred volunteers recruited from over ten different nations who have journeyed to Vietnam for a month or more to carry out charitable work. Some of these volunteers were sons and daughters of Vietnamese people who had earlier come to America. Others were young people of different countries who wanted to learn more about Viet Nam. They all wanted to help in Vietnam and we placed them in positions for teaching, for doing work in hospitals, for working with people and youth in remote rural villages, and for assisting in other social work including with the elderly.

A number of these volunteers have remained in Viet Nam where they have served for years as teachers and social workers. At the same time, I worked in my American community where I lived; I helped the local people as well as raised my children.

Our Foundation has raised over twenty-seven million dollars in funds, medicines, operations and surgeries, food, clothing, school supplies, and other beneficial services. In carrying out our mission to build bridges of friendship, we have also hosted and sponsored some 250 people from Viet Nam and other countries to come to America for professional, medical, legal, governmental, business, and educational projects. I must mention one doctor who came here and eventually learned to do kidney transplants. He returned to Viet Nam where he was the first Vietnamese surgeon who could do this. All this humanitarian activity was one way for me to pay back my First Motherland for all she gave me.

I must mention more about the Sai Gon Plaza. This was a hundred year old building on West 54th and Detroit. For many years it had been a furniture store; then a church acquired and used it for a bingo hall. Finally, as people of that Church left the community, it was abandoned for several years. Then I heard it was for sale. But when I tried to buy, suddenly somebody else came along and bid more on it. So I lost this building. I thought, "If God had wanted me to have and use that building, He would do so." However, two weeks later, Alex the building manager called me and asked if I was still interested.

I said, "Yes" and I gathered together all my life's savings. About that same time I

helped establish the agency, and then gained a graduate degree with honors in psychology which is still a relatively new field of study in Viet Nam. He is now the director of one of the largest mental health establishments in Viet Nam, helping both patients and their families. He has more than 3,000 patients, a staff of over one hundred professionals which includes five psychiatrists and six doctors.

For the Asian and Pacific groups I have been proud to sponsor our annual Asian Heritage Month which is highlighted by Asian-American Heritage Day at Cleveland City Hall where we celebrate our history and culture. This is crucial for all of us from around the world who have Asian backgrounds. This Asian heritage we expanded to a weekend of dancing, singing, and exhibits including at the Sai Gon Plaza. Eventually this grew into the Asian Festival celebrated annually in Cleveland which attracts 30,000 or more people of all races.

We people of Viet Nam have always appreciated learning. Continuing this tradition of scholars, my Friendship Foundation has welcomed students who come to the United States from Viet Nam, study in our universities, continue our Asian drive for scholarly excellence, and then return to their homeland. My organization has provided them with advice and guidance as well as housing and good Vietnamese food so they can study harder.

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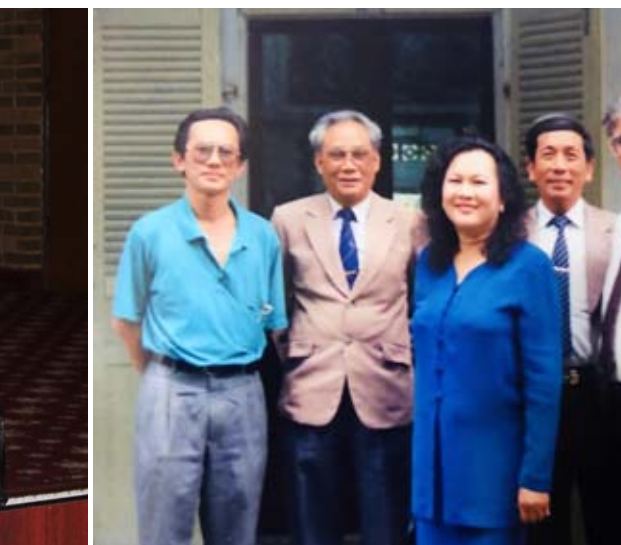
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By Joseph Patrick Meissner