

**Vietnam travel journal, March 2011**  
**Part 4: The Trajectories of Generations**  
**Home of Hope #2**

As she tearfully waved good-bye to the only home she had ever known, seven year old Nuy (pronounced "Nee") assumed they were taking her somewhere to serve as a house-girl. At least her brother, eight year old Nguy (pronounced "Nwee"), slumped there beside her, wide-eyed and just as bewildered.



The car parked next to a church. The warm greeting and gentle eyes of Huong did not match Nuy's expectations of an employer, and immediately alleviated her foreboding. Day after day in this new place unfolded like a sweet dream that one clings to amidst the constant threat of waking: enough food to eat; a new school and ample time and support to study; warm and comfortable beds; and best of all, a mother's and father's arms to hug her close. Her worst fear, now, she says, is that the woman she has come to call "Mother" will grow old and leave her like the mother she lost when she was only four.

Huong is a pastor's wife who is always talking to other people about the love of God. Now, she says, she is learning so much about what that really means, as she loves three precious children who have come to her at Home of Hope #2 through tragic circumstances.



Huong is deeply concerned for Nuy's and Nguy's family of origin. She asks for strength and wisdom to love them well. My mind flashes back to their sister, so young and brave.



I grapple with the different archs of two girls' lives – Nuy's and her niece's, Nuy's sister's oldest daughter, who is next in line for head of household in the matriarchal society.



Two young girls, one bound by custom to marry young, work incessantly, bear the oppression of poverty without complaining, and give birth to a daughter to inherit the same. The other, snatched into a dream come true, a daily experience of Jesus' love as she soaks up the delight of parents who have the emotional energy to be fully present to her. Just thinking of Nuy floods my heart with gratitude, but when I stop and think of the trajectories of generations to come....



**Vietnam travel journal, March 2011**  
**Breaking News**

Dear friends of Hope's Promise,

One of the highlights of our time in Vietnam, as I shared with you in the introduction to my Vietnam travel journals, was meeting Douc and his grandparents:



*No one helps this brilliant little guy with schoolwork, but he brings home papers marked perfect or near perfect. He says he wants to be a doctor when he grows up. Douc goes to the market for his impoverished elderly grandparents and helps them with many chores around the house. But they are terrified of the day they die. If there is room in a Hope's Promise home, they want more than anything for him to have a forever family.*

We have just received word from Thanh that the house-parents of Home of Hope #2 are willing to receive Douc into the home as their fourth child! Douc's older brother, Dat, is currently a member of the Home of Hope #2 family. Although the house-parents originally planned to parent only three children in the home, they have agreed to welcome Douc in addition to Dat, Nguy, and Nuy. We anticipate that the move will occur in July, even as we are trusting God to provide the funding to bring Douc into the home. If by any chance the Lord should place it on your heart to sponsor Douc, please visit <http://www.hopespromise.com/orphan-care/child-sponsorships-2/> to learn more about HP child sponsorship.

Douc's sponsorship needs will total \$115/month for full sponsorship or \$30 or \$45 co-sponsorships to reach the total.

To sponsor or co-sponsor Douc:

- Please visit: <http://www.hopespromise.com/donate/>.

- Using the “GiveDirect” tab, select “Vietnam HoH #2 child sponsor” in the drop down menu.
- Type “Douc ” in the comment section.

To learn more about Douc’s story, please continue reading.

### **Breaking News, continued** **A New Child for Home of Hope #2**

They are old and sick, and the light in their lives is little Douc. Their daughter abandoned Douc and his older brother Dat completely in their care in 2005. She came back only once four years ago, to sign divorce papers from the boys’ father, an alcoholic who was physically abusive to his family. Grandpa is 82, blind, has high blood pressure and struggles to walk. Grandma, at age 77, is very ill with malaria, even as we visit. We urge her through Thanh’s translation to lie down, but she refuses. She clings to an agenda that supersedes her own suffering.



Grandma grew up an orphan, raised by Catholic nuns. When she met Grandpa, he subscribed to the indigenous Vietnamese religion of Cao Dai. “Adherents engage in ethical practices such as prayer, veneration of ancestors, nonviolence, and vegetarianism with the minimum goal of rejoining God the Father in Heaven and the ultimate goal of freedom from the cycle of birth and death. Estimates of the number of Cao Đài adherents in Vietnam vary, but most sources report 2 to 3 million.” (Source: Wikipedia, on-line encyclopedia.)

Grandpa followed his wife to the Catholic Church for a few years, but then dropped out and forbid his wife to attend. Six years ago, Grandma suffered a stroke. They had no money for treatment. Terrified that she would die, her son urged her to speak with a visiting Christian evangelist. Both Grandma and her son came to faith in Christ. Grandpa refused to have anything to do with their newfound beliefs, until another pastor visited several weeks later to share the Gospel. This time, Grandpa was ready to give his life to Christ and remove the objects

of ancestor worship from their home. Within days, his wife experienced miraculous healing from her stroke.

Their faith grew stronger as the local Christian church rallied to help care for the boys, contributing food for the family every week. Grandma peddled food at a nearby school to raise money for her grandson's school fees, earning about a dollar a day. But, last year, she became too weak and the family lost even this meager source of income. Their pastor shared with them about a new home opening for orphans. There was only room for one of the boys. Grandma and Grandpa especially feared for Dat. At age eight, with high energy levels and many friends in the streets, their oldest grandson was running wild. Although they knew they would miss him terribly, they gratefully sent Dat to join the Home of Hope #2 family in 2010.



*Left: Home of Hope #2 children – Nguy, Nuy, and Dat, March 2011. Right: Dat, March 2011*

Every night, Douc prays for Dat and his new family. He tends to his grandparents, going to market for them and helping with house-hold chores. He works hard in school. Grandma and Grandpa never learned to write, but Douc wants to be a doctor when he grows up. Proudly, the family pulls out Douc's recent school papers. He is acing every subject.



Our visit is drawing to a close. Grandma plays her last card. Will we take Douc into Home of Hope #2? She can't bear the thought of the empty house if he goes, but she is worried that he will go hungry and have to drop out of school. She is even more terrified that she and Grandpa will die. She wants Douc to have a hope and a future.

Thanh explained the situation to us before our visit. The house-parents of Home of Hope #2 originally intended to take only three children. However, the house-mom has met Douc and developed an affinity for him. Their house is small, but they have brain-stormed ways they could fit another child. They have expressed initial openness to the idea. We affirmed that we are behind the staff of Vietnam, whatever they decide. Despite current funding shortages for Vietnam, we will trust God's provision.

For now, Thanh tells Grandma, we need to discuss the idea further with the house-parents and find out their final decision. Grandma and Grandpa stand on their front porch as Douc escorts us down a winding lane back to our vehicle.



Douc hops on the back of a friend's bicycle to return to the village, at least for now.

**Vietnam travel journal, March 2011**  
**Part 5: Subversive love**

If you are an American Christian, cherish your religious freedom. And *never* forget that somewhere in the world at this very moment, a brother or sister is passionately surrendering possessions, homes, liberties, emotional and physical security, and even their very lives for the sake of the Gospel.

I can't stop watching him. It's like he is a mirror reflecting some distant radiance. I listen to the interview we are conducting, but all the while I keep stealing glimpses of the luminous evangelist, ever smiling, and his gentle, graceful wife, settled in a hammock at the back of the room, cradling a young child. Their brilliance floods the room, washes over children whispering, nudging one another, and giggling on a woven floor matt.



We arrived at this place in disguise. Our identity as Western outsiders was concealed, even as we rode in the car, by sun hats and rectangular fabric mouth coverings hooked over the ears with elastic, commonly used by Vietnamese to screen pollution. When the car rolled to a stop on the rocky road high in a mountain village, we hustled through the door of a home, smiling in relief and greeting as our new friends motioned that we could remove our coverings.

The evangelist and his wife lead a church of about 200 people. The church is Hope's Promise's (HP) hands and feet to sponsor a LEADS "pod", an educational scholarship group of thirty impoverished students and a social worker. The group started with fifteen Christian families and fifteen families of other beliefs. The "pod" we are visiting is one of three in Vietnam serving a total of ninety children. We interview several students in the group that has gathered in the discrete shelter of the evangelist's living room.

Just two weeks before our visit, government officials made the rounds to all the families with students in this LEADS group. They ordered the parents to withdraw from the program, threatening to confiscate houses or jobs and deny any government aid, such as support in the event of natural disasters. The Christians remained resolute and unafraid, trusting in God as their ultimate authority. But four of the non-Christian families, immigrants from the North where government oppression is even more severe, withdrew from the program. Our planned visit to the LEADS group is reconsidered, but deemed worth pursuing. Arriving under disguise furthers the chances that our visit will not be interrupted by government officials, who would not harm us but would send us away.

We learn that despite multiple offers from outside non-governmental organizations to build additional schools for the children, the government adamantly refuses. Children in grades 1-5 attend a school in the village, but those in grades 6-9 walk 14 km round trip. Students in grades 10-12 must re-locate to a boarding school 30 km away where they are not allowed to attend church and have no money to visit their families. One little girl we interview reports that her two older sisters ride their bikes every day to the high school, a 60 km round trip! To complicate matters further, the government threatens families that if they are receiving support from our LEADS program, they will not even authorize documents for the student to go to boarding school. The government has a loan program, but not for Christians.

Why is the government so afraid of education? As recently as five years ago, this particular tribal group peacefully requested the return of their land which was confiscated after the Vietnam War. The people in this area were once a separate country, and the government fears that they will attempt to secede from Vietnam. Army and police officers quickly and violently squelched demonstrations. Keeping the people deliberately uneducated is a blatant strategy to keep them oppressed. Christians, in particular, are a threat. They are not afraid of the government and they refuse to subscribe to the unified ideology of Communism. Additionally, many tribal Christians sided with the Americans in the Vietnam War and represent a long-held defiance of the government.

After the student interviews, we ask more questions about the evangelist and the church. When Thanh translates that the evangelist is on the government “Black List,” the man laughs with a razor sharp glint in his eyes of unshakeable confidence, unbending will, and untarnished worship. Again and again, he recalls, government officials admonished him to stop inciting the people to praise God. I see it in my mind’s eye: he bows his head in respect as they berate him, unflinching with that blinding smile. Then he watches the receding dust kicked up by their vehicles and turns on his heel, back into the church to lead his people. Like the early church in Acts, they cry out to God, not for protection from their oppressors, but for increased boldness.

In Vietnam, churches are openly persecuted until they reach a critical mass of about 100. They can then submit an application to be “recognized” by the government, a status through which they are supposed to experience religious freedom. Many never receive recognition, even after growing to more than 300 members. In some parts of Vietnam, even “recognition” does little to protect religious freedom. This particular church reached the capacity to qualify for recognition, but it has been denied in retaliation for the evangelist’s defiant worship through the years.

When the body of believers began construction on a church building next to his house, government officials demanded that they stop. They called on a major leader of the denomination, well-known by the government and protected by multiple connections with outsiders. He drove up the winding mountain road and stood in the middle of the construction. “Kill me,” he told the officials, “but they are going to build this church.” The leaders grumbled amongst themselves and finally said, “Fine, we’ll just return when it is complete and tear it down.” When they came back, the believers gathered; and the officials withdrew again.

We don our disguises and walk to the nearby home of one of the Christian students. In a style common to the area, the weathered wood home is raised on short stilts for ventilation. The nine year old girl’s father abandoned the family, and her mother labors in nearby fields to try to provide subsistence for the family. We duck into the interior, all of its meager contents visible in one room: a kitchen area with an open cooking arrangement on the floor, shelves with a bottle of oil and a few other food staples, a sack stuffed with clothing hanging from a roof beam, and a wooden bed draped in mosquito netting with a woven matt instead of a mattress. The girl’s mother hurries up to the house as we are leaving, with a baby on her hip and a basket strapped to her back like a pack, filled with farming utensils. She has that same unearthly smile, like the evangelist, as she thanks us profusely through Thanh for making it possible for her daughter to go to school.



Before we leave the village, we pause in the sacred space of the church sanctuary, serene and empty, flush with a palpable peace. Our new friends tell us more about the church in Vietnam, including the story of a nearby church that was ransacked and destroyed in 2010. A spokesperson from the largest government-recognized denomination in Vietnam, the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (South) said, “There was no reason for this – it is religious persecution, pure and simple, incited and allowed by local government officials.” (June 2010, Compass Direct News.)



A reverent breeze wafts through open windows and doors, bearing the fragrance of pungent bare red-brown soil prepped for planting. Framed by intricate scrolling metal window frames, I can see looming misty mountains and fertile cassava and sugarcane fields. We bow our heads in prayer. When it is my turn, I offer my small, seemingly insignificant gift in a place already pulsing with the very Presence of God – I simply ask for more of what they already so bountifully possess. I have no doubt that God is standing in our very midst. I know, because I can see His radiance reflected on the evangelist’s face.



Thanh puts it this way, “Every day, we pray for our people and the authorities, too. They do not know what they do. They need the Light. We always choose the solution ‘conquer them with love’.”

Despite the obstacles, indigenous churches across Vietnam are partnering with Hope’s Promise to plant tiny seeds of subversive love, placing orphans in families, serving impoverished people through medical missions, and helping tribal groups overcome oppression through education. The soil is fertile.

Glory be to God – He is worthy.

*If God has planted any seeds of passion for Hope’s Promise Vietnam in your own heart, please drop me a reply email! I’d love to hear from you. Or, call Associate Director Lorie Bailey at 303-660-0277.*

*Colleen Briggs*

Hope's Promise  
Director of Orphan Care