

A Humanitarian Non-profit Organization Approved by IRS Code 501(c) 3 & California Section 23701D

P.O. Box 9322 Auburn, California 95604-9322 - Email: info@FriendsofVSO.org -Web: www.FriendsofVSO.org

June Newsletter, 2013 - Volume 10 Issue 3

To Vietnam and Back, Again

It's been a busy year for FVSO Board members, many of whom have traveled to Vinh Son. First, Dave Chaix and Colleen Sands, then Mike and Marion Little, and finally, Clyde Lewandowski and Dennis Coyne, all made the long journey to Kontum, Vietnam. Their specific trip objectives may have varied, but what drove each of them was their love of the children and caregivers. Whether it's assisting with the planning and execution of annual commitments, or seeking out the love of a single child, these travelers have acted as your representatives, between contributor and recipient. Some of their stories, observations and pictures are shared in this newsletter. Everyone is safely home now, but already thinking about "the next time."

Clyde's Comments

Clyde's complete report can be found on our website - <http://www.friendsofvso.org/sitepages/news.html>

The children were off from school for a few days, so we had plenty of opportunity to mingle. Many were helping with chores in the fields and at their respective sites. This may sound harsh to us from a western culture that children work like this; but in their culture and with their needs, this is common. They do it with a sense of joy and pride that they are also helping themselves and each other. They operate in the mindset of "we" and not "me". It is very refreshing to see how they all care for each other.

The Sisters commented multiple times that we must be more clear and specific as to what the money is to be used for (both special projects and basic needs). We will take actions to improve our communication and make this happen going

Clyde (L) with a few of his newest pals; Sister Martha (R) showing off her infectious smile



Our visit began at VS-1, the most visible of all the VSO sites, located behind the old wooden church. There, we met Sister Martha for the first time. Her mother died when she was only 1-year old, so she was raised by her Aunt, a Nun who has been helping lepers for 45 years. Martha is a faith filled and joyful person, totally dedicated to helping the children.

As always, it was difficult to leave the kids, their laughter and contagious optimism. We accomplished a lot during our stay, but communication remains a challenge. Mr. Ho, one of the English teachers, was there for us all the time and we cannot thank him enough. Sister Martha has more energy and willingness to learn than anyone I have ever met. She is working on her English and computer skills. An excellent motorbike driver, we nicknamed her "Hot Rod."

Clyde Lewandowski



The Tooth Fairy Strikes Again

Insights from Dennis

As you've read so far in this newsletter, so much happened while Clyde and I were in Vietnam. As always, we wish we had more time to work the issues. As you know, we make these trips at our own expense, so we often weigh whether an outright gift would be better served than actually going there. Sometimes, however, the gift is not as important as our presence. We found that to be true again this time.

As I reflect on our visit, what stood out for me was:

1. The love we saw expressed by the children for each other. It is demonstrated in how they care for each other. We saw this in the feeding of the young by the older children; we saw it in the fluoride treatment; we saw it in their everyday interaction. I have not witnessed this in any other institution like this. 2. The care given by the Sisters, the teachers, and others who work with the children. The children are learning important values and important life lessons from these wonderful adults. 3. Happiness - in the midst of an environment which has few material things - "stuff" - they thrive. It's a lesson I take home after each visit.



Dennis wasn't afraid of a little work at Vinh Son 1



Dennis brought over 1,000 treatments of Medicom Duraflor Halo fluoride varnish treatment to Sao Mai and Vinh Son.

The treatment was provided at a reduced cost by DDS Mike and Dan Beiting from Edgewood, KY and Darby Dental, their wholesale provider, who partnered with us on this project. Two of the Sao Mai children stepped forward to help the caregivers learn to administer the fluoride varnish treatment.

Above is Sister Imelly Y Tis, assisting at VS-1.

Two other thoughts. On one of the many visits to each site, I was going through my standard drill of contemplating "why" we were there and "what" we wanted to accomplish, when one of the Sisters stopped me and asked a pointed question through the interpreter: "Why do you do this?" The question set me back for a moment - still dealing with a 12 hour jet lag - but it was important and I didn't want the message to be lost in translation. I finally blurted out: "Because Jesus said so." As we all know, it is in the New Testament in many statements by Jesus. She smiled and understood what I was driving at. I told her she was doing the hard work - she was the hands and heart caring and loving the children. We (board members and donors) were just other parts of the body helping the best we could. You make a difference in their lives every day by your gifts.

And finally, "Who's on first?" In one of the many meetings we had with the Sisters, we were involved in a discussion of how other people were helping VSO. The conversation got a little rapid for me and I started missing parts. Sr. Martha, our new on-site coordinator and translator, was giving us a run down on other key players helping the children. She mentioned a priest's name but I totally missed hearing it, and asked, "**Fr. Who?**" and she responded, "**No, Fr. Vu**". At that point Clyde and I lost it. Having grown up with Abbott and Costello and their hilarious comedy skit ("Who's on First?"), we had our best laugh in two weeks. Our version goes like this: **Father Vu's** on first, **"What's"** on second, and **"I don't know"** is on third. It really helps to maintain a healthy sense of humor on these long expeditions.

All is well at Vinh Son.... thanks to you.

Dennis Coyne

A Dream Comes True

Mike & Marion Little, with Y Nhun

A little one can enter your life and fill a special place in your family. A place that, until that moment, you didn't even know was empty. This is exactly what happened to us on Easter morning of 2000 when a beautiful toddler walked directly up to us, placed a tiny hand on Marion's leg and, with a dazzling smile, fused herself to our souls. Our little one's name is Y Nhun, and she has lived at Vinh Son almost since birth.

While miles and years have separated us since that Easter morning, we've been able to stay in touch with our little girl thanks to many friends who've travelled to Kontum. Due to their generous support; our gifts, photographs and letters have been delivered to Y Nhun on a regular basis. Through these deliveries we've helped celebrate most of her life's milestone events, applauded scholastic efforts and have become our own unique family. This is the good news!

The bad news is that for many years we wondered if we would ever be together again. Since 2001, the political situation in the Highlands has made it difficult for foreigners, especially those with ties to the Montagnard community, to enter the country. On three occasions our visa applications were denied, which left us to wonder. Would ever see that beautiful smile again, or would there only be photographs? Would we ever hear her voice again, or would we only have letters? Would we ever spend another day together, or would we only have our dreams?

In January, we decided that we needed to try to visit one more time. You can't imagine our surprise; nix that, shock when both visas were approved. It took thirteen long years, but on Sunday, March 17, 2013, we learned that sometimes dreams DO come true!

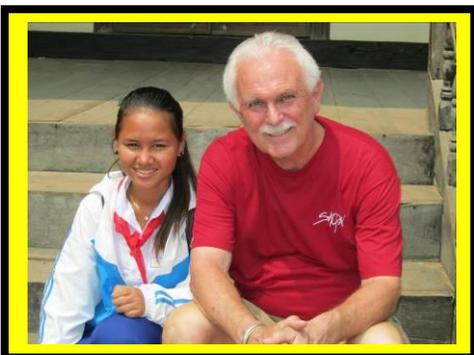
"There she is!" Y Nhun was waiting for us with open arms at the entrance to the Wooden Church. Reminiscent of our first meeting, she took Marion's hand and guided us to seats next to her, smack dab in the center of the all-girl choir. Mass had just started, so our entrance created quite a stir. Church was filled to capacity with orphans of all ages (and ability to sit still). As meaningful as it was to share the service with Y Nhun, it was too much fun watching so many of the caregivers struggle to maintain order with the boys. It was an uphill battle, the kids were winning, and the entertainment value was priceless.



Easter morning, Y Nhun didn't know she had been adopted



Y Nhun and Marion enjoy a quiet moment on the swing-set



Mike & Y Nhun didn't always understand each other but that was ok

After Mass, we spoke with Sister Imelda. Over the years, the Nuns at Vinh Son have been instrumental in nurturing our relationship with Y Nhun, and our desire to sponsor her both emotionally and financially. We made plans to meet later for lunch; but first, Marion and I had a date with our girl. We were going shopping! And, we had told her that she could bring a girlfriend!!!

Well, let's just say that the central market isn't exactly the mall, but the excitement of two young girls on a shopping expedition was more than familiar. Y Nhun and Y Thuing used a shopping cart for the first time in their lives, and it didn't take long for them to understand its usefulness. As the cart filled with everything from clothing to umbrellas, we kept our distance, allowing the girls to enjoy the moment and freedom to choose anything they wanted.

Shopping must make teenage girls hungry in Vietnam too. By the time we met Sister Imelda and the rest of the nuns from VS-1 for lunch, the girls had apparently worked up quite an appetite! We know they weren't starving, but it was awfully quiet at our table once the food was served.

Laughter, walking, chatting, walking, photo sessions, walking, dinner at the Dak Bla restaurant and walking filled the rest of our day together. By the time we returned Y Nhun and Y Thuing to Vinh Son for the evening, we were certainly happy the hotel was nearby. Did I mention we did a lot of walking? Still, every step had been worth it. Every step had been a dream come true!

On Monday, we only had a few hours together since Y Nhun had school in the morning and we were scheduled to leave that afternoon. Although time together was brief, all our goals were accomplished.

Does she know we love her? Check! Does she know she is a member of our family? Check! As a 16 year old, does she have her own memories of time spent together now? Check! Have we made a positive difference in her life? Check! We've also made plans to return for her high school graduation in three years time. We might even be able to bring Amanda, Taylor and Sean (our children here) for the happy occasion. We have a new dream...

Mike & Marion Little

Smiles of gratitude from some of our friends at VS-1



Walking Y Nhun home from school; Ms. Thien, our trusted friend and translator, is wearing the hat



**Special Projects Update
Completed or In-Progress**

- Outdoor walkway at VS-1
- Repair sitting room at VS-1
- Boys bathroom repair at VS-1
- New kitchen & dining room for VS-3
- Water purification system for VS-3 & VS-5
- Boys dormitory project for VS-4

Special projects are often joint efforts with other non-profit groups and often funded by generous donors who target their contributions. The next newsletter will focus on these efforts.

Organizations supporting FVSO

- 189th Assault Helicopter Company
- Vietnam Veterans of America, Chapter 535, Nevada County, CA
- Counterparts
- 4th Infantry Division Association (NY & NJ Chapter)
- 14th Combat Engineer Btn. Association
- MilSpec Tours



Vinh Son & Sao Mai Orphanage Facts

- Population – approximately 830 Montagnard children in seven orphanage facilities
- Administered by the Sisters of the Miraculous Medal & St. Paul Chartres
- Location – Kontum/Pleiku, Vietnam
- \$12 feeds, shelters, and educates one child for one month

Officers

- President** - Dave Chaix
- Secretary** - Dennis Coyne
- Treasurer** - Colleen Sands
- Senior VP** - Pat McKee
- 1st VP** - Sr. Marie Dominique
- 2nd VP** - Michael Little

Board

- Hank Gonzales
- Rich Lahey
- Clyde Lewandowski
- Bart Ruud
- Patrick Leary
- Alan Brooks

Donation Information

Please make checks payable to FVSO or Friends of Vinh Son
Donations are gratefully accepted year round
100% of administrative costs are paid by the Board and Officers