

My Unificationist Memoirs - Chapter 8

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June 27, 2021



Mission District in San Francisco

After I met Lan Pham and began to teach her the Divine Principle at the Judah Street "Asian Church," I received strong support from Mr. Kobayashi, our Japanese witnessing leader, who always had the heart of an older brother and mentor. With his encouragement, I continued to cultivate my relationships within the Vietnamese community. Lan invited me to her family's home in the outer Mission District in San Francisco. There, I met her parents, brothers and sisters, cousins, and extended family. They warmly embraced me. I listened to their stories and found myself deeply moved by their courage and love in the midst of intense suffering, loss, and sorrow. As Lan and her brother, Thai made me increasingly aware of the difficult economic circumstances of many of the refugee families, I recalled the Oakland Church's highly developed community outreach, Project Volunteer, and their food collection warehouse. I contacted them and arranged to pick food up on a weekly basis. With the help of Lan, Thai, and their cousin, Hanh Nguyen, I would repackage the food into family-sized allotments, and bring it to homes in the Tenderloin.

I also began to assist many of the Vietnamese high school and college students as an English tutor. To this day, I recall their fresh faces radiating discipline, determination, and energy. Having survived the most harrowing experiences both during the war and in their escape from Vietnam, these young men and women possessed a resilient heart that shone through their spirit. Moreover, their Buddhist ethic and moral compass, the commitment to service instilled by their religious tradition and teaching, deeply impressed me. Although they welcomed me into their community as an "uncle" and a "teacher," in fact, they were growing my heart, expanding my understanding, and sharing their love to such an extent that I received more than I could ever give.

The dynamic of living for the sake of others sustained their families and clans. After arriving and settling, the older members of the family went to work to support the younger siblings in school. The job of the younger siblings was to study hard, achieve academic goals, and provide an economic foundation for the future. Thus, among the children I tutored, there are now doctors, pharmacists, engineers, and CPAs, as well as social workers and teachers. Once the younger siblings succeeded, they supported older siblings

who continued their education. And always, they supported their parents.

Hanh Nguyen and Thai Pham were pivotal in my outreach efforts. It simply was not in their DNA to only receive, they had to participate and serve. Hanh inherited this spirit from her parents who were deeply Buddhist. When Ông (grandfather) and Bà (grandmother) were a young married couple, escaping from the turmoil and famine in the North of Vietnam in 1945, they came across a starving Catholic family with a young son, Long, on the road south. The parents, strangers to them, begged the Nguyens to take their son. They did. Although they were Buddhists, in honor of Long's parents, Ông and Bà raised him as a Catholic. Long eventually joined the Army of SVN as an officer, and rose to provincial level responsibility. In 1975, he was captured and sent to a re-education camp where he endured seven years of torture, at times living for extended periods in an oil barrel suspended from the ground. Eventually, Bà would have 12 of her own children, two of whom would emigrate to France, while nearly everyone else, including Long, resided in San Francisco.

At the time, Ocean Church members with David Rosenblum were staying with us at Judah Street. I would catch buckets full of Rock Cod with them outside the Golden Gate and bring most of the catch over to the Nguyens. Bà would spread newspaper on the floor of her kitchen and squat down till she had cleaned all the fish. She would then freeze it and distribute it to families. Through her family, I was introduced to the monks and nuns at the Vietnamese Buddhist Temple in the Castro and began to distribute Project Volunteer food through the Buddhist community organization. Again, the community embraced me and my opportunities for service grew.

As did my spiritual ties. On occasion, I would attend the Buddhist services with the Phams and the Nguyens. I had many deep spiritual experiences in which I felt God moving through the hearts of these faithful people. One experience stands out in particular. I was staying in the Nguyen's home and rose early to meditate, as is my practice. I could hear Bà praying and meditating in her room above me. As I settled into my breathing and my mind opened up, I experienced a profound union of heart with her. The love of God flowed between us like a live current. My concept of religious denomination, of faith, and "inside and outside" were shattered in that moment. When True Father speaks of the very special love of mothers, of their naturally broad and expansive hearts, and their high level of spiritual attainment, I immediately am drawn in my heart to Bà.