

Hi All!

Communication from our 'budget' hotels here in Sai Gon (local spelling) has been sketchy at best. I sit writing this on my iPad with two fingers so please forgive any typos.

As most of you know, I returned to Vietnam with my husband, Laurens this time. Laurens has been the custodian of poetry and other documents he found in Vietnam 40 odd years ago when he was a soldier here. The University of NSW in Canberra tracked down the family of the Vietnamese soldier these documents belonged to, and Laurens finally returned to Vietnam for the first time to return the documents to the 'enemy' soldier's family. The soldier's name was Phan Van Ban.

We had no idea that this simple gesture would capture the imagination of people both in Australia and Vietnam. Foreign Correspondent came to Kyneton and Vietnam. When we arrived in Sai Gon, Laurens had to face a media conference. Then a bus load of TV and newspaper journalists accompanied us to the mother's village. She is 85 and had lost 2 sons in the war.

Despite the constant media scrum, it was still an emotional event and one that made Lauren's and Phan Van Ban's mother very happy. The day after we returned the documents, we travelled back to the village to have a feast with the extended family. Laurens and Phan Van Ban were both 20 years of age when they had their close encounter in Long Bin. Mr Ban's mother mentioned this fact via a translator, then 'adopted' Laurens as her eldest son and me as her eldest daughter-in-law. (Anh Hi and Chi Hi). We now have a Vietnamese family. Photos were taken to celebrate the occasion. We both felt honoured by this gesture, despite the fact I learned the eldest daughter-in-law has to do all the housework, cooking and cleaning!! Lol



Our new Vietnamese family (not the fellow at the back).



Lt Colonel Tien of the Vietnamese Army and Laurens working on international relations. Lt Col Tien helped trace the family and has invited us to visit her home in Vinh City.

The fun day for 420 kids from 8 orphanages at Nha Trang on April 1st was an amazing spectacle! One orphanage got flooded in by a circling typhoon. The kids must have been so disappointed. These children rarely, if ever, leave the compounds of the orphanages. Our Aussie friend, Robert Costabile was responsible for this coup. The logistics were incredible. Busses, catering, head counts, clowns, music, games, prizes and little party favours for every child to take home. Foreign Correspondent were meant to come to this with us too however they went from Kyneton to Vietnam via a story that had to be covered in Prague. There they got held up getting media visas.



Some of the 420 kids from 8 orphanages enjoying the fun day at the beach in Nha Trang. Some of the children in the foreground I met last year.



Eric Campbell and I enjoying a beer after a very long, very hot and crowded day.

All in all our time here so far as been hectic but we are heading back to Nha Trang tonight to visit orphanages and relax a bit. We delivered a swag of brand new clothes donated by Debz Fashions, a lap top donated by Maggie Millar's son, a Samsung notebook donated by us and heaps of lollies and chocolates for the fun day.

In May, we meet up with Son Michael Pham, from Seattle and Founder of Kids Without Borders to see what we might be able to achieve together. We will also meet up with other organisations and visit some more orphanages.

The food here is so beautiful and some of you got to sample Vietnamese food at 'One Night in Saigon' at Mr Carsisi. We love the deep fried pumpkin flowers stuffed with prawns, the crispy soft shelled crabs and the rice pancakes. Everything is so affordable.

Thank you to everybody who has ever supported ARTISTS FOR ORPHANS,

Love and light

Roni Wildeboer  
Founder  
Artists for Orphans, KYNETON VIC  
[Artists-for-orphans.com](http://Artists-for-orphans.com)

\* Below is the link to the second article to appear in The Age:

<http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/a-mothers-forgiveness-helps-heal-a-soldiers-scars-20120407-1wide.html?ref=nf>

\* Some of the Vietnamese translations made for interesting reading. Here is one:

<http://vnweb.org/vietnam/about/experience/40-year-tormented-for-a-poem>

\*And one in Vietnamese with photos:

<http://dantri.com.vn/c20/s20-581715/x250c-dong-gi226y-ph250t-cuu-binh-218c-trao-ky-vat-cua-nguoi-1237nh-viet-nam.htm>