

## Peg Thomas and Jerri Hirsch's Trip to Vietnam 2011 - Part 2

The following content was taken from the Bridges to Learning blog on Blogger.com. Thank you to Peg Thomas, former Executive Director of B2L, for sharing her journey and creating the posts.

# Tales from Vietnam

---

### Bleach Day at Anh Linh School

January 24, 2011

Today is Bleach Day. The goal is to scrub up the school for tomorrow's Tet celebration. After that the children will be off for 2 weeks.

Bleach Day is compromised by the fact that they are building a new road in front of the school. By any other standard, the road in front of the school is little more than an alley. Until about three days ago, it was a dirt path heavily traveled on by motorbikes, bikes, cars, trucks, walkers, etc. However, the workers have hauled in gravel and sand, and have been mixing cement. The new road is almost 2.5 feet higher than the old road. This is a tremendous problem since now all of the buildings are 2-3 feet below the level of the road. This answers the question, "Why were the kids complaining about flooding last fall".

Later today I will be catching up with my travel blog and posting more photos.



---

### Ha's journey to Anh Linh

January 24, 2011

Ha is probably one of the smallest kids you would ever meet. At age 11 she looks like she is about 4 or 5 years old. Two years ago the police brought her to Anh Linh school. She had lived her life picking up garbage off the streets with her "aunt". However, it is assumed that she was used and abused for begging.

"When she first got to school she would go through the garbage everyday and ferret out the old pencils, paper and bits of ruler and proudly show us her new book," says Sr. Cam Thuy, principal of Anh Linh.

Ha was given a spot in the girl's dormitory, several stuffed animals and an older girl, an "angel", to help her start learning how to live in a house, and socialize with the kids. She has been learning how to do her chores (washing her own clothes, sweeping, mopping, making dinner and cleaning). She has learned to embroider and has just begun making beaded figures. She is now reading at a second grade level, and enjoys math, literature, social studies and other school subjects. She is provided with a uniform, meals, medical care and a monthly haircut.

Today she got a gift from her sponsor April Hickel which included barrettes. She has been wearing different barrettes every hour and says that this is the first present she has ever had.

Her future looks bright at Anh Linh school. As one of thirty girls in the middle school dormitory, she can stay at Anh Linh for as long as it takes for her to graduate. By the time she can handle high school work, the school should have the classes. And, if she manages to make it to college, she can live at Anh Linh and go to college. Bridges2Learning.org is financing about 70% of the funds received by Anh Linh school. The support received by children like Ha gives hope and opportunity to children who would have ended up dead, or worse.



## Tet in Ho Chi Minh City

January 24, 2011

When my sister casually asked if I was warm enough, I realized that I had been woefully remiss in my blogging. While Hanoi was about 50 degrees and felt a bit like New York (before the snowstorms), Ho Chi Minh City is more like Miami. Not only warm, HCM is hot with opportunity. The new Vincom Center says it all. This is the high end 5 floors plus shopping mall where you can get the real Jimmy Choo shoes and purses and not the exquisite knock offs down the street at the acres large Ben Thanh Market. The latest in fashion from all over the globe is available at this and any of the other malls. Notice the old and the new; the Viacom juxtapositioned against very old property waiting to be sold and rebuilt. The jackhammers are going all the time here, the sound of a city on the rise.

To celebrate the new wealth, which will only be increasing for Vietnam, families are getting ready to celebrate Tet, the Vietnamese Lunar New Year which comes on February 3rd this year. Tet in the north is celebrated with pink peach tree blossoms, and in the south with yellow apricot tree blossoms. However, in this combined country you can see both. As well, for the Chinese, even those folks living in Vietnam, this will be the Year of the Rabbit. For the Vietnamese, this is the Year of the Cat. For all, this is a time for elaborate decorations, gifts and family. Parents and kids are coming into the city 3 and 4 on a motor scooter, or by car to join in the fun, look at the store window displays and buy new clothes--the traditional way to celebrate this event. Several streets will be blocked off and will become Tet floral walkways. Festivity is in the air, and everyone seems to be getting ready to celebrate--by doing a bit of pre-holiday shopping.

---





## Tet at Anh Linh School

January 25, 2011

The Tet Celebration was a huge success. The parents and friends came, the program was beautiful, the school was spotless and the children performed beautifully. During this event student achievement was recognized. Kids who have been studying hard got dictionaries and notebooks. Teachers were then treated to a banquet prepared by Sr. Cam Thuy's brother who is a caterer.

For the ceremony I was presented with a traditional Ao Dai. The Ao Dai is a traditional Vietnamese dress which fits like a glove! The long panels in the front and back cover fitted silk pants. It is an elegant dress and the combination of pants and top make it quite practical--though sitting and moving in it is an acquired skill.

During the ceremony the Anh Linh children were presented new uniforms, toothbrushes donated by Larry and Pam Kreugers--friends of Julie Grimme, And beanie babies. Yeah they made it all the way from Minnesota and they were worth it. The kids liked them a lot. They are handy and fit into a backpack. While stuffing them into the packages with the girls, we got to practice naming all of the animals in English. The children also received lucky money both from Bridges2Learning sponsors and from the Saigon International School presented by Tina, the President of the PTA. She recommended we watch this YouTube clip created by one of the juniors at the school as part of their service project. It is about Anh Linh and features the students:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hlk1VSS-i3Q>

(2023 Editor's note: the video is not available anymore.)

On a sobering note, the children all received Tet bags which contained cooking oil, sausage, and soup mix so that they would have something to eat during this long Tet break.



So happy smiles by students and teachers, the place was bustling with joy! Happy New Year indeed.

---

## Chicken in Vietnam

January 27, 2011

My sister Wendy Thomas is an author, mother of 6, owner of 4 dogs and blogger about their 36 chickens in New Hampshire. Her loving partner Marc is about as crazy as she is, and so the family is often on high adventure. Wendy blogs about lessons learned from chickens (kids, dogs and life) at [Lessons Learned from the Flock | Life raising children and chickens in New Hampshire \(wordpress.com\)](http://Lessons Learned from the Flock | Life raising children and chickens in New Hampshire (wordpress.com))



During this trip, she encouraged me to send chicken photos so that she could share them with her blog readers. The first photos were of the chickens a bit north of Hanoi on the Perfume River. I took photos in the town before we got into the Vietnamese River boats. [Project Chickens before the Eggs – Lesson 235 – A Vietnamese rooster and one wet hen | Lessons Learned from the Flock \(wordpress.com\)](http://Project Chickens before the Eggs – Lesson 235 – A Vietnamese rooster and one wet hen | Lessons Learned from the Flock (wordpress.com)) and then up in the hills as we were visiting the pagodas. [Project Chickens before the Eggs – Lesson 237 -more chickens from Vietnam | Lessons Learned from the Flock \(wordpress.com\)](http://Project Chickens before the Eggs – Lesson 237 -more chickens from Vietnam | Lessons Learned from the Flock (wordpress.com))

The chickens were in fact adorable, fat and well fed.

Trying to get chicken photos in Ho Chi Minh City has resulted in less wonderful images. Most of the chickens I have seen are scrawny and are in baskets, or scavenging the bleak areas where the kids who attend Anh Linh live. Often these areas are in tidal pools so they flood twice a day during the high tide (which is why you see so much debris in the photos).



So, the life of a city chicken pales in comparison to its country neighbor. We will see what the Mekong Delta area of Vietnam brings.

---



## A Tale of Two Student Groups-Michael and Hanh

January 27, 2011



We didn't draw straws for this, but Jerri and I are off to two very different assignments. Jerri is in Singapore. We were all going to go to the Singapore American School to make a presentation to Michael Hsun's service project. Michael, an enterprising young 16 year old at the school has been very helpful as an intern at the school. He and the students in the Singapore American School created the [website for Anh Linh school](#), a [blog](#), and have regularly visited the students. He is responsible for finding 25 used computers that got "lost" during shipping thanks to UPS services, (forget about tracking through them in Vietnam--and they have been very unresponsive to him). See his letter to [UPS](#)



Michael has succeeded in capturing the attention of the Singapore American School and will be bringing 20 of his classmates to Anh Linh School in March as a service project.

Hanh Hong is another dynamic student giving back to the world in ways that exceed her age and stature. Thanks to Long Vo in Minneapolis, who introduced me to Hanh on this trip, I will be boarding a bus to the Mekong Delta to a remote



village on the Cambodian border called Dong Thap. B2L is looking at adding some schools to our portfolio of support and caring. In Vietnam it makes sense to support the city and country schools that serve poor people because the movement back and forth between the city and the

country is quite fluid. The government assigned everyone a district in which to live. However, some districts in Vietnam don't support a livelihood and so often poor people have one foot in the country where they should be living and one foot in the city where they can find work. Many of the children of Anh Linh school have parents who are in the country and they stay with a grandmother, aunt, cousin or stay in the Anh Linh dorm if they were living on the streets.

I will be boarding a bus and will be meeting An Pham and Thanh Pham who are both student volunteers of the [Chap Canh Uoc Mo Charity Community](#). After seeing the school and staying the night, I will go to Can Tho City to join Cam Thuy and Jerri for a day. So, it looks like about 8 hours of crowded bus ride to the school!



*(2023 Editor's note: the website and blogs mentioned in this post are no longer available. The relationship between the Saigon American School and the Anh Linh school continues.)*

---

## **Memories of Viet Nam**

March 29, 2011

As I watch the snow begin to melt in Minneapolis, I think about Viet Nam and the Anh Linh Free School. Michael Hsun and 20 students from the Viet Nam Service Club from the Singapore American School are arriving today in HCM. They bring backpacks, books, lesson plans, games, and hours of engagement for the children. The Viet Nam Service Club has been meeting twice a week to organize all of this.

Meanwhile, back at home, we have been hard at work showing sponsors at Anh Linh photos of their sponsored kids. Each of more than 100 sponsors commits to financially supporting these children. The SAS group and our volunteers in Minnesota help get the photos, stories and updates so that sponsors can see the progress that the children are making.

Bridges2Learning.org has information about how you can be a sponsor of a child, or how you can donate to support this amazing work. We are helping more than 401 students move up and out of poverty. We are a bridge to learning.

