

University Scholarship Program: Vietnam

KIEN, NGUYAN THIEN

A few years ago, in 2005, Mme Hoi, the then Vietnamese Ambassador to Canada, presented us at TDH with a request. She had learned that one of the Vietnamese newspapers in Hanoi had run a feature story about a boy named Kien, Nguyen Thien. We learned something about his background and his character. He comes from a family of extremely poor but extremely hardworking parents. His mother suffers from excruciating back pain, undiagnosed at this point. His father is a handicapped invalid. He has only his left arm. But he has a job collecting money for electricity, which earns him 100,000 Dong a month (about \$8 dollars CDN). His second job is his hairdressing business. He is so skillful that people sit for hours waiting their turn with him. So Kien comes from a family of courageous, hardworking people. University students are famously poor, but this boy's poverty went beyond the norm. He was so poor that he did not even have the money to buy his books. So what he was doing was borrowing the books from other students and copying them out longhand at night. It was an arduous and inefficient way to learn! Mme Hoi went on to tell us that there were numerous students like him in Vietnam. It seemed a terrible waste of a mind to allow a boy with that kind of determination and thirst for knowledge to have to stumble along under such a burden of poverty. Dorinda, TDH Foundation's director, found a sponsor for him at \$100 a month. Some of Kien's translated words read this way:

"...something I could never have imagined that I would be the recipient of your precious help. It has touched me enormously. You who live so far away, on the other half of the planet from where I live, there are so many differences between us: geographical distance, the barrier of language, of culture...but you bring me love and a kind heart. I am so very appreciative. I understand that it is the conviction among people on earth, as the Vietnamese say, that we should open our arms to others. This encounter between you and me has bound us together, and has made life more meaningful. I am happy to benefit from such a great help at the beginning of a part of my life full of such profound changes for me..."

His life and that of his parents has been altered. And he is fully aware of what it has meant to him as his letter attests. When we went to Vietnam in 2008, we arranged to meet Kien at a restaurant. He was all that Thuy, coordinator for TDH in Vietnam, said he was and all one might expect of a serious student. He has chosen to study electrical engineering and has recently sent us his report card with a 7.8 average.

As you can see, Kien is an unusually intelligent and determined young man with the evident virtues of industriousness, perseverance and resourcefulness. He is someone of whom his donor, and indeed all of us at TDH, can all be proud.

\$100 per month provides the opportunity for a young person in Vietnam to attend University. Sponsorship may be shared among several families (e.g. 4 families each contributing \$25 per month).