



Dining for Women

## Food for Thought

April 2009  
Children of Vietnam  
Vietnam

*To me, you are benefactors who give me a future and make my dream come true. I would like to say thank you, thank you so much for your love, and your bringing to my family a warm compassionate house.*

-- Duong Thi Le Thu



**Note:** For the first time ever, Dining for Women has a film created by a chapter leader visiting a featured program. Page Walter's film on Children of Vietnam is available on YouTube and will be shown at April meetings. Page and her family visited Vietnam last December and saw firsthand the incredible work of Children of Vietnam.

### APRIL'S EDUCATIONAL THEME: EDUCATION AND HOUSING

Our featured program deals with the importance of education and safe housing in the lives of young women and single mothers in Vietnam. We are looking specifically at the relationship between safe and sanitary housing, transportation and scholarships to achievement of universal primary education for female children. In addition, this program links education to the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger.

### ERADICATING POVERTY AND ACHIEVING UNIVERSAL EDUCATION

In previous issues of *Food for Thought*, we have looked at the United Nation's Millennium Development Goals. This month, we will focus on two of these goals and how they are inextricably linked. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), to be achieved by 2015, set forth eight goals which respond to the world's main developmental challenges. The MDGs are drawn from the actions and targets contained in the Millennium Declaration that was adopted by 189 nations and signed by 147 heads of state and governments during the September 2000 UN Millennium Summit. The eight goals include:

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
2. Achieve universal primary education for children
3. Promote gender equality and empower women
4. Reduce child mortality
5. Improve maternal health
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases
7. Ensure environmental sustainability
8. Create a global partnership for development

A recent study shows that of all the MDGs, there has been substantial gain in developing countries to achieve universal education. **The report also shows that being poor is the biggest deterrent in access to basic education.** Not only does the MDG report the numbers of

### Fast Facts

In Southeast Asia, **75%** of women aged 25 and over are illiterate. These women typically make less than **\$3** a day.

Vietnamese families must pay approx. **\$38** a year to send a child to school.

Many children in rural Vietnam must walk **4 to 6** miles to get to school.

In 2006, **25%** of children did not attend secondary school.

children receiving education, but the initiative also includes the quality of the education being received.

### *How does lack of education contribute to the poverty crisis?*

#### **Women are subject to:**

**Limited education:** In much of Africa and Asia, 75 percent of women age 25 and over, are illiterate. Without education, women take menial jobs such as farmhands and street vendors. Although these women may be the only wage-earner in the family, they make less than \$3 a day.



**Substandard Living Conditions:** In Vietnam, as in many developing countries, poor families live in dwellings that do not have toilets or safe methods of cooking. Many of these families are headed by single women. Children in such families often suffer from parasite infestation and burns. As a result children do not attend school or have poor attendance records.

**Limited resources:** In Vietnam, education is not fully funded by the government and most families must pay approximately \$38 a year to send a child to school. The majority of the people in this area of the country are unemployed or under employed. With an annual income per person of approximately \$360, the cost of school alone is a major expense. Unfortunately many families opt to keep their children home to work or care for younger siblings, while the mother works in the fields or markets. Many times it is the girls in the family whose education is cut short.

In addition, advancement to secondary education requires successful completion of national exams. Children of means are provided with tutoring from an early age, which provides them with a definite advantage over their impoverished peers. Again, an imbalance in opportunity is clearly shown between rich and poor, male and female.

**Limited transportation:** Many children in rural Vietnam travel 4 – 6 miles to school. The only mode of transportation for many poor families is walking. Teachers in rural schools report that once a family has a bicycle, attendance becomes more regular and children are more successful in their studies.

### **APPROPRIATE APPROACHES: SUCCESSFUL INTERVENTIONS**

Although, there is still much poverty in Vietnam, women are making great strides in education. In order to ensure that women meet the challenges of a growing Vietnamese economy the government and non-profit organizations need to:

- Continue to fund education for primary and secondary students, with special emphasis on those in female lead households.
- Continue to provide tutoring to disadvantaged students to provide them with equal opportunities to succeed
- Continue to provide access to safe and sanitary housing to reduce parasite infestation and kitchen accidents

**Children of Vietnam** provides school scholarships, grants for tutoring and bicycles to increase school accessibility. This program also identifies families with small children who living in substandard housing and provides new housing providing that the family agrees not to sell the house for a profit for a number of years.

In addition to the school lunches, Children of Vietnam provides supplemental rice programs at a number of sites throughout the area. On the right you will see COV's employee (in the white hat) distributing 40 pound bags of rice to eligible families. The rice costs about 10 cents per pound. The bag of rice will supplement a family of four for a month and costs approximately \$4.00US.



Children of Vietnam provides medical aid through a number of programs which include the following general "basic" services:

- Emergency treatment at the Da Nang Hospital for poor people who cannot afford medical care or stays in the hospital.
- Generic medicines taken to Vietnam and given to clinics who in turn will dispense the products properly and without cost to the recipients.
- Medicine Packs: These are collections of medicines that can be purchased in Vietnam and provided to the clinics. They can be tailor made to the needs of the local population.
- Hearing aids for children at Da Nang Deaf School. The devices are acquired locally for about \$100 US and given to children.
- Orthopedic surgeries and prosthesis.
- Clinics using local providers such as dental, etc.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- *How does living in extreme poverty in Southeast Asia affect the educational opportunities of girls and women?*
- *What are some of the key components of the Children of Vietnam model? How does each of these contribute to the program's success in helping to equip children and families with the skills and supports needed to lift themselves out of extreme poverty?*
- *How did the video and/or reviewing the materials provided impact you personally?*

## VOICES

The following comes from a letter, written by Dinh Thi Qua, a widow with two young girls.

*I am Dinh Thi Qua, born in 1958, living Phu Hoa I, Hoa Nhon commune, Hoa Vang district, Danang city, Vietnam. I write this letter to present a matter as bellow.*

*I have two children (girls), they are Dinh Thi Lieu born 1991 and Dinh Thi Thoa, born in 1994. My family belongs to a poor household. My husband died years ago, so I have to work alone to support the children who have to give up school for lack of financial condition. We are now living in a temporary house. As a farmer, I cannot earn enough money to repair the house. Thus, I write this letter to submit to you to search for support so that we can build a safe house to get fair condition to look after my children. We wish for your consideration. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.*

*Dinh Thi Qua (will also receive funding)*



*I would like to say thank you, thank you so much for your love, and your bringing to my family a warm, compassionate house. Before, I was a pessimistic child, I didn't think that my mother can be able to be well again and I can live in a good house. Sometimes, I sit in front of my father's altar to ask him 'why did daddy leave my mother and three children and why my mother get that damn heart disease?' Then I waited and waited but my father still hadn't the answer, my daddy just looked me in silence. I felt so lonely at those times! I brushed away my tears and I returned to my room with a wish for tomorrow I could wake up and see my mother can recover from her illness and my family could have a safe house to be able to shelter from rain and shield from the sun like the other families. And then my dream can come true and you yourselves who give me that truth- a warm, compassionate house. You know, when we live in this house I can feel the love that you reserved for my family, I feel optimistic more and don't feel my future be gloomy like before. Thank you so much for your help, I promise I will keep my house always clean, beautiful and make it warmer. I will try my best in my learning to requite your favor.*

*Duong Thi Le Thu*

*Thanks to your concern, your whole-hearted help, my family circumstance can become better at present. Before, my family's economic condition was so difficult, my father died many years ago, my mother was a farmer but she often gets ill. My family just had one rod of land to plant rice for my family food that was not enough to feed three of us. So, my*

mother had to work as a hired farmer to get some more money for my sister's learning. Our daily lives were so hard. Now, thanks to the concern and help from Children Of Vietnam Organization and especially Mr. and Mrs. Hemel with many gifts from you such as the new nice house for our living; the bicycle and even the study light for my learning and your meaningful gift of support for my tutoring courses, my family life is able to get much better. Now, I can live in a safe and nice house, I have means to go to school and have tutoring to improve my learning ability. This is not only a valuable material gift but also a highly precious moral gift that all of you presented to my family and me, you gave us good opportunity to be able overcome our hard lives.

Le Thi Nguyen Thao

## MEETING RESOURCES

### WEBSITES

Children of Vietnam [www.childrenofvietnam.org](http://www.childrenofvietnam.org)

Dining for Women video created by Charleston, SC Chapter Leader, Page Walter

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1gda9FHoOFw>

Food and information on the country: <http://www.foodbycountry.com/Spain-to-Zimbabwe-Cumulative-Index/Vietnam.html>



### BOOK CORNER

***Non-Fiction (available on Amazon.com):***

Last Night I Dreamed of Peace Dang Thuy Tram, 2008. A diary of a very young, female, Vietnamese doctor who was killed during the war.

The Eaves of Heaven, a Life in Three Wars Andrew X. Pham, 2008. In a narrative set between the years of 1940 and 1976, Pham (*Catfish and Mandala*) recounts the story of his

once wealthy father, Thong Van Pham, who lived through the French occupation of Indochina, the Japanese invasion during WWII, and the Vietnam War.

When Heaven and Earth Changed Places. Le Ly Hayslip, 1989. Hayslip was born a Vietnamese peasant in 1949; little more than 20 years later she left for the United States with an American husband. Her early years were spent as a Viet Cong courier and lookout; a black marketer; an unwed mother; a bar girl; a hospital aide; and (once) a prostitute. She was tortured by the South Vietnamese army, raped by Viet Cong, and harassed by Americans. This story is juxtaposed with the tale of her difficult return to Vietnam in 1986.

Women of the Vietnam War, Mark Schynert, 2005.

Discusses the lives and roles of women during the Vietnam War. The challenges and opportunities of the Vietnam War changed the lives of many women. They took on diverse roles: war correspondent, nurse, entertainer, black market entrepreneur, mama-san, war protestor, soldier and more.

Perfect Spy: The Incredible Double Life of Pham Xuan An, Time Magazine Reporter and Vietnamese Communist Agent Larry Berman, 2007.

Pham Xuan An was a Vietnamese nationalist and member of Ho Chi Minh's army in the 1950s. Knowing that war with the United States was inevitable, the Party sent An to America to study journalism (for his cover) and observe its people and culture. For twenty years An lived a lie and no one knew because he was so good at his day job, which was interwoven with his assignment in espionage. Several years after the war, the new Vietnamese Communist government revealed that An had been one of its most effective spies. But An's disaffection with the new government's treatment of their southern countrymen and his close friendships with Americans made him suspicious in the eyes of the Communist government. He was soon placed under house arrest and to this day he is banned from leaving the country.

Foods of Vietnam Barbara Sheen, 2006.

A discussion of Vietnamese life, culture, history, geography, economics, folklore, cooking traditions, customs, eating habits, and food sources, celebrations, and daily life through its food. Staples, favorite dishes, snacks and holiday foods

are all investigated

**Fiction:**

[A Hundred Years of Happiness: A Fable of Life After War](#) Nicole Seitz, 2009.

Two daughters search for the truth they hope will set them free. It's been forty years since the war, and John Porter-now a wealthy builder in South Carolina-is feeling the past nip at his heels. A Hundred Years of Happiness is a story of family, war, loss and longing, and the transforming power of truth. The distance between children and parents, past and present, reality and deception narrows in this spiritual fable of life after war.

**Film:**

[The Beautiful Country](#), 2004

One of the consequences of the Vietnam war was the children of GI's by Vietnamese women. Those women were social outcasts, while their children endured abuse. One such child, Binh, was forced from his village at 17, went to Saigon to find his mother, then tried to escape to America with his much younger half brother 1990. The film lingers on the rigors of the voyage: the sampan, the Malaysian detention camps, the illegal refugee ship, and the underground economy with near slavery in New York City before he is able to go on to his father he believes is in Houston

## SOCIALLY CONSCIOUS SHOPPING:

**Silk Handbags made by the women of Southeast Asia:** [www.clairev.com](http://www.clairev.com)



Claire V offers an exclusive collection of women's handbags and accessories. The line blends the luxury of silk and the beauty of hand-embroidery to offer one-of-a-kind style.

Most of the Clarie V collection is handcrafted at training centers for landmine victims in Cambodia. Ten percent of the net proceeds are donated to the education and health programs in Southeast Asia.

Claire V donates handbags and accessories to Children of Vietnam for its fundraising efforts.

**Black Tea from Vietnam:** <http://www.arborteam.com/vietnam-nam-lanh-black-tea.html>

## DINING WITH WOMEN RECIPES

Vietnamese cooking is an everyday celebration of bright flavors, from its bouquets of fresh mint, cilantro and basil, to its irresistible spring rolls, tempting grilled meats, and hearty noodle soups. Delicate and satisfying, the cuisine of Vietnam includes countless dishes that are simply delicious, yet easy enough to cook at home.

### **Stir-Fried Bamboo Shoots and Shiitake (Mang Xao Nam Dong Co)**

Adapted from <http://www.recipehound.com/Recipes/1222.html>

Really easy, fast and very fresh tasting. You could also add asparagus.  
Serves 4-6.

1 package shiitake mushrooms, stemmed and sliced  
2T vegetable oil  
2oz. chopped fresh ginger  
1-6oz. can bamboo shoots, drained and julienned  
1/3c chicken broth or water  
2-3T fish sauce

Pinch sugar  
Ground black pepper  
3 scallions, sliced into 1 inch pieces  
(optional)  
Mung bean sprouts – a good handful  
(optional)



In a wok or skillet, heat the oil over medium heat and add the ginger and scallions if you are using them. Stir-fry for a minute or two. Add the mushrooms and bamboo shoots and stir-fry for another 5 minutes or so. Add the chicken stock, fish sauce and beans sprouts, if using, and a few grinds of black pepper. Stir and cook another 5 minutes. Serve hot. May be used just as a vegetable side, or over jasmine rice.

### **Cucumber Salad (Dua Leo Ngam Giam)**

Adapted from Mai Pham, Pleasures of the Vietnamese Table, et al.

The Vietnamese use cucumbers in all sorts of dishes and consider it an all purpose vegetable. This is a light, refreshing, pretty salad, just in time for spring! This would be a good addition to a table salad. A table salad is a standard part of a Vietnamese meal, and it consists of a platter of various salads and cold dishes (mainly vegetable), and lettuce leaves. The platter is passed and diners choose what they like, sometimes using the lettuce leaves to pick up their choice. Enjoy!  
Serves 6 as a salad.

1/3c rice vinegar	1½ greenhouse seedless cucumbers, or about 8 picklers, halved lengthwise and cut into
2T lime juice	
4T sugar	¼ inch thick slices (2½ -3 cups)
1/2t salt	1-2 scallions, thinly sliced
	½-1 serrano or other fresh hot chili (optional but recommended)
	6 sprigs cilantro, or other green herb like parsley, chopped (optional) for garnish

Combine the vinegar, lime juice, sugar and salt in a small bowl and stir well, making sure the sugar and salt are dissolved. Place the cucumbers and chilis, if using, in a bowl large enough to toss the salad in, add the vinegar mixture and toss well. Set aside for 15 minutes, or longer, before serving. Toss again before serving, and garnish, if desired, with chopped herbs of choice.

If using on table salad platter, transfer with slotted spoon.

### **Vietnamese Dipping Sauce**

Makes 1 1/2 cups from Best of Vietnamese and Thai Cooking by Mai Pham

2 small cloves garlic, sliced	2/3 cup hot water
1 t. ground chili paste	2T fresh lime juice with pulp
1 fresh thal bird chili, chopped	1/4 cup sugar
1/4 cup fish sauce	2 T shredded carrots for garnish

Place garlic, chili paste, and chili in a mortar. With a pestle, pound into a paste. If you don't have a mortar and pestle, finely mince the garlic and chili. Combine the garlic mixture with the remaining ingredients in a small mixing bowl. Stir until the sugar has dissolved. Ladle sauce into serving bowls and float the carrot slivers on top.

### **Twice-Cooked Eggplant with Garlic and Basil**

Serves 4, a side dish from Pleasures of the Vietnamese Table

Vegetable oil

2/3 pound Asian eggplant, cut on the diagonal into 2/3 inch slices or globe eggplant, cut into long cubes

2 cloves garlic, chopped	1 1/2 T mushroom sauce
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1 shallot, thinly sliced	1 T soy sauce
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3 Thai bird chilies or 1 serrano chili, chopped	1/3 cup water
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2/3 cup basil, roughly torn

6 ounces tofu, drained and cut into 2/3 inch cubes



1. Heat 2 T. oil in a skillet over high heat and swirl to coat the entire surface Add the eggplant slices in one layer (work in batches if necessary) and sear briefly on both sides, about 1 to 2 minutes total. Do not cook completely. Drain on paper towels and keep warm. Repeat with the remaining eggplant, adding more oil as necessary.

2. Heat 2 T. oil in a pan over high heat. Add the garlic, shallot, chilies, one third of the basil, tofu, mushroom sauce, soy sauce, and stir gently until fragrant, about 2 minutes. Add the water and continue to cook until the sauce is slightly reduced, another 3 to 4 minutes.

3. Add the eggplant slices and the remaining basil leaves and stir until the vegetables are thoroughly hot.

### **Hot and Spicy Chicken with Lemon Grass**

1 pound boneless chicken breast, slices 1/4 inch thick and 1 1/2 inches long  
1 t cornstarch  
3 T water  
3 T vegetable oil  
10 whole dried chilies, or to taste (optional)  
1/4 cup minced lemon grass, preferably fresh  
1 T minced garlic  
2 T sugar  
1 t ground chili paste and/ or  
1 small fresh red chili, thinly sliced

1/2 cup chicken stock  
1 T fish sauce  
1/2 t salt  
1/2 yellow onion, sliced into thin wedges  
1 cup julienned carrots, blanched and shocked in ice water fresh  
cilantro sprigs for garnish

Combine cornstarch and water in a large mixing bowl until well blended. Add the chicken, making sure it is well coated. Heat the oil in a nonstick fry pan over low heat. Add the dried chilies and cook until they puff up and are slightly brown (not black) about 10 seconds. Remove, drain on paper towels, and set aside.

Increase the heat to high and add the lemon grass, garlic, sugar, chili paste, and fresh chili until fragrant, about 1 minute. (The sauce is exquisite when the sugar is slightly caramelized.) Add the chicken, and using chopsticks or a spatula, stir to separate. Cook until chicken turns to opaque, about 3 to 4 minutes. Reduce the heat if the pan starts to burn. Add the chicken stock, fish sauce, salt, onion, and carrots and continue cooking for another 3 to 4 minutes. Add the reserved chilies, garnish with cilantro. Serve with rice. Serves 4.



### **Vietnamese Spring Rolls**

These spring rolls are made with rice paper wrappers and can be filled with anything-I used chicken, mint, shredded carrots, cucumber, red onion, Bibb lettuce, cilantro. Shrimp is a very popular filling. Also I used rice stick noodles (vermicelli) that had been cooked for 1 minute in boiling water, drained, refreshed under cool water, then drained again.

To prepare the rice wrapper:

Fill a bowl or pan with hot water and spread a moist cotton towel on your work surface.

Dip the rice wrapper in the hot water for 3 to 5 seconds, then spread wrapper on the towel.

Place a lettuce leaf over the lower third of the spring roll sheet. Arrange your fillings on the lettuce leaf. Fold over the bottom, roll over once to form a cylinder, fold in the two side. Roll tightly!!! The rice paper will adhere to itself. Can cover with a damp towel to prevent them from drying out. Serve with dipping sauces.

### **Mustard Greens with Garlic (cai xao toi)**

Adapted from Mai Pham, Pleasures of the Vietnamese Table. Harper Collins, 2001  
Another extremely quick and easy vegetable recipe. It calls for oyster sauce or mushroom soy sauce, both of which are readily available at Oriental food shops. If you don't have the time or inclination to get either of those, some good (not light) soy sauce or tamari would suffice. I used broccoli raab for this since it is similar to another oriental green I am familiar with, but any green, such as bok choy or mustard greens, would work just fine. Serves 4-6 as a side.



1lb. greens of choice  
2T vegetable oil

5 cloves garlic, minced  
2-3T oyster, mushroom soy or good soy sauce

Heat a large kettle of water to boiling. Trim ends off stems of greens, then cut stems off entirely and chop into 1-inch lengths, on the diagonal. Chop the leaves into 2 inch pieces, more or less. Once the water boils, plunge the chopped greens and stems into the boiling water and parboil for about one minute. Drain the greens, plunge into ice water to stop the cooking and drain well. (This step may be skipped if the greens are very young and tender, but I find that it helps to keep the greens green, instead of olive drab) Heat the oil in a wok or large skillet over medium heat, add the garlic and stir briefly, then add the greens and whichever sauce you are using and cook stirring frequently for about 2 minutes. Serve warm.

### **Nuoc Cham Dipping Sauce**

1T sugar	3 T lime juice
1/4 cup warm water	1 garlic clove, minced
1/4 cup fish sauce	1 fresh Thai chili (2 to 3 inches long, red) including seeds, thinly sliced
2T unseasoned rice vinegar	crosswise

Stir together sugar and water until sugar is dissolved. Stir in remaining ingredients and chill, covered, at least 2 hours to let flavors develop. Bring to room temperature before serving (this will take about an hour). Makes 1 cup.

### **Shaking Beef with Purple Onions and Watercress**

From Quick and Easy Vietnamese, by Nancie McDermott

A few easy steps and you'll have a hearty centerpiece for a quick meat with rice or a spectacular starter. You can use fresh spinach instead of watercress, tearing any large pieces into bite-sized pieces or try the packaged lettuce mixtures in the produce section. Use any kind of vinegar you like and try serving Shaking Beef with little saucers of Lime-Pepper-Salt Dipping Sauce for an extra burst of flavor.

For the Marinated Beef:

¾ pound of thickly cut steak, such as New York strip or rib eye  
1 tablespoon of fish sauce  
2 teaspoon of soy sauce  
½ teaspoon of sugar  
½ teaspoon black pepper  
2 tablespoons vegetable oil  
2 tablespoons of finely chopped garlic

For the Watercress Salad:

2 tablespoons of vinegar  
1 teaspoon vegetable oil  
1 teaspoon sugar  
½ teaspoon salt  
½ teaspoon pepper  
½ cup very thin onion slices, preferably purple onion  
2 cups bite sized or torn pieces of watercress, tender spinach, or lettuce leaves

To marinate the beef, begin by cutting into big, bit sized, chunks, about 1 inch square. In a medium bowl, combine the fish sauce, soy sauce, sugar, and pepper and stir well. Add the beef, toss to coat it evenly, and set aside for 20 to 30 minutes while you make the salad. Or cover and refrigerate for up to 1 day.

To make the watercress salad, combine the vinegar, oil, sugar, salt, and pepper in a medium bowl and stir well. Add the thinly sliced onion and toss to coat it with the dressing. Add the watercress to the bowl but don't toss it yet.

To cook the beef, heat the oil in a large, heavy skillet over high heat until a bit of garlic sizzles at once. Add the beef and let it cook on one side, undisturbed and nicely browned, 1 to 2 minutes. Shake the pan to turn the meat and cook the other surface the same way. Add the garlic and continue cooking, shaking and searing the meat, until evenly browned and done to your liking. Remove the pan from the heat and set aside while you prepare the serving platter.

Toss the watercress to coat it with the dressing and arrange it on a small serving platter. Scoop up the steak, pile it in the center of the watercress salad, and serve hot or warm.

*Many thanks to Carolyn Mayers (Onancock, VA-Chapter Leader) for researching and sharing with us the Socially Conscious Shopping and Recipes every month! Thank you to Jane Tracy (St. Louis, MO-Chapter Leader) for compiling our monthly book & film recommendations. Thank you to Linda Mayfield for providing the text and pictures for the monthly program section of our e-newsletter. Thanks to Jo Prostko for creating our monthly Program Fact Sheet. Thanks again to Page Walter for her DFW video.*

Changing the world, one dinner at a time.

[www.diningforwomen.org](http://www.diningforwomen.org)