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2007 Public Service Month – Essay Contest
“Words of the Lonely, Thoughts of the Begotten”

“Khi nao co nguoi khi khoc, co nguoi khi hay lam khuyen-giai cho chinh-ta.”
(Wherever there is someone who cries, there is someone who shall comfort them.)
~Father Nguyen Dao-Kim

“Being unwanted, unloved, uncared for, and forgotten by everybody. I think that is a much greater poverty than the person who has nothing to eat.”
~Mother Teresa

In 1975, the last barricades surrounding the city of Saigon fell and the country of South Vietnam was no more. Those still wished to exercise their freedoms of liberty and justice fled by any means possible to countries who embraced democracy. In the following years, between five and ten million evacuees entered the United States in search of the American Dream. However, this dream is not easily realized. The Vietnam War became highly publicized through anti war demonstrations, polarizing the nation and creating a backlash against immigrants. These individuals became an iconic symbol as Boat people, the rejected population of two nations, neither of which gave much concern to them, who wanted to gain a better life, but could not raise their situation because they were unable to adapt to new lifestyle. They, who were unwanted, unloved, uncared for, and forgotten by everybody, along with the destitution of having nothing to eat, have the destitution of having no one to care and comfort them as well.

As a second-generation to parents who were immigrants, I was raised in a household torn between embracing the American standard of living and keeping old Vietnamese traditions alive. Entering school, it was much easier to associate myself with other children of Vietnamese refugees, since we shared the same symptoms of poverty and neglect by society. However, at our local church, the Vietnamese Martyrs Catholic Church, there was a priest who had taken a special interest to the minority youth growing up in the Vietnamese ghetto in Houston. Taking in each and everyone, he taught us about compassion and the strength of individuals as a part of humanity – how everyone is part of a community. One Lent, he took us up on the altar and asked us to take off our shoes and began to wash our feet. I could not hide my shocked expression to see a beloved priest of the Church bow before us and acting humbly as a servant. In his congregation, Father Dao-Kim was the poorest of the poor and the most humble of the humble. Everything he owned, he had long since given away. The only retaining asset that he had left was his sense of community and service to the public. In all the years that I went to that Church and listened to him, not once have I heard him complain about his lot in life.

When I entered high school, Father Dao-Kim started one of the first youth groups in all the Vietnamese Catholic Churches and geared it towards providing a brighter future for those who had no other avenue of hope. Here, he taught and raised us to be upstanding citizens of the community through our own achievements in academics, athletics, and leadership. Furthermore, he emphasized service to the community,

particularly amongst those who had no one to care for them – the elderly with no other relatives, the sick and the starving who had nowhere to turn, and those that the American Dream had forgotten because of lack of communication or understanding. Here, these youth worked to service a community and provide a new generation of Americans. Some became doctors, others studied law, and more still went into the seminary to follow the footsteps of Father Nguyen Dao-Kim.

In remembering the words that father Dao-Kim had once told me, that wherever we go, there will always be a need for us to comfort the tears of another. Mother Teresa said that those who are forgotten it is a greater tragedy than poverty or hunger, and I agree. One aspect of myself that I can never lose is my identity as a descendant of the Vietnamese people. No matter how much I change my looks, my speech, or my actions, my and mind are instilled with the thoughts of a nation that lies across the border. One generation after the Boat People arrived in the United States and the outcries of the war have become forgotten, the people who still reside in Viet Nam have become unwanted, unloved, and uncared for by the global community. My goal as a member of the Seton Hall community is to learn how to foster growth and development in order to raise the spirits of those who are forsaken, much like a humble priest had done for me so many years ago. Can you hear the words of the lonely? Can you feel the thoughts of the forgotten? It is difficult to become the one who reaches out for those in darkness, but Mother Teresa and Father Dao-Kim, without care for any reward of consequence, taught me that one only needs an unwavering spirit and the desire to care for the community in order to fulfill an individual's commitment to public service.