



Công-Tác Xã-Hội Quaker Tại Việt-Nam

QUAKER SERVICE - VIETNAM

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Dear Marty/Roger:

Sitting here having a face-down with my typewriter....listening to Christmas music on the tape recorder and wishing I were back home (or somewhere) where people never die, go hungry and where problems are unheard of....Come to think of it, that must be somewhere else than the world....

I've been putting off writing this letter for several days, hoping that something might change to make the facts untrue or the world ~~will~~ stop spinning so I wouldn't have to tell you...."that the ~~girl~~ bottom seems to be dropping out, Boss." I could wax funny about the whole thing, I guess, if it weren't for Anh An....

Used to be that 2+2=4: Just two and a half weeks ago, we had 8 lively and fully visable students enrolled in the physical therapy aide course. See em, hear em, count em... Now we have 6 and that figure is wobbling. I finally decided that I had better write tonight before that falls to 4. The first subtraction, I think you already know about. Ta Thị Diên never did show up for class. Anh Cảnh (our receptionist) told me about a week ago that she had come in during that first week but just to tell him that she didn't want to study. Well, that was okay... If that was her attitude, better she be honest enough to say so and not waste her time and ours. It would have been nice if she had said so earlier, tho. During that first week I had Anh Cảnh write a letter to one of the other applicants who had not been chosen but might have made a pretty good student. She has never come in response to our invitation to come join the class. Considered looking for another one but finally decided that nothing was wrong with the figure 7 and let it go at that. I hadn't forecast how shrinkable that figure was... Monday I took Cô Tuyết aside (the new Cô Tuyết-student) to talk to her about her poor performance during the first two weeks.. She had managed to flunk both tests so far and dreameed her way through all the classes. I honestly didn't know if the girl wasn't interested or just didn't have the intelligence to get the material. She is one of our 9th grade girls and should not be having any~~z~~ particular trouble but when questioned in class she reacted as if I had asked her to complain a problem in nuclear physics. Nothing was "sticking" in her head, but nothing... I tried to draw out of her what might be the matter but all I got was a non-committal, "I've been sick." Which was not true, by the way...At least she had been to all the classes and looked quite well to me. Finally I told her that her work would have to improve over the next few weeks and that I hoped she would try very hard. She said nothing and I have not seen her since. The rest of the students profess ignorance of why she hasn't returned but I am guessing that some of them do know. I am assuming that she simply decided that it would be easier for her to quit than to be dismissed a few weeks hence. Now we are six... Actually, this was the best possible solution for Tuyết...It was obvious that she wasn't going to make it unless there was a drastic change in attitude and performance...I'm still trying to figure out how we went so wrong on that choice.

Rumors still persist that Cô Nhâm is talking about going back to teaching as soon as she can find a job. You will recall that she is the most highly educated of all our students. She has her 2nd Bac decree and is as bright as a silver dollar. Mr. Ry, with his private store of wisdom, feels fairly strongly that we are going to ultimately lose her. She is a good student but I must reluctantly admit that she doesn't appear to be wild with enthusiasm in class...However, she has improved in that respect in the past two weeks... I

have tried every gimmick in the book to keep her challenged and towards the end of last week, things were looking up as both Anh An and Anh Linh were pushing her hard for honors. Those three are the ~~biggest~~ bright hopes of the class....Cô Cửu, Bông and Nhhung are sweet girls and I think they'll make it but they are "plodders". Like little Cô Vân of the last class, I think they will make skillful technicians if they keep at it but they'll never be innovators. So one of our "bright stars" is wavering and the other is in deep, deep trouble.

Anh An: To those who have known An in the past, this may come as a shock but not a complete surprise. Tuesday, An attempted suicide. He came too close for comfort and scared the heck out of us.

As near as I could tell, An has been happy in the class and certainly has been applying himself. He keeps right on Cô Nhén's heels academically and seemed to be cultivating Anh Linh as a close personal friend. I was quite pleased...and apparently quite fooled.... Tuesday morning when I went to work I found An burning a piece of ~~paper~~ paper on the lid of a garbage can in the P.T. department. It was entirely in flames when I walked up to him so I had no idea of what it was.... He was standing over it with a very sad face and obviously concerned that every bit of it be destroyed. Nonplussed for a minute, I gave him kind of a teasing glance and made some remark about his secretive activities.... He laughed too, then immediately became very morose... He said, "No, this is very sad." I didn't feel that I could ask questions but I gave him every opportunity to tell me about it if he wanted to.. He didn't seem to so I just patted his shoulder and told him I was sorry for whatever it was and then went on about my business. During class that morning, he seemed perfectly alright. He was cheerful and participated as enthusiastically as usual... After class I gave him 50 piastres and asked him to bring a bag of tea to work in the afternoon so we could have a tea break...He promised he would and went home for lunch...

After our lunch I was sitting in my room reading and around 2 pm, An came to the door. He came in and sat down at my desk.... I had no idea why he had come so made general conversation for a minute or two but it was quickly obvious that he was very upset... He seemed afraid to talk for fear he would burst into tears. Finally I just sat silently hoping he would open up (wishing fervently I were a skillful analyst so I could figure this moody boy out)...He didn't..He sat there alternately looking as if he were going to cry and as if he were going to laugh. I urged him to tell me what was wrong...Then he said he had to have the afternoon off and wondered if I would give him permission. He has asked twice before * since the classes started...One time I finally granted him the time off and the other I didn't.. Trying to impress on him the difficult situation his special friendship with us created and that he should lean over backwards to avoid taking advantage of it. So Tuesday afternoon, I said some of the same things and he just sat as if his situation couldn't change any... Ultimately I asked, "An, do you really have to have this afternoon off?" He looked very sad and said, "Yes, Cô Bé, I really do." He couldn't tell me why so I weakened and said okay...He did look so pitiful that I decided it must be important.... A few hours later, I had reason to wish I had been a bit more hard hearted. He left then but as he went out, he handed me a sealed envelope with my name on it. I was puzzled and guess I looked it..And he told me not to open it then... I was getting a bit disgusted with what seemed to be an over amount of emotional mysteriousness by that time... "When will I open it, An?" "You will know when." he said and walked out. I was absolutely stunned as I think I instinctively knew exactly what he meant...In fact I know I did. As ~~#~~ I sit here now, I can't think of any good excuse to give for not immediately running after him and stopping him. But I was still standing there with that envelope in my hand a full two minutes later... Then began the rationalizations....An has always been a moody and mysterious boy...This is just more of his "fun and games"...If he were going to commit~~#~~ suicide why would he come and ask me for the day off...etc.... I spent the next three hours evading the possibilities of truth and eyeing that letter. Finally I couldn't stand it any longer. I went to Lou and asked what he thought we should do. As should have been done earlier, we opened the letter...It was obviously a letter of farewell, apologizing for all the trouble he has caused the Quakers, etc...But it was vague enough that we just weren't sureIt could have been that he was just saying that he wouldn't ask for any more afternoons off but it seemed too final for that...We hoped it meant that but really knew it didn't... It wasn't much later than that

Cô Vân (An's new wife) came over to get Chuck.... Piecing the story together later on, it seems An must have gone directly home and told his mother that he wasn't going to class but wanted to sleep. Then he apparently took a number of mephobarbante (sp?) pills... Chuck's estimate is about 10 capsules. During the afternoon they had tried to wake him up for something but didn't worry when he wouldn't rouse... But came dinner time and they realized that something was radically wrong. They rushed him to the OP department of the hospital and came after Chuck.... Chuck stayed with him til he was out of danger and the family took him home sometime in the wee hours of the next morning....

Lou went to his house to talk to him the first thing the next morning and later on I did too. Both of us were struck by An's very bizarre behavior. He would roll over and start sobbing with his face buried in his arm and then turn over with a weird grin on his face and no tears in his eyes. You at times could almost see a constantly changing display of emotions across his face. I pressed him a bit to find out what had gone wrong but as I left about an hour later I felt that I had really learned nothing... He volunteered no reasons other than one.... He said that he felt valueless to everyone, even his own family... Later when I asked him specific things that might be troubling him, he agreed to them all without amplifying.... Was he having problems with his marriage? Yes.... Was it something to do with the note that he burned? Yes.... Was someone threatening him? Yes.... etc.... Finally, being on very insecure ground and not really knowing what was appropriate to say or to do, poor An's current state... I stopped the interrogation and just spoke to him straight from the heart. Told him that no matter what was wrong, we still wanted ~~for~~ him to come back and go on studying... That we would help him in anyway possible but that we were helpless as long as he refused to talk to us... Well, lots of other things were said but nothing that helped him any or revealed anything... When I left, he promised to be back in class this morning..

He did come to class, looking terrible both physically and emotionally. As far as we can tell, no one around the hospital seems to know what happened. I find that difficult to believe knowing how gossip spreads around this community.. But if they do know, they are not talking about it. He sat through class but was dull in his responses and once again I was horrified by the ~~freedom~~ rapidly changing and inappropriate expressions on his face as he sat there huddled into his jacket and hands in his pockets. To look at An is to get the feeling that this is a boy play acting some strange and tragic drama.... But our An is not acting! He is a sick boy.... And we are helpless to help him... I'm no psychiatrist... But I venture the guess that An has probably long been emotionally unstable as may have been indicated by his moodiness. However, I am also guessing that some very real problems in his life have triggered this breakdown. Guesses as to what those problems are, are a dime a dozen... It could be his marriage... Most of us have observed that it was not a happy one even from the day of the wedding but for awhile in Saigon it looked as if things might be improving... It could be that all these rumors about An being a government agent of some kind are true to some degree... The note he burned undoubtedly had something to do with it... It could be a combination of things....

Personally, I am feeling very pessimistic about An.... Maybe I'm all wrong... I hope to God I am... But I have the strong feeling that he is going to make another attempt and before very long... Other than keeping him as busy and as gratified as possible, I have no idea what to do to help him.

Anyway, that's the shaky situation with the PTA class right at the moment. We have discussed possibilities of going out hunting for new students but it's a bit late to do that. By the time we find any and get them going, they would be at least 5 weeks behind everyone else. We've even discussed "arresting the progress" of the present students while we look for new ones but somehow, that doesn't seem to make much sense... Six students is enough but if we lose Cô Minh, we're down to five... And if our estimate of An's psyche is anywhere near accurate, I don't know how much we can count on him even if he does stick it out. I don't know, Marty.... Maybe I'm just taking much too gloomy a view of things tonight... Hope so. For the moment, I would say that our decision is not to add new students. We'll ride it out and see what happens. There's no reason why Beth can't have a 3rd PTA course if we fall short after this year.

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Lesson Plans; To cheer you up a bit, the progress on lesson plans is progressing ~~fast~~^{fast} faster than I had hoped. Mr. Can is now ~~begin~~^{beginning} to go over the revised copies.. This will be the second time he has check^d them and Ry and I have been over each one several times... The first of next week I hope to send you the first bunch so you can proceed with whatever it is that you have to proceed with to get them printed.

General news of Quang Nai: Ma Gosh, they're coming in the windows! Meaning journalists of one kind and a nother... I'm not even remembering their names anymore... Everytime we turn around, another one is underfoot. Nothing much to report on any I guess... Lou talked to all of them... He'll brief you on what goes with them....

Mr. Kenneth Bennett from CREAM just left this afternoon. He's a nice man! He can come out again anytime he wants.... We really grooved on him....

Cloudy and cool... Very light rains..... Night before last we counted 3-5 rockets (depending on who was counting) passing over our house on their way to the province headquarters, the MAC V compound and I don't know where else... The same time Chu Lai apparently was hit rather hard by rockets.... Demolishing a dispensary and killing and/or wounding all in it... Fortunately, there were no patients there at the time.

Nothing much else... All here are well. Glenn-O growing like a weed....

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