

Dear VMDT,

Wow – more stuff to read! Perfect for those of us who are now in hibernating mode (sub zero temps are only good for bragging rights – and that's not much)!

BTW, if you haven't RSVP'd to our Tet Celebration (or one near where you live), perhaps the first article will make it seem a bit more worthwhile to pull on the overcoats and make it happen. We all need to know that we belong and a building full of adoptive families celebrating their children's birth culture is one big, noisy, happy way to make that happen. Even if our hands are cold, our hearts are warm!

Enjoy!

*Nancy*

**Included:**

- APV Post by Emma, a Vietnamese-Australian adult adoptee
- Post Adoption Services Educational Offerings (includes course taught by Julie Schulz!)
- Blue Dragon Children's Foundation

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**First Adult Adoptee from Vietnam Post**

*Editors Note: This was posted on APV (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/a-parents-vietnam/>) on January 23<sup>rd</sup>. It was written by an adult adoptee named Emma, who lives in Australia. APV has asked adult adoptees to share their experiences and Emma's was the first posted. Her comments are lengthy and cover several topics such as attachment, searching for birth family, heritage, language, and finding a community. If I were to put a subject line on her note, it would be "Belonging". Since my mind keeps coming back to this post, I thought it may be of interest to those of you who haven't had an opportunity to read it.*

"firstly, in relationship to parents? i did not have a real family so to speak till i was 15 and even then it took me a while to get to know and to be sure that i could trust them and not for me to be under pressure to be something than what i was.

from the time i was five, i went through many many families as i explained to you in my first email to you until the right family found me. each time a family did not work out, i was always to blame. ie, "if only you had been more grateful; if you only had of done this; if only you had not had done that. if only you had said this and not said that," not that i said anything to give away too much for it was not worth my life to be living if i had. "if only you could be like so and so you could have had a family now. be grateful we took you in because no one else would," came from one of my numerous families. so of course you can understand that i was very much on my guard. yes. sadly even today there is that mentality to feel grateful and appreciative. It is enough that the kids have enough of a difficulty trying to find where they fit in the family let alone these other emotions added on. children need to know that they are accepted for who they are what they bring to the family and what they can achieve as their future opens up to them. children already

know that they are different without the family consciously or unconsciously pointing out their differences. however, it seems that even adopted children of today still have that innate feeling of a need to be grateful. parents if they can need to sit down and explain to these children which they have chosen to adopt that there is no need for them to feel grateful and appreciative. children already feel that without having it constantly pointed out to them. parents need to start thinking how lucky they are not how lucky "you," are. I used to hear it often. aren't you so lucky to be taken in. or "how lovely of that family to be so kind as to take you in to their home." well? was it my choice? parents will gain love and respect from their adopted children without putting added pressure on them to feel grateful.

children need to find out who they are. and as parents, you can play an important role. if their adopted child starts exhibiting an interest in their birth country, parents can help in this process. they don't need to feel threatened that their children are going to forsake and leave them. and, understandable this is how some parents may feel when the child they have adopted wants to explore their roots. and instead of encouraging them parents prevent this process by weaving stories. this may work for some time but it won't work for ever. children may end up rebelling or feeling that they and their identity is not important. however having said all that if children are not interested yet in finding out about their original roots parents need to try and back off and not push them before they are ready. when they are ready let the child have some kind of control as to how far this process goes. the thing is to dialogue back and forth. be as truthful with your answers as possible and if parents and adopted children are not sure how to answer questions, then research. find some resources to help. these days, parents who have adopted have so much at their disposal make use of the resources available. i am sorry if i sound as if i'm lecturing. believe me i'm not trying to. i sincerely want to help. for, in my quest to find out who i am and reclaim my identity i had very few if any resources to turn to. and even those resources were not as good as they are today for i'm glad to say much has and is being invested in helping children whether they be adopted locally or internationally to find out as much about themselves and their birth country as is possible.

one of the things that really helped me when i was in difficulty was my imagination and my imaginary friend. if i had not had those, i doubt that i'd be here today telling you my story. i hope i am not boring you. please let me know. my imagination and my imaginary friend were so vital in certainly my first four years in australia. and the other that helped me was my last and real family. my mother helped me so much. she never pushed me in to keeping contact with her though she told me many years later that i'd just about driven her mad with worry. With my life and my trust just about in tatters, you can understand my reticence in getting to know another family. but, my mother was extremely patient. she waited. how she did it, i'll never know; but, i'll always be thankful to her for that. for she and i went on to have a relationship which i'd longed for ever since coming here to australia. a relationship that i hope every parent whether adopting or giving birth to their own will have and can have. it all takes work trust and communication.

My mother understood my need to find out about myself as possible. she did not feel threaten by that. she knew i would have to find out if i could. she encouraged me to do it. not only did my mother encourage me but, i had and still have some very good friends who helped along the way to make my venture as easy as possible. Here i wish to pause to say that if adopted children want to find out about themselves and their roots, i would encourage them to let their parents know that in doing this, they are not displacing them in anyway. in that way, it is hoped that parents will feel a measure of comfort in this.

The germ of a plan for me to return to vietnam for the first time took started in 1987. it took three years for this germ of an idea to blossom in to reality. in that time, i had to find out as much about vietnam and its culture as i could before venturing back. remember, i had few resources to go by. but, i'm glad to say i did as much homework as possible. i had decided that i would not go back in the hopes of trying to find out if my birth family were still living for, it would have been very doubtful if i'd found anything for many records were either destroyed in the war or, were not

kept. I went back to vietnam in the hopes that i could at least reclaim my childhood and my identity and there begin to heal. i'll never know my full history but, i am beginning to feel proud of who i am despite not knowing much of my early history.

as for the moon festival and tet, I came to know about those when i returned from my first trip back to vietnam and determined i would learn my language or try to relearn it again. a friend found a teacher for me and it was through him that i came to know more about vietnamese culture customs and traditions. i certainly learnt a few things whilst in vietnam. and, it was through this teacher that i became involved for a little while in the vietnamese community. sadly however, i found that if you are not living with a vietnamese family or involved in the community or don't speak the language there is little acceptance for an outsider. i don't speak about the people in the community, just the community in general. if it had not been for my teacher i would not been allowed to join in some of their functions. this i feel sad about for, my teacher has since died and of course i am not with the vietnamese community. i have some vietnamese friends but, most of them want to speak english. i find it really quite funny. they want me to teach them english but, they are reluctant to teach me vietnamese. i have to smile about that one. however, i have a large collection of vietnamese music. not really large but i have quite a lot. I have been back to vietnam three times since my first trip. and even though i feel a bond i know that vietnam is not my home and yet nor is australia strange to say. i think though if i'd been more settled in regards to a constant family, things might have turned out differently. but, it is pointless to speculate on that. so there is much i need to come to terms with. and hopefully in time i can do that.

it was in 1999 that a book was thought of writing about international adoptions and its consequences. a book of this kind as far as i know had never been written looking at it from the adoptees point of view. and in that time meetings were held whereby i had an opportunity to meet many adoptees from vietnam. and of course other countries too. but, i was astounded as to just how many people were born in vietnam and were adopted in australia. for so long, i thought i was the only one. let me tell you, it was like a breath of fresh air to know that at last i was not alone in this world. and to know that, at last i could relate to some one who felt just like me. it was wonderful to be able to talk to others who had similar but, not quite the same experiences as i had. certainly some of the emotions felt and expressed were the same as i'd felt. it was wonderful. as a consequence, an organization was founded ICASN and there discussions were taken up on the net and events planned. i have made some very nice friends out of this organization; and still am in contact with them even today."

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### **From the Children Home Society and Family Services Spring/Summer 2007 brochure**

Please note, these courses are open to anyone who has adopted, not just CHSFS clients:

Post Adoption's new class format includes a theme-based post adoption education night on the 4th Tuesday of each month. During this evening, two seminars for adults will be offered which will be led by community experts and adoption staff at CHSFS.

The My Time offering, on the same night, is an informal children's activity group offered at the same time as the seminars.

These events are open to all individuals in the community.

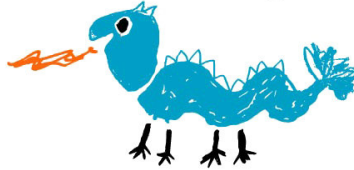
Early registration recommended for all sessions.

[www.childrenshomeadopt.org/Educational Workshops.html](http://www.childrenshomeadopt.org/Educational%20Workshops.html)

**Please note our own Julie Schulz will be co-facilitating PE 024 Ten Adoption Talking Points for Parents and Teachers on March 27<sup>th</sup> 6:30-8:00pm!**

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# blue dragon



CHILDREN'S FOUNDATION

## **Blue Dragon**

Editors note: I became aware of this non-profit via APV. It was founded in 2002 by three friends (one Australian, one Vietnamese and one Spanish). They began by meeting street kids in Hanoi and offering classes in English, math, art and yoga. They now offer many more services but they emphasize that it's important to use an individual planning approach because in recognition that every child requires a different level and type of support.

It appears to be an effective organization, well worth knowing more about! Check out their website: <http://www.bdcf.org/welcome.html>

I also enjoyed reading their blog, it provides personal insight into the daily ups and downs of their work: [www.vietnamstreets.blogspot.com/](http://www.vietnamstreets.blogspot.com/)