

New Eyes

I sit in the park by the beach. Behind me the sound of motorbikes, cars and buses. In front of me, grass, trees and red and yellow flags fluttering in the breeze warning swimmers that the South China Sea is rough today. The sun is bright, the sky blue, and the sea turquoise. The breezy air is scented with flowers and the sea. Children play and lovers love. The Lunar New Year holiday is over and finally NhaTrang is becoming quiet again. Nha Trang has been declared a “number one city” and this year’s Tet celebration is Amazing. The city was dressed from head to toe in lights and flowers, and visitors came from all over Vietnam to enjoy the splendor.

I think it’s been a year since I last sent an update of my adventures. In that time I’ve been home for 6 months to visit NY, NM, N. Carolina, and my sister in Mexico. It was a renewing and refreshing visit. It was wonderful to spend time with my kids and their kids and to have Christmas with them for the first time in many years. I spent 6 weeks with my sister in Mexico, the longest we’ve been together since I was 12.

Now I’m back in Vietnam, and it seems I’ve come back with different eyes. Vietnam has always been for me The Beauty and The Beast, but now it seems that the beauty is outweighing the beast. Instead of seeing a dirty city, I see a colorful one. Instead of hearing the raucous noise of the city I hear its life. It’s all the same but my eyes are different.

It helps that I’m living in a western style apartment, complete with flat screen TV, HBO, Starworld and CNN, a microwave and cleaning service. I’m much more comfortable here. If I close my windows I can forget I’m in VN for a while. I’ve been back in VN for almost 2 months, and after teaching for a month the Tet holiday began. I have a lot to tell about the holiday, so I’ll break it into segments and send a little each week. I’ve one more week of holiday before I get busy teaching again, and I’ll spend it writing and remembering.

I spent 12 days traveling and visiting the families of 8 students, all of them farm families. Their homes and economic circumstances are varied. I learned about some of the realities of farming. For example, if there’s not enough water when the coffee trees are blossoming it will affect the crop, and your life for the coming year. One student’s family was worried because they needed to water the coffee, but not enough water was available. The pond that was full last year was just a muddy bottom now. And when the crop is bad, as it was this year, Tet isn’t such a happy time. Conversely however, it seems that more “Lucky Money” is distributed. Lucky Money is a Vietnamese and Chinese tradition at the New Year, when money is given by elders to Children. In return the children wish their elders good fortune in the coming year, this everyone is “lucky”.

To be continued next week.

I wish everyone Chuc Mung Nam Moi, Xin Nien Kuai Le, -- Happy New Year!

June Bayard
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