

## GIFT OF LIFE AND GRACE

“Today I am very thankful and grateful for God’s precious gift to me—the gift of life and the gift of Grace,” says Minh Phuong Towner ’13. Minh was raised in a Catholic home in her native country of South Vietnam, where she first learned to pray to God for her needs, and where she began her journey of knowing God was with her always.

In 1968, the communists attacked her city. Her father, younger brother and sister, and Minh were among the many Vietnamese people captured. They were lined up and waited to learn whether they would live or die. Minh watched as her father, brother, and sister were shot. She closed her eyes as her turn came. She heard the shot, fell to the ground, but realized that her head was only. Getting up, she ran and found her mother and her remaining siblings.



In 1975, South Vietnam was lost. Minh and her other younger brother were among the thousands who fled the country. However, they were also among those who were captured. Minh says there were days she prayed to God to take her life away before she had to go through another day of torture. Life in prison was full of cruelty, harsh treatment, loneliness, suffering, and despair. She began to feel herself losing hope. One night, she asked to be given a sign, so as to continue having hope in Him, and noticed from her cell window a tiny star brightly shining in the dark black sky, and knew that God had not abandoned her.

After her third attempt she escaped with her brother to Taiwan and from Taiwan to France. Four years later, Minh decided to move to Australia to seek a better future, while her brother stayed in France. She married, had children, and had a successful professional life as a nurse. Years after that, she lost her brother to cancer, and she grew angry at God. She started to drift away from the church. Her marriage disintegrated and she was diagnosed with acute depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. Yet, amidst all of this she knew God wanted to have a relationship with her. At her lowest point, God brought Minh healing through her friend Martha who brought Minh back to the church.

In 2005, she found herself moving to Virginia to be married and she had a plan to continue being a nurse and her children would eventually join her. But that plan never happened. She began volunteering at Vienna Presbyterian Church, started sharing her story of God working in her life, returned to Vietnam with a mission team, and realized she was called to the mission field to bridge people together. In 2009, she decided to follow that call by pursuing her studies at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary.

Now it is 2013, and Minh just graduated with her masters of divinity and is ready to change the world, for she knows that no matter what she faces she will find God, for God will never abandon her.

Written June 2013

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