



# PROUD TO BE VIETNAMESE

Kính thưa quý vị quan khách và các bạn trẻ. Thật là một niềm vinh dự lớn lao cho cháu được đến đây để chia sẻ và học hỏi những kinh nghiệm và những ưu tư trong cuộc sống của chúng ta, là những người Việt Nam tha hương và của thế hệ trẻ Việt Nam, với hai quê hương. Hay nói cách khác, chúng ta những người trẻ Việt Nam có hai bà mẹ: mẹ Việt Nam và mẹ Hoa Kỳ. Đối với cả hai bà mẹ, chúng ta đều phải có bốn phận. Kính thưa quý vị, cháu xin phép được diễn đạt bằng tiếng Mỹ để cháu nói dễ dàng hơn.

I can remember my first day at the Naval Academy. It was Plebe Summer. Plebe Summer is 6 weeks of pure hell—getting yelled at, intense physical activity, shooting guns, running obstacle courses. In short, being exposed to the military life. After we took our oath of office, I had to run upstairs to where all of the Plebes (a degrading name for us freshman). I was so scared. I almost started to cry. One of the officers saw this and took me aside into her office. She told me that it would be okay. She said I shouldn't take the yelling personally

and they were only doing it to make me a better person. I left her office, determined to be strong, determined to succeed. I wanted to show everyone that this Vietnamese girl was there to stay. I didn't merely want to get through. I wanted to be at the top. It was this determination that carried me through the four years. Many people

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ask me, "Wasn't it difficult to compete against all those guys, because they're stronger than you." All I can say is, "sure they're stronger than I am, but when we're all in the same boat, when it's 105 degrees outside, when we're all exhausted from lack of sleep, from doing hundreds of pushups, from running numerous miles, it's your determination that will keep you going. I never gave up; I never fell out of the runs. When they asked for a volunteer to do the dirty jobs, I was

always the first one in line. I earned the respect of my upperclassmen and my classmates. The four years there was a wonderful leadership experience. Many people believe great leaders can only be born. I believe otherwise. EACH ONE OF YOU has the potential to be successful and be a great leader. It just takes practice, hard work, and most importantly learning from your mistakes. I think THAT was the best thing about the Academy. It was a leadership laboratory where you practice your leadership skills. With each consecutive year, you were put in charge of more and more people. Finally in my senior year, I was put in charge of half of the Brigade, which is approximately 2000 people. I'd like to share some of the things I learned that year with you:

1] Put the welfare of your people before yourself. Your people will know whether or not you really care for them by how you treat them. Only then will they give you 100% rather than merely the minimum.

2] Don't micromanage. If you assign someone a task, don't tell him or her how to do it. Show them that you have confidence in their abilities. Let them think of a way to accomplish the task. Allow them to discuss it with you and let them carry out the task. It will give them more pride in their abilities and they'll work harder than ever. People work harder if they know someone believes in them.

3] Set the example: If you expect your people to be there at 8:00 AM, don't come strolling in at 8:05 or 8:10. Be there at 7:50. As the military saying goes, to be early is to be on time.



4] Always do what is right, even if no one is looking. Because it can come back and haunt you.

5] Praise in public; discipline in private. I have seen many leaders AND parents make the mistake of yelling at one of their subordinates in front of other people. What does this accomplish? It simply demeans the person or embarrasses your child. You'll not only lose the respect and loyalty of that worker but the respect and loyalty of your other subordinates.

I think the most important attribute of a great leader is service to others. In today's fast-paced society, people forget the most important things in life. It's not money, status in society, the clothes you wear, or the things you have. It's how you live your life everyday knowing whether or not you've made an impact on society, or made someone, just one person's life better. That's what is important. Live your life to make others feel better about them AND THEN you will feel better. After I found out that I was graduating second in my class, that the navy was going to pay for medical school for me, that Stanford had accepted me, I didn't feel joy in my heart. I just felt that I had done what was expected of me. I didn't feel true happiness until my graduation party. My sister and I stood in front of 500 Vietnamese people, and it suddenly hit me. I felt happy because I was giving the Vietnamese community something to feel proud about—one of their own had succeeded. I felt privileged to be given that honor. Fifty of my father's Vietnamese navy buddies flew to my sister and my graduation from all over the United States. They were proud that a Vietnamese female had done so

well. When I think about it now, I feel blessed that God has granted me the opportunity to bring happiness and pride to our Vietnamese culture.

***... I realize how much I owe my future to my parents and how much they have given me.***

Because I was born in the United States, I've always struggled with my identity. Am I Vietnamese or am I American? I'm sure many of you young adults have struggled with that too! I used to be embarrassed about being different, because I went to an all white school. I remember asking my mom: Why is our skin yellow? How come our noses are so flat? How come our eyes are so funny looking? It took me a long time to accept these differences, to love my heritage, to love the community I came from.

I've learned to love myself just as how I look, because that's God's gift to me. My self-acceptance has made me more self-confident, more open to diversity and different ideas. I seek out the differences in people, because that's what makes each person beautiful to me. I'd like to share with you a book named "Catfish and Mandala," written by Andrew Xuan Pham. Andrew and his family escaped from Vietnam in 1979 and settled in San Jose, CA. After 20 years he is unsure of his heritage and who he is as a person—is he Vietnamese? Is he American? Is he Vietnamese-American? And what exactly does it mean to be Vietnamese-American? In order to find out his roots and his heritage he decides to take his bike and ride through Vietnam.

During his ride, he encounters many, many young Vietnamese people his age who were unable to obtain an education because they had to help the family make a living, so they end up staying out in the streets all day trying to sell anything and everything, sometimes resorting to selling their own bodies. Andrew sees this and he comes face to face with the realization that if his parents had not taken the incredible risk of escaping from Vietnam, he would be one of those poor young people trying to make a living by selling anything and everything. He sees this and realizes how much he owes his future to the risk his parents took to give him and his siblings a better life/future. I see this and I realize that this could have been my situation as well, if my parents had not risked their lives to give my brother and sister and me a better future, I would not be here today speaking with you. I see this and I realize how much I owe my future to my parents and how much they have given me.

I'd like to take the time now to honor all parents: for their sacrifice, for their hard work, for even risking their lives so that their children could have better futures...

Students and friends,

I hope you see this and realize that could be your situation as well and thank your parents. Maybe some of you feel awkward and can't thank them verbally, so you thank them by studying hard, getting good grades, making a better future for yourselves, making them proud of you. Your parents have given you the incredible gift of a better life, take advantage of that gift, and use your talents to their fullest potential. This country has SOOOO



much to offer you if you only know where and how to use it. DO not let their sacrifices for you go to waste.

Parents, I ask that you try to understand us. We grow up torn between an American culture and a Vietnamese culture. The American culture stresses independence. But in the Vietnamese culture “cha mẹ muốn con học gì, con phải học cái đó.” Most Vietnamese parents I’ve met want their kids to be doctors, engineers, or lawyers.

I would love for the parents to realize the United States is a country of diversity. It’s possible to be successful in any type of profession: singer, actor, businessman, electrician, whatever. What matters most is if you are happy with what you are doing.

I have also seen a lot of parents who are so worried about making money for their family that they spend all of their time at work. I hope you realize that before you know it, the kids will be all grown up and you won’t have that time to spend with them anymore. I beg you to take out at least I

or 2 hours each week to sit down and talk, have a picnic, or even better, do a community service project together. Not only are you instilling in them the importance of family, but also the importance of contributing to society. Be there for your children. Guide them but listen to them and respect their ideas. Tell them that you believe in them. Children are like seeds. Your words of love and encouragement will nourish them and help them grow.

I encourage you to learn about our history, to learn our language, and learn our culture. Don’t forget your heritage. No one else has any like it. For example, hai bà Trưng. What other country can say that two women single handedly tried to fight back the country of China. And bà Triệu. At the age of 20, she raised an army of more than 1,000 people to fight the Chinese and committed suicide rather than surrender herself to the enemy.

I am so proud that these are the type of ancestors we have. I am proud to be Vietnamese.

Cháu hân hạnh được đại diện người trẻ tại Oklahoma nói riêng và Hoa Kỳ nói chung được góp lời trong ngày Quốc Hận hôm nay. Cháu xin được nói tiếng nói của riêng cháu và chắc chắn cũng là tiếng nói của những người trẻ Việt Nam tại hải ngoại. Chúng cháu mong được đóng góp khả năng của chúng cháu cho quê hương Việt Nam khi đất nước được hoàn toàn tự do dân chủ.

Xin cảm ơn tất cả quý vị đã lắng nghe.

**Josephine Cẩm Vân Nguyễn**  
Stanford, CA

***Your parents have  
given you the  
incredible gift of a  
better life, take  
advantage of that  
gift, and use your  
talents to their  
fullest potential.***

## The Woman

A wise woman who was traveling in the mountains found a precious stone in a stream. The next day she met another traveler who was hungry, and the wise woman opened her bag to share her food. The hungry traveler saw the precious stone and asked the woman to give it to him. She did so without hesitation. The traveler left, rejoicing in his good fortune. He knew the stone was worth enough to give him security for a lifetime. But a few days later he came back to return the stone to the wise woman.

“I’ve been thinking,” he said, “I know how valuable the stone is, but I give it back in the hope that you can give me something even more precious. Give me what you have within you that enabled you to give me the stone.”

## and the Stone

