

Vietnamese Nurse Has Survived Adversity

Villages Regional Hospital nurse Minh Dornshuld overcame harrowing childhood experiences.

By FRANK ROSS
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George Horsford | Daily Sun
Minh Dornshuld, of Leesburg, a nurse at The Villages Regional Hospital, administers stress tests.

Patients and co-workers say there's a bundle of joy working in the radiology department at The Villages Regional Hospital.

The source of the happiness that radiates from Minh Dornshuld may be difficult to understand, considering her early life.

The land her father farmed in Vietnam was in an area known for Viet Cong activity, and her home was burned twice. Her father was a civilian casualty in a bombing attack on her rural village. At the time, her mother was pregnant with her younger sister. Food was very scarce.

"We couldn't raise food because bombs were dropping, and the helicopters would come and shoot anyone who was outside," she said. "We didn't know where our next meal was coming from."

Dornshuld recalled their diet consisting mostly of sweet potatoes and roots of the papaya and banana trees they were able to dig up.

"We were dying of starvation," she said.

She was 6 years old when her mother gave her and her

at age 16, she got into a small fishing boat with 11 others. Under the cover of darkness, they left in the exodus that became known as "The Boat People." Thousands drowned or were recaptured.

The first night, she thought death would be a welcome relief. A violent storm created mountainous waves and soon everyone on the boat was seasick. They threw everything overboard and kept bailing. During the storm, their freshwater container was destroyed.

When the sun finally came up, the sea was so calm it looked like a mirror.

"When we would see a ship coming with a Russian flag we would turn away," she said. "They would have taken us back to Vietnam."

Three days later, dehydrated and hungry, they were picked up by a Chinese ship and taken to Hong Kong. After a mountain of red tape, she arrived in the United States unable to speak English.

"When I came here, I could say two words in English — hello and hi, but I didn't know what hi meant," she said.

She pressed the people she lived with to let her take classes in English. Reluctantly she was allowed a one-hour class, twice a week. That spark kindled a fire that still burns.

She was later taken in by a foster family. Her foster father was a college professor who fueled her desire to learn.

Starting in 10th grade, Dornshuld soon earned her high-school diploma.

"I had a big gap in my education," she said. "There were no building blocks. I had a big gap between nothing and 10th

grade."
During summer school, she met her future husband, Carl, who was studying law.

"I had such a strong desire to learn," Dornshuld said. "Some kids hate school, but I hated Friday because I couldn't go to school on the weekend."

She got her bachelor's degree in nursing at Akron University in Ohio and passed on her passion to her children. Today, her daughter is a pediatrician, and her son has a doctorate degree in chemistry and is a professor at Mississippi State University.

"I wanted to be a nurse so bad," she said. "Nursing was a dream and nobody, including me, thought I could achieve it."

It took her 10 years to complete a four-year program because she got married and had two kids. She graduated in 1991 with her nursing degree.

"I don't take my nursing for granted," she said. "I've always stressed education, worked hard and look what God has given me."

After Vietnam was open to tourism, Dornshuld said she went back twice. She found the village where she grew up and

relocated her family. "I was afraid to go back because I left Vietnam illegally," she said. "By rights, the communist scould keep me. I was very anxious."

An American friend went with her to make sure she was able to come back.

Dornshuld, 58, lives in Leesburg now.

"I don't have any regrets," Dornshuld said. "I tell my children that it was my past that enabled me to help them. It made me who I am today. Everyday I just see the blessings."

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