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## This issue features NHAT LINH

The Viet Nam Literature Project helps the world read, research and teach in English the literature of Viet Nam. Our overall purpose is to improve the opportunities for Americans to gain a serious understanding of our world by listening to people from somewhere else. The difficulties we address are the patchy demand in English for this literature which impedes trade publishing, academic research, and teacher training, and the lasting divisions among Americans as well as Vietnamese caused by the struggle for a free and independent Viet Nam.

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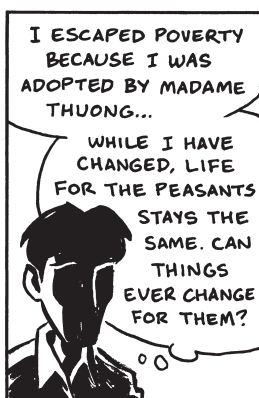
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AN EXCERPT FROM  
**TWO BEAUTIES**  
 by NHAT LINH  
 ADAPTED BY  
 JASON RAINEY  
 BASED ON A  
 TRANSLATION BY  
 JAMES BANERIAN

Doan had set himself up to sketch the crowd. There was a fair that day, and he wanted to depict a country scene.



Yet lately, Doan had felt disquiet and not even the joy of drawing could settle his soul.



Doan returned home, where villagers had gathered to pay off debts to his family.



Madame Thuong saw Doan as he approached.



*the comic continues inside...*

DEAR FRIENDS

Dear Friends,

Winter came to Orange County in November. Hard frosts have had me breaking ice in the horse troughs and we've already gone through half the hay we stacked in the barn after the September harvest. After Christmas I'll be hauling it from the shed in the back field.

Now is my favorite time of year for work. I stay up two hours after sundown and it's only eight o'clock, plenty of time to sleep eight hours and still get up at four. By the time I walk **Bob & Betsy** a mile through the fields out to the road for the paper, I've got a stack of work to mail.

When I get back from walking the dogs I read the *Times* like a novel. We are living in history. Next month I'll go see the inauguration of **Barack Hussein Obama** with a friend in business who would not have had free time last January.

November saw the death of **Huynh Sanh Thong**, who invited me to take over his Viet Nam publications at Yale years ago. In December, friends in Ha Noi celebrated the 90th birthday of **Huu Ngoc**, the scholar who reached out to the United States just after our war with a landmark series of translations of Vietnamese literature.

**Thong** was one of the first Vietnamese to set foot in the United States, in 1948, not long after **Ngoc** joined the Viet Minh, one of the post-colonial governments to stand up to the West after World War II. They each did their bit for the progress that has put a black man from



Dan with Gianni Belli, Mayor Andre Garcia and Lucy Duffy at St. Parize le Chatel, Armistice Day 2008, photo by Colette Mayo

Indonesia with a Muslim name at the head of the United States.

Knowing what disasters **Ngoc** and **Thong** faced, and what triumph they won, lends me confidence in the importance and the possibility of what Viet Nam Literature Project plans to achieve. The unification of an independent Vietnamese nation, asserting the place of its people in the world, is part of history's long arc toward justice.

Not long after **Dr. King** spoke of that slow curve he spoke out on the American conduct of war in Viet Nam and was shot. Live a hundred years, begins the Vietnamese national poem, and you will see things that make you sick at heart.

But of course **Nguyen Du** made that observation in verse which millions have learned by heart for one hundred and fifty years, which **Ngoc** taught me, which **Thong** translated into striking English. Works of fiction and

poetry and drama transform difficulties into entertainment for our peers and instruction for the next generation.

Here is a photo of the power of literature, at the monument to the American dead of the Great War, at my grandmere's village in France. I was brought there with the mayor and his deputy by my mother's work translating and documenting the stories and poems her mother wrote about her childhood in the war, which have been passed on to today's children in the village.

The monument used to stand on the site of a mass grave of Vietnamese laborers who died in the great flu after helping the Allies defeat Germany. It is as if they never were there. Our work, now that all empires have fallen, is to help the world hear the works of the Vietnamese authors among us.

Viet Nam Literature Project offers a growing body of teachable translations at our website, provides reference support at Wikivietlit, and one day will train and certify teachers in this tradition of art from life. Please help us as we begin in winter a year in the new America.

Dan  
Editor, Viet Nam Literature Project  
*Literature News* Winter 2009

Doan sat down and started going through the account book



Initially, he was pleased to see how his family had helped so many. But as he studied the accounts received, a realization stunned him. His schooling had been paid for with the money of these peasants. He had known this before but never grasped the base truth of it until now.



Later, Doan went to his studio, hoping to find solace in his art.

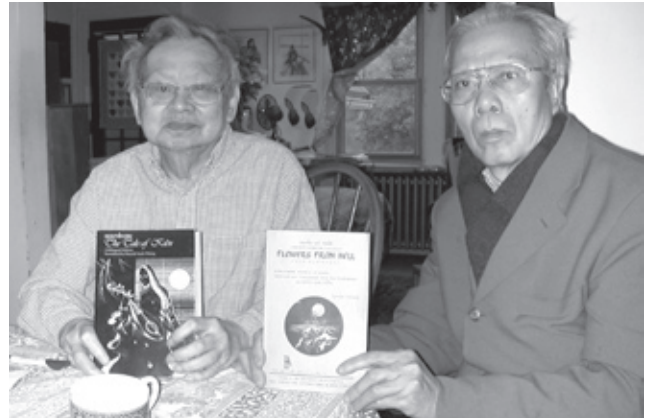


## E V E N T S

## In Memoriam Huynh Sanh Thong

Translator and editor **Huynh Sanh Thong** died suddenly on November 17, 2008, after collapsing at home in Hamden, Connecticut. **Thong** arrived in the United States in 1948 after imprisonment by the French and a job sweeping up in an American office. He boasted that the French released him after a petition displaying his command of their language, although he had refused higher education in colonial schools to join the revolution. He made virtuosity, self-education and revolt the gesture of his life, refusing a scholarship to Harvard Business School and leaving graduate studies at Georgetown and Cornell. He turned down a position in the government of **Ngo Dinh Diem** after assisting the future head of state on a visit to the United States. He threw out his television after **Diem's** murder and then the landing of Marines at Da Nang, devoting

himself to teaching Vietnamese language at Yale. The position was cut soon after the peace agreements in Paris. Through the 1970s and 1980s **Thong** translated Vietnamese poetry and published Vietnamese studies scholarship, rescuing poets and scholars, American as well as Vietnamese, stranded by the fall of Saigon. The senior generation of Vietnamese studies scholars at universities in the United States owe their tenure file to his work. He brought international attention to prison poet **Nguyen Chi Thien** while he languished in Hoa Lo. After winning a McArthur fellowship for his work with Vietnamese literature **Thong** turned to the basic question of "the origin of thought, language, and culture", focusing on



*Huynh Sanh Thong with Nguyen Chi Thien, April 27, 2005, photo © Quang Phu Van*

the words referring to snakes in all languages. **Thong's** generative thesis attributes fundamental importance to woman's role, no surprise to any who visited his happy marriage. Address condolences to **Van-Yen Huynh**, 46 Glendower Road, Hamden, CT 06517-1201.

## New York Party

VNLP held an event in New York City on Thursday, January 15, at 6 PM to celebrate founder **Dan Duffy's** dissertation. We had dinner and **Dan** read a few passages and discussed them with the group.

"Self-Reliance: Literature Outside Viet Nam" describes a walk in Paris to show how France and Viet Nam developed together, to suggest how Vietnamese literature will gain a public in English in the United States. **David Moore's** string band played, with **Jeff Ratner** and guest **Sam Duffy**.

**Tom Enders** and **Elise Thoron** provided their loft, and hosted with **Pamela Rosenthal** and **Donna Dennis**. The guests were **Robert Anderson**, **Kim, Larry & Elicia Berger**, **Lisa Brainerd**, **Christine Burgin**, **Emily Clarke-Pearson**, **Dana Doan**, **Jenny Young Dupont**, **Seth Fagen**, **Samantha Gillison**, **Pharibe Wise Hannan**, **Carol Irving**, **Vlad Klimenko**, **Kathy Klyce**, **Andrew Knox**, **Jacques Lezra & Susanne Wofford**, **Michele Lowrie**, **Michael Lynton**, **David Norris**, **Lydia Rhodes Petty**, **Janeth Thoron**, and **Ocean Vuong**. We ate through a mountain of food from **Bun Soho**. The *Da Mau* website ran an announcement of the event.

**Ken Chen** of the Asian American Writers Workshop couldn't come, but met **Dan** for breakfast the day before and we discussed common goals. That night, Wednesday, **Elise**, a stage director, rehearsed me in front of **Desaix Anderson**, **Jim Friedlander**, **Cindy Prescott Kuster**, **Zan Ottaway**, **Joanna Wissinger**, and **Oz**. **Mitch Bradbury** took **Dan** out for lunch the day of the event and brainstormed about how to find supporters for VNLP.



Doan was reminded of a line from one of his new books...



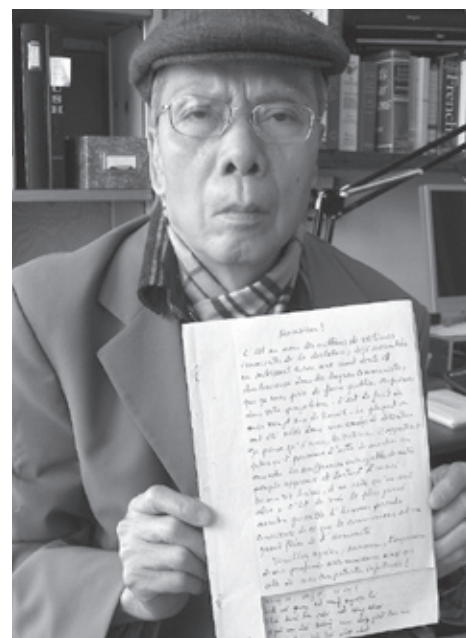


## Nguyen Chi Thien Recovers Manuscript



Excerpt from 'Blood Seeds Become Poetry' by Jonathan Hill

Readers of poet **Nguyen Chi Thien** will be delighted that his *Flowers of Hell* manuscript has returned to its author. These are the hundreds of poems with which **Thien** burst into the British Embassy in Ha Noi in 1979, before security forces dragged him off to Hoa Lo prison. He had written the poems down in hiding, on release from the prison camps where he had composed them in memory since 1961. The diplomats wrapped the manuscript in a Foreign Office calendar and sent it to London, where colleagues passed it to **Patrick Honey**, Viet Nam specialist at the School of Oriental and African Studies. The rest is a history of publication and translation around the world. **Thien** first learned of the success of his bold adventure when jailers at Hoa Lo confronted him with a foreign edition of his work. Interrogators demanded he write the poems out again himself to prove that there were no collaborators. The original manuscript returned to **Thien** early in 2008.



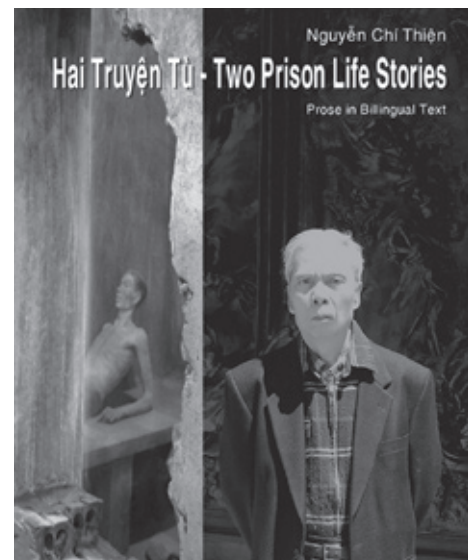
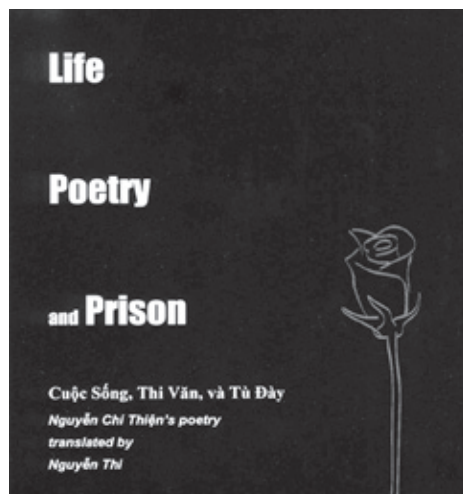
Nguyen Chi Thien with *Flowers of Hell* manuscript at San Francisco office of Marcel M. Matley, Examiner of Documents and Handwriting, October, 2008, photo© Jean Libby

## New Nguyen Chi Thien Books

Four books by **Nguyen Chi Thien** are now available direct from Amazon, thanks to the distribution work of **Jean Libby** and of the Yale Council on Southeast Asia Studies. Yale's title, *Hoa Lo Hanoi Hilton Stories* gives **Nguyen Chi Thien**'s account of his days after bursting into the British embassy with his manuscript poems. It is also available directly from

the Council on Southeast Asia Studies. Amazon and Yale both continue to sell **Huynh Sanh Thong**'s bilingual version of the manuscript, *Flowers From Hell*. Allies for Freedom's new *Hai Truyen Tu – Two Prison Life Stories* is a bilingual study of literary life in the camps where he composed the first poems, and of their transmission overseas. *Life, Poetry, and Prison* is one of the first English translations, in reprint. Amazon sells

both books, which **Jean Libby** also sells directly from Internet Bookselling, <[www.AtoZProductions.com](http://www.AtoZProductions.com)>. The authoritative edition of the poems in Vietnamese reviewed by the poet, *Hoa Dia Nguc*, as well as earlier editions and translations by **Nguyen Ngoc Bich** are still available directly from the publishers and on the used book market.





Wikivietlit at <[www.vietnamlit.org/wiki](http://www.vietnamlit.org/wiki)> makes Vietnamese literature intellectually accessible with more than 200 articles on authors, works, periods and topics written and revised by subject experts. Editor Linh Dinh assures the quality and importance of articles ranging throughout the national literature and diaspora.



Linh Dinh, Wikivietlit editor



### Phung Quan, Featured Wikivietlit poet Winter 2009

Phung Quan (1932–1995) was born in Hue and died in Hanoi. He joined the resistance against the French at age 13, then the Viet Minh, then the army of the newly-formed Democratic Republic of Vietnam. He is remembered as a member of the *Nhan Van Giai Pham* dissident literary movement. His biting, fearless poems, such as “Chong tham o lang phi” and “Loi me dan”, were dubbed “atomic bombs” by the public.

He was banned from publishing from 1958 until 1987, and jailed or sent to hard labor for much of this time. When not in prison, he survived by fishing clandestinely, since one needed a license, and writing about 50 books, published under different pseudonyms. For complete article with citations to print and Web resources, consult <[www.vietnamlit.org/wiki](http://www.vietnamlit.org/wiki)>.

### What Mother told me once

By Phung Quan

I lost my father when I was just two.  
My mother, for my sake,  
chose not to wed again.  
She'd grow mulberry trees,  
raise silkworms, and weave cloth –  
she reared me till I was grown up.  
After some twenty years I still recall  
that day when I was five.  
It happened that I told her a lie –  
next day I feared she'd spank me.  
But no, she just looked sad.  
She hugged me, kissed me on the head:  
“My son, before he closed his eyes,  
your father said that all through life  
you should remain sincere and true.”  
“Mother, what does it mean,  
to be sincere and true?”  
My mother kissed me on the eyes:  
“My son, a man sincere and true  
will laugh when, glad, he wants to laugh,  
will cry when, sad, he wants to cry.  
*If you love someone, say you love.*  
*If you hate someone, say you hate.*  
Someone may not entice you with  
sweet words –

still, don't say *hate* when you feel love.  
Someone may grab a knife and  
threaten you –  
still, don't say *love* when you feel hate.

Since then, when some adult asked me,  
“My boy, whom do you love the best?”  
remembering what my mother told  
me once,  
I would reply:  
“I love best one who's true, sincere.”  
The person stared at me in disbelief  
thinking, “He's just a parrot, that  
young boy.”  
But no, for what my mother told me once  
impressed itself upon my brain, my mind  
as if on some immaculate, virgin sheet  
were drawn a crimson, bright red line.

Now I am twenty-five –  
the orphan has become a writer since.  
But what my mother told me once,  
when I was five,  
remains intact – a crimson, bright red line.  
What at the circus tightrope walkers do  
is quite a feat.  
Yet harder is what writers do  
who'll walk the path of truth through life.

*If you love someone, say you love.*  
*If you hate someone, say you hate.*  
Someone may not entice you with  
sweet words –  
still, don't say *hate* when you feel love.  
Someone may grab a knife and  
threaten you –  
still, don't say *love* when you feel hate.  
A writer, I shall write the truth  
and speak the truth throughout my life.  
No sugar and no honey of success  
can bribe my tongue.  
Thunder that crashes overhead  
can't strike me down.  
And if they grab my paper, seize my pen,  
I'll take my knife and write on stone.  
(1956)

*From An Anthology of Vietnamese Poems: From the Eleventh through the Twentieth Centuries, edited and translated by Huynh Sanh Thong. Yale University Press asserts copyright on the poem without citing permission from Phung Quan or his heirs. Thong translation reproduced here under fair use.*

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### David Willson Sick

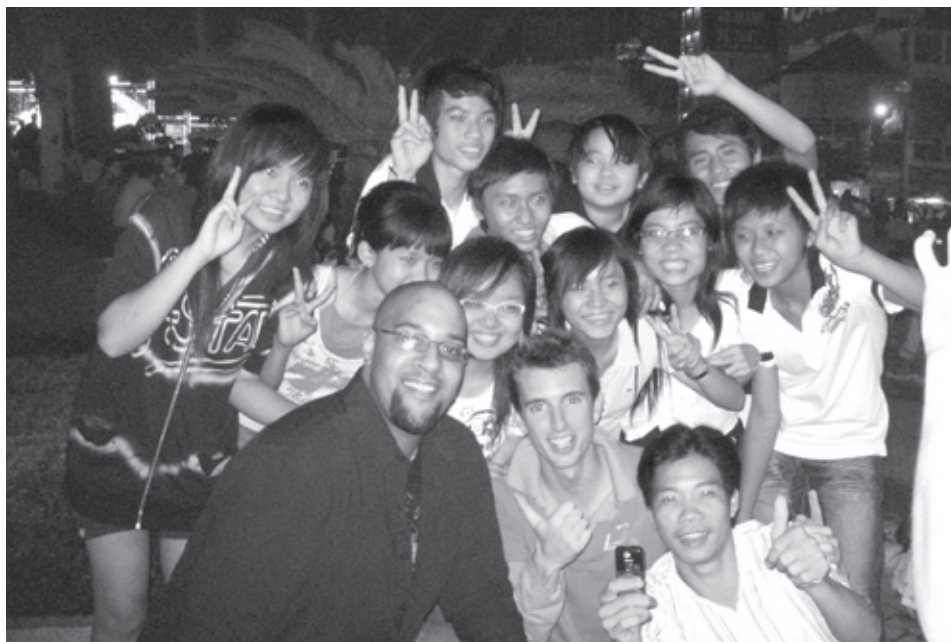
**David Willson**, the Army veteran whose *REMF* novels select the most petty aspects of life with the majority of US troops, in

the rear, is succumbing to multiple myeloma, the consequence of duty at Long Binh, even today a dioxin hot spot. He is writing up the experience in a sequel to his classic novels *In the Army Now*,

*REMF Diary*, and *The REMF Returns*, the manuscript entitled "REMF Diary of Dying and Bureaucratic Complexity". Write to David at 23630 201st Avenue SE, Maple Valley, WA 98038.



Board member Pete Delevett with son James Phan, born to Kim on August 14



Webmaster Philip Arthur Moore rings in the new solar year with the crowd in Saigon

### Zixbook launch

**Bui Huy Trang** has launched his first Zixbook publication, an oversize graphic novel, in color, to appear in English, Vietnamese and French along with music on an attached CD. *Legend of Lost Love: Exile 1* begins at the Tet parade in the Vietnamese retail district of Paris and follows the focal character in his preparations for return to Viet Nam on a photographic tour of the highlands. For ordering, see <[www.zixbook.com](http://www.zixbook.com)>.

### Nguoi Viet 2

*Nguoi Viet*, the community newspaper of Little Saigon, renewed their support of VNLP and moreover mounted a banner on their English-language *Nguoi Viet 2* website linking to <[www.vietnamlit.org](http://www.vietnamlit.org)>. VNLP has in turn mounted a *Nguoi Viet 2* banner in rotation with banners from the William Joiner Center, the Viet Nam bibliography of the Yale Council on Southeast Asia Studies, and Education About Asia. *Nguoi Viet* publisher **Anh Do**

will be speaking at Yale in April, and has offered the use of the *Nguoi Viet* community room for a VNLP event later in the year.

### Happy Birthday Huu Ngoc

Foreign friends celebrated the 90th birthday of the great "importer and exporter of culture" at the World Publishing House in December. Send more good wishes to **Huu Ngoc** care of NXB The Gioi, 46 Tran Hung Dao, Ha Noi.

### Credit and Debit Card Donations

VNLP now accepts debit and credit card donations at <[www.vietnamlit.org](http://www.vietnamlit.org)>, thanks to the Giftworks online donations program. The page passes both one-time and scheduled contributions directly to the VNLP bank account and lets us know.



## T H A N K S

In the fourth quarter of 2008, **Ocean Vuong** volunteered to work on **Wikivietlit** coverage of English-language authors, **Tom Enders** and **Elise Thoron** offered their loft for our January event, **Pharibe Wise Hannan** put **Dan** in touch with Exeter classmates for the guest list, **Rebekah Linh Collins** made **Dan** dinner in Paris, **Philip Arthur Moore** cleaned up the **VNLP** website, Viet Nam-era veteran **Britt T. Jackson** of the **USPS** designed our Business Reply Mailer, **Jason Rainey** made new stationery from **Jonathan Hill's** and his own comics, **Emily Jack** explained **LEARN NC**, **Sam Duffy** hooked **Dan** up with **David Moore** for music for the January event, **Giftworks** set us up with online donations, **Greg Lockhart** collaborated on his **Wikivietlit** entry, **Anh Do** and **Shawn Long Nguyen** put a **VNLP** banner on the English-language **Nguoi Viet 2** website, **Thuy Dinh** read **Dan's** dissertation for discussion on the *Da Mau* website, and **Jim Peacock** included **Dan** in the **Global South** faculty working group at **UNC**, where **Hodding Carter** told us to get in touch with **Desaix Anderson**. Thanks!

### ***VNLP Legal Status and Funding***

**VNLP** is a d/b/a for **Books & Authors: Viet Nam, Inc.**, a federally recognized 501.c.3 non-profit corporation in North Carolina. **VNLP** has established its editorial program largely with private funding.

Twelve friends have sponsored events to develop support in New York, Washington, DC and North Carolina: **Valerie Asher** in Bethesda, Maryland; **Pamela Rosenthal & Samuel Wertheimer**, **Donna Dennis**, **Tom Enders & Elise Thoron**, **Sam Duffy**, **Nina & Hal Drooker** and **Carol Irving** in New York City; and **Anna & Steve Wilson** in Durham.

Major gifts from **Anonymous**, **Lucy Duffy**, **Tom Enders & Elise Thoron**, and **Pamela Rosenthal & Samuel Wertheimer** started the work. Over 2005-7, **Philip Alperson**, **Anne Asher**, **Valerie Asher**, **Kim & Larry Berger**, **Pete & Kim Delevett**, **Donna Dennis**, **Paul Dionne & Jenn Esperanza**, **Tran Do**, **Nina & Hal Drooker**, **Tim & Denise Duffy**, **Dennis Dunivan**, **Lan Duong & Viet Nguyen**, **Anne Frank**, **Kimloan Hill**, **Robert Jones III**, **Chan Khuong**, **Kim Vu**, **Ly Lan & Mart Stewart**, **Khoa Le**, **Phuong Anh Le**, **Jean Libby**, **Noah Long**, **Sandy Mills**, **Terri Moore**, **Yen Ngo**, **Dana Sachs**, **Dzung Senser**, **Penny & Bernard Snow**, **Wee-Teng Soh**, **Jeneva Stone**, **C. Michele Thompson**, **Truong Anh Thuy**, **Son Truong**, **Jun Wang** and **David Yin** contributed. In 2007, **Anh Do** of *Nguoi Viet* newspaper made the first corporate contribution, and **David & Betty Jones** and **Charlie Hunter** made major gifts.

The **William Joiner Center** of the **University of Massachusetts, Boston** awarded **Dan** a **Rockefeller** fellowship for academic year 2006-7 to build a reference for and about Vietnamese literature scholars on the **VNLP** website, launched in March 2007 as **Wikivietlit**.

The **VNLP** editor served until August, 2008 largely as a volunteer, supporting himself caring for livestock at **Infinity Farm** in Hillsborough, doing general labor at **Highfield Farm** in Rougemont, and managing audits of intellectual property for **Open Source Risk Management** in Durham. In September, 2008 he began additional work as an expert witness for the Charlotte law firm of **Tin Nguyen**. A second major gift from **David & Betty Jones** in honor of **Dan's** dissertation allowed **VNLP** to pay him for work in August and September, 2008.

**Valerie Asher**, **Kim & Larry Berger**, **Pete & Kim Delevett**, **Paul Dionne & Jenn Esperanza**, **Nina & Hal Drooker**, **Lucy Duffy**, **Anne Frank**, **Jean Libby**, **Sandy Mills**, **Mart Stewart & Ly Lan** all renewed their support in 2008. **Anh Do** renewed the corporate support of the *Nguoi Viet* newspaper. **Tin Nguyen** joined as a new donor.

**VNLP** recognizes its authors and editors with modest honoraria and pays contractors and vendors their going rate.

## VNLP Mission and Programs

Viet Nam Literature Project promotes Vietnamese literature and supporting materials in English translation, when necessary, in America and to the world. We do this to help teachers, students, and readers understand the social realities of the nation that has played so great a role in the life of the modern world, and to develop Vietnamese literature as a field of study in the United States. We further support the freedom and influence of Vietnamese writers by working for their public recognition.

Three programs fulfill these goals:

**Website** • teachable extracts by Vietnamese authors, in English translation when necessary, with supporting materials for classroom and research use.

**Wikivietlit** • online reference to Vietnamese literature, written by experts, edited by poet Linh Dinh

**Outreach** • newsletter, e-bulletins, and events in major cities

# Literature News

The Viet Nam Literature Project Newsletter



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☐ **Member (\$25)** covers the cost of preparing and sending you *Literature News*.

☐ **Impresario (\$250)** provides honoraria for a **Wikivietlit** author of reference articles.

☐ **Supporter (\$50)** or ☐ **Lit Lover (\$100)** helps us send *Literature News* to those who have not yet joined.

☐ **Patron (\$2000)** pays the honoraria, production, and promotion costs of new author page on the VNLP website.

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