



The Award Winning

Malibu Rotary Club Surfwriter

March 11, 2015

Official Newsletter of the Rotary Club of Malibu
Malibu Rotary Club President Margo Neal

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- **Check [Calendar](#) on Malibu Rotary website www.maliburotary.org**
 - **Rotary International Website: www.Rotary.org**
 - **Rotary District 5280 Website:www.rotary5280.org/**
 - **RI President (2014-2015) Gary CK Huang**

- **Rotary District 5280 Governor (2014-2015): Elsa Gilham**

Pepperdine Registrar Hung Le Tells How his Faith Kept Him Going on a Tough Journey from Viet Nam at Age 11



Pepperdine Registrar Hung Lee told a combined meeting of the Malibu Rotary Club and Pepperdine students' convocation on March 11 how he endured being an 11 year old boy separated from his family before the fall of Saigon in 1975, to live in refugee camps in foreign countries and be put into the home of an older cousin in the state of Washington where he was physically abused, finally to end up as a student and now registrar of students at Pepperdine University in Malibu. When he was a boy in Vietnam Hung wanted

be a priest, but his rough journey in his early life had him questioning his faith. He ultimately realized when he arrived at Pepperdine that he was on holy ground, that God works on His own timeline.

As a child in Saigon, Hung went mass every day. He had an older brother, one that could continue the family name, and had made the decision to become a priest by the time he was 9. He told his parents of his decision and they approved. He told his local priest, who encouraged him in his plan, and he fully expected that when he was 18, he would be in the seminary, ultimately to be ordained as a catholic priest.

These were times of war in Vietnam, and plans often had to be changed because of the circumstances of war. Hung said that just as many people in California have an emergency Earthquake Kit, or in Malibu have a emergency survival kit in case of fire, the families in Saigon had family emergency war kits. The war kit may be bag or suitcase of things they would need, important papers and survival gear, when the Viet Cong attacked their home and they had to leave in a hurry. The hope was somehow everyone would run to America. Hung said that he had met American GIs and they seemed very friendly.

During this time Hung's older brother died in a drowning accident. This was the first time Hung saw his father cry. After his brothers burial Hung's mother told him that he still did not have to give up his dream of becoming a priest. Hung had two younger brothers, and one of them could take on the duties of the eldest son so Hung could continue on his dream of becoming a priest.

After that, though, the war heated up around Saigon. The Americans who had been defending Saigon were pulling out. The Viet Cong were closing in and anyone who had fought against the Viet Cong (as his dad had) had to flee. No one knew exactly what would happen when the Viet Cong captured the city, only that it would be very bad for Hung and his family.

Just before the fall of Saigon, June 30, 1975, Hung's mother took him aside and told him. "You are going to America."

He noticed that she didn't say *we* are going to America. She said *you* are going to America.

"We were able to get one ticket for a boy from our family to get out of the country and go to America. We want you to go and continue the family name."

It turned out that a family cousin who had been working with the Americans was allowed to get tickets for his immediate family. The immediate family included tickets for the cousin's two sons. One of the cousin's sons had died, but the cousin hadn't told the Vietnamese government about the son's death. As a result they would get and sell to Hung's father, the ticket for the deceased son.

Hung's father sold whatever possessions he had to pay for Hung's passage on the military transport that would be leaving Saigon.

With his war kit suit case packed and after saying goodbyes to the family he never knew he would see again, 11 year Hung looked out of the back window of the transport bus. That was the second time he saw his father cry.

Hung was sent from refugee camps in the Philippines to Wake Island. He remembers daily breakfast menu was bacon, eggs, and rice. His routine was very mundane and routine. One day there was a 3 x 5 card on the table, with words written on it in Vietnamese. It said: "VIETNAM HAS FALLEN."

Hung did not know the fate of his family. He knew he was not going to be priest—a priest can't continue the family. He knew that somehow he was going to end up in a place called the United States of America.

Hung was sent to a refugee camp in Honolulu. Part of the price that Hung's father had paid for Hung's ticket was the sponsorship of an uncle in Michigan, where Hung believed he was going to go next. The uncle decided he didn't want to sponsor Hung. Hung would have to find another sponsor.

Hung didn't know what was to become of him. Would he stay in refugee camps? Would they send him back to Vietnam?

He found out the someone in Seattle, Washington, USA was sponsoring him. There was a American GI who married a Vietnamese woman living in Seattle who volunteered to sponsor Hung.

Hung felt so blessed that these strangers were taking him into their home—not just any home but one of the largest homes he had ever seen. The Vietnamese lady, Mrs. Key, cooked him a wonderful Vietnamese meal, the first one he had since he left Vietnam.

After dinner she said, "Let me show you to your room?" His room? Hung had never had his own room. Hung walked down the hall in the direction Mrs. Key had indicated. It was dark and he hadn't bothered to turn on the light. He could see there was a bureau and the room was carpeted. He lay down on the carpet and fell asleep.

Later there was a knock on the door. It was Mrs. Key. She asked, "What are you doing in this room?" Hung believed he must have made a terrible mistake.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I thought this was my room."

"No," she said, smiling. "This is your closet." She pointed to a much larger room on the other side of the door. "That's your room, and that's your bed."

Hung couldn't believe his fortune. He later found out that Mrs. Key and his father had been betrothed to each other by their grandparents, but each had found their own mates as they grew older, but apparently had stayed in touch.

Hung's happiness in the home of Mrs. Key didn't last. One day another older family cousin came to the Key's home, asking for Hung. The cousin was trying to qualify for subsidized government housing and needed another body to get the housing paid for. He wanted Hung to be that extra body.

Neither Hung nor Mrs. Key knew all that the cousin had in mind. It turned out the cousin had a terrible temper and a brutal sadistic personality. Who beat Hung almost daily—careful not to hit his face, but other places on his body that others could not see. He had bruises all over his body, and always wore long sleeve shirts and long pants so the bruises would not show. The cousin threatened Hung with “You are here illegally—if I report you to the authorities they will deport you back to Vietnam where you will be killed!”

Hung was not allowed to touch anything in the house without the cousin's permission, not even the washing machine or clothes dryer. One day a school friend of Hung's came over and asked Hung to go out with him. Hung said he couldn't go because his clothes were wet. The friend asked, “Why don't you put them in the dryer?”

Hung told the friend that he was not allowed to turn on the dryer—the dryer was owned by his cousin and he didn't let Hung touch it. The friend said, “Well I can touch it.” And the friend turned on the clothes dryer. Hung had a bad feeling about that, but before he could stop the friend the clothes dryer was turned on. When the cousin came home he was livid. He hit Hung so hard his ear drum popped and Hung saw stars.

Through all of this Hung believed through all his suffering something good would ultimately happen.

One day he was invited to a birthday party by one of his friend's parents, Mrs. Beard. He had heard about Mrs. Beard's parties and was so excited about the invitation that when Mrs. Beard came to pick him up he forgot to put on a long sleeve. He could see that she was looking at him in the rearview mirror. She asked about the multiple bruises on his arms. Hung told her he was clumsy and often hit his arms on things.

Mrs. Beard didn't believe him, and Hung told her the source of his bruises. She got Hung out of his cousin's house, went to court on his behalf and was able to relocate Hung into foster care.

Ultimately Hung was able to get messages from his family Vietnam, and it wasn't good. His sister had escaped on a boat, but died when she was given tainted water on the boat. Hung's father had been detained in a “reeducation” prison camp by the Viet Cong.

Hung started to doubt his faith. Why would God kill his sister? Why was God alive and his sister dead?

It is ironic, Hung said, that it was his friend Craig, an atheist, who posed to Hung the following idea: “Maybe God works on His own timeline.”

While finishing high school in Seattle, Hung applied to colleges across America, but not in California. He said that his friends had told him not to consider California universities. Mrs. Key recommended that he apply to Pepperdine University in Malibu, California.

He reluctantly applied and was accepted. The tuition at the time was \$11,000 per year. How could he afford that?

Somehow money was provided. Hung says, "God opens doors." When he came to Pepperdine he felt he was stepping on holy ground. He found a new family at the university; he could feel the kindness of the people. After graduating from Pepperdine in 1987 he was offered a position with a firm on Wall Street in New York.

It was always Hung's dream to bring his surviving family to the U.S. from Vietnam. While in New York he was invited to meet a New York congressman who was proposing changes to the immigration laws. The congressman told Hung, "There are only 2 ways to get your family out of Vietnam, change the law or pray for a miracle!"

When the Viet Cong took over South Vietnam the South Vietnamese were asked to sign documents renouncing their religion and proclaiming allegiance to the new Communist government. Those that didn't do that were sent to "Reeducation camps."

Reeducation camp (Vietnamese: trại học tập cải tạo) is the official title given to the prison camps operated by the government of Vietnam following the end of the Vietnam War. In such "reeducation camps", the government imprisoned several hundred thousand former military officers and government workers from the former government of South Vietnam. Reeducation as it was implemented in Vietnam was seen as both a means of revenge and as a sophisticated technique of repression and indoctrination, which developed for several years in the North and was extended to the South following the 1975 Fall of Saigon. An estimated 1-2.5 million people were imprisoned with no formal charges or trials. Thousands were tortured or abused. Prisoners were incarcerated for as long as 17 years, with most terms ranging from three to 10 years (from Wikipedia).

Hung's father refused to renounce his religion and spent over 5 years in a reeducation camp. Hung said a man in a trench coat came to his door one day. The man was representing the U.S. government and told Hung that a new law that was passed which allowed immigration to the U.S. for Vietnamese that had spent over 3 years in re-education camps in Vietnam.

Specifically the law has the following provisions: "In order to qualify, the applicants must show on the following: (1) who spent three or more years in a re-education center as a result of their close association with U.S. agencies or organizations to implement USG programs and/or policies prior to April 30, 1975; OR (2) who spent at least one year in a re-education center as a result of their close association with the U.S. Government (USG) prior to April 30, 1975 and who were also trained for any length of time in the United States or its territories under the auspices of the USG prior to April 30, 1975; OR (3) who spent at least one year in a re-education center as a result of their close association with

the USG prior to April 30, 1975 and who had been directly employed by the USG, a U.S. company or a U.S. organization for at least one year prior to April 30, 1975; OR (4) Widow/widower applicants: whose spouse was sent to a re-education center as a result of his/her close association with the USG prior to April 30, 1975 and who died while in a re-education center or died within one year after release.”

As a result of this in 1991 Hung was able to get the his parents and surviving brothers and sister out of Vietnam and into the United States. His parents now live in Reseda and his sister is a Pepperdine graduate.

her News and Guests from Last Malibu Rotary Club Meeting

March 11 Malibu Rotary Club Meeting in the Fireside Room on Pepperdine main campus

The Malibu Rotary Club was be back in Fireside Room, the same Room the club met in for breakfast for 18 years (from 1985 to 2013) for the Malibu Rotary Club meeting March 11, 2015. There was about 60 people at this meeting—mostly Pepperdine undergraduate students who were getting convo credit for attending. **Shannon Latson** did a great job organizing this special meeting, making sure there were plenty of cookies and refreshments for the audience and the room was set up

David Zielski presided over the event. The Rotary District “3-2-1- Go To End Polio” Day at Griffith Park on March 21. It is a 5 K / 10 K Run or Walk and Family Festival with the Start and Finish Line at Griffith Park at Chrystal Springs. The 10 K Run starts at 9:00 a.m and 5 K walk at 10:00 a.m., which is also when the Family Fun Festival Starts—there is also a 1 mile fun walk and lunch by IN-N-Out Burger starting at 11:30 a.m..and a raffle. All proceeds will go to END POLIO NOW, a humanitarian program of Rotary International to eradicate polio worldwide. Register on line at www.321gotoendpolio.com.

Bill Wishard appointed Rotary District Special Olympics Czar

Dave Zielski wasn't the only Malibu Rotarian who was at PETS last weekend (Feb 20-22). Dave was there because all Rotary Club Presidents must attend PETS before they can become club president. Bill Wishard went there too, because he wanted to know if the Rotary District was doing anything special for the Special Olympics games being staged in Los Angeles July 25 - August 2, 2015. He asked District Governor Elect DJ Sun what his plans were for the games. Who was coordinating it for the Rotary District? DJ said he hadn't had time about, but knowing of Bill's experience with the 1984 Olympics that were held in Los Angeles, DJ announced the next morning that a new position had just been created in the Rotary District for the 2015 Special Olympics and Bill was in charge.

Guests at the last Malibu Rotary Club

There were so many Guests at the Malibu Rotary Club meeting Feb March 11 we could not tally them all. **Tom Bos** was called on to give the mostly non-Rotarian audience something about Rotary.

Malibu Rotary Club Supports RainCatcher

Clean drinking water is a problem affecting millions of people around the world. A Malibu company, RainCatcher, is trying to solve the problem in an efficient manner. Much of their work has been in Africa. The Malibu Rotary Club along with the Rotary Clubs of Beverly Hills, CA USA and the Rotary

Club of Entebbe, Uganda has applied for a Rotary Foundation Grant to assist Raincatcher. There are several videos available on You Tube that show the amazing things Raincatcher is doing bringing clean drinking water to places in Uganda and Kenya where there was previously no clean drinking water.

David Zielski, Executive Director of Raincatcher, makes regular trips to Uganda and Kenya to do Raincatcher installations and maintenance. In February The latest video showing what David and the Raincatcher people are doing in Africa was shown at the Malibu Rotary Club meeting on August 20. A link to the video is now on the Maliburotary.org website. The direct link to the video is at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=59rzOcM-RL0&list=UUFetq8NgjhXhtkVf0idcQUg>

Calendar (for details on these programs see maliburotary.org)



March 18 2015 – Report by Margo on Rotary District Humanitarian Trip to Guatemala

In Room LC 152 of Pepperdine University Drescher Campus **Malibu Rotary Club President Mago Neal** talks about her recent trip with 84 Rotarians and friends as they went on Humanitarian trip to Guatemala. The itinerary was changed a bit when a volcano erupted near their hotel. Fellowship at 11:30 a.m. and meeting at Noon.

March 25 2015 Coach Allison (Kim) “Life-Work Balance--When Your Lifestyle Demands More Than What's Humanly Possible “

March 31 2015 at City Club in Los Angeles

Last Rotary District Breakfast of this Rotary year—featuring the Rotary Youth Organizations (Rotaract and Internact)

April 1 2015 Marshall Thompson and Brad Davis

Emergency Preparedness Network in Malibu

Marshall Thompson, a writer, producer, director and photographer will be bringing Brad Davis, City of Malibu Emergency Services Coordinator to the Malibu Rotary Club meeting on April 1 to talk about the Emergency Preparedness Network in the City of Malibu.

May 6, 2015-03-15

Mati Waiya, Chumash Ceremonial Elder

Wishtoyo Foundation--Preserving Chumash Culture in Malibu

"Wishtoyo was founded in 1997 by Chumash ceremonial elder, Mati Waiya and our mission is to address modern day environmental issues by preserving and utilizing the ancient wisdom

of Chumash culture and inspiring the public and its youth to have environmental awareness and responsibility for sustaining the health of our land, air, and water. At the heart of our programming is the Chumash Discovery Village, an authentic recreation of a working Native American village next to Nicholas Canyon Beach in Malibu. We provide education programming to over 3,000 school children per year and we open our doors to the general public one Sunday per month. Our board members include: Beau Bridges (actor), Terry Tamminen (Schwarzenegger administration), Carole Goldberg (Vice Chancellor UCLA), Debora Sanchez (Supreme Court Judge) and David Kaplan (Surfdog Records). For more information about us, you can visit our website at www.wishtoyo.org or see us in the Malibu

