

Recent Missionary Stories of May's family: Sharon & David Berry

Sharon:

I asked everyone in our English class to make a list of everything they did before they left for work every morning. One woman said she gets up at 4:45am and goes to do aerobics at the park for one hour, then sells newspapers.

Then she goes to the market and buys her food for the day. She comes home and cooks breakfast and wakes her family up. She gets her son ready for school and she takes him to school at 7:00am (He stays at school until 7pm) After she cleans the house, she gets herself ready and goes to work. She works as an accountant and says she doesn't make very much money and it is very boring until the end of the month, then it is very busy. She comes home from work and cooks dinner for her family and then cleans up and usually goes to bed about 11:00 or 12:00.



These people are very hardworking and are not spoiled. I am amazed at how much they work and how little they get paid. Many people work all night long and gather fruit and vegetables and drive into Hanoi and sell their things and drive home (sometimes an hour on their bikes or motorbikes) and just get a little bit of sleep. When we buy their produce we never haggle over the price because they are so poor. This morning I bought a big bouquet of flowers with 8 giant roses for \$2.00. Once or twice a week I buy big bags full of vegetables and it only costs about \$1. It is incredible.

... The amazing thing is that these people are so happy. They work very hard and yet are smiling and laughing and having so much fun together. Every time we go into meet someone we are ushered into a nice room with chairs and a coffee table and offered tea or coffee or bottled water. We love the latter. Many times they fix us fruit or tiny tangerines

... We are trying to get the Wheelchair Projects, Clean Water for 2,000 and Cow projects finished. I am going to be editing English articles written by Madame Zine, the Vice President of the Women's Union which is like the RS in the church. It is organized all over Vietnam and she wants me to help her with English translation and editing of some of her articles she is publishing in a newsletter.

This month we enjoyed going to the Linh Singing Festival about 45 minutes from Hanoi. We were the only Caucasians there out of 2,000 people. They were there to hear the beautiful folk singing of love songs. They were dressed in traditional costumes which included head pieces and tiny little shoes. They all sang very beautifully as they floated in a boat in a small lake and sang under a pagoda. Sometimes they did duets, quartets, and sometimes it was solos.

Sometimes from the audience came someone who just wanted to sing. They had beautiful oriental sounding voices. We met some nice people and had some great discussions about families and homes.

The most exciting thing that happened is what Dad will tell you about that happened a week ago in Ho Chi Minh City. We flew down to welcome a new couple, The Reeders, from Brigham City, and train them. We were very surprised to find out that verbal permission had been given for the Vietnamese and the Caucasians to meet together, and that they were going to have a baptism and 28 people would be coming into the church from Vietnam. Yes things are changing down in HCMC and maybe we here in Hanoi will not be too far behind. A few weeks ago we had a Vietnamese woman, who was a member, come and join us at church here at our Sacrament Meeting. It was fantastic for as you know we have had to be very strict about letting any Vietnamese into our meetings. This was strictly forbidden. I think that Vietnam is really trying to give religious freedom to all religions and so we are seeing little by little steps which will result in some great things happening here we hope soon. We are just trying to keep up with our Heavenly Father who knows just what is best each step of the way. To see 28 people baptized, some who had been waiting for 20 years, and become members was just fantastic. This is not something that can be announced because we want to keep it very low key and not make a big deal out of it. But we are just thrilled with the progress. Dad will tell you more.

... We had a good Fast and Testimony Meeting last week and I gave the WW on the Atonement. How I love our Savior. Any sacrifice we make is just a tiny bit compared to his sacrifice for us. I know that He is in charge here and is watching out for us...

Dave: We recently returned from Ho Chi Minh City, after meeting and helping our new senior missionary couple there, Hal and Janet Reeder from Brigham City, UT, get settled into their apartment. [While there] we attended a special meeting that we would like to share with you, from my personal journal entry:

On Sunday, Feb. 26, 2006, for the *first time in thirty years*, the Church was able to have a *baptismal service* in Vietnam. There have been two LDS groups meeting on Sundays in Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC), Saigon. There has been a small branch of “expatriates” (Caucasians working in HCMC, and their families), and a small branch of native Vietnamese members. Today, the two branches were combined, with the expatriate branch leaders being released, and the native Vietnamese branch leaders being retained.

Not only was it a day for *combining the two branches*, but it was a day for beginning *a new branch meeting location*. Here-to-fore the Vietnamese branch was meeting in the small front room of Branch President Coi’s home. It was so small that sometimes two or three members had to sit on each chair. The expatriate branch was likewise meeting in a location that was too small. Today the combined branch met in a much larger room, on the top level of Ryan and Theresa Bird’s large, three-level home. It will accommodate approximately 100 members, and it is large enough for each member to sit in his/her own seat. It will be a suitable location until the membership grows larger, and the Church can find a satisfactory space that can be leased. For weeks, Ryan and Theresa have been preparing the room for today’s meeting. The preparations included adding air conditioning to that part of their home, as well as adding sun screen tinting to the many windows in that upper floor room.

The most important reason that this was such a significant day, is that at 9:00 AM a baptismal service began in this new meeting location. There were *twenty eight, beautiful, prepared Vietnamese youth, young adults, and older adults, who were baptized and confirmed members of the Church*. President Towers, our mission President, and two of his top Vietnamese elders, came to HCMC two days early to accomplish all of the necessary interviews. They were busy

doing that, from morning until night. Prior to that, all of the candidates had all been taught and prepared by an older Vietnamese sister missionary, who has been serving in the Cambodia Phnom Penh Mission, by the name of Sister Huynh. She is from SLC, UT, and her companion had gone home so she was by herself, with just a couple of months left to go on her mission time. She is a very humble, sweet, wonderful person, and she came to Saigon with that special assignment from the mission president. For the *five weeks* prior to today, she had gone around, by herself, to each of the homes of the new-members-to-be, patiently and lovingly, teaching and preparing them for the two holy ordinances. Some were already semi-prepared and had been waiting for many years for this special day to come. The branch president's wife, who has waited twenty years, and their children, were among those to become new members. Regardless of where they were with their Gospel knowledge, they all benefited from, and appreciated, Sr. Huynh's instruction. Each day her teaching began at 6:00 AM and ended at 9:00 PM. She had instructed the 28 people to come thirty minutes early to the meeting, to ponder and enjoy the prelude music. They did exactly that, and they were in their seats, at 8:30 AM, ready for the 9:00 AM meeting. They were all dressed in the white jumpsuits that had been custom-made by a Vietnamese sister. There was no talking. It was a time for reverence, and reflection about the significance of the special occasion that was about to happen.

The font was filled and ready to go. It was a large, rectangular shaped, light-weight, plastic basin sitting on the floor. It was supported by a tubular metal framework that included a ladder on one corner with four steps leading into the water. The make-shift font was small and cramped, approximately 5 feet long by 4 feet wide, but it was adequate for this sacred purpose.

Ryan had it made by an engineer at work, from a computer sketch, for a small, "portable swimming pool" for his children. By 9:00 AM, the rest of the people had come in and taken their seats, and the baptismal service began on time. Some of the brethren from the former expatriate branch speak fluent Vietnamese, and they provided excellent translation, as they led music and interpreted for the speakers. Ryan Bird was also one of the speakers, and he provided his own translation.

By Vietnamese law, the Vietnamese branch leadership positions all have to be filled by native Vietnamese. This also pertains to those who perform ordinances. The baptisms and the confirmations which followed, were done by two members of the branch presidency, President Khoi and Brother Vu, and by the two Vietnamese missionaries from Cambodia, Elders Son, and Huy. They all rotated being the mouthpiece for the ordinances. With the baptisms, there were several re-do's of the prayer because of mistakes, or of the immersion portion, because of hair, a toe, or a finger failing to be completely immersed under the water. This would be expected, with inexperienced, native leadership, but it was such an inspiration to witness wonderful, worthy Vietnamese Priesthood leaders leading, and blessing the lives of their fellow, also wonderful, worthy Vietnamese brothers and sisters.

After the 1.5 hours baptismal service, there was a 1.5 hours sacrament meeting. The latter meeting included the sacrament, 28 confirmations, and some talks. There was an unmistakable, rich outpouring of the Spirit through out both of these meetings, in which twenty-eight happy, glowing Vietnamese people were baptized and confirmed. There was complete quiet and reverence during the lengthy meetings, that didn't seem long at all. I watched the new converts, and they were so attentive, and they were absorbing, like sponges, every spoken word, and the special feelings that were there. There were many wet eyes, and a feeling of love that filled the room. I am sure that this same feeling of love, happiness, and appreciation was felt on both sides of the veil by the attendees.

President Towers said, in his remarks, “This is a day that you’ve looked forward to for more than thirty years”, and he thanked the members for their patience in waiting for this day to come. He told the young men that they should plan to receive the Priesthood next week.” Brother Vu, the second counselor in the Branch Presidency said: “What a great day it is! Today we have many new members, in a new branch, in a new location. I was baptized 35 years ago, on the third of October. It was a very special day, but I had forgotten it. When I looked at their faces today, I remembered my own baptism very well.” President Khoi, the branch president, said: “I could hardly sleep last night...we have looked forward to this day for so long! And now I am so excited, and my heart is so full, that I can hardly speak. I am thankful that the expatriates and the Vietnamese can learn from each other’s cultures, and share their Gospel knowledge. Our LDS family is growing and getting bigger. Today we grew from a handful of members to a few dozen. I am so thankful for all who are here, and I love you!”

After the meeting, I spoke with Sister Huynh, the Vietnamese sister missionary, who had helped prepare the new members, and I asked her about her plans. She said that she would like to extend her mission and stay in Vietnam for another month or longer, if her visa can be extended, to help prepare and teach the new members about family history work. Feb. 26th, 2006 was a historic day, and a great step forward for the country of Vietnam. The majority of the wonderful people here in this land don’t even have a glimpse of the marvelous things that are in store for them one day. We are excited to be here, among these good people, and to witness the hand of the Lord moving things forward in many wonderful ways!