**Nam Phuong Pham**

Can you remember a specific moment in time that made such an impact that it determined your life’s calling? Nam Phuong Pham can. She was only 18 years old when a 15 year old orphan changed the way she saw the world. Pham was volunteering as a tutor at an orphanage in her hometown of Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam when this 15 year old, who was only in the sixth grade, selected her to be his tutor. He later told her that he chose her because she looked kind. As Pham got to know this young man, she learned that both of his parents were in prison, and his father eventually died while incarcerated. Not surprisingly, this young man had emotional problems which caused Pham to realize that not everyone comes from a perfect family like her own. From that point on, she was determined to make a difference in the world and give something back to the less fortunate.

Pham’s loving, supportive family consists of her parents and two older brothers. She also has relatives in the United States, which is how she ended up at Lone Star College-CyFair. After taking only one semester of ESOL classes, Pham was ready to tackle credit-level courses. Thanks to her mother, Pham’s English skills were already quite strong because her mother had enrolled her in English classes in Vietnam starting at age 5. Although she was at first apprehensive about the U.S. educational system, Pham has enjoyed studying at Lone Star College because she is exposed to a variety of classes that expand her worldview. From philosophy to chemistry, Pham sees the importance of studying diverse subjects. However, her true love is art and she hopes to earn a degree in a related field such as animation in the not so distant future. In the meantime, Pham is enjoying her time at Lone Star College taking basic courses while she waits to receive acceptance letters from four-year universities.

In addition to the education that Pham has received at Lone Star College, she is also thankful for the support she has received from her professors. Two instructors in particular made a great impact on her: Macarena Aguilar and Deon Robinson. Professor of ESOL, Macarena Aguilar impressed Pham with her friendliness and dedication to the teaching profession. Pham also impressed Dr. Aguilar who said, “Pham is very analytical, so her contributions in class were always of excellent quality. Also, when she gave oral presentations, she was passionate about her topic. This passion comes through in everything she does. I know she is planning to transfer to continue her studies. I have no doubt that she will be very successful.” While Dr. Aguilar inspired Pham academically, Deon Robinson provided the artistic inspiration. Even though Pham lives near the Lone Star College-CyFair campus, she was willing to drive two hours roundtrip to Conroe to take classes with Deon Robinson, Adjunct Professor of Art. Mr. Robinson stated, “As a student Nam Phuong Pham is extremely gifted. Her drawings reveal her to be a kind of visual poet. She negotiates the path of technical proficiency with a unique stylistic flair that is all her own. It has been a joy to see her develop as an artist in my class.”

And it is through art that Pham gives back to the community. Before leaving Vietnam to study in the United States, Pham founded a non-profit organization, Hand in Hand. She created one-of-a-kind greeting cards designed to customers’ specifications, and the profits were donated to help poor children in her hometown. Even though she is thousands of miles away from home, she maintains contact with Hand in Hand, and the group is now selling teddy bears to benefit the less fortunate.

In the future, Pham hopes to return to Vietnam one day and open her own animation company so that she can share the rich culture and beautiful stories of Vietnam with the world. In addition, she dreams of one day opening her own orphanage in order to provide parentless children with the love and attention that all children deserve. Both of these dreams illustrate the selfless nature and giving spirit that Pham exudes, and both of these dreams allow her to pay homage to her family, her country, her culture, and to one special teenager who, perhaps unknowingly, changed her life forever.