

Here are some touching stories from our interviews at University of Education in Saigon:

1. Ngọc:

Ngọc's father died from HIV when she was only 6 years old due to his drug abuse. Her mom was also diagnosed with HIV and died when Ngọc was 12 years old. Before she died, Ngọc's mother worked extremely hard over those 6 years to save money for her two young children to survive with. From the age of 12 onwards, Ngọc and her younger sister (11yrs old) moved to a shelter in Binh Duong Province. They stayed there until recently when Ngọc entered our University of Education. Ngọc is a good student and very matured for her age. That is what struggle does to any young kid - it forces us to grow up fast in order to survive in life. During her years in the shelter, Ngọc learned many skills so as to allow her to make a small living - knitting things for sale, playing instruments to perform, etc. She also interacted with many kids and adults with disabilities at the shelter, and her heart is full of love and compassion for them today. She and her sister suffered from discrimination in her neighborhood because others worried that they both could be infected with HIV. As a result, they went through many blood tests for a long period of time to put these people at ease. Looking at her from the outside, one cannot tell or ever imagine her struggles. She may be used to hiding behind that calm face for many years in order to be accepted by people around her. When we asked Ngọc what she wants to do after university, she said she wants to return to the shelter to help people in need. I guess it's her way of showing gratitude and giving back to her "mom" who heads the shelter. Her biggest priority is to look after her younger sister, who is studying in her last year of high school. Ngọc wants the best for her future, hoping that they can move in together. Ngọc constantly challenges her sister to think about her future, her career, her strengths and weaknesses. It's admirable and touching that Ngọc seems to care more about her sister's future than her own. I guess she is making the same sacrifice that her mom made for them both when Ngọc was between 6 and 12 years old. I can feel her suffering over the years, but I can also see her massive potential as a loving teacher. We at AMA already have ideas on how to encourage Ngọc to think bigger and farther. We look forward to having her as part of our AMA family.

AMA's family of scholarship recipients is full of students like Ngọc. It is people like Ngọc that keeps me motivated every year for the past 5 years. We are trying to touch their lives, but they are already touching ours on day one.

2. Lê:

Lê is studying both English and Russian at the University of Education. She works 4 hours daily as a waitress for 7 days a week after school to pay for her expenses, earning VND 10,000 per hour (or less than USD 0.50 per hour). Her boss warned her that if she fails to show up for work on any random day, she won't get paid salary for a whole month of work. In the meantime, Lê is trying to adjust to living away from home and dealing with loneliness in a new city. She does not have a social life either since school work and her job are both demanding of her time and energy. When depressed occasionally, Lê calls her mom in the countryside and they chat for 1-2 hours each time. She misses her mom very much. Her dad never wanted her to pursue her university education, asking her to apply to work abroad as a foreign laborer instead. The family has 8 children and they are extremely poor. Nevertheless, Lê stays focused on getting an university degree and got herself admitted by the University of Education in Saigon. During our interview with her, Lê expressed some doubt as to whether she can really make it through university and complete her degree in 4 years. Her older brother is her voice of support and hope, encouraging her to study and believe that education is her key to exiting poverty one day. AMA welcomes Lê to our family of recipients for 2016. Through our scholarship program, we hope she can afford to spend more time on school work and school life, rather than being enslaved by her boss at work. We hope to strengthen her self-belief and keep her motivation level high over the next 4 years. We want to send Lê a message of hope and love.

Here are some touching stories from our interviews at University of Education in Saigon, continued:

3. Lộc:

Lộc wears this pair of very thick glasses with one layer that bulges out like plexiglass. His eye balls are magnified when you look at him directly, hiding the fact that he is actually blind in one eye and has only 30% vision in the other eye. He thinks and talks fast, full of eloquence and confidence. Despite suffering from poverty and disabilities, Loc has managed to represent Vietnam in both soccer and judo in regional competitions for the para-olympics or the equivalents. He says he relies on his hearing whenever he cannot see clearly. He is an outstanding student who is very focused on beating the odds thrown against him. Being a good listener with a caring heart, we at AMA think that he will make a fantastic teacher one day.

4. Nhung:

Nhung is 18yrs old now and has two younger siblings. When her younger brother was born with down syndrome, her father left the family and just disappeared. They were already poor and the situation then got more desperate for the family. Her mom never gave up and kept on raising 3 children on her own. Nhung started working at the age of 12 to help her mom financially to the extent possible, but she also stayed in school and performed well. Her mom did not have an education, but she does not want the same for her kids. Now Nhung is the first person in her family to attend university. AMA will support her and help her graduate in 4 years time from now.

5. Quý:

Quý was born to a poor family. His father fought in the wars between Vietnam & France and Vietnam & USA, during which time he was exposed to Agent Orange. Quý and his siblings were also exposed later. His elder sister cannot take care of herself. During her childhood when everyone had to go to work, the family made a wooden crib to keep her safe inside. Around lunch time, his parents came back to feed and bathe her. By the age of 8, she could do some basic things to look herself more. Quý and his younger brother also have some health issues. They get sick easily and are quite weak physically. Due to Agent Orange, his father got very ill and passed away 5 years ago. At the time, Quý already got into the Medical University in HCM City but had to drop out to take care of his father. His family also could not afford to support his school fees. After his father's death, Quý had to work many odd jobs to help the family financially. However, Quý's health is not stable and the crops at home do not always yield well, so his family is in constant financial difficulties. Quý realized during period that only a higher education can change his life. He was determined to pursue his studies again and got accepted into the University of Education in Saigon. He also got the highest entrance score for Maths faculty. However, after only one month of studying at the university, he had to go to the Student Affairs department to ask for temporary drop out due to financial difficulties. Fortunately, his teachers encouraged him to continue his education and introduced him to the Maths Institute in Hanoi in an attempt to get a scholarship for him, since Quý is excellent in mathematics. Quý has passion and the ability to do well in math and science subjects. He is very interested in chemistry and wants to take this subject seriously. After graduating from the University of Education, he hopes to teach in his hometown so that he can stay close to his family. Quý is a good son and a student with very strong will. AMA looks forward to helping him to finish his studies and become a good teacher.
