

# With Literacy and Justice for All

--by Jill A. Oglesby, Director, Valencia County Literacy Council  
280 La Entrada, Los Lunas, NM 87031 (505) 925-8926



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## Byrd and Lun

About 1 year ago, Byrd and Lun first met. Byrd, a retired professor, had just completed her New Tutor Training with the Valencia County Literacy Council (VCLC).

They met in the Volunteer Tutoring office at UNM-Valencia Campus and decided they would meet after that at the Belen Public Library. Lun had brought a friend with her that speaks Vietnamese. Lun could speak almost no English. Byrd could speak no Vietnamese, and she was a little nervous.

They started with single words in English. Byrd used pictures from a picture dictionary from the tutoring office to show Lun vegetables and teach her how to say them in English. It was very difficult for Lun to pronounce English consonants. For “p” Lun would always say “f” Byrd says until Lun learned to say potato. There are no prepositions in Vietnamese either, Byrd says, and the verb “to be” doesn’t exist.

They sat by the café in the Belen library and began to say hello to people. Lun

became friends with Consuelo in the café who is from Mexico. One day they met a Navajo grandmother and her grandson. Vietnam veterans came into the café to buy a burrito. Lun would introduce herself, and their faces would open up as they would talk to her.

Byrd says Lun began to feel that “friendship was in the air.” Lun got a library card and checked out some books. Lun would often remark on the bicycles outside because there are a lot of bikes in Vietnam, and after the storm last year that damaged so many roofs in Belen, Lun was very interested. Lun began to point out roofs and say “roof bad.”

One day, Lun became very concerned because there were many police cars outside the Belen Public Library. Byrd thought probably the police were having a meeting in the library. She and Lun looked around until they found the right room and then peered in so that Lun could see it was only a meeting.

Now Lun has begun to write small essays and poems. The other day she wrote, “Lotus are fragrant and beautiful—leaf green—lotus two colors, white and pink. Lotus nuts eat very good. Petals lotus tea are fragrant. Vietnamese and Chinese people like lotus.”

For this article, Lun wrote a special essay, looking up the English words in her electronic dictionary: “I Vietnamese people. I no English. My friend help go library one year—teacher Byrd teach me English very good. One year I talk English and write English. I happy and thank you. I thank America—I love America.”

Last January, Lun rode the train to Santa Fe to help VCLC promote the literacy council. One of the people she met was Senator Michael Sanchez, who presented the

VCLC volunteers, students, and staff to the seated senate. Afterwards, Lun wrote, “I and friend Jill and teacher Byrd go Santa Fe. Hello. Thank you mister Senator. I tell Senator I Viet Nam. I live Belen. I thank you help English. We go train. Tired very much. We happy.”

I asked Byrd what the most rewarding thing about tutoring was, and she said, “Lun’s being. Lun is a beautiful human being.” She says, “Vietnamese culture is very graceful and delicate” and “Lun’s writings are like haiku.”

Want to help another adult learn to read or speak English? VCLC is offering a FREE, two-day, certified tutor training for volunteer tutors on September 19 and October 17, with half-day orientations on September 9 or 15. To register, contact Susan Howard, our Volunteer Tutoring Coordinator, at 925-8935 or **showard@valencialiteracy.org**. You can check out more of Lun’s writings, too, and see her picture on the Student page at [www.valencialiteracy.org](http://www.valencialiteracy.org).