

*"Where do I start?"*

Please allow me to use lyrics of the Love Story song to tell you about us. How did I meet Diamond? Where and when? When is a good term! It started at sometimes in 2004. My best friend from Sydney came and visited me in Los Angeles. We took a tour at Santa Monica Pier, like Cavill Ave in Surfers Paradise with many street performers. We spotted a young kid about 12 years old who played excellent music with his guitar on the street. We approached and spoke to his parents. Turned out they were from Vietnam, former boat people like us.

As a guitar player myself, I took that kid, named Adam, in under my wings and wanted to help him as much as I could including college education. In brief, Adam also knew about recording and building websites. He made several recording sessions and built a website for a lady named Diamond. I looked at the website and saw her holding a guitar. At that time, I had a volunteer band playing at nursing homes in Southern California during the weekend. My guitarist just quit so I called Diamond and asked her if she was interested to join me as a band member. She politely replied that she would "think about it". I did not know she has been a professional singer since 1981 in Melbourne. Singing or playing guitars for elderly folks in nursing homes is not her ideal show.

Early in October of 2004, Diamond took Adam and his parents back to Vietnam so that he could visit Vietnam for the first time. She wanted to grant his only wish since he has been a great kid and being helpful with the work of recording and building the website. I knew about the trip but I still had not met her in person until that time. Late in October of 2004, due to the weather delay Diamond could not reach the driver so that she could reschedule the pick-up. Because of to time-zone differences Diamond failed to contact him. She then called me and asked me to contact her driver instead. I asked for his name and she said: "Crazy Phu". I then replied: I would not allow a "crazy" guy to pick up. Let me do it myself!

Like any driver who had not met his client before I made a sign with her name "Diamond" and waited for her at the airport. I wore a Mexican hat and prepared to speak only Spanish if she turned out to be a total diva. I would drop her off at her home then say: *Akia, akia, tu casa. Adios* (here, here, your house. Good bye)! We ended up saying *hello-hello* and went out for a lovely dinner (another twist here if I have time to tell you more about this event). Two months later we went to Las Vegas and got married by an Elvis-impersonate Minister on Christmas Day, 25-12-2004. We have not been apart since then.

Remember about the "when" term I used at the beginning of this story? After Diamond moved in with me and she started putting a few photos of her and her family members. I noticed a photo of her and her sisters at the beach in Vung-Tau. Image of the seventeen years-old girl in the photo jogged my memory and reminded me of the girl I met in 1976 on the beach of Vung-Tau, 28 years ago. A few minutes later we discovered that we actually met and had a crush for each other back then. She was a student and her high-school in Saigon had a tour trip to Vung Tau. We did not talk but spent half a day looking and smiling at each other. After the war I was hanging around the beach almost every other day waiting for the US Navy ship that would come and pick up any Vietnamese who wanted to flee from Vietnam. Just rumors but I remembered waving and saying to her "See you in America" as her bus was about to leave. I was sure that I would get on the US Navy ship later in the evening and with her "rich appearance" she would be able to pay someone to take her out of Vietnam by boat.

It is destiny! Like I had said, we did end up seeing each other again in America after 28 years of separation. After almost a year in Indonesia refugee camp I came directly to Minnesota

USA in 1979. She escaped Vietnam and went to Melbourne on 02-12-1981. After 10 years living and working in Melbourne she set out for an adventure trip to California where entertaining opportunities were more available. She worked for a big law firm during the day but performed at concert halls and TV stations at night. At once time she was running her own TV and radio shows. Most Vietnamese people in Southern California knew her, except me. I was very much immersed in the American business and life style. I did not read, hear or watch any Vietnamese program.

Until we met again after 28 years, we both had our previous marriage. She has a daughter and I have two sons. She maintained her Australian citizenship and did not want to become an American citizen. Since most of my shipmates went to Australia after our escape trip in 1978 I always spent my holidays visiting them in Sydney and Brisbane. I loved every minute of my time there and I have always wished that I could retire in Queensland someday. With Diamond's citizenship status, we were able to buy a large block of land in Lockyer Valley in 2007. We still had our daughter in college so there was no rush of relocating. Finally late in 2015 she graduated from Stanford University. Our job was done and we started packing.

After of two weeks delay, on December 16, 2016 we arrived to Brisbane International Airport. As soon as I got out of the airport door, I bent down and kissed the ground. Thirty minutes later I got in my hand the temporary Medicare Card. People in Australia do not value it as much as I do. Health care is very expensive in US, with or without insurance. Besides my true gratitude toward Vietnam Veterans, the saving from not paying for health insurance in US has helped me greatly in organizing many events to honor them. Hopefully Diamond and I will continue being healthy so that we can do more for the former Australian soldiers who had spent their younger days in Vietnam protecting us from the harms of Communist forces.

We are at the moment living in Surfers Paradise, not too far from Cavill Ave where many street performers are gathered there every night. Adam has moved on with his life in California but because of him and my buddy in Sydney (also named Thai), Diamond and I were finally reconnected after 28 years of separation. Together we have done many great things for others. Besides honoring American and Australian Vietnam-Veterans, I was able to find the Captain of two Taiwanese fishing ships who saved me and 28 others from drowning 40 years ago somewhere in South China Sea. Someone had told us before: "you are two different person but you both share the same heart and passion". No argument from us!

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