

Le Huynh Hoang (Phuong Trieu)

In 1977, as a result of the hardships of prison life, I developed what should have been a simple stomach ulcer. Due to the lack of health care however, the ulcer developed into a severe and chronic illness. In desperation, I sought the only available physicians, Dr. Tran Van Chon and Dr. Hoang Nhu Tung who were imprisoned in the same cell with me. To save my life, they performed emergency surgery using only sleeping pills as a sedative. They cut my belly with a razor, removed my ulcer, sewed me up with a seamstress needle, and then wrapped me with many layers of undershirts. My chances for survival were very slim, and the prison guards built a coffin in anticipation of my death. I was unconscious for three days. Through a miracle, I somehow regained consciousness, and although I survived, I never again regained my full strength. I immigrated to the U.S. through the Humanitarian Operation Program. The life experiences I have endured still haunt me to this day. Since then, I have been writing poems to express my feelings about my beloved country, my family, and friends.

*Reflections on the Interview***By Nancy Bui**

Using both Vietnamese and English, Mr. Le and I exchanged letters. This was the most convenient form of communication, since he has been suffering from thyroid cancer since 2004. Mr. Le was in his wheelchair during the interview and was very weak. Although the war almost took his life, and although he currently suffers from a critical illness, Mr. Nguyen has always managed to live a beautiful life. He expresses his life experiences in his beautiful poetry where he praises life and mankind. He is such an inspiration with great courage and kindness.