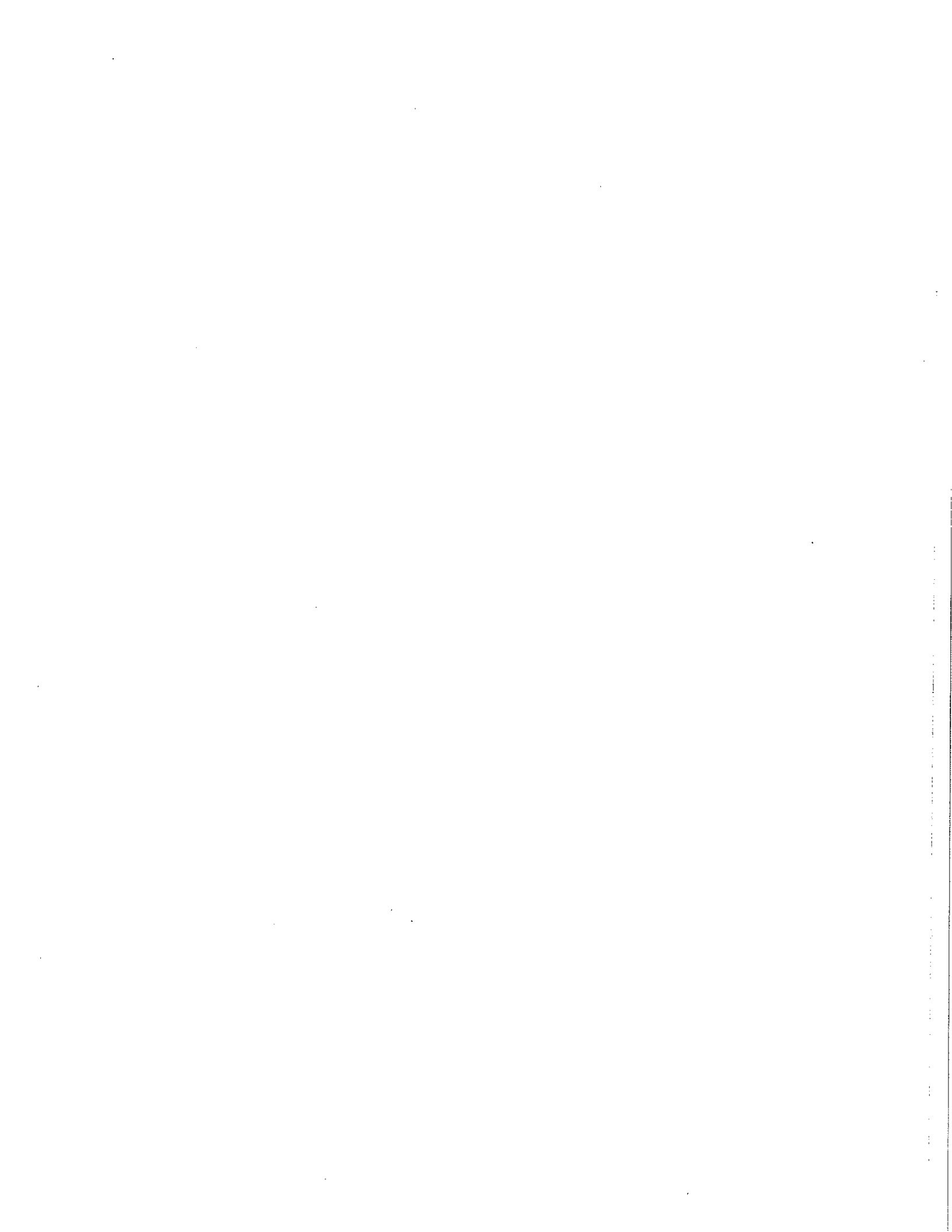


Poems of  
**Thanhlang Vo**

John Bartram High School  
2002-2003



## DAUGHTER OF THE MOUNTAINOUS REGION

She is a daughter of the mountainous region  
Was born in the sound of water running over stones  
Grew up in the strong arms of wind  
and the warmth of motherland  
which is the poorest, farthest land of Vietnam.  
Dry season, sun burns the skin  
Rainy season, the floods sweep away the richness of land  
sweeping away the resources of people's lives  
but she is still alive and has fun.  
The cold of wind, the dryness of land, the hardness of life  
are reflected on her dark skin,  
on two burly arms,  
on peeled feet.  
Wrinkles mark tails on young eyes  
still her black watery eyes sparkle with a strong hope  
hoping a good future will come.  
On her shoulders, a wood backpack's full of seed-rice  
rhythms following her steps  
her bare legs walk quickly on the cracking road  
She goes forward  
to the sky line  
Her smile's shiny as the sun.

(inspired by a picture)

Thanhlang Vo  
Vietnam

## YOU

My life is a song  
unfinished. . .  
You come,  
change its tune.

My life is a tree in Winter  
stripped of its leaves. . .  
You come,  
carry the warmth of the Spring.

My life is a quiet river,  
water flows and ebbs every day  
You come,  
waves and wind.

I am a white mare  
running. . .without target.  
You are a carpet of green  
a blue and pure stream,  
make me look back and halt.

Thanhlang Vo  
Vietnam

## THE KITE OF WISHES

I am a paper kite.  
My friends are little boys and girls,  
so naive and natural.  
At sunset,  
they find joy in running on the field,  
sitting on the backs of buffaloes,  
playing their flutes,  
and flying me into the sky.  
My life is full of fun and the laughter of children.  
Warmed by the hugs of Father Sunshine  
and fondled by the hands of Mother Wind,  
I live in the house of deep blue sky.  
On my head, the roof of white clouds.  
Under my feet, the green carpet of grass,  
trees, and square fields.

\* \* \*

My body is so light and soft,  
but different shapes,  
simply because I'm made of paper, glue and sticks:  
paper from magazines, from notebooks.  
sticks from twigs, from veins of coconut leaves.  
I was folded by skillful hands.  
Fingers ran softly on my body, to and fro.  
One, two, three. . . squares cut out,  
following wrinkles placed on the sheet.  
In just minutes, they were done:  
a paper kite, me, in small hands.  
Some girls drew my face  
with two black eyes, a line for a nose,  
and a smile like a crescent.  
Their wishes covered my clothes, word by word.  
And now Mother Wind lifts me up and up. . .  
Wishes following wind's hands fill the huge sky,  
fly into Heaven,  
and talk with the gods.

Thanhlang Vo  
Vietnam

## MY THO, THE FRESH MORNING

My Tho, my home town,  
lay along the bank of the Mekong River  
where the water was running swiftly  
and the sun was warm.  
Just about every morning  
starting at 5:30 a.m.  
from the government's loud speaker,  
the news and the music began..  
I woke up,  
smelled the fresh morning air  
and began to take a morning walk..  
Just like me,  
hundreds of people woke up early  
and enjoyed the fresh morning  
and the beautiful sounds of the birds  
sitting on the trees.  
Some were running,  
others were taking time to stroll  
along the bank of the river.  
The young boys and girls were laughing,  
enjoying their shuttle cock and soccer  
game.  
The elders were practicing their Tai Chi  
and shadow-boxing in groups.

\* \* \*

As the sun began to rise,  
the noise of the motorcycles got louder.  
The coffee shops were crowded with  
people.  
Some were enjoying their cup of coffee  
and conversation with friends;  
others sat quietly to enjoy the lovely  
music.  
From the food vendors  
the smells of barbecue and Pho\*  
filled the morning air;  
it made my stomach grunt.

Along with my friends,  
we stopped at one vendor  
and began to enjoy a hot bowl of Pho.

\* \* \*

My Tho, I'll never forget you.  
Every morning as I get ready to go to  
school,  
I remember..

Thanhlang Vo  
Vietnam

\* Pho - a hot Vietnamese noodle soup

## LOVE

What is love?  
Beautiful or ugly?  
Circle, rectangle or ellipse...?  
Only one word -- love -- why can't we define it?  
Don't know -- but we all experience it  
At least once in life.

Is it like a glass ball?  
Colorful under sunshine  
Beautiful and pure  
But...thin as morning dew,  
Breaks easily.

How does it taste?  
It's like a sugary pill  
Mixed with bitterness and pepper.

Thanhlang Vo  
Vietnam

## THE GAME OF TEACHING

Having a blackboard  
having a stick  
having chalk  
borrowing from my mother  
a pair of shoes with high heels.  
They're too big -- three times the size of  
my feet.  
That's all!  
I become a teacher,  
a teacher -- five years old.  
Students are the same age as the teacher;  
some are even older,  
or very young, two or three.  
They come from my neighborhood.  
Just six people.  
I have an interesting class.

\* \* \*

The teacher stands in front of the class,  
talks endlessly -- about everything:  
some songs she studied in her infant  
school,  
some letters, such as:  
"O" is oval like an egg  
"O" -- remember, it has a hat on its head.  
"I" has one line like a stick. . .  
Sometimes she doesn't know  
what she is talking about;  
she even gets the facts wrong  
because she didn't study them before.  
Students also argue against the teacher  
with all of the knowledge they know.  
The class is heating up.  
The stick beats strongly onto the board.

\* Bump bump bump -- "Please be quiet.  
Quiet!"  
"You are a bad teacher," a four-year-old  
student says.  
"Come here and sit. I want to change  
your position."  
"All right. All right. I'll come,  
but tomorrow I want to play teacher too."  
The class calms down,  
listens to the new teacher.  
This time, teacher teaches how to draw:  
draw people, draw houses, draw cars,  
draw sun, draw river, draw tree. . .  
Lines are dancing on the board,  
following the small hand of the young  
teacher.  
Suddenly a soft voice says,  
"I'm hungry now."  
"OK. OK. It's time," the teacher answers  
He beats the board as if beating a drum (  
"Time break," he says.

\* \* \*

Memory is still memory,  
still green.  
I'll remember -- never lose it.

Thanhlang Vo  
Vietnam

(\* In Vietnamese schools, a big drum is  
beaten to signal the end of each period.



## FAMILY

Father is a blue candle  
Mother, a pink one  
Child, a yellow one  
The three are lifted  
By the same candlestick  
Three flames are dancing  
With the same tune  
Rhythmically.  
Because we are a family.

Family,  
The sound is familiar.  
Clasps my childhood.  
Gives me a happy time  
Memories still green.

Family,  
Walks alongside of me  
From the beginning  
To the end of my life.  
Always shares my sufferings  
As much as my happiness.

Going away,  
We will miss each other.  
Come back,  
Our hearts are warmed up.  
Because we are under one roof  
Because we are a family.

Thanhlang Vo  
Vietnam

## STILL HAVE A RIVER

Mother,  
Do you know. . .  
You are a river  
Water flows calm  
for me, to swim in on hot afternoons.  
I am an orchard  
and you're the nourishing soil.  
Grow me up  
beautiful and heavy with fruit.  
You're angry:  
river changes color  
floods up, up, and up.  
Water runs all over  
...  
Subsides.  
Leaves my land more rich.  
Trees root, shoot and blossom out.  
Fruits come from your nourishing soil.

Thanhlang Vo  
Vietnam

## STROLLING ALONG THE RIVER

Every evening,  
the time of sunset  
when the sun goes down  
and the night will begin,  
my grandpa and I stroll along the river.  
Two carpets of green spread out to the horizon,  
sunlight plays on the water,  
red water waves follow our steps,  
wind starts to whistle.  
His hair is fondled by gusts of wind  
and dances without tune, without direction.  
His clothes float in the breeze.  
White seems to cover him,  
white of hair, of thick eyebrows, of clothes he wears,  
but can't cover his wrinkled skin  
which shows the years he's passed.  
Under sunshine, the final light of the day,  
he appears like a god.  
His eyes, brilliant as starlight,  
sparkle in the dark sky.  
As lines on his forehead relax,  
his face is so friendly.  
He walks rhythmically,  
like a dancer on the stage,  
arms' gestures following legs.  
His shoes slap on the ground,  
step by step,  
quietly and silently.

Thanhlang Vo  
Vietnam

