

Mount Holyoke College Class of 1964

After the Middle Ages comes the Renaissance!

Walker and Khanh's Traditional Vietnamese Wedding

This meant getting oldest brother Patterson, his wife Annie, and their two boys, Connor, 11, and Lucas, almost 9, and middle brother Peter, his wife Paige, and their sons, Colton, 9, and Bryson, 6, plus Charlie's brother Paul and his daughter, Julia, all to HCMC and housed in a lovely but inexpensive hotel with French accents and great breakfasts!

With the wedding day, 2011 December 19, came many surprises. The evening before, six large red-silk-covered containers arrived in our hotel room overflowing with wedding gifts to be presented from the groom to the bride's family: tea, rice, beetle nuts, wine, and fruit. The next morning, I dressed in the traditional au dai Khanh had had made for me (she had secretly kept my measurements for the dressmaker to make me two stunning dresses for the wedding festivities!). A knock on our door and six young men entered. Hastily, we realized they were part of the wedding entourage - hired groomsmen. Once assembled down in the lobby, and in front of large copies of a Monet beachside painting, the red lacquered containers filled with the gifts were ceremoniously covered with the red silk cloth and then presented one-by-one by the groom's mother (me!) to the groom. Then the groomsmen carried them out to the waiting van and white bridal sedan, which was decorated with red and white carnations. Red is the dominant color in Vietnamese and many Asian weddings.

The wedding party proceeded through HCMC traffic to the bride's home. We walked in a procession down a long, narrow alley (typical of Vietnamese residential areas). Little shops and vendors dotted the alleyway surrounded by three-story dwellings, one room wide usually. Neighbors squatted or leaned out of windows, and once we neared the bride's house, a canopy of red and white carnations covered the walkway, and confetti showered down on our family procession. Six "rented" bridesmaids in pink and white au dais, waited by the house, and Khanh's parents, Lai and Lan, welcomed us and ushered us into a tiny room with a table set for tea. They poured tea and offered us cashews and coconut treats. A large ancestor altar covered with a red cloth and decorated with beautiful red gladiolas and white lilies, a large offering of fruit, and tall red and white decorated candles in tall brass candlesticks dominated the other half of the room. Pictures of Mr. Nguyen's father and mother were high over the altar, symbolizing the reverence for family ancestors.

Our first duty was to present our son to Khanh's parents. "Thank you for having us, and we are happy to present our son to you." They responded, "Welcome, and thank you for your son." Then, one-by-one, the offerings were uncovered and each wrapped box in each container was placed on the altar. Then, Khanh descended the narrow wooden stairs, resplendent in her wedding au dai, red and embroidered, with a stunning traditional head dress and her hair piled high in curls within it. She was stunningly beautiful. Walker presented her with a bouquet of cali lilies and the ceremony, brief but poignant, began. The father of the bride and of the groom lit the tall candles, and the six of us stood reverently praying silently to the ancestors. The bride and groom placed a lotus flower on the altar and then exchanged rings, identical gold bands. Khanh's mother placed a gold necklace around her daughter's neck and the ceremony was over. Exactly a half hour! Pictures, pictures, and more tea! Then we processed back down the alley between the groomsmen and bridesmaids, under the canopy, led by the bride and groom.

Charlie and I hosted a casual luncheon at a nearby restaurant, but later that evening, a reception for family and friends was the real celebration. Khanh's mother and I each had another silk au dai (mine was black with silver mesh sleeves and pearls and sequins sewn into the splash of flower detail), and Khanh, once again model beautiful, appeared in several bridal dresses, white ones and a pink one with her black hair this time cascading

to the side in charming curls. An MC introduced the bride and groom, the parents, and a variety of entertainment acts. Once again, ceremonial tea was served to the parents by the bride and groom, delightfully symbolic. Most of this celebration was patterned on western wedding receptions. And the bride and groom toasted each other with champagne, poured a cascade of champagne glasses, watched small fireworks light up the stage, and spent time greeting each table of guests with plenty of beer!



Walker with Charlie and Mary Vic
(Mary Vic dressed in traditional Vietnamese au dai her daughter-in-law had made for her!).



Walker and Khanh in front of the ancestor altar in her family home.



The proud groom on his motorbike.
THE mode of transportation!



Mary Vic in her au dai Khanh had made for her
for the evening wedding reception!
The dress is exquisite -- the fanciest I have ever had!



Walker and Khanh at their evening wedding reception.



Walker and Mary Vic with the traditional gifts he will bring to his bride's family and to the ancestor altar in her home.

Submitted by Mary Victor Jones Giersch
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