

Who Says Nice Guys Finish Last?



By Marti Giese, Fairfax County Public Schools NEDP

Several months ago Qui Vo, an NEDP graduate, visited us to share his big news. We remembered Qui to be a mature nineteen-year-old, ambitious, hardworking, and dedicated. What we did not know at the time were the extreme conditions under which he sought his high school diploma.

Qui grew up fatherless in a family of five during the post-Vietnam War era. His father was a P.O.W. for thirteen years and his mother single-handedly raised five boys in a village with no running water, no electricity, and no toilet. With the family earning a mere forty cents a day, struggles for food and shelter overshadowed Qui's academic dreams.

In 1993 Qui's father was granted asylum to the United States. The family of seven lived in a small, roach-infested two-bedroom apartment in Alexandria, Virginia. Qui often dreamed big about his future. Watching his mother slave at three jobs and his father working the graveyard shift to support him and his four brothers motivated him to be financially independent. He worked odd jobs to alleviate the family's financial pressures instead of attending classes throughout high school. As a result, his focus shifted away from academia and into the workforce. The tension between school, family and excessive work collided by the middle of his junior year. He dropped out of school and decided to move out of his parents' house.

Shortly thereafter, Qui came to NEDP, asking for a waiver because of his young age. Once accepted to the program, he worked with enthusiasm and completed the program. Qui did not stop with NEDP. In 2010 he graduated magna cum laude from Northern Virginia Community College, a dream he would have never thought possible. After graduating, his next goal was to attend a university, and he applied to several. His two-page admission letter ended with the following.

"... My unique academic and business experiences have enabled me to see beyond the textbooks and helped me appreciate learning much more than my peers. If you are looking for an intelligent student who is not deterred by failure, highly ambitious and is able to advance beyond conceptual thinking and into practical wisdom, then I look forward to meeting my professors and classmates in the fall."

Recently Qui visited, this time with his fiancé, a student at the University of Virginia. He excitedly told us he was accepted at the University of Michigan and American University, each awarding him large scholarships to support his academic career. Qui is now studying at the University of Michigan. This nice guy is well on his way. Congratulations, Qui!

**"No one saves us but ourselves. No one can and no one may.
We ourselves must walk the path." Buddha**