

- From the age of 6, what urged you to discover the life of your mother?

I didn't discover mother's life at the age of 6, but much more earlier. My mother used to work hard outside in the garden, and when she would take a break outside on the stairs in front of the living room, we would use to drink some tea together and listen to Vietnamese music or Vietnamese songs that she would translate to me. Sometimes she would pet my head and sometimes, I would remove her grey hair when she would lay her head down on my knees. While doing this, it urged me to ask her about her origins. I had already noticed from the French "école maternelle" and "école primaire" (Kindergarten and Primary School) the behavior of the people there. The adults as well as the children in my class would treat me as a different person or would make some remarks about my mother. This is why I wanted to know why she was so different from the others around me and why it seemed to bother others. Her appearance was different, her language, her food. It made me curious and so I kept asking her very early in my life (around 4 and 5) why. It became a kind of ritual. Each time we would spend some time together, she would tell me a new story about her life. At the age of 6, she finally told me: "Now there is no story about my life that you don't know about. I have told you everything".

- The story of Ms Dau Thi Cuc's life is not easy to tell a child. So, do you remember the way she started to tell you her story of her life to help you understand easily?

Of course I do remember. She started with telling me stories about animals and nature in Vietnam. She told me about her father hunting animals but also speaking to them. For me as a child it was an exciting, beautiful and sometimes funny adventure in another world. I would hear some stories about a mysterious, wild man (her father) speaking to elephants, observing enormous snakes and catching birds. She would

describe his weapons and the poison he would use to go hunting. She would describe the beauty of her colorful homeland and emphasize the smile on Vietnamese people's faces (in comparison to the French people that didn't smile to us). She would accompany her storytelling with Vietnamese songs and make me feel the atmosphere. Bit by bit, I asked more and more questions, I wanted to know more. Of course, when she came to speak about some tragic episodes of her life (like the time when Japanese soldiers came to her village and pillaged, or when a Japanese soldier almost killed her): during this episode, she would only resume the tragedy in showing me the scar on her stomach.

- I am curious to know when were all your collected materials about your mother started and happened in your mother's stormy life when you was 15?

My mother always taught me to memorize things I have been told. She said the best way to achieve knowledge is to learn everything by heart. I could memorize the stories easily because they were all too exciting to be forgotten. I mostly wrote down some dates, the names of the persons she met during her life and the cities she had lived in. When I was 15/16, I started to write her story. It looked more like a roman. It was lacking the depth, the authenticity. I was definitely too young to be able to describe the true emotions behind the story.

- Can you please let me know how much materials about your mother's life were collected?

I have, as I said above, mainly my memory as the basis of my manuscript. In a booklet with the manuscript, I have many names, notes, remarks about our several conversations during the decades. I

still have this manuscript, the “body” of mother’s story in my house. I also have original pictures taken in the fifties and later. I have original documents like her “Carte d’identité, her passport, some old letters, some original negatives, etc... With some official documents that have some stamps and dates (like the date of entry in France), I could reconstruct (after mother’s death) the exact sequences of her adventurous live.

- **Beside your materials about your mother’s life, your book includes a lot details about history, geography...etc. How did you learn to add these in your book?**

Before starting to write her biography, I read several books about Vietnamese history, culture and geography. I also had a friend (he died in the meantime), a collector that borrowed to me some material about ancient Vietnamese history. I spent half a year after mother’s death studying this material. I also went to France and spent some time with Mrs. Ngoc, the last living best friend of my mother (she is still alive in Tours and I am in contact with her till now): she gave me lots of details and helped me in some matters.

- **When did you start to write this book? Why do you earnestly want to write this book instead of keeping your mother’s story for yourself?**

I started writing this book (as I said above) first at the age of 15. But this first try wasn’t successful. I was also too busy with my own life at this period of time, bemoaning my own fate. Though I earnestly wanted to share mother’s story at the age of 6. Already at this young age, I promised to her that when I would be adult, I would share with the world her amazing story in a book. Her story had impressed me so much, that it was never my intention to keep it for myself.

- For you, what is the most special thing about your mother?

Her wisdom, her warm heart though the struggles in her life, her kindness, her strength, her courage, her will to change things in order to live a self-determined life, her love and respect for mother earth and for freedom. If I should resume her in one word: it is her LOVE that dominates.

- In 1990, that was the first time you came back Viet Nam with your mother. What is your deepest impression on this trip? Are there any "witnesses" of the book that you met during that trip?

In 1990 I had only one question that was burning in my heart: I wanted to know if all the Vietnamese people were like my mother. I quickly found out: no. So I knew from that day on that my mother was someone very “special”. With my mother on my side, it was a journey in her past. The first “witnesses” of the books were buildings, monuments and streets where she had been before. The next “witnesses” were her younger brother Le and her younger sister Thao. We met them in Da Nang after an adventurous search and journey.

- During the time of writing the book, what was the most difficult thing for you?

The most difficult part was not the writing itself, because I know I am mostly guided and inspired during the writing process. The most difficult part was to put myself in mother’s situation and live her life again. I had to “artificially” endure her struggle, her suffering, her sacrificing and her hopes. I wrote her story with her tears, her sweat, her blood. I cried so many times while writing and suffered with her

again and again. Then, when I couldn't cry anymore, I knew that the story was perfect.

- **Why did you choose to write the book in German instead of French which is your mother tongue?**

It has something to do with my childhood. It is a kind of little revenge towards German children. When I was 10, I had to leave France in order to live in Germany. There I had to learn the German and English languages. At the beginning, I failed. Instead of being an excellent student (like before in France), I had to accept at that time one defeat after the other: It was so difficult for me, especially when some German pupils laughed at me and humiliated me doing this. This is why I promised to myself that one day I would learn the German language so well, that I would be able to teach German kids their own language. It was also a challenge for me to see how the mix of emotions of a multicultural writer like I am would work on the readers.

- **Until now, does the book make your life change?**

Not really. It only relieved my soul. I am happy to have kept my promise to my mother.

- **How did German readers receive your book?**

The fact that this book was finalist at the German amazon competition KindleStoryteller Award 2015 shows how big the interest of German readers is. Not because they are directly related to Vietnamese history, rather because they are affine to exotic cultures. This book helped them to find out and experience a very foreign, abstract culture of a far country. Before they read this book, they only associated Vietnam to the war against America. After

reading this book, they had learned much more about the former rules of mother's time, about the role of women and history. They were fascinated and touched by mother's story. Many of them thanked me for writing this book that gives them from now on more strength to cope with live.

- **Do you have any plan to publish this book in other languages?**

Yes I do. The English translation is finished since a few years. I didn't publish it yet, hoping that an English publisher will pay attention to "Loan". If not so this year (2019), I may publish the English version as a self publisher. I will take the decision later. And of course the next language should be French. Many people in France asked me already to translate the book. Because I am too busy with my Charity Foundation LOAN Stiftung, I didn't find the time to do it yet. The next language should be Chinese. As you see, all countries involved in mother's story should have its own version. This is why this book should definitely be released in many languages.

- **What books have you published so far?**

Regardless of some activity books for small children, I published some years ago a children's book called "Hip Hop im Land von Ellsaby" ("Hip Hop in the land of Ellsaby"). It is a story about separation and death (between a dog and a flea) and at the same time a story of love, friendship and hope. The children's books are all illustrated by myself. The next "real" book "Phönix Tochter – Die Hoffnung war mein Weg" ("Phoenix's Daughter – Hope was my path") was published in Germany. It is the series of "Loan", my own biography describing the next 35 years of my live.

Under this link you can see my books.

https://www.amazon.de/l/B00J8Q6G1O?_encoding=UTF8&redirectedFromKindleDbs=true&ref=dbs_p_ebk_r00_abau_000000&rfd=1&shoppingPortalEnabled=true

- Can you tell me a little bit about your second book: "Phonix´s Daughter - Hope was my path" (2009) and "Phönix Tochter" (2014)?

In fact I didn't plan to write this book about my own story. My priority was to publish mother's story "Loan". As the famous German publisher house S. Fischer Verlag /Krüger invited me in Frankfurt in order to sign the contract for "Loan" in 2005, during our conversation they suddenly told me that it would be better to first publish my interesting biography instead of mother's biography (they promised to publish "Loan" later). The reason why was that "books sell better" when the protagonist of the story (me) is still alive (in 2003, mother had passed away already). It meant that I would need at least 2 more years to write my own biography, not because I write slowly, but because I had to raise up two children and take care of our company at the same time. I spent 2 years writing from the evening till late at night and during the week-ends, with discipline. The German publisher released "Phoenix's Daughter" in hardcover version in 2009 and in 2011. Because the German publisher didn't keep its promise to publish "Loan" (they said that they didn't sell enough "Phoenix's Daughter", that mother's story would not be interesting for German readers, that it would be too much risk for them to publish a book about someone that is not famous), I left them and published "Phoenix's Daughter" one more time as a self-publisher at amazon in 2015. From this book I read in public 150 times in 8 different German provinces. Over 3,5 years some media talked about this book (TV, radio, newspapers, magazines, etc...). This book still gives much hope and strength to people that struggle in live.

- Do you plan to become a professional writer?

I do not plan to become a professional writer. I am a professional writer that does not have the opportunity yet to find completion in writing, because I am still caught in other duties that are also very important to me (LOAN Stiftung).

- Can you introduce briefly about Loan Stiftung and some projects that you have carried out in Viet Nam until now?

From June 2016 till today (February 2019) the LOAN Stiftung has completed (or is completing) its 20th project in the poorest northern, mountainous areas of Vietnam: building and equipping boarding houses, kindergartens, schools and taking educational care of 6 orphans.

Under this link you will find all projects of LOAN Stiftung (in Vietnamese language): <https://loan-stiftung.de/cac-du-an?lang=vi>

- What criteria of sites does the Loan Stiftung choose to implement in Vietnam?

The projects have to be for the poorest children in need in the most remote areas in the north of Vietnam, where humanity aid doesn't exist yet. There, many villages have no infrastructure and many children do not have equal chances to get educated.

- Doing charity requires a lot of patience, endurance and a stable source of finance. After 3 years of managing your fund, what is the most difficult thing to you?

One difficulty is to reach the remote areas we chose. In some districts, the roads are very bad and dangerous. Another difficulty is the Vietnamese law that doesn't allow yet Vietnamese people to donate to foreign NGOs. Because of this, Vietnamese people willing to donate in order to help their own poor people can't. It should be urgently improved.

Wish you have a lot of energy to fulfill your plan. Thank you very much!

Thank you, you are welcome!:)