Agent Orange Champion: Kim Nguyen Browne

By Greg Ligon

[Note: I wrote this post for the Make Agent Orange History campaign. This advocacy campaign raised over $100 million dollars from the U.S. government to pay for clean-up and remediation of Agent Orange in Vietnam. But it’s over and inactive. The original piece can be found in the wayback archives.]

In April 1975, Kim Nguyen Browne (birth name: Nguyễn Sơn Thủy) was one of the last children flown out of Ho Chi Minh City. She was two months old. Thirty-one years later she won a “Do You Dare to Dream” competition at the company she worked for and returned to Vietnam to volunteer at the orphanage where she spent her earliest days.

“I wanted to give back and to find my birth mother,” Browne said, “More than anything I wanted to give back to Go Vap Orphanage.” Browne’s first home, Go Vap Orphanage is a facility in Ho Chi Minh City that cares for children who suffer from severe illness and disabilities, including those affected by Agent Orange.

Upon leaving Vietnam she made a promise to the children. “I promised I would return,” Browne said. In 2008 she formed the Vietnam Volunteer Network, a small charity working to bring people from around the world to Vietnam to help children in need.

“I started thinking of what I could do to help on a long-term basis,” Browne said. “I thought what is needed is love and a human touch for the children, especially the sick children.”

An enthusiastic networker, she began by seeking out and connecting with fellow adoptees and Vietnamese expatriates. She met new friends in the United Kingdom, France, Australia, and the United States. “It’s really nice when you start getting feedback and you start forming friendships,” Browne says. “I think if you are
open-minded and passionate about trying to get justice and help, you meet the right people at the right time.”

Browne is also a very active user of social media, particularly Facebook and YouTube. She believes strongly in supporting the causes of people she works with. “I talk about what they’re doing, about any donations or aide they need. It always comes back,” Browne says.

It is this collaborative approach that has allowed Browne to grow the Vietnam Volunteer Network from a single volunteer (herself) in 2008 to 62 volunteers in 2011. She has also enlisted the help of five volunteer staff coordinators from four different countries. All volunteers, including Browne, pay their own way to Vietnam.

“The Vietnam Volunteer Network would not be what it is today if not for my volunteers,” Browne says. “They are my and the children’s heroes.”