



# Thao Nguyen Foundation Inc. Newsletter

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December 2022

TOGETHER, WE BRING LIGHT TO MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS

IN THIS ISSUE

## Greetings from the President

Nhung Hendy

Welcome to another issue of our newsletter. I hope that this newsletter finds you all healthy and in good mental health. As I reflect upon the season of giving, I am so grateful to all of you and feel humbled for your kindness and unwavering support to the Foundation over the past 9 years. I hope that you all had a good time with families and friends this Thanksgiving holiday.

First, I would like to update you on the Foundation's Board membership. After serving for 6 years, Phil Hall stepped down as Director to pursue other ventures. We wish him all the best in his new ventures. We welcome Ms. Stella Nicole Coffman as our Secretary and Social Media Manager. Stella brings with her several years of experience in social media marketing and Internet influencing. We are very excited to have her on our Board as we believe she will add value to our mission and contribute to expanding the reach and sustainability of the Foundation in the community and beyond. Second, our Third Juried Art Show Reconciliation was a success. Please read the report on page 2 for more details on the winners of the show, as well as how to purchase a copy of the show catalog if you have not done so. If you are interested in

purchasing a piece of art on display at the show, more details will be posted on our web site in mid-December. It would be a great holiday gift to your loved ones while at the same time supporting our budding artists and the Foundation.

Third, a sonnet by William B. Yates titled Reconciliation that will bring you hope. It is one of my favorite poems and speaks to me the importance of building bridges and finding common grounds in what may seem like paradoxes. Fourth, I hope Stella's letter to Thao/Joe will move you as it did me. Last but not least, you will find a brief summary on the latest research in mental health. Thank you again for your continued support and have a safe and healthy holiday season as well as a very Happy 2023!



Stella and her son, Atlas

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### TN Foundation Board of Directors

Michael Biderman, Director  
Stella Nicole Coffman, Secretary & Social Media Manager  
Nhung T. Hendy, President & Treasurer



## Reconciliation Juried Art Show Report

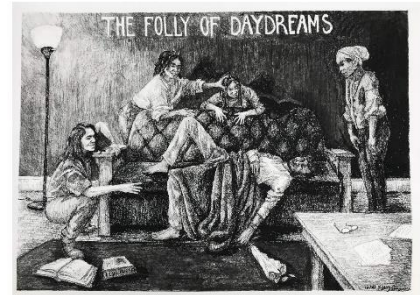


Our third juried art show Reconciliation was held successfully on Saturday, October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2022, at the York-Penn Art Gallery in Towson, MD. We had people travelling from all over Maryland, Washington, D.C., and New Jersey to attend the Opening Reception. The quality of the submitted work was so high that the judges decided to grant 4 third place winners (\$100 each): Japhet Chukwuma (American Gangster); Gregor Knuth (A Dragon on the Wing), Lucy Saper (Interlocked), and Greg McClemore (Mannequin in heightened spiritual state). Our second-place winner (\$500) was Heidi Wiggins (the Folly of Daydreams). Our first-place winner (\$750) was David Schlesinger (Neglected Door #2). Congratulations to all winners and artists for submitting your artwork to the show. We wish you the best of success in your future exhibits. Please consider purchasing a copy of the show's [catalog](#) if you have not done so. Thank you for your support and attending this event. We are deeply grateful to Ms. Deirdre Aikin for her generosity in donating her studio space to us as well as donating refreshment and food for the reception. In addition, Deirdre volunteered her time to judge the entries alongside with Professors Nora Sturges and René Treviño.



First place – Neglected Door #2

Our deepest gratitude goes to Prof. Jenee Mateer for her leadership in overseeing this art show. Her students, Khoi Nguyen and Caleb Spencer were curators of the show and did a great job in installing and taking down the show without a hitch. Please help us thank these individuals next time you see them. Again, thank you all for your continued support. We could not have done it without you.



Second place – The folly of daydreams

## Reflecting on my Survivors of Suicide Loss Day

By Nhung Hendy



This year, for the third time in a row, I volunteered with the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) to serve as a facilitator of a breakout group session on the International Survivors of Suicide Loss Day on 11/19/2022. It was held virtually again this year using Zoom. The event was not as well attended as last year with about 30 people from Maryland, Delaware, New York, New Jersey, and Virginia in attendance. I helped facilitate a breakout session of 7 mothers and fathers who all lost either daughter or son to suicide. My group ranged from those who lost their child almost a decade ago to those who have just lost their son within the past two years during the peak of the pandemic. There was a sense of openness and tolerance within the group, something that I still struggle to reach. As I shared my story with the group,

I learned that we could find peace in our grief journey through finding a new purpose in life, rather than feeling guilty or negative toward life about losing our loved ones because nothing could or would bring them back. One father shared with us how he struggled to find a new purpose in life after having lost his adult son to suicide and helped his daughter to move on with her life without feeling guilty about it. Several mothers said they found being at events like this one where they could just listen to others share experiences very helpful. I left the meeting feeling encouraged as I am not alone in my journey and my volunteer work was deeply appreciated by others.



## IF YOU WANT TO CONTRIBUTE AN ARTICLE

Contact Nhung Hendy,  
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## Reconciliation

By William B. Yates

Some may have blamed you that you took away  
The verses that could move them on the day  
When, the ears being deafened, the sight of the  
eyes blind

With lightning, you went from me, and I could  
find

Nothing to make a song about but kings,  
Helmets, and swords, and half-forgotten things  
That were like memories of you—but now

We'll out, for the world lives as long ago,  
And while we're in our laughing, weeping fit,  
Hurl helmets, crowns, and swords into the pit.  
But, dear, cling close to me; since you were  
gone,

My barren thoughts have chilled me to the bone.

Source: Poetry Foundation

([www.poetryfoundation.org/poems](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems))

## The State of Things, Without you

By Stella Nicole Coffman

Dear Thao,

The year is 2022, and you have been absent for longer than I care to admit. It is November, the month of your 30th birthday, and the world and life that I inhabit now are infinitely different than the world and life that you left behind. I find myself not for the first time wondering if, had you seen this future, it would drive you to stay, or even drive you away from us sooner. There are horrors we have endured without you that our young selves could scarcely imagine. Most of us had no real sense of the world we were a part of, but you always seemed to be more connected to it than most. You never took for granted the beauty of things, and you felt deeply the pain of them. I think often of the way you stood up to the disaffected who scoffed at our naive attempts to change things we were powerless to change. You said that having conversations and spreading awareness were powerful tools, and that everyone has a place in making a difference, even when it's as small as talking to your friends about what is happening when faced with institutional injustice. I think of the way we all said you should be the President of the United States one day, if you could, because of your ability to imagine a radically different world, and your habit of instilling that same vision in others just by believing in it fiercely yourself. I must say, you would be much better than the Presidents we've seen

since you've been gone. I think of you when Congress and the Supreme Court are attacking peoples' rights to their own bodies and making decisions that endanger others. I think of you when the lives of children are being taken in their schools because our nation has failed to act in any meaningful way to protect them. I think of your righteous fury, and it reminds me to stay vigilant and strong when I'd rather despair. To be quite honest, there are many things that I am glad you did not have to see, because I know that they would break your heart. But also, I think of the way you loved the smell of mornings, because it was the smell of beginnings. I think of your excitement when facing anything new, even if it was scary. I think of you when I go dancing—something I would have been too embarrassed of myself to do, at one point in my life, but an experience I always wish I could share with you now. I think of the unbridled joy you brought into the room when others felt gloomy. I think of the way you shared yourself with others, your vulnerability, and your listening ear. Things are bleak, and oftentimes turning on the news is a terror. I don't deny it. This is an imperfect place with imperfect people. Even still... Gen Z? They're doing alright. You'd be proud of their ability to organize and to cause some real change, utilizing the tools at their disposal. And your friends? We're doing pretty good, too. Some of us have found great purpose doing things we love, whether it be in our careers, our relationships, our activism, or our families.

I think of you most when I hold my son, now six months old, untouched by the traumas and pain that will await him in this life. I think of the pain your mother had to survive when losing her only child, and how much more poignantly I admire her fortitude. I think of how my son would love you, and how you would love him, as you did all things, with your whole heart. I think of how tickled you would be that he, like you, has Vietnamese blood... I always remember you saying that you could feel your Vietnamese blood drawing you towards the equator, and I promise you that I will travel with him when he is old enough. The hope that I feel for the future when I look at his tiny form is unlike any I've ever known. It's a hope that he might grow up to help others. I wish that you were here to teach him what you taught me about forgiving yourself, being compassionate, cherishing nature, valuing friendship, leaving an impact in this world. For as dark as it gets, there are things you have missed that would have filled your heart until it overflowed. There are things that would leave you beaming with pride. There are many joys that shine light that is brighter than the darkness of any of these dark times, and we are longing to share them with you.

Love,

Stella

## Research Summary

By Nhung Hendy

### Did COVID-19 lockdown impact people equally?

A group of researchers from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor conducted a longitudinal study consisting of 560 adults of which 147 were healthy individuals serving as the control group. The researchers observed these individuals during the period of April 30, 2020, through May 30, 2020 (the lockdown period). Various measures were assessed including Generalized Anxiety Disorder, COVID-19 impact, Sleep quality index, and Patient Health survey. The results showed that all participants reported an impact of lockdown. Those with bipolar disorder reported having more severe impact from the stay-at-home order with disruptions in routines, gainful employment income, social support, and pandemic related stress. In contrast, the healthy individuals in the control group did not experience the same level of severe impact, but their recovery in terms of mood improvement was slower compared to the bipolar patients. This finding is particularly alarming because whereas the pandemic negatively impacted everyone, those without a diagnosed mental illness seemed to be slower in adapting to the pandemic environment. In addition, comparison was made between pre-pandemic (2015-2019) and post pandemic (after 2020), and it was revealed that there were no significant differences among individuals with bipolar disorder, whereas health adults in the control group showed a significant, albeit transient, increase in negative mood symptoms. The researchers concluded that COVID-19 was an equal opportunity harasser because it impacted everyone. However, those with bipolar disorder experienced more life impacting changes from the stay-at-home orders vis a vis healthy adults in the control group. These disruptions improved over time, but much more slowly than did individuals in the control group. Pre versus post pandemic comparisons showed a modest but significant increase in mood severity in the healthy adults that was not observed in participants with bipolar disorder. Based on this longitudinal study findings, we should not neglect our own mental health because the impact can be insidious. We should all take the time to practice self-care.

#### Reference:

Yocum, A. K., Zhai, Y., McInnis, M. G., & Han, P. (2021). COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown impacts: A description in a longitudinal study of bipolar disorder. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 282, 1226–1233.