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MIZZOU

One Mizzou in Vietnam

Four Mizzou grads serendipitously connect halfway around the world.

Story by Kelsey Allen

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Sally Schuppan Gunderman was the first person in her family to go to college. Her father was in business, so Gunderman studied business, too, even though most of her sorority sisters were studying education or liberal arts. As one of about five women in the business school in the late 1950s — compared to 1,000 men — Gunderman, BS BA '60, says she never felt discriminated against. But when she interviewed at a big investment firm, no one would hire her.



From left, Jo Anne Crider Ellis, Darlene Robertson Johnson, Ngan Thuy Le and Sally Schuppan Gunderman in a hotel lobby in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The women are holding hand-stitched pictures of Vietnam that were gifts from Trang Duong. Photo courtesy of Darlene Robertson Johnson.

Gunderman found a job at a clothing store for \$50 a week instead. She eventually opened her own store in Arvada, Colo., and started traveling to Paris to buy clothes not available in the U.S. for women in the Denver area. At the peak of her career, she shopped for more than 2,000 clients. In 1996, she moved to Tucson, Ariz., and opened Cactus Cove Bed and Breakfast. Now, she flies overseas twice a year, buys a collection and shows it to 25 clients at a hotel in Denver.

When her father died, she and cousin Dan Schuppan, BS BA '67, MBA '69, started the Gilbert and Herbert Schuppan Endowed Finance Scholarship at MU in honor of their fathers.

“I couldn’t get a job [in finance] when I graduated, so I suggested to Dan that the recipient be a woman in finance,” Gunderman says.



Darlene Robertson Johnson and Trang Duong met for the first time at the Rotary Club of Columbia luncheon in January 2013. Photo courtesy of Darlene Robertson Johnson.

Since Gunderman started funding the scholarship in 2006, she’s received a few thank-you letters, but none sparked an international adventure like the one she received in October 2012.

When Trang Duong got the news that she received the scholarship in summer 2012, the junior finance major was at home in Vietnam.

“Usually, if I have something to tell [my family], I have to call them,” Duong says. “But this time I was home. In Vietnam, it’s a little bit different from here. After my parents found out I got the scholarship, they informed my grandparents, my aunts, my uncles. They were even happier than me. A scholarship means I did a good job in school and is proof to my parents that I’ve been trying hard.”

After receiving the letter, Gunderman and two friends, both Mizzou alumnae, were set to leave for Cambodia and Vietnam for three weeks. She emailed Duong back with information about her upcoming vacation, and Duong put her in touch with Ngan Thuy Le, whom Duong met through MU’s Vietnamese Student Association in 2010. Le, MA ’12, returned to Ho Chi Minh City after she graduated and offered to show the 1960 grads around.

“When Trang told me she had received the award from Sally, I was very happy for her,” Le says. “My happiness was double when Trang said Sally and her two friends were going to visit Vietnam.”

In November 2012, Gunderman; Darlene Robertson Johnson, BS Ed ’60; and Jo Anne Crider Ellis, BJ ’60, met Le in the lobby of their hotel. Johnson handed Le a stuffed tiger, and softly, with a smile, Le said, “M-I-Z.” And the women responded, “Z-O-U.”

“It gave me goose bumps,” Johnson says.

The four Mizzou grads spent an evening and the next day together, with Le as their tour guide, shopping and sightseeing in the center district of the city and eating authentic Vietnamese cuisine.

Gunderman flew back to Tucson, Ellis to Cassville, Mo., and Johnson to Columbia where she has since kept in touch with Duong.

“[This] proves that the ties we form at Mizzou bind all ages and cross many boundaries around our planet to create One Mizzou,” Johnson says.



Trang Duong, a junior in the Trulaske College of Business, was instrumental in bringing together four Mizzou grads, three from 1960 and one from 2012, in Vietnam. Photo courtesy Trang Duong.

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