

Teen's film speaks for many

■ A Seffner native's film of members of Tampa's Vietnamese community and the war experience has received much recognition.

By LATEEFA MOREHOUSE
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At age 10, Andy Nguyen realized that he wanted to make films. Born and raised in Seffner, Nguyen began writing his first film, *A Silent Night*, during his freshman year at King High School.

Nguyen developed the 13-minute film by listening to the stories of the Tampa Vietnamese community who lived through the Vietnam War. He later traveled to Vietnam to shoot the film.

Now a first-year student at Florida State University, Nguyen, 18, has been awarded the Heartland Film Festival Jimmy Stewart Memorial Crystal Heart Award, the 2005 Moondance International Film Festival Columbine Award, the SAIF Film Festival Best Student Film, and Audience Choice Award for Best Student Film.



Nguyen

How did you become interested in filmmaking at such an early age?

I became interested in filmmaking because it is the premier media form that communicates your experiences. You can integrate sound. You can integrate pictures, music and emotions — things that are very true to our lives. At 10 years old, I worked on a major motion picture series. My acting was horrible, but I knew that I'd like to work behind the camera and make things.

How many films have you made?

A Silent Night was the first film that I marketed through the film circuit, but I have gained experience through doing claymations, production and wedding videos.

What is *A Silent Night* about, and how did you develop the story line?

It's about a young Buddhist monk who ventures into the depth of the deadliest days of the Vietnam War to reach out to an American soldier that longs for home.

I came up with the story line through talking to people who lived through the Vietnam War. I interviewed civilians of the Vietnam War who saw their families suffer from the war, but had no control over the war. So they tried to maximize the peace in their situation.

What obstacles did you encounter in filming *A Silent Night*?

The primary obstacle that I encountered was obtaining the filming permit in Vietnam.

I applied for three years, since I was a freshman in high school. After that, I went anyway. I put so much work into it. I didn't want to stop and go halfway.

Another obstacle would be the budgeting, considering I was dead broke. A lot of people volunteered their work because they saw that I was dedicated to my craft. I didn't think a lot of people were going to respect me because I didn't have much experience coming in, but they helped me a lot because they understood where I was coming from.

How did you feel going to Vietnam knowing you didn't have a filming permit to be there?

I was pretty confident. You know it's a risk, but I think it's a typical thing done in the film industry where people are taking risks in order to attempt to break barriers.

I read that you based your screenplay on literary styles of classic novels. What is your favorite novel and why?

Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, because the author uses a lot of symbolism in a story that seems mundane — to branch out to something so much more.

Are you currently working on any story lines?

I'm working on a script dealing with people in the nail industry. I recently got my own license in nail technology so I can experience their lives. I'm going to tell the story from a Vietnamese point of view because 70 percent of nail licenses in Florida are held by Vietnamese people.

What plans do you have for the future?

To continue to make films in order to keep my name going. The kinds of films I want to make are films that are the voice for the people who don't have one.