

# FAST TRACK

*Alums on the move*

## *A Cultural* **EPIPHANY**

*By Bill Ibelle*

**OLIVIA NGUYEN WANTS** to tell you a story about Vietnam.

But first, you have to know a little about her.

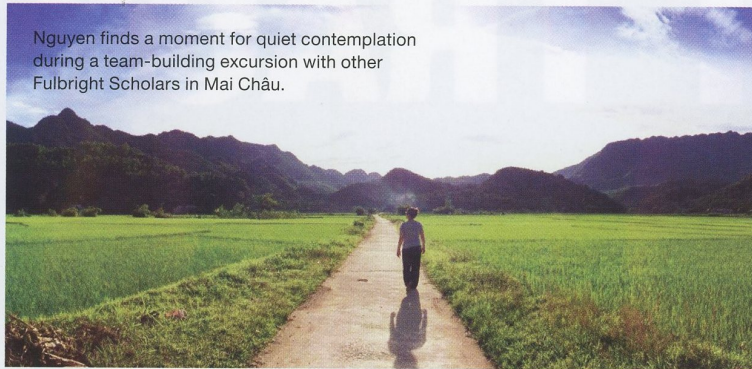
Nguyen, DMSB'15, grew up in suburban New Jersey, reading voraciously, playing sports, and joining piles of clubs like any other high-achieving high school student. She knew that her parents had fled the brutal aftermath of the Vietnam War, but they didn't talk about it much—it was too traumatic. And until Nguyen arrived at Northeastern, it seemed like ancient history.

“When I went to college, the meaning of being Vietnamese American changed,” she says. “I met Vietnamese Americans in Boston who were much more ‘Vietnamese’ than I was.”

Then, when Nguyen was 19 years old, she attended a family reunion and, for the first time in her life, she had both the curiosity and the opportunity to learn more about her family's past. She learned about the escape of her father's family by boat in the dead of night, and the struggles of his nine siblings to stay together when they arrived in America speaking no English.

“I began to feel this urgency that if I didn't attempt to explore my heritage, I would never feel whole,” she says. “I realized that my **CONTINUED ►**

Olivia Nguyen, DMSB'15, teaches English in Yên Bái province, one of the most remote regions of North Vietnam.



Nguyen finds a moment for quiet contemplation during a team-building excursion with other Fulbright Scholars in Mai Châu.

future family would be incomplete, and that I would be dishonoring my ancestors by ignoring the past.”

So during her senior year at Northeastern, she applied for and won a prestigious Fulbright Scholarship to teach English in a remote section of North Vietnam. She arrived in August and has spent the last six months teaching English at a high school in Yên Bái City.

As she puts it, “I’m here to learn my story, make lifelong friends, and fall in love with the world a little more.”

Nguyen is not shy. She is a passion-

ate and insightful observer of the human condition. She has many stories to tell of her time in Vietnam, but one stands out. It goes like this:

*Sometimes there is a moment during your travels that floors you—the kind of moment that knocks the breath out of you.*

*I had a moment like this the other day. It was 2 in the afternoon, and there was a knock on my door. It was Mr. Nam, a highly respected literature teacher who tutors me in Vietnamese twice a week. The sessions are informal conversations*

*to help me improve my language skills. After about an hour I asked him how he met his wife. He told me that she had worked at a neighboring school. One day, he passed by and saw her outside... and the rest is history.*

*“Ah, love at first sight,” I said. “How...” I paused and had to ask how to say “romantic” in Vietnamese. He told me the word is “lãng mạn.” I repeated the word and he explained that “lãng” represents the shore, and “mạn” represents the waves crashing onto the shore.*

*“That is the literal translation,” he said. “Waves crashing onto the shore, the same way that love overcomes a heart during a romance.”*

*That was my moment—learning how to say a single word in Vietnamese on a hot afternoon, over some tea. It was a cultural epiphany for me. I savored its music on my tongue. I have new respect for a language that I had never really cared for. I now wonder what metaphor lies behind each new word I learn. I savor the way my tongue dances in my mouth when I speak.*

*I am not just learning another language—I am learning poetry.*

## Hooked On News

By Magdalena Hernandez

**WHEN MICHELE** (Richinick) Gorman, AMD’12, started her first co-op in 2009 at *The Boston Globe*, nearly everyone was sounding the death knell for journalism.

The New York Times Company was threatening to close the Boston paper, which it owned, while friends and family urged her to follow a different career path.

But Gorman, who had wanted to be a reporter since sophomore year in high school, proved them wrong. Today, she is a staff writer at *Newsweek*, where she works for both the print and online versions. “I have the best of both worlds,” she says.

Though the industry is digital-

heavy, she has always wanted to work for a print publication. “The foundation of journalism is print, so I’m drawn to that,” she says. “And there’s something about seeing your name in print.”

Before *Newsweek*, Gorman worked as a digital writer at MSNBC.com, where she penned a 64-part series—“Too Young to Die”—on children lost to gun violence. She says it was an “eye-opening and terrible” experience, but that telling the victims’ stories made her feel as if she

was working for the greater good.

“A lot of times, I felt like the family therapist,” she says. “Once I broke down the barrier, I would hear the [victim’s] whole life story.”

While she is committed to the role of journalism in maintaining an open democracy, she is equally enthralled by its power to touch people’s lives.

“It’s an amazing feeling when one person tells you how much a story means to them.”

Gorman credits her success to her undergraduate placements at *The Boston Globe*, NBC News, and Boston.com.

“I wouldn’t be where I am without co-op,” she says.

