

## The Story of Ho Van Lai – Going the Extra Mile

Ho Van Lai has received support from PeaceTrees for a number of years. We want to update you on his story of renewal and growth. Those unfamiliar with Lai's story will see that his remarkable tale stands out not only because of the seriousness of his injuries caused by a landmine explosion, but also because of his courage and resolve to continue his education, retain his independence, and fully participate in life.

Lai's accident occurred when he was 10 years old. After school one day, on his way to visit his grandmother, Lai and three cousins stopped by the side of a road to play. Within minutes, a landmine exploded. Two of Lai's cousins lost their lives immediately, and Lai was seriously injured. He lost his right hand beneath the elbow and two fingers on the left hand. He lost his right leg above knee and left leg at the ankle. He lost one eye and was left with only partial vision in the other. His face and body were badly burned.

It took Lai a long time to adjust to his new reality. Both he and his family struggled to cope with the situation. During his year-long stay in the hospital, PeaceTrees visited often and provided part of Lai's treatment and nutrition fees, and constructed a handicap accessible bathroom and wheelchair accessible ramp at Lai's house. PeaceTrees also offered financial assistance to Lai's family, which allowed them to open a small shop at home and generate more income.

After two years, his physical wounds had healed. But, Lai was unable to attend school due to his disability. Embarrassed and scared, he began to hide from his friends. But his motivation to continue his studies was strong, and in 2002 he asked his family for permission to attend the Nguyen Dinh Chieu School for the Disabled. PeaceTrees helped pay his tuition and meal fees. It paid for an individual tutor during Lai's time at the school. And, once again, it upgraded the school's bathroom to be accessible for Lai.



In 2006, with incredible determination, Lai left the Nguyen Dinh Chieu School and decided to continue in the mainstream education program that he was forced to abandon due to the accident. Now, he attends school like uninjured children. The only difference is that he goes to school by wheelchair and writes using those three fingers on his left hand. Although teaching Lam requires a bit more creativity and patience, he is having fun, making friends, and gaining confidence every day.

This year, Lai finished middle school. But that is not the end of his story. PeaceTrees is honored to share some tremendously good news: In 2009, Lai passed his high-school entrance exams. This accomplishment is difficult for any student in Vietnam, and especially so with a person who had additional challenges to overcome. Now, Lai will attend 10<sup>th</sup> grade in Le Loi High School at Dong Ha City, the capital of Quang Tri Province. This means that Lai will have to spend the next three years far away from the comforts of his home and family, living alone in a rented room. Although Lai recognizes the long and difficult road ahead, he is aware that education is the only road he can take in order to have a better life in the future.