

KIM PHUC: PICTURE OF FOREGIVENESS

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Surgeries and medications can help heal the visible scars, however, nothing but time and in this case, faith, can heal the heart.

You may not know her name. But you know her face. Kim Phuc is that nine-year-old Vietnamese girl running naked down a dirt road after four canisters of napalm were dropped on her village during the Vietnam War in 1972.

Ms Phuc will be this year's Whitchurch-Stouffville Prayer Breakfast guest speaker, May 16 at Station Creek Golf Club.

"How terrifying it was. How horrible it was," is Dennis Seeley's reaction to that infamous photo. He is chairperson of the Whitchurch-Stouffville Prayer Breakfast.

"I believe that we will be (hearing) a strong faith component come out of her story," he said.

The deadly gel-like substance burned off her clothes and caused third degree burns to half of her body. Two of her young cousins died.

To this date, when the weather changes, she can feel it right down into her bones.

In the hospital, where she had 17 operations in 14 months, Ms Phuc felt normal. She even dreamed of becoming a doctor as a way to give back to those who saved her.

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Upon her release back into her community and for the next 10 years, Ms Phuc felt different, ugly and deformed, despite her celebrity status as a national symbol of the war.

She also suffered from low self-esteem and wanted to die.

In her childhood religion of Cao



TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE FILE PHOTO

Kim Phuc is famous for appearing in an iconic photograph shot during the Vietnam War. Now living in Ajax, she's the guest speaker at the Whitchurch-Stouffville Prayer Breakfast this month.

Dai, Ms Phuc was taught, among many things, if you eat chicken, upon death, you will be resurrected as a chicken.

Despite her pain and desire to just be an ordinary little girl, Ms Phuc tried to be perfect and did all the government asked of her, so she would come back as something better than poultry.

"The more I tried to be good outside, the more I hated myself inside," Ms Phuc told The Sun-Tribune from her Ajax home.

"Why me? What's the purpose for my life? Why didn't I die?" Ms Phuc said of questions she asked herself over and over again for years.

Seeking answers, one day she

went to a library in Saigon and read a number of religious books. One them was the New Testament.

During Christmas of 1982, Ms Phuc converted to Christianity.

After opening her heart to Jesus Christ, Ms Phuc said she was able to finally find the peace she was seeking and move forward.

That included forgiving the pilot who dropped the napalm bombs on her town.

"I got it," she said. "I feel so loved, honestly, I didn't want to die anymore."

In 1986, Ms Phuc was given the opportunity to study in Cuba. She was finally going to become a doctor. That is where she met another

► Go to kimfoundation.com for more on Kim Phuc.

Vietnamese student, Bui Huy Toan.

The pair married in 1992 and honeymooned in Moscow.

On their way back to Cuba, their plane stopped to refuel in Gander, Nfld.

With nothing more than her purse and the clothes on their backs, the couple never got back on that plane. They made their way to a Toronto Quaker home run by a woman who helps refugees.

The couple has two sons, Thomas, 19, and Stephen, 15.

In 1997, Ms Phuc launched the Kim Foundation International in

PRAYER BREAKFAST HELD TO 'INSPIRE'

The Whitchurch-Stouffville Prayer Breakfast was started in 2002 by former mayor and councillor Sue Sherban, Stewart Wideman and Mr. Seeley.

"We want people of faith and people who do not attend church to attend and feel welcome," Mr. Seeley said of the annual event that is part of national and provincial prayer breakfasts.

The event is not a fundraiser.

"The purpose is to pray and be inspired by a good speaker," he said.

The 2014 guest speaker has already been booked - Stacey Campbell, from Prison Fellowship Canada. The date is May, 15, 2014.

the United States. Three years later, a Canadian not-for-profit branch was started.

The foundation partners with other organizations such as Save the Children, Doctors without Borders and the Rotary Club, to help children and other victims of war, as well as the under privileged.

Although Ms Phuc never did become a doctor, her work now helps people deal with emotional pain, which she said is harder and more important to heal than the physical.

Tickets are close sold out for her presentation and may be available at Candlelight and Memores, 6198 Main St. for \$20 each.



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