I had secured an appointment at a local salon to have my nails done. I wanted fashionable French nails and had waited a long time for this day to come. My beloved Bill drove me and with my newly cut blond hair flowing in the air I bounced into the nail salon. I had been told the salon was run by Vietnamese. Once inside, it was obvious that this was the case.

‘Hello, how are you doing today?’ I addressed the young man behind the counter displaying my customary smile. ‘I have an appointment with Don.’

It turns out, Don was standing right in front of me and I was speaking to him. He had a flu mask on, and was staring at my nails.

‘I would like French nails,’ I said.

Without looking up, Don spoke what sounded like a question, ‘Fu set?’

I spoke louder this time, ‘I would like French nails.’

Don answered again, ‘Fu set?’

I felt like I was back in South Africa and hearing the word, footsack, which is a derogatory slang word meaning, buzz off. I was about to raise my voice with eyes wide open and greater emphasis, but realized Don did not speak English so well and I should be more understanding.

Lowering my tone, I said, ‘Yes please, I want French nails for my ten fingers.’ I held up all ten fingers for him to see.

At that point we smiled at each other. It was only later, after my nails were done, that I noticed a sign on the wall that listed the price of a ‘Full Set,’ and other options. I simply had not understood what he was saying.

‘Come this way,’ Don said in the continued broken English.

I noticed several other people of the same nationality in the salon. Their heads were all turned to face me and their eyes following my every move. Don eventually explained that they were all his family of various ages. I quickly deduced that some were there to work, and others were there to make the salon look busy. A couple of them were reading, and one was even nodding off in her chair.

‘Where do you come from,’ I asked with real interest?

Don answered, ‘Vietnam.’

‘Very interesting,’ I replied. ‘You and I come from opposite sides of the world. I am from Africa by birth and Israel by choice.’

To which Don remarked, ‘Dangerous places.’
‘I guess that’s right,’ I replied. Don was struggling with expressing himself and was a little reluctant to talk, but I was not going to let him off the hook so easy as that. I am always fascinated by people from far away places, and they usually can teach us a great deal.

‘Tell me about life in Vietnam,’ I said. Don pulled on his mask as if to say, don’t you see I am sick and do not want to talk.

I continued. ‘I am very interested in your country of Vietnam. Like my home country, Vietnam has gone through very difficult and sad times. Can I please ask a few questions?’

Don’s family members were clearly keen to hear my questions, and some even answered my questions when Don hesitated.

‘Tell me about the Vietnamese people.’ I went on, firing multiple questions. ‘Are they mostly farmers? What are the cities like? Is there a major industry there?’

Don let out a big sigh and replied, ‘People have money, good place to live. People have no money, bad place to live. Government no help, not like America. Here Government help a lot.’

‘Well, not having money is a universal problem, and 95 percent of the world have the problem,’ I said. ‘Vietnam is also a Communist country where people do not have free choice, and when people are deprived of their freedom it is never a nice place to live.’

‘Are you now an US Citizen?’ I enquired.

‘Yes, and all my family who you see here US Citizens now, long process.’ His eyes still on my nails, he went on. ‘America very kind to us, good life, much easier than Vietnam.’

‘What is the geography like in Vietnam?’ I asked him.

‘Like jungle, dense like Amazon, beautiful mountains, neighbor to China, Burma, Laos and Cambodia.’ He added, ‘Peace time for my life. No more war, thank God.’

Don brought God into the discussion, so I brought up the name above all names.

‘What do you think of Jesus Christ?’ I asked directly.

Don dropped his tool as he finally looked up. His eyes seemed as big as saucers. It is funny how this question can startle people.

‘Me not talk,’ he said, clearly uncomfortable with the topic.

‘Don’t worry, Don, you can speak to me. Jesus loves you. That is what I am here to tell you.’ No comment from Don, and his eyes had returned to my nails.

‘What do the people of Vietnam believe in?’ I fired my next question.

I was surprised to hear him say, ‘Most Catholics in Vietnam, some Hari Krishna.’

‘Very interesting, so you and your family are Catholic?’ I asked.

‘Yes, Catholic.’

‘So why are you so shocked when I say Jesus Christ?’ I asked. Again, no comment.

‘Let me say again, Don, Jesus Christ loves you. I am a Christian and Jesus is more important than anything else in my life. He is God, and Savior of the world. It’s a matter of life and death that you understand this.’

Still no comment, and he began showing a little aggravation at my persistence in this area. Clearly I had to press the point though. ‘With Jesus Christ you have life, without Jesus Christ you have no life. I came to deliver this message to you, Don. I am speaking the truth.’

I said no more.

As Don finished up the work on my French nails, I could see that he was in deep thought. Suddenly he looked over at his family and began talking to them in their own language quite loudly. Don was translating my witnessing. He was evangelizing without even knowing it. His
family was all very engaged and animated as they heard the conversation and all had an opinion. Some were smiling, and some were not. That’s okay because I am not here to receive approval or rejection. I am here to represent Jesus Christ, and it is my privilege and honor to do so.

About then my beloved Bill swung the salon door open and entered. He had returned from his errands to retrieve me. I waved at him, and he came to where I was sitting.

I explained that my nails were done, but they needed to finish drying in the two warming contraptions. I looked up at him and nodded toward my bra and said softly, ‘You have to go into my bra and pull my money out, my nails are too wet for me to retrieve it.’

Again the family was watching our every move.

Bill looked shocked that I would ask such a thing in a public place and replied in a half whisper, ‘No way I’m reaching into your bra here.’

But before I could respond he realized he had no cash and there was no other option. He reached forward and slid his hand into my left bra. He had trouble locating the bills and fished around for a bit before finding them.

Don’s mother, who sat across the salon, was fixed on Bill’s actions. Bill was clearly embarrassed as he pulled the money out. He held it up for all to see and especially waved it toward the mother hoping she would understand what he was doing. He laid the money on the counter in front of me and then placed his hands on both sides of his head with a grimacing expression on his face displaying astonishment that he had done such a thing.

It was at this point that the place broke out in laughter. Bill went to the front of the salon and took a seat as the laughter continued.

Clearly I was not the typical client, but rather a lady on a mission. The mission was accomplished with a good message, and we brought a little laughter into the lives of this family.

Thank you, Lord. I love my job.

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Since my encounter with this family from Vietnam, I’ve done some research on Vietnam and included some facts here.

Vietnam was part of Imperial China for more than a thousand years, gaining independence from China in AD 938. France’s conquest of Vietnam began in 1858 and was completed by 1884. It then became part of French Indochina in 1887. Vietnam declared independence after World War II, but France continued to rule until defeated by communist forces under Ho Chi Minh in 1954. Under the Geneva Accords of 1954, Vietnam was divided into the communist North and anti-communist South.

Two years later, North Vietnamese forces overran the South reuniting the country under communist rule.

The United States got involved in 1950, and until 1975 the Vietnam War was fought between North Vietnam, (supported by the Soviet Union, China and other communist allies), and the government of South Vietnam, (supported by the United States and other anti-communist allies). The Viet Cong, aided by the North, fought a guerrilla war against anti-communist forces in the region.

Shortly after the withdrawal of US troops in 1975, the North Vietnamese Army captured Saigon, and North and South Vietnam were reunified the following year.
One to three million Vietnamese service members and civilians were killed. As many as 300,000 Cambodians, and as high as 200,000 Laotians were also killed.

The United States felt a great pain as their losses for trying to help stamp out communism cost 58,220 American lives.

Vietnam’s population currently stands at 93,421,835. Their currency is the Dong, VND, and the economic growth rate has been among the highest in the world, but the country still experiences high levels of income inequality.