

Xieng was born in 1980. He lived with his parents and seven siblings in a small stilt house deep in the hills of Nghia Lo, where his family had resided for generations. Each morning, they had to walk for thirty minutes to get to their field, which was high up in the hills. After eighth grade, Xieng dropped out of school in order to help his family grow rice and vegetables in their field. When nature was harsh, they raised animals, cut wood, and cultivated land... anything that would generate income to keep the house warm and the family fed.

On September 9, 2005, shortly after a devastating hurricane had swept through Vietnam, Xieng, now a young man of twenty-five, ventured up into the hills to cut down trees and gather timber to earn money for his family. He was trying to remove tree bark when his blade slipped and accidentally cut a rope that secured a stack of logs. Xieng jumped and started to run away, but he slipped and fell; one of his legs got caught between rocks.... in an instant his leg was crushed.



He was rushed to Nghia Lo Hospital, where he was informed that his leg was beyond recovery and had to be amputated. While he was in the hospital, his parents, siblings, and friends all took turns taking care of him. They offered him encouragement and told him to be brave. "I didn't want to disappoint them," Xieng admitted, "but at the same time, I was doubtful of my future. Will I be able to walk again? How will I ever find a job?"



Before the accident, Xieng was an outgoing young man who loved to be in the company of others. He dreamt of studying at the Agricultural - Mechanics Institute, to learn the skills necessary to bring tractors, thrashing machines, and other modern equipment to his village. After the surgery, he felt confined in his own home. He could not walk to town to meet his friends. He could not go to the field to help his parents. Even walking down the stairs of his elevated home to feed the animals became a difficult task. His dream of continuing with his education, of bringing technology to the people of Nghia Lo, seemed to be on hold indefinitely. He looks away as he says, in a quiet voice, "When I was in the hospital, my family spent every penny on me... now we have nothing left, and I can't even help them with anything."

On December 25, 2006, Xieng received his first prosthesis from the Prosthetics Outreach Foundation. Still unfamiliar with his new leg, he took each step with careful measure.

When asked what he plans to do with his newfound freedom, he replies, "I want to help my parents. They've grown old, and I want to ease their workload. One of these days, I want to be able to walk up the hills and tend the field again." He smiles and reassures us, "Now I can walk down the roads of my own future."