

**Closing Remarks by Kien Pham**  
**Friday December 30, 2005**

Fellows and Friends:

We are now at the end of our gathering. I have listened to many comments and questions from you. I have also listened to inspiration and encouragement expressed by our speakers.

The strongest impression I got was the big question on what you want to do and who you want to become. This fundamental soul-searching question indeed should be asked constantly by all of us. The answer might not come easily but it should be discovered by you, and you alone.

In my experience, that answer might change over time. That is because you change or your career changes. Life is not a stagnant occurrence and your views in life should not be stagnant, either.

I would like to suggest a small but important exercise to you. You know what a tombstone is. It's the headstone of your gravesite. Whether we like it or not, a gravesite is the final destination for all of us.

Here's your homework: Write down what you want to have written on your own tombstone. It should be just one line that captures your life on earth. It speaks for what you want people to know about you, to remember you as.

Start with your name. So for myself, it would be something like:

Kien Pham  
1958 – 2058 (I'll be 100 years old when I die!)  
He loved to make a difference.

When you sit on the plane going back to your campus, think about your tombstone statement. Write it down. Keep it and may be share it with your family and best friends. The answer to the big question of what to do and who to be is in fact inside of you.

Since you already know I love to dispense wisdom. Let me tell you what else I love.

I love seeing you guys and watching the friendships you have for each other.

I love seeing Tien Dung and Nguyen Hoang here because they came back from Australia and Vietnam to be with us.

I love seeing Kim Chi being reunited with her two years old daughter and her husband after a year of separation.

I love seeing the change in you. Most of you look better. Some of you lost weight and the rest of you did the opposite.

I love the many good questions you had for the speakers and no question you had for me.

I love the way you surrounded Joe Tye after his speech because you are so interested in leadership.

I love the feedback we received from our guests on how smart and wonderful you are.

I love the fact that you can sing better than I because that means I won't have to sing tomorrow night.

I love the fact that we have nothing schedule tonight so I can go to sleep early and get up at noon tomorrow.

Lastly, I love the fact that you can change the world and make life better for the next generation of Vietnamese children, including my daughter and yours.

So I thank you. I thank the National Academies. I thank my staff. And I thank the Man Upstairs for the opportunity to serve, to make a difference and to have something that I can put on my own tombstone.

Go forth and change the world. See you at our next conference.