

Christina Noble OBE charity worker

We all have dreams, but Christina Noble, OBE, had a dream that was to transform the lives of 700,000 children. In 1971, at the height of the Vietnam war, Christina went to bed after watching the news and dreamed she could go there and help the children. At the time she was raising three children of her own. She had had little education and knew nothing about Vietnam. She called an aid agency. They listened politely and said they would call back. They never did.

A childhood of appalling suffering

But there was one qualification Christina had for the work. She had had a childhood of appalling suffering. ‘It doesn’t matter whether you’re in a gutter in Dublin or Ho Chi Minh City, it’s still a gutter,’ she says. ‘Every child deserves love and cuddles and kindness and warm food and a bed.’

Born in 1944 in the slums of Dublin (the worst in Europe), Christina was the eldest of eight children. Her mother died when she was ten and she had to become a mother to her younger siblings. ‘I tried to feed them, I tried to get them to school. I’d go to the market at 4 a.m. to get oranges and cabbages.’

It was hopeless, made impossible because her father was an alcoholic. ‘I’d go from pub to pub looking for him. When I found him I’d say, “come home, Daddy!”’

Eventually, someone reported the family to the authorities. ‘We were taken away,’ says Christina. ‘We were all screaming, “Daddy, Daddy, please don’t let them take us. We’ll be good, we’ll go to school.” I remember him shouting back: “Your mammy is dead and I can’t look after you. It’s for the best.”’



The children were put into separate institutions. Christina was told all her siblings had died and it was many years before she was reunited with them.

‘Mamma Tina’

But Christina never forgot her dream. In 1989, her children now grown up, she simply got on a plane to Vietnam, checked into a hotel and started talking to street children. When she saw kids who were dirty, hungry, and afraid, she smuggled them into her hotel room, and gave them a bath and food. They called her ‘Mamma Tina’.

Eventually, in 1991, she got two oil executives to donate \$10,000, and she set up the Christina Noble Foundation. Based in Vietnam and Mongolia, it now has offices in 14 countries around the world, and 700,000 children have been helped to a better life.

The pain has never left

It’s impossible to recover fully from a childhood as horrific as Christina’s. The pain has never left her, and she doesn’t want it to.

‘The most important thing in life is remembering that we’re all the same, we’re all human beings,’ she says. ‘I learned in the slums of Dublin how to help a child in the slums of Vietnam.’