

I first met Ken Quinn on a cold Iowa night in the winter of 1976, when he came to a celebration we were holding for the Tai Dam refugees from Laos, whom we had welcomed to build new lives in Iowa following the end of the Vietnam war.

Ken, who was a member of Henry Kissinger's National Security Council staff at the time, carried a letter from President Jerry Ford praising Iowa for the humanitarian example we were setting. I was so impressed with his passionate presentation that when he sat down, I said to him that "we sure could use someone like you back here in the state."

I did not realize it at the time, but this was to be the beginning of a great partnership, which over the next four years would add significantly to Iowa's heritage and create a great legacy of openness to welcoming people fleeing political persecution and bringing relief to those who were starving and in danger of death.

Ken arrived in Des Moines in September of 1978, with his wife Le Son and son Davin who was two years old, to join my staff on loan from the State Department. He immediately made an impact becoming the key person in state government in dealing with the problems that beset the Iowa National Guard, and guiding the process by which we chose a new leadership team that put the Guard on the trajectory to become the proud organization it is today.

But the most significant part of our journey came in January 1979, when, at Ken's urging, I returned to the office after a Drake basketball game to see a video recording of a special CBS report by Ed Bradley. It showed Vietnamese refugees in a frail boat on a remote stretch of coast in Southeast Asia, being pushed back out into the ocean by local officials who feared being overwhelmed by the flood of refugees escaping communism. We watched in horror as their flimsy boat broke apart in the waves with dozens of refugees falling into the sea and drowning.

The problem was, as Ken explained to me, that no country in the world, including the United States, was accepting any more refugees from Vietnam. These innocent Boat People refugees were facing terrible fates from pirates, stormy weather and, if they survived those perils, being refused any safe harbor.

Ken said prior to coming to Iowa, he had worked to reverse this U.S. policy while at the State Department, but to no avail. Now the situation was more acute with human lives at stake. While no one would expect Iowa to do something to address this problem, Ken and I discussed that we could not turn our backs and we should try to provide the leadership needed to end this tragedy.

That same night, Ken and I drafted a letter to President Carter that I signed and made public the next morning. It said that Iowa would double the number of refugees we had accepted, if only the President would re-open America's doors to accept these unfortunate Boat People. Shortly thereafter, Ken and I went to Washington and began the process of lobbying the White House, the National Security Council and State Department to reverse its policy. Given his prior experience at the foreign affairs agencies, Ken knew where we could be most effective.

The result was that six months later, in June 1979, Ken and I were part of the official U.S. Delegation to the U.N Conference on the Boat People in Geneva, Switzerland. There, Vice President Walter Mondale, announced that henceforth the United States would accept 168,000 refugees a year from Indochina.

It was an extraordinary moment in that old League of Nations Hall in Geneva. With the exception of the Soviet Block countries, every delegation stood and spontaneously cheered for this dramatic humanitarian leadership our country was demonstrating. With Ken at my side, I told the Vice President that this was one of the most proud moments of my life as an American.

I am so proud that my letter was the first statement by any governing leader in the world to have offered a refuge to the Boat People, and that Iowa provided the global moral leadership that saved the Boat People. It was all thanks to that initiative that started when Ken urged me to come back to the office on a cold night January to see that video.

Four months later in October, 1979, shortly after the visit of Pope John Paul II, Ken proposed that I lead a group of Governors to Thailand to assess the situation of refugees there. He was with me on the trip. However, we were not prepared for the level of human suffering that we encountered at a remote makeshift camp along the Thai Cambodian border called Sa Kaew.

There, 30,000 emaciated Cambodian refugees were strewn about a large open field with almost no shelter or food. They had just five days earlier escaped after living for four years under the genocidal Khmer Rouge, led by Pol Pot. They were dying at the rate of 50 to 100 a day, with their bodies being bulldozed into mass graves.

Billie and I had never encountered such human suffering. When we returned, the photos I had taken were spread across our state by the press and media causing a widespread sense that we needed to do something. Once again, we could not turn our backs.

And once again, I turned to Ken and he came up with the idea for Iowa SHARES, Iowa Sends Help to Aid Refugees and End Starvation, a tax exempt, non-profit with a board comprised of political leaders of both parties, religious leaders of multiple faiths and the editor of the Des Moines Register.

With Ken and Nicky Schissel of my office providing the leadership, a fundraising campaign was launched between Thanksgiving and Christmas, eventually raising over \$600,000 in small, individual contributions from citizens all across our state. This money was used to send food and medicine to desperate, starving Khmer people, both along the border and deep inside Cambodia itself, with our first gifts arriving, appropriately, on Christmas Day.

Iowa SHARES also supported volunteer Iowa doctors and nurses who provided life saving assistance at a makeshift hospital on the Thai border at Khao - I -Dang. This was an extraordinary humanitarian endeavor that lasted two years and deserves a special place in our state 's history.

Ken performed other important roles in state government during his four years on my staff. He was the disaster coordinator during a severe tornado and point person during a prison riot, both occasions when I was traveling and out of contact for a significant period. He was overall coordinator of public security for the visit of Pope John Paul II, which brought more than 350,000 persons to Living History Farm. All of this was in addition to playing third base on the Governor's Office softball team.

When Ken left Iowa in 1982, his family now included a second son, Shandon, and a daughter, Kelly would soon be born in Vienna. But even though far from home, Ken remained close in spirit, always willing to help me in recording the history of this period. I was delighted when he returned home in

1999 to assume the leadership of the World Food Prize. It has been my privilege to represent that organization in presenting the Borlaug Medallion to the King of Thailand, serve as an honorary co-chairman of the Iowa Hunger Summit and as an honoree at a Hoover -Wallace Dinner.

In looking back, Ken was like a national security advisor to the Governor. He shaped Iowa 's foreign policy, and was my indispensable partner in showing that our small state far from Washington, could affect great change in official US policy and provide global, moral leadership on humanitarian issues.

Starving people were fed; Refugees live in freedom; Lives were saved. All thanks to Ken Quinn.

It was for all of these reasons, that it was my great pleasure to nominate him for the Iowa Award, our state's highest honor.

Robert D. Ray

