

People Exclusive

Vietnam War's 'Napalm Girl' Kim Phuc Helps Launch Foundation to Help Wounded Warriors and Other Burn Survivors



Kim Phuc in Washington, D.C. on March 5

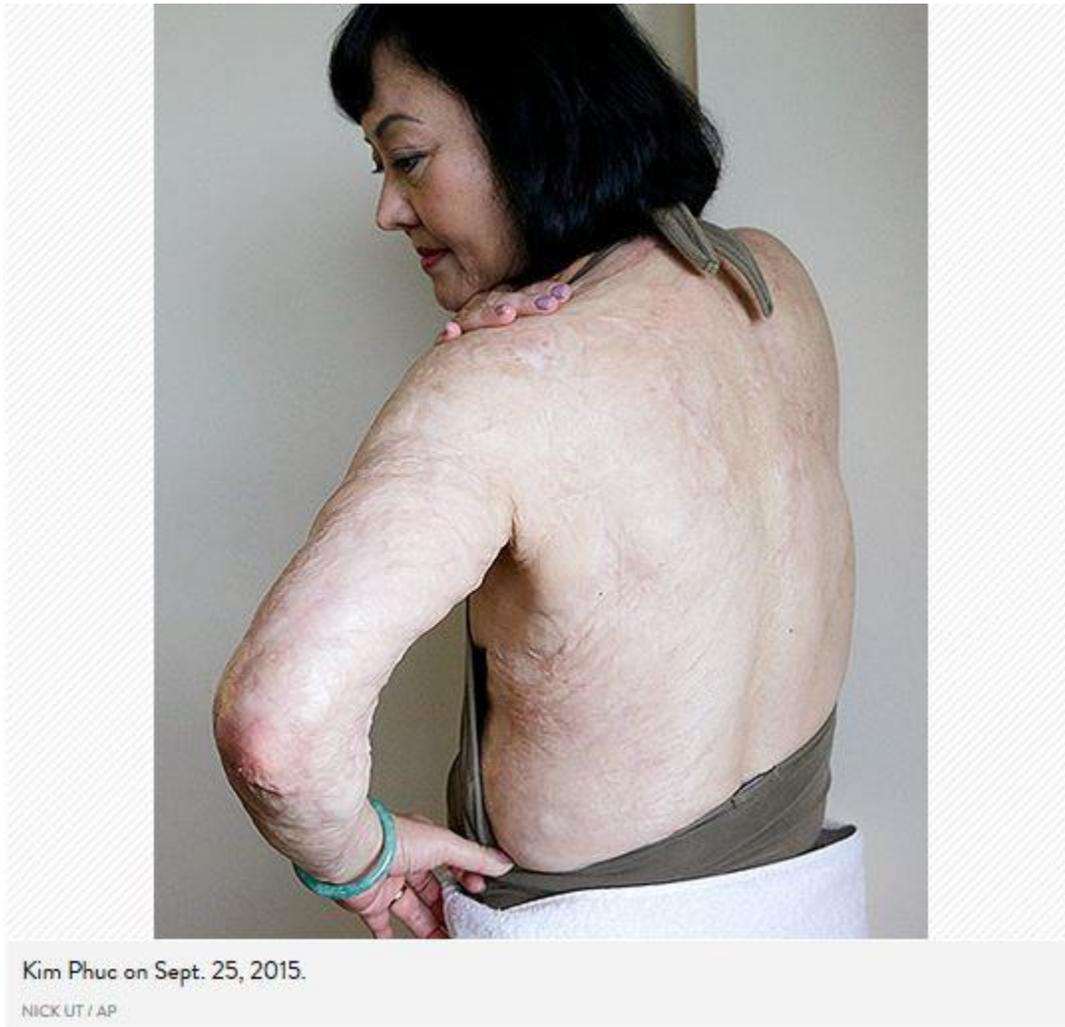
JOHN HARRINGTON/RESTORING HEROES FOUNDATION

For the past several months, Kim Phuc has been undergoing laser treatments to rid her body of the pain – and scars – caused by the napalm bombs mistakenly dropped on the South Vietnamese temple where she and her family had taken refuge more than 43 years ago.

On Saturday night, Phuc helped launch The Restoring Heroes Foundation, a non-profit that will pay for wounded veterans to get those same treatments, and any others they need that their medical insurance doesn't cover.

"I wish I'd gotten treatment when I was 9 years old," Phuc, 52, tells PEOPLE exclusively. "I suffered for almost 44 years. I just wish that every patient who gets burned can get the treatment like that.

"The sooner the treatment, the better the healing."



The 1972 Vietnamese bombing left Phuc with burns over 65 percent of her body; and doctors thought she wouldn't survive. The photo of her running and screaming, burning, down the road became an iconic image of the Vietnam War and won *Associated Press* photographer Nick Ut a Pulitzer.

She began the treatments with Miami-based Dr. Jill Waibel in September, after Waibel offered them pro bono and a sponsor picked up the cost of her travel and stay.

While Phuc started The Kim Foundation International for child war victims, she and her husband, Bui Huy Toan, 55, live mostly off his modest salary as a social worker in Toronto.

"I believe 100 percent that my scars will be much better," says Phuc, who was honored by the Restoring Heroes Foundation Saturday night. "I need three more treatments. Right now it's not fun, but I look forward to being healed in the future. I'm so excited for that."



Tzipi Ozer-Armon, CEO of Lumenis, and the famous photo of Kim Phuc

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Phuc says she hopes everyone who needs the treatments can get them someday.

So does Waibel, who helped form the foundation and is the dermatologist who is using the lasers to heal Phuc's scars.

"We need to make sure our veterans are getting the best care there is," Waibel tells PEOPLE. "Because of the budget cuts, they've been let go from their hospitals early.

"This will be a foundation that directly helps with ancillary medical care for severely wounded veterans – the double amputees, the triple amputees," Waibel says.

She pioneered the technique, which is a combination of fractional lasers, with burn victims 10 years ago. The backbone is the Ultrapulse laser made by Lumenis, says Ty Guthaus, vice president of sales and marketing for the company.

It works by "vaporizing" scar tissue and giving the body the ability to heal itself, Waibel says.

"The fractional laser is a game changer," she says. "We can take a person that's severely burned and within three to four outpatient treatments their skin is almost normal."



Kim Phuc (center) with husband Bui Huy Toan (right), Dr. Jill Waibel (left), Lumenis executives and others at the March 5 launch of the foundation

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The problem is the laser therapy is expensive – about \$500-\$3000 per treatment – and it's not covered by health insurance, so the foundation is also launching an effort to get a code passed so insurance will cover it.

"So the next time a 3-year-old with burns comes to my office, I won't have to look at the parents and say, 'You're going to have to pay for this even though your child has been burned,' " Waibel says. "I'm very excited about it."

They hope to get TRICARE, the health insurance program that covers veterans after they leave the military, to accept a temporary code while they go through the legislative process to get Congress to pass it.

"I think it's our duty as doctors to advocate for our patients," Waibel says. "Seventy percent of the burn survivors in America are children ... I just see so much suffering, and the laser can alleviate that suffering and really get people back to life."