

# South Vietnamese refugees: the story unfolds

By LOUI TAYLOR  
 Herald staff writer

It isn't easy to settle in a strange country where everyone speaks an unfamiliar language, but the Vietnamese refugee families who have come to Halton Hills want to stay in Canada, and they are determined to make the adjustment.

By today (Wednesday), there should be four refugee families in Halton Hills. The most recent arrivals are a husband and wife and their two young children, who were expected to arrive in Georgetown yesterday.

A husband, wife and their four children arrived in Acton two weeks ago, sponsored by the Acton Lifeline group. The family doesn't speak any English, but group spokesman Arlene Bruce said volunteers are conducting language classes every morning for two eager students. The children are attending schools in Acton.

The two groups of refugees in Georgetown are actually one family, although they are sponsored by two groups. Mr. and Mrs. Tsan, their son Ken and his wife, Sue, and a single woman, Ann Tang, are being

sponsored by the congregation of the Georgetown Christian Reformed Church. Tsuan Tang, Ann's brother, his wife Nip Soi and their nephews Tuong and Loi are being sponsored by the congregation of St. George's Anglican Church. Nip Soi is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Tsan.

**NEW LIVES**  
 The Herald spoke with both the Georgetown families about their lives in Viet Nam and their new lives in Canada. While Nuan Tang and his wife speak some English, the rest of the family is still learning the language. The interviews were conducted with the assistance of an interpreter, and with Rev. John DeJong, of the Reformed Church, and Andrew Henwood and Roger Beck of St. George's Church.

What becomes very clear after talking with all members of the family is that, although they miss the members of their families who were unable to leave Viet Nam, they don't want to go back.

Nuan and Ann's father, brother and sister are still in Viet Nam, as are Sue's parents, brother, sister and her sister's seven children. Sue's uncle and two of her nephews

are in Malaysia and hope to immigrate to Canada. "It's tough, you know," Rev. DeJong said. "None of us can imagine the kind of situation these people are in. They may be cut off from their families forever."

Mr. Tsan is now working part-time on a local chicken farm, and his son, Ken, works as an apprentice mechanic in a garage in Brampton. Nuan is working as a machinist at Moldmasters. Ann does some cleaning work from time to time, but because her English isn't fluent, she hasn't been able to find a job in her former profession of banking.

"Many people would like to hire them, but the jobs require they be able to speak English, and communication is a problem," Rev. DeJong said.

**STARTED WORK**  
 Mr. Henwood said Nuan and his family haven't had much opportunity to sightsee in the area because Nuan started work within two weeks of his arrival and the family has many things to learn in their spare time.

All the members of this family lived near a village called Bienhoa, about 30 kilometres from Saigon. They

were some distance from the actual war zone, and while they saw American soldiers in Saigon and heard the fighting in the distance, they were not directly affected by the war, as it raged on, other than the affect it had on the economy.

Before the Communist take-over, Mr. Tsan owned a farm. Ken worked in a bicycle and motorcycle shop. Nuan was attending university, where he studied mathematics, physics and geometry. He went on to study mechanics for a year, and worked for a year as a mechanic.

By 1978, Nuan and his family were planning to leave Viet Nam, and he lost his job. There were no other jobs available, and the family had to sell their belongings to survive. Mr. Tsan lost his farm bit by bit, year by year, to the Communists, until there was nothing left.

"From what we learned about their background in sessions with the interpreter, Mr. Tsan didn't like the Viet Cong government," Rev. DeJong said. "They took the Vietna-

nese out of their businesses, and banks and the Communist officials took over. I think this is the reason they left the country. They didn't fit in the Communist system."

Ask Nuan why he wanted to leave Viet Nam, and he answers, "Because of freedom and human rights." His nephews, who are 14 and 12, were attending school in Viet Nam at the time of the Communist take-over.

Then, the afternoon classes were cancelled and the students had to work in the fields. Those wishing to leave Viet Nam were required to pay the government six ounces of gold before they were permitted to leave, and had to find their own transportation, Rev. DeJong said.

**EXPORT PEOPLE**  
 "This was brought up at the United Nations," he said. "Viet Nam was accused of exporting people as its major commodity."

None of the people in Georgetown was able to bring any possessions with them from Viet Nam. They travelled

to Malaysia by boat, over the course of five days, during which time 360 people were crammed onto a small boat so tightly that they spent the entire period seated on their haunches, packed in together like sardines, Rev. DeJong said.

According to what sponsors have been able to learn through interpreters, the boat took the longer route to Malaysia in order to avoid pirates. While Mr. Tsan and his relatives survived the trip, they say they saw other people die on the trip, or heard of other people who had lost their families.

The family lived in refugee camps in Malaysia from the end of April until just prior to their arrival in Canada. The camps were very crowded, and the food was often very poor, Rev. DeJong said. The refugees were often given fish that was spoiled, and their diet was supplemented with rations from various relief organizations.

Nuan said he had some idea of what Canada would be like because a friend of his attended McGill University in Montreal, and he learned something about Canada through corresponding with his friend. While he studied English at the

secondary school level in Viet Nam, he doesn't speak it fluently yet, and he still studies the language with help from the family's sponsors.

"I am not getting enough practice in speaking English," he said. "We try to practise at home. I know a good many words, but I can't say them. I read English better than I speak it."

Whatever other words Nuan knows in English, he picked up quickly on at least one. When asked how Canada differed from Viet Nam, his

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Between working and learning all the things necessary to get along in Canada, the Halton Hills refugee families are being kept busy, but there is still some time for relaxation. Nuan Tang, his wife, Nip Soi Tsan, and their two nephews, Tuong and Loi, are enjoying everything about Canada except the cold. (Herald photo)

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