

Vietnam Orphan Weary of U.S.

Canoga Park
Los Angeles County

"I tried to fit into the American way of life, but now I try to get out of it," says a South Vietnamese orphan who came here ten years ago and wants to go back to his homeland.

"I cannot get accepted in America. They can't accept me and I can't accept them," said Son Minh Nguyen Rockstroh, 21. "I would prefer to go back to the simple and enjoyable life I had in Vietnam. Whether it's Communist or not, I don't care."

He and his sister, Kim, were among the first Vietnamese orphans brought to the United States. A special act of Congress was needed for their adoption in 1965 by the Phillip Rockstrohs of Oxford.

Son said in an interview that Vietnamese cannot be at home in America.

"You know you're different than everybody else, and you want to be like everybody else," he said. "But you know you can't be like everybody else, so you feel rejected."

"Americans have to expect any Vietnamese person to someday look for his roots in his home country," he added.

Vietnam was not peaceful when Son left ten years ago. He lost his left hand in a fire that destroyed his village. He still has visions of bloody bodies.

But he said, "When I get letters from my Vietnamese mother, I sometimes think I should have stayed over there. When the Communists start getting close, I sometimes wish I could go back and die with my family."

When he first came here, Son recalled, he lit a fire on the floor of his new home, "just as he had done in Vietnam."

"It was natural for me," he said. "My family was furious, but they couldn't explain it to me because I couldn't understand English."

"The adjustment to American food was also hard, because the food that is good for Americans gives Vietnamese a stomach ache," Son said.

Another problem was his

Vietnamese trait of not showing affection.

"We don't hug each other or shake hands," he said. "All we do is bow."

Mrs. Rockstroh recalled the pain she felt when Son rejected her affection.

"It hurt very much because when I first put my arms around his shoulders, he just pushed my hand away," she said.

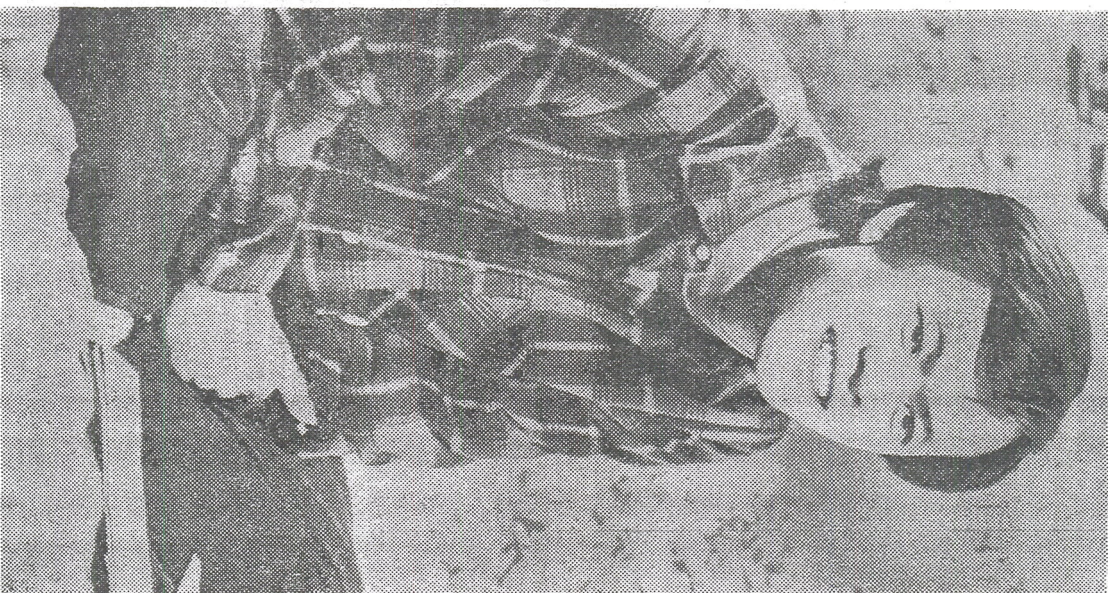
America wasn't what Son thought it would be.

"I pictured everybody living in a giant skyscraper, because the only pictures of America I saw in Vietnam were of skyscrapers. I thought nothing could possibly be wrong in America. Next to heaven, America is it, I thought."

And Son wasn't what American children expected.

"Another thing that bothered me was that every American kid thinks every Oriental kid knows judo, karate and kung fu. To have friends, a Vietnamese kid will lie about his experiences in Vietnam. And I was a professional at felling lies."

Associated Press



SON MINH NGUYEN ROCKSTROH
After ten years, he's not at home

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