

Viet Family Has New Life In Va. Home

By Janis Johnson
Washington Post Staff Writer

After a five-week odyssey, Huynh Van Trong, who fled Saigon with his wife, six children and little else but the clothes they wore, has resettled in suburban Dale City in someone else's house, wearing second-hand clothes and dependent upon others for food and transportation.

In Saigon, Trong says he feared for his life. On the flight over the United States, he spotted snow in the Rocky Mountains and was scared he might freeze to death in the cooler climate.

Now he feels secure, warm, and hopeful, because John Beckman, a management analyst with GSA, worker with six children of his own, has cheerfully squeezed Trong and his family into his five-bedroom split-level home 25 miles from Washington.

Trong says he is overwhelmed by the hospitality of the Beckmans and the generosity of Holy Family Roman Catholic Church, one of 50 parishes planning to help resettle refugees in the Diocese of Arlington.

"I worked for American for 10 years. Now I'm in your country. Americans take care of me and let me go (out of Vietnam) . . . I'm not worried. We worry when we came here. We don't worry any more. We no die.

"Mr. Beckman, I think, a very good man," said Trong in halting English. "We're able to live together. His children like my children. They play together. My children like his children. His children learning some Vietnamese. My children learning some English."

His wife, Nga, who speaks no English, sat silently beside him, wearing blue knit slacks and a pink shirt donated by the parishioners.

"We have nothing, nothing," Trong said with a shrug. He stroked a blue and silver patterned tie accenting his peach short-sleeve shirt and blue pants. "This was a souvenir from my boss," he said of the tie with a wide grin.

Trong, 47, was a messenger-driver at the U.S. Embassy's Defense Attache Office at Tan Son Nhut air base outside Saigon before he hurriedly piled his family on an Air Force plane April 22 at 8:45 p.m.

"My colonel, he wanted to take care of

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REFUGEE, From C1

me. He said, 'you better go,' but me, I wanted to stay, to pick up people," Trong said. He had been helping other Vietnamese out of the country by hiding them in the trunk of his car, which he drove to planes leaving the air base.

"I said, I want to stay here. He said, 'you drive yourself, you go.' He commanded it," Trong said.

"I speak English, but not very good. I cannot write very good either. My job is driver," he said.

Beckman said parishioners who are sponsoring Trong and his family have made contributions ranging from food expenses to legal services.

They intend to help him find a job.

"I want to stay in Virginia near Mr. Beckman, Trong said.

"Saigon and U.S. very different, for sure," said Trong, lighting a cigarette. "I think driving would be easy here. There is no dust. Vehicles are driving in a straight line. There is beaucoup smog in Saigon."

Trong's English is laced with French expressions like "beaucoup" for very much

and Vietnamese pato is like "ti ti" for very little.

For about 30 days, the two families will live together in the Beckman's house in the Dale City subdivision with a garden in the back yard and a forest beyond.

In preparation for the Trongs' stay, Peggy Beckman, who is expecting her seventh child at the end of July, purchased 50 pounds of long-grain rice.

"It's no inconvenience, really," said Beckman.

Trong's children from 4 to 21 are much quieter than his own, who range from 20 months to 9 years, said Beckman.

Their immediate concerns are obtaining more clothes, getting Trong new eye glasses, securing Trong a driver's license, investigating Prince William County schools for the children and finding some English tutors.

Already the parish committee in charge of Trong's family—also Catholics—has rented a three-bedroom house, which they will paint and furnish for them.

Beckman said 10 parish families volunteered to house the refugees temporarily, but "we were the lucky ones. We were chosen."



By Ellsworth Davis—The Washington Post

The John Beckman and the Huynh Von Trong Families take a backyard break.