

Vietnam Refugee Family Caught Between

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DELAND, Fla., June 21— Ten days ago, an affable, iconoclastic Jewish businessman who lives not far from here drove all the way across the state to meet the family of Vietnamese refugees he had happily agreed to sponsor.

But when James J. Becker arrived at the relocation center at Eglin Air Force Base, he found that his Vietnamese family was not there but already on the way to this little town under the sponsorship of a Fundamentalist Christian missionary group.

"Somebody goofed," he said today—and while the origins of that mix-up are not yet known, it seems altogether clear that one more complication has crept into the the life of Hong Van Hoanh, a 55-year-old upper-class merchant who fled Saigon in April just before its fall to the Communists.

Caught between the war-

This is another in a series of articles following selected Vietnamese refugees through various stages of adjustment to life in the United States.

ring ideologies of his homeland, he left friends and fortune and brought his wife and family to this country, only to find himself caught between two sponsors — a more subtle but equally unsettling swirl of cultural cross-currents.

Sponsors Contrasted

On the one hand is Mr. Becker — shrewd, relaxed, zesty, irreverent, eclectic—a nonconformist capitalist whose life is filled with the noise of an outspoken wife, uninhibited children, pampered pets and enthusiastic enterprise.

On the other is the retirement home and geriatric nursing center of the Christian and Missionary Alliance Church—strict, sedate and somber — a quiet, passive place where life moves at the pace of the aging and laughter is as rare as a

child's face.

"I cannot know yet what I will do," Mr. Hoanh said today, speaking in French. "It is hard to know what to do. There is so much I do not understand."

What he does understand, though, is that after six weeks in a bivouac tent at the relocation center in northwest Florida, he and his family are now enjoying a comfortable, spacious old white house provided here by the church.

Taking English Lessons

His wife, Le Thi Tam, a 34-year-old, English-speaking nurse who worked for the American Embassy in Saigon, is employed as a nurse's aide in the nursing center just across the tree-lined street.

He and his three sons from his first marriage—Dung, 17, and twins Chi Lang and Ngoc



John Becker, the other sponsor, said, "Somebody goofed." He feels he could help more than the church.

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2 Sponsors in Florida

An, 14—are taking English lessons along with his wife's sisters, Bui Thi Lan, 19, and Pham Thi Thu Ha, 13. Their entire family, including their 4-year-old son, Khanh, and their year-old daughter, Duy-en, is being fed by the church at the retirement center next door.

"It is so good of them to help us," his wife said in English, translating her comment, quickly into Vietnamese for her husband, who nodded gravely and concurred with a rather unenthusiastic "Oui"—a babel of language that seemed to symbolize one of Mr. Hoanh's most pressing concerns.

He has decided that until he learns English he will

not decide on a choice of vocation in this country, and while that approach has met with the stoic approval of the church officials, it is worrying his other sponsor, Mr. Becker.

"I'm not upset by the mix-up in sponsorship," the 48-year-old grandfather said. "I'm interested in Hoanh's future and since he's a businessman and I'm a businessman, I think I can best help him in the same way that he could help me if the situation were reversed—not by giving him charity but by assisting him in getting started in whatever business he chooses."

Sponsor's Diagnosis

As Mr. Becker sees it, Mr. Hoanh's problem is a blend of cultural shock and a lack of motivation caused by his language deficiency. "He's

got to be kicked out of his depression before he'll learn the language, and those people at the church are not helping at all. He needs a crash course. He's getting spoon fed."

Mr. Becker's approach coincides with his life-style. He is a former Miami policeman who was wounded on duty, left the force, earned a doctorate in psychology, became an insurance executive, and opposed the Vietnam war from its beginnings. He moved his entire family to Toronto so that his son, Herbert, could escape the draft.

Then, a year or so ago, he returned to Florida and opened an equestrian-oriented string of businesses in the nearby village of Orange City—a feed store, a tack shop, a Western boutique and a boarding stable.

He also bought a large chunk of acreage on which he built a house with a heated pool where live his Sorbonne-educated artist wife,

Lorraine, and their four children. There are also seven horses, some cattle, a gregarious sow named Ishkabob, a few chickens, several cats and an ever-growing number of Belgian shepherds.

A Disapproving View

"We're the token Jews here and because we're sort of crazy anyway, people wonder about us," his wife, who also runs an art school and gallery, said. "And I suppose nobody wonders more than the people at the church where the Hongs [Hoanhs] are staying."

Her suggestion could not

be confirmed, but a woman at the church's retirement center, who preferred not to be identified, said, "The less the Hongs have to do with them [the Beckers,] the better it will be for the Hongs."

The contrast between the two potential influences could not be more striking.

The church, which has the largest Christian missionary enterprise in Vietnam, follows a literal interpretation of Scripture and a conservative approach to theology. It frowns on alcohol and tobacco and some of the staff at the center here have been

encouraging Mr. Hoanh to stop smoking.

"Can you beat that?" Mr. Becker said. "Here's a guy who's been through hell. He's left his birthplace, his business, and his whole life behind. He even has two daughters who are still in Saigon and one that's in Paris and he's bewildered and depressed because now, without any money and without any occupation, he's not the one taking care of his family—and these people decide that what he really needs to do is quit smoking cigarettes."

So, the quiet struggle continues.

Mrs. Hoanh works for \$2 an hour at the nursing home. The older children wash dishes and clean up in the retirement center for nothing, and Mr. Hoanh helps the yardmen with the lawn and takes long bicycle rides through this little town, thinking as he pedals "about my condition."

His three teen-age sons, raised all their lives as Buddhists, have learned to bow their heads when grace is said before meals in the dining hall and to say "Amen" when it is finished.

One sponsor is not impressed at all.

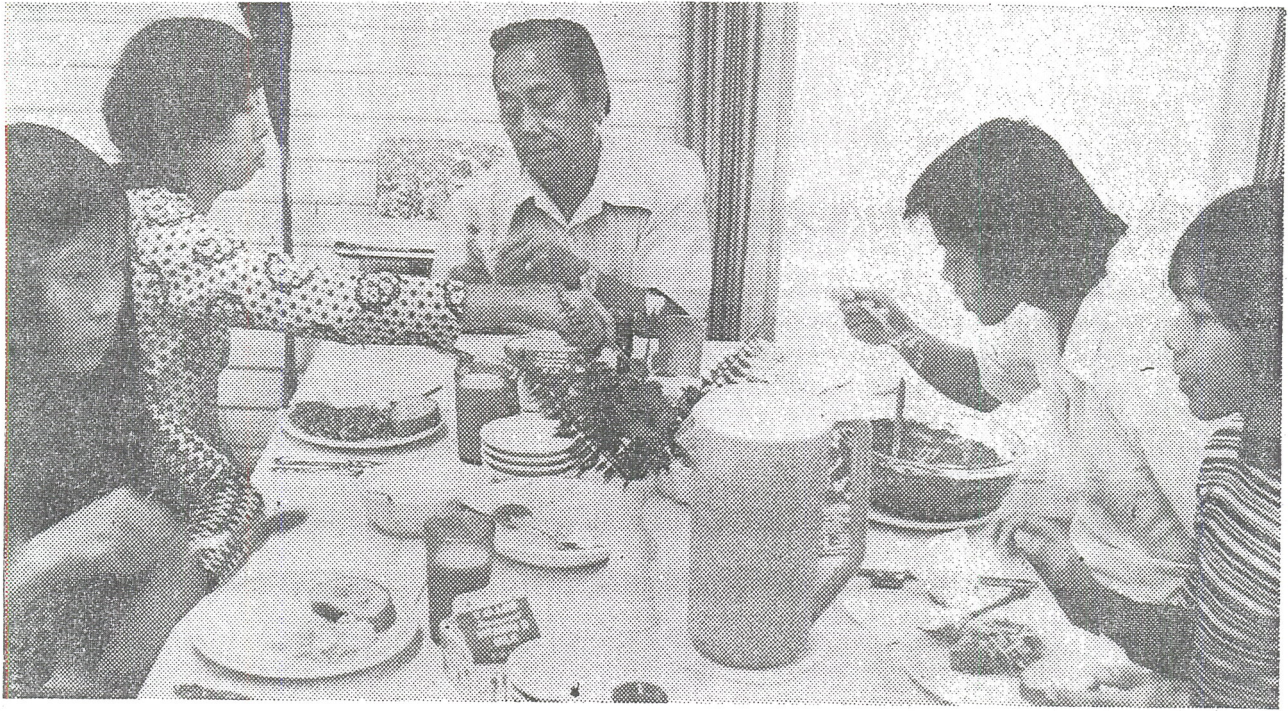
"What they need is a sense of self-sufficiency," Mr. Becker said, "not passive surrender."

The other sponsor is pleased.

"We believe," said the woman at the center, "they are learning to love the Lord."

Mr. Hoanh is confused.

"There is so much I do not understand," he said.



The New York Times/Bob Sherman

Hong Van Hoanh and members of his family eating in a house provided for them by the Christian and Missionary Alliance Church in Deland, Fla., one of the sponsors of the Vietnamese refugees