

Battle Over Custody of 5-Year-Old Viet Boy

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Royal Oak, Mich.

A 5-year-old Vietnamese boy is the subject of a court battle between his mother and an American couple who want to adopt him.

Barbara and David Pederson are trying to adopt Duong Quoc, whom they call Matthew. They say a return to his mother would be emotionally damaging to the boy.

But his mother, 25-year-old Duong Bich Van, who now lives in Green Bay, Wis., has filed suit in Oakland County Probate Court to block the adoption

proceedings and regain custody of her child. A hearing on the petition will be held Thursday.

"Mrs. Pederson, 28, said the child is 'happy' here. He loves us and we love him. He's found a home, a family and security."

She and her husband, 34, say they've considered the child their own since April, 1975, when he was flown out of Saigon along with thousands of youngsters. The couple have no other children.

The Pedersons said they filed a

petition last June to adopt the boy. They said they learned then that his mother was alive, but they were led to believe she had voluntarily given him up for adoption.

Mrs. Pederson said Matthew now calls the Pedersons "Mom and Daddy."

"We are thrilled to have Matthew as part of our family," said Pederson, a service technician who maintains and repairs intercom systems.

"We feel if he's taken away from us, it will reinforce his earlier anxieties. He needs support and security in his

formative years."

Henry Basikin, attorney for the boy's mother, said Miss Duong never signed an adoption release. He said she was working with an adoption agency in Saigon and was anxious to get the boy to the United States and safety.

James Elisman, attorney for the Pedersons, said although Miss Duong may not have signed an adoption release, five witnesses have signed affidavits saying she intended to have her child adopted by an American family.

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