

Eugene harbors new hope for boat people

By DAVID STEINMAN
Of the Emerald

One day last year, Kim Bun, a Chinese man living in Cambodia, watched as soldiers killed his brother and sister with clubs. The days of dying continued.

Kim watched five more members of his family starve to death. The soldiers returned to stab two more, and though the stabbed ones were not yet dead, the soldiers partially buried them in a ditch, with their feet pointing to the sky.

Bun escaped overland on rain-forest trails of Cambodia and Thailand. As did many other ethnic Chinese facing persecution from Vietnamese communists, Bun ended up in a refugee camp in Thailand. He eventually received permission to enter the United States, and he now lives with a Eugene family.

A month ago, Bun was introduced to other Southeast Asian families and Americans who came to the Central Presbyterian Church's cultural party for post-1975 refugees. While Bun's sponsors recounted his tale of horror, he stood with his hands clasped behind his back, showing no emotion. He doesn't speak English very well, and even when Kim has something important to say to his American family, it's difficult.

Fifty-five Southeast Asian families now live in Lane County. In the last three months, seven Southeast Asian families have resettled here. The recently arrived live with their sponsoring family. Others have been assimilated into life in Oregon, living in apartments scattered throughout Eugene

and Springfield. Virtually all the Southeast Asian families in the county have been sponsored by a church or a synagogue.

One of the few families to take in a refugee family without church sponsorship is that of Ernie and Marietta O'Byrne, who live on a farm near Veneta. Chi and Hoy Luong, two young ethnic Chinese from Vietnam, have lived with the O'Byrnes for less than two weeks. The brothers help with farm chores and, more importantly, help the O'Byrnes learn to communicate with people when language and cultural barriers exist.

"Chi and Hoy are so polite it makes it difficult sometimes to be aware of their needs," Marietta O'Byrne says. "At first, if they were hungry they wouldn't tell us; they wouldn't take their own food, and we wouldn't know that Chi and Hoy were really very hungry. And when it came to sleeping, they slept on top of the bedspreads instead of under them. To be aware of their needs really takes a great deal of sensitivity."

For Chi, who came to America with nothing but a satchel shared with his brother, the impact of America was akin to an explosion. Chi and Hoy speak no English. Communicating with them is possible only with the help of an interpreter, a University student from Hong Kong.

"The material things amaze me most," Chi says. "There are so many material things. Then I wish I can study and learn English so I can share my experience."

Cookies and soft drinks at a church gathering taste sweet to anyone. They're even sweeter



Photo by Keith Allen
Lisa Kirchner demonstrates American cookie etiquette to Thinh, a Cambodian, who had tried to eat the cookie with a fork. The two met at a biweekly church party which gives Southeast Asian families a chance to talk with others who speak their native language. They also meet English-speaking Eugeniens through the help of interpreters.

for refugees who come to Southeast Asian cultural parties held biweekly at Eugene churches. The parties offer one of the few chances Southeast Asian families have to meet and talk with other families in their native language. But if English-speaking people want to talk with the Southeast Asian families, interpreters speaking Chinese, Cambodian, Vietnamese, Laotian and Thai-dialects are there to help.

The parties are for acquainting people and church groups with procedures for sponsoring a Southeast Asian family. These include having the family examined by a doctor for any diseases, obtaining for each working member a social security number and job, enrolling children at appropriate public schools and enrolling the adults in English language classes at Lane Community College.

"Four years ago, 80 percent of the refugees were on public relief," says Dave Morse, publicity chair for Oregonians to Save the Boat People. "This figure is now 45 percent."

Work for the refugees often means a step down. Before the

communist takeover in 1975, Can Du owned two of the largest auto parts stores in Vietnam. He was a rich man. Now he works as a janitor for the Citizen's Bank. His two daughters are on the work-study program at LCC and his 14-year-old son picked strawberries and beans this summer.

"I think the refugee families are making a pretty good adjustment in Lane County," Morse says. "They're eager to learn English and other aspects

but as the monthly quota for refugees entering the United States is increased — from 7,000 to 20,000 since May — the function of OSBP will become even more important.

"Right now we'd like to bring 10 refugee families in a month," Morse says. "We're falling a little short of that goal, but we've started to work with civic groups, instead of only churches, to sponsor families."

In addition to sponsoring more families, the Lane County

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of living in America. The ones who face the greatest problems are the women with children. They're stuck at home during the day and get out only for one or two hours to go to language classes. They aren't exposed as much to the outside culture and don't make as many acquaintances. The women get depressed with only household duties."

The Lane County Chapter of OSBP is only four months old,

chapter of OSBP is working toward establishing a Southeast Asian cultural center that would be run by Southeast Asians yet would be for everyone, Morse says.

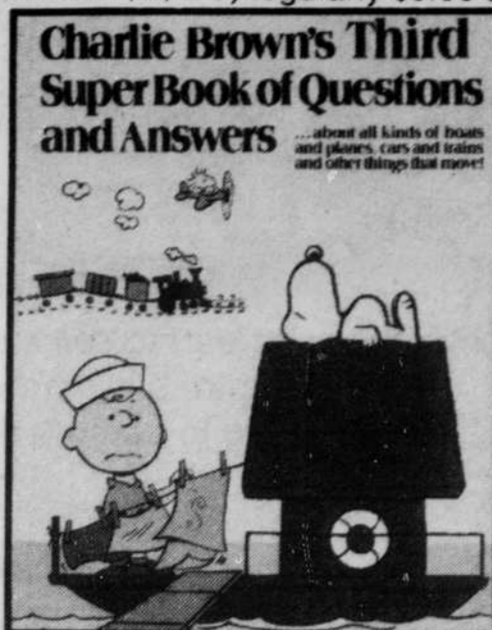
"I really feel good about working with the refugee families," Morse says. "Any human life is of inestimable value in the eyes of God. I see a real dignity in these people and very little bitterness. Sometimes a little sadness."

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