

Unsung hero

Meet Vera Mingo

By LORAIN McCLISH

Welcoming strangers into her home is a way of life for Vera Mingo.

She has been a hostess to 13 foreign exchange students through Youth For Understanding, and it never failed to be a pleasant experience, she said.

Language was never a problem. Today, correspondence and subsequent visits with her foreign guests and even their relatives are both commonplace and enjoyable.

But a different kind of culture shock faced Mrs. Mingo when she volunteered to house a Vietnamese family sponsored by the Lutheran congregation of Church of the Shepherd King.

For her efforts, the Farmington Hills resident was nominated as an "Unsung Hero" by Mary Kay Zolton, who wrote in part:

"No one can imagine the frustration and exhaustion involved in giving over a bit of one's life to people who cannot communicate in the same language, who do not grasp the simplest elements of our way of life.

"The physical dangers to their very well-being in the initial weeks were many."

The most difficult adjustment for everyone concerned can probably be attributed to a prolonged jet-lag that lasted for weeks.

"I NEVER thought they'd get their days and nights straightened out," Mrs. Mingo said of the five-member Thanh Nguyen family.

"They would start cooking at 2 a.m. on an electric stove they never did learn to master. Or they would be making a phone call at that hour. To whom, I never did learn.

"Lights were on day and night, another thing I never figured out, and I came from a family of light turn-offers.

"When they discovered they were out

of Simlac for the baby, they expected me to jump in the car and get them some at midnight."

Mrs. Mingo's job was to teach the family to stand alone in their new country.

"I raised six children of my own," she said, "so I knew I wasn't doing any favors for anybody by doing things for them. They were going to have to learn for themselves, and do for themselves and that was the worst struggle of all."

DUNG AND THANH Nguyen lived with her parents from the time they were married, "where Grandpa made all of the decisions," Mrs. Mingo said. Mrs. Nguyen's children were born and raised in a refugee camp where she had very little responsibility for them.

The result was that the couple turned to Mrs. Mingo for a decision "on just about everything," she said.

"She (Mrs. Nguyen) would ask for my approval on the very smallest of purchases in a supermarket. And as for planning ahead, it was just something that never crossed their minds."

As the dependence grew stronger, Mrs. Mingo said, "I knew the day had to come when it was necessary for their own dignity for them to move on, and I knew that it was me that was going to have to force this."

"They had begun to call me Mama."

English lessons came slowly.

Mrs. Mingo walked the two oldest children to Beechview Elementary School every day, "using that time to get in an English lesson or so," she said. After dinner, she used flash cards to drill the children.

Mrs. Mingo schooled the family in counting money and aided with opening a bank account. There were trips to the doctors to be made. The use of chopsticks were replaced with silverware.

HER HOME was the family's learning laboratory in their combat with all



Vera Mingo took on the job of helping a Vietnamese family stand alone in their new country by turning her home into a learning laboratory for five persons who did not know how to speak English. There



were both rewards and frustrations for the Farmington Hills woman during the family's three-month stay. (Staff photos by Randy Borst)

of its electrical and mechanical appliances.

Two young children were at the same time frightened and fascinated by the vacuum cleaner "which has never been used before so much in so short a period of time," she said.

One fortunate aspect occurred when Thanh Nguyen, an unskilled worker, quickly found a job with Mid-States Aluminum in Farmington Hills.

But guarding against medication errors was a 24-hour-a-day job as the Vietnamese family's understanding of medicines was limited to the use of

tiger balm or camphorated oil for everything.

Through most of the family's three-month stay, the language barrier stood firm.

WHEN MRS. MINGO read the nomination letter written in her behalf, she commented, "Mary Kay didn't say anything about the rewards that I got out of this."

"These people came with two or three satchels not bigger than diaper bags, which is all they had in the world. "It was rewarding to know of the ab-

solute trust they put in us. Every new word they learned was a thrill for me.

"Dung was frightened silly when she arrived here and it was a long time before she even talked to me, or tried to.

"Thanh has his driver's license now. He called this week to give me their new address and their zip code. Do you know what a far cry that is from the time he could say no more than 'Good morning'?"

"They left here with new clothes, a sewing machine for Dung, and more furniture than they can ever use (given by members of the church).

"They are settled in Lansing now, and I have every hope that they are going to make it," she said.

Mrs. Zolton concluded her nomination letter by writing: "In countless ways she helped them make the quantum leap from life in a remote Vietnamese fishing village to life in a huge modern American city."

"For her unflinching selflessness, for her forbearance in the difficult act of giving to people of another language, custom and culture, Vera Mingo is merely one terrific lady."

Fantasy takes readers on easilpop adventure

By CORINNE ABATT

When Vickie Najjar Teichner isn't at her desk in Brooks Patterson's office, taking care of home and children, going to college or doing volunteer work, she may be out promoting her first book.

Written for children ages 8-12, "The Easilpop Adventure" started as conversation between Mrs. Teichner and co-author Gwendolyn Alison Smith of Livonia when they were in college together at U-M Dearborn.

"We were a couple of English majors, and we decided we wanted to write a book," Mrs. Teichner said.

So, last summer, they got busy, sat in

the sun, tossed dialogue around and worked over each word and phrase. The result is a space adventure with two youngsters, Gerton and Vintar, somewhat patterned after Mrs. Teichner's son and daughter, Eric and Maria.

Reporters Gerton and Vintar who live on the planet Nimbus are sent to inspect the Easilpop Works on Moon Luna 10. Easilpop (Mrs. Teichner's brainchild), it turns out, is similar to bubblegum. But, when chewed, it becomes an accelerator.

"What do you mean 'accelerator'?" asks Vintar.

"You know how we float when we

sleep and how balloons float to the ceiling when we blow them up? Well, with Easilpop WE can float all the way to the ceiling," replies Gerton.

NATURALLY, THERE'S A bad guy, Rancidone of the planet Banos, a set of parrotlike twins to add a touch of humor and a happy, if goofy, ending.

Rose Turk did some illustrations, the writers found a printer, spent \$500 for 1,000 copies, and were up and flying.

"The Easilpop Adventure," in yellow plastic-coated cover, is available in the Children's Book Store, Applegate shopping center in Southfield and Birmingham Bookstore, 263 Pierce, Birmingham.

But, the remarkable part of this story isn't really the book per se, it's Vickie Teichner. Quite obviously, the book is a first try — pleasant enough, innocuous in fact, but may be enjoyed by a youngster who likes easy science-fiction stories.

Mrs. Teichner, a former Farmington Hills resident now living in Birmingham, is close to being a prototype of today's woman. In her mid-30s, divorced head of household, she started back to college at 24. After 10 years she earned a degree as a secondary English teacher by attending the local branches of the universities. She taught in the Farmington, Birmingham and Troy school districts, but was laid off because of lack of seniority.

Next stop was the Oakland County prosecutor's office for a job as legal secretary and administrative assistant. That's what she is now. But, she won't stop her education.

She's planning to go for a graduate degree in psychology at U-M branch in Birmingham, write more books and do volunteer work with pediatric patients at Troy Beaumont.

THIS KIND OF LIFE, makes tremendous demands on energy, but Mrs. Teichner apparently has an unlimited supply.

"I'm really interested in medicine and astronomy, and I like to fantasize a lot and make up stories," she said.

She thinks there's a need for stories for youngsters in which the characters are less than perfect physically. Vintar, for instance, suffers from allergies. In future stories, her heroes and heroines may be in the hospital, need operations, have colds and flu and still like to go exploring the universe.

"The writing that I like to do is fantasy — how we live in space. The best thing I learned from doing this book is the technique of brainstorming," she said.

A modern woman, all right, Mrs. Teichner is willing to work hard to get where she wants to go. She's ready to explore outer space, at least on paper, and trying her best to make use of all talents.



Winsome Lindsay Raben isn't eligible as a contestant for the Beautiful Baby contest because her mother, Gail, is one of the sponsors. But the infant has been touted around in her GM Love Seat for all

of her 6½ months. Lindsay is the Jaycettes' choice of a beautiful baby to publicize the group's contest to promote infant safety in automobiles. (Staff photo by Randy Borst)

Church sponsors baritone in concert

Clarenceville United Methodist Church will host David Baker for a day of concert on March 30.

The church is at 20300 Middlebelt, Livonia.

Baker, a baritone, is a graduate of Seattle Pacific University and the College Conservatory of Music in Cincinnati.

He will be singing at 8:45 a.m., 11:15 a.m., and 7 p.m.



DAVID BAKER

Beautiful babies sought for Jaycettes' contest

By LORAIN McCLISH

The Farmington Area Jaycettes Baby Contest is under way launched for the second spring to promote infant safety through the Buckle Up Babies (BUBS) program.

All babies from birth to 18 months are eligible entrants regardless of residency.

"Our purpose is to keep spreading the word about safety for infants in automobiles," said Sandy Winston, this year's chairwoman of BUBS. Last year's contest-promotion was a success as to number of baby photos submitted, and it was a success as to

the number of telephone inquiries the Jaycettes' received concerning the General Motors' Love Seats which cradle infants while they are passengers in automobiles, according to Ms. Winston.

The one new facet of the contest is the judges, who will be all guests who visit The Gathering Place on a specified day in May. They will be allowed one vote. Regulars at The Gathering Place will act as administrators of the voting.

"The grandmas and the grandpas over there thought we had a good idea," Ms. Winston said. "They were happy to cooperate with us and happy

to be included in our program for keeping babies safe while driving."

PICTURES of entrants are to be no smaller than wallet size and they cannot be returned.

Entries must include names of the babies and their parents, address, telephone number and date of birth. Entries must be postmarked no later than Tuesday, April 22.

Picture and information should be sent to: Baby Beauty Contest, 22731 Brookdale, Farmington 48074.

Members of the Farmington Area Jaycettes are exempt from the contest.

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