

# Creative Living

classified real estate and homes



Corinne Abatt editor/844-1100

(P.1E)

## Courageous mountain people build a new life

By Corinne Abatt  
staff writer

Cultural shock has rarely been as severe as that experienced by the people of the Hmong tribes of Laos who resettled in Michigan cities such as Detroit, Lansing, Saginaw, Pontiac and Bay City.

Yet, these people of the small mountain communities of Indo-China who suffered such devastation during the Vietnam war and now living in our area have brought some outstanding needlework skills to the state along with a refreshing spirit of pride and independence.

Susan Julian of Pontiac can attest to that. A former member of the Peace Corps, stationed in Malaysia, 1968-71, she works with the Hmong (the H is silent) of Michigan on a volunteer basis and helps promote and market the stitchery. The center for that work is the Open Arms Community Center in the basement of Mt. Zion Lutheran Church of Detroit. She said there are 90 Hmong women from Michigan represented.

One of the people supporting their artistic efforts is Phyllis Krause of Bloomfield Township, owner of the Phyllis Krause Gallery, 29 W. Lawrence, Pontiac.

IN ADDITION to displaying and selling Hmong stitchery at her gallery, Krause recently had three women there to demonstrate their substantial skills, Yang Lor, Cha Lor and Kaying Hang. All three come from the same family group.

Yang Lor, who has been here with her husband and family for five years, speaks and understands English. The other two are beginning to do the same.

In addition to the amazingly beautiful embroidery, applique and reverse applique, they do with seemingly no effort, they are learning to use sewing machines incorporating the handwork to make clothing for American women.

Julian said, they have five or six different kinds of things they do — batik, reverse applique, applique, cross stitch, chain stitch and other kinds of stitch such as satin stitch. They call it all Pa-nau which translates means flower cloth or making cloth beautiful.

Betty Hoffman of Southfield, home economics teacher who is helping with the sewing machine project through the community center, said,



Cha Lor has been in the United States just a few months. She wears the intricately fashioned metal bib that was, in other times, made of silver.

"They learn very fast. They've picked up the American style real fast. All the traditional patterns are in their heads, they're not written down."

She also showed how the Hmong sewers cut intricate designs in folded fabric as a child cuts snowflake designs in folded paper. They cut free-hand without a pattern, yet the result is a perfect, delicate cotton filigree to be laid on top another color fabric for applique and reverse applique work.

THE BRIGHTLY colored Hmong work in the gallery would do splendidly as pillow tops, bed spreads, coverlets, table runners and wall hanging, depending on size.

Krause said the money the women receive from their work is sent back to relatives in the refugee camps and Krause, in turn, shows some of the handwork by the women in the camps who embroider story pictures about their experiences.

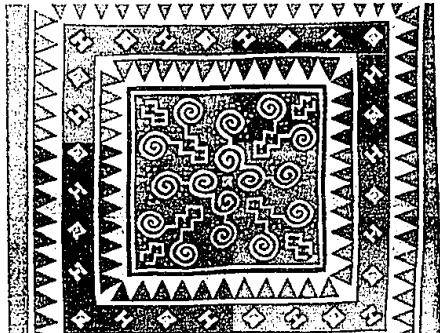
One of these shows groups of Hmong crossing the Mekong River in Laos. Some are swimming, one group is in a small boat, another is on a raft. A soldier with a gun is waiting for them on the other side.

As she looked at the picture on the bright yellow cotton with the black embroidered figures, Yang Lor said that 40 people in her family came across in two boats, adding, "A lot of people have died there. They didn't have a boat."

Julian said, "The Mekong River is like the Mississippi at some points,



The Hmong women, Kaying Hang (left), Cha Lor and Yang Lor, are dressed in traditional Hmong clothes, now worn for special occasions. The dark colors are accented with brilliant pinks, greens and reds. They were demonstrating their expert needlework at Phyllis Krause Gallery of Pontiac recently.



This Hmong work, applique and reverse applique, is large enough to cover a generous pillow. It is in shades of bright green, pink and black. The triangles are symbols for mountains, long a part of the life of the Hmong people.

broad and wide and treacherous, and they are mountain people. Sometimes there was shooting from both sides.

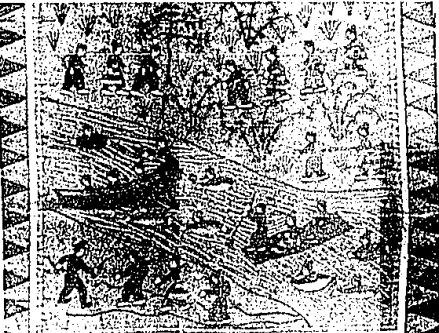
SHE SAID they were either sent back or to the refugee camps although a minority opted to settle in a third country if they had papers showing they had connections here.

The Hmong people sided with the French when the Japanese invaded Indo-China in 1940 and they worked closely with the Americans during the Vietnam War and suffered a much higher percentage of casualties. When the Americans pulled out, many were left behind in unfriendly territory.

Julian said many of the Hmong people came to Detroit in 1979, a bad time because of the high unemployment, but they have had a lot of help from Lutheran Social Services and Catholic Social Services.

These people, who take pride in being independent, have taken an important step, Julian said. One of their own people is now job developer with the Hmong Assistance Association and another is medical translator accompanying newcomers to doctors and hospitals when needed.

Both Krause and Hoffman are surprised at the adaptive spirit of these people. They look at American



Wall hanging made by the Hmong women in the refugee camps told a story of crossing the Mekong River, a treacherous undertaking in which many died. Because they are mountain people, many of the Hmong weren't prepared for the ordeal, and there often were soldiers waiting for them on both sides.

Staff photos by Stephen Cantrell

quilt, and American clothing and sense what is appropriate and will be appreciated. They still favor the bright pinks, reds and greens, but they also work in more subtle colors. The quality remains constant.

Their smiles and pleasant manner are reflected in their work, which is full of color and beauty. Phyllis Krause Gallery, 29 W. Lawrence,

Pontiac, is open 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday.

The Hmong people may also be contacted directly through the community center where visitors see their work on Monday and Thursday evenings. For specific hours, or to make an appointment, call 587-1840 Monday and Thursday evenings.

## She is what she is — a natural

By Corinne Abatt  
staff writer

Just as some talented authors can write books for little kids that adults love, Lois LaFond has recorded a tape of original songs, "I Am Who I Am," for youngsters that parents will almost certainly appreciate.

LaFond, Marian High 1963, now living in Boulder, Colo., has been a performer ever since she can remember and a pop singer, actress and composer on the side.

She said a degree in teaching and communication arts from the University of Detroit gave her direction.

Then marriage and two children, Arisa, 6 1/4, and Liam, 5, refined the focus even more. She still sings with several bands, writes music and occasionally produces live programs for children, but the revelation came with motherhood.

"BY WATCHING my own children I saw they were quite sophisticated in musical taste, so I coordinated modern rhythms with lyrics appropriate to the child's age level."

What makes "I Am Who I Am" different is not only the quality of the instrumentation — percussion, pedal steel, congas, bass, alto sax, baritone sax and trumpet — and the catchy, sometimes complicated rhythms, but the charming, straightforward lyrics about things that interest children — space, their room, dinosaurs and rainbows.

THE TITLE song, which helps builds self-



Leibo Jordan drew the clown and sent the words with it to his daughter, Lois LaFond. The clown became her emblem, and the words are the title of her first tape for children.

esteem, has a hand-clapper rhythm that characterizes most of the others as well.

LaFond sings them all, has a little help from her children, drove into a storybook mode in "Dinosaurs," and invites participation, particularly in "Rock & Roll," with flin-

ger snapping, toe tapping, tongue clicking and whistling.

One verse of "Rainbows," which daughter, Arisa, wrote, is in French and "Colors/Colores" is a pleasant mix of Spanish and English.

"I'm very interested in a combination of cultures," said LaFond. She went on to say that this recording was a mix of fun and learning is a nice combination for her, using the basic parts of her personality and current life — parenting, teaching and performing.

IT'S HAD its tryout period in Colorado where it was well-received by the radio stations as well as stores, schools, churches and synagogues. Now, she's building a wider, national audience.

Locally it is available at Borders Bookstore, 13 Mile and Southfield, Beverly Hills, and Birmingham Bookstore, 263 Pierce, Birmingham.

The possibility that a record company, a book company or a toy company will pick it up and distribute it much more widely hasn't escaped her attention.

It is attractively packaged with a book of the lyrics, an explanation of the instruments and illustrations by LaFond's father, Leibo Jordan.

"It was Jordan, a retired commercial artist, who sent his daughter a picture of a clown he had drawn and the phrase, 'I Am Who I Am.' 'He started the whole thing,' she said with a smile.

She already has half of the songs written for her next tape, "Ballads for the Newborn." She wrote one of them right after her son was born and wasn't expected to live. Although he is now a healthy child, the song remains as a gentle reminder of the thinness of the thread of life.

MUSIC AND performing were always a part of LaFond's family life. There was always music in the home when she was growing up. Her mother, Anne Jordan, sang on the Danny Thomas radio show in the '50s. "It just comes naturally to me," LaFond said.

She taught various aspects of the communication arts in school systems in Michigan (Ferndale), Ohio, and Colorado; continued her study of dance, movement, mime, music, acting, dance therapy and Gestalt therapy; has conducted workshops and taught in these fields; and continues to be a busy vocal performer and producer.

The positive response which "I Am Who I Am" has elicited, especially from teachers, including those working with the handicapped, has convinced her there's a real need for her kind of upbeat music and straightforward songs for children.

While a lot of it is geared for pre-schoolers, she said the complicated rhythms appeal to children in the upper grades. To help teachers handle those rhythms, she has written a special guide book. For information on that, write to LaFond at Boulder Children's Productions, Box 4713, Boulder, Colo. 80306.



"By watching my own children, I saw they were quite sophisticated in musical taste, so I coordinated modern rhythms with lyrics appropriate to the child's age level."

— Lois LaFond