

# Family wins 4-year struggle for Vietnamese daughter

By JACKIE KLEIN

Her name is Nguyen Thaingoc Trang and she answers to the name of Trang. She speaks Vietnamese but has learned to say she's years old in English. Trang started Southfield No. 10 Elementary School Tuesday where she will learn to say more than "My name is Trang," "I am eight," "This is a table," and "This is a chair." But what she has experienced can never be taught in school.

TRANG ARRIVED at her situation via Detroit Metropolitan Airport Nov. 19, after flying half way around the world alone, for a joyful and tearful reunion with her mother, Lon Sofer, and her stepfather, Sheldon Sofer, of Southfield.

The plucky little girl left Vietnam in May on a boat with 550 other refugees. She was sent to three refugee camps in Indonesia. Finally, through the persistence of her family and U.S. Rep. William Brodhead, a Detroit Democrat, Trang flew to America.

The Sofers and young Trang were separated during the fall of South Vietnam in 1975. Trang lived with her grandparents until Mrs. Sofer's brother-in-law, who is Chinese, was encouraged by the Vietnamese government to emigrate. He, his wife, three of their four children and Trang fled.

Sofer planned to send for others in the family, but South Vietnam had fallen. So far, they haven't been allowed to leave but the Sofers are hopeful. Trang was considered a higher priority because it was believed she had hepatitis.

SOFER TELLS a story of frustration and of gratitude to Brodhead, who with the help of his staff assistant Sue Clugston cut through miles of bureaucratic red tape to reunite Trang with her Southfield family.

"I worked for the U.S. State Department in Vietnam for two years," said Sofer, 44, who is now with the Detroit Board of Education. "I met Lon at a party and we decided to get married. I got the papers I needed from the embassy in Vietnam, which took some doing, and I flew to Detroit.

"I borrowed money to return to Vietnam to get Lon. My mother and I have a joint checking account and I needed her signature. My mother lives in Florida, so I had to fly there first. I had trouble getting a flight to Saigon, my luggage was lost and the embassy wasn't anxious to evacuate anyone."

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have to stay until she was ready for an immigration camp," Sofer remembered. "News was controlled in Vietnam and we really didn't know what was going on. When we got to the Philippines, we learned the war was over."

THAT WAS in 1975 and the Sofers have been married 4 1/2 years. There were more delays before they could leave for America. They sent messages to Lon's family but there was no chance of them immigrating.

The Sofers came to America and after years of frustration, Sofer turned to Brodhead for help.

"I've never asked a congressman for anything before," Sofer said. "But I received a card in the mail from Brodhead which he sends to his constituents. It includes his telephone number and he urges people to call him if they have any problems. And we sure had a problem."

"I had been in contact with Catholic Social Services and Immigration and Naturalization Services but we weren't making any headway. Lon got a letter from her sister saying that Trang may have hepatitis. When I called Brodhead, I said if the little girl died it would be hard to live with Brodhead intervened and he's still helping us."

Through Brodhead, Sofer was able to be in direct contact with a French medicine boat. Doctors said Trang had been checked and was healthy. That provided immediate relief, Sofer said, but the child had left May 7 on a crowded boat that took her to an island in northeast Indonesia. She arrived May 11 and the Sofers weren't notified by United Nations officials until July.

BRODHEAD called Singapore, Jakarta, Geneva, New York and Washington to work through the log jam with international and U.S. authorities.

"I'm delighted it turned out the way it did," Brodhead said in a telephone interview from Washington Monday. "It took a little extra effort to get the job done, but that's what I'm paid for."

"Sofer called my office to ask for help in getting the little girl out of a refugee camp on an island in the Pacific. We helped get her to the American Embassy in Indonesia where immigration is processed."

"We made a lot of phone calls to find her location and what condition she was in. We also worked to expedite the processing of her papers. And we wrote many letters. The most urgent concern was about her health."

"It's complicating to deal with the United Nations but it's a challenge. I think this points out the fact that it's not easy to bring refugees over to this country."

The Sofers are grateful to Ms. Clugston who called them all hours of the

day and night to give them the latest news about Trang. There was more confusion about the child's flight to Michigan after a number of stopovers, but Ms. Clugston again came to the family's aid, Sofer said.

"Trang brought her whole airplane meal with the napkin, fork, knife and spoon," Mrs. Sofer said. "She said she wasn't hungry and she didn't want to waste food so she'd eat it later."

Mrs. Sofer, who owns a shoe store in Warren, took Trang to the doctor Monday and he said she appeared fine but should be watched. Trang enjoys going to the store and being a stockgirl, her mother said.

Mrs. Sofer became an American citizen last June. She and her husband have two children, Michael, 3, and Julie, 1. The couple is also sponsoring two boys from Vietnam and Sofer says they'll need wall-stretchers when other members of his wife's family arrive.

## Book shows best stamps

The U.S. Postal Service's 1979 commemorative mint set and this year's edition of "Stamps and Stories" have been released for sale.

The 1979 mint-set album contains all 30 commemorative and special stamps issued by the U.S. Postal Service during 1979 and includes this year's Christmas stamps.

The sixth edition of "Stamps and Stories" — the U.S. Postal Service Encyclopedia of U.S. Stamps — relates more than 100 stories about the stamps. It is designed to introduce non-collectors to stamp collecting.

The book has 1980 market values for novice and experienced collectors. Many stories in the new edition have been changed substantially to illustrate a different aspect of an individual's life or of a significant historical event.

"Stamps and Stories" also contains information on price trends of selected stamp issues, catalogue numbers and current prices for souvenir pages and

commemorative panels. It's index lists every U.S. postage stamp ever issued.

The books are available at the Farmington Post Office.

## Medal given to Francois

Richard W. Francois, son of Mr. and Mrs. Gilbert Keizer of Farmington Hills recently was presented the Meritorious Service Medal at Camp Casey, Korea.

The medal is awarded to members of the armed forces who have distinguished themselves by exceptional achievement in the performance of their official duties.

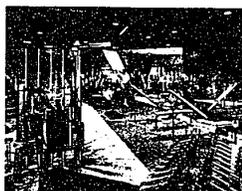
Francois received the award while assigned as a personnel clerk with the 2nd Infantry Division of the Army. He is a 1972 graduate of Clarenceville High School, Livonia.

His wife, Song Sil is with him in Korea.

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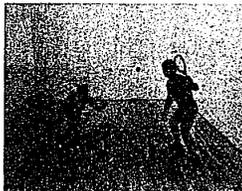
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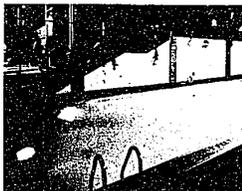
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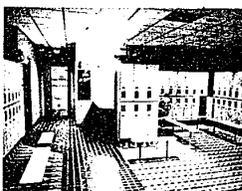
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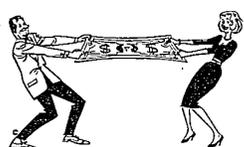
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