



Homestead



Notes

Solanco family opens home to refugees

By SUSAN KAUFFMAN
Feature Writer

Twin Pond Farm in Little Britian Township, Lancaster County, is very different from the people-packed city of Saigon Vietnam but it has become the home for two brothers - Dat and Thanh Tran.

The Jesse Wood family, Nottingham, R2 has sponsored the brothers since July 10, 1975. The two were not the first young people from other parts of the world to live with the Woods. Opening their home and the warmth of their family to others began five years ago when their oldest daughter, Cindy, wanted to be an exchange student to a Spanish speaking country as an extension of her Spanish classes. In January, February and March of 1971, the Woods had a very pleasant experience with an exchange student from Lima, Peru who came to stay with them. Cindy went to South America in June, July and August of that year.

Just previous to the first exchange student's arrival, the Woods had remodelled and built accommodations for up to fourteen guests. From 1971 to 1973 the Woods had guests stay during the summer months. Their guests enjoyed the rural setting so much that their appreciation of it touched the Wood family into realizing how much they had to value. "The Lord has been so good to us - we have so much to share with others," Ruth Ann says. In 1973 Ruth Ann accepted a full-time employment as a rural mail carrier thus ending the farm vacation business. "This left us free to take on a responsibility such as this sponsorship," Ruth Ann remarked.

Jesse and Ruth Ann have five children: Cindy - 22, Jesse - 21, Edna Sue - 19, Linda - 17 and Jeff - 13. Edna Sue, Linda, and Jeff are at home. Jesse is married and works with his father on the 265 acre dairy farm where they milk 65 registered Guernsey cows, feed 30 steers, farm 300 acres of crop ground and do custom work for neighbors. Cindy is a Physical Education and Health teacher in North Carolina, and so making Dat and Thanh welcome was primarily Edna Sue's, Linda's and Jeff's opportunity.

Prior to making any inquiries into sponsoring Vietnamese refugees, Jesse and Ruth Ann talked with their children and all were in favor of such an undertaking. Ruth Ann talked with their pastor about such a plan and he suggested they wait to see what support the church's refugee family might need. The Woods really weren't satisfied with that and hoped something more specific might materialize. "It was really very strange how things worked out," said Mrs. Wood. One day her mother called and said she had been contacted by friends in the Lutheran Placement Service to ask if she knew of a family who would sponsor two non-English speaking brothers at Indiantown Gap. The boys had been difficult to place because they were without a parent, spoke almost no English, did not want to be separated, one was 11 and the other 23. They needed a home to learn the English language and American customs without having to earn their keep.

"This was just what we wanted," Mrs. Wood remarked. After approval of sponsorship through the Lutheran Placement Service and a short three-week processing of applications, Dat and Thanh came to Twin Ponds Farm.

The boys spoke almost no English - in sharp contrast to the foreign exchange students the Woods had had in their home. The exchange students were taught English as a second language from the beginning of their schooling and were easy to communicate with from the start of their visit. Thanh, the younger brother, said, "I am fine, how are you?" - and that was all. Eleven year old Thanh picked up the English language fast and mixed with other children much more spontaneously than did his older brother Dat. The Woods took Dat to special English classes in Lancaster during the summer and he presently attends weekly English classes at the Mechanic Grove Church of the Brethren, Quarryville R2.

At first the family had to rely on translations through other English-speaking Vietnamese in the area. If the Tran brothers and the Woods came to a point in their discussion where sign language couldn't get the point across, they would call the English-speaking Vietnamese and have them relay the meaning to the boys in Vietnamese. Thanh, in a few short months, has learned enough English to accomplish grade level work in a regular fourth grade class at Little Britain Elementary School. His bright shining black eyes and his friendly contagious smile have endeared him to his adoptive family, his classmates and his teachers.



A family portrait plus is what the Jesse Wood family posed for during a recent visit. Shown above are (back) Edna Sue, Linda, RuthAnn and Jesse. (Front) Jeff, Thanh Tran and Dat Tr

The older brother has successfully adapted to life in his new country. "Dat was very lucky to get and keep a job," explained Ruth Ann. He has been employed as a baker at Willow Valley Restuarant, Lancaster, since September. "At first, during the summer months, it wasn't too bad for him out here in the country, but when the children went back to school, it was so quiet here on the farm - so different from the city of Saigon he was accustomed to," commented Jesse. Getting and keeping a job has brought a real change in Dat. He has contact with other people - both Vietnamese and American - and he has something to do during the day. "These two were big-city boys," says Jesse, they are very willing to do whatever we suggest as a family or parent, but they had no experience with rural life before coming to America."

Dat and Thanh's father was killed by the Viet Cong five years ago. Their mother worked during the day and Dat took his little brother Thanh with him to work on a boat in the Saigon harbor. Sometimes they would be out on the boat three days then return home for a day or two. Dat was out on the boat when the take-over of the city started. He wanted to leave the boat and return to the family, but those who tried to return were immediately captured. Thus, Dat and his brother Thanh stayed on the boat which traveled to Guam. From there they boarded a plane which flew them to Indiantown Gap. They were at the Gap a month before being placed with the Woods. They have not been able to contact their natural family since their arrival here.

In sharp contrast to the very Americanized foreign exchange students from South America, these boys had no possessions other than a suitcase full of clothing provided by the Red Cross. "They never had any experience with a lot of our foods and customs so they had to learn a lot from our children's examples," explained Ruth Ann. "We tried not to set rules without good reasons they could understand," said Jesse. "We did not feel we could force our customs on them without their being aware of why they are as they are." "Our kids were great; they could teasingly teach them table manners and correct them without causing problems," Ruth Ann explained.

Although there were inconveniences such as driving Dat to and from work and classes and finding ways to communicate, there have been none they haven't been able to handle in stride, according to Ruth Ann and Jesse. "Our children really appreciate what we have and are glad to share with others since they have seen these Vietnamese boys marvel at what we take for granted." Thanh remarks often, as when the refrigerator was stocked full after a trip to the grocery store - "very much money, no have at home." He especially prizes oranges, fresh fruit and ham. Dat is so overwhelmed with our variety of foods that at work he says he always orders a "club sandwich or ham loaf, - all else I not know - very many!"

When asked if the boys want to go back to Vietnam, they replied that they longed to be reunited with their mother and brothers and sisters but would not like to leave our cultural and economic advantages. Eleven year old Thanh's goal is to study hard, make a lot of money, then be able to bring his mother to America.

The Jesse Wood family, like many in the United States, has opened their home to strangers and in doing so have learned a valuable lesson about the advantages of living in a country such as the United States.



Country Corner

'Gardening Woes

By MELISSA PIPER

The following poem is dedicated to the gardeners and what their future may be.

The farmer raised his palm and wiped the sweat from his head.
It's going to be a good year
if the weather holds out he said.

I hope this spring is not too wet
and the summer months aren't dry,
If the sun is too hot for tomatoes
those delicate plants will fry.

The farmer's wife simply nodded
and brushed the dirt from her dress,
She picked up another packet of seeds
Remembering last year's weeding mess.

I hope these peas do well she spoke
drawing the hoe through the soil,
We've waited so long for gardening again
but it seems like an awful toil.

Her husband laughed as he planted the beets
and laid the corn to rest,
We'll do okay he cried out loud
without insects, rabbits and pests.

The planting was long and hard,
but when the task was done
The couple gathered their seeds and tools
the horizon red blazen with sun.

Spring has come and we've done our best
the farmer told his wife,
the rest is up to the rain, sun and soil
to offer the seeds a life.

Then trudging back to the farm house
the wife dropped her hoe and pan,
But what if our yield is great she cried
And I don't have those lids to can!

