

MOUNTAIN — For most refugees, it's a trip they're lucky to survive even once. From the wasted, war-torn villages of Cambodia, from the abandoned cities marked by mass graves — through wilderness, mountains, jungles — they hobble on stick-like legs, clothed in rags, stomachs distended, impoverished faces that have seen too much suffering, too much agony.

It is a nightmare of horror, blood and death. They have been called victims of a second Holocaust.

Since last October, 80,000 Cambodians have safely reached the Thailand border. One can only imagine how many never made it that far — who because of disease, starvation of Khmer Rouge soldiers — never reached the overcrowded refugee camps beyond the frontier.

Mie Hoa Wan, his wife Thou Sin Lo and three of their daughters made that trip twice.

Their very existence defies the policy of genocide which tried to wipe them out. They made that trip because they believed in survival, in a better way of life — and they found that way of life in a small village called Mountain.

The Wans are staying with Mountain resident John Blom. Sponsored by Holy Cross Church and St. James Church in Kemptville and St. Daniel's Church in South Mountain, they arrived in Canada two months ago.

Since then, they have eagerly tackled the job of adapting to the ways of a strange country, especially the children. For the first time in their lives, Pie Chou Wan, 13, and Pie Lin Wan, 12, are attending school. Their older sister, Pie Kuon Wan, 21, is also resuming her studies again after years of lost opportunity.

Enrolled at Nationview Public School, the children are so thrilled with learning that they become miserable when the teachers take time off for a professional development day. When the Khmer Rouge, as the Cambodian Communist forces are called, took over their country in 1975, education was forbidden.

Blom says the teachers at Nationview have worked wonders with the children. The Wans speak a mixture of Chinese and Cambodian, but already the children are learning English. Both the younger girls are in Grade 5, while Pie Kuon is in Grade 8.

The recent weeks the family have spent in Mountain are an unbelievable contrast with their life in Cambodia.

During the early years of the Vietnam War, their country was neutral. However, later, Cambodia unwittingly became a base for the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese which led the United States to conduct savage bombing attacks on it.

In 1970, its popular Chief of State, Prince Norodom Sihanouk, was overthrown by Lon Nol. Five years later, Lon Nol was deposed by Khmer-Rouge-backed Pol Pot — and the years of terror for the Wans began.

In 1975, Mie Hoa, who owned a trucking business in Phnom-Penh, was stripped of all his possessions. He and his family were forced-marched to resettlement on rural communes. There they worked from dawn to dusk, while all traces of civilization in their country were slowly wiped out by the new regime.

Families were separated, the state

religion of Buddhism was abolished, postal stations, telephones and currency were destroyed. There was mass murder everywhere. The once-beautiful city of Phnom-Penh was left to rot.

In halting English, Pie Kuon explains what life was like.

"There was no city anymore," she says quietly. "There were no people, no dogs, no trees. Only the wind."

"In the camps we worked all the time. Day after day. There was not much food. We were always hungry."

Pie Kuon stops her story to search for something in Blom's refrigerator. She pulls out a can of soup.

"Here," she says offering the can for inspection. "This is what we had to eat for dinner — twelve of us and just this much food."

What you immediately expect from these people is emotional scarring, their spirits broken, ravaged by years spent in fear. But if the scars are there, as they must be, they are well hidden. Blom says he is amazed at the reserve of his guests. Although affectionate in manner, even among themselves they will rarely touch each other.

Leafing through a recent Time magazine detailing the plight of Cambodians, Pie Kuon stops at a photo of a starving child. The body is wasted, shrivelled into a pale imitation of a child's limbs. Her younger sister Pie Lin makes a face while Pie Kuon mentions, almost as a footnote to her own story, "that's what I

Immediately she breaks out in an embarrassed giggle. It is almost as if she believes she has broken some vague social code and is ashamed to have mentioned her starvation.

The first time the Wans escaped from Cambodia was last March. After a three day march, they reached the Thai border and were admitted to a refugee camp. But a month later, they were loaded in buses by the Thai government and with other refugees, they were driven back to the mountains of Cambodia.

In August, they tried again. But this time they had much farther to go. For 37 days they walked toward that intangible promise of freedom. Their feet were cut and bleeding, their legs could barely support their starving bodies.

Near the Thai frontier, the constant danger they faced reached a crisis. Pie Kuon lies on the floor with her arms covering her head to show how her family hid during a battle between the Khmer Rouge and invading Vietnamese soldiers.

This time, they were allowed to stay in the camp. Crowded, infested with disease, littered with dying bodies, the Wans knew that they were lucky to be there. Four months later, their prayers were answered. The Wans were healthy enough to emigrate to Canada.

But still the whole family isn't together. Two daughters and a grandchild



Pie Lin (left) and Pie Chou (right) get some help with their homework from sister Pie Kuon. All three are students at Nationview Public School.

are living in St. Agathe, Quebec and the Wans have visited them there. Another two sons are living in Paris, France and are hoping to come to Canada soon. The Wans know that these children are secure in their safety.

But another daughter, her husband and their two children are surviving in a refugee camp in Vietnam. The Wans write to her and are desperately working to get the family out of the camp soon.

Ask the Wans what they like about Canada and watch their faces break out in wide grins.

Mie Hoa speaks one of the few English words he knows — "everything."

Don't bother asking them if they mind the cold, the snow or the strange food. They love Canada and they are grateful to Canadians. Blom says the response from people in the area has been overwhelming. The Wans have received baskets of clothes and presents. The congregation of St. James Church has offered to buy two hearing aides needed by Thou Sin Lo and Pie Lin.

At school, the girls are quickly making friends and learning how to play volleyball and other Canadian games. They eat a lot of ice cream.

Blom says Thou Sin Lo is a superb cook and Mie Hoa is a skilled mechanic. Although neither are working yet, Blom plans to advertise that the couple would like to do mending and tailoring.

Back in Cambodia, Pol Pot no longer rules the country. The Vietnamese invaded the blood-soaked land more than a year ago and installed a puppet regime headed by President Heng Samrin. But things are not much better.

Some 250,000 Cambodians are waiting to escape. Another 2.25 million will more than likely die in the next few months unless massive aid reaches them. That aid is being sucked into a quagmire of red tape.

For the Wans, life begins now. The horrors that their countrymen are facing, the horrors that they faced, cannot be described as anything else but a nightmare.

Winchester Press Feb. 7, 1980

Whatever you're up to drop it for O Canada

Canadians are being invited to delay their golf shots, put down their beer, drop whatever they're doing at noon local times on Tuesday to sing O Canada as it becomes the official national anthem.

But those who sing in English might be slightly confused because the English lyrics approved by Parliament are slightly different from the version sung most often in the past.

The new lyrics go like this:

O Canada! Our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

God keep our land glorious and free!

O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The first four lines of the new official anthem are identical to the version written by R. Stanley Weir in 1908 and now sung by most anglophones.

But two new phrases — "From far and wide" and "God keep our land" — in the new lyrics replace two of the five "stand on guard's" in the Weir version and shift one "O Canada."

Weir's version, composed to go with the music composed by Calixa Lavallee of Quebec in 1880, goes like this:

O Canada! Our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.

With glowing hearts we see thee rise,

The True North strong and free.
And stand on guard, O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

O Canada, glorious and free!
We stand on guard, we stand on guard for thee.

O Canada, we stand on guard for thee!

The main criticism of Weir's words has been that they ask Canadians to stand on guard too many times without telling them for exactly what.

The French lyrics have not presented the same problem. The new official version is that written by Sir Adolphe Basile Routhier in 1880 to accompany Lavallee's music:

O Canada! Terre de nos aïeux,
Ton front est ceint de fleurons glorieux!
Car ton bras sait porter l'épée,
Il sait porter la croix!
Ton histoire est une épopée
Des plus brillants exploits
Et ta valeur de foi trempée,
Protègera nos foyers et nos droits.

Ottawa Journal June 80