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Denver firm's mine poisons river

Golden Star operation spills 325 million gallons of cyanide waste in South America. **Page 3A**

Vietnam Babylift marks 20th anniversary



Young people evacuated from Vietnam in 1975 as orphaned infants in Operation Babylift say goodbye at the close of Reunion '95 at the YMCA Snow Mountain Ranch near Tabernash. "We came as individuals, we leave together," said one of the 50 participants Tuesday. "We'll always be together now." **Page 10A**

War orphans give thanks

Last to flee Saigon meet at Colorado reunion.

By Maureen Harrington
Denver Post Staff Writer

FRASER — They're closer to teenagers than to adults. Their hair is moussed. They're tattooed, pierced, hip.

On Saturday they were strangers. By yesterday they were hanging out, smoking, eyeing each other in the hot grip of youthful hormones.

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Vietnam War babies. Conceived in a nightmare, born into hell — their baby pictures are part of the war records. Their childhood snapshots are filled with ghosts.

This morning, they will memorialize their dead. They pray for those not so lucky — for children not chosen for adoption. They will remember those too weak to make it through the first months of

■ **INSIDE:** Fateful flight to U.S. killed children, volunteers. **9A**

dysentery and pneumonia. They wonder if anyone else in their birth family survives — brother, sister, mother, father.

They will mourn those they left behind and celebrate their own sweet fate.

One hundred and ten twentysomethings from across the U.S. have gathered at a YMCA camp near Winter Park. They are some of the 2,003 children flown out of Saigon by the U.S. military in April 1975 and adopted by American families.

These are the children of Operation Baby Lift, the last to escape before their country closed for two decades.



The Denver Post / Kent Meirels

SAVED: Alan Watkins was one of 2,000 babies from Vietnam who were airlifted to the United States as part of Operation Baby Lift.

Please see **BABIES** on 9A

Monday, August 21, 1995

THE DENVER POST

Rescued Saigon orphans give thanks at reunion

BABIES from Page 1A

All of them lived as infants in one of five Saigon orphanages started by Rosemary Taylor, an Australian ex-

Fateful flight to U.S. killed children, volunteers

By Maureen Harrington

Stark has no regrets about the six years he spent in

Colorado & The West



Dean Krakel/Rocky Mountain News

Participants in the reunion of young people airlifted as infants from Vietnam 20 years ago pluck ribbons of remembrance from a memorial wreath at YMCA's Snow Mountain Ranch.

Vietnamese airlifted to U.S. 20 years ago connect at reunion

Cribmates become soulmates

By James B. Meadow

Rocky Mountain News Staff Writer

TABERNASH — With lips that trembled, voices that broke and eyes that glistened, they bore witness to a curious-yet-comforting truth: 8,500 miles from their birthplace, they had finally come home.

Tuesday was the farewell segment of Reunion '95, the 20th anniversary of the arrival of the last infants airlifted from Vietnam in Operation Babylift, the innocent refugees from a war that few would ever understand. For four days, these 50 young men and women coalesced at the YMCA's Snow Mountain Ranch.

They had been among those helpless orphans — some sickly, some half-doomed by their mixed Amerasian blood, all imperiled by the war. They arrived to find adoptive parents

who loved them and cared for them and raised them.

Yet there had been something missing.

"There were things, we didn't know we felt; a lot of us didn't really know who we were," said Ethan Brady, 22, one of the reunion organizers.

"In the United States, Vietnam is a war, not a country," said Brady, one of those Vietnamese babies who arrived 20 years ago. "At this reunion, there was finally a place to be among those who have similar backgrounds."

Not surprisingly, the paths to enlightenment took diverse routes. One level was social — hiking, horseback riding and 3 a.m. star-gazing. But on another, more searingly personal level, the four days represented an epiphany.

"For me, this reunion has been very cathartic," said Kate Pickup, a 21-year-old senior at

Princeton University. "I grew up in South Florida, and there's not much of a Vietnamese community there. It wasn't until college that I thought of myself as Asian."

Helping Pickup were the many seminars and discussion groups the attendees held, discussing a litany of issues.

"Everything from what's it like to be part of a trans-racial adoption, to who *am* I, to did my birth mother abandon me, and if so, why?" said Brady, who became so emotional at the closing ceremonies, he had to stop his impromptu talk on several occasions to compose himself.

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One of the most intense gatherings occurred Monday night, when some of the men and women who had been back

See **BABIES** on 14A

utures of Vietnam tap wellspring of emotion at reunion

from 10A

n showed slides and
out what it was like to
their homeland. Perhaps
ceived more rant atten

researching Catholic schools and
orphanges in her homeland.
Medinger ran into a nun who
"knew my mother and recognized
me because I looked just my moth-
er did when she was my age."

"That whole experience
brought a sense of peace and com-
pleteness to me that I can't really
describe," said Medinger. Then
she added, "But this reunion has
been like that also. It's like being

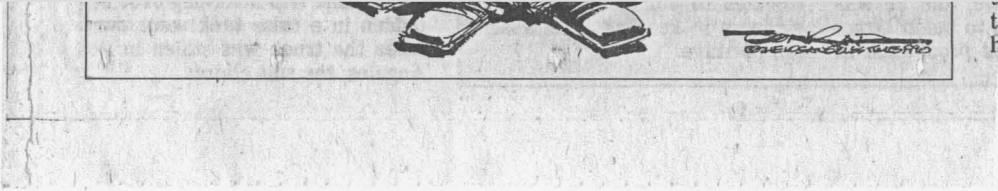
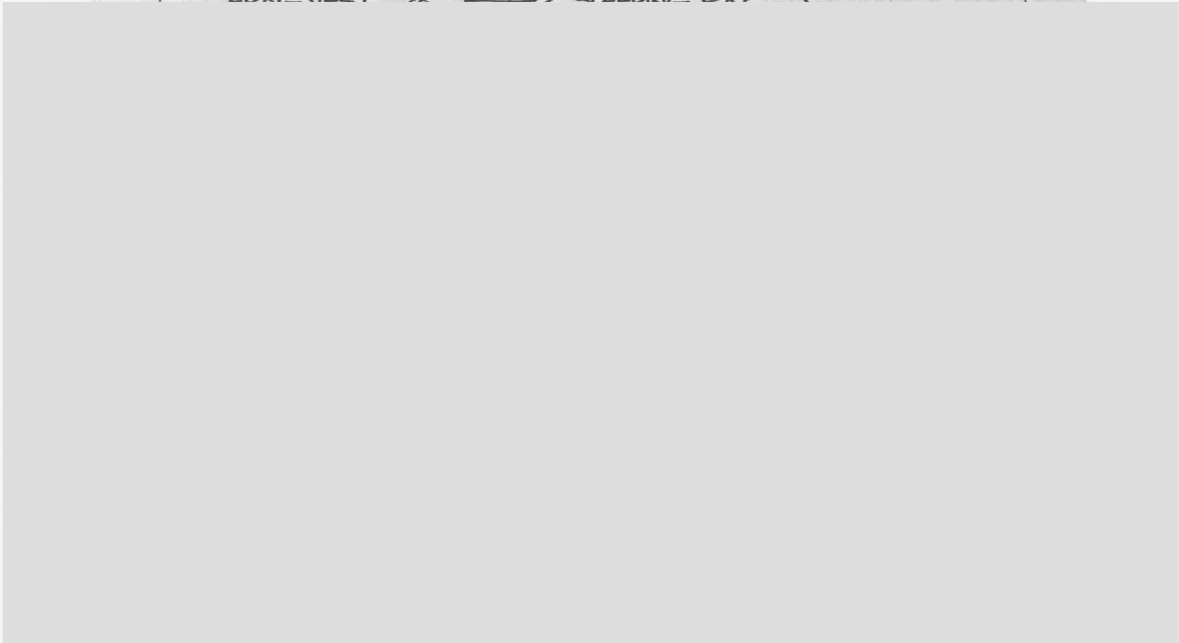
a lot of questions," said 20-year-
old Tim Hoye. "But we leave with
answers. We leave as true friends.
We leave as brothers and sisters."
Or something even deeper.

why many of the participants
weren't willing to wait 10 more
years before the next reunion.
"Our looks, our backgrounds,
the prejudices we've faced

Tom Gavin's column
and Fridays

...S. the ...

EDAC VEST M-16 RIFLE SHOVEL
SLEEPING BAG



Denver Post
1990

Inquiry launched anew into reports of live Boulder woman, others seek Pentagon action

By Kit Miniclier
Denver Post Staff Writer

A new congressional inquiry is under way into persistent reports that American POWs are still being held in Southeast Asia 17 years after the last GIs were pulled out.

"This is a very unpredictable thing. We could be chasing fairy tales, or we could be onto an interesting story," said Don Dennis, of



forensic anthropologist Michael Charney of Fort Collins compared photographs of a captured airman taken by a Soviet film crew in Vietnam with other photographs of Grace and concluded the Soviet pictures show Grace.

Charney said the prisoner's receding hairline compares favorably with Grace's hairline.

There is "little doubt that the

Asked whether the Pentagon believes there still are POWs being held against their will in Vietnam, Lundquist said: "We are unable to prove any Americans are being held against their will in Indochina today," and "we are unable to prove that there aren't any.

"As long as we continue to receive reports, we will continue to investigate those with highest pri-



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reports of live POWs

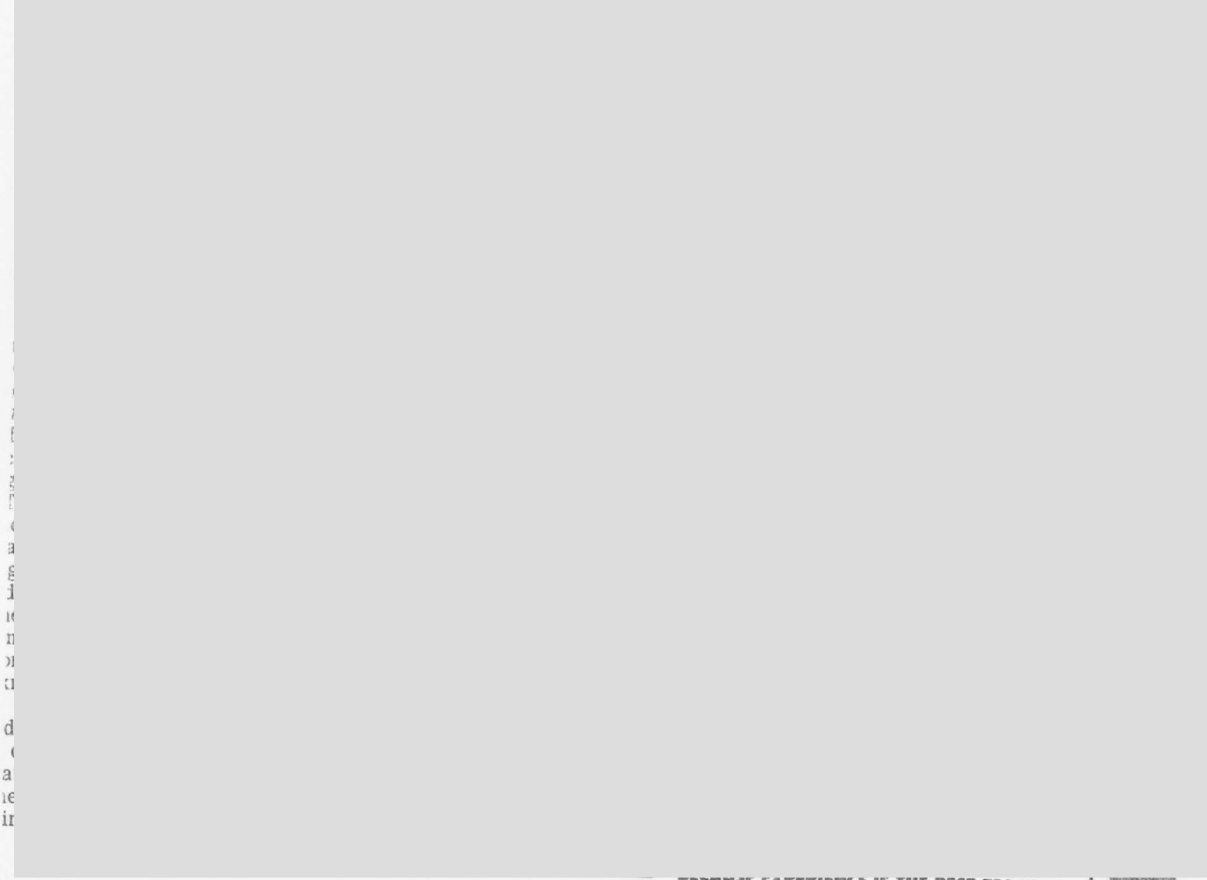
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...THE BEST TEACHER.

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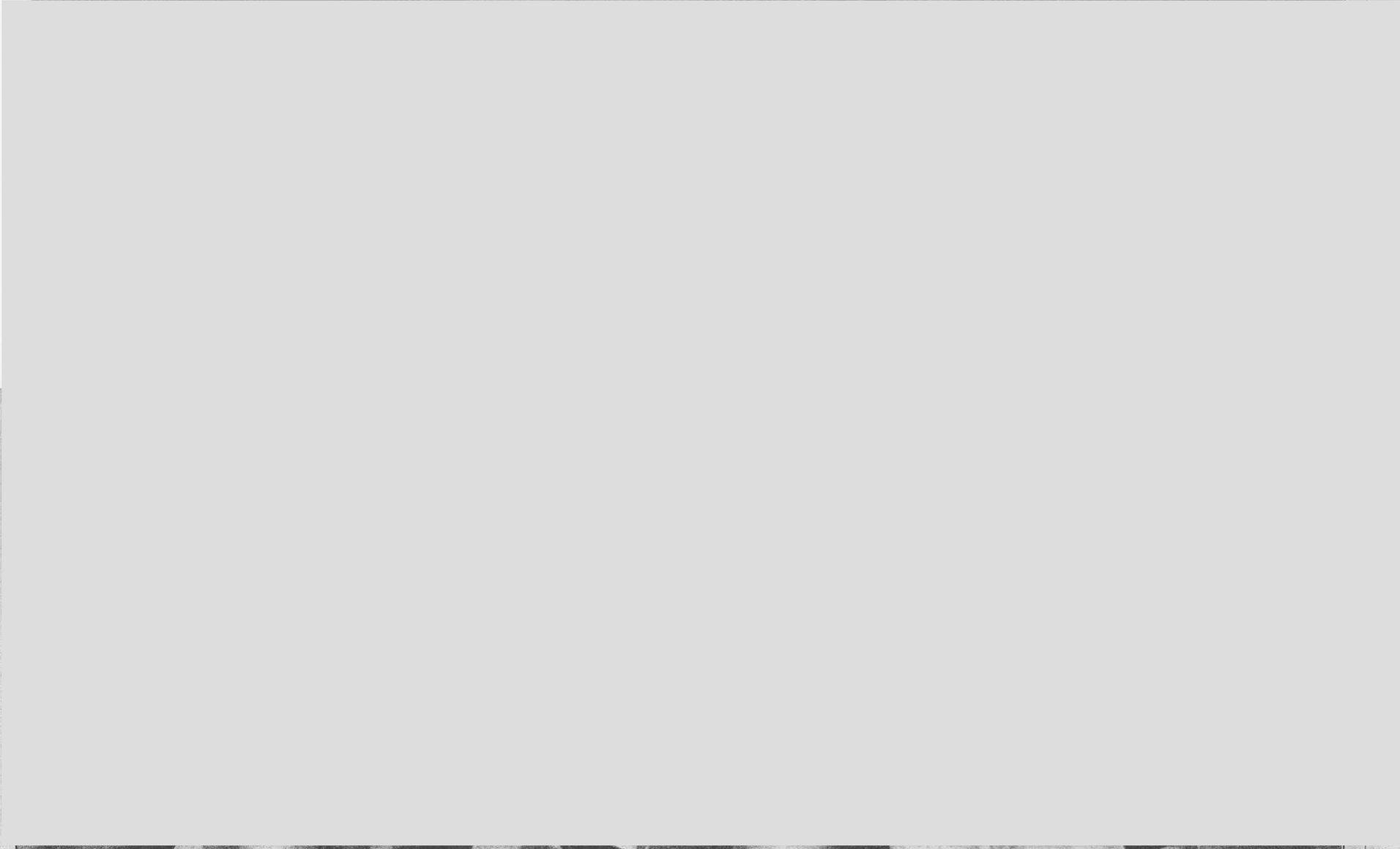
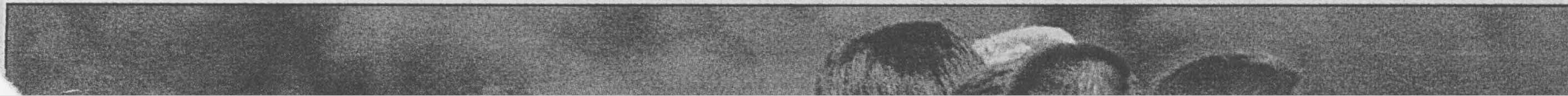
The Denver Post / Kent Meireis

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Please see **BABIES** on 9A

Denver Post
8/21/95

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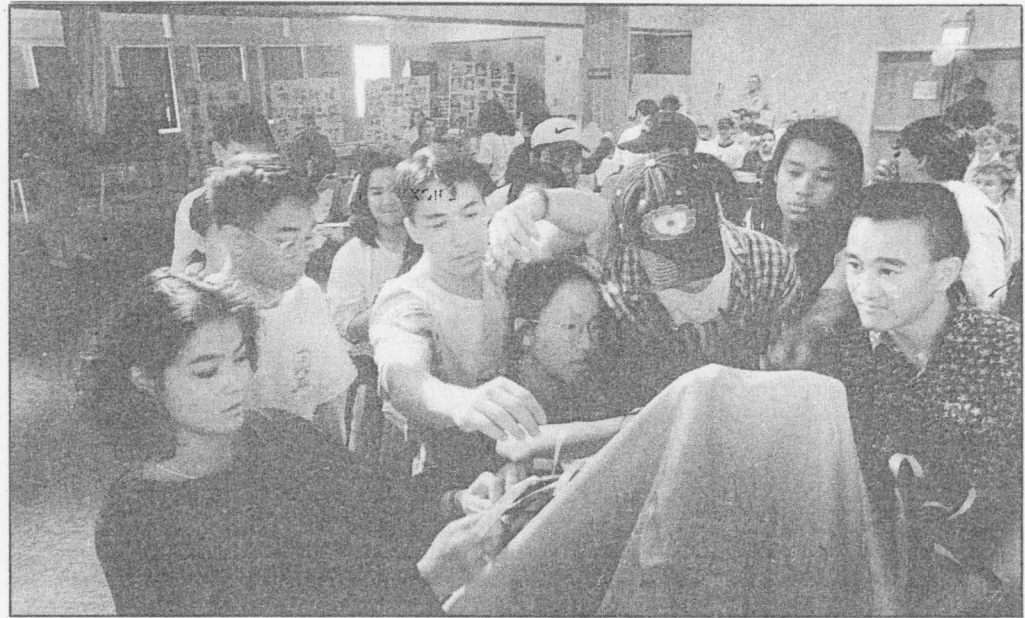


Dean Krakel/Rocky Mountain News

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Rocky Mountain News 8/23/95

Colorado & The West



Dean Krakel/Rocky Mountain News

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See **BABIES** on 14A

**Fort Collins women
rescued 300 infants
as Saigon fell**

**Viet babylift
saved 'child
of destiny'**

By Karen Abbott

Rocky Mountain News Staff Writer

Twenty years ago, Jennifer Lin Bergner was one of the thousands of babies packed three to a cardboard box and airlifted out of Saigon as Vietnam fell to the Communists.

Soon, the 20-year-old Denver woman with a past lost in Vietnam will be teaching classrooms of American children. Bergner, a star athlete when she attended Thomas Jefferson High School, is studying psychology and education at the University of Colorado in Boulder.

INSIDE

■ Excerpts from the book *This Must Be My Brother*/17A
■ Vietnamese celebrate victory/29A

In early April 1975, just three weeks before the last U.S. helicopters left the rooftop of the Saigon embassy, the baby now known as Jennifer Bergner and 299 other infants were rescued by two women who now live in Colorado.

The Viet Cong had reached the suburbs of Saigon and bombs were falling when Bergner was flown to the United States in a frantically assembled planeload of 300 babies.

"Oh, plenty of time," LeAnn Thieman said recently, recalling the exhausting, terrifying journey she spent feeding, diapering, burping and rocking the babies.

Thieman and her friend, Carol Dey, then young mothers from the Midwest, had never dreamed they would walk into a wartorn nation halfway around the world when they volunteered to work for Friends of the Children of Vietnam.

The Denver-based agency flew them to Saigon — with assurances from the State Department that they would be safe — to escort a half-dozen babies back to the U.S., where families waited to adopt them.

But war conditions abruptly worsened, and Iowa mothers suddenly found themselves swept up in world history. This year, they published a book on their unexpected adventure, *This Must Be My Brother* (Victor Books) that includes a photograph of Jennifer as a fragile, 7-month-old with her head shaved because of grave illness.



Ken Papaleo/Rocky Mountain News



JENNIFER LIN BERGNER was airlifted as an infant from Saigon during the city's death throes in 1975. Now, she is a student at the University of Colorado. Photo at left, showing Bergner as a baby, appears in *This Must Be My Brother*, a book by LeAnn Thieman and Carol Dey. They're the Colorado women who helped rescue her.

Thieman and Dey now live in Fort Collins, less than a two-hour drive from the university where Bergner is preparing for her teaching career. She hasn't seen them since the airlift, which she doesn't remember. But she read their book in one night. "It was my past," she said.

The airlift not only changed Jennifer's destiny, it changed the lives of Dey and Thieman, who struggled to fight their own fears that they would be killed and never return to their children in Iowa.

"The book for me is symbolic of growth within myself and how my life has been," said Dey, "That is, to be sometimes fearful about stepping forward, and then being able to muster the courage to do what I think is right

— and the strength that comes from that." The two women had to be very strong. They had to watch mothers who had loved and cared for their tiny babies give them up so they could have better lives. They had to watch as other infants were left behind because they were too ill to make the trip. They had to listen to frightening gunfire as they cared for hundreds of crying babies in the stifling tropical heat. Thieman became ill in Saigon.

They were terrified when an airplane carrying babies exploded on takeoff, killing many of the infants and the escorting adults on board. No one knew what had caused the explosion.

See **RESCUED** on

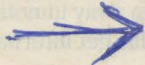


ROGER DONG

▶ SPIRITED TO SAFETY

Vietnamese orphans rescued in 1975 by Operation Babylift recall the past—and dream of the future.

40



EVERETT COLLECTION



TONY KORODOV/SYGMA

STARS AND STRIPES

▼ Actress Paula Korologos's enthusiasm never flags for her role as a right-winger on *Murphy Brown*. 106



SAM JONES

singer **Victoria Williams** is busy playing to a whole new world of fans

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Tree artists **Skip** and **Chris Roth** arbor a passion for their unusual wood sculptures

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Regulatory gadfly **Philip Howard** pleads for relief from burdensome rules in a surprise best-seller, *The Death of Common Sense*

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Got a sophisticated new computer program? It may have been tested by 9-year-old wunderkind **Adam Baratz**

TRIBUTE • 95

Beloved balladeer-actor **Burl Ives**, who died on

Good Friday at 85, beguiled children with "The Blue Tail Fly" and riveted adults with his rendition of Big Daddy in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

COUPLES • 99

Their careers cover both ends of the clock, and *The Tonight Show*'s new bandleader **Kevin Eubanks** and *Days of Our Lives* star **Tammy Townsend** are cuddling most hours in between

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In Friendsville, Md., **Spencer R. Schlosnagle** is happily serving his fifth term as mayor—despite numerous arrests for indecent exposure

ON THE MOVE • 106

She grew up romping in the halls of the Nixon White House; now **Paula Korologos** is making waves as *Murphy Brown*'s resident Republican

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TO A NEW HOME

Twenty years later, Vietnam's Babylift orphans come of age

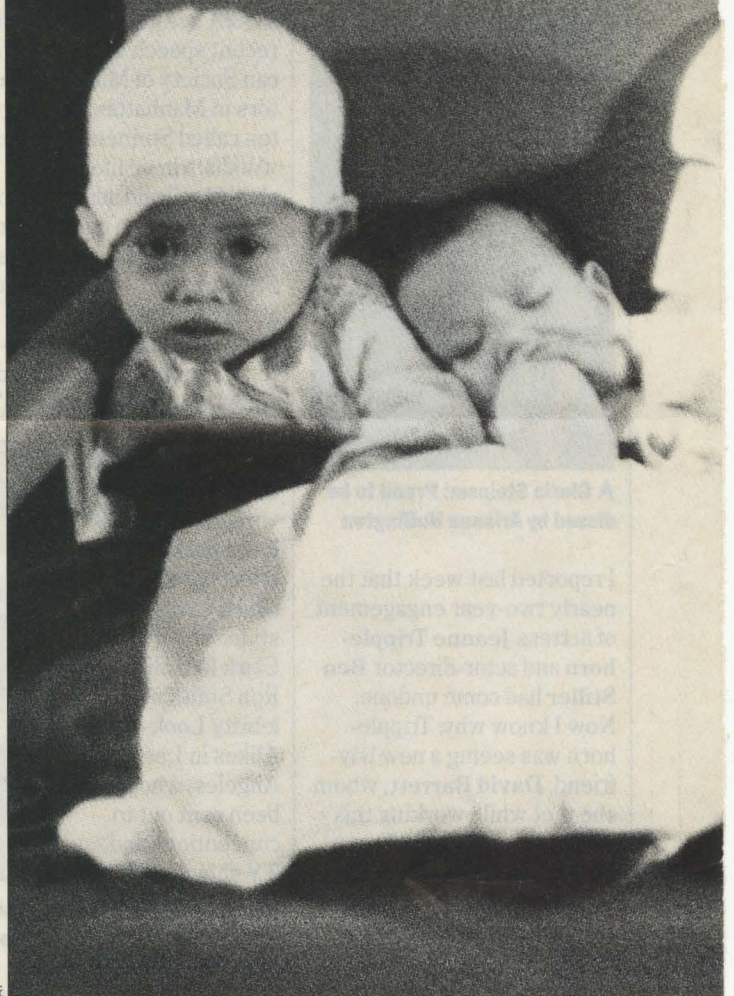
The C5-A transport carrying 228 Vietnamese orphans was just 12 minutes into its flight from Tan Son Nhut Air Base near Saigon to Travis Air Force Base in California when something went terribly wrong. "There was this loud explosion," recalls Dr. Meritt Stark, a retired pediatrician living in Asheville, N.C., of the April 4, 1975, flight. "I thought we had been hit by a surface-to-air missile." What he could not see from his position on the upper deck was that the rear cargo door had burst open, damaging the plane's rudder and stabilizer and causing a sudden decompression in the plane's interior. Air Force Capt. Dennis Traynor turned the crippled plane back toward Saigon and managed a crash landing in a rice paddy. The plane broke apart on impact; although 176 survived, the bodies of 49 adults and 78 Vietnamese orphans lay strewn about the site.

The crash was yet another calamity for children—many of them offspring of U.S. servicemen—whose lives were already freighted with tragedy. But it was also the beginning of an extraordinary moment of hope. As North Vietnamese forces closed in on Saigon—soon to be renamed Ho Chi Minh City—the U.S. scrambled to evacuate its remaining 7,000 soldiers, diplomats and civilians, and President Gerald Ford sponsored one last effort on behalf of Vietnam War orphans under the care of relief agencies. From April 3 to April 19, Operation Babylift, the largest such rescue effort in history, flew 2,003 children, including the survivors of the April 4 crash, to new homes in the U.S.; another 1,300 went to Britain, France, Germany, Canada, Australia and Scandinavia. Recalls lawyer Ross Meador, 40, who helped run an orphanage near Saigon for the Denver-based Friends of Children of Vietnam (FCVN): "People were desperate to get children out."

For the children of Operation Babylift, being given over to adoptive families in the West represented an unimaginable change of fortune. The transition has not always gone smoothly. According to FCVN executive director Cheryl Markson, about a quarter of the children airlifted to the U.S. have had adjustment problems. Yet most of them are now productive young adults, attending college, pursuing careers, starting families of their own. With the Vietnam War under renewed scrutiny 20 years after the fall of Saigon, Operation Babylift stands out as a victory. As the stories on the following pages attest, it provided a future for children for whom hope appeared lost. ➤

➤ In April 1975, as the North Vietnamese closed in on Saigon, relief workers hurried children aboard an American plane.

These infants in the C5-A flight deck were among the 150 orphans who survived the April 1975 crash.



THE FALL OF SAIGON

UTTER CHAOS

Panic reigned in final hours

By George Esper
The Associated Press

HO CHI MINH CITY, Vietnam — "Finis! Finis!" the South Vietnamese police officer yelled, his arms flailing wildly, his eyes crazed with fear. He raised his pistol to his head and pulled the trigger.

As he lay mortally wounded in the downtown Saigon square, hundreds of his comrades stripped off their uniforms in a desperate attempt to blend in with their victorious northern Communist foes.

By then, the sole remaining American allies — 11 Marines — already had scrambled aboard the final helicopter leaving the besieged U.S. Embassy.

Twenty years ago, on April 30, 1975, a dispirited South Vietnam surrendered to North Vietnam, its lifeline of American blood dried up, its supporting U.S. war machine turned off.

The U.S. toll: 58,153 dead. The Vietnamese toll: 1.1 million Communist fighters, 223,748 South Vietnamese soldiers and nearly 2 million civilians, according to Vietnam's official casualty report, which was released

April 3.

The end came in chaos — with South Vietnamese clawing frantically at the U.S. Embassy's chain-link gate, thrusting their babies at American strangers with bags of gems and gold, desperately trying to bully or bribe their way onto the departing helicopters.

Any plans for an orderly evacuation collapsed in panic and bedlam, and hundreds of Vietnamese allies promised safe passage were left behind.

"It still leaves a bad taste in my mouth 20 years later," says Col. Harry G. Summers Jr., then an American negotiator in Saigon. "It was just disgraceful. It was the Vietnam War in microcosm. Good intentions but fatally flawed execution. The whole thing was just tragedy working itself out."

Rockets rained down

The beginning of the end came with the dawn of April 29.

For more than three hours, from 4:10 a.m. to 7:15 a.m., North Vietnamese gunners rained rockets and

Please see SAIGON on 27A



Associated Press / Neil Ulevich

DESPERATE: Mobs of South Vietnamese try to scale the 14-foot wall of the U.S. Embassy in Saigon, trying to reach the evacuation helicopters as the last Americans leave Vietnam on April 29, 1975.

Viets slowly opens to world

Bicycle Village *plus fitness*

giganti

LOOK FOR YOU

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IN TODAY'S
PAGES 23

TO A NEW HOME

Twenty years later, Vietnam's Babylift orphans come of age

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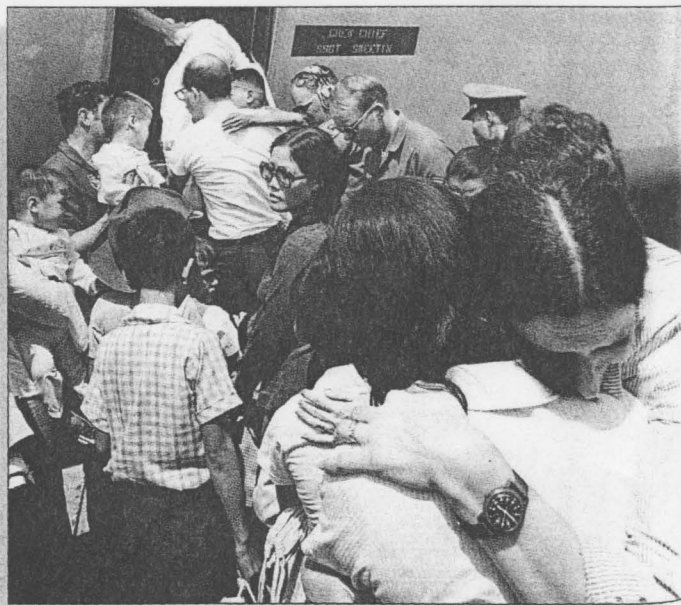
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*Surprised
if so few*

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Colorado & The West



Dean Krakel/Rocky Mountain News

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See **BABIES** on 14A

Pictures of Vietnam tap wellspring of emotion at reunion

BABIES from 10A

researching Catholic schools and

"That whole experience

a lot of questions," said 20-year-old



Over the past three years, Binh Nguyen Rybacki (far left) has spent only two hours with her own relatives in Vietnam, preferring to devote her time to the hundreds of Vietnamese children without families, such as these toddlers at a typical state-run orphanage in suburban Hanoi.

Raina Zeeh

Champion for “the dust of life”

Vietnam expatriate
adopts orphanage
in former homeland

By Michelle Mahoney



was on another kind of mission as she swept through the Vietnamese shopping district on South Federal Boulevard.

Dressed in stylish wide-leg jeans, leotard, silk scarf and black linen jacket, Rybacki also wore a broad smile that conveys both confidence and her take-no-excuses determination. In less than an hour, she whipped through the business of applying for a visa and getting

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Binh Nguyen was an 18-year-old college student when she fled Saigon, just hours before the South Vietnamese capital fell to communist troops from the north.

She took along a pair of yellow sandals but left behind a sweetheart without a goodbye.



Nguyen Ngoc Anh Dung

turn to Vietnam.

Rybacki easily alternates between fluent English and the clipped consonants and elongated vowel sounds of Vietnamese. In Vietnam, her knowledge of the language has opened doors for her humanitarian efforts. But it hasn't shielded her from some of the hazards

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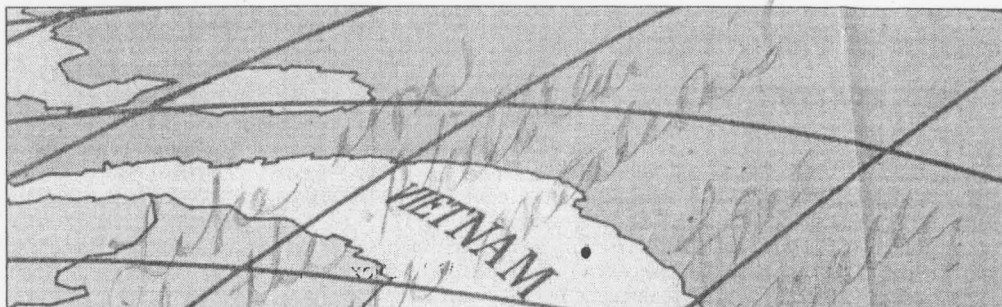
Let's smash the myths of Vietnam war



TONY
SNOW

fight, which means that now, on the

The Vietnam War marked the first time in American history that we waged war not only against a foreign enemy, but against ourselves. Truth was the first casualty of that internecine



fact instead.

This verbal sleight of hand spared the presidents the trouble of having to seek a congressional declaration of

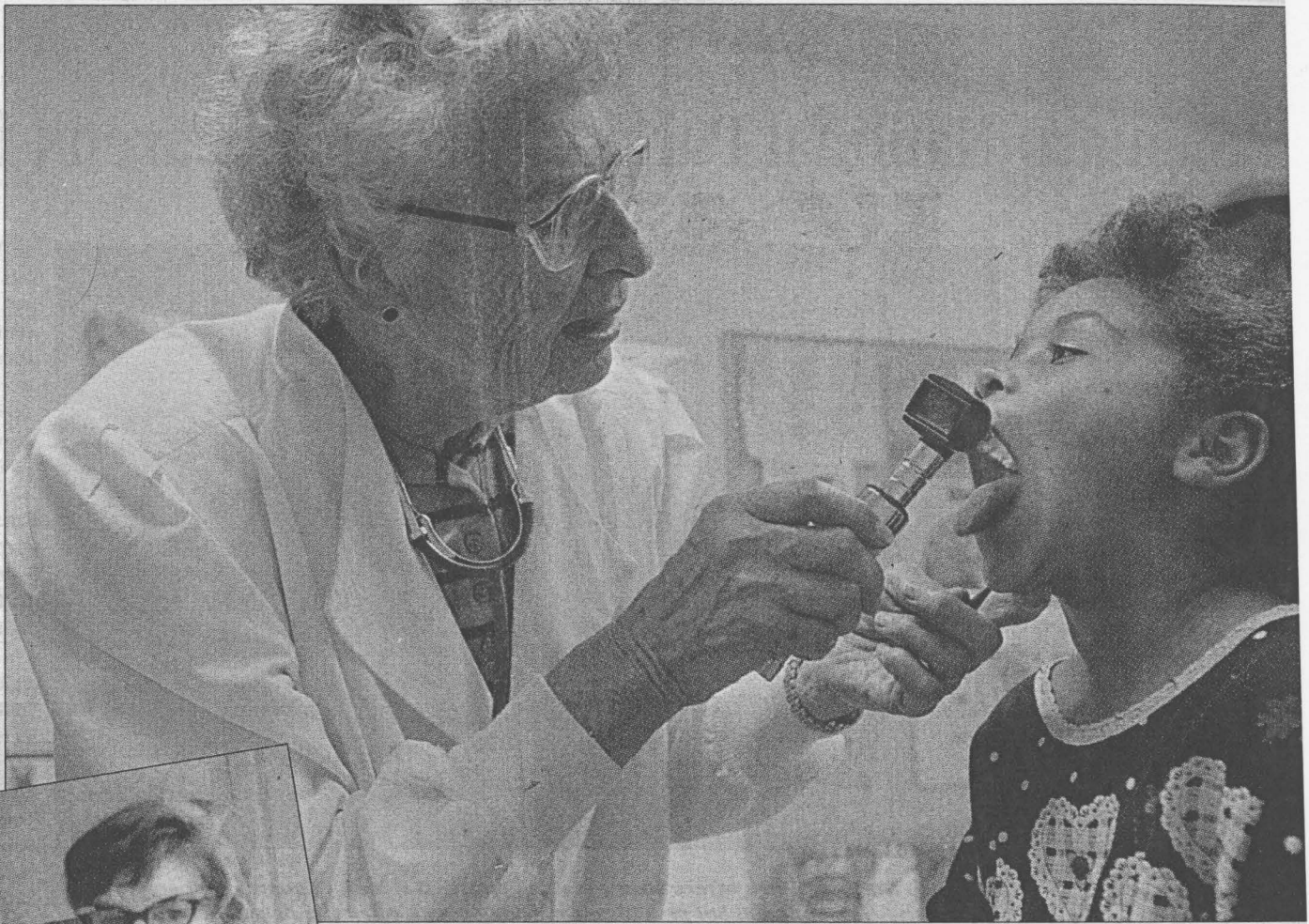
which I occasionally was one — began their opposition to the war in earnestness and ended it in fecklessness.

an reasonable doubt that the Vietcong were peddling death and misery — and yet, left-wing commentators refused to acknowledge the fact.

Tony Snow writes for *Creators Syndicate*, 5777 W. Century, Suite 700, Los Angeles, Calif. 90045.

At 78, Lillian Turner has a lifetime of tales to tell. She started her medical career with the Japanese invasion force that landed on Iwo Jima in 1945, spent years in Vietnam and in various spots around the world. Now at an age when most people are retired, she's providing medical care to a tiny town of 100 in Hanna, Wyo.

by Lee Olson



Above, Lillian Turner, 78, checks the throat of Jennifer Smith, 7. Left, two decades earlier, Turner holds a young napalm victim of the Vietnam War.



Special to The Post / Lee Olson

WAR STORIES

NEARLY three decades ago I spent eight days in South Vietnam. I'd been on a press tour of India for The Denver Post and made a stop in Saigon on the way home to Colorado in November 1967.

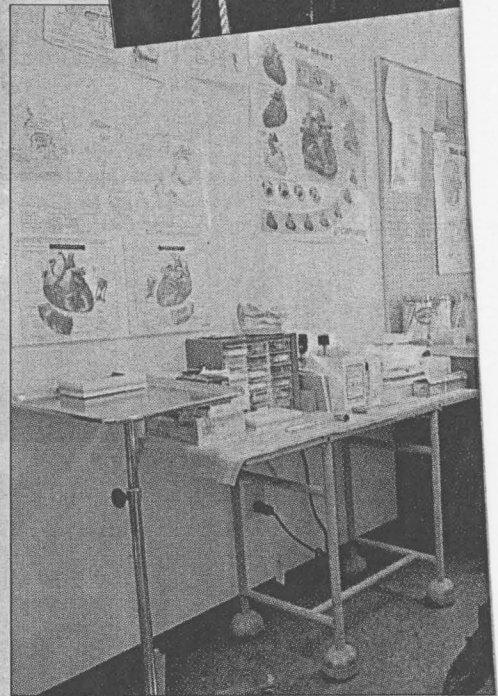
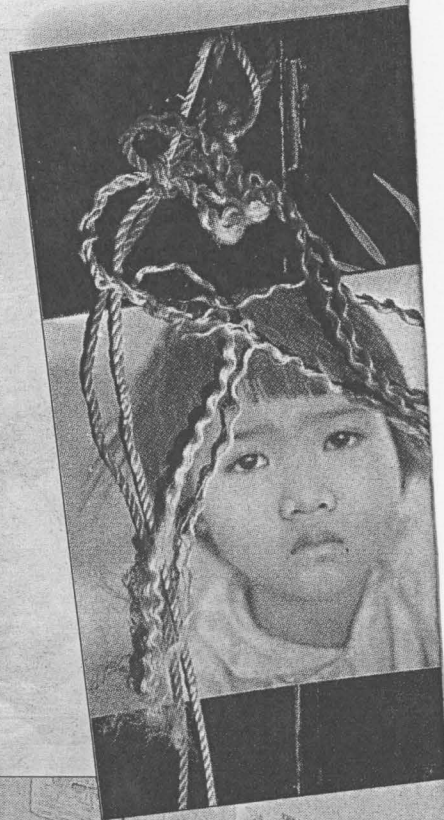
It was a trip I'll never forget. The sights and sounds of Southeast Asia, the thump of mortars, the nightly flares over the surrounding jungle and the tensions of civil war still are fresh in my memory.

I flew out to the carrier Oriskanyu for a wonderful story: an interview with a Colorado fighter squadron that had engaged in a rare aerial dogfight and had shot down a MiG fighter over Hanoi. I was in a Jeep accident in Da Nang that resulted in a three-hour stand-off with a hostile crowd. It took the Shore Patrol to rescue us. Both were memorable events.

But with the passage of time the image that stayed with me is a picture I took at the Da Nang Medical Center. This was a civilian hospital staffed by American volunteers paid by the U.S. Public Health Service under President Kennedy's "Hands Across the Sea" program of peaceful aid.

The center's burn ward was a gloomy place, but I took a photo of a nurse from Walden, Colo., holding on her lap a child who had been severely burned by napalm. The sincerity of the picture seemed to sum up the hopes that Americans still had for Vietnam in 1967.

In the hurry of journalism, I wrote the hospital story and went on. But earlier this year I came across that picture and wondered what had happened to the woman. A little research turned up Lillian Turner, now



Turner comforts Amanda Tugya during a visit

Denver Post
8/16/96

Vietnamese orphans

'Angel of Saigon' saved 200 kids at war's end

EDITOR'S NOTE — She was called the Angel of Saigon, a petite American woman who arranged for more than 200 orphans to be airlifted out of South Vietnam in 1975 as the Communist forces were closing in. The children found a new life in the United States, but as adults they still haven't forgotten "Miss Betty."

By James L. Eng
The Associated Press

SEATTLE — The children of Vietnam's An Lac orphanage are men and women now, scars slowly fading more than two decades after their war ended.

Rescued as babies from an uncertain fate in war-torn Saigon, adopted by American families and schooled in U.S. colleges and universities, they have gone on to share in the American dream. Many now have families of their own.

But they do not forget the petite, dark-haired American woman who gave them a second chance. Nor has she forgotten them.

She is Betty Tisdale, but the children of An Lac knew her as Miss Betty or Miss Sweet. Some called her the Angel of Saigon.

Tisdale raised money for and helped run the orphanage. She scrubbed floors, changed diapers and taught English to hundreds of abandoned or orphaned babies.

When the North Vietnamese army closed in on Saigon in 1975, she organized an airlift of more than 200 An Lac orphans to the United States, where all were adopted by American families. Tisdale and her then-husband, Army doctor Patrick Tisdale, adopted five of the children themselves.

"It became my life. I just felt I was meant to do this," Tisdale said in a recent interview at her home in Seattle's Queen Anne neighborhood, where she has lived since 1982.

"The Vietnamese people that came here are still part of my life. The ones that I left behind are still part of my life. And my children. I can't imagine what life would be without them."

The mission that would take Tisdale half a world away began in the late 1950s, when she read a book about Dr. Tom Dooley, a U.S. Navy lieutenant who devoted much of his life to helping the sick and poor of Southeast Asia

and New Year's holidays — visiting "An Lac." She saved money for the trips by skimping on lunch — "Howard Johnson's had the best hot dogs for 30 cents" — and buying her clothes at discount stores. She stayed in Javits' office after hours to use the office typewriter.

By the early 1970s, the orphanage had added washing machines and dryers, a new kitchen, indoor showers, a station wagon and bicycles that made it easier for the children to attend school.

In the spring of 1975, when bombings were routine and the fall of Saigon was imminent, Tisdale returned to An Lac one last time

with actress Ina Balin, intent on rescuing all of the approximately 400 orphans then at An Lac.

They persuaded Vietnamese government officials to allow an airlift of all the children to the United States. But at the last moment, trying to avert pandemonium, the government decreed that only children under 10 could leave.

Working for three days straight with little sleep, Tisdale and Balin rejiggered the list and drafted identification papers to comply with the ultimatum — a task complicated by the fact that none of the children had birth certificates. Some of their documents showed

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NO INTEREST

FOR 6 MONTHS ON ALL SO

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Dr

recall U.S. rescuer

various older children to be 8 or 9, though one reportedly began shaving the next year. As the children were loaded onto Air Force planes — the babies were placed in boxes

fore South Vietnam fell to the Communists — Tisdale flew to Guam and arranged for Madame Ngai and her two assistants to come to the United States. Ngai

adopted daughter Kim returned to Vietnam and visited the old An Lac building, which had been converted into low-income housing. When word got around that Miss