

Faculty Wife's Role Leads Her to Saigon

Family adjusts to life with servants but minus ice cubes, window glass

By Jane Mary Farley
of the Journal Staff

BEING a faculty wife sounds like a pretty grim and gloomy life. Conversations, lectures and president's teas.

But for the last year and a half, Mrs. Ralph Struckler, wife of a Michigan State professor, has been keeping house behind enemy's cutting, managing three foreign speaking servants, boiling every ounce of drinking water and throwing recipients for as many as 250 government officials at a time.

As a faculty wife in the "forbidden" outpost of Saigon where her husband headed a technical assistance course of political scientists, she learned to cook birds' nest soup and shark's fin, whisked liquids instead of cobwebs from the corners of her big, furnished house, taught English to her French and Vietnamese neighbors and helped found the country's new International Women's club.

Former Milwaukeean

Last week, after taking the long way home through the middle east and Europe, the former Milwaukeean and their two youngsters, Gary, 7, and Sandy, 4, visited at the homes of their families, Mrs. Harry Zimbrinsky, 2640 N. 37th st., and Dr. and Mrs. Robert H. Struckler, 2277 N. 44th st.

Twelve-year-old Sandy returned down in Saigon in June, 1955, when the Strucklers substituted their new home in East Lansing, Mich., and set off on their return.

"We wouldn't go without the children. And I didn't want Ralph to go without me," said the vivacious Mrs. Struckler. "So we decided we would all go together." Naturally disliked them, she admitted, but health problems worried them even more.

"We all had about 15 shots apiece before we left and took lots of antibiotics with us," she explained.

Found Riots, Bombs

When she landed quiet in the city. But in the country itself the Strucklers found riots and bombings still making in the streets.

"It was kinda scary," young Gary admitted. "One of our suitcases got stopped by half." The family was startled by travel with unaccompanied servants rolled up and down

found it easy to slip into the ways of another country. Before she knew it, the housemaker was installed in a big home, with a living room large enough for receipts of 200, 30 foot mileage and three servants.

No Windows, Zippers

"Actually it sounds much more significant than it was," she hurried on to point out. It had no windows, no electricity, few refrigeration facilities. Instead of glass, windows were simply covered with grill-work. Only a few of the American families had screens.

Tile floors had to be scrubbed down each day because of the heat and mold. Shoes could turn moldy overnight. In the heat, everyone changed clothes several times a day and hurried to take 1:30 naps to escape the hottest hours. Clothes had to be fastened without zippers, which rusted quickly. Elastic in bathing suits rotted readily.

Mrs. Struckler found that she "had a cook like did nothing but cook, a boy who did the laundry and served, and an 'uncle' named Nam who took care of the children and scrubbed the bathroom floors every day. But you need that kind of help because you have perhaps 200 people when you give a cocktail party or reception."

"And your servants have servants, too. Right now I'm concerned," she grinned. "After having three servants for 24 hours a day, I don't know how I'll ever go back to having a girl come in three times a week."

Language a Barrier

Before long Gary was enrolled in an American school; Sandy went to a French primary school and the Strucklers found themselves caught in a



Little Sandy Struckler, 4, dressed in a typical Vietnamese costume, showed off a curvy she learned at a French nursery school in Saigon. The youngster, her brother Gary, 7, and her parents Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Struckler, former Milwaukeeans, visited in Milwaukee recently after 18 months of adventures in Vietnam where Struckler, a Michigan State professor, headed a technical assistance team of political scientists.

—Journal Staff

in or any previous teaching experience, the young woman began teaching her neighbors English. In exchange, they schooled her in French and Vietnamese.

Breaks the Ice

At the very first dinner party for the single assistants in the language of the country helped break the last remaining ice.

"They were so pleased and thrilled when anyone takes the time and trouble to learn," she observed. "And they're all just dying to learn English."

But her tasks with the new language necessaries got her into trouble, too, she admitted.

"I'll never forget the day I told the cook we were having 'breads' or 30 for dinner when I actually meant 'fruit' or 12. She was frantically scurrying around trying to get ready for a real mob," she chuckled.

As Mrs. Struckler and the 500 spoken Vietnamese women established better communications, she began to find out what doesn't appear different when they are like American women in many ways. They gossip, and talk about how to look to please their husbands and worry about their weight.

Unfortunately, she added, only about 15% of the women can read or write. Many of the peasant women still work in the fields and on roads or do cooler labor. Others who are out of the laboring class simply see to running their families and managing their servants. Few of them, she said, have gone on to school, and those usually attend school outside the country.

More Pleasant Careers

For the most part, they lead quiet, serene and sheltered lives. Often, Mrs. Struckler noted, diplomats and other government officials turned up at the round of parties along with the women that their wives were "too fatigued" or "too busy outside."

"I really think they stayed home because they were tired and afraid," admitted Mrs. Struckler. "I noticed that after my friends learned some English and could carry on a conversation, they didn't miss a single party."

Little by little, she noticed, Vietnamese women seem to be looking toward careers.

"For instance, the president's sister, Madame Ngo Dinh Nhu, is a member of the general assembly, first lady for the president and she has learned English on her own in

strange dishes and an gracefully in the slow, oriental slouch and trousers that are the tradition of the country, the Vietnamese women, she noticed, were all curious about her own way of Western life.

Fascinated by tales of refrigerators, toasters and candy is

were clicking. "They were undoubtedly excited to have a nice nice, once out a real cocoon cake," she laughed.

During her stay, Mrs. Struckler and three other women helped organize the Vietnam International Women's club.

Times to page 14.

Richard Rich

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Busset Terra Atenead

to have been just one of another day, whisked inland instead of outside from the corners of her big, borrowed bonnet, taught English to her French and Vietnamese neighbors and helped found the country's new International Women's club.

Former Milwaukeeans

Last week, after taking the long way home through the middle east and Europe, the former Milwaukeeans and their two youngsters, Gary, 7, and Sandy, 4, visited at the homes of their families. Mrs. Harry Zimolsky, 2045 N. 27th st., and Dr. and Mrs. Robert H. Swackler, 2377 N. 48th st.

Thomas had hardly returned down in Saigon in June, 1955, when the Swacklers sublet their new home in East Lansing, Mich., and set off on their way.

"We wouldn't go without the children. And I didn't want Joseph to go without me," said the vivacious Mrs. Swackler. "So we decided we would all go together." Newsweek disturbed them, she admitted, but health problems worried them even more.

"We all had about 15 shots apiece before we left and took pills of medicines with us," she explained.

Found Riots, Bombs

Vietnam seemed quiet in the west. But in the country itself the Swacklers found riots and bombings still volleying in the streets.

"It was kinda scary," young Gary admitted. "One of our windows got ripped in half." The family was cautioned to travel with automobile windows rolled up and doors locked. A nurse kept them close each evening.

"But it was when we slept under mosquito nets and saw things on the ceiling that scared me most," Sandy said, and Mrs. Swackler wept.

Despite night bombings and grenades, limited water supply and other strange and dangerous circumstances, the family

the recipients of 200, 20 foot ceilings and three servants.

No Windows, Zippers

"Actually it sounds much more magnificent than it was," she hurried on to point out. It had no broiler, no dishwasher, few refrigeration facilities. Instead of glass windows were simply covered with grill-work. Only a few of the American families had screens.

The floors had to be scrubbed down each day because of the heat and mold. Shoes could turn ruddy overnight. In the heat, everyone changed clothes several times a day and learned to take 100 sestas to escape the hottest hours. Clothes had to be fastened without zippers, which rusted quickly. Elastic in bathing suits rotted rapidly.

Mrs. Swackler found that she "had a cook who did nothing but cook, a boy who did the ironing and mended, and an 'amao' named Nain who took care of the children and scrubbed the bedrooms floors every day. But you need that kind of help because you have perhaps 250 people when you give a cocktail party or reception."

"And your servants have servants, too. Right now I'm concerned," she grinned, "after having three servants for 24 hours a day, I don't know how I'll ever go back to having a girl come in three hours a week!"

Language & Barrier

Before long, Gary was enrolled in an American school. Sandy went to a French elementary school and the Swacklers found themselves caught in a balance and never-ending round of favorites, part of the diplomatic and traditional protocol.

"Experiments were devised as well as three cocktail parties or receptions and then to an 800 dinner party," she said.

According to the Milwaukee woman, the most frustrating barrier she found between



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—Associated Press

east and west was language. Along with the confusion of cups, all her hot water was in French, a dispirited 12-carbon drinking water faucet and radiator, Mrs. Swackler went to Vietnam equipped with one more valuable thing, a year's study of colloquial French.

She also knew the "vocabulary

even her 6 hours because I didn't know the native language." It was hard to negotiate French and Vietnamese spelling services with her language and slothful French she admitted, but she realized at her first dinner party she

would have to learn the language is serious. "You can sit and smile at a dinner party. But you can do just what we do: eventually get home to my morning," she said.

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A Real Man—She Craves

As Mrs. Swackler and the soft-spoken Vietnamese women established better communication, she began to find out "that despite apparent differences they are just like American women in many ways. They gossip, and talk about how to look to please their husbands and worry about their weight."

Unfortunately, she added, only about 15% of the women can read or write. Many of the peasant women still work in the fields and on roads or do coolie labor. Others who are out of the laboring class simply see to tending their families and managing their accounts. Few of them, she said, have gone on to school, and those usually attend school outside the country.

More Parvise Careers

For the most part, they lead quiet, uneventful sheltered lives. Often, Mrs. Swackler noted, diplomats and other government officials travel up at the head of parties along with the women that their wives seem "less foreign" or "in the middle."

"I really think they should know because they were timid and afraid," surmised Mrs. Swackler. "I noticed that after my friends learned some English and could carry on a conversation, they didn't meet a single party."

Little by little, she noticed, Vietnamese women seem to be looking toward careers.

"For instance, the president's sister, Madame Ngo Dinh Nhu, is a member of the general assembly, first lady for the president and she has learned English on her own in the last few years."

While Mrs. Swackler learned to deal with servants, cooks

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East

From page 12

and for the rest of her stay, the former Milwaukeean served as the group's program chairman.

"It was hard to figure out programs without too much speaking because we had members who were Vietnamese, Thai, Japanese, Chinese, French, British, Indian, and American." Each month the group concentrated on a different member country, featuring customs, food and dances. There were about 220 members when she left, Mrs. Smucker estimated.

In a six week trip en route through the middle and near east and Europe, the Smucklers gathered even more treasures and their eyes popped with such wonders as the Taj Mahal, the Eiffel tower and London's Big Ben.

"But nothing," admitted Mrs. Smucker, "looked as good as a huge tossed salad with sour cream dressing, a glass of fresh milk, ice cubes in drinks, once more, television, ice cream, and for the children, someone to talk to who can understand them."

Back at Michigan State, the wives of the Saigon team have resolved to form a "white suit" club.

"We kind of agreed among us that when we get back to the campus we'll help one another when we have parties. It's such fun to be a hostess when you don't have to cook or do the dishes," she smiled.



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