

A Rescue at Sea

By Mark Morelli, *The Net Worker*, 1996

They had been adrift on that flimsy boat in the South China Sea for many days, too many to even guess. Some died. They were starving and parched. Boats passed them by, ignoring their cries for help.

There were sixty-three boat people trying to escape cruelty, who had five hundred to a thousand dollars for boat passage out of Viet Nam. They now faced the ultimate cruelty of being stranded to die at sea.

Then they came within sight of another boat. With their last gasps of energy, under the baking sun, they cried for help.

“Help us!”

“Help me!”

“We will all die!”

These were the words written down in the deck logbook of the M/V Rover, manned by the Seafarers in the Government Service Division, after rescuing the refugees. River Edge native and Sat. Peter the Apostle parishioner Mike Meany, the chief cook, prepared the gentle foods that the refugees slowly put into their raw, scorched stomachs.

This was just over ten years ago. The story could end there and still be a happy one.

Thai Minh-Tran, a 26-year-old Vietnamese seminarian, was glad to be alive. But Thai, who had no friends or relatives in the states to sponsor him, would have difficulty entering the United States. Until he was befriended by the man who had prepared the food that brought him back to life. With that friendship, Mike Meany put into practice every good homily lesson he'd ever heard. And he pledged not only his own, but the friendship of his family in River Edge.

Mike's father, Dr. John Meany, states how Thai Minh-Tran found a home here. "I contacted Catholic Social Services in Newark. There, Mrs. O'Donnell helped us fill out some application papers but was very pessimistic about our chances of getting Thai over to the USA." Dr. Meany contacted a priest in Gretna, Louisiana who had been one of Thai's teachers in Vietnam. This priest enlisted the aid of his order, the Blessed Sacred Congregation. There, Thai began again his seminary studies in a new language and new culture.

Dr. Meany tells how his son helped Thai learn about this country. "Mike went to Gretna and took Thai for quite a tour of the U.S. – Houston, Los Angeles, San José, San Francisco, Reno, Chicago, Cleveland and finally he spent a few days with us in River Edge."

On April 16, 1994, Dr. Meany and Mike attended Thai's ordination at Corpus Christi Church in Houston.

There, Thai gave back to Mike the bread of life.