

PAUL TRUONG:

Happy To Be A USCF Member

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Paul Truong is a survivor. And although he would like to say that his love for chess helped to sustain him during two hellish weeks in early 1979 aboard a crowded, leaky, wooden refugee boat — it would be untrue.

For Paul, who was born in Saigon on June 2, 1965, and whose Vietnamese name is Hoanhhan, found that "survival pushed everything else to the back of [his] mind." Still, chess does play an important role in the life of this energetic, young Vietnamese-American.

Paul learned the moves in 1971 at age six from USCF master Kenneth Clayton, who was then working in Vietnam as a computer adviser. Paul and his father Tien, who spoke good English, used to visit a local sports club with a large swimming pool, billiards tables, and whatnot. But it was chess which attracted the lad. Recalls Clayton of the young boy: "He was always attentive, retained what I taught him, possessed good nerves and evaluated positions objectively. I recall one game against a strong player, whom Paul defeated in an ending in which he used a Bishop to trap his opponent's Knight on the rim of the board. Playing virtually a piece up, he just walked in with the King. He had seen a similar maneuver in one of my games."

At age eight, Paul won the closest thing that Vietnam had to a national championship by finishing behind only Clayton in a tournament at the sports club. "In our game," Clayton remembers, "I set some nice traps that he saw. I was finally able to wear him down positionally, but it was a real struggle." Clayton estimates that the eight-year-old's strength was in the class "A" range.

UNHAPPY DAYS

The happy times didn't last. The South Vietnamese government fell to the Communists in early 1975, and Tien Truong, a former employee of the United States government, faced hard times for himself and for his family. And in 1979, when the Communists began to persecute Vietnamese citizens of Chinese ancestry, the Truongs formulated a plan to leave. Acquiring false identification papers and greasing the palms of a few officials, Tien and Paul managed to leave. "We wanted the freedom a human being deserves," says Paul, "and my father was concerned about his children's futures." But Paul's mother, Yeh, and a younger brother, who was too young to make the perilous journey through the South China Sea, had to remain behind.

The following six weeks were the most memorable period of Paul's life. Over 600 passengers were crammed into a 150-foot wooden vessel, which had to return to Vietnam for repairs after several days at sea. When the boat again left Vietnam, after payment by the passengers of additional bribes, it was boarded by pirates on the second day out. And the refugees found themselves without much of their food, medical sup-

plies, and valuables. Women were raped, and the boat was virtually torn apart as the pirates searched for jewelry.

There were additional boardings, and the boat drifted for days beneath the tropical sun — a vessel of misery filled with terrorized human beings. And then the refugees were spotted by an American oil tanker.

Tien Truong persuaded the tanker's captain to help the passengers reach the East Coast of Malaysia, where they spent weeks in a teeming, island refugee camp before setting out in a new boat. On this second voyage, people began to die of hunger and thirst before reaching the coast of Indonesian Sumatra . . . where they were again turned away.

In despair, the passengers began to throw overboard the dead bodies in order to lighten the boat's load. And suddenly, the Indonesian authorities took pity on these unwanted refugees, allowing them ashore. Whereupon, Tien and Paul spent six months in yet another camp. On December 1, 1979, Tien and Paul arrived in the United States, sponsored by an aunt who lived in New Jersey.

PRAYERS, HARD WORK, SAVING

Paul started school in the ninth grade in Washington Township, New Jersey, finding that he had plenty of catching up to do. Tien looked for and eventually found a job with Versa, a valve manufacturer in Paramus, New Jersey, where he now works as a control manager. After school, Paul also worked. He and his father offered prayers, and they saved money to pay for the freedom of his mother and younger brother. And some six years later — in August 1985 — they, too, arrived in America.

School, money scrimping, hard work — none of these things kept Paul away from his old love of

chess. But his rust was apparent in early American tournaments, and his first rating was only in the 1600s. However, he improved rapidly thanks, in significant measure, to support from the North New Jersey chess community. At the 1981 New York State Championship, he achieved a USCF master's rating, which he has kept ever since.

Thus far in his chess life, Paul's most memorable competitive experiences (aside from playing for the Collins Kids against Iceland in 1983) occurred in the summer of 1984 when he qualified for the U.S. Junior closed (in which he finished a disappointing eleventh in a twelve-player field, despite defeating tournament favorite Maxim Dlugy) and when he participated in Gary Kasparov's "Starwars Simul" — a set of ten games played by Kasparov in London against British and U.S. juniors, with the Americans in New York playing via a telecommunications hookup. Paul went astray in a complex middlegame, but the then world championship contender later said that Paul played better than any of his compatriots.

QUEEN'S INDIAN DEFENSE [E13]

W: GM Gary Kasparov

R: NM Paul Truong

Kasparov Satellite Simul, 1984

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nf3 b6 4. Nc3 Bb4 5. Bg5 h6 6. Bh4 g5 7. Bg3 Ne4 8. Qc2 Bb7 9. Nd2 Bxc3 10. bxc3 f5 11. e3 Nxd2 12. Qxd2 d6 13. a4 Nc6 Paul remembers that Kasparov suggested 13. . . Nd7 as a better move. 14. h4 g4 15. c5 Na5 16. Qa2 Qe7 17. Bb5+ Kf7 18. 0-0 dxc5 19. Bd3 (diagram) 19. . . Rad8



After 19. Bd3

And here Paul misses a golden opportunity later pointed out by the world champion. With 19. . . Qd7, intending . . .



In a Sicilian Defense, Paul Truong sacks a Rook for White's Knight on c3. That's the sort of sharp trading he had to practice to survive a perilous journey to the United States.

