

*"In my country, I would not have been able to do the things I have done here. I am grateful that the United States gave me the chance to be all I can be."*

— *Nguyet Thi Tran*



**By Sherry Matthews**  
Trying to adjust to a new way of life and a new country filled with strange customs is not an easy task, but is "worth the struggle," according to Raeford businesswoman Nguyet Thi Tran.

Tran, a Viet Nam native who moved to the United States in 1966, owns and operates the China Doll Restaurant on the U.S. 401 By-Pass.

Since her arrival 18 years ago, Tran has become a teacher, consultant, social worker and restaurateur.

"I could not have done the things in my country that I have accomplished here," Tran said.

"My people would have looked down on me for what I have accomplished here in America," she added.

Tran, who admits to being Americanized, started her new "American life" in Los Angeles where she attended school.

"It was not easy back then," Tran said.

"I did not know anyone and could not speak your language," she added.

"It was frightening," Tran said.

Despite her fears and the "struggle" to be accepted, Tran enrolled herself in an English class where she began to break the language barrier.

"Once I learned the language, I felt I was on my way," Tran said.

While in school, Tran majored in Social Psychology and business management.

"School was not easy. There were very few foreigners," Tran said.

"I found that people seemed to be looking down on me. It made me feel so terrible," she added.

Although prejudices seemed to follow Tran through her first years in the United States, she "refused" to let it discourage her.

"I have always been stubborn," she said.

"I wanted this life and was determined I could adjust," she added.

Once she completed her schooling in Los Angeles, Tran moved to Washington, D.C.

From Washington she traveled to North Carolina and hung her shingle at nearby Fort Bragg.

"I came to Fort Bragg in 1971 to look for work as a substitute teacher," Tran said.

When Tran arrived, she found "many" Vietnamese wives living on base.

"They were just miserable," Tran said.

"They were in a strange country, with no friends and no way of communicating," she added.

"I knew how they felt. I wanted to help in some way," Tran said.

For Tran, helping came in the form of English classes that she began teaching during her stay at Fort Bragg.

"When I started the class, I was teaching about 30 ladies. From there the numbers began to grow," Tran said.

"I was trying to help them adjust," she added.

For three years, Tran taught her students the "American way of life" managing the classes without salary.

"I did it to help, not for the money," Tran said.

"I supported myself by taking odd jobs that would help me make ends meet," she added.

Teaching her classes during the day and washing dishes in local restaurants at night made Tran happy.

"I love to work. I am a workaholic," Tran said.

Besides the work, Tran admits that helping "strangers" make the needed transition to American life gives her "great pleasure."

"These people have been culturally unrooted and left with no identity," she said.

## HELPING STRANGERS

"They must learn to accept a strange American culture and leave the heritage they have known behind," she added.

"That can cause you to lose any identity you may have brought with you."

"I tried to help them adjust to a new way of doing things so they would be accepted over here."

"Life here is a lot easier once you learn to adjust," Tran said.

"I just want to help my students realize this so that they can get on with their lives," she added.

With 594 volunteer counseling hours under her belt, Tran decided to try her hand in the new adventure of the restaurant business.

Although Tran was looking for a new venture, she decided to maintain her rigorous teaching and social work schedule.

"I was ready to do something different, but I wasn't ready to quit my other jobs," Tran said.

"I can't stand to be idle. I am just a restless person," she added.

Now, Tran organizes, administers, cooks and hosts at the China Doll restaurant along with her other activities.

Her staff are also her students, transported here to help run the business.

"It is a learning experience

for them. They get a feel for what life is like in America," Tran said.

For Tran, life in America "feels great" and is "very much appreciated."

"It has not always been easy, but I think it was worth it."

Although Tran admits to bouts of homesickness, despite her family's arrival nearly 10 years ago, she has never been back to her country.

"They would not want me to go back. There is too much difference now."

"I would not be accepted in my country the way I am now, and I am not going to change," she said.

Although Tran has become Americanized through the years she admits to holding on to "at least part" of her culture.

"I still have the honor and dignity of my heritage," Tran said.

"I am really stuck between two cultures," she added.

Since her arrival in Raeford, about four months ago, Tran has received the welcome she has waited for.

"People have been very nice to me here," Tran said.

"I don't feel like an outsider," she added.

"Since I have been in Raeford, I have been made to feel very welcome," Tran said.

"I have no regrets about any of my decisions. I am doing what I want," she added.

"Isn't that what America is supposed to be about?" Tran said.

"The people here have given me

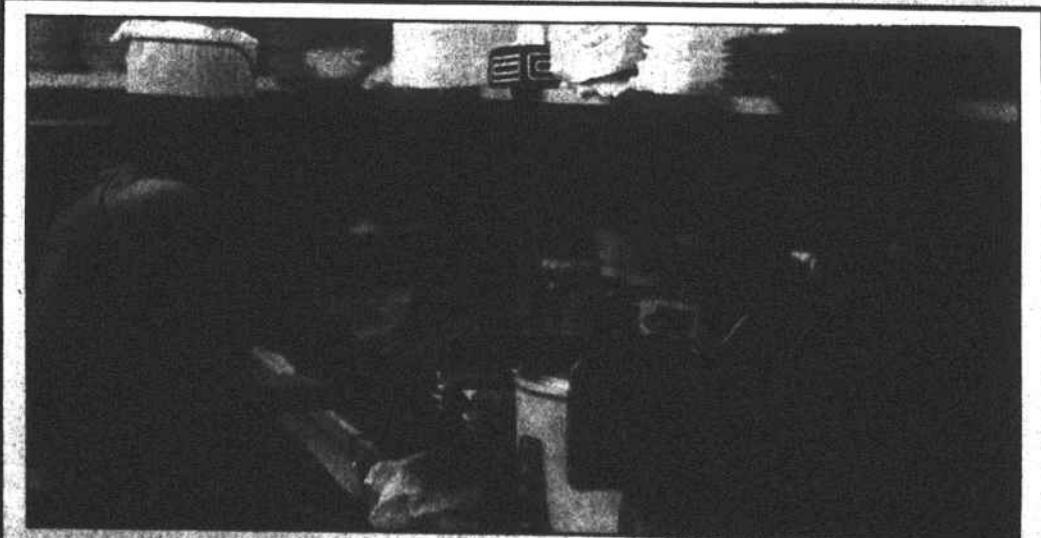
and my business a lot of support and I really appreciate that," she added.

With her life, "pretty much" together, Tran is not sure where she will go from here.

"I am pretty much satisfied with my life now."

"I have my work, my hobbies and acceptance," she added.

"I have had to fight a lot of battles to survive, but I made it."



**Getting ready**

This Vietnamese refugee is employed by Tran at the China Doll; he is also one of her many students. Tran is attempting to get the refugees "Americanized enough" to learn how to work and live in the United States. "I am just trying to give them a sense of identity," Tran said.