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efore March 7 : ?

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ROBERT STEPHENS
The London Observer

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Life's Many Sides

EVERYTHING ONE MAY WANT

By TON THAT THIEN

My family and I have moved from a «generals' area» to a so-called popular area. It is a very interesting experience to us. The area is just across Truong Minh Giang bridge.

In the first place, there is practically no road, and where our newly rented house lies, no road at all. There is a dirt road full of hills and valleys, so to speak, and to reach my house, we had to build a stretch of road ourselves. What the whole thing would be like in the rainy season—which will soon be there — I would not like to imagine. And the section of the road leading into my area is so small that if a car is parked there, there is no way for another small car to get past it.

Thus one evening, when I came home from work, a military jeep was there. I honked and waited for a full twenty minutes, but no one bothered to come out. The officer was visiting his wife and would not be disturbed. And so there was nothing else for me to do but to leave my car behind his and walk home. At 1.30 in the night, two soldiers banged at my door and told me to get my car out for it was blocking the way! It was past curfew hour, and technically I had no business being outside. Only the officer and his men had!

Next we have no light. Since we moved in, we have had perhaps a few hours' electricity and the current was so weak that it was useless trying to read.. But I was usually awakened past midnight to switch off the light because it was the usual time when we got electricity! Very considerate of whoever was responsible for supplying us with the stuff. Naturally, we have not had a single cool drink since we got there. I must add that our electricity is «fished» (as we say in Vietnamese) from the last house reached by the power line.

We have no running water, naturally, and have to buy it from neighbouring wells. But that is not a big bother.

Yet, we are quite happy there. The neighbours are nice and considerate. Most of them are hard working common people. Our daughter had friends to play with. Their parents' houses' doors were not locked up, and neither was our door, and the kids would just come in and out all day and tell us all about the neighbourhoods: who was nice and who was not, which wife beat her husband and which husband beat his wife etc... There has not been one single case of theft since we were there and the area seems safe and secure.

Above all, it is very cool, for there are plenty of trees and fish ponds (some of which serve as public toilets — New York cannot do better in the way of sanitation!), and my family and I have been doing much better My daughter no longer has to sleep on the floor to try to beat the beat, and I am blessed with the pleasure of not having to close my windows and of having a cool breeze all night. And we are no longer plagued by the twist and jazz music blaring and day and night and the noisy dancing parties in the neighbourhood.

Letters to the Editor

Pen friends