

Alumni & Friends

Sisters and Brother in Arms

The Nguyens fled their home country more than a quarter of a century ago and went on to forge a Trojan mini-dynasty.

"IT WAS JUST like in the movies," says Yenchi Nguyen '81, PharmD '83 of her family's escape from Vietnam. One night in April 1975, her mother, Tuyet Thi, hid behind a jeep and, working by the light of a street lamp, typed out passports and visas for the family on a manual typewriter while Yenchi kept watch for military police. An undercover U.S. State Department worker hovered nearby, then stamped the documents, and within minutes the entire family was aboard a military airplane, whisked away to freedom in the dead of night with little cash and few possessions.

The eldest of five siblings and a self-proclaimed "geeky" teenager, Yenchi spoke no English when her family staked its roots in San Clemente, Calif., a town where Asians were scarce and the Nguyen clan was a curiosity. Yet she adjusted quickly, and in two years' time she not only spoke fluent English but graduated from San Clemente high school as valedictorian. Her accomplishments garnered her a scholarship from USC, and six years later she graduated with a doctorate from the USC School of Pharmacy.

For many younger siblings, Yenchi's



The Nguyen clan gathers with some newer family members. Back row, left to right: Andrew Haduong, Quan Haduong (Yenchi's husband), Yenchi Nguyen '81, PharmD '83, Tasha Nguyen '83, Linh (Nguyen) Bui '82 and Andrea Nguyen '90, MA '96. Front row: parents Tuyet Thi and Hoang Quoc Nguyen hold grandchildren Paulina and Nikita Haduong. Missing is Dan Nguyen PharmD '90.

achievements would have been a daunting act to follow, but the Nguyens enthusiastically embraced the Trojan path. All five siblings – Yenchi, Linh '82, Tasha '83, Daniel PharmD '90 and Andrea '90, MA '96 – graduated from USC and went on to rewarding professional careers.

IT WAS HARDLY a bump-free road to success for a family that suddenly abandoned its familiar lifestyle in a quest for liberty. Their father, Hoang Quoc, had been a

colonel in the South Vietnamese army and had studied and taught philosophy in Vietnam. But in the U.S., he accepted whatever jobs were available to him, selling life insurance, teaching English as a Second Language at night school, cleaning houses and running a landscape company.

Tuyet Thi, meanwhile, put her French sewing skills to work and picked up jobs as a dressmaker. When she and Hoang Quoc learned about a local business that made bikinis, they turned their garage into a makeshift bikini factory, enlisting the help of the entire family in the evenings.

AS A HIGH SCHOOL SENIOR, Yenchi was offered scholarships from two local universities. But she had no way of knowing that other forces were in play. Herbert and Elinor Nootbaar, people she and her family had never met, had learned about her accomplishments through Robert Beals, a family friend who had sponsored the Nguyens when they arrived in the United States. The Nootbaars were so impressed with the Nguyens' story that they contacted friend and former USC president Norman Topping to share the family's tale.

Soon Beals gave the Nguyens exciting news. The USC director of admissions had sent the Nootbaars a letter stating that he wanted Yenchi to attend USC. Unsure of their next step, the Nguyens showed the letter to an acquaintance who was a USC grad.

"I still remember what he said," recalls Hoang Quoc. "He said, 'This is a very heavy letter.'" So Yenchi and her parents dropped in for an impromptu visit to USC's admissions office. Following a brief tour and a little paperwork, Yenchi accepted her admission to the university.

Continued on page 56

Nguyen

Continued from page 53

Later, the Nguyens met the Nootbaars and formed a lasting friendship with the couple. "We owe the Nootbaars a lot for introducing Yenchi to USC," says Hoang Quoc. "It led to all five of my children attending the university."

THE SIBLINGS did more than attend USC; they blossomed under the school's tutelage.

Inspired by his sister's success, Dan followed on her heels and entered the USC School of Pharmacy, driven also by his positive impression of the program.

"It turned out better, more well-rounded pharmacists than other schools I looked into," he says. Dan currently works as a pharmacist for Albertson's/Sav-on in Yuba City, Calif., while Yenchi owns and manages a pain clinic in Las Vegas, Nev.

The youngest Nguyen, Andrea, credits USC's Thematic Option program for providing her with "a small, liberal arts university experience" that she could not have found elsewhere in Southern California. "Also by then, since I was number five, my father knew how to fill out all the financial aid forms!" She earned a master's from the USC Annenberg School for Communication and is currently a writer and communications consultant living in Aptos, Calif.

Sisters Linh and Tasha also flourished at the university. Linh went on to the George Washington University School of Medicine and is now a physician specializing in radiology, while Tasha, a Phi Beta Kappa, *summa cum laude* USC graduate who earned her JD at Harvard Law school, currently practices business law at the Los Angeles office of Holland & Knight, an international law firm.

"My experience at USC rounded me out," says Tasha. "It was a time to grow up and explore new things." In 1997, she was named one of the 50 most powerful women in Los Angeles law by the *Los Angeles Business Journal*.

Though they credit USC for their career successes, all the Nguyen siblings agree their parents served as indispensable role models.

"My parents are 'can do' type of people," says Tasha. "They didn't have conversations with us about America being the land of opportunity ... they just did it."

—Laurel DiGangi

IN SUPPORT

The Center of the University

Two fervent USC football fans give \$10 million to support the construction of a new campus events center.

STRENGTHENING A LINK to USC and the Trojan athletics program that has become an integral part of their lives, Louis Galen LLB '51 and his wife Helene have created a \$10 million trust to support the construction of a new campus events center.

"I feel very strongly that the university must have an arena," says Lou Galen, who as a student watched the Trojans play basketball in the Shrine Auditorium – on stage. "More than just a facility for games, it will also serve as a cultural center for concerts and other student events. Helene and I both feel that this is very much needed."

"Lou and Helene have been tremendous supporters of our athletic department for a long time," says senior associate athletic director Don Winston. "This gift is a great boost towards our goal of completing the funding for the events center. We are truly grateful."

The gift marks the Galens' second multimillion-dollar contribution to the Department of Intercollegiate Athletics. In 1997, the couple donated \$1.25 million to establish the Louis J. and Helene Galen Athletic Center – a combined dining and social activities facility for student athletes and the campus at large.

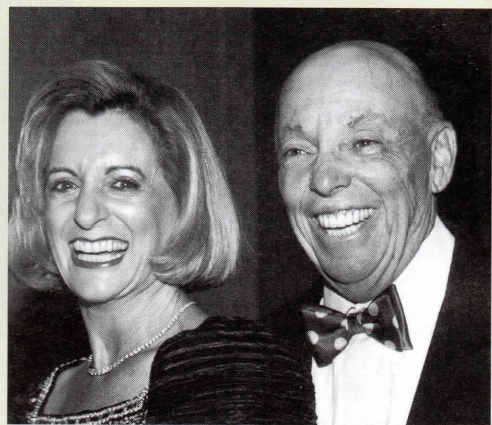
LOU GALEN'S LOVE AFFAIR with USC began when he was a schoolboy fascinated by Trojan football. To this day, he admits that a great disappointment in his life was missing the chance to see USC great Irvine "Cotton" Warburton play in an early 1930s semi-pro football championship game at what was then known as the Victor McLaglen Field and Sports Center.

Another period of football deprivation came when Galen was called to serve in the U.S. Army during World War II. After ending his military career with the rank of first lieutenant and returning to Los Angeles in 1947, he made up for lost game time: He bought season tickets for UCLA as

well as USC, and went to every game.

In between games, Galen found the time to co-found Lynwood Savings and Loan, now known as World Savings. He also went on to the USC Law School.

In 1972, Lou met Helene. A native of



Helene and Lou Galen: "USC has always been an important part of my life," Lou says. "There's just something about it." London-born Helene quickly came to share his passion.

London, she had no prior allegiance to any American university.

"I didn't even know what a Trojan was when I met Lou," she recalls.

It didn't take long for Helene to understand – and share – Lou's affection for USC. The couple sealed their engagement in front of 3,000 people at a USC/Notre Dame football rally. On their wedding day, Galen presented his bride with a Trojan Marching Band helmet, which she wore at the reception. To top it all off, the band played "Fight On" for the couple's first dance as husband and wife.

"USC has always been an important part of my life – there's just something about it," Lou Galen says. "We felt that if we could make an additional gift to the university, we should direct it where it would do the most good. And from our point of view, this is it. The university needs a campus events center."

—Rizza Barnes