



Hughes constantly searches the streets of Saigon for boys with no home. Here he chats in Vietnamese with two small friends.

## 'I care so deeply for each of them'

to place them all, with things they love, with learning, or trades. I want them to take over running the whole show. They know me well, and now they want me to know they care.

A young girl was killed by a truck up the block this evening. As many times before, the kids reacted with an alienation from the incident that bordered on morbidity.

I visited Te Ban Prison today. Futility, absolute futility. Save for more dirt and a few cuts, the young boys there were like our boys at the house. It was a whole other "twilight zone" and I was reminded of Eugene O'Neill's characters, the rejects and outcasts that go unrecorded and unnoticed.

Got Cho off to the dentist to care for a tooth abscess that had infected all the way through the jaw and begun draining externally. He spent the day resting, pondering what it would be like without a jaw that had an indentation as before.

New arrival today: Ngoc. Sixteen years old and has been through the mill, from shoe-shine boy to pimp to thief, and now just drifting. He was most recently living in a tree. His father was killed in the army and his mother died of a heart ailment. He seems eager to stay and help out with the others. I sense a deep goodness in him.

**W**hat joy! I got six boys out of jail today. How could such a tragedy have occurred when the only thing they needed was so simple: love. But somebody decided they were bad boys and it didn't look so good when dignitaries or government officials drove by to have them sleeping on the streets. So off they went. And when I think how many are still in jails in all of Vietnam, I realize that justice can sometimes be a very morbid joke.

I have never thought of this work as a project, and maybe that's why it still exists today, why all the original boys have remained to this day. And I refuse to leave until I am assured they will have not only a place and someone to love, but a future; until I know their lives are in order.

Whatever my future, the boys will always be with me, on a windy beach, a makeup room, or on a stage. But will I keep the joy they have taught me? It will be very very hard, but maybe I should take one final lesson from them. What do they do when things turn very bad? Tan would smile and say "No-o-o-sweat!"

*In a diary kept during his first year in Vietnam, Dick Hughes recorded the following discoveries and impressions of the street boys. The work he started has since been organized as the Shoeshine Boys Foundation, c/o Dick Hughes, Shoeshine Project APO San Francisco 96213*

**E**very night I go to sleep thinking, "What in God's name will happen when I leave? How will they look at me when I go? What can I say? How can I ever do anything again without their haunting memory, their drifting days and nights with nobody, absolutely nobody?"

Soap and toilet paper go so fast I can hardly keep up. Many of the skin sores are beginning to disappear. And seven or eight boys have now become regulars. Little possessions—shirts, notebooks, polish—are brought in for safekeeping.

Already I am part of them. I'm caught. I care so very deeply for each last one of them. They are gallant and good. And I cannot fathom where all their love had gone before I came. Not long ago we all started sharing something. Nothing was said but we all knew it. My towel began to appear along with theirs, in a soggy heap on the floor. And we began drinking out of the same water pitcher and having wonderful, boisterous pillow fights.

They are older than I am. Much older. They know what is fair. I have been their unsuspecting student. They wanted to know how much I was willing to give. Could I laugh at myself? Most of all, did I under-

stand what I was getting into? Did I understand how deep was their loneliness? How often they had been betrayed?

Tried to "handle" them tonight, resorting to old tactics of yelling, threatening, knocking heads together. Couldn't relax in spite of myself. You can never really see yourself at these times but they look at you like you're a foul ball. Perhaps if I can recognize this before it happens, rather than after, there will be a change.

I have never seen any of the kids bear a grudge or seek revenge. For them life is too quick to waste that way. Then I remember how many times I have made pride my cohort and revenge a way of life. It's somewhat humiliating to realize how much they have to teach me.

Their frustration is both subtle and perpetual, a sort of "domino theory" of depression. They are constantly having to prove themselves as members of the gang and sink deeper into boredom and futility when challenged to prove their worth.

They seem fiercely independent but are complete softies for a hug, or a pat on the head. I know that they are pushovers for love. So obvious is their weakness that I can practically rule their will by gently caressing their heads or taking the time to hear about what happened today, how great they were.

I guess I have good ideas for them. I want