

# Too many 'ifs' block happiness

Cockroaches, leaky taps and an unlit hallway are just some of the problems faced by the tenants.

By Alison Uncles  
The London Free Press

The eight-member To family could be completely happy in their two-bedroom Cheyenne Avenue apartment.

If last winter they'd had heat. If the cockroaches would go away.

If the tap would stop leaking. If the lights worked in the hall. If it was safe for the children to play in the yard.

If their landlord didn't call them "little pigs."

Chroeng To, 46, and his wife Saroeun To, 41, head the Cambodian family living in a second-floor apartment at 105 Cheyenne Ave. in London.

They said Friday all those "ifs" have driven them to look for another place to live.

**CHEAPEST AVAILABLE:** Speaking through Lam Vong, an interpreter with the Cross Cultural Learner Centre, Chroeng To said the family took the apartment about a year ago because the \$405-a-month rent was cheapest they could find after moving to London from Clinton.

He said the family — whose children range from age four to 18 — paid first and last month's rent and \$20 for the apartment key before they were allowed to look inside the apartment.

When they did see it, Saroeun



Mike Hensen/The London Free Press

The To family — Kanha, 6, Rith, 9, Mom, 10, parents Chroeng and Saroeun, and Joanne 4 — have supper Friday in their 105 Cheyenne Ave. apartment in London. They've lived there about a year.

To said cockroaches were climbing in through cracks and under doorways, windows were cracked and the toilet had overflowed.

"It was not safe for the children," Saroeun said through the interpreter. "Sometimes cockroaches would crawl onto the table when they were eating, sometimes the cockroaches would crawl into their ears (when they were asleep)."

The four youngest children sleep on the floor in their parents' room. The oldest two share the second bedroom.

For now, the interpreter said, "they (the family) don't really en-

joy living here, but they know they do not have a choice."

The family — who fled Cambodia in 1983 — said they have been on the London and Middlesex Housing Authority's waiting list for four months, but have not found another apartment.

Saroeun said she called landlord Elijah Elieff, who owns the 105 and adjacent 95 Cheyenne Ave. buildings, last week about the cockroach problem. She told him she has seen at least one cockroach a day since the buildings were sprayed for bugs in October, but Elieff said only: "Your people are like cockroaches."

Elieff refused to respond to the tenants' comments. In an earlier Free Press story, he likened his tenants to "pigs" from a "jungle." Saroeun said what really makes the family unhappy is the way they and the other 20 Cambodian families are being treated by their landlord. "We're unhappy here because the landlord says that our people are little pigs."

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Young Cambodian translator takes up cause of Asian immigrants outraged by racial slurs.