

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26



**UNITED STATES BANKRUPTCY COURT  
CENTRAL DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA**

In re  
KHIM LAM and AI XIEM TRIEU,  
Debtors.

---

DAVID L. RAY, Chapter 7 Trustee,  
Plaintiff,  
v.  
KHIM LAM and AI XIEM TRIEU,  
Defendants.

Case No. LA 05-18914 TD  
Adv. No. LA 05-02221 TD  
Chapter 7  
FINDINGS OF FACT AND  
CONCLUSIONS OF LAW  
DATE: June 26, 2006  
TIME: 9:00 a.m.  
PLACE: Courtroom 1345

The Complaint To Revoke Discharge, filed by David L. Ray, Chapter 7 Trustee (the Trustee), came on regularly for trial on June 26, 2006.  
Having considered the testimony of the witnesses, the exhibits admitted into

1 evidence, and the arguments of counsel, I make the following findings of fact and  
2 conclusions of law in support of judgment in favor of defendants Khim Lam and Ai  
3 Xiem Trieu (the Lams).

4  
5 **FINDINGS OF FACT**

6 On April 22, 2005 (Petition Date), the Lams filed a voluntary Chapter 7 petition.<sup>1</sup>

7 On May 23, 2005, the Lams signed and filed their bankruptcy papers, including  
8 their Schedules (Summary Of Schedules and Schedules A - J) and Statement Of  
9 Financial Affairs. The Lams did not list an ownership interest in 4006 Tyler Avenue, El  
10 Monte, California 91731 (Tyler Avenue Property) in their bankruptcy schedules. The  
11 Lams did not list a debt to Far East National Bank (Home Equity Lender) in their  
12 bankruptcy schedules.

13 On or about July 5, 2005, the Lams appeared for their Section 341(a) Creditors  
14 Meeting and, during the course of the meeting, stated under penalty of perjury that  
15 they had listed all their assets and all their creditors in their Schedules.

16 The last date for a party to object to the Lams' discharge or the dischargeability  
17 of any of the Lams' prepetition debt was July 22, 2005, but as of that date, the clerk of  
18 the bankruptcy court had not yet entered the Lams' discharge.

19 As of July 22, 2005, the Trustee had no knowledge of any interest of the Lams  
20 in the Tyler Avenue Property or Lams' participation in the 2003 home equity loan.

21 The attorney for the Trustee received a letter dated August 4, 2005, from  
22 counsel for American Premier Bank, notifying him of the existence of the Lams'

23  
24  
25 

---

<sup>1</sup> All chapter and section references herein are to the Bankruptcy Code, 11 U.S.C. §§ 101-1330,  
26 unless otherwise specifically indicated.

1 interest in the Tyler Avenue Property.<sup>2</sup>

2 On September 30, 2005, the Trustee filed a Complaint To Revoke Discharge  
3 (Discharge Revocation Complaint) because the Lams omitted assets and creditors  
4 from their Schedules. By the Discharge Revocation Complaint, the Trustee sought to  
5 revoke the Lams' discharge pursuant to § 727(d)(1) and § 727(d)(2).

6 The Lams are husband and wife and were refugees from Southeast Asia who  
7 completed the sixth grade in Vietnam and did not attend high school.

8 Zhaoqing Huang is a Buddhist monk who does not speak or read much English.

9 Huang purchased the Tyler Avenue Property in August 1998, using his own  
10 money for the down payment. He signed a promissory note for the balance of the  
11 purchase price and also signed a deed of trust, both in favor of Republic Consumer  
12 Lending Group, Inc., in connection with the purchase.

13 Huang uses the Tyler Avenue Property as a temple, known as the American  
14 South Sea Pu Tuo Mountain Temple, and lives at the Tyler Avenue Property.

15 Huang has made all monthly mortgage payments on the purchase money, first  
16 mortgage loan secured by the Tyler Avenue Property as well as all real estate tax and  
17 homeowner's insurance payments relating to the Tyler Avenue Property.

18 The Lams have known Huang since 1995. The Lams worship at the American  
19 South Sea Pu Tuo Mountain Temple.

20 For reasons presently unknown to him and unexplained by the evidence, Huang  
21 executed a Grant Deed to the Tyler Avenue Property (Tyler Avenue Joint Tenancy  
22 Deed) granting the Tyler Avenue Property to Khim Lam, Ai Xiem Trieu, and  
23  
24

---

25 <sup>2</sup> I admitted the letter as Exhibit 4, over the Lams' objection, solely for purposes of the section of the  
26 letter on page 2 entitled "Undisclosed Parcel of Real Property - 4007 Tyler Ave."

1 himself, as joint tenants. The Tyler Avenue Joint Tenancy Deed was recorded on  
2 September 1, 1998. Neither of the Lams paid any money to Huang at any time in  
3 connection with the making of the Tyler Avenue Joint Tenancy Deed. There was no  
4 explanation in the testimony of any witness or in the documentary evidence, as to the  
5 reason for the Tyler Avenue Joint Tenancy Deed. Huang and the Lams testified that  
6 they had no recollection concerning the subject, and the Trustee offered no testimony  
7 or documentary evidence to explain the reason for or the circumstances that led to  
8 Huang's Tyler Avenue Joint Tenancy Deed.

9           Neither of the Lams has ever lived at the Tyler Avenue Property. Neither of the  
10 Lams has ever made any payment to the first mortgage lender, Republic Consumer  
11 Lending Group, Inc., or for real property taxes assessed against the Tyler Avenue  
12 Property, or for homeowner's insurance coverage on the Tyler Avenue Property.

13           In April 2003, the Lams assisted Huang in obtaining a line of credit from Far  
14 East National Bank (Home Equity Lender). The Lams opened a checking account at  
15 Far East National Bank in connection with the home equity loan to accommodate  
16 Huang. The Lams signed a Home Equity Line of Credit Agreement in favor of Far  
17 East National Bank on or about April 28, 2003, secured by a second priority deed of  
18 trust against the Tyler Avenue Property, in favor of Far East National Bank. The  
19 money advanced from the line of credit was deposited in an account in the Lams'  
20 name, but Mr. Lam testified that the entire proceeds of the home equity loan were  
21 used to repay loans from third parties made and used to assist Huang's mother in  
22 China. I find Mr. Lam's testimony concerning such payments to be somewhat vague  
23 but credible. The Trustee chose not to challenge Mr. Lam's testimony about the loans  
24 from, or payments to third parties, or that Huang's mother was the ultimate beneficiary  
25 of the home equity loan proceeds. The Trustee's evidence neither attempted to  
26 establish nor proved that the Lams received any benefit from the home equity loan. I

1 infer from the evidence that the Lams signed the loan papers out of personal, non-  
2 monetary concern for Huang's welfare and peace of mind and without any financial  
3 motive on the part of the Lams.

4 Cross examination of the Lams focused on several checks, all in the \$300-400  
5 range, drawn by Mr. Lam, payable to the Home Equity Lender. Mr. Lam explained that  
6 the checks were written as an accommodation to Huang to ensure timely payment of  
7 interest on the home equity loan and that each check was fully reimbursed to the Lams  
8 by Huang. Again, the Trustee did not challenge Mr. Lam's testimony about the  
9 purpose of the Lam checks or Huang's reimbursement payments to the Lams.

10 On May 23, 2005, the Lams met with their bankruptcy lawyer, reviewed their  
11 bankruptcy papers, and signed the papers under penalty of perjury stating that the  
12 information set forth in the bankruptcy papers was "true and correct to the best of  
13 [their] knowledge, information, and belief."

14 The Lams intended to and did disclose in their bankruptcy papers (a) their  
15 ownership in their residence located at 4016 Clark Avenue in El Monte, with an  
16 estimated market value of \$325,000; (b) their bank accounts, including the Lams'  
17 checking account at Far East National Bank from which a few interest payments on  
18 the home equity loan were advanced on behalf of Huang; (c) the Lams' brokerage  
19 accounts; and (d) \$90,440 in funds on deposit in the Lams' attorney's trust account.

20 The Lams did not list the Tyler Avenue Property in their bankruptcy papers  
21 because, as they each explained, they never considered themselves to be owners of  
22 the Tyler Avenue Property.

23 The Lams did not list a debt to Far East National Bank, the Home Equity  
24 Lender, in their bankruptcy papers because they believed the debt to be Huang's debt  
25 rather than their debt. The Lams also believed the money advanced from the line of  
26 credit from Far East National Bank was used directly for the sole benefit of Huang and

1 his mother and that payment of the line of credit was secured the Tyler Avenue  
2 Property owned solely by Huang.

3 When the Lams stated under oath at their Creditors Meeting that they had listed  
4 all of their assets and all of their liabilities in their bankruptcy schedules, and when the  
5 Lams testified at trial, they believed their statements were true and accurate.

6 The Trustee asserts that the Lams' conduct in signing their schedules and in  
7 their 341(a) Creditors Meeting testimony was fraudulent.

8 The Trustee's claim is based on the evidence of (a) the 1998 Tyler Avenue Joint  
9 Tenancy Deed, (b) the 2003 home equity loan, and (c) the Lam's financial  
10 transactions, as discussed above, plus the rebuttable presumption that the Tyler  
11 Avenue Joint Tenancy Deed vested the Lams with an interest in Huang's Tyler Avenue  
12 Property.

13 The Lams' evidence taken as a whole and under all the circumstances of this  
14 case is sufficient (a) to rebut the presumption that the Lams had any beneficial interest  
15 in the Tyler Avenue Property or home equity loan proceeds and (b) to persuade me  
16 that the Trustee has failed to prove by a preponderance of the evidence the existence  
17 of any ulterior motive on the part of the Lams or any fraudulent intent on the part of the  
18 Lams, within the meaning of §§ 727(d)(1) or (d)(2).

19 To the extent that any conclusion of law herein is deemed to be a finding of fact,  
20 it is incorporated herein by this reference.

21  
22 CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

23 The court has jurisdiction of this adversary proceeding pursuant to 28 U.S.C.  
24 §§ 1334 and 157(b)(1).

25 The Trustee has the burden of proof by a preponderance of the evidence. In re  
26

1 Lawler, 141 B.R. 425, 429 (9th Cir. BAP 1992).

2 A claim for denial of a discharge under § 727 is construed liberally in favor of  
3 the discharge and strictly against a person objecting to the discharge. See In re  
4 Adeeb, 787 F.2d 1339, 1342 (9th Cir. 1986); In re Devers, 759 F.2d 751, 754 (9th Cir.  
5 1985). A discharge may be denied or revoked for a false oath only upon a finding of  
6 actual intent to hinder, delay or defraud creditors. See Id.

7 The Trustee did not learn of the omissions from the Lams' schedules until after  
8 their discharge was deemed entered on July 22, 2005. Accordingly, the claims in the  
9 action by the Trustee seeking to revoke the discharge were properly raised under §§  
10 727 (d)(1) and (d)(2). In re Dietz, 914 F.2d 161, 164 (9th Cir. 1990).

11 The Lams did not make a false oath within the meaning of § 727 (d) in  
12 connection with their bankruptcy schedules or at their Creditors Meeting. The  
13 omissions of the Tyler Avenue Property and of the 2003 home equity loan debt do not  
14 constitute a false oath within the meaning of § 727(d) because there was no proof of  
15 any fraudulent intent on the part of the Lams. Nothing in the Trustee's evidence  
16 supports an inference of an intent to defraud the Lams' creditors or to mislead the  
17 Trustee or the court by either of the Lams. The Lams did not consider themselves to  
18 be owners of the Tyler Avenue Property and did not participate in any way in the 1998  
19 first mortgage loan, insurance, or property tax payments. The Lams considered the  
20 2003 home equity loan debt to be Huang's debt, not their debt. There is no basis in  
21 the evidence to conclude that the Lams derived any personal financial benefit from  
22 Huang's 1998 Tyler Avenue Joint Tenancy Deed vesting them with a legal interest in  
23 the Tyler Avenue Property or from the 2003 home equity loan secured by the Tyler  
24 Avenue Property. In this regard, I find the Lams' exculpatory evidence, however  
25 vague, to be more persuasive than the Trustee's evidence.

26 The Lams have a bare legal interest in the Tyler Avenue Property but no



1 NOTICE OF ENTRY OF JUDGMENT OR ORDER  
2 AND CERTIFICATE OF MAILING

3 TO ALL PARTIES IN INTEREST LISTED BELOW:

4 1. You are hereby notified that a judgment or order entitled:

5 **FINDINGS OF FACT AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW**

6 was entered on 7/25/06.

7 2. I hereby certify that I mailed a true copy of the order or judgment to the persons  
8 and entities listed below on 7/25/06.

9 Debtors/ Defendants

10 Khim Lam and Ai Xiem Trieu  
11 4016 Clark Avenue  
12 El Monte, CA 91731

12 Counsel for Debtors/ Defendants

13 Raymond Aver  
14 Law Offices of Raymond Aver  
15 12424 Wilshire Boulevard, Suite 750  
16 Los Angeles, CA 90025

17 Chapter 7 Trustee/ Plaintiff

18 David Ray  
19 Saltzburg, Ray & Bergman, LLP  
20 12121 Wilshire Boulevard, Suite 600  
21 Los Angeles, CA 90025

Counsel for Chapter 7 Trustee/ Plaintiff

Damon Saltzburg  
Saltzburg, Ray & Bergman, LLP  
12121 Wilshire Boulevard, Suite 600  
Los Angeles, CA 90025

U.S. Trustee

Office of the U. S. Trustee  
Ernst & Young Plaza  
725 S. Figueroa St., 26<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Los Angeles, CA 90017

REQUEST FOR SPECIAL NOTICE:

Attorney for Creditor American Premier Bank

Jennifer Witherell Cratz  
Hemar, Rousso & Heald, LLP  
15910 Ventura Boulevard, 12<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Encino, CA 91436

22 Dated: 7/25/06

23  
24  
25  
26  
  
Clerk