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Interview with Rev. Pa Mang Her

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PaMang Her

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Editor: Paul Hillmer

Tell us your name and when you lived in Laos. Where were you born and where did you grow up?

My name is PaMang Her. I lived in Laos in the village we called *PaKad PaLang and I was born in the village PaLang in the city *Quinxinqu. I was born in the year 1950 during the time the Hmong people started to become believers in Christ. (0:37)

Tell us, in your village what kind of jobs did your mom and dad have and while you were growing up, what did you do in your village?

Both my parents just farmed for a living. They didn't do anything else. When I was older, there were already believers and they came to tell us the good news and there was already a church, and I went to learn (or school) in the church already. After that, I went to school in the city and during that time the world fell apart [the Vietnam war broke out]. We moved and I went to school in *VianChang and when I graduated I went to work with the *Meeka [either Americans or white people] (1:19)

Tell us why the Hmong became believers and tell us according to what you understand why Hmong became believers in Christ and how did God provide a way for the Hmong and how the Hmong heard about Christ. Can you tell us the origin, when it first started, to the present. Tell us so we can listen to your thinking and your understanding and why we are still here and still believe in Christ.

In Laos, long ago Laos didn't know that there was a God and they didn't believe in him. Before the land of Laos started to believe in God, there was a French priest who went to China, then rode in a boat and came down the river *Mekong into Laos to *Luangprabang; then he saw that world [meaning Laos] and he had missionaries send the good news to Laos. At first they only went to the Laotians. Laos—before the Christian Missionary Alliance came, there were already the Swiss Brothers who came and lived in the South and they gave the good news to the side of *BacXy, Savan Nacak. Then there was a Laotian family who were believers, who was Pastor Salee Quantapayab. Their family believed in God and at that time Pastor Salee was still a youth. Then, before 1949, the Christian Missionary Alliance came to *Luangprabang in the King's city where his palace, which is the *Palacesavong was the King's city, the Laotian King's city. They befriended the King and they taught the king how to speak English. Then they learned how to speak Laotian from the King and became friends with the King. When they did that, they had time to go tell the *Poob Twg [a tribal group] in *Luangprabang but because there wasn't anyone who believed, they went looking down South and they knew that the Swiss Brothers came to *Savan Nacak in southern Laos. Then they went and took Pastor Salee to work with them. Pastor Salee then helped the missionaries teach the good word to the *Poob Twg and then they became believers and when the *Poob Twg became believers, they built the very first Bible College in *Luangprabang. In 1949, the missionaries decided that they were going to go teach the Hmong to become believers and right by *Luangprabang there were some Hmong there. Then the Catholic Priest—and I forgot his name, I think it was Priest Tchia Phong, but I don't know, I forgot, but that priest still lives in “Gria,” which is in the south France and is American land. He is a French priest but he learned how to speak

Hmong. Then the Missionary Alliance had the Pastor Budney [couldn't really understand] and Dr. Smalling and both of them were the Protestants. Dr. Smalling was a linguist and they took two Hmong people with them and then they started to look for Hmong words to write. That group was American and French and when they started to write in Hmong they decided to use the American alphabet and that is why Hmong words do not use or have the marks that Vietnamese uses. The ones who wrote it came together and sit together and they designed and Dr. Smalling was a linguist and he designed the Hmong language here. He didn't know how to speak Hmong, but he listened to the tone or the pitch of the word and he designed it, and that's how he designed the words and how they came about in the Hmong dialect, the white language. Then in 1949 they finished the Hmong language and the plan was to use this to teach the Hmong so they would know how to believe in God. After 1949, the Hmong couldn't go to the city and most of the time Hmong lived in the mountains. When the Hmong went into the city, they would catch virus and cold and they would go back home and they would be really scared so they didn't want to go into the city. Laotians would mostly go to the mountain. In 1950 they sent the missionary to the province of the Hmong and his name was Pastor Elenor. He went to the province and took a *Poob Twg pastor called *NaKing who taught [the Hmong]. During that time there were no cars or planes to go in, so they rode elephants or just walked. Then they went to the province and they lived there. At that time, they used the track [tracts?] and passed it out to the people and rented a house from a Shaman-Man whose name was *Npua Yam. He was the mayor, and Hmong only had one head, who was the mayor. He had a house which was the house haunted by ghosts. The missionary went and rented that house and Npua Yam told them that they could not live there, but the missionaries told him that their God was with them and they were not scared. When they lived in that house, they prayed so the ghosts all went away and the ghosts could not scare them. That was when *Npua Yam wanted to know the missionary more and see how God was more powerful than the ghosts and how he could get that power to get the ghosts out. After that he had a cousin who was sick and he did find a shaman to try to help his cousin, but it didn't work. He took the missionary to pray for her. After that, he went to his cousins' house and they told him not to become a believer because he might just die, but Npua Yam told them that if he becomes a believer and dies, then the cousins shouldn't become a believer and if he doesn't die then they all should become believers. The missionaries prayed for him and a miracle happened and he didn't die. Hmong laws stated that if you went and just threw away the rules and laws then you would get bitten by a monster and you would die. That is why the missionaries came and got rid of all those laws and untied them and burned the laws. Everyone waited to see if Npua Yam was going to die. But he didn't die and God blessed him and he became prosperous and he went to tell his village. He told his Thao cousins and they all became believers. Many young boys went into the city to school to learn and many young boys never went to school. According to what I heard (I don't know but I heard if from the elders that) Pastor Xeem Pov Thao didn't know how to write or read. They came to learn about the life of Christ and tested and he failed. He couldn't go to school anymore because he had failed and he started crying. A teacher came to see what he was crying about and was moved by this, so the teacher gave him the test orally and he passed and from then on they taught him how to read and write. Then he learned Laotian and God's word altogether. After he learned, he was a great pastor. We pastors who learned and know how to carry ourselves cannot compare to him. He just passed away not too long ago. There is also Pastor YuXu. There is Pastor Vam Yee Her and many of them who still are here. There is still Pastor YuXu Thao, who is still living but if you want to know this well, you should talk to Pastor YuXu Thao in Illinois and he will be able to explain it well. Also, we have the pastors who wrote the resource, like Dr. Pa Zeb Thao, who is Pastor YuXu Thao's son, who wrote a Hmong history book on how the Hmong became followers of Christ. He also interviewed his father in the book. The Hmong District of CMA has a copy. There is also Pastor

Nom Lum Kong, who wrote a book about Hmong believers. And if you want to know this better you should talk to these people I mentioned. (14:12)

Tell us about your life and why you became a believer, and how God worked in your parents' lives and in your life.

According to the Hmong, the Thaos believed first, and the Mouas, Hers and Thaos all lived by each other, but in different villages. And the Thaos would spread the news when there was someone in need or sick. During that year, many people became believers. Before my parents were believers, my father was a Shaman-Man, and my father was Zong Chue Her. They used to call him Shi-ye Zong Chue and he was a prophet. Before he was a prophet he wasn't a believer, but one day he said that one day everyone will believe in God and all the monsters will go away and the believing in God will come, Christ is going to come. Then the relatives decided that Mr. Zong was crazy and they moved him from *PaKad to *Tumthoa. There we lived with relatives as well and for a while the missionaries came and my father told them that he was talking about this all along. 'They have come. These are the ones that God wanted me to speak about.' When my father said that they took him because he knew how to do shamanistic rituals and my father took all his old ways and laws and burned all of them and everyone still said he was crazy and if they didn't do anything to fix him, he was going to die. My father was a dear friend and relative to them, so they were all very worried. But then my father didn't die and told them that God had told him to become a believer and he didn't die, so we all should become believers. And now most of them are in Colorado, Kansas City, and in St. Paul, especially in Maplewood Alliance and Hmong Christian Alliance and there is where most of our relatives are.

Now I'll be talking about God's righteousness and we Hmong during that time—only the Green Hmong [a Hmong group that speaks a different dialect and that's what they call themselves] believed in God and only a few White Hmong believed. The first White Hmong believer was *Tho-xeng [head of his village]. Chai Pao Vang and his son, who is named Pastor Vang Sou, just died not long ago but he believed and during that time he was like royalty in the Hmong because *Cua-Moung means mayor but *Tho-xeng means like head of a district. During that time *Payan Tou Bee Lefong told him to move to *Dondan whis was very close to *Payan Tou Bee, so they could work together, so he did and during that time French people didn't come in yet, so Vietnamese people were still around and living there. During that time in the house they were living in, *Tho-xeng Chai Pao's family members were possessed and were sick and no matter what [they did] nothing happened. Even *Payan Tou Bee couldn't heal them. So he went everywhere to find someone or something to heal the pain, but nothing helped so he asked *Payan what else there was to do, so he told him there was a way. There was a white [meaning Americans or French] couple who could get rid of the ghosts or spirits and [he said to] go fetch them. *Tho-xeng Chai Pao went and met the missionary couple and they came. They talked and they spoke about the good news and about a God who created everything, even this earth. So he ran home to tell his father what he had heard and that they could get rid of all the evil spirits. The spirit that was in the house could not do any wrong because if something went wrong the spirit would choke the father's neck and all he could do was point to the uncle and say that the spirits wanted to eat chicken and pig so we had to kill it and prepare it for them. So if they didn't prepare it then the spirit would just keep choking. So the son told the father not to say anything and for them to go far away and they would talk then. And then *Tho-xeng Chai took his father and they talked and Chai Pao told his father that there was a way to get rid of these spirits and the his father asked if they could really do it. *Tho-xeng Chai said to his father that they could really do it and that they had done it to many families already. His father said, 'Okay, well let's get rid of them then.' They didn't tell the family at all, they just killed chickens and pigs and called the missionary couple to come, and before the couple got there, people started

asking why they were preparing a feast. *Tho-xeng Chai Pao and his father just told people that it was just in case the spirits came back. When the couple came, they decided to become believers and ate and after that the spirits couldn't do any harm to them anymore. The missionary couple told *Tho-xeng Chai Pao, 'Now that you're a believer you need to pray before you eat. Before you sleep you need to read His [God's] Words. You have to sing and praise Him.' And *Tho-xeng Chai Pao did that to this very day. And right when he started to be a believer, he resigned his * "Tho-xeng" position and became an ordinary believer. He was one of the first ones who first believed in God. He was good Christian. To this day he prays well. Now his sons are at Good News Baptist at Fridley, but he and his wife live in Atlanta, Georgia. If you want to hear this story more, you should talk to him or his son Vang Lo in Illinois. He knows this story very well, and if you meet him he can tell you a more precise version of this story.

Why did the Green Hmong first become believers before the White Hmong? Was there a specific reason?

The Green Hmong were the people the spirits were around more and were harsher on them than the White Hmong. The spirits were really harsh and mean to the Thaos. This is why they were so scared. For example, like us Hers, if we went gardening and we carried food in our back-basket and we saw fruits around and picked them and put them in our baskets, when we got to the garden and later tried to find our lunch, there would be snakes there. So there were many things that the Hmong people tended not to do. The Hers had many of these things to prevent any horrible situations. If you didn't do this well, the spirits would make you sick and die. The Hers had what they called a curse and they were what people were so afraid of—for example, sin. If you have many children and you are addicted to opium and you cannot provide [for them], or if you are rich but have no children or if you have children and money, then you'll die soon. The Hers were really scared so when they heard that if you became a believer that you'd be okay, they started to believe and God helped them and they escaped the curse. The Green Hmong became believers because the very first one was Green Hmong. *Tho-xeng Chai Pao was the very first White Hmong to believe, so after that there were some white Hmong who believed, but there were very few of them. In 1960, Laos had a civil war and that was *Napon, [which means general] Kong Le betrayed to kill *Latapang and took communists and Vietnamese to help him. At the time General Vang Pao was a major or commander who had four stars and he was the one in charge of our defenses. Then the Americans killed South Vietnam [Perhaps a reference to killing of Ngo Dinh Diem?] and they used General Vang Pao to help and they went against Ho Chi Minh. Then the Americans promoted Vang Pao from a Major into a General and then he called all the Hmong to be soldiers and many believers volunteered to be in the war. The believers prayed and were good examples for the non-believers in the war during all the pain and sickness happening in the war, and that's how they spread the gospel in the war. It happened quickly from 1960-1970 and that was the time when the White Hmong heard the gospel.

Tell us why you decided to become a pastor. Was it because of your parents or was it your own decision?

I think that they didn't imagine me being a pastor, but I knew they wanted and wished for me to be, because they really prayed for me and my father said to me that as I grew older I became a leader in our clan, but he didn't say in Christ. When I finish school in 1971 in *BaSoun I worked for the Americans as a translator or interpreter. At the time there weren't many people who could speak English. In 1968 I in *Loo Cheem. I was listening to Pastor Nhia Lo and I accepted Christ there. There was no fresh water and usually it [baptism] was done with the fishes, so I asked if I could be baptized in a church in the city, and I was able to. I never knew Jesus Christ until that very day,

even though my parents were already believers. At the time there were missionaries there, such as Pastor Sawyer, Madame Sawyer, Madame Ruth, and many more, and I studied really hard from them. At the time I learned at the foster care [center], although I wasn't a foster child. The pastors lived close to us and that foster center was from World Vision's center and the kids there were orphans and they had support from Americans. I was not a foster child, although my father had died, but they gave us a special rent. It was free rent but we had to buy our own food. I went to school there, and there was a Bible College nearby and in my heart [I knew] the pastors lived poorly and had low education, like two or three years only. I went to high school and I pondered if I was a pastor, there would be no better way to go on. But I was close with God and wanted to tell [share] his words. I was a witness to my classmates. I taught an English class for free and I taught the New Testament. At the time all the students became believers.

You said you dad had died. What happened?

In 1967, my father died of old age. I am the youngest child and I was very young when he died. I was about 16 and went on into high school. I was very poor with no support, and my mother had no monthly income, so I made a decision to learn English. I had three brothers, and a year after my father died, the oldest son died as well. In 1960, my other brother was the first person who died in the whole country during the break of the war. No one had died in war yet, and at that time my father didn't let any of his sons go into war. But after my father died, my brother died of malaria. And I only have one brother left and at the time he was only 20 years old and was the one who led my family. But God helped us and He used me because I suffered a lot in school. He helped me with school and I became very fluent in English and [He] blessed me with a job working with Americans in Laos in *Ban Soun. In *Ban Soun there was a big church, nothing compared to here, but it was considered very big there. No one came because there was not a pastor; only refugees came to worship. There was a hospital nearby and I knew that many of the nurses were believers, so I went to find some and told them that I wanted to hold a meeting for Christians. I first invited the nurses to come and worship the Lord. I also went to invite anyone in the city who was interested to come, and I preached the gospel in 1971 for the whole year, and we started to grow. We then got Pastor Phong Xiong to be our pastor. I got married and then Pastor Phong left and Pastor Nhia Long became our pastor. We then moved the church into a better place. At the time I had a friend who was an American and was a Christian supervisor and told him that we were poor and had no wood or trees and asked him to help. His name was Bob Wally (he now lives in Missouri, and I don't know if he's dead or alive, but he's a very good Christian). He was my supervisor and I told him that I wanted to come to America and attend a Bible school, but it didn't work out. Bob helped us and we cut some trees and the Americans gave us cement and trees. In 1975 we moved into the new church. I was the youth leader from 1971 to 1973; then I got married and became a deacon for the church. In 1975 we moved because of the war. We moved and when we got to Thailand. I was a rich young man because I worked for the Americans so monthly income was plentiful. I had a business teaching English and fishing. I had many students, so income came in. I always put in 10% for God, so he blessed me. I saw that every pastor still had their title, but I lost everything while moving. In Laos, if you had 100 dollars you were very rich. I cashed in my retirement and got 250 dollars, so I wanted to come to the US. I asked the pastor how and where they got work, because they still had their title. All the majors, colonels, and many more lost their titles and had no recognition, but the pastors did. (I feel that one day in heaven we will still have out pastor titles.) At night I went to pray and prayed that if I could go into the US, I would become a pastor, and I did get to come. I was one of the very first. My sponsor was a Presbyterian pastor, Reverend Russell Burns in Kentucky, and I saw him baptizing babies, sprinkling them with water, and he smoked cigars. So I had many questions. I knew that there were many denominations learning in Laos, but

I was not going to change my faith. I sat down with him and told him that I disagreed with him and I knew that he loved me very much. I could not accept how he baptized the babies by sprinkling water. I just can't do that. I won't. I believe that Jesus had already made an impact on you and you are already old enough to make that decision yourself, knowing that you are a sinner. I don't believe that baptism is salvation and is just symbolic. So he told me that I was a Baptist and sent me to a Baptist church. He and I are still very good friends after that, but now I cannot find him. I heard his wife just died, but I don't know, maybe he's gone too, but I cannot find him. So that's how I became a Baptist member. In 1978, many Hmong arrived in Kentucky, and Pastor Chang Xiong, who was the first man to translate the Bible into White Hmong in Laos—and there was also Pastor Vang Sou who was *Tho-xeng Chai Pao's son and was the senior pastor in *Vian-Caing. He was the first Hmong student to get a Master's degree in New Zealand. Pastor Vang Sou was the brother-in-law of Pastor Chang. Pastor Chang and I got together and formed a church in Christian Missionary and Alliance church, because Pastor Chang's sponsor was a Christian Missionary and Alliance Pastor and sponsored him to come into the US. So we were the first Hmong Christian Missionary and Alliance Church in 1977, '78, or '79—one of those years. I came here to the US in 1976, and we were able to get all the Hmong refugees to become believers in Kentucky. At that time we told them to be believers because there was no other way they could worship their spirits anymore. But in 1979, in the summer, Pastor Chang announced that he went to the first conference in Long Beach, California because Pastor Vang Chong Lee lived there, and they were calling all the pastors, Hmong Pastors, to that conference. At the conference Pastor Vang Chong Lee was voted to be the head director, but he refused because he preached for radio shows and had no time, so they elected Pastor Chang. At the time the Christian Missionary and Alliance asked that there were many denominations, such as the Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, and so many more, and many pastors said that the Hmong could stay with them, but that their degrees were very low still and that they would have to let the CMA pastors teach them. They didn't think that the Hmong population would grow, because there were very few at the time. So they put Hmong into the "Specialized Ministry Field." They told the Hmong pastors that they were willing to pay the director \$1000, so he could survive, but for the rest of the pastors, they would not pay them. So both sides agreed with this negotiation. They chose the headquarters to be in Denver, Colorado, because it was in the center of the US. Pastor Chang then moved into the position in Denver and asked me to major in Bible, and at the time I was a business major, so I changed majors and at the time they told me they were going to help me financially.

There was a church in St. Paul (CMA), but in Minneapolis there was no church, so I decided to form one in Minneapolis. Permission was granted when asked, so I formed a church on Grand and 31st Street in Minneapolis, which was already a CMA church, but a White church, so I asked to use their facilities for a Hmong session. The church grew bigger over the years; however, I did not have the qualifications to become a pastor, so a colleague of mine was made the pastor. In 1980, in Denver for the first time for a conference, they wanted me to be a treasurer, but since I lived in Minnesota I couldn't, because it's too far, so they elected someone else. In 1984 our church broke out into two congregations. We were CMA still, but we were independent and not depending on the district. I decided there to be a Baptist. I was preaching and teaching to the Laotian people, and I knew that God wanted me to preach the Good Word to them. One day, my Laotian friend was in the hospital and I met his pastor, and the pastor told me he needed help. I thought I was going to just help him one week, but the pastor informed me that he wanted me there permanently. So that mission grew and we didn't have any more room. I told the pastor that we needed a bigger room because so many Laotian people attended. The pastor decided to allow us to use their facilities, but in the afternoon session. I finally told them that it was time for them to find a pastor to lead them. The Laotians wanted me to teach and lead them, but I was CMA and I didn't want to become a

Baptist. The pastor told me that denominations do not matter, only if they come to God, that is the only thing that matters. So I decided to pray for a month for a sign from God. One day a Laotian person took me to see his mom because she was a very pagan person. She did not want to convert and believe in God, but evil spirits cursed her with blindness and she suffered with many kinds of sickness. I prayed for God to save her soul. God did, but she was permanently blinded. I talked to the mother and told her that I prayed for you and God healed you. Why don't you believe what all your children do? She asked me to pray for God to heal her eyes to see and then she'd believe. I told her that you can pray with your heart, but only for God's Will for a miracle to happen. And it did. She saw until the day she died!

I then decided to form a church in Minneapolis for the Hmong people. There was a member who was possessed by a spirit. His family was so scared they didn't stay in the same house. This man moved from Portland, Oregon to Fresno, California to Minneapolis. He finally decided to convert to Christianity. He told me that there was this particular spirit that came to him every day. I prayed for him on Sunday. On Monday night the spirit didn't come to him, but he saw something bright and white and it said, 'I will be your commander.' So he got up and rejoiced, even though he didn't know what that bright light was saying. I told him what it meant when he came to me and asked me for a translation. That night the spirits didn't come to him, but when he left the house and went outside, he felt its presence. The first night he went to work, it was a snowy night and he worked third shift. There, an old lady came looking for Yee Lee, which was this man. This old lady was the spirit that was always around him. From that time on, finally, the spirit left him alone. Right now, I don't know what happened to him. That was a sign from God to me.

We needed the Bible so quickly, so I went to a Bible Society. They gave us a copyright and said if we could do it, it would be our own. Within two years we were finished. We were the first bible translated and then CMA finished theirs after. In 1999, the Green Hmong asked me to make a Green Hmong hymn book because we already had the White Hmong hymn book. Since we had the copyright, we made many copies and sent them out to Vietnam and Laos. The Lord God had me serve him in many ways.

Before I became a pastor, I had a strange dream of a tree. I woke up and asked God what He wanted, because I was nothing. But I realized that God uses me to do something very important for Him. I knew nothing on Earth could live forever except God—yes, and His Word. And we were able to translate the Bible. It wasn't just me, but it was God's will for me. I didn't give up and I thank God for using me to fulfill his will.

Do you have anything to say to the next generation when they hear these things you talk about?

I want everyone to understand that every skill cannot be attained, but if you want to become a preacher, anyone can. A preacher does not serve man, but God. Everyone who truly believes in God, like in Romans 12, can be a living sacrifice for God. Be open for God and be available for God. Anything that you can do for God, even at work, give it to God and glorify God, and he will bless you. I can testify to that because I was once there. I was pretty well off, but money does not stay around forever, but God's blessings will never run out because I gave to Him all that I can! He will never forsake you.