

12-1-2007

Interview with Xao Vang Vue

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Recommended Citation

Vue, Jena, "Interview with Xao Vang Vue" (2007). *Hmong Oral History Project*. 25.
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Xao Vang Vue

Interviewer: Jena Vue (daughter)

Translator/Transcriber: Jena Vue

Editor: Paul Hillmer

Tell a little bit about yourself. Who are you? When and where were you born?

Me...when I was born and where I was born only?

We are just going to begin with this first. So just tell a little bit about yourself.

Let me go get my license so I know.

No. But when you came to America you changed it already.

It was changed, but my birthday was originally over there.

So it is the real one.

Uh huh.

Okay. You don't remember your birthday?

I remember but I have to look at the license first to remember. I'm losing my mind. Hold on.
[A short conversation before recording about what to talk about.] You said to talk first about when my parents gave birth to me?

Tell me your name first.

My is Xao...Xao Vang Vue. My name is Xao Vang.

How old are you?

Right now?

When were you born and what were the names of your parents?

My parents' name was Vang Yeng Vang. I was born on September...uh.....[asks her husband for her birthday]... It is September 20th, in the year of 49.

Where were you born?

In Laos.

In what town/city?

In a town called *Ta Ni.

In Laos, what was your life like? What did you do?

We worked for survival in the mountains. In the mountains, the way to survive was to farm.

Who did the cooking and cleaning at home then?

The one who cooked and cleaned...my mom and dad went to work and we left the house by itself and then would come home and make dinner to eat.

So what did you mean when you said you came home to cook and clean from what? Did you go farm?

When cooking...I was small, so my mom and dad took me with them and when they we came back, they did the cooking.

When you went to the fields, what did you do?

I went to play.

Who did you play with?

[In English] I played with my brothers

How many brothers did you have?

Just three.

You also had a second mom, correct?

Yeah.

How many did second moms did you have?

Step mother [English]...just two.

Just two? How long was it until your father married your second mom?

About 10 plus years. Probably about 10 years. That was when my oldest brother was about 5 years old and I was about 3 years old. It was then that they married my second mom.

Why did your father marry a second wife?

He liked her so he married her.

He just liked her. It wasn't that there was heavy work for the family that he married her?

Or was it that your mom couldn't have any boys or girls that he married again?

He liked her so he married her.

So there was no problem of any sort.

No. He liked her so he married her.

So he just took her or what did he do?

They took her. Back then they would discuss it at the house of the person who is being pursued. But my dad just took her.

So, changing the topic...I am going to ask something else. In Laos, what did you do every day?

When I was older or younger?

Both.

Every day my job in Laos was to go farming.

What did you plant?

We planted rice, corn, beans, and fruits to eat; things of this sort. We planted squash and cucumbers.

What was the males' job?

They did the same thing. They would pull the weeds every day. There was no resting day.

What about the females?

They did the same.

How about the children?

If there was someone to watch them, the elders would watch them at home. If there was no one, we would take them to the farmland and an elder would watch them there.

How about coming home? What was the work load at home for everyone?

We didn't do much. We stayed home. We did house chores like cleaning the house and other things.

What did you mean by you did other things? What did the men do when they got home?

They got home; they usually sat around at night having conversation for fun. When dinner was eaten, we would go to sleep.

What about the females?

They fed the chickens, fed the pigs, and cooked food to eat for the family. They pounded the rice, and cooked. We would sleep at night and the next morning we would wake up at 5 to cook breakfast, then go to the fields.

What about the children?

The children would wake up and they wouldn't know what to do. Mom and dad would have already packed food and they would go to the fields. They would go with mom and dad to the fields. The little children would stay there while the older children babysat the younger ones.

What kind of clothing did you wear?

We wore Hmong clothing.

Yes, but could you explain a little bit further about men's clothing? Isn't your family Green Hmong? Wouldn't your side of the family wear Green Hmong clothing?

We wore White Hmong clothing. Living with Green Hmong, they would still wear White Hmong clothing too. Because the Green Hmong did not always wear dresses, so we all just wore black clothing.

This meant that you all wore pants only. Regarding celebrations, what did you do for fun?

During New Year, we had ball tossing of the Hmong culture and New Year.

Was there any music?

There was music, but it was singing, *khu xsiav.

About games, you explained a little bit about ball tossing but could you explain the reason why young men and women would play this game?

Men and women throw balls because it has been a long year. During this time, there is a 15-day celebration for young men and young women to come together and get to know one another better. It also provides elders with the opportunity to witness the interaction between the younger generations, to see relatives, and to provide the chance for everyone to get together and talk about what has happened in the long year. It provides that chance for people to talk about their happiness of Hmong life in a single year. During the 12th month, they want to experience a time of fun.

Is the Hmong New Year in America similar or different to those in Laos? Are there vendors trying to sell products?

There are no vendors. But in each year there is one family that has to sacrifice a pig for a feast for everyone to celebrate. This family has to sacrifice a pig that is about 100 to 150 pounds.

During this time, what did you wear?

We wore Hmong clothes with coins. Those who had them wore them, for those who didn't have new outfits would wear the old ones. They would wear their finest for the elders to see and to have fun.

What was your role in your family?

As a daughter, I cooked for the family to eat. Girls didn't go to school at that time, so I would go with my parents to the field to farm. Back then the boys didn't go either, so they had to go farming too. But when they got home, they had the time to go out and have fun. They would play soccer, *tuj lub, and meet/talk with girls. Girls were to stay home and help their parents do the home chores of carrying the water, cooking, and feeding the animals.

Tell me about dating. Could you explain dating from your point of view or from your own experiences in Laos?

In the past, an old saying goes that if you are a girl and living with your parents; you will eventually get married off and have a family. You can never live with your family forever. You have to get married. When you are still a single girl you can only help your family out so much, which is why a girl's life will only end in marriage. Getting married is the beginning of helping yourself out for your future.

I have heard that in the middle of the night, men would come out for a midnight conversation.

When I was still a single girl, there were Hmong boys who came to you and talked about love, being girlfriends and boyfriends, and marriage. In the Hmong culture, if a girl had a boyfriend, this boyfriend would come in the middle of the night, around 12 am. He would come over and talk to her (she would be inside while he was outside of her bedroom). They would talk about love and how their love could go deeper. There might be talk of marriage, but that was about it.

Would the Hmong lover sing to his girlfriend?

When he comes over, he plays a tune on an instrument called a *qah before he wakes you up. It is only then that you are able to talk to him.

Wouldn't the boy shine something in the girl's eye to wake her up?

He would use that too, after he plays a tune. You would first have to agree to talk to him. You could turn him down too.

What is your religion or belief?

*Ua neeg ua yeg is our Hmong culture. It is when we are sick or when our spirit is no longer with us that this shamanism comes into play. In one year, when a New Year came around, we would do this calling for good fortune for everyone to live well. In one year, we have to have this calling to cleanse us for us to live well and happily. If you were frequently ill, the shaman was able to do a calling and look into the spiritual world to find the reason why a person was sick. This made it important to have a large calling of the spirit to fix what was bad. In other words, it was to get rid of the bad things of the year and bring the good fortunes of the New Year. There was also the calling of the spirit for the house that a person lives in. It was mainly to get rid of evil spirits and cleansing. If a person didn't do this, they would get sick a lot.

What makes you sick? I know the reason why you get sick is because you don't do *ua neeg, but what or who actually causes it?

There isn't anything that causes you to get sick, but this is the Hmong culture. Some elders say that it is because you didn't cleanse yourself or the house from evil beings.

When you *ua neeg who do you call upon?

You call upon the *daj gau [monster song] to protect you. You call upon the *daj neeg and *dab vaj tshej [protector of house] and ancestors.

In America, they have a belief in a god. Do the Hmong have a god?

The Hmong do have one. *Teeg daj, *teeg su kaj, *teeg ghej daj ghej khua, *teeg daj neeg, teeg daj tsua. In a year, the Hmong would have to do a calling of *daj tong and *yuj tchua.

There are several words that I don't understand here. If possible, can you explain in a way that I can better comprehend it.

What *teeg daj means is that every year the Hmong would have to do a grand calling of the spirit for everyone to live well and feel good [English] so you do not sick or tired in order to live a full life. Every year, after 12 months has passed, sicknesses come and go. If you do not recognize [*teeg] or do a calling, you become ill. The *daj njei [good spirits] protects you from harm [or] *daj quo [bad spirits].

There are still a few words that I don't know. *Daj tong....what is that?

It is the good [daj njei] and bad [daj quo] spirits. *Daj vaj daj tshej [spirits of the house] they call it the *suv kaj. Daj neeg is suv kaj daj njei [spirits within the home are good spirits]. *Daj quo [bad spirits] are called *toj tong ho pej. Hmong *teeg [call upon] the spirits of the house only.

What does *teeg mean?

*Teeg means that they take a paper like a picture and they take the feather of the sacrificed animal and dip it in blood and glue it on the paper. Have you seen one?

Yes.

They would use the sacrificed chicken's blood for the feathers to be dipped into. They then hang this paper on an altar. They call this the *suv kaj. This is also known as the good spirit *daj njei. It is the protector of the house. *Daj quo is never called upon. The only time that you would call upon this bad spirit is when you are going on a long journey and you are walking—for instance, if you walked from Oroville to Fresno or Sacramento. In my home country you walked far distances. If you walked a full day and rested in a neighboring town or on the way to the town you were going to, when you ate, you would have to call upon *daj tej daj chuy [bad/wild spirits]. You would say: 'We have arrived at this location and we ask for you to help protect us to arrive at our destination. Please do not harm us. Now that we are eating, please come and join us in your share. Whether we eat in small or large portions, we are eating with you. Please come join us in exchange for our protection and help get us to our destination.' When ever you eat, you have to call upon them to join you. If you do not call upon them in my home country, when you arrive to a town or city that is far away filled with jungle, and you go there, there are bad spirits called *pe kong quoi and *pe yu vui. They are bad spirits that drink blood. If you call upon them, you sleep throughout the night without any disturbances. Plus, if you also don't set up a fire that has a sour stench. If you come to a place that is surrounded by a large number of bad spirits [a feeling of coldness] or you hear strange cries, it is wise to call upon these spirits to join you when you eat. I've heard them before, especially in places that are cold and in towns filled with jungles. You have to remember to call upon them to protect you from even greater threats like *daj ku haj or any kind of *daj that are really evil and mean. There are nice and evil spirits, as the elders once told us. Some will help you while others will bite you and another will drink your blood. There are some *daj that will love you and help you. The elders once told us that but I've never seen it for myself. I've heard it before when you've arrived to some towns that are cold or in places filled with jungles, there is the feeling of being scared of sleeping at night, even when you have nine to ten people with you, you follow this trail and when you sleep you have this feeling of being scared and you feel like you have to call upon the spirits to protect you [poj yeej]. When you do this calling, when you arrive to your destination you will have to sacrifice something in return for the spiritual protection. The Hmong culture does this.

When you go into places that are no good or into a place when it is the wrong time to be there, you will become very ill. They say that you have found *daj quo. When you get home, you become very sick. Some will go and return home dead. This person will have bad luck and end up dying. Others who travel in good times will return home without a problem. This person will not have any trouble. Sometimes when your blood isn't too healthy and you go to a place that is very cold; a place that you have never been before or place of *daj territory—my mom used to tell me that if you go to a place that you have never been to before, this place will be cold and when you return home later you will end up dying.

In addition, when you arrive in such a place, you should not kill any kind of animal that has always lived there. If you go and want to eat an animal you will have to ask. These animals belong to the *daj quo or the wild spirits. You have to remember that when you go, you will have to burn incense and say that you want to eat one of their animals. It is only then that you are able to kill one of their animals to eat. There will be no problem. But if you go and kill the animals without asking or deliberately slaughter the animals for fun, when you return home, you will become very ill. When the shaman does a spiritual healing, the shaman will say that the reason why you are ill is because when you arrived at this certain place, you deliberately killed

their animals without permission. They want someone's head in return. This was why you are ill.

What was the climate like in Laos?

The climate is very similar to the land of America. When it is hot, it is very hot. When it is cold, it is not that cold. [English] There is no snow. There is no ice. There is no sleet [end English]. In my native country there was none of that, but there morning dew called *thej. You know, when it is frozen on leaves. When it is cold out in the field and on logs or leaves or whatever, you will see these small frozen drops that would make tree stems stiff. My native land was like that. But it wasn't too hot. In the mountains, or what they call *toj tong ho pej, there is no morning dew or anything or cold. In the low lands, it was very cold during the winter time and it was very hot during the summer time. In the jungle, in the mountains, where the Hmong mainly lived, it was neither cold nor hot. During the rainy season, it would rain seven days and seven nights. The rainfall was very heavy. The Hmong stayed in their homes doing nothing. The heavy rainfall didn't allow you to do anything. You couldn't cross over large rivers because they got bigger during this time. The seven days and seven nights of rain made it difficult to do anything, especially crossing the river. You had to cut down a tree to help get you to the other side.

What do you remember during the Vietnam War? What do they call it in Hmong?

*Njia laj tub taj. During the Vietnam War I was only a child and I didn't know anything.

You've never heard of it during childhood?

I was only a child. I don't remember it at all.

When did you first heard about the Vietnam War?

During 19...I remember...the year 1975.

How old were you?

That was the year 1975, so I was quite old. I was in my early teens. But the time that I remembered during the time of the jungle was when...I don't really recall what age, but the year that I could remember was 1974 and around 1975. I don't quite remember the exact year when the Vietnam War began.

It was in the '60s.

I don't know. But what I remember was 1975.

Didn't you relocate? Was this during the time that you were married already?

No. I was still a child. When I married your father it was the year 1975 of the 12th month.

Were you still in the same city in Laos when you married dad?

*Ta Ne. No. I was in a different city. When I married your dad, I was in another place.

But prior to marriage, you have never heard of the Vietnam War?

Prior to marrying your father, I had never heard of the Vietnam War. The first time I heard of it was when I married your dad.

Was there anyone close to you who fought in the Vietnam War?

I knew. My dad fought, but I think it wasn't the Vietnam War. It was prior to 1975 and I think this led to the Vietnam War.

Was this when you lost your father?

My father died in 1973 or 1974. Then in 1975 I married your father.

Did he die in battle or when he came home?

He died in battle.

So you didn't get to see him?

We did. When he died, they were only able to bring back his torso. The ammunition *bay-40 blew him in half.

Did you see what was left of his body?

I saw it, but I didn't know. They had him in a bag.

So you don't remember crying?

I didn't know. I was only about five years old, maybe a little bit younger. I could carry a baby on my back already. Probably about three to four years old. I didn't cry. I didn't know better.

Why did the Hmong side with the Americans?

Because the American CIA helped us. Maybe they helped us because Vang Pao asked for their support. That is why they helped. Vang Pao is a general and he wanted us to have a land. The land belonged to Laotians. There is the northern and southern Laos. Vang Pao had to ask Americans for help. Vang Pao was supporting the northern Laos. There are two groups in Laos. There is one group called, I don't remember...the Red Lao.

There were three groups. There was a neutral party. There was the Red Lao.

There was a group of Red Lao, and two groups in the northern and southern Laos. There were those who were forming a union between north and south.

This was the neutral group.

The Americans and Vang Pao were with northern Laos. Vang Pao had asked for American support, which was why they helped us. But then again, I was only a child. I didn't know anything.

I've read a little about the subject but I must have forgotten some information. What do you think about the communists?

Communists are bad people that want to take another person's land. They want to take someone else's land and make it theirs.

How has your life changed after the Vietnam War?

[In] my life after the Vietnam War, I grew up, then I got married. After a few years we came to America.

But after that your father wasn't with you any longer, so your life must have changed a lot.
Yes. After my father died my mom took me to the field and to work for a living. I then grew up. Around five years old, after my father died and after two or three years, we moved to a larger city. During the third year, we went *Man Toj. Five years after my father died and after I grew up, it was five years after that I married your dad. Five years after my father died and after working three years in the big jungle, during the 4th year, I married your dad.

So, you have never lived anywhere else and you lived in *Thong Tuer. Where did you live after that?

We lived in the big jungle afterwards, then the Vietnam War occurred. It was only then that my uncle came. Then we went with him to the city where I married your dad.

What was the city called?

*Man Toj.

How old were you?

I was about 15 years old.

How old was my dad?

He was probably 35.

Thirty-five?

He was a lot older than I was. He was about 35 to 30 years old. He was a lot older. I was only 15 years old when I married your dad.

When you said big jungle, did you actually mean "big jungle?"

It was a jungle. A real jungle.

Why did you live in a jungle?

Because if you lived in a place, like a big jungle and you labored for food, like rice, they turned out really good. When you cleared the land and cut the trees down and burned it, and you planted rice, they came out really good.

It wasn't that you were running from the Vietnamese?

No. At that time we were only looking for a place to live and plant. We moved to this place deliberately.

Then you moved to *Man Toj.

*Puh Ma Toj.

This was where you married?

No. Not yet. I was only 14 years old then.

So, you first lived in the big jungle then in *Puh Ma Toj.

Yes. We lived in the big jungle then we moved to a big city *Puh Ma Toj.

How long did you live there?

We lived there a long time. It was four years. We moved from the small city to a big city and it had been four years.

After that you went to live in the city where you got married?

Yeah.

Why did you move so frequently?

Because we were following our relatives.

Why did they relocate?

Our grandparents all died, so we went back to our home place. Our home place was small. My grandfather said they relocated because they were following the government. For instance, like Sacramento, we wanted to live by a big city and when the Vietnamese War occurred, most of the residents were relocated by plane to smaller cities in the jungle. You know the planes called helicopters; they carried the people or the refugees to live in big jungles. They took up so [many/] to big jungles. In our home land, the jungles were really large. Laos, is small but the jungles are huge. It was a good place to thrive in.

Was this in the place where you got married?

No. This was in the city where my grandpa and grandma lived.

I am a bit confused.

When all of this was happening, in the place where we were living, the small city where we lived, I was still little. The things that I was telling you, when we moved to live in the big city after the Vietnam War, when I was still small, we moved from the small city after my father died. We didn't have a family anymore, so my uncle came to get us to live in a larger city. It was there that I married your dad. After I married your dad, we then moved to an even larger city. I forgot to tell you the cities. The first city we moved out from, when I was still young, was *Ta Ne. We then moved to *Tong. When I grew up, my mom and dad took me to *Tong. When war broke out, my father passed away. After his death, we relocated to *Puh Ma Toj. They came to get us to *Puh Ma Toj. It was the biggest city and it was where I got married. After I got married, I went with him to Lima 21. There were American soldiers in Lima 21.

Why did you move there?

Because family moved there, your father's side of the family. After I married your dad, war broke out. They said that the land was going to get better. After a month, we moved to *Sin Sia. After a year in *Sin Sia, war broke out again. It was only then that we finally made up our minds to go to Thailand. We lived in Thailand for a year. We applied to come to America. We came to America. And that is about it.

What was the experience like when you crossed the Mekong River to Thailand? What was your feeling?

During our journey to Thailand, it was raining really hard in the 7th month. We came upon the river. It was the year 1977. We met some Vietnamese people. We were scared. We became lost people on a big hill. We came in a group of 140 people. A group of Vues and Vangs. Some

of them didn't want to listen, so some of them returned and some died. There were only 110 people afterwards. About 40 people returned. They either died or starved to death. We came to Thailand. On our way, we met Laotian people. We lost some people. We had lost two or three people on our journey. When we crossed the Mekong we went on a boat and arrived in Thailand.

Was it night time or day time?

It was night time.

How many days did it take? What city did you set out from?

When we first started out, we left from *Laj Tej. It took us three days to get to Thailand. We traveled during the day time and night time. We spent most of our time traveling in the day time and spent two nights walking in the dark.

Were there any Vietnamese soldiers?

No. When we came, we never met any Vietnamese soldiers. It was only those who weren't listening that encountered them. After we arrived in Thailand, we had already crossed the Mekong River with stolen boats. We finally came to *Nong Khai.

What was your feeling when you crossed the Mekong into Thailand?

I wasn't that scared—I guess both scared and not scared. But when we crossed at that time, there were no killings. There were no soldiers to stop us.

So your group came before things had gotten really bad. I've read in books that some Hmong suffered great losses. You were lucky compared to some of the [other] refugees.

We were one of the first groups that came. We came without trouble. As the first group, we came from the north. Those who faced the terrible killings and other mishaps were those after us. When they knew that we were able to make it across, it was then that they had made their decisions to go, too. By then they were met by death and many have died.

Who was the leader of the group or the person who led the way?

Your dad. Your dad had been to Thailand before, so he knew the way there. He went there first, then he came back to get us. He knew the safe routes to take so they wouldn't end up dying. He led us on the way so we could get to the other side.

Why did some of the people in the group not listen and decide to return?

Those people didn't want to go. They were still thinking that their animals and food were still at their homes. They were going to go back and live in the big jungle and had thought that what they had would be able to help them survive. That was why they returned.

On the journey, you did not rest?

When we came, we did not rest at all. Wherever we went we just ate there. We looked for fruits and anything that could be consumed.

You did not bring rice or any other kind of food?

At that time, I think we only had three to four pounds of rice.

For all of the 100 people?

No. Each family carried their own rice. Some families carried about 20 to 40 to 100 pounds.

So those who came within our family to Thailand were you and dad, or others too?

Grandpa and Grandma, too. And Uncle and Aunt Xai. And Uncle and Aunt Pao.

Did you bring any possessions?

When we came we brought food to eat, clothing to wear, blankets to sleep in, money and silver bars. We probably had four to five thousand worth of money.

Did anyone get sick or pass away?

There were no people who died, but there were a few who got lost. There was no one sick, either. Those who didn't listen got lost.

Let me ask you another question. Did you know how to swim?

I didn't know how.

You didn't know how. Was the water deep?

Yes, it was deep—about 100 feet. It must have been deep, because you couldn't walk across it.

How did you get across? Oh yes, you used boats.

We used boats. We came in five boats.

So it must have taken the whole night.

Yes. All the way until morning. It was probably 12 o'clock when we crossed and it was about 5 in the morning when we all were across.

Who went first?

Your dad. But we all went at the same time. We used all five boats. So in each boat there was a family of 10. The boats were pretty large.

When you arrived in Thailand, there were no Thai troops securing the place?

When we came, we encountered no problems.

What city did you first come to? Was it *Nong Khai?

No. It wasn't *Nong Khai. That was the place where we stayed. But the city where we first landed was *Song Sa Lu. After we arrived there shortly, they came and checked us to see if we carried any knives or weapons. Then they took us to the other city.

Was the other city *Nong Khai?

We arrived at *Song Sa Lu and then they checked us for weapons. They then took us to *Nong Khai.

Is *Nong Khai far or close?

It is about a day's walk

Did you walk or did they drive you there?

They drove us there. They took us in big trucks.

All of you went. At that time the Thais were not mean yet. It was only after that they became mean and guarded the Mekong.

Yes.

When you came to Thailand, did you see or meet any Americans?

I had never met any of them until we registered to come to America.

What was your first impression of Americans?

I didn't think of anything but that they were white people helping us get to America.

So, your thinking was that they were there to help you. You didn't have any stereotypical thinking of Caucasians?

I didn't think of that. I only thought that they were there to help me. My thought was that I've never seen such nice people who are willing to help and love the Hmong people.

Was *Nong Khai a refugee camp?

Yes. *Nong Khai was a camp that took in refugees.

I think there were probably five refugee camps. *Nong Khai is one of them. Do you know the rest? In comparison to others, is *Nong Khai one of the better ones?

*Long Poj was the only one that remained the longest. It is the one where the refugees are today.

*Nong Khai was one of the first refugee camps to be opened. It was in a city. This was the first place where most refugees settled. It was a place where the Thais supported the Hmong for two to three years until they were able to come to America. Those who got to go first to America were those who were soldiers with the Americans. Those who were just farmers were registered last to go to America. We were the very first because our group was composed of soldiers who lost their land and went to Thailand to go to America. We came to America in 1979.

So you had only stayed in *Nong Khai?

Yes. We only stayed in *Nong Khai until we registered and came to America. We landed in Bangkok first. We stayed there for one or two nights, then we came to America.

When you came to America was it you, dad, grandpa, and grandma?

Yes. When came to America I, grandpa and grandpa, your dad, Neng, and Shoua came together.

Dad came before you?

No. We all came together, but your dad did come first and then he came back to get us.

Who did you leave behind?

I left my mom and my three brothers. Your dad left behind his two sisters.

How long did you live in *Nong Khai?

About a year.

What was it like there?

In there we didn't worry because we thought that since we had no land we were waiting for support. Whatever they gave us to eat or use was what we had. We were also waiting for our names to be called so we could go to America.

You didn't think that living in a refugee camp [was bad because] you didn't get to farm anymore, or didn't have a regular life anymore?

I don't remember thinking that. I only thought that since our land was lost, our land was lost. In the end, we had to go to another place and be able to hope for a brighter future.

Did you reunite with any relatives in the refugee camp?

Yes, my mom, brothers, and sisters-in-law.

You said that they sent food for you to eat, so you obviously didn't farm. What did you do?

We did. We did *paj dtau to sell for money, cooked, farmed, and put together vegetables to be sold in the market. Sometimes when they didn't send enough food to eat, I started to worry. You end up having no money to use. Your dad went to work for the Laotians and plowed their fields. He was given money to buy extra food to eat. Those who had children sewed *paj dtau for money. You also planted a field at the corner of your home. You could sell what you grew for money.

How long were you married before you had your first child?

I lost one child before your oldest brother was born. It was 1975. I married your dad in 1975 and following that year into 1976, I had my first child. He was a 9 month baby but died during labor. Then a year later, I had Tou. I had Tou in Thailand.

When you lived in *Nong Khai did you celebrate New Year?

Yes. Within that one year when we were still there we had one.

Were the Thai cruel to the Hmong?

We experienced no problems. They sent enough food and rice for people to eat. They gave a good share of meat for everyone.

So you have never seen or lived in other refugee camps before?

Yes. We've only lived in *Nong Khai, then went to Texas in America.

What was your reaction when you first heard that you were going to America?

There was nothing. There was the feeling that, yes, I wanted to go and there was also the feeling of sadness and not wanting to leave. However, we all felt happy and that we all should go.

Prior to coming, what were some of the requirements before coming to America?

Nothing. We just came. They only said to prepare a little food to eat, clothing to wear, some pots and pans to go to *Kong Te.

***Kong Te?**

Yes, *Kong Te. You know the place where I told you we stayed for one day.

Is it Bangkok?

Yes. Bangkok. There is a place called *Kong Te, too. I don't remember if it is the one closer or further down. Bangkok is the big one. *Kong Te is a place around there where people live. The poor people or refugees live there.

What do you remember about making the journey to America?

I thought that when I came, will there be a day that I will return?

You must miss your home land.

Yeah.

Do you know how many refugee camps there are?

In Thailand, there is one in *Nong Khai, Vinai, *Kong Te. There were only three.

When you were in *Nong Khai, did you hear anything about other refugee camps? Was it good or bad, meaning strict?

I heard that they were okay. It was strict. They let us go to places. But I didn't stay long, so I wouldn't know for sure. When we were still there, they didn't close any places. They let you out to go find a living. You had to have papers to go out to work. In Vinai I don't know, because I've never lived there. But I did hear that if you wanted to go someplace, you had to sneak out.

What was your first impression of *Nong Khai?

I don't know. We just thought, being refugees, will there be a day that we could return? We wondered if we were able to go to another land or stay there for a few days and return home. When we arrived there, they said that Americans were there for registrations. So we just registered to go. But when we were still back in Laos, we heard that when you arrived in Thailand, there was no way of returning.

What did you like/dislike in *Nong Khai?

Most of the things were unpleasant. The first thing was being unable to find a way to survive. Second was living there. Third was not having a decent place to live and sleep. It was crowded and it was difficult. There were people who did mean things. I thought that if there was the chance to go to America that I should. It would be better than staying.

I heard from elders that every night you would hear the sound of the funeral drum beating. What was your feeling?

I wasn't scared. Instead I thought that there were so many people living here together and that there were so many deaths occurring. I kept hearing the sound of drum on a continuous basis. Two or three days passed and someone would die. It was sad. But maybe it was due to contaminants in the food.

What there irrigation? Was there water to use for laundry or bathing?

There were wells and irrigations that ran through. Three times a day, they would open the water for people to carry the water back for use. For the wells, they dug a big hole. Then you would use a pail with a string tied to the handle and drop it in there to pull out the water. You used the water to do laundry.

How do you keep healthy?

There was a big hospital where those who were sick or hurt could go. They were free hospitals.

If you ran out of clothing, where were you going to find new ones?

They had clothes. There were several markets nearby.

What did you do for fun?

We didn't do much. The young spoke to one another, carrying on conversations. The elders ended up doing *paj dtau for money, sold what they farmed, and sold meat every now and then.