

CHIPPEWA VALLEY MUSEUM  
Eau Claire Hmong Documentation Project

FIELD REPORT

Contact: Joua Bee Xiong

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833-1977(w)

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Occasion:

Date: December 15, 1992

Place: Chippewa Valley Museum, library

Circumstances of the Interview: See remarks accompanying the tape index.

Supportive Materials:

Photos: none

Slides: 2/15-2/19

Audio Tape: 120 minute DAT (original retained by fieldworker), two 60 minute cassettes (second generation "dub" provided to the Chippewa Valley Museum)

Tape Index: 7 pp. index, preceded by remarks about the circumstances of the interview

Video Tapes: two commercially produced videos featuring Hmong music and including Mr. Xiong

Observations:

As my preliminary remarks accompanying the Tape Index suggest, Mr. Xiong had houseguests that prevented an interview occurring at his home. We met in the library of the Chippewa Valley Museum. Although I took a few slides of Xiong playing and of his instruments, I highly recommend that he be photographed at home or while playing at some Hmong cultural event.

Joua Bee Xiong was born in a Hmong village in northern Laos around 1961. His father was a soldier for the CIA-supported Hmong leader Vang Pao, and Xiong did his share of soldiering as a young teenager. In the late 1970s, Xiong traveled with his family to a refugee camp in Thailand. He immigrated to the United States in 1979 and arrived in Eau Claire in 1980. A determined young man, he graduated from high school and went on to gain several technical school certificates. Nowadays he is a caseworker for Eau Claire County Human Services.

During a period of two years after the 1975 end of the Vietnam War, however, Mr. Xiong had the opportunity to learn to play the Hmong geej. This free reed instrument, somewhat akin to the bagpipe, is not learned casually. Qeej

players must serve an apprenticeship with masters, and Joua Bee Xiong learned from two older relatives, Kao Yia Xiong and Kao Neng Xiong. The geej, traditionally, is an essential instrument at Hmong funerals. Because the Hmong language is tonal, songs can, quite literally, be "spoken" through instruments. Funerals require a set of traditional songs to escort the spirit safely to its ancestral home. Because funerals are extended rites of passage, during which geej-playing is constant, apprentice players spell their masters under the critical appraisal of elders and the deceased's relatives. Mr. Xiong received his training in this way in his home village, and his skills were sharpened in the refugee camps where death was constant and the geej-playing demanded at funerals seldom ceased.

In this country, Xiong continues to play for traditional funerals, although their duration and certain aspects of their practice have been altered by the nature of life in urban America. There is another type of non-ritual geej-playing, however, in which lexically meaningless sounds are played. This playing outside the funeral context generally takes place at New Year's celebrations and involves dance steps and acrobatic moves related to competitions between musicians that once characterized funerals.

Mr. Xiong also plays a number of instruments that have been in more widespread use among Hmong people, both males and females. These instruments--reedless end-blown flutes (raj pum liy), side-blown flutes with copper reeds (tan nplaim), and the jaw harp (ncas)--were used in Laos by young men and women of courting age. Using the Hmong tonal language, youngsters would convey their feelings, often expressed in traditional verse forms, by both singing the songs and playing their words on instruments. In wartime Hmong people could alert fellow-Hmong of their coming by playing words on the instruments.

In this country, Mr. Xiong continues to play these secular instruments, although most frequently within the context of "demonstrations" on Hmong culture for non-Hmong people.

Many of his children are musical, as are various brothers. The assorted Xions illustrate the range of Hmong musical activity in Eau Claire and, by extension, the United States. Joua Bee Xiong plays the geej at both traditional funerals and at new world Hmong seasonal competitions, he plays other instruments in "culture shows" for outsiders. He is teaching two of his young boys to play the Hmong geej and to dance. A daughter, however, plays the western classical violin, while another plays the western flute. Meanwhile several brothers play in a Hmong rock band: their songs are chiefly Hmong traditional songs rendered in the Hmong language, but their instrumentation and sound is that of an American "soft rock" band.

TAPE INDEX

Interviewee: Joua Bee Xiong  
4709 White Avenue  
Eau Claire, WI 54703  
715/836-9629(h)  
833-1977(w)

Recorder: SONY DAT TCD-D3  
Tape: Fuji DAT R-120  
Microphones: mono lapel mic  
for interview and some music,  
stereo mic for geej playing

Interviewer: James P. Leary  
Date: December 15, 1992  
Place: Chippewa Valley Museum Library

Circumstances of Recording:

Mr. Xiong had houseguests, so conducting an interview at his home would have been an imposition. The interview site was the Chippewa Valley Museum's library, chosen because it was fitted out with tables and chairs, was relatively quiet with acceptable acoustics, and had enough space for Xiong to maneuver while playing the geej. Besides the interviewer, Tim Pfaff of the Chippewa Valley Museum staff was present, as was Metin Ekici, a Turkish graduate student in folklore at the University of Wisconsin. Pfaff and Ekici each raised pertinent questions in the course of the interview and they are noted in the tape index.

The interview session extended from shortly after 5 PM until 7:50 PM. Mr. Xiong arrived from work with four flutes, a jaw harp, and two geejis. He had to leave prior to 8 because of his houseguests. Accordingly the interview was not as thorough as it might be, but it does manage an overview of Xiong's musical repertoire, with particular attention to the importance of the geej in funerals. Joua Bee Xiong speaks excellent English and was both articulate and accomodating throughout. Toward the end of the two hour tape recorded interview, Xiong sang songs and played them on various instruments. Because he played the flutes and jaw harp while sitting at a table, I kept the monophonic lapel microphone on Xiong, but for the geej-playing, I used a stereo microphone and a boom.

NOTE:

1) I have kept the DAT (digital) tape on which this interview was originally recorded and have provided the CVM with a dub of the interview on two cassette tapes. My reasons for keeping the DAT tape are: a) the CVM does not have equipment to play it, and b) I would like to use it for a Down Home Dairyland program on Wisconsin Public Radio to promote the Hmong exhibit in fall 1993. Should the CVM wish to use the original DAT tape in order to make a "soundtrack" for the exhibit, I will be happy to provide it.

2) I did not stop Mr. Xiong to get spellings for Hmong or Laotian words. In some cases I was able to find spellings. Others are indicated with empty brackets. Perhaps a translator could fill in the information. The songs might also be rendered in Hmong and in English translations.

Time

Content

0:00:00-0:00:27 Announcement.

0:00:28-0:01:04 B. in Laos in a village [ ] in the province of Xieng Khouang. B. ca. 1961, not certain.

0:01:04-0:08:40 Father was a soldier, had eight brothers and a sister. After Vietnam War American CIA withdrew from Laos, Communist Pathet Lao took over in Laos. Made life difficult for the Hmong. Xiong's family went to hide in the

forest after 1975 end of Vietnam War. Carried guns, grenades, ammunition, hid in tunnels and caves until 1978. Ran out of arms. Had totally lost their village. Were in the high mountains of Laos, the [ ] area. April 1978 walked to Thailand with other families, about 3,000 people fighting and walking. Took about 2 1/2 months to get to the Mekong River. Had to fight at the river several times and to get around an electric fence. Family split up. Joua sneaked across the border to the river, told family he would try to return with a boat. Once across regulations prevented Xiong from going back. After a few weeks was able to return. Hmong on the Laotian side were starving. Some had gone back to the mountains, some had surrendered. Xiong could not find his parents, walked nearly half way back to the mountains trying to find them. Had no luck and returned to Thailand. Three weeks later his parents and brother found boats and were able to cross. (Joua Bee himself had crossed by floating and swimming with a bamboo pipe.) The Mekong River about a mile and a half wide. Water buffaloes looked smaller than chickens on the other side.

0:08:41-0:15:25

Once in the camps only stayed about six months, then came to Philadelphia with a brother and uncle. Parents came shortly afterward. Were in an urban black area, only knew a few words of English. Black folks not very friendly, thought Xiong was Chinese and could do kung fu. Got in several fights, one time almost to the death. Scary. Then Xiong's parents settled in Chicago so he went there. Situation not much better. Got in touch with Kai Moua in Eau Claire. Were encouraged to come to a place that was a small town and offered good educational opportunities. Arrived in Eau Claire in August 1980. Had come to Philadelphia in July 1979. Went to Memorial High School. Very difficult at first, knew math but no English. Past experience as a soldier and a farmer gave him no skills to get by in the USA. After high school, studied computer languages at Chippewa Valley Technical School. After graduating, worked six months for the Hmong Mutual Aid Association (HMAA), then decided on more education. Got a criminal justice degree and joined Eau Claire police reserve for four years. Currently working with Eau Claire County Human Services' Employment and Training Program. Initially worked with SE Asian refugee peoples, after one year switched to doing the same work with the Euro-American population. Has been at that task for four years now. Case load almost 200 people. Trying to help people back to school, to find child care, to find jobs. Most of his case load consists of divorced women. Joua Bee is the first person to work for his family. Arrived in the USA single, but now has a wife and seven children. Bought a home for himself and has several duplexes for rent. Is proud of his accomplishments.

0:15:26-0:20:30

Regarding music: After 1975 Vietnam War was over. Spent a few years working on the farm in his mountain village. No school was possible. Began to learn music from his relatives in the village at age 13 or 14. Worked hard at night, worked in the fields in the day. Occasionally had to go and fight to protect the village. Two years are not enough to learn Hmong music, but Xiong learned quite a bit during the six months he spent in the camps, especially by helping elders at funerals. When Xiong came to this country and married, wife's parents were Christians who had rejected

much of their traditional culture. Eventually realized the importance of keeping his Hmong culture. The geej is an important symbol of the Hmong people, no other people, says Xiong, have such an instrument. In this country the elders support Xiong's playing at New Year's and at the funerals. They say he is the best player in this country. Did not play much at funerals in the early years in the USA, but did a lot of presentations to people who were interested in learning about Hmong culture and music. Sometimes got paid, sometimes didn't. Put a lot of his time into this because he felt it was important to convey a sense of the Hmong to the larger populace.

0:20:31-0:27:56

Regarding his early training in music in the village: Cousin bought Xiong a geej, told him it was important to learn the instrument. No school was possible, war had subsided, there was time to learn. Learned to play at night and sometimes in the day from elders who had no formal schooling but were steeped in Hmong oral tradition. Xiong worked for these elders in exchange for their teachings. Learning the geej was the most difficult learning experience Xiong had. The master played and Xiong listened, then he played and the master listened and watched his fingers. After two years Xiong just learned enough to help at funerals, but was not yet a master. Funerals of important persons required 2-3 weeks of constant playing and drumming. Younger players were needed to help the masters. Xiong's masters still live in Laos. He has been able to go back to visit them. Xiong has now surpassed his masters in skill because they have had fewer occasions to play. His masters are very proud of him. One is Kao Neng Xiong [sp. of full name?], the other is Kao Yia Xiong [sp. of full name?]. Back in 1986 one of Xiong's masters won a competition in Laos as the best geej player. Xiong's masters now live in the city because the communists want to keep track of the Hmong and prevent them from being in contact with Hmong soldiers in the forest. In 1985 Xiong had won a parallel competition in Minneapolis/St. Paul. Xiong has traveled recently to China where he has met geej players. He believes he is currently one of the best players in the world.

0:27:57-0:34:08

The oldest brother of Xiong's master knew how to make the geej. It is made of small bamboo called [ ]. Has to dry the bamboo 8-12 months. Uses hard wood for the sound cavity, cuts it into a rounded shape with a knife, then sands with a coarse leaf in lieu of sandpaper, then splits the round wooden piece in half and hollows it out and pierces it so that bamboo pieces have to be passed through the sound cavity. The piercings have to be measured carefully so that the bamboo passes through tightly. The sections of bamboo passing through the sound cavity are fitted with copper reeds that have been pounded many times. The halves of the sound cavity are held together with a bark twine, although tape is often used in the USA. In Laos beeswax was used to seal around the sound cavity if the maker had not fitted the bamboo snugly through the holes. The bamboo and reeds passing through the sound cavity are of varying dimensions to produce different tones, yet efforts are made to keep these dimensions standard from one geej to another so that various instruments will deliver the same sound. The finished instruments may be fitted out with

straps and decorative beads.

0:34:09-0:42:30

On funerals. When Xiong's masters were young, there were competitions at the funeral where one player challenged another to see who could follow the other's moves. No competitions in funerals in Xiong's experience. Cows and water buffaloes were killed at funerals, there was lots of meat. If a rival geej player won a funeral competition, they got the largest share of payment in meat. This custom created bad feelings and was discontinued some decades prior to Xiong's birth. Christianity among the Hmong also resulted in the rejection by converts of the old ways. In traditional customs, the dead person's body must be washed and dressed in new clothes, and placed in the living room. Then the geej player must perform a certain song to help guide the spirit back to its original home so that it can be reincarnated as a human being or something else. The trip back is made step-by-step as the geej player sings the spirit back through time to all the places where the spirit has lived. Eventually the spirit is taken back to the child's house where its "baby shirt" or placenta is found. The spirit needs this to return to the spirit world. [In Hmong culture the boy's placenta is buried near the center post of the house, the girl's is buried under the bed.] Guidance back is intended to allow the spirit to become a human being again instead of an animal that will be eaten or a stone that is mute. The song that guides the spirit back takes 3-5 hours to perform. It is very important and is followed by a second requisite song that also guides the spirit back. After those two songs are performed the geej player can play an array of songs that are "fun," "happy," "sad." There are also "foster" songs for people without parents, widow songs, songs for various meals. The dead person's spirits are invited to eat with those gathered. Then there are several important songs at the end when the body is moved outside. After all the singing the family can bury the body. After a year the spirit is invited back again by the geej player and the drummer. This is the last time that the spirit and the family can enjoy one another. Many of the same funeral songs are repeated over a one to three day period.

0:42:31-0:47:15

Hmong songs are delivered through the music. The playing of geej is not music but words. Xiong had to memorize all of these words and then coordinate his memory of the words with his breathing and fingering to make the instrument speak. Although the basic structures of funeral songs are the same, different geej players may express them with individual variation. The young player helping out a master must be aware of the basic songs and the variations in order to help out competently at funerals. Non-playing elders form a critical audience at funerals, poor players lose face. Elders and master players sit around while the younger players are playing. They appear to be sleeping but are listening. They do not criticize directly but make comments to others. Very occasionally a young player will get a direct compliment. At the funeral typically the master performs the important songs, then younger players help out.

0:47:16-0:49:15

While the playing is going on during protracted funerals, many goings-on. Some relatives prepare food for many

visitors. Some play cards and tell stories to make the house warm, to make some fun and some noise so the family isn't continually despairing. But the geej and the drum are constant. Some geej players are also shamans. Once the person is dead, there is little for the shaman to do.

0:49:16-0:53:05 Regarding the steps done by the geej player during funerals: [Joua Bee misunderstands me here. By "steps," I meant the dance steps executed by the geej player, but JBX interprets steps to mean the stages involved in the funeral. He goes over elements of the funeral mentioned previously before we clarify the misunderstanding.] Before people are put in the coffin a special song is sung [ ] suggesting that the person is about to ride a horse back to the spirit world. There are also songs when a cow or pig is killed. The spirit is told who has given the animal to them; each animal has a symbolic significance. The cow is associated with the umbrella that protects the spirit on its journey. The chicken will protect the spirit from being scared; the chicken knows whether or not the spirit is being received by other spirits that are actually their relatives or whether they are bad spirits bent upon deception. [I clarify my interest in learning about the geej player's footwork.]

0:53:06-0:56:50 All the people in the village come to see the funerals during a particular day. There is a special name for this day: [ ]. The villagers bring food and money and come with another geej player. The player inside at the funeral has to come outside and welcome the people and the other player and invite the latter inside to play. The players dance and play while this is going on. Many years ago when the outside player came there was a competition between the outside and the inside player over payment for the funeral. Nowadays the outside player plays a few songs and then sets his instrument aside. Dance steps and special moves remain cultivated by contemporary geej players, however, for dance competitions.

0:56:51-0:58:55 The same songs and basic sequences are observed for funerals. But additional songs can be added, so the lengths of funerals vary depending upon the age, wealth, number of relatives, and so on of the deceased.

0:58:56-1:01:45 There are dangers to both the deceased spirit and to the geej player during the funeral. The player is careful to conceal his identity from the bad spirits. Otherwise they can follow him and make him sicken and die. The player tells the spirit false descriptions of himself to tell to the bad spirits: "His eye is so big and his ear is an elephant's ear [ ]. He came today, but he went back yesterday. He came on the air, but he went back under the ground." These statements confuse the bad spirits. The dead person is also given a crossbow, a gun, and a guiding chicken to ward off the bad spirits.

1:01:46-1:08:25 On changes in funerals in America. If people are Christians, they do exactly what other American Christians do: they have a short service, the body is buried, and people go home.. JBX does not think this is as valuable as the old Hmong way. In the old tradition, if someone brought money and food, there was a bond or an obligation.

Christians feel they have no obligations except to God. They do not observe the traditional reciprocity. Christians do not stay as long at the funerals either. When JBX plays traditional funerals in Eau Claire, he plays 2-3 days for 24 hours a day. Bodies must be separated during funerals so spirits are not confused. Here in Eau Claire arrangements are made with the funeral directors so that no other body is in the building during the ceremonies. Often the Hmong have to pay extra for this. Because the spirits have to travel further from America, the notion of the coffin as a "horse" is replaced by the notion of the coffin as an "airplane." People who die must be guided back to the old country. Bodies are also fitted out with special shoes that keep them warm in cold weather and ward off insects.

1:08:26-1:14:35 Many years ago geej players performed at marriages, but JBX's masters didn't know these songs, although they had heard of them. Other occasions for playing the geej include festivals, but funeral songs are never performed apart from funerals. If you play the song for someone who is alive, that person may sicken and die. There are some songs that are for fun and there is a New Year's song to send the old year away and welcome the new year. There are also competitions for geej players (in Minneapolis, for example). There are 10-15 judges who know how the instrument is played. Songs are not played, the sounds made by the geej have no linguistic meaning: it is just music to accompany the player's dances. The player-dancer executes difficult steps, leaps, and tumbles. In America geej players like JBX are often asked to present Hmong culture to outsiders. On these occasions, he explains the significance of the instrument and plays/dances to demonstrate.

1:14:36-1:15:52 When first learning the instrument and the dances, JBX practiced rolling over and moving without any instrument. He was given a piece of wood to simulate the geej. The real instrument was expensive (one or two silver bars in Laos--a wife costs only four silver bars) and a young player did not wish to risk damaging his geej while practicing dances. Repair was expensive as well and makers were hard to find. JBX broke his instrument once and had to walk two days to where someone was who could fix it. Never broke one again.

1:15:53-1:16:59 JBX can think of nothing else in particular to say about the geej. [Tim asks if the instrument was always going in the refugee camps and JBX answers that it was.]

1:17:00-1:22:40 At age 13-15 in the village JBX began to play instruments other than the geej. These were "for fun, for dating." Even if you are not very handsome, you can do well by playing well. The other instruments were also used for protection. If he traveled from one village to the next he played the instrument to let people know he was not a soldier or a dangerous animal. The flute was especially useful for courting girlfriends and expressing feelings of love and affection. JBX courted his wife with singing. When he sang a very good love song at her house, she fell in love with him. This is in America. In Laos he would have been outside the house. JBX's song was: If I get you I will take care of you; if there is heavy work I will do it; I will love you for ever.



- 1:22:41-1:26:08 JBX introduces a song he used to court his wife. It concerns a boy who is studying in school while his girlfriend waits for him. Then he sings the song.
- 1:26:09-1:27:18 JBX sings this song in a particular Hmong dialect, but he can sing in other dialects as well. He can also play this song on the flute. He sings, then plays a brief snatch of another song on the flute.
- 1:27:19-1:29:00 JBX has gotten out his flutes. He doesn't know how to make the flutes. Each flute is different. One is a [ ], a flute that is cut in a certain way. Another is a [raj pum liv??] where you can cover the opening where the air comes in (i.e. a fipple flute). According to Hmong tradition, this is a safer flute. In Laos there are many spirits in the mountains. They are attracted by the flute and can enter through the opening, come into the mouth of the player and make him sick.
- 1:29:01-1:29:30 JBX plays the flute he has just described.
- 1:29:31-1:30:00 Tries another song but cannot quite get it on the flute.
- 1:30:01-1:30:32 Explains the first song played on the flute: To be a human being is very difficult without your parents. When your parents leave the world you have no others who will love you as much as your parents.
- 1:30:33-1:32:48 Another song for a girlfriend. How come you were born so pretty? What kind of food did your parents eat that you were born so pretty? I'm short and not so handsome, but I like you very much. My parents say that if you become their daughter-in-law they will love you forever. Ask your parents to let us marry. [1:31:30] Tries to play the song on the flute, but has to switch flutes before succeeding.
- 1:32:49-1:35:30 Some flutes have a better tonal range than others. JBX picks up another flute and introduces a song, "pretty much from this country": when I go to school, there is nobody to support me, I have to struggle by myself and suffer; when school is through, I have to pay off debts. [1:33:41] Plays the song on the flute.
- 1:35:31-1:38:39 Takes up another flute which has a copper reed. The prior flutes had no reed, but the tan nplaim is a single free reed instrument with finger holes to produce different pitches. JBX plays it when he feels stress or loneliness. He speaks his feelings through the instrument and after playing it feels much better--better than if he had gone to a counselor. [1:36:45] Plays song. [1:38:09] This instrument has more of a buzzing sound and requires more breath to play. Some of these flutes can very long, but JBX prefers a shorter one that is easier to carry.
- 1:38:40-1:43:53 Takes up the jaw harp or ncas. The instrument can be carried easily in a pocket. It comes in a small case and, some say, has the capacity to be used as a weapon. The small strip of metal, housed in a case, can be flicked out to strike someone in the eye. But this has not happened, to JBX's knowledge, for many generations. The instrument is used to play at night to a girlfriend. The instrument is not loud, so it must be played at a quiet time. You play

love songs on the instrument and you can express things on the instruments that you could not say in ordinary language. One of JBX's instrument's has a long string. If he wasn't that taken with the girl, he would hand her the instrument to play back to him, but would be able to retrieve it by means of the long string. Plays the ncas that comes from China. [1:42:40]

1:43:54-1:47:54 Then takes up the ncas from Laos, which is a little louder and lower than the one from China. Explains the prior song: Dear lover, how can you be so beautiful? If you don't mind, can you be my lover forever? Then reckons his next song will say: I am not so handsome and am very poor, but will you marry a poor person who really loves you? How will you feel if we get married and only have water to drink in the house? [1:45:20] Plays the song on the ncas from Laos.

1:47:55-1:49:08 There are lots of other Hmong instruments, but these are all that JBX can show today. One of his daughters plays the violin, another plays the "American" flute. They don't play the Hmong flute. But Joua is teaching two of his young boys to play the geej and to dance.

1:49:09-1:50:44 Joua's brothers play in a Hmong rock band. They would like to do a concert in collaboration with JBX sometime. The brothers don't know anything about Hmong music. They have learned to play by ear. They have been playing since about 1984. They play traditional love songs, sad songs, and pedagogical songs.

[At this point I switch to a stereo microphone to record the geej.]

1:50:45-1:55:26 JBX explains a mythological song. At the beginning of the world there were nine suns and moons, but someone killed eight of them. The remaining sun and moon very scared to come out. The rooster is the only animal who knows when the sun will come out, and so he crows to encourage the sun to come out. No other animal has this power. In an early era the chicken had no corn, but the sun gave the chicken corn. JBX sings the song. [1:52:30] JBX plays the song on the geej. [1:53:55]

1:55:27-2:02:20 JBX introduces another traditional song about studying and going to school. Sings the song. [1:56:10] Plays the song on the geej. [1:59:35]

[The tape runs out as the session ends.]

# Joua Bee Xiong

Tuesday, December 15, 1992, Jim Leary, Chippewa Valley Museum in Eau Claire and Timothy Pfaff.

Q. When and where were you born?

A. I was born in Laos in the Village called Muong Cha around 1961.

Q. How long did you live there or how did you come to Eau Claire?

A. My father was a soldier and I have one brother and one sister. So, when the war was over and the American CIA was withdrawn from Laos. And, then the Communist took over and they said we, the Hmong people, were the hands, eyes, and hairs of the American CIA. And, they killed mostly men, and for children, they killed mostly young boys who were old enough to know the politics. It was very difficult for us to live in there. After 1975, we moved to the jungle to hide there. We carried our guns, hand grenades, and ammunition that we've hidden them in the cave or tunnel or in the forest. We had fought until 1978 without anyone's support. We ran out of weapons and ammunition. We fought while we were with our family, and children against the communists. That was very difficult. We totally lost our village. During that time, most of the Hmong, who fought against the communists, lived around or near Phou Bia, the highest mountain in Laos. In April 1978, they attacked all the villages. [The Communists invade Muong Cha area in February 14, 1978] A lots of people died and some of us who survived walked to Thailand. We knew that even we stay there and fought against the communists, we probably wouldn't survive because no one in the world would support or knew that we were still fighting. All the politicians only knew that the communists took over Laos and that everything has ended. But they didn't know we were still fighting and the war was still going on. We lost our village and my family with other families about 3000 people walked and fought our ways to Thailand. It took us about two and an half months to get to the Mekong River. We almost got to the Mekong River and we were attacked. The communists stood along the Mekong River like fence blocking it and it was very difficult. We fought a couple times. Our family departed [separate] each others. I was the one who knew little bit about warring. I had my gun I can sneak through the boarder into the Mekong River. I told my family to stay in the other side of the River and if I got into Thailand I would get the boat and came back to get them to Thailand. After I got in Thailand, they had rules that we couldn't go back to the other sides. I stayed there a couple weeks then I asked a couple of my relatives to go with me to get my family. There were still many people lived in the other side [across from Thailand]. At that time, people ran out of food because they were there more than three and an half months. So, they eat any edible leaves or anything that they can eat. Some Hmong returned

to Phou Bia area. Some let themselves being captured by the Communist. Some crossed the Mekong River. And, my parents were waiting for me to returned to get them. It seemed that no one would come back to get them. I took two of my relatives with me to where I left them and we found no one there. We walked almost half way back to where my family originally came from or Phou Bia. We couldn't find them so we went back to Thailand. Three weeks later, my family were lucking that they found a boat to get to Thailand. When I and my relatives crossed the Mekong River, we used bamboo for floating. The other two didn't know how to swim so they hang-on to the bamboo while I swam and pulled them like the propeller and motor across the Mekong River into Thailand. The Mekong River is one and a half mile wide, possibly bigger than the Mississippi River.

When I was the other side of the river and I looked at a buffalo in Thailand it was as small as a chicken. So, I knew it was farther than a mile. We got back to Thailand and my parents also arrived there just matter of days. We only stay about six months in the camp and we decided to come the United States. I first came to Philadelphia with my brother and my uncle. My parents were behind in Thailand. I was in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania for two months. There, we live in the urban area where a lots of blacks lived there. We could concentrate to study because we didn't speak any English. We just know how to say "Hi! how are you?" "Good morning!" or things like that. When we went to school with black students and they were not very friendly. They first saw me they thought I was a Chinese by assuming I know Kunfu like you see in TV. It was very difficult and I was involved in fight. One time I was almost frightened to death. A few months later my parents came to Chicago and I moved there. I knew they came there so I telephoned them and I moved to live with them for a few months. And in Chicago, it was not much different from Philadelphia... We didn't have any good education. Kay Moua was one of the first Hmong families who came to Eau Claire. We telephoned him and he said that up in here Eau Claire is a small town with good education for you. We and others moved to Eau Claire in 1980. I arrived in July 1979. I was a tenth grader. I graduated from Memorial High School. Compare to any human being, I was just like three years old to study in 10th grade. I went to school, I knew math, but not English at all. The teacher math explained to me that I only do one part of the math, but I still didn't understand him so he tore away the part that I didn't need to do and threw it in the garbage. I then understood him. I started my life with everything new. My past experience as being a soldier or serviceman there was nothing related that it could work over here. Farming skill was not work in here. Nothing in my background could help me. I graduated from high school and I went to Chippewa Valley Technical College. I studied Computer language. I thought I chose the most difficult major because I didn't know half of the

English words. The Computer itself is another language. So, I studied the basic computer language called COBOL, BATCH, and some other computer. I graduated from there and I worked at the Hmong Mutual Assistance Association, Inc., for six months. Then I went to Mount Senario College and I graduated with the Criminal Justice Major. I joined the Eau Claire Police Reserved for almost four years. Right now, I'm working at Human Services for the Employment Training Program. I first work there as a CWEP case worker for just the Hmong for a year and then I changed my job to different position; except I work with Caucasian for four years now. I'm glade that I could start my new life here. I not only help my people, but right now I can help Caucasian. My case load is almost 200. I help them to go back to school, find child care, or find them jobs if they are job-ready. Or, if they need more education. Most my cases are divorced women who did a lots of stupid things when they were in high school and they had children. Right now they realized that it was not what they want and they would like to go back to get their GED or high school diploma equivalent to get their jobs. Now I really proud of myself that I can help my family. I was the first person in my family to work. Right now I have some kids. I bought a house, some duplexes for rent, and few other rental apartment buildings.

Back to talk about my music, a few years after 1975 which we only concentrated on working in the farm and there was no school. I learned it from my relatives who didn't even have any type of education or schooling. But, they knew Hmong culture and music; Hmong instrument. I took my time to learn those for two years.

Q. So, you didn't start until you were about 14 years old then?

A. Yes, probably about 13 or 14 years old. I learned very hard at night. During the day time I went back to work on the field or farm. Some day if we need to go to the front line to protect the village. Two years was not long enough for me to learn about Hmong culture, but I kept learning including the six months I spent in Thailand. In Thailand I learned English and Hmong Qeng (Qeej) including play the music at the funeral. When I came to this country, I got married to my wife and her parents are Christians. I stayed with my parents in-law for a year and I forgot a lots of my music and culture. I was working hard on my English and my high school works. When I realized that my culture is important and I need to keep it, but I already lost a lots of them already. I glad that I still remember some and be able to keep some of them. I believe that the Qeng (qeej) is the symbol of the Hmong people. When I search for our history, our name, and our identity I didn't find anything else but the qeng, which no one on earth has; except the Hmong. We the only one that carry the instrument. When I was in Laos, I was good at playing the instrument. The

other kids knew how to play too, but they were not as good as I did. We played at the New Year or at the funeral, the elders were proud, supported, and praised me that I can perform or dance well with the qeng (qeej). I was good with it naturally.

In Eau Claire I didn't play at funeral, but I play at conference or presentation, school, churches, and museum or any other organization that is interesting about Hmong culture and music. I am willing to take my time to go there to play for them. Sometimes, I receive reimbursement for mileage, but most of the times I do it for free. I am willing to share my culture and music to this new world. We are human being and we have some important things to share to other people.

Q. Could you talk about when you were back to the village where you start to learn from the men, the situation, and how you learn?

A. At night or during the day time I learned it. My brother bought me a qeng instrument and he said, "My younger brother there is no longer any school and you need to learn this to help the community." Since he told me that I realized that maybe it is important thing for me to learn. Since no school and the war was slow down. Most people thought the war was over. There were no more communists coming to our village so I got the time to learn it. I learned at night and we then got together during day time. Just as I said these older people never were in school, but they were good at the music from the beginning to the ending. I helped them to work during day time and they teach me at night. I stayed until one or two O'clock in the morning to learn.

The Qeng music was the most difficult thing I ever learned because there is no note for you to follow. The master just said you need to follow the sound. He watch my fingers during the time I played if I did right. If not then he played and I listen to the sound and watch his fingers in the same time. I have to try and try until my qeng's sound match to the master's. It was difficult to learn. I learned it for two years and I only knew enough to help in the funeral, but not know enough to teach, or be the master.

Q. Can you tell me little bit about your master?

A. My master are Neng and Yia Xiong. A year ago, I went back to Laos and China and I met one of my master who is still in Laos. I told him to show his dance and music to me and I show him mine. After we played and danced he said that I am now better then he is. In Laos they are poor and they do not practice often. In here the US I have the chance to travel and to learn new techniques. I created some new techniques myself. He told me that they had a contest in Laos back in 1986 and he won the first place.

Q. Is he still a farmer in Laos?

A. Right now he can not farm any more and he came to live in the city. The communists said that anyone who live in the village [rural area] is considered having contact with the rebel Chao Fah, meaning Soldier of the Lord of Sky or the Godly Soldiers. They work in a little rice paddle and small business to survive. In 1985, I also received the first place in Twin Cities, too. I told him about that and he was very happy about it. When I went to China, the Hmong people there have an association called, "Hmong Study Association, Inc., and all the Hmong in the world come there to have meeting. Some of them bring things like custom and culture show and the qeng (qeej). But, I didn't see anyone was able to do as well as I do. So, I believe I am still one of the best players in the world at this time.

Q. Was the maker of the qeng in your village? Did you know him?

A. Yes, he was the older brother of my master.

Q. Did you ever seen how he make it?

A. Yes, I eyewitness he did it. The qeng is made of wood and special and small kind of bamboo Hmong called them the qeng bamboo (Xyooob qeeg). The bamboo should be smoked up to a year or minimum of 8 months. He would choose the best and hardest wood as the main qeng. Everything is made by hand. He used the rough leaves we had in Laos as the sand paper to make the wood smooth. One can easily see two lines from the bottom of the qeng to the top because it was made from two pieces of wood by putting together. The qeng maker used a knife or tool to cut the wood and make it round. He used the tree bark as tape to hold the two pieces together. The man then made holes in the wood. He cut the bamboo and make some holes and inserted the reed into the large hole. He made other round holes in the bamboos as the holes that your fingers would cover to make music. Then the qeng maker inserted the bamboo pieces into the wood and seal them with bee wax. Each bamboo piece is different length to make different tone. The string is only for carrying or hanging the qeng.

Q. Can you tell me about the role of the musicians at the funeral or the musician's job is?

A. It was the idea of competition while playing in the funeral. Since I grew up I have never seen any more. If one person play certain ways, the other just follow. We still play at funeral home and do some samples for fun and did not get into a real competition. A person who competed and won the contest would take all the meat that belong to the other qeng players of at the funeral. This kind of competition made people got into argument about their tradition and it was stopped. In Eau Claire, anyone who is not Christian passed away will have to have a traditional ceremony with playing the qeng before allowing to burry the

person. In Laos when a Hmong person die, they dress him up and lay him in the living room then the story teller would come and tell him a story about the first two people on earth. Then the qeng player will play the first song for the dead person to instruct him back to his ancestors, meaning the first two people on Earth. The story teller and the qeng players will track down his/her past to pay for the tree, and the nature s/he used and to appreciate for using them. The story teller and the qeng would take the dead person to find his/her placenta by calling it a coat and then there s/he began the journey to find the ancestors; the first two people on Earth. The qeng player and the story teller then instruct the dead person to reincarnation by being born to the rich and famous families on Earth. They also warn the dead person not to be animal and other living things beside human being. After the first a couple important songs, you can play songs about break-fast, lunch and dinner because we believe that the spirit is still with us. So, the song was to take the opportunity to invite him to eat with us. After those songs, then we have songs just for fun; for an example, we play a song about an orphan who has no parents, brother or sister and s/he feels so lonely. A year after a person die, the family then welcome the spirit back for a ceremony as visiting. We then told the spirit that it will be the last time for him/her to visit the family. The ceremony begin again similar to when the person died.

Q. Are the songs that people are singing?

A. Songs through the music. If anyone who want to know, you can tell them words by words. We call songs, but it was words that we play. The songs are stories or instructions. For an example, if I play a song for a dead person name "John." I can say, "John now you are dead and things change from living to dying. You heard a lots of insects are singing, but it actually are crying voice from your family and friends. You see the rain fall heavily, but it is the tears falling down from your family and friends' eyes." We have to memorize all those words into your mind. Sometimes, you not necessary need to remember the words, but how your fingers moved. You have to breath correctly with your fingers in order to play sounds right.

Q. When you play for a different person, do you change the structure or tone for the person because of his name is different?

A. The same structure unless you have a different master who does things differently. [The qeng player does not mention the dead person's name, but call him the "dead fellowman" when playing the songs. So, everyone will be the same.]

If you're going to play in the funeral you have to know all the structure so that the elderly people who listen to the song you play will not laugh at you or look down on you. You



don't want to embarrass yourself, or your family and clan so before you'll play in the public you really need to know the qeng and the structure well.

Q. When you play in the funeral, do people openly making the evaluation how you play?

A. All the qeng master usually are sitting around or near you and listening to you. I learn that a lots. Sometimes you do not do well they won't say anything in front of you, but they would tell other people how bad you did. When you do well then they give you a drink and praise your work by saying, "you did a very good job," but that does not occur occasionally and that is Hmong culture.

Q. When you said you help out at funeral. Does this mean that the master is there and you're there to help him?

A. Yes, the master has to perform or play the first two important songs and then anyone can play. Just as what I said, the funeral is three days long and if you have no body to help those master then they would not be able to handle it. The more helpers the better it is.

Q. What else is going on at the funeral as the qeng players are playing the songs? What about the family?

A. Some family cook for visitors who came there to visit. Some keep the record as receive donation. Some were there to play cards. Some tell stories to make the house warm and make the family hear and see others so that family do not have to think about the dead person all the time.

Q. During the music, do the qeng musicians work with shamans at all?

A. Some of the qeng musicians are shamans, but they don't work with shamans. Shamans and qeng musicians are opposite from each others. Shaman treat to prevent the person from dying and has nothing to do with the dead person during funeral. The qeng musicians help when the person died, but do not help when they are still alive.

Q. What are the steps you mentioned?

A. After a person died, you wash him/her and then dress him/her with new clothes. Lay him/her in the living room to certain direction as the family rule is and then the story teller would tell the dead person the story of the two people on Earth and his way back to find them. The Qeng player then play its song same story as the story teller does; except it was from the qeng. The second song was about the horse (the coffin). Hmong folktales said that God told the Hmong to call it a horse to take the dead person back to him in heaven. The song explain the coffin and its role how the dead person can use it to get back to heaven or his ancestor. We don't call the coffin a house, but a horse. If we kill an animal for the dead person, we play a song to tell what for; from whom; and why the animal is

being killed or given to him/her as a gift for certain purpose by certain family person. The animal may be call an umbrella. We tell the dead person to use the umbrella for protection when it rains. The chicken is to guide the dead person's way to find his ancestors; the first two people on earth. The song or story said that people who come to welcome you and claim to be your ancestors are not your ancestors. When your rooster sing, your ancestors' rooster will sing to response or answer it. The family whose rooster answered yours are your ancestors. So, you have to follow your rooster's advice. That is the story or the song said.

Q. Did the qeng players do something about their feet when they play the qeng?

A. Oh, that is the dance. Hmong do have one funeral day we called khua chue (Qhwa txws). It is the open day for all friends and relatives to come and visits. They all bring food, and money to help the family. [If it is a funeral for a married male when the older sister and the brother-in-law come, they would also bring a qeng player with them. He would play from outside into the house. If it is a funeral for a female then the older brother and the older sister-in-law would come with their own qeng player]. The qeng player inside the house would play to welcome the outside into the funeral. Each one would play a style or technique and the other would follow as best as he can. We dance with the qeng. He would take the role from me if I ask him and then he would play any songs he likes or what I ask him to do. As I mentioned earlier, Hmong used to have competition. The qeng player who came would dance and play with the one at the funeral until one of the player gave up or lost. If the qeng visitors won the competition, he would take anything the family gave to you as your portion for your role at the funeral. If the qeng visitors lost then they would just leave. Now people don't do that any more. We just go for helping. The qeng visitors would just play for fun and for help. We're just helping each others. We one qeng player danced a style or a technique and the other could not follow then he lost. Each technique means differently. Some of the techniques are fighting or kicking [not to hurt the other player, but to show how well you can perform].

Q. Are there differences between young, old, male, and female for the length of the funeral would be?

A. The songs are not different, and the funeral steps are not different. But, the young do not have children and friends so the family do not want to spend much money for the funeral. And, if a person is an elder, rich, who have many sons and daughters would help each others to keep the body not to burry. It is just a matter of the family whether they are rich or poor. It is an important person or not. But, we the qeng players, do not refuse to play because of the person is a child or not an important person.

We do not refuse to play a certain songs because they are not old enough [all necessary songs have to be played]. We treat all spirit of any dead person the same way. The family have their own choice how long they want to keep the dead person at the funeral. I can shorten the qeng songs to match the funeral or extend it if the funeral is going to be long. There are four steps that are important in Hmong funeral. After those four steps then it is your choice to keep the dead person as long as you want.

Q. Are there dangerous spirits if you don't say something?  
A. Right. It's dangerous to you and at the last step before you return, you have to hide yourself so then can not follow you back home. Because if they can follow you then you would get sick and die. Before we return back, we sing some songs and we tell him or her that if the bad spirits asked who brought you here then you have to say that the person who sent me here has a big ear as the fan; his eyes are as big as a bowl; his nose as big as an ax-handle; he came in the air and he returned underground; he came today but he returned yesterday already. You have to hide yourself and confused the evil spirits about yourself.

Q. What kind of changes as the result of Christianity or new life in America (younger generation no longer know the tradition) affect on Hmong funeral?  
A. If a Hmong person become Christian then his funeral would just be like American Christian funeral. People would just sing songs and open only sometimes for friends and relatives can visit. But, it is not as valuable as our traditional funeral. What I mean is that you don't have many friends or relatives who would come to visit. People feel that they don't appreciate you or thank you for visiting and helping them when people bring foods, and money to help them. In our culture, we thank someone we have to bow or kneel down rather than just saying "thank you." Christians think they would not bow to anyone in the world but God. So, if I give them \$50.00 they would just say thank you and would not physically thank you. Hmong traditional way of thank you would bow and swing your hands back and forth and say, "Thank you sir for your kindness, your sympathy, and your care to bring us food, or money, to help us while our family are in needs. Giving to us might take away your chance to spend for other needs. However, we will remember your kindness, your sympathy, and your love and care. If in the future you have any similar problem we will try our best way to help you up if we can. If it happen to be at the time we are poor and do not have anything to help you then it may sound like we forget your help today." The person makes those statements and bow to them and they would bow too, or would pull you up and said, "Don't bow, just the words is enough." But, the Christian is different because they refuse to do those steps and they do not want to open too long.

Q. Did you play traditional funeral here in Eau Claire?

A. Yes, we played traditional qeng here, but we realize that it is very hard for us to reserve a funeral for three to four days. If two Hmong people died in the same time then we want one funeral end before the other open or one in different funeral home. This is because we do not have enough help in the community to perform the traditional funeral. In this country we have to be very careful because while we use the funeral home then we don't want anyone else to use, too.

Q. Are you being forced by the state law to have funeral at funeral home?

A. No, we asked the funeral home and they said they can give us time to perform our traditional funeral because they understand our ways of having funeral. We will have to pay whatever cost to keep the dead body there until the ceremony is over.

Q. Is there anything in the songs that help the spirits to travel across ocean and others back to home?

A. Back in Laos we call the coffin the horse. But in here the United States of America, we call the coffin the airplane because when we came here we flew on airplane. So, we told the spirits that you need to take airplane back. We still guide the dead person way back pass China, crossing freezing death terrain, crossing plain of very large caterpillars sting people. So, we have to make him/her shoes to wear for protection. We told the spirit that if you observe snow or caterpillar, put on this shoes. If you being attacked, use your cross-bow or your gun.

Q. Can you tell me little bit about other occasion that the qeng is used or played?

A. In the early time our great-grand-parents played at the weddings, but I have never seen anyone play since I learn and play. The master no longer practice and know the songs for wedding. I heard that a few people knew those songs and those ways of performing, but I have never seen or talked to them about it. We can play it at the festival when we gather qeng players to play for fun. We do not play songs that is particularly for guiding the spirit back to his/her ancestors. We feel that those songs are very important and if I play them to you while you are there listening to them, might cause you to get sick and die. We don't play those songs inside our house, we only play outside or in the field. Mostly we play songs for fun only when we have a gathering. We have songs just for fun and we can play those songs. We played at the New Year. We have a new year song.

Q. Can you tell me about the new year song?

A. The song send away sickness and bad luck with the old year and welcome goodness with the new year. - So, that

everyone will receive goodness in the new year. We don't have many steps to perform or do like funeral. It is just the song that we play. After that song, most qeng players do not play song, but dancing music.

Q. What goes on in Twin Cities so that people can go there for qeng competition?

A. It is just an events for sport activities. They advertise all kind of sports and music. They have rules that you have to follow or play. One could play after another. There are 15 judges who are qeng players to judge how well you do.

Q. Do you play certain songs?

A. We do not play with songs, but with dancing music. The dancing music is not word or story. It is just music that you have to learn to know how to play.

Q. Can you tell me about various program that you can play in this area?

A. Yes, when people requested me to do at the Hmong culture shows I usually explain how important the qeng is, how to play and others. I can play a few more songs; such as happy or sad songs that I dance with it. Mostly I talk about it and play only a part of it. I found that people like the dance the most.

Q. Did you learn to dance with the instrument or you learn to play and work on it?

A. I have to learn with the bare hands without the instrument. I learned to roll-over. Sometimes with a piece of wood to start it first because it is expensive to buy an equipment like this. In Laos we had to pay one to two silver bars per one--and that we considered very expensive. You know a wife only cost silver bars to marry her and if this is two silver bars then it is very expensive. If any piece is broken, you have to take it to the qeng maker to repair or replace it and he would charge you a lots of money, too. So, we need to be very careful. There were not many qeng maker. My master didn't know how to repair or replace it. I had to walk two days to fix it. I broke my one time and after that I have to be very careful and didn't break one any more.

Q. Is there always will be qeng at the funeral?

A. Yes, there will always be qeng if the dead person is not a Christian. It doesn't matter whether it is a baby or an adult if the body is going to be at the funeral for a day or so then you need to play the qeng.

Q. Did you learn as a young man to play the other instruments?

A. No, I didn't play until I was about 13 to 14 years old.

Q. Can you talk about learning the other instruments?

A. The other instruments are made for dating and for fun. The more you know, the better the girls would like you. If you play well, the girls would enjoy listening to it. Some they like you and miss you, so they invite you back and you have a lots of girl-friends. That is one thing that I play. Some instrument help to protect me because we live in country of a lots of jungle with war and tigers. My music let the villagers know that I am not a soldier, but their girls' boyfriend. I am not a dangerous animal because we have tigers and other animals. Everyone has gun and it is very dangerous. So, part of the reason I play was for protection. You play to let them know that you not a criminal person and others, but a boyfriend of their daughters. If you play the music, it make them feel lonesome and want to talk to you because they know you are there to date them. You can tell a story to the girl how much you love her and miss her. You can say sweet words to her through the music you play. Make the girl you date happy or love you. I play since I was about 13 years old because that time I was ready to get dating with girls.

Q. So, did you caught a girl with the music then?

A. I sang a song. I sang a very lovely song to a girl and she fell in love with me. I went to her house and ask the parents that we are not in Laos any more and we have to date their daughter in open. They invited me into the house and stayed late with their daughter in their house. That was the way I dated my wife. We spent about two hours together and she asked me to sing her a song. I sang a song saying that if I ever got you, I'll love, and care for you. I will carry the heavy things. I will love you forever. The song is like a poem. After listening to my songs, she might find me a different person than my physical appearance. Most of the girlfriends I had acted the same thing.

Q. Can you sing that song right now?

A. Yes, I'll sing a song about a girl stay home while the boyfriend is away to college or university. She should be patient and wait for him so he could concentrate on his learning. It is also true for wife who stay home while the husband is away to college.

Here is the song: "(1) Oh, my lovely woman while I'm gone to get my education in other part of the world, and while you are waiting for me to return please do not invite your old lover to stay with you. So, it will help me to have good education without you causing me any pain in my heart. (2) Oh, my lovely woman while I'm gone to get my education in other part of the world please do not invite your old lover into your heart. So, that it will help me to have peace in mind without you causing me any kind of pain or illness. (3) Oh, my lovely woman while you are waiting for me to return,

please do not give your old lover your heart. So, that I can have the peace to learn and finish my education. (4) While you are waiting, please do not just think of your old lover, so that it will help me to have the peace to learn well or better.(5) I end this song on a dry leave and if you're patient to wait for me then when I finish we'll enjoy our new lives."

Q. Can you play the song by playing the flute?

A. Yes, I can play and say "Oh, my lovely girl." I can play any songs that I know in this flute.

Q. Do you make any of these flutes here?

A. No, I don't know how to make it. I just bought it from the Hmong people here.

Q. All these flutes here are the same kind or different?

A. No, they all are different. This one is called "Raj Hliav" (Sharp flute) or called "Raj Cua" (Air flute); this one is called "Raj Ntsia los Raj pumlib" (Inserted flute) because we inserted the wood into the bamboo. Sometimes we believe that this flute can protect you from the evil spirit because it makes noise, but your mouth is covered.

Q. Can you play just little bit of this one then?

A. Sure, I can play. (Play..." Oh, my lovely Yang Girl. It is sunny today. I do not have any brother or sister or parents in this country and I have no one to talk to and I feel so depressed and I do not know whether I would survive or I would die.")

I can play this song that I would play for a girl to make her happy and I'm saying that "how come she is born so pretty and it is a cloudy and foggy day, but your prettiness make me happy. What kind of food did your parents eat to give you birth and that you are pretty. How come I was born so short and not very handsome and all what my parents are talking about you becoming their daughter-in-law and they'll love you forever. Will your parents let us get together and get married." Here I'll play the song....[the song just repeat the above words].

Some of the flute we can raise the tone to higher or lower, but some can not do so. And, I can play this one. I'll play a song and that no one would support me (It is pretty much in this country). I have to support myself. I have to struggle through school by myself. It's suffering and soon as I'll get done by school, I'll need to work to pay my school loan back. " Oh, my fellow Hmong, I will be in school soon to get my education and I don't have anyone to help me. I have all the rouble in my mind, I don't know if I would learn or I would die. I feel so much anxiety myself. Don't you know my lovely girl, yes you are my lovely

girl, a really love one. I want to learn the technology, but I fail myself for personal reason and that I have no family member who would financially assist me in these difficult times. I want to learn the concept and the knowledge for my future uses, but my situation has failed myself. I don't have any lover any where that I can go and tell about my problem. This made me angry to myself and I feel so much anxiety in my mind. I sometimes scream or cry. I want to die or I want to live. It is too difficult for me and I don't know what to do.

This one the sound comes from the reed. The others only have a hole to make sound. This one has a copper reed that when you blow air to it than the vibration makes sound. I'll play this one. It is mostly play for dating purpose by the younger people and older people play to release lonesome. After I play this flute I feel less depress just as I have seen a psychiatrist or psychologist. I express my feeling to other people. This is the reason why I play this one. "Girl, my lovely girl. It is a sunny day, but I do not have any parents to love me. I feel lonely and sad, but whom can I go and tell. Yes, it is a sunny day. Not only I do not have parents, I also do not have a girl who would love me would talk to me and say sweet or nice thing to encourage me. The more I think about it, the more it make me fee so sad about myself. I don't know whom and how I'll should tell about my problem. So what do you think of my situation--and what would you do if you are I?"

We called this flute "Raj Nplain" (Reed Flute). What I got left to demonstrate is the Ncas (njah). I heard some people said that it can be used as weapon because it is a very sharp instrument. When I have long and short string like this one is to play to my girl friend. Everything you play is words. You can tell her how much you love her and think about her. Hmong girls in Laos are best in playing these instrument. If you just go and tell her that you love her, she would say " Don't lie to me and don't look down on me by making false statement trying to gain my love." But, anything I said through the instrument would not offense her. No matter how sweet you say the girls would accept my words. If I do not like the girl very much then I would give her my ncas (njah) to play, but I would hold on to the string. This is because the boy is outside the house talking to the girl inside. She sleep her bed and you gave the instrument through any hole you found and hold on the end of the ncas (njah). If you like her you don't have to hold on to the string so she has choice whether to give back to you or to keep it. You also have the choice to return because you too know she likes you. Sometimes the girl would say "This ncas (njah) plays so well. Can I borrow for a couple nights?" You don't want to say "no" or say that you also borrow from someone. If you don't want to go back to that girl then you have no reason to give to her.. It is



expensive to buy one and there are not many for sales around. I'll play this one even though it was made in China, the sound is not too different from those in Laos. (Play...."Bayvo! Bayvo! My lovely girl. Today it was sunny because God knew I would have the chance to see you tonight. Any way I feel so much lonely because I do not have a lover who is beautiful, sweet, and so kind like you in this area. Would you considered me for a lover, my sweet girl in this part of the world. If you are happy to be mine, I will be happy to welcome you and I'll come back and forth to see you without any delay. If you are not happy to be mine, I will not feel sad, but I would not come back because there is no one here that I want to see or talk to like I do with you. And, also want to know whether your parents would permit us to get married if you are happy to be mine. Tell me how you feel about me. I know that my parents will always welcome you into our family and they're always will be happy if you would become their daughter-in-law."

This is the ncas (njah) from Laos. I'll tell her that I am not very handsome. I am very poor and some of the day in our marriage we might have to drink just water to pass the day. How does she feel about that. (Here is the play....." Bayvo, Bayvo, my lovely girl in this part of the world. Since I found you to be one of the lovely girl, would you be happy to be my girlfriend. I want to know that you are the best for me. But, how do you feel about being my lover? Will you take someone who is not very handsome like me? I'll be very happy to have you forever. I truly make this statement. Trust me, I don't have parents or relatives who would love me and if I ever have you as a lover it will be forever. I promise you that I'll come back and forth to see you to make sure that we love each other. And, to make you my real lover. When I am not with you, I hear all kind of birds and insects sing and it remind me about you. I feel so lonely because I don't have you; don't you know my lovely girl."

Q. Do any of your children play any flute or music?

A. Yes, my older daughter play American violin, and the younger one play American flute. They don't play my flute or music, except my two sons who has been training to play the qeng with me. I train them and they are very good at it. They like to play, but they are still too young to be able to understand it.

Q. Can you tell little bit about your brothers who play the modern music here?

A. Sure. They told me that I'm good with Hmong music. So they want to play different kind of music so that in the future we can have a conference that we all can play all kind of music. They are good at modern rock n' roll music, but they are not good at Hmong music. They have been played since 1984 and now they are very good at it. They play love

songs, sad songs, migration songs. The Hmong people believe that a long time ago, there were 9 moons and 9 suns. The weather was extremely hot and trees and living things began to die burned down into soil. River stream began to dry. Starvation began world wide. A strange person was born. One of his name was called Yang Yee Yang Yua. Yang Yee Yang Yua made a copper cross-bow with copper arrow to shoot down 8 moons and 8 suns. The ninth sun refused to come back the next morning. The world became dark and cold. Everyone was sent to call the moon and the sun back. All had tried with no success, but the rooster did. That is why no rooster always sings before the sun rise in the morning. The sun gave the rooster the comb to wear to sense that the sun is rising. The rooster also sing when the sun will be set to say good-bye and to thank for rising again. "Here is the song..." "I will blow, I will sing, the sky is beginning to brighten the far away part of the world. A woman's rooster will get up and sing to welcome the sun to rise above the sky again. The sun is happy to be welcome to the world again so it gave the rooster the silver and gold comb. The rooster couldn't take it; couldn't take it."