

September 10, 1992

Interview with Yong Kay Moua by Tim Pfaff

Q. Start out by giving me like a brief sketch of where you came from and what your life was as a child. Where you lived? How you grew up? Tell me about your life in Laos!

A. It's kind of a long story, but I would like to introduce myself, first. My full name is Yong Kay Moua. And my first name that was given to me by my parents is Kay Moua. I was born on January 3rd, 1950, in Ban Cha You, Tasseng Pha Boun, Muong Nong Het, Khoueng [province of] Xieng Khouang, Laos.

Q. Xieng Khouang Province, Laos?

A. Yes, Xieng Khouang, Laos.

The first thing that I remember about the village that we lived in was a very small village. It was only about six families there. And, that was back in 1954. One of the things that I remember was that it was during the planting time. I was babysit for my younger brother. We went to the rice field, and I stayed with my brother. I remember that the black airplane flew passed over our heads. It was one of the things I can remember. And, then after that, I kind of remember a couple things along the line with the village that we lived in. I learned that the village used to be like twenty families or so, but they all moved out, and only four or five of the families that left behind. My father was the village chief who lived in that village.

Q. What is your father's name?

A. My father's name is Sao Chia Moua. All his cousins or friends had moved up to Phou Dou. [The distance is] about two-day walk to the southwest from the village that we lived in. So we lived there maybe another two years or so, and possibly about one year. We knew that the Pathet Lao came and they took my father away for a couple months then they let him come back. The government side then came and took him away for a couple of months.

Q. Was that the Laotian government?

A. Yes, The Laotian government. So we had no idea why my father was just gone like that for a couple months, or with that group for a couple of months. We didn't really know what was going to happen to our lives. After the second time that my father was taken away by the government, he came back and he called our family together and said that we might not be able to live there anymore. It might be dangerous for our families and our lives. So just maybe a couple weeks or a couple months after that, somebody [an intruder] just came to our house. He painted his face really black [intimidating demeanor], and he [was] digging some area inside our house. We didn't know, but maybe he was

searching for some money. He might thought that my father even though was not really a rich man, but he was kind of the leader of the village and that he might have some money buried under ground.

Q. Was he looking for money being buried under ground?

A. Yes, at that time, maybe something that they [his parents] keep burying money or something under the ground. So when we knew that happen in our house, we then decided not to stay at that house anymore. So we moved to a different town about a half day away in the mountain to live with other people who lived there. So, possibly there were about 30 or 40 families lived there.

Q. To Ban Phou Mou?

A. Yes, in Ban Phou Mou. With the other people who lived there. In that village, possibly it was about twenty or thirty families there. So we moved out to those people, and we lived there maybe another year or so then my father died. Well, at first, we moved to that new area, and my uncle's baby died then my uncle's wife died. Then my grandmother died and my father died. Just within a month.

Q. They died from sickness?

A. Yes, sickness. Because we moved to a different location, a new location, so [we had] some kind of disease. We didn't feel that we could live there any longer. At that time my uncle and my other aunt had moved to Tham Lome and they moved to Nam Hauk near Phou Dou [to live] with other cousins who already moved over there. When my father died, maybe I was about six or seven years old.

Q. Do you have any brothers and sisters?

A. Yes, I do. And, at that time my older sister was about eight years old, and maybe I was about six. I do have a brother and my mother was still pregnant after my father died. So it was very difficult for our family. Our close family [members] all moved up to Phou Dou. After my father died, we lived at that village maybe about six months. Then we decided to move and to follow our cousins and our uncles to Phou Dou. Somehow my mother sent a message to our uncle in Phou Dou and they send some people to pick our family up. Possibly about two or three people came to help my mother carry my brother and myself. We moved to Phou Dou at first then we moved to Nam Hauk. We lived there [Nam Hauk] for two years. My stepfather, Wang Seng Moua, then came to marry my mother. He lived in Phou San. It was about two-day walk. We didn't know how far, but it was about a two-day walk.

Q. I believe Phou Dou was a small village; wasn't it?

A. Phou Dou was a village of about more than one hundred families. It was quite big. From Nam Hauk to Phou Dou was very close. We only knew that we moved to Phou Dou. But, actually we moved to Nam Hauk. It was very close about three-hour away. We lived in Nam Hauk for about two years, and my mother was remarried to my stepfather. We then moved from Nam Hauk to Phou San. Phou San was a small village of about thirty families at that time. Other villages were kind of nearby, but the village that we lived in was about thirty families.

We lived there about six months then we moved again closer to the field, or we moved down to the lower land so that we could have some rice fields. We moved from Phou San to Ban Hak. Ban Hak was a very small village about seventeen or eighteen families. We moved down where one of my father's cousins, named *Cher Pao Moua*, was the tasseng in the area. Tasseng [a district leader] compared to this country might be smaller than county, but bigger than city or town.

Q. Was tasseng in charge of many villages?

A. Yes, he was in charge of many villages.

Q. Was he appointed or elected by the people?

A. [He was] elected by the population in his area.

Q. How would they do that?

A. Well, I think [he was elected to serve] about four-year term. [Every] four years we elected [a new tasseng].

Q. Who voted for tasseng?

A. The head of the household from many villages. If he win he will continue to be tasseng for another four years. But if he loose, the winner will take his position.

Q. Were there two or three candidates?

A. Yes, like two or three people campaign for it.

Q. How did they campaign?

A. I think he just gave the message to people, or village to village. Well, we lived pretty close together. Like a couple hours away and people in the village were kind of know everyone. Everyone know everyone else.

Q. Was it a good job or a good reputation?

A. In the past I think it was a very good position. Possibly the reputation to be a Tasseng was very good back at that time. His job was to help the villagers to solve all civil problems related to the people in the village.

Q. Was he like a judge?

A. Yes, he was kind of like a judge to help with disputes. They had to come to the tasseng for it. Well, first they have to call or they have to go to their elderly or their like clan leader in the village. After that, if they could

not solve the problem, then they went to the village chief [naiban]. If the chief could not help, then they should be sent over to the tasseng. So it was kind of level to level [hierarchy].

Q. Was the reason you moved quite often due to war or just for the purpose of farming?

A. I think at first because of war, and we could not live there because of the war for the first couple of times that we moved around like that. But after we moved to Nam Hauk, and moving to Phou San, because my mother was remarried with my step-father. We moved from Phou San to Ban Hak, well, because the land does not make any good production anymore. So they moved to lower lands, so they can have better fields.

Q. Was your step-father a farmer?

A. Yes, he was a farmer.

Q. What kind of crops did he plant?

A. Rice and usually families in Laos, they had to raise everything.....They have to have corn. They have to have rice and they raise cows and [water] buffaloes and chickens and all those things. Everyone had his/her own. So at that time I remember that my father and our family, we moved to a new village, and we have to build our own house. At first, we moved to a very small one, then we built a bigger house. We lived there not too long; just about two years or so then the war came again.

Q. So Was there a time when you knew what was going to have peace?

A. I am too young to know about that. But after 1960 and I learn...that we moved...when the Communists came over in 1954. We moved to Nam Hauk during the time that the Vietnam or the Pathet Lao came over in 1954. It was during the time that they had a war in Dien Bien Phu. I learned it later that the war took place there, but back then I didn't know what was going on in Vietnam. After we moved to Ban Hak, Tasseng Cher Pao Moua ordered the villages to build a road from our village to the bigger road. When you walk [the distance to the road was] just about two to three hours away. ...He ordered the villages to help to build that road to connect to the other ones. It was the time that we saw the first big truck came into our village. After the big truck came into our village, and I think they carried some soaps, some other goods to the village. So we felt proud that we were getting closer to the city, but we haven't been to the big city, yet. It was just for a couple months and we noticed that the war started. One day one of the single engine airplane came to our village to drop some letters to tasseng. We knew it dropped something, but we didn't know what was going on. After a couple weeks or so, we hear from my father that maybe the war was going to start again. We didn't know if we can stay there ... because the road was

connected to our village. It will be very easy for the communists to come over there very soon. After we heard that for a while then we moved to the jungle. Because at that time we saw so many airplanes came in. It was around 1960.

Q. What season was it or during what time of the year?

A. Possibly it was about February or March.

Q. Was it the dry time?

A. Yes, it was the dry time. The airplanes were coming in during dry time.

Q. Were you used to seeing airplanes?

A. No, we heard them flying past, but not that many at all.

Q. Were you scared?

A. We were kind of scared. We didn't really know which side had the airplanes. At first I heard from my father that they belong to the communists and the Pathet Lao, they have all those airplanes. So we had to move. Otherwise they might bomb us or they might kill us. We were very scared about the communists...we moved to the jungle for a couple weeks or so then we came home. Suddenly, the communists came over to our village and all the men and our tasseng fled to the jungle, or the forest somewhere. We felt that when those people came in they talked to the kids and they talked to the women about why and where the men were gone. We stayed in the village for a couple months, then we felt it wouldn't be safe for us anymore so we left.

Q. Were there several hundred families?

A. Not that many. Possibly about seventeen or eighteen families in that village at that time.

All the men were involved with the war or [were serving in] the army. Because the village that we lived in was the village of the Tasseng. So all the men who lived with the tasseng had to go with the Tasseng. Tasseng was working with the government side. My father came home and he said, "Well, we have to move again. Then we moved from Ban Hak to Bouam Long. Bouam Long, after, during the war they called Lima Site 32 (LS32). We moved from Ban Hak to Bouam long and it took...two days or so. [It was a] little more than two days and we reached Bouam long.

Q. Why was the war going on?

A. It was very confusing. We didn't really know. All we were wondering at that time was who started it. We just moved place to place without knowing what was going to happen. We were really afraid because we heard that when the communists came, they were going to kill all the men and the boys, including those who were able to walk. So we all were kind of afraid and were made with the communists. So 1961, possibly early 1961, we moved to Bouam long. When we reached there, it was a new village. A new community that people were kind of moving in from other places. They moved up over

there. They build little houses to live in. So we lived there for many years. Since 1961 to 1963. During 1961 to 1963, we already had school (over there) in Bouam Long. So we start school for those who were younger than me. For those who were older than me, they were involved with the army and became soldiers

Q. How old were the soldiers?

A. At that time, they were not that old. They were about fourteen or fifteen. They have to be involved with the army. And so it was not that big.

Q. I heard there were some twelve years old. Weren't they?

A. Yes, Some even younger than that depend on the size of the people. Some people by age ten or eleven, they are really big enough. But at that time, maybe I was about eleven or twelve. So I didn't get involved in the army yet, but they built the school. And, I participated with the school and attended school. Start in the very beginning back in 1961.

Q. Now I read this in the book...some of Vang Pao's soldiers were very young....?

A. Yes, because they considered those kids whose age were six years old to ten years old to go to school. I was about eleven or twelve, and three of my brothers had to go to school. My older sister stayed home. My mother said that I had to stay home to help her with the younger brothers and prepare food for them or help them to gather some firewood and other things. My mother didn't want me to go. That was why I didn't have chance to go at first. But, well, the school was not too far from our house and from our water well. So I was kind of keep going and watching other kids who went to school. I think that the first day that I got into school was October the 15. I remember that because school was starting in the middle of August and they [were] already in school for over a month. I really wanted to go to school. So one day it happened to me when I went to the well to get some water. I broke my bamboo pipe that I supposed to use for carrying water. I was afraid to come home I then went to school to watch other kids. One of the teachers was very nice and he asked for my name and why I was there. I told him that I really wanted to attend school. So, he welcomed me to go inside and sit with other kids to see if I would like it. But, I like it very much and other people took all the seats from the front to the back. So I had to sit very close to the front near the teacher when I started. I sat there, and I felt very good about being in school. At lunch time when the students went home to have lunch, I was kind of getting worried that I was gone all morning. I was afraid that my mother would beat me up so I went to my uncle's house. I came to talk to my uncle and I explained to him that I really want to go to school because nobody would play with me.

The older kids, they became group like soldiers, left the others who were not students like me at home. The younger kids went to school. People at my age were not in the village. At that time I talked to my uncle, and I cried. My uncle then said, "Well, don't cry. I will go with you to see your mom and talk with your mom. I will ask her to let you attend school." So he came with me to talk with my mother. She said, "Well, you have to promise me to do all the work that you do before you can go to school. Otherwise, you could not go because you got all these things to do and you know that no one would help me. So if you would like to go, you have to do them early in the morning before you can go to school. Or, after you came back from school then you have to do it." So I promised her that I would do my routine work at home before or after school. She then let me go to school. Life was very difficult when I had chance to go to school. I had to learn very hard. I start with first grade in October 1961. By the end of 1962, I already skipped three grades from first to third grade. So, it was kind of going very fast.

Q. In the classrooms, did they have only one classroom?
 A. Yes, even over three hundred kids and they all sat in the same room. Because there were no big school enough for everyone, so they just build it that way.

Q. How many teachers did you have?
 A. Two.
 Q. Two for three hundred kids?
 A. Yes, over three hundred kids. Starting from first to third grade.

Q. So most the students were Hmong then?
 A. Mostly were Hmong. Teachers were not certified, but because we were short of teachers. So we just asked someone who knew how to write and read to be our teacher to help us. After the second year, they build other schools addition to the first one that we had. Many more schools were built not in every village, but built with many classrooms.

Q. Can they separate the kids?
 A. They can separate the kids, but all the kids such as first grade in one room, no matter how many they were. For an example, sixty to one hundred had to stay in one classroom.

Q. Did you pretty much work yourself up then?
 A. Yes, I pretty much working myself up. Our teacher wrote on the blackboard, and everybody then copied from it.

We didn't have many books for everyone. The teacher just wrote on the blackboard and we copied into our paper. We just wrote them into our book.

Q. Were you writing in Hmong?

A. We were writing in Laotian.

Q. Did they speak Lao?

A. Depends on the age. Pretty much the older people, they knew how to speak Hmong and Lao.

Q. Are they similar, Hmong and Lao?

A. They are quite a bit different. We were kind of trading back and forth between the Lao and the Hmong. We were kind of know how to speak the language.

Q. So you went and you were able to skip a couple of grades?

A. Yes, pretty quick. Not many in my age could do it. I promised my mother that I would do well and would learn very fast. So after 1962 to 1963, then I already went to the four years, fourth grade. Between 1963 to 1964, I had to go to different town to learn in higher grades because in Bouam Long we didn't have the higher grades. I had to go to Phou Kum, west of Bouam Long. I had to walk to Phou Kum one day.

Q. You had to walk one day to the West?

A. Yes, West of Bouam long. At that time, there were not that many kids who would go to the fourth grade or higher grades. There were only six of us who had to walk to Phou Kum. Over there we had the fourth, fifth and sixth graders. So, I had to go to Phou Kum for three years.

Q. Walked back and forth for three years?

A. Yes, at that time my mom and my dad felt better about me because I was the older kid. I can go first and three of my younger brothers were still behind. Many of the kids were still behind. I am the only one that was catching up passing all those who were in third grade and fourth grade.

Q. Was your father home with your mother then?

A. No. No. He stayed in the soldier camp most of the time and he came home maybe once a month or so. Otherwise, maybe sometime once in a week or one in a couple weeks. He had to be gone a lot. He had to be gone most of the time.

Q. How far was the camp?

A. Not too far but Possibly his job need to be there. [The distance] maybe is just about here to the county farm or Elk Mound.

Q. Was it hilly?

A. Yes, it was kind of mountains.

Q. How was the war there being fought?

A. It kind of bombing and shooting all the time. When I moved to Phou Kum to study there, it was kind of a little bit further from the area that they were fighting a lot.

Q. Was it quiet?

A. Yes, a little quiet over there. During 1964 to 1966, Phou Kum was a higher land so we can see all the way to the East and we could see the airplanes were kind of dropping

bombs and some lights with parachutes. I don't know how you call it.

Q. Kind of like a flare?

A. Yes, it was like a flare in the air to light the darkness so they would see at night. They did that all the time.

Q. Was fighting going on constantly?

A. It was kind of different. Sometime it was constant, and some other times it was quiet for a while. Maybe it was quiet for a couple of months or so. Thenkind of start over again. Because the soldiers were kind of moving back and forth, or changed back and forth. If the communists came over and they could not resist then they had to move back. After that maybe they had to move forward.kind of going back and forth like that.

Q. Were all the men being ordered to join the forces?

A. No, at that time I think most of the men have no choice because the communists came over to take their village, take their belongings, and others. They were not willing to surrender, but to fight to help their family, their village, and to help the civilian people. If we Hmong were not keeping the fight against the communists, they would have taken over our country at that time. We didn't really know that the Americans were involved with South Vietnam or with Cambodia or other countries. We knew that the American were on the Laotian Government's side and were helping our government. That was what we understood at that time.

Q. Didn't you know the Americans were in South Vietnam?

A. I didn't know how the war there was related to the one in Laos, which the government and the Hmong fought, but we knew they were there.

Q. It was more that the Communists were going to come and take your stuff?

A. Yes, it was like you have to defend yourself because you have all your belongings, you house, your animals, and everything. When they came, they were going to take over everything. So, we were kind of fighting against them to protect our goods, our village and our people. It was very difficult because we happened to live in the area that was kind of very close to the road that the communists were coming to Laos and were going down to the south. We didn't really know what should we do. We were just kind of protecting. We didn't want them to come into that part of the country. We were kind of protecting our area.

Q. And in the book [by Houa Moua-Trail through the mist], I think I remember the Hmong call the Vietnamese, "Red Ants" right?

A. Oh, Yes, I think that "Red Ants" was what they mean for the Pathet Lao or the Vietnamese soldiers. They used the "Red Ants" to identify that group as the communists.

Q. All right. So you were at school in Phou Kum.

A. Yes, I was there for three years.

Q. Was life as a student there difficult?

A. It was very difficult life at that time. At first, a couple of us lived on our own. We built a very small house and we lived there. The teacher was related to my family. He asked me to live with him. So, I lived with him for two years. The first part of the first year and the second year. Then after that I lived with one of the teachers for one year. My life was very difficult. I had to do things inside the house. I had to learn like other kids. I had to do all the house work. The teachers were kind of like me. I stayed with the teachers. It was a little bit better for me. I considered that was better for me. Other kids had to live by themselves.

Q. Were there only few students in higher grades?

A. Yes, during 1966 to 1967, the first time we had fourth, fifth and sixth grades. We did not have that many students at those level at all. The first year we had over twenty kids. By the end of 1966 to 1967, our group had only thirteen kids. We had only thirteen kids in that class. Because we were the first group that went to higher grade. We didn't have many people in the first group

Q. Did teachers get food from the government?

A. No, I think at that time the teacher got food from the village, or from the people in the village. They gave some food to the teachers. And, some of the refugees who just moved from other places to Phou Kum were still receiving food from USAID. They gave some to the teachers.

Q. Did they clear a site for USAID to drop food?

A. Yes, they can drop some rice for the refugees.

Q. Did they drop rice in Bouam Long?

A. Yes, they had been doing that back in Bouam long since 1961 to 1962.

Q. How often did they drop rice?

A. Depends on the population and the area. In Phou Kum, I think at that time we had about seven or eight thousand. And every other day, like three days or four days, and they dropped once. In Phou Kum they dropped once in every three days or four days. Sometimes, every other day. It also depends on the weather condition, too.

Q. You went to school everyday?

A. Yes, everyday. School schedule was pretty much like here in the United States. We started school at eight o'clock and we were done at four in the afternoon. It was not three o'clock like here. Some schools were done by four or four-thirty in the afternoon.

Q. So you had eight hours of schooling?

A. Yes, we had to do a lots of studies. The system there was kind of different than this country. We had to learn so you can speak or you memorize by heart. So, it was very difficult.

Q. You had to practice?

A. Yes, we had to practice.

Q. Beside Laotian, did you have to learn foreign languages?

A. Yes, we knew that we had to learn the second language. We started to learn French at third grade and fourth grade. We didn't learn English because French was the second language in Laos. So we started to learn French.

Q. So how often did you have time to visit your parents?

A. Christmas time and New Year time we had to go back to see them. We stayed there maybe a couple days. We had five days off from school. So we had time to visit our parents.

Q. Were there missionaries?

A. Not in our area at that time. The missionaries were already there and we had some Hmong Christians. And they got some help from the missionaries office who would come to visit them every other month or so. But no missionaries would come to say there....kind of come and go.

Q. So you went to school there all the way to sixth grade then?

A. Yes, I went all the way to six grade over there. By the end of 1967, or by May 1967, we had to go from Phou Kum to Sam Thong to take a test. Everybody have to take it. If you don't pass the test, you don't have a chance to go on. You have to pass the test. So we had to fly from Phou Kum to Sam Thong to take the test.

Q. Where is Sam Thong?

A. Sam Thong is about an one-hour flight by airplane down to the south from Phou Kum. Well, if you walk it might be a week or so. But, when you fly it was not that long. Maybe about an hour so it was not considered too far.

Q. Was that the first time you left Phou Kum?

A. Yes, to Sam Thong. Sam Thong was pretty close to this area [pointing to an area of a Laotian map southwest of Plain of Jars] and Phou Kum was across the border. On this corner here Sam Thong was very close to this area. Sam Thong was very close to the edge of the border of Vientiane Province from here down to here [pointing to the map].

Q. I have a better map. Was it the first time you flew there?

A. Yes, it was the first time we had to fly by plane down to Sam Thong. We have two groups from the same school. Unfortunately, I was the only one who passed the test. The rest didn't pass and some had to go to a private school. In

public school, if you didn't pass, you didn't have a chance to start over again. So those who really wanted to go further, you had to attend a private school. The rest of my friends just quit and joined the army forces.

Q. Did your parents ever have to pay?

A. It was public school so they didn't have to pay for the school. They had to pay for my living, my clothes, my food, and schooling things.

Q. How did they pay for it?

A. Well, they just gave me some money. When I moved to Sam Thong, I had to stay with my uncle. I had an uncle there so I stayed with him. I shared his shelter and some of his food. So I just bought myself some clothes and other things that I would like to have for school.

Q. So you went to Sam Thong?

A. Yes, I went to Sam Thong in June 1967.

Q. And at that time was the war going on?

A. Yes, it was still going on. It was more dangerous at that time. Sam Thong was kind of a refugee center. They didn't come to Sam Thong at that time, yet.

Q. Could you explain how dangerous it was?

A. Oh, during that time it was kind of you didn't want to go place to place. It was very dangerous when you walk like a day or so from your place or from your village to the others because you didn't know how safe you would be. So you didn't go place to place.

Q. Did the draft affect your education?

A. Yes, exactly if you didn't stay a full time at school, they draft would affect you and you had to go join the army. For me, it was different. I had a chance to go to school because I was the first group that went. I think, at that time, they kind of encouraging kids to attend school and learn well. They didn't stop anyone either. They kind of encouraging more kids to have education. Those who dropped out of school or failed had to go right to the army.

Q. What was the name of the school in Sam Thong?

A. It was Sam Thong College. We call college, but we actually it was a Lycee in French, that means [High School] of Sam Thong.

Q. The name was written in French?

A. Yes, in Sam Thong we had two classes; Class A and B. So the group A, they had like forty-two or so, and I was in group B. In group B we had forty-six students. Those were the first two groups that we had in Lycee Sam Thong. It was the first year that we created and started in Sam Thong. It used to be Vientiane, but it was a little far away. We were very happy that we had a chance to be in Lycee.

Q. Now was Sam Thong a lot different from the other place?
A. Yes, A lot different. Sam Thong, Possibly they had about eleven thousand people during the time I was there.

Q. How about Phou Kum?

A. Phou Kum had about seven thousand people. It was a smaller, but the refuges moved together at that time.

Q. Was it in the mountains?

A. Yes, it was in the mountains.

Q. Sam Thong is not in the mountains?

A. No. Sam Thong is kind of little flat land.

Q. Were there any airplane flying out and in? Was this airport busy?

A. It was very busy because the headquarters used Sam Thong airport to carry out food and water for the soldiers. It had about a dozen airplanes or so to help carry the food or some medical things, medication to the people and to the refugees who moved throughout the region. So Sam Thong was the headquarters for that. It was very busy.

Q. Was it the refugees assistance center in Xieng Khouang?

A. Yes, the second region was kind the assistance center in Xieng Khouang area. it was not just in Xieng Khouang, but it what it called Military Region II. It was kind of covering all the way up to northeastern part of Laos.

Q. Was there more fighting?

A. Yes, That was more the fighting.

Q. Was....?

A. Yes, so they had a section or center.

Q. That was the main place then?

A. That was the headquarters of USAID. It was very busy during 1967 to 1970, we had lots of fighting all over the places from north to south. It was in Military Region II. They were not just protecting and helping their region, but they had to send some soldiers to help on the northwest and the south. [pointing to a map] East side is in here.

Q. Along the mountains?

A. Yes, it was along the mountains.

Q. Was there a mountain between Long Tieng and Sam Thong?

A. Right, it was between Sam Thong and Long Tieng. It was pretty close to Long Tieng. Long Tieng was a little bit bigger area.

Q. So, was there a lot of refugees

A. A lots of refugees were in Sam Thong at that time. They were not just Hmong, but the Lowland Lao and Lao Theung. All kinds of races.

Q. Now did they all or didn't they get along very well?

A. Depends on the group. Some groups get along pretty good. But, others didn't get along so well. For an example, the Lao Theung and the Hmong got along better. But the Lowland Lao (Lao Lome) and some of the Hmong didn't get along well. They used to be separate and now they came together, I think language was one of the problems. The other thing I would say it was kind of racial discrimination because of the language, color, attitudes, and cultural differences.

Q. Different religions?

A. Yes, different religions. The Lowland Lao believe Buddha and the Hmong believe in different things, including shamanism.

Q. Did all the Hmong went on one side, and all the Lowland Lao were on the other's?

A. It was pretty much so. The Hmong were kind of lived outside in the open area. The Lao lived in the center. They were pretty much kind of living together. At that time.

Q. Okay. Was there a marketplace?

A. Yes, they do have a marketplace in downtown. Right.

Q. What was that like ?

A. Well, the market was kind of open market for all days. Like five days, seven days a week. Like that. But they kind of mixed. Some Laotian, some Hmong. Kind of mixing in the marketplace

Q. What can you buy?

A. Oh, you can buy things. You can eat some things there. Like some food, some fast food, and some restaurant food. They have all kinds of food.

Q. Did you live in Sam Thong the whole time?

A. Since June 1967 to March 18, 1970, the Communists took over Sam Thong and we had to move. I think that night it was kind like a dream. My cousin worked with USAID and he had a big tape recorder. When I came home from school, he said, "Kay, do you want to go with me to chase girls?"

Q. That was your cousin?

A. Yes, my cousin. We were supposed to go and chase girls. I said, "Yes, why not?" We just went and listened to his tape recorder and chasing some girls at the open market. He said, "Well, tonight other people feel that we don't feel safe to stay here. Maybe we should go [home] to our family." We did have family about two hours away. He said, "Maybe we should go there and stay there overnight and see how things tomorrow would happen then come back." And I said, "Yes," and then, we just went. Either him or me didn't carry

anything. I left all my clothes and all my belongings at school. We just walked with the girls to the what they called old Sam Thong. That was the original Sam Thong which most Hmong there had lived there prior to the war. We went over there and we didn't really know what was going to happen. Approximately 3:30 AM that night the communists just came and opened fire and killed a lots of the people where we lived. We lived very close to the hospital. They killed some of the Hmong who live near the hospital. One of my teachers was killed because his wife was kind of mentally ill or crazy. She didn't know where to go, or what to do much about things. He kind of chasing her around, and how to get her out. She didn't know that the communists came over and they were shooting people.

My teacher was killed with his wife that morning. We just could not go back to Sam Thong. We then moved from our field to Muong Phone. Muong Phone was about one day south of Sam Thong. So we just walked there. By eight o'clock we all were kind of coming together in one area where some of the officers and some Americans, who used to stay in Sam Thong, were with us. Some of them had to fly back to Vientiane. A couple American friends escaped there with us. I think they had radio and they called to request helicopters to come and pick up some of the officers and the two Americans to Na Xou and some to Vang Vieng. After the helicopters came to pick up those people, we were more afraid because we knew that the communists were going to chase those kind of people. They knew that the helicopter came to the area. We were kind of keeping running down the hill. It was kind of very difficult for us that day. We went all day long, and the next morning we got to Muong Phone. So many people were there. I didn't know the number was killed, but in the morning just in the morning after we left from the rice field, we saw the airplanes came to bomb the area. The shooting was going on all day. That made people so scared. Our family and other people had already moved to the rice fields. We lost everything at home. We didn't have anything left. We just moved to Muong Phone. USAID officers came over and they just dropped some rice. They provided some clothes and some blankets and other cooking pots to us.

Q. Where was your family then?

A. My father was killed already. My mother was with me. My father was a chief with a group in Bouam Long. He was there in the old village of Bouam Long that we moved to earlier. In November 1969 he was killed by the communists. My mother, brothers and sisters stayed there with me. My family went to the rice fields before the communists attacked. They were where my cousin and I planned to stay with them. We all moved and many other people were killed and got separated from the family. But about a week or so [later] they can get together. They can find each other again.

Q. Did you still have school at the time the war took place?

A. Yes, March 18 and school was not over yet when the communists took over the school. We moved to Muong Phone and became refugees over there. Thousands and thousands of refugees were in Muong Phone. We didn't live inside Muong Phone, but about only seven or eight miles away to the East side of Muong Phone. About three thousand people lived there. We called it "Nam Phai." We [the refugees] who lived in Nam Phai [during that period] were about three thousand people. People didn't know how to write and read. Most people were kids or children. I was kind of helping to teach the children and the soldiers' wives how to read and write. Many of the men had to stay of the front to fight. I was with that refugee groups in Nam Phai for two months, until June. Then they [USAID] ordered that group to move on again. We moved to Keo Sa Khai about one day walk from Nam Phai to the Southeast. Some people stayed in Muong Phone, but some had to move to Phat Khae and Keo Sa Khai. We moved to Keo Sa Khai and we built little houses so we could have shelters to live there.

Q. Did you walk there?

A. Yes, we all walked. During the day we could walk so it was kind of safer.

Q. Were there a lot of people walked there?

A. Yes, a lot of people, the whole village did. After we moved, we had to cross a wall, the Vientiane Province and the Xieng Khouang borderline. So Nam Phai and Muong Phone was within the Vientiane border. So they ordered all the refugees to get out from Vientiane [Province] territory to Xieng Khouang.

Q. Why ?

A. Well, for some political purpose, or something else. After we moved to Xieng Khouang [Province] territory, other refugees didn't. Possibly they got some negotiations with the provincial government. They finally allowed some of the refugees to stay there, Muong Pheng and Muong Phone.

Q. Were the refugees all Hmong?

A.kind of mixed, but most of the people were Hmong. Some were Lao Theung, and some were Lao. They also moved, too. However, the Hmong were the majority of the refugees at that time. So after we moved to Keo Sa Khai, we were kind of separated from the group. Maybe about seven or eight hundred people, who live in Keo Sa Khai. After we got there, and I got a shelter for my family and other people also did. Then I decide to go either it was July and early August.

I made a trip to Long Tieng to talk to my cousin, Song Lue Moua. We talked a little bit about if by any chance I can go to Vientiane to continue my education. As we talked to each other about it, he had a concern that the hardship of not having money and shelter or a place to live in Vientiane was very difficult. So I decided not to go to Vientiane, but

I decided to go to USAID Office to ask for a job. I came back to USAID Office on August 2. When I got there, I talked to my uncle who was the director for USAID.

Q. Who is your uncle? What is his name?

A Chue Keu Moua. He came to the United States and he just died last year in La Crosse. We buried him in Wisconsin Rapids. So, I talked to my uncle and he said, "Well, you are the person who I depend on. I will like you to go for further education, but it was very difficult because even my own son, I didn't have that much money to support him to go to Vientiane. So it depended what you decided to do then you should just do it. It was very difficult because you had your mother and your brothers and sisters. I could not take care of all those people." After listening to him, I decided that I should work. I then said, "Okay, then I decided that I will stay with you and I'll work with you." He said, "Well, we have to go and see Mr. Pop [Edgar "Pop" Buell], the American chief officer. He was the chief of USAID at that time. I could not recall his last name, but his name was Pop. He took me to see Mr. Pop [Edgar "Pop" Buell] and he said, "I don't know that I have a position for you at this time. I know that I have a lots of jobs, but I didn't know how you are good at." And, he said, "I don't promise you that I will accept you as an officer here with USAID, but you may try to work with us." At that time, he said "at first I don't pay you anything at all and if you will like to volunteer yes, we always accept a volunteer, but we don't have money to pay you." Well, at that time, a lots of refugees moved throughout the second region, you know, so there were many people. He doesn't have any funds, any money, to pay for all the people that he would like to have them to work. So I said, "Yes," And I decide to work with him voluntarily. Since August 2 until October the 15th or so then he came after me, and he said, "How do you feel about doing some job like we doing here." I say, "It's okay because I know what I do and I know other people need to do." Because I know how to figure out the food that we would send out to the people in the field. I know how to type a little bit and I also knew English a little bit, not much at all. Mostly, we talked in Lao and at that time he decided to hire me.

Q. Did you do the schedule?

A. Yes, it was kind of helping to schedule all the food supplies and send it out to the refugees like that. Other people had to go out to the fields to check place to place to see how many people were there then they provided the number of refugees to us. They had to bring all those number of people at each location to our office. I had to figure out how many pounds of rice for a day per person for those people, and how much of other things. I had to figure all those things out before giving them to the warehouse officer. The warehouse was then responsible to get all those food out and send to the refugees. We had other

airplanes that we serviced in the region. So, we were kind of doing step by step.

Q. Did you have many volunteers?

A. At that time we asked for as many volunteers as we needed, and we had over a hundred people. After a couple months, then we were able to pay the people to do the job. At first, we didn't have money, but if they would come and work with us, and after a day or so, we would give them some rice or something that we have. That was how I got started.

Q. Where did that happened?

A. That was in Na Xou because Na Xou was the place that we can have a bigger airport there. So, the airplanes can land there because we needed to use the airport to deliver the food to all the people.

Q. What did you feel or think the war would be fought?

A. At that time, we were wondering all the time because today we didn't know how tomorrow would be and where we would go and what we would be doing. At that time, the American officers just came during the day and in the evening they had to fly back to Vientiane or to Udorn, Thailand. Eight o'clock in the morning they had to come to Ban Xon to schedule food delivery to the refugees throughout that area. We also had six or seven big trucks that we could send food out with the truck to the area that the road reach to them. But, other areas that we could not send trucks then we used the airplanes to deliver them food. Sometimes we used the small airplanes. Sometimes we used the helicopters to take all the rice and food and medication to the refugees.

Q. The Americans only came during the day then?

A. Yes, they just came during the day.

Q. Was there a peace talk?

A. Yes, they kind of making peace talk at that time. It was what we could do. Some other people lived close to us so we asked them to come over and pick up the food at the warehouse. We delivered to others.

Q. What was your duty?

A. Mostly I did paper work. My position was the secretary. I was the secretary, at first. All the food that came in or went out, had to come through me. I had to type on the form and make up all the forms to deliver the food to the refugees. During 1970 to 1975, I did a couple different jobs and I was a couple different positions. At first I was the secretary, and then after that I was the field assistant. I had to go with other people to the field and to check and register refugees. I was the paymaster helper that means I had to keep all the time sheets for the 116 employees that we had over there. I kept all the time sheets for them. I think we got paid every two weeks. We got paid every two weeks. So after that I had to collect all the time sheets and sent them to Vientiane. When the paymaster man came, I had to go with him, and call the people to come and pay them or gave them money. That was my job at the end possibly around the last part of 1974 to 1975.

Q. Where was your office located then?

A. Well, we stayed in Na Xou from August '70, until May the 20, 1975.

Q. You did?

A. Yes, we did. We were there for that long.

Q. When did you move there?

A. In 1971

Q. Did your wife come to Na Xou?

A. Yes, She came to Na Xou because she came from Bouam Long. I met her and I remembered her back in 1967 to 1968. During that time it was during the New Year which I went back to Bouam Long from Sam Thong. I went back over there for three days and I met her there. I still have my cousins who live in Bouam Long. Houa and her parents lived very close to my cousins. So They kind of knew me from that time. They knew me from 1969 when I went back to Bouam Long one more time. She saw me, but I didn't see her. We were kind of know each other since then. In January 1971 she took her sister to the Na Xou Hospital. We met over there again.

Q. Were you surprised to see her again?

A That was kind of a long story and it was kind of surprising.

Q. Did people still live normal during the war?

A Well, when you think back about that, life during that time was like a dream. It was very difficult because the war was going on while people need food, people got sick, and you had keep your life going, too. So it was kind of very difficult.

Q. I think it was amazing to me. It was hard for me to imagine how people kept life going while the war was fought every day?

A. You could not imagine. People were born and died everyday. People got married every day even though the war was going on to keep our lives going at the same time. We had to struggle with that and who knew when you were going to die, and where you would go. Nobody knew at all. We just started very rough life. Not a long term life because our lives seemed to be short term plan. You just know today, but do not know tomorrow. Sometimes I had a flash-back to the life during the war, life was still very difficult for me in the dream.

Q. You're not sure what was going to happen to you so did it take a while before you finally be able to adjust to life over here?

A. Yes, it took a while. Even today we, Hmong, still could not plan any long term lives due to their suffering from the war. When you would like to do something in the long run, you had to have some background. We lost our confidence, everything is kind of turning around and we don't really

know how to plan for it. Well, in Na Xou, we didn't really know where we would go. We didn't plan to go from Na Xou to other places at all. Thousands and thousands of people who lived further from Na Xou. Na Xou was south of the area that the fighting was going on. We thought that we would be there for a while. Suddenly, the communists took over on May the 20th. That morning we all drove to the airport and we just got in the office like usual schedule. But, when we were there, the Pathet Lao already were there. We had some walkie-talkie [radio], but it was not the walkie-talkie. So when we got there, and the Pathet Lao already took over our seat. They sat down in the office and some of the doors were broken.

Q. What did you do then?

A. We got the radio and we called out to Vientiane, but nobody answers. They called us back, and nobody answers. We called other places, nobody answered. We just stay there. We didn't know what to do, or where to go. Many of the usual schedules were not fulfill because we have to wait for the airplane to come. We had to deliver the food to all the people and do other things. But that morning, we were just wondering not knowing what we should do. The Pathet Lao took over, so they asked us for keys. I was the one that kept all the keys for the offices so I had to give them the keys. The first day they asked for one key. I gave them each the room for one key, and they kind of search through all the offices and all the buildings. They asked us to come over again on the second day and third day. After the second and third day, many of the officers didn't show up, because they don't know what to do. They didn't know what the Pathet Lao was going to do to them. Our whole group were about a hundred people just disappeared. I was the only one, because I had the keys for the offices.

Q. Why did you go back?

A. Well, because they asked me to teach them so they knew what to do, how to operate all the things. Myself and one of the machine operators had to go and start that machine. We have the light for our radio. The two of us had to go with them for a week. Then the fourth or the fifth day, they asked for all the keys. They just said, "well, you have to come if you will like to. Otherwise we would call you when we need you." By that time, all the officers already left and on the 20th. By the 26th or 27th, we still went back to the office. After the first week when they took all the keys from me, then the second week we didn't go over there and start the machines any more. We just went to the hospital and they bring the radio back to the hospital. We used some electricity from the hospital to call other places in the region. But that day, everywhere was quiet. Nobody answered. Nobody did anything with the radio. We were afraid that they might take us away. They might ask us to do other things, or to go other places. Because maybe they would like to have some of us go to Vang Vieng. Vang Vieng

was about a two-hour drive on the west side of Na Xou. We were afraid so many of our friends already went down to Vientiane and to the headquarters. We didn't have our paychecks yet. It was a good chance for me so I talk to the Pathet Lao Officer that we didn't have the paychecks for May. I was the paymaster assistant so even they could not send the money to us there. I had to go and get all the money for all those people. Because they haven't got paid. They were going to get paid by this week, but they didn't. You know so they knew because they went through all the offices and all those things. They got all the papers that I worked over there. So they think that I would say to them the truth. So they got a permission for me to go down to Vientiane and to get the money to pay for the employees.

Q. Were they the Pathet Lao?

A. Yes. They were the Pathet Lao.

Q. Were they office or soldiers type?

A. They were soldiers type, and they didn't know. That was why they asked me to be with them for the first week to get everything. So I talked to my wife that I did have a chance to go to Vientiane. In my mind, I didn't plan to come back. It was very difficult. People were kind of moving around. Thousands were moving. So, I talked to my wife, and she says, "Well, I got some idea because I went to Vientiane many times, and I know where my other cousins lived in Vientiane. I am going to ask for permission from the Pathet Lao that I would go to that place, or that address. Because that was my home town down and I just came here to visit. Now I am going to go back." So she made that idea and I took her to see the Pathet Lao officer who were going to get the permission. We didn't pretend that we were couple, so we just go there like other people. So she got the permission to go back to Vientiane. I got the permission that I would go to Vientiane to bring some money to deliver to the employees. Our decision was very difficult for us at that time. We didn't know it would be safe for us to go together or separate it. We didn't want to be separated.

Q. Did you have any children?

A. Yes, we had two kids together, and we had to come back and plan for two days because your family and cousins were behind. Everything was just like your life. You just went fishing or went to do something, and left everything behind. That was very difficult to make the decision. Finally we talked and talked for two days. We decided that at least we would go together. We would go together and we would pretend that you didn't have me. Our two little kids were still small. They didn't know who was dad and who was mom So my wife took my brother, one of my brothers, and one of her sisters. Without two babies. And they sit in the front.

Q. Did she disagree?

A. No. I did convince her and she said it was very difficult at this time. We could not make that together. Otherwise, if they found out that the whole family were going to move, then they would kill or jail us.

Q. So your mother didn't come with you, didn't she?

A. My mother-in-law did come, but my mother didn't. We made a plan that we would separate. Some of our family would go today and tomorrow the rest would go. Maybe other day my mother would come. That was the plan, but that day it was kind of lucky because on the 29th they kill all the people in Hin Heup because the people just walked there like on strike to Vientiane by the thousands. That day the communists opened fire to the people. Some of them just came back. They called me and asked for the driver to go to Hin Heup to pick up the injured or wounded people. We still did that on the 29th of May, 1975. So after that we felt very frustrated. The next two days we decided to go together. Finally, we got to Boun Tha Nong. Boun Tha Nong was like a big bus. A Boun Tha Nong was the travel bus. It was kind of similar to a bus with two levels. Boun Tha Nong was the name of the truck or bus.

Q. It was more like a truck?

A. Yes, more like a truck, but it was a bus. We decided to take it with many other people, too. My wife and kids sat in the front and I just had a little suitcase and I just go very far to the back. I sat there and we pretend that we didn't know each other. So, we have to go through a couple check-points. They had to check through all the permissions. People who have permissions lasted only three days. After three days it was no good any more.

Q. Were there lots of people walking?

A. No.

Q. Did they close the road for people who walked then?

A. Right, because they had to close it. We had to move a little faster, and we got to Vientiane.

Q. That was about how many hours?

A. Well, actually, it was about three hours. With all the check-points, it took us about six hours to get to Vientiane.

Q. So that was kind of making the day short?

A. No, it made the day much longer. When we got to Vientiane, we went straight to my cousin's house. We stayed there for several days. The first day we didn't do anything. The second day I went to USAID, the headquarters. When I get there people were kind of protesting to ask USAID to move out. They said, "CIA, go home." "CIA, go home." When you go into the headquarters, officers came in and there were such a terrible thing. Some American friends came through the door to go inside, were written on by using some red ink sprayed or wrote on their back or front as they came

in. They just asked you to stop so they could write on your chest saying, "CIA, go home." They wrote on your stomach on your back and they didn't do that for me because I am Hmong. The Lao did to my American friends who were there. They asked him to stand up and then they wrote on his back, "CIA, go home." They spit into his face. They do such a terrible thing to them.

Q. Were the Americans still there?

A. Yes, a couple were still there. Many of them already flew to Thailand. I did talk to some of the people over there and asked for the money not to bring back to the employees, but just for those of us who went down there. We did have cars and trucks. We still had the employee cars. We had to bring our cars over there and then asked them to pay us the money. During that time, it was very difficult. We asked USAID officers to pay us. Many of us had salary and some had hourly wages. When we asked them to pay us and they refused because they were in the process of closing the office. "According to the contract, we have to pay you back like three months," said USAID Officers. "We had to figure all those money and we will pay you maybe in the next couple of weeks, or so." The Pathet Lao didn't allow USAID officers to wait. They asked USAID officers to pay us the next day. "We would like to get you out of here by tomorrow," said the Pathet Lao.

Q Did the Pathet Lao come into USAID office then?

A Yes, They came into the office and they went everywhere, every place even in the road. That was the American section or area. When they came in, they didn't know who was the officer, who was the CIA. They called everyone CIA including myself and other people who went in there. They called us CIA, too. We had to go back the next day and they said, "we could not get everything out by today." So I had to wait and wait until the 8th or 9th of June, 1975. We arrived in Vientiane on June the 2nd, 1975. So I had to stay there until the 8th or 9th to get paid. They paid us some money and I get my money before I planned that I would not go back but I would cross to Thailand. I met some of the American friends and one of them said it was every dangerous for our life. "We didn't even stay here at night. We have to go back to Udorn, Thailand every night. So if you could find your way, or you could find your safe place to go until then, you should do so." So, many of us who didn't feel it would be safe for us because we worked for USAID then found way out because the communists had our identification and our paper work and all those things were seized. We knew that some day they would search for us. So, we decided to cross to Thailand. On the 10th, we plan all day. On the 11th we knew that we had to relocate, and planned what we should do. Our idea was that we should keep the kids stay awake during the day. In the evening, or at night, they would fall a sleep during the crossing. Or we could go on

the 11th possibly in morning. We found a Lowland Lao who was a taxi driver. He came up to us, and he knew that we were going to cross to Thailand. He just came to us and talk to us and he said, "Okay, tonight I will come back, but I will come like other usual taxi drivers to stop here." He just stopped there and picked us up. During the day, we collected about thirty-one or thirty-two people. Other people came from Ban Xon. I think about eleven o'clock he came. And he said, "How may people you have?" I said, "Thirty-one or thirty-two." He said, "Wow, what could we do?" He had only one taxi. It would be like a full size car. He planned for two trips for thirty-two people. Get six or seven older kids, or older people in there then get all those kids laying down. I didn't know how could he make two trips for thirty-two people. he brought us very close to his house. Very close to the river at that time. So he just dropped us out there, and he asked some of us to go up to his house. But some he asked to stay down in river bank. He was gone back not too long, but he went about two hours or so. He then brought the other group in again. So he stayed there from eleven o'clock until about two-thirty in the morning. Then he just come up, and he asked us to go down to the river. We got there, already some people there in some boats down there so all the thirty two people were going down to two boats.

Q. How many were adults and how many were children?

A. Eleven or thirteen people were adults. The rest were little kids. He put us to the boat and he asked for the money first, but we said, "The money here, One hundred and eighty-thousand Kips for thirty-two of us, but you will not get them until when we got in Thailand."

Q. How much in Dollars?

A. One Dollar was exchange for five hundred Kips. One hundred and eighty-thousand [\$360.00]. It was still a lot of money. Well, we spread the money out. We didn't want just one person to keep all the money. We gave the money out to three men. Three of us had sixty thousand Kips. We said, "Here was the money when all of us could cross to Thailand safely we would hand you the money. Otherwise, you won't get it." So all of us went into two boats and they were just going quietly across to the river to the other side. It seemed like the trip was very long because he didn't make it going very fast or straight to make noise at all. It took us like an hour to cross the river. I don't think it was that long, but it seemed long for us to cross [Mekong River]. When we got to the other side, lots of people were coming in and helping us. Whether they try to help us and carry our belongings to their houses, or to the river bank. We didn't know, we thought they were friendly people who came to help us. We just let them help us to carry all those belongings off to the river bank. When we got there after we got out of the boat, we just hand the

money to the people. We got all the other people to the river bank. When we got there, many of our belongings were disappeared. We don't know where they went. The Thai who pretended to help us took them all. We just got some blankets and some other things that was not necessary. Our clothes were including in the list of missing. Some good pants and shirt and something like that. We didn't know those people, or where did they go. They just took all those things. For an example, you just offer to me, "Can I help you." So you think that they were friendly people, and you just hand all your bag and your belongings to them. You said, "Yes, this one, and that one, too." When they got up over there in the river bank and when you got there. Those people just went here and there. Even they carried in front of you, you could not say anything. After they pass to their houses, you didn't know where they went. That was something that we didn't expect to see, but it happened. We had a couple knives that we brought over with us. They took all those knives and all the good things. We still had some blankets for the night. After we knew that had happened then we asked for the village chief. A couple of the ladies show us to go to the village chief. We went up to his house.

Q Did you speak Thai?

A Yes, Lao and Thai. The Thai in the border, they could speak Lao fluently. We talked to him, and he offered us to stay at his house. In the morning then we told him that we lost everything, including our money and our good things were gone. When we got to his house some people came in with the truck and offered us to go with them. They were going to send us to Nong Khai Camp. We refused because we know for sure that those people were just take us out to rob and kill. They would just get your things or your belongings. We didn't go with them and we decided to stay there until the next day. The next morning no one would talk to each other what they lost. Everyone just stayed quietly without saying anything at all. In the morning we then talked. That night we knew that it was very dangerous. So let the kids and the women sleep inside and the men stood awakening all night long to guard for the group because we were sleeping on the patio of the house, but not inside. It was just under the shelter, but it was open to the outside. We guard our group all night. Maybe from three o'clock until six o'clock or so. After the day was bright again, we then talked what was missing and everyone of us lost everything, except some money that we were hiding in our bodies. Some of us hid money under the shoes. Put inside their stockings. Some said, well, I didn't loose my money because I carry in my pocket. Some said, "I still have some money that I put inside my shoes or somewhere." Okay, We share some money. We asked for a lady that we would like to buy some food for our kids. A couple of ladies in the neighborhood bring us some rice and some food for our children. Those were older

ladies and they were very nice. They offer us some food, some juice and some other drinks. They said, "well, these lovely children need to eat because they were hungry. We will give you some bananas and some fruit."

Q. Did other people also cross the river?

A. Yes, every day. Not at the same area that we came to, but other areas. About a couple blocks away, they had about two or three hundred refugees out there. When we got out there, and we talked to the village officer, and we said, "Is here any place that we could go." He said, "No, tonight you will come to stay here because it is dark." We asked them if there is any center, or any temple that we could go. He said, "Tonight it will be better for you to stay here." We stayed there, but in the next morning we found that only two blocks or three blocks away are big temples. So a couple hundred people were there. We decided that we didn't want to join that group. We would like to go to Nong Khai Thailand to a bigger camp. We paid for a taxi to give us a ride to the Nong Khai camp. It was just like a dream when we got to Nong Khai

Q. Did you think you will be staying in Thailand or you were going to come to the US?

A. No, we didn't know that we were going to come to the United States. We thought that we would stay in Thailand for maybe a couple months or so until we got some negotiation about the government. The Laotian government would take us back.

Q. Did you think you would go back?

A. Yes, we thought that we would go back because we thought that Thai government had negotiated with the Lao. The two groups of Laotian government would come together and form a permanent government. We thought that they were going to follow the same rules, and they were going to do that. We thought that we would stay there for only a couple months to see if they would get the politics straightened out and everybody could go back and stay freely. But, things were not happening as we thought. After we moved out to Thailand, everyday your life was kind of changing. In the next couple of months, everything turned around. It was never coming close to the coalition government mentioned before. You know.