

Second interview with Kay Moua
October 16, 1992

Kay Moua - When I recall, June 12, 1975, the village chief in Thailand that morning....was kind of difficult for us to think about. When we got up and the kids [were] so hungry and we didn't know where we would go. Finally, in the morning, many of the village ladies...brought us some food, [or] some sticky [sweet] rice and some fish. They gave them [food] to our kids, our little babies. We had thirty-two people in our group and only seven or eight were adults. The rest were babies, you know. So a couple of us guys talked together and thought that which way we should go. What should we do? One of the guys, Lee Houa, I and my brother-in-law made a decision that we don't trust any other people. We asked for the village chief to go and get some guys or some taxis for us. So we did ask him that, "We depend on you to ask some people that you trust to send us to Nong Khai Camp." So he thought about it a little bit, and he said, "Yes, I will do." He was gone for a little while. We didn't know where he went, but he was gone a little while. He brought in a guy that had a trailer-truck.....that truck came over and we all kind of get everything in the truck. He drove us to the Nong Khai Camp.

Q. Everyone?

A. Yes,...in the truck some people...stood in the back....the belongings just fit in the top and all the people sat inside. So a couple of the guys were standing in the back. So we went to Nong Khai Camp, and we got there around eleven o'clock.

Q. How long did it take?

A. Well, maybe about from here to Menomonie. It is not that far, but we had to check a couple of places that we had to go through to the camp. So we had to stop...they checked everything and everybody. And, then we would start forward to the camp. When we got there, [we found] some of the Hmong [were] already there. I saw my uncle there and many other people that we didn't know. They were there. They had a little camp, maybe just about a quarter square mile....and there were about seventeen hundred people [were] there already. So, it was kind of crowded....it was kind of a border police station....they have a camp that they fenced it.

Q - Seventeen hundred were all together?

A - Yeah, all together. So we went in there.

Q - Was there any shelters?

A - Yeah, they have a couple big houses in there and those people [who were there]...before us [were] already in the house.....we went in and we didn't have any place to put our things.....we just put [them] in front of the office with the Thai office.....called, "TAU, XAU, DAU."
 [Abbreviation for] Police Border Station. We stood there for a while and we kind of register everyone that we come as a group with them. They told us that they don't have any place for us to live and if we will like, just get outside the [first fence]...they had two fences. One is....large and one is small around the camp [shelters]. The large one [was] all around the camp. So, they told us to go out [of the fence to] the second area there.

Q - Was it just a Hmong camp?

A - Yeah, just Hmong....some Hmong, some Lao, and some Lao Theung...kind of mixed. It's a mixed group there. We started to go out to the [Thai] village, and we bought some bamboos and some straw. So we can put up a little tent. So we start to do that.

Q - was it just for covering?

A - Yeah, just kind of cover for rain.....[from being] wet.

Q - So you were able to go out then?

A - Yeah, we were...

Q - Any time?

A - During the day it [was] kind of any time, but you just go only to the village and come back to the camp. You can not go any place else. So we bought all those things and we made a little tent. Well it was not lucky that night. It rained so hard and many of our people could not sleep at all.....the tent was kind of short and we could not stand up in there so we kind of sit down. You could not sleep because the water is coming..it floods...everything. It's just kind of like a dream. So in the morning, every body..... [were like] mice coming from the hole that you put the water [into the hole]. Everyone is wet. We found some fire wood, and we start to make our fire and cook for our kids for the next morning. Well, it is very difficult. The older and younger were not really hungry, but...we faced some very difficult time and everyone kind of crying. [When] kids cried...the older people were crying, too. It was very poor condition and we don't know what we are going to do or where we would stay [in the next]....a couple weeks. I think two weeks....they bus some people to Nam Phong Camp. We got there on the 12th and the bus too those people to Nam Phone on the 20th.....just eight days.during the eight days, we [refugees] had gained from seventeen hundred to twenty-six hundred people. [More] people came from Laos. They took twenty hundred to Nam Phong Camp and the rest stayed in that camp. After that the

first group were [bus] out, then we were able to move into the houses that they lived in.....

Q - Were you still staying in Nong Khai Camp?

A - Yeah, stay in Nong Khai Camp, but.....we moved in their houses. The condition were kind of dirty.....during the....raining time. It rained almost every day that things kind of dirty. We didn't get any help from other people at that time. So, we have to spend out money. Whatever we had, we exchanged for [Thai] money to buy food, and things we needed [such as] clothes and blankets....

Q - You had to buy all those?

A - Yeah, we had to buy everything even food. Well, now we had about six or seven hundred people there and we lived there for about a month. People kind of come every day. So we lived there for three months, from June until September. We..[gained] to seven thousand people there. At that time, they decided not to send our group to Nam Phong or other location. So they decided that the people came from Laos can overflow, and they will keep us there for temporary, that's what they said. So when the people kept coming.....we could not find food in the area. It was very difficult. So we had to go to the mission and the priests (Thai mission and American Priests).

Q - Nong Khai?

A - Yes, Nong Khai.

Q - Were they outside the village?

A - Yes, they were outside. Kind of consider the village. We asked the Red Cross and the priests and the American missionaries to help us with the food. So, for three months, I think everybody kind of spent everything. Many startnot just starving, but....get sick and die, too.

Q - Was the sickness like malaria?

A - It was kind of malaria, mostly malaria and other sickness that I know they called meningitis. When people have malaria for many days and they start to have some symptoms like meningitis then they died.

Q - Was it happening every day?

A - Yeah, every day, people died. Sometimes three people died a day, four or five died a day, like that. And, we had a couple thousand dead. We then started to worry that maybe something was wrong with the food or with some of the conditions. We had to ask for help. So at that time, the missionaries and the red cross came in to help us to look over those things.....they cook and bring food...and call all the children...and share the food with the kids. We knew we are short of food and medicine. We lived in that kind of conditions until September. At that time, we still

had the American officers who were working with us in Laos. And, they still come from Udorn to visit us in Nong Khai.

Q - Were those working with you before?

A - Yeah, the people that we were living in Laos. Our Americans friends that [we once were] working together in Laos. They came to visit us in Nong Khai, and most of them already left Thailand for home. But, still a couple people still there. They came and we talked and talked about what would the future from there be. They gave us some advice that for those who worked directly with the US Embassy or the US Government will offer a chance for us to start a new life in America. That was in September 1975.

Q - Did you know there was some kind of agreement about that?

A - No, nothing before that. I think by June or July 1975, many of the Americans that were working with us already left Thailand to the U.S. A. already. So at that time, kind of quiet. We don't and help from the Red Cross or the United Nations or any other source at all. So everything kind of mixed up at that time. It took us a couple months for them to work out. Many fo the people from outside Thailand came to visit us, too. Mostly, they came from the American missionaries and other volunteer agencies. They came to visit the refugees there. Well, finally, we know that we don't have choice because we don't want to go back to Laos. We know...we learn that many of the people that cannot get out at that time.....were killed...or being sent to re-education camp. So, it was fearful tor our lives and finally I think in late September 1975. We decided that maybe we would make the decision to come to America.

Q - That was December 1975?

A - Yeah, three months. So in November, I think the American officer came there again and talked to our group. Them mentioned that....the US. Government would be Okay for those people who worked directly to the United States to come to America. So we make the decision at that time...to register with them. They said that they would talk and would work it out with the high rank or high officer in Thailand. In December, they came back again and said, "Yes."

Q - Did they came back and forth?

A - Yes, kind of come back and forth from the US. Embassy in Bangkok and Udorn.

Q - From Udorn?

A - Yeah, Udorn is very close to Nong Khai...not too far from there. So in December, they came back and they allow those families who have four to six people come first....those who know how to speak English a little bit, or at least two adults in the house that workable. They

asked for some volunteer agency or people in the United States to sponsor those people to come to America. So at that time.....all the USAID employees...over forty or fifty families were there.

Q - Head of families?

A - Yeah...only three families so far that I know on the first day said, "Yes, we are going to come." My uncle, who lives in California, myself and one of the Xiong families decided to come. So I think that we sign up all the paper work that they need to sign in December. In early January 1976, on January 11, was the first time for our group that depart to America. So, my uncle left, and I decided not to come at that time because I am not sure there we are going to end up, plus that I have my wife's mother and family with us....and they allow only six of us to come. My wife had very difficult time to leave her mother behind. So, we decided not to come at that time. We kind of wondering about who [would sponsor us], [weather] condition, and climate, all those things. So we let my....uncle come...and write back to us [about] condition, how we can get food, and so on. I think he left on January 11 to America and two weeks later he wrote us back. He came to Long Beach, California and he said, "Yes, we got a Lao Oriental Food Store here, too. There are many people, oriental people, but we just don't talk to them. They are probably Chinese or Japanese and Korean. There are other people, but not Hmong or Laotians here at all." He described about the food and the conditions and climate of all those things to us.

Q - How long and he was able to do that?

A - Two Weeks

Q - That's all?

A - I think it is more than two weeks, a little more than two weeks because he wrote a letter to us and he said he had been there only three days when he wrote to us.

Q - How many people were in the camp?

A - By that time, we had close to seven thousand.

Q - Seven thousand. Was it crowded?

A - Yeah, it was kind of very crowded in there.

Q - How people manage to survive?

A - Money is running out. Everybody kind of get sick and not enough food. We spent everything we had. For example, I had about.....six hundred thousand [Kips].....but, exchanged for Thai money, we got about four thousand... Bahts. We spent two hundred every [week] and it lasted us only four or five months, and we didn't have any more money.

Q - When did you receive help from Red Cross and other agencies?

A - By November [1975]....the Red Cross and the United Nations [High Commissioner on Refugees] started to help us with some food, rice and other food. Actually, we just spent money for ourselves from June 1975 to the end of September 1975. October and November, they started to help us with some food....not enough, but it is better than before. The conditions that there were too many people in only a quarter of square mile, everybody kind of sleep under or over others.....We kind of thinking how long life in the camp would be and where we would get out and go to start a new life. Many people think that maybe [life in the camp] would be only temporary and when the condition in Laos becomes better or the government would work out together and we would go back. Everyday was not better, but worse. Back in Laos, many of the families who used to work with the US. Government, soldiers, or armies and many of others just ran into to the jungle. You didn't know where they went and many were captured. I think they arrested those who have higher ranks on the services first and then started from there. They started to send those people to the re-education camp. We didn't know that they would have a chance to come or not. So, it was kind of scaring people out and people started to migrated to Thailand. Well, after we made a decision that we would stay for a while. We were very poor. My wife and I and other people kind of gathering in a group and talked about life in the camp and where we would go from there. Finally, we made a decision that we would come to America, but we didn't know where we're going to end up and who would be our sponsor. With the American officers who talked to us.....they sent our names to America, here the United States. Maybe people would volunteer to pick up our names to sponsor us. We just waited and waited until they came back to tell us, "Now you get sponsors for your family." At that time, I think they just asked for volunteers [to be] the sponsors through the church and through agencies like that. Our family and three other families happened to be...random pick up from New York. When we got here Eau Claire, we learn from the pastor that in November 1975 he went to the meeting in New York and after the meeting....one of the officer announced that many refugees from Laos to Thailand need some sponsors to sponsor their families to start new lives in the United States. They had whole bunch names in a cup and he just picked four. He picked four names from that, and he share one for Hope Lutheran Church, one for St. John Church, one for Our Redeemer Lutheran Church, and he kept one [for Trinity Lutheran Church].....Four families....

Q - Who was the pastor?

A- Pastor Andy Bowe at Trinity Lutheran Church. In January to February, he got those names our to the churches and they were willing to sponsor us to Eau Claire. See Thao was the

7

first family arrived. Two weeks later Ge Yang then came to Eau Claire.

Q - Whose was the first family?

A - See Thao. The second family was Ge Yang. And, another two weeks then our family came to Eau Claire on April 9, 1976. Another two weeks then See Moua came. So we have four families came to Menomonie. Another one came to Durand. So, we had only six families in the area until spring 1977. Even we had six families in the area, we didn't know how far they lived and so on. We got some phone numbers through the sponsors. We just call each other once in a while and we don't know how far they lived and how we could get together.

Q - Back up for me now. How you actually came to the United States from the refugee camp in Thailand?

A - Going back to the trip. That was very, very difficult for my family, particularly for my mother-in-law and my wife. In March, we got the announcement that we were going to come to America in the end of March or early in April. At that time, we were running out of money. So I had to go and work with the Thai people to earn money and to have a little party to celebrate the family's [farewell] separation. Well, to make the money, we went outside of the camp and helped the Thai farmers worked in the fields.....It was very difficult. I think during the day we kind of looked at each other, but at night we all kind of crying. "We don't know what to do. Where to go from here. Do we have a chance to get together again or not?" That was how we felt. I went out to work with the Thai [farmers] about four or five days and my hands were bruise [had blisters] and only get paid two hundred Bahts. Well, I got those money, then came back and I talked to my wife that, "Life in the camp you just only know today. We don't know tomorrow who is going to die because people died every day. Maybe we will survive if we will take a chance to go to America." Finally, we made a decision and we bought some meat from the store to make a little party to call all our family member to get together. My uncle and a couple of the close family came to have a celebration together. I think that was late in March [1976]. So, on April 1st, we started our journey to Bangkok. That morning my mother-in-law was almost faint. She screamed, and she almost died that morning because we were the second or third family to leave from the camp to America, and she had very difficult time to go through. The whole family were upset and when we got to Bangkok, we stayed in Bangkok.....it was very difficult. You didn't feel whether it was day or night....

Q - Was it kind of waiting?

A - Yes, kind of waiting. But, finally we make the decision that whatever happened we got to go. Maybe when we get to

America, we will ask for a sponsor to sponsor my mother-in-law again. We made the decision like that then we talked to the family. We talked to my mother-in-law that, "Please don't cry when we get to America, we will make some way to get you from here to the United States of America with the family. We did make the trip to America. On the trip, there were a couple of Hmong families came to Wausau. One boy that who came to America was just get married for maybe just three weeks.....He is a Lowland Lao. When we left Nong Khai to Bangkok, he was so sad and he made the whole group sad, too. He would cried and we didn't know what to do, and how to help him. Finally when we left Bangkok together to San Francisco. By the time we left Thailand until we got to San Francisco, the guy had very difficult time that he left for the US without his wife. When we got to San Francisco, he just faint. I think some officer just took him away and we didn't know what happened to him. That was the last time we saw him. Our whole family and the other couple family came to Wausau were kind of feeling sad. We came to Hong Kong. We stayed over night in Hong Kong then we came to Tokyo and just stopped there for a while then we came to San Francisco. We changed airplanes in San Francisco then we made our way to Twin Cities and then Eau Claire. When we got to Eau Claire, it was April 9th, about five o'clock in the evening. It kind of a little dark, rained little bit. It was very cold...still very cold for us. We were wondering what things would be? When we got out of the plane and we saw everything was kind of turning around.....everything kind of looks different. The people are different, the buildings were different. When we get to a building, I think a whole group of people stood there and waved at us. They told us that, "We are your sponsors." Well, they look very friendly, smile, and seems very happy. They had some flowers, some fruits, some jackets, and all the warm clothes for us. We kind of think in our mind that, "Wow, these are the people who sponsor us and they are so friendly."

Q - How did you communicate?

A - I know English just a little bit. A very little, compare to at this time.

Q - But, you were still the best one?

A - You will be the best one. Yes, I talked a little bit and I still would like to see those pictures that they took of that day. Maybe you can find those pictures and have some of those pictures.

Q - Who were the sponsors?

A - The Trinity Lutheran Church.

Q - Were all the people in the church came to the airport when you came from Thailand?

A - Yes, we had a whole group of people from the church. Well, when we got our, I think they brought us to the car and they brought us to Starr Ave, coming down to Birch Street, coming to downtown Eau Claire. We went on State Street and we turn left to Clairemont Ave and they show us the church.....they told us that was the church that sponsored us. And, they brought us to Altoona, the trailer court in Altoona. I forget the name, but it was up on Clairemont Ave.

Q - Was it called the Low Creek or....?

A - Something like "Green.." for the name of the Court. Well, that evening I think they brought us to the trailer house. They already had some people there cooked for us. I remember that they cook some rice...little rice kind of mixed with some meat, you know. They had some very good food there. They knew that we were very tired and they talked to us just a little bit and they show us where the food and so on. They prepare some food for us to eat a little bit and they left. They told us to stay by our own you know. Well, it is very tired, and I think it took us twenty-seven or twenty-eight hours on the plane. You still felt...the trailer kind of moving. We stayed there overnight. At that time, I had my two brothers, Lo Pao Moua, Dang Moua, and my two sons. My wife was still pregnant and she was sick and tired.

Q - How far was her pregnancy?

A - One month....but she was very tired. Well, in the morning when we got up and we looked on the window, all the trailer houses kind of quiet. It was so windy, but no one was out there. We hear only the dog barking, you know. And, we wondered that, "Why no people in this little town or village." Well, we stay a little later, I think about seven o'clock or eight, then our sponsor come back again. They came back and they helped us to prepare the food. They checked our belongings, and they help us prepare the food and cooked for us. And, I think they really care for us for a couple weeks. Just every day...until night or dark, and they went home. And, they had a couple of groups. Some come to help us and some do other things. Well, life is just like you started very low in the bottom. And, they had to care for us, help us, how to do dishes. How to wash the clothes, and how to bedding, and all those things. Every day they have to change and wash and do it again. And, they show us like, well, start a new life just like a baby, you know. We kind of wondering how life in America is going to be. Not just only days, but even a couple months, we were still wondering what we're going to do and how we were going to get our lives started again and so on. But, I think in July they found a job for me to work at the Growth and Industrial. It's kind of east side of Embers. East side of Embers on Clairemont Ave....and that job was kind of doing inventory some towels and all those things. And the job I

start to work like five or six o'clock in the evening. And some nights you worked until in the morning. Sometimes you worked until maybe two or three o'clock [in the morning] like that, doing some inventory and sorting some kind of towels and like that. So, I started to work---well, we got here in April and I started to work in July. By August, we moved from that trailer court to a house across from the Trinity Lutheran church on the other side. On a duplex right across from the church. That's on the other side. So when we moved over, it was getting easier, little bit easier. But every day when I went to work while we lived in the trailer court, our two pastors had to pick up me from home to work, and when I was done I had to call him and he had to come and pick me up and brought me home. And, went back and forth like that until we moved to [live near] the church. Then they showed me the way how I could walk to work. So I started to walk to work, and [to home] when I was done.

Q. Walked from Trinity?

A. Yeas, from Trinity Lutheran Church to Embers, across Embers on the other side.

Q. A long walk?

A. It was a little more than a mile. Little more than a mile. But, life was kind of difficult for me because the weather, the climate (in the winter, I had to walk like that every day), especially during the winter, you know. I saw only myself that would walk in the snow and some of the rabbits that made footprints with me. It seemed that nobody in the hole world that would walk with me to work because they drove cars when they went, you know. But, for me it was difficult because I had to walk and work at night, especially at night.

Q. Walked at night?

A. Yeah, walk back home, I think the police stopped me many times when I walked back home, you know. At night like two or three o'clock in the morning. It was kind of snowing, and very cold. And they stopped me and they asked. That time, I didn't speak English that much. But, the sponsors just wrote me a little note and put in my pocket. And, that note said, "I am coming home from work." "If any questions, call this number.....," [the note said], you know. They gave the Trinity Lutheran Church number. So, I don't have any other ID, but the little note. And, the looked at the note and I didn't know whether they would call or not....they said, "Oh, poor boy!" and they let me go on my way. Well, I kind of think it was very difficult for me, my life was. I kept doing that because sometimes it was very cold and windy when it was dark. I got [sinus] sick in here very deep in the middle of my two eyes,...really deep down there. So, when I feel that for a while and if I didn't cover my eyes for a while, then I felt that I was going to

11

faint. I was going to fall down. One time I came to K-Mart, and I felt that I could not walk through the parking lot because it hurts so much. I had to sit down in front of the door and cover my face for a little while. Then I got up and walked again to my house. I thought about my life in Laos comparing to my life in America at that time, I thought I had made wrong decision to come to America. As I looked at the road, people ride a car or drive a car. They talked about a couple thousand Dollars to buy a car, to ride a car on the road...

Q. You kept doing that the whole time?

A. Yeah, I kept doing that and when I came home a couple times, I did cry and I did talk to my wife that we did make the wrong decision to come to America.

Q. How old were you?

A. Twenty seven years old at that time.

Q. Did you get to go school?

A. Go school?

Q. Did you go school here?

A. Yes, I worked at night and went to school during the day.... So, we went to Technical School to learn English. And, we asked for our sponsor to baby-sit for our two kids. And, we have to drive my wife to school. And, also drive me to school. I went to school during the day and at five o'clock I had to go to work. And, at that time, I walked-- it kind of in between, from Trinity Lutheran Church to Technical School. It was on the west side, so we had to walk to school. And, I have to walk from our houses to work on the East side. Life was going back and forth like that until 1978. I think around April 1978. At that time, it is Spring. We felt that if during the winter time or in September...or October, I already faced some difficult time..we talked and we decided that we will have only three kids. So, in November 11 our baby daughter was born in Luther Hospital. We decided to stop, not to have any more babies. And, I think my wife kind of look at me. I look at my wife and we think that we thought we were the couple that got married in Laos, but from our kids, "who would marry them?" And, "whom they'll marry to?" Because we don't have enough people here, not enough Hmong here. We wondered whether the Caucasian will like us or not. Because our pastor mentioned to us that, "not everyone is going to like you because many people have their sons and daughters died during the war, the second World War, and the Korean War-- and many people here don't like the brown color people, or oriental people." "But, don't pay attention to them!" "Those people are the people who have problems with themselves, and they're already got mad at your people," he told me before. It didn't seem to have that many oriental people at that time. We are kind of getting worried about our lives, our children and so on.

Q. Were there two or three Hmong families in Eau Claire?

A. Yeah....Those two or three families were still in Eau Claire. We met at school. Their sponsor did drive them to school, and we met at school. But, at the school, we all laugh, and we can call on the phone and talk once in a while, too. but, you never know in the future that what is going to be, going to have some more people coming in, or where you will like to go from here to where you can meet with other people, you know. But, well, at the Spring 1978, and we heard that my mother-in-law is going to come. So, the church got some connection with the immigration office, and they write to us that my mother-in-law was going to come. Her family was going to come. We heard that other Hmong families started to come to America. So, we felt a little bit better. Finally on April the 21st, my mother-in-law came to Eau Claire. We felt a little bit better at that time. But, life at that time, I changed my job at the Growth Industrial. And, I thought that I could not do that job forever. My English was very low. The money was not that good so we could support our family. Only three Dollars an hour at that time. But, that was even better because I worked two jobs. After I started to work at Growth Industrial for a couple months (I think early Spring in 1977), we didn't earn that much money to support the family. So, I decided to have another job at Sears. At Sears...I just wash all the fingerprints on the windows and on the doors. Took out the gum and some of the cigarette stuff that they left on the outside. Doing some cleaning outside and inside, and empty the garbage can and like things that. But, they only paid me two Dollars and twenty-five cents an hour. I work there just only part-time. So, I worked that one part-time, and I worked...kind of full-time at Growth Industrial. Not enough money for our family.

Q. Did you ask for public assistance like AFDC or did you know about it?

A. No. At that time we don't know that we have AFDC or we have some assistance from the government at all. We just lived what we earned and if not enough, our sponsor just buy some shirts and bring us some food or something like that, or help us to pay for other things that our money not cover. So, we didn't know that we have the assistance for us. And; I felt that this was not enough money for me. So, I started to look for other job. And, at that time, See Thao got a job at Northern Center by Chippewa Falls. And, he was working there to help the retarded people over there. So, he told me that, "Oh, they have some jobs open over there." I went with him to see the personnel office there. I filled out the application with them. So I got a job over there and it paid a little more. It paid four Dollars an hour. So, I started to work there in, I think, July '78. I worked there until May 1979.

Q. For one year?

A.Summer 1977 to May 1979...about two years. Over there in the maintenance. And, I just keep the building #3. They have three floors, three stories. I had to clean that house, that building. But, when I started to work over there,....it paid a little more...it's kind of nice, too, but you didn't have anyone to talk to. You just work around the house. Even day did the same thing. I said to myself, I am here to learn English, and if I kept doing this, I will never learned. I will never speak English at all. So, I decided ..maybe this is not the right job for me. So, I decided to quit that job and came back to technical school. I already made my decision so I, at that time knew that they have some assistance, or have some help, you know. So I did go to the Courthouse and talked to one of the maintenance officer over there. And, I explained for her about my situation that I need to come back to Technical School to learn some more English. She said, "OK." So I just went to Technical school to talked to them and applied for admission over there. they said, "OK," too, you know.

Q. Could they teach you English when there was no interpreter and the instructor didn't speak Hmong?

A. Well, it was kind of experience for the teacher and for us, too. Learning is kind of different system from Laos and here. In Laos, I think you have some books or something you had to go by, and you had to go in book one, book two, and three, and so on. So, you had some level to go by. But, at technical school, I think we learned how to speak English and kind of learned some vocabulary and learned to speak in pronunciation and like that. Started from chair and table and airport and so on, you know. But, I made my decision to come back to Technical School in May 1979. And, I graduated from Technical School in...March 1980. Right after I graduated, I got a job at 3-M Company in Menomonie. And, what happened there was that at that time we didn't have that many people to translate and we got a Hmong family came to Elmound.and I think that there is a priest who sponsored the family. They would like me to go with the family to 3-M in Menomonie to translate for him and to help him to fill out an application. So, I did go with him and I did have a chance to go to 3-M in Menomonie and got an application. Because at that time I almost completed my courses at Technical School. So, I got the application and I fill it out and mailed it back. I was called for interview. So, after I graduate from Technical School, I just got a job at 3_M in Menomonie. So, I started there for about two weeks or so and my boss came to me that he knew that I knew how to read blueprint pretty good. He knew that my English was not that good, but in reading I am doing good. So, he asked that if I was willing to learn to be a set-up man. They have a program learning on the job. It might take me like two and a half years to learn and to do on the job. And, I said, "Yes." So I kind of started to do that, and I was learning each week maybe two hours or

sometimes four hours that have to learn some paper--some kind of note that what to do, you know. Kind of like supervisor position and what you're going to do, like that. Usually that course take two and half years to complete, but I did finish for three years..... And I started to work at 3-M for well, may 19, 1980 until.....July 1986. they arranged the department, they're going to have some new machines coming in and replace the old machines that we had over there. SO I was on Lay-off for temporary for a couple months, until they put all those new machines in. But, by the time that I was laid off, one of my sponsors in my church that was working at Industrial here, he just offer me a job. And, he said, "Well, just come to my shop and work over there." So, I worked with him for six months. Well, by the time that they got all the machines coming into 3-M in Menomonie, and the called me back. At that time, the Hmong Association, the Project Coordinator at the Hmong Association got a different job and he quit. So, that position was empty. So I did applied for the position.

Q. When did the Hmong Association started?

A. the Hmong Association started in....well, actually at the end of 1982. But, officially got all the papers done in July 1983. By the Fall of 1979....before that we had four families. In 1978 we had about seven or eight families. In early 1979 we had a dozen families and in the Fall of 1979, we started to have thirty or forty Hmong families moving from Chicago area.

Q. Was that in 1980?

A. That was in the Fall of '79.

Q. Was that when we started to have second migration?

A. Yeah. Right. Well, coming back to the situation that why they moved to Eau Claire. I think in 1977 to 1978, the only four families that lived here, all the husbands and wives, we had a choice....to go to Technical School, you know. And, in 1979, Kou Yang and Bee Yang, they both graduated from machine tool and dye. They were already on their way, so I started late. They started first so they finished first. And, at the time I had Touly Xiong and Der Moua. She was my cousin who moved from Green Bay.

Q. So you had some friends?

A. Yeah. We had some friends, but we all had a chance to go to school and learn. So, in 1979, three or four of us graduated from Technical School and that makes other people think that Eau Claire gave some chance for the refugee to go to school, you know.

Q. Did you tell people about the school then?

A. No. At that time, I think people when they come to Twin Cities, and....it is so much different than we live in Eau Claire than the big cities. So, they came from Twin Cities

to look at us here and they came from Chicago to look at us here. And, that time Twin Cities had some programs to teach Hmong refugees, but in Chicago they didn't. They didn't have some special programs for the refugees, yet. So, when they heard that we had some program here, then they started to move to Eau Claire to get some education. I think that was the first group that came in. So, in 1980 people started to move to Eau Claire more and more since that time. By the end of 1982 when we were going to started the Hmong Association here, we had pretty close to 800 people. That was a big group already at the time.

Q. Did the people were here now then started to recruit more people to come?

A. Yes, but people come here at that time now more than one half had moved out. Well, they came here for a couple years, and they got some training from Technical School or they start to look for some jobs so they kind of spread out to other communities to get jobs. So, we kind of get new people coming all the time. Even today, we still get some second migration to the city.