

Interview of Hout Try

A: Interviewer: Leng Theory

B: Interviewee: Hout Try

Summary of the Interview

Hout Try was born in 1952 in Trapeang Chrey village, Kampong Cham province. In this interview, he shares several vivid experiences, from surviving a fall into a local well as a child to his marriage being abruptly interrupted by the Khmer Rouge takeover. He especially focuses on the upheaval surrounding the Lon Nol and Pol Pot eras and shares his struggle to conceal his education and background to survive interrogation by Khmer Rouge authorities. Having traversed numerous challenges throughout his life, he now works as a skilled elementary school teacher in Kampong Cham.

A: Okay. So, to start off, I'd like to thank you for allowing me to interview you today and ask about a bit of your life history as well as your family's. And like I said before, this is a project of BYU which is called the Cambodian Oral History Project. So, I am conducting this interview today, which is July 11, 2018. My name is Leng Theory, I will be your interviewer today. This interview is taking place in the district meetinghouse of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Kampong Cham. So please tell us your name, including your last name?

B: My name is Hout Try.

A: Hout Try?

B: Yes

A: And—

B: I'm the first counselor in the church in Kampong Cham.

A: I see. And do you have any nicknames other than that name?

B: No. I don't have one.

A: Even when you were young, you didn't have any other names?

B: Nope.

A: Only that name, is that the same name that's on your ID?

B: I've only had my ID made once.

A: But that's the name on the ID? Are they the same?

B: Yes, the same one.

A: So, what's your current address, where do you live?

B: Oh! Village No. 6, Veal Vong commune, Kampong Cham district, Kampong Cham province.

A: And where is your hometown?

B: My hometown is in Trapeang Chrey village, Krala commune, Kampong Siem district, Kampong Cham province.

A: Trapeang Chrey village?

B: Yes! Trapeang Chrey village, about 10 kilometers outside of Kampong Cham.

A: Yes. So, you were born there?

B: Yes.

A: So, you're from Kampong Cham. Another thing, do you remember your birthday?

B: 05/04/1952.

A: So that means May 4th?

B: Yes, the 4th of—the 5th of April!

A: Oh! The 5th of April 1952. So, what about the Khmer year? What year are you?

B: At that time the Khmer year was probably the year of the rabbit.

A: The year of the rabbit. So you were born in the year of the rabbit, how old are you now?

B: 68.

A: 68?

B: Yes.

A: How many siblings do you have in your family?

B: I have six siblings—there are three girls and four boys.

A: Which child are you?

B: I am the youngest. And now all my siblings are dead.

A: You're the only one left?

B: No, all my brothers are dead, and two of my sisters are dead. [Actually], one sister is dead, my oldest sister is still alive, along with my youngest sister.

A: Yes. and do you remember all their names and birthdays?

B: Oh! Birthdays, no. Names, yes.

A: You remember, could you tell me their names?

B: My oldest sister is Yu Theang, she is over 80 years old now.

A: Yes.

B: My second sibling, a brother, is Hang Sa. He is dead.

A: With his last name?

B: What?

A: Including the last name?

B: What?

A: Is that including his last name?

B: No, his last name is Khouv. Khouv Yu Theang, Khouv Hang Sa, and another is Khouv Hang Son who is also dead. Next is Khouv Hang Ngoan, who is also dead. Khouv Yu Eang, who is dead as well. Next is Khouv Yu Srouy, who is still alive. Next is me.

A: And they all have the same last name. You are the only one with a different last name?

B: For me, during the Khmer Rouge, I hid my identity. I changed my name to Hout, after my grandfather, whose name is Hout Bon Khouv. That's my last name. So that's why my last name is like that. It should actually be Khouv, but to hide my identity from Pol Pot I put Khouv instead—oh! I put Hout instead. And in the church, it is still the same, Hout. I'm too lazy to change it, because for my job that's what I put.

A: So, what year did you change your last name? During the Khmer Rouge?

B: I changed my last name in 1979.

A: In 1979?

B: In 1979, the Khmer Rouge ended. They conducted a census, and the group presidents walked around and asked, and I put my name as Hout.

A: I see, okay. And do you remember any good stories from when you were younger with your siblings? Like, what did you like to play with your siblings and such, you know? Do you have anything?

B: Like a kid, we were like normal, like the other kids. We were normal, we played like kids do, you know?

A: Did you have any games that you played regularly with your siblings? Do you have anything?

B: No, I was the youngest, so I just went and played with my older siblings. Nope! They were the older siblings, and I was the younger, so it's like I was at a lower level, you know?

A: So, what can you remember from them, your siblings? Are there any memories about them that you can remember?

B: I only remember—it's like this. When I was older—oh! Not when I was older, when I was young, my mother would go to the market or something, and my mother would have my older siblings look after me. So, they would always rock the hammock to help me fall asleep. But when they swung me, they would sing me lullabies to lull me to sleep—at that time these were memories. I was an infant, and infants always act childlike. They would sing lullabies to lull me to sleep, but I wouldn't stop crying. I would want something from them and cry louder. But that's just how babies are.

A: How many of your siblings did you say are still alive?

B: Only one of my sisters, but she has Alzheimer's.

A: How old is she?

B: Almost 90.

A: Oh, she's very old!

B: Yes.

A: Where does she live now?

B: She lives in Andoung Kngan, in western Phnom Penh now.

A: What's her specific address?

B: Andoung Kngan, I'm not sure what it is, because I'm not familiar with Phnom Penh.

A: But she's in Phnom Penh?

B: Yes, she's in Phnom Penh. She's in Phnom Penh with her child.

A: I see. So, she's the only one left. What about your parents, what are their names?

B: My father's name is Leang.

A: What about his last name?

B: What?

A: What about his last name?

B: Khouv Kun Leang. And my mother's name is Hout. She only took my grandfather's name, she just took her father's name. I don't remember why. I filled out my family history for her and I put Hout Kim Loan as her name. Kim Loan.

A: I see. And do you remember when they were born?

B: I don't remember. But I've been researching their family history, and I've been trying to find when they were married. I think they were married at age 25.

A: I see.

B: And I think that one year later, when they were 26, they had a child.

A: I see.

B: So that's the oldest child. I know her age. So, I add 25 or 26 years to her age, and then we know when they were born. So according to that, if I don't do that, then I wouldn't know their birthdates.

A: So, when you did that, what year were they born? After you calculate it?

B: Oh, I don't remember, but I wrote it in a book, because I [have a bad memory]. I finished my family history. What year were they? What year was my mother, what was her birth year? We could find it out with what I said before. Because if we didn't, we couldn't know, no one could tell us because they've all died already.

A: I see. So they've died?

B: What?

A: When did they die? And how old were they?

B: My mother died in 1975. She was sick during the Khmer Rouge. She was sick here and died. And my father died in the fifth month of 1900-something—oh! In 2005.

A: So, he just recently died a few years ago?

B: 2005? A few years ago? It's 2018 right now.

A: Oh! 13 years already.

B: 13 years already, [maybe more than that].

A: I see. And when he died, how old was he?

B: He was 94.

A: Oh, he was old!

B: What?

A: Did he die of old age?

B: Yes, old age.

A: I see. Old age. Was it the same with your mother?

B: She was sick.

A: Oh, sickness! And when she died, how old was she?

B: She was about 60.

A: Oh, she wasn't very old.

B: Not very old. At that time, she was sick, she had osteoporosis.

A: Oh! So, what do you remember about your parents?

B: Oh, I clearly remember that my parents were very good people, I looked up to them as an example.

A: I see.

B: The people in my village also loved them because they were very caring and sympathetic. For example, there were cow herders who took their cows to drink at a well in front of my house at 11 o'clock pm. When they finished drinking, they would always poop next to there.

A: Next to that well?

B: Next to that well. My parents never said anything, never got mad at them. After they left, they grabbed their baskets and scooped all of it up to throw it away. The area around my house was a place where there were frequent accidents, they would happen year after year. Every so often, there would be cars that hit people, at least two people a year. But when there was an accident, they would keep us from looking. They were worried that we would be witnesses and get in trouble. So we were quiet, we didn't want to know anything. They said that they didn't want us to be involved in things like that. Another good thing was that, in our village, there were wild dogs. They would call others to go and chase them away and hit them, they were scared that they would bite the kids. They led the others with bamboo sticks and chased them. And at the well, when [my father] would go shower, sometimes he would find watches, gold necklaces, because people who had them on and came to use the well, they would take them off and then shower. When he found them, he would take them and if anyone lost anything and was the actual owner, he would call them to come get it.

A: And are they both kind?

B: What?

A: Are they kind?

B: They are super kind!

A: Were they kind with you and your siblings, and their grandchildren?

B: They never hit their kids with a switch. I can't think of a single time. They never hit us.

A: So, when you were with them, if you think of yourself, what did you learn from your parents? What sort of things did they teach you or their other kids?

B: Oh! They taught me about how to live my life.

A: I see.

B: They never wanted us to know about their problems or hear them gossip about others. That's one thing that I have tried to do, to follow their example. Another thing is the way that they helped others, like with the dog story. Some people in this village just sit in their houses and don't pay attention to [the dogs]. But my parents didn't do that, they chased after them. And during the dry season at the well when it broke, my parents paid the workers to restore the well.

A: But that well was a well for everyone?

B: It was a public well.

A: A public well.

B: A well dug by hand, you know?

A: I see.

B: It was a public well, and they sold goods there. When they sold beer, they sold it at a discount. At that time, if you work for a whole day, you got about 25 riel. My parents gave them beer if they did good work.

A: 25 riel is about how much in today's money?

B: Oh, back then, one chi of gold was—oh, one damlung was about 3000 riel.

A: 3000 riel in Khmer money?

B: 3000 riel in Khmer money, so if there were 25 how much is that?

A: [Laughs]

B: 300 for one chi.

A: I see.

B: So if that's true, then 25 is worth one Hun, which equals 30.

A: Yes.

B: About one Hun! Those people would also drink water from the well after they were hired which was improper because we were the only ones allowed to drink there. We all came

together to restore the well, but my parents didn't think like that, they paid the workers for it.

A: So, you said from before that they sold goods and merchandise?

B: Yes, my father sold different goods.

A: What about your mother?

B: Hm?

A: Did your mother also sell things with your father?

B: Oh! They sold things together.

A: Oh, they sold together. So, have you ever heard them tell stories from their youth?

B: Oh, I have! My father told me that in China during the Second World War, they had to pick soldiers like they did here in the Lon Nol era, so he ran away from China to Cambodia.

A: So, your father is Chinese?

B: Yes, he's Chinese.

A: And he's from—?

B: Beijing.

A: He came from Beijing?

B: Yes.

A: Oh!

B: He didn't know how to live here—when he traveled here, he went through Vietnam. He ate duck eggs for a whole month, like duck eggs we have here.

A: Like salty duck eggs?

B: Not salty duck eggs, just plain duck eggs.

A: How did he eat them for a whole month?

B: He put fish sauce and other sauces. He used chopsticks and dipped them in the sauce.

A: Hm.

B: And all the [Chinese] children were used to eating salty foods. Why? Because if you ate food without salt, you would eat too much, so you had to eat salty food. And remember, most of the Communists—well, if you only ate a little, how could you feel full? It wasn't enough. He said that he would take pig fat and gravel and fry it with salt after washing it and put other stuff in there. Once it was cooked, he would suck on it. It was miserable! And he didn't have any money when he came. He did any work he could. He would cut grass and hay to sell every day—hay for cows and buffalo. Then they made a Chinese community—the Chinese community in Kampong Cham which was founded by a man named Pol An. Pol An was a rich man back then, he had a car he hired someone to drive him around in. He was the provincial governor, he had power. There were lots of poor people there, so they founded the society. The society helped them out with their monetary needs.

A: Okay. And when he came from China, at first, he didn't know Khmer, how did he fare? Did he learn Khmer, or how did he start to know [the language]?

B: At first, he didn't know it. Even afterward he still didn't understand it, he only knew a little bit. It was hard for him, hard for him to survive.

A: I see. and what about your mother, is she Khmer?

B: She was born here. Her father was Vietnamese, but she was—uh, her mother was Vietnamese, but she was Khmer—oh! Her father was Chinese, and her mother was Vietnamese.

A: Oh, so she was part Chinese and part Vietnamese.

B: Part Vietnamese, but probably from a few generations back, I'm not sure.

A: I see.

B: But my mother [he means to say his grandmother] was half Khmer and half Vietnamese, and learned at school until she knew the 10 Buddhist precepts, so she was very knowledgeable.

A: Is that on your mother's side or father's side?

B: That was my grandmother.

A: Yes. Was that your grandmother from your mother's side?

B: My mother—oh yes! That's right, not my mother, my grandmother!

A: Yes, your grandmother, from your mother's side, right?

B: Yes, on my mother's side. Because at that time, my father's side came from China. But that grandmother was with my mother, so she is on my mother's side.

A: So you know your grandmother on your mother's side, what about your grandfather?

B: My grandfather?

A: Yes. but on your mother's side, your mother's father?

We talked about your grandmother before, what about your grandfather?

B: Oh! My grandfather on my mother's side came from China. His name is Tha Hout. Tha Hout also came from China. And his wife is my grandmother. She's my grandmother, the mother of my mother. How about that, does that make sense?

A: I got it! So what about your grandparents on your father's side?

B: Oh! I don't know them, they were in China.

A: So you've never heard your father say anything about his parents?

B: Nope. He told me but I didn't understand, because [the things he was talking about] were so far away from me, in a separate country.

A: And so—so, because your father is Chinese, and your mother is part Chinese and part Vietnamese. When you were growing up in your family, did you learn or speak Chinese? When you were young?

B: I didn't learn Chinese when I was a kid. I only know a little bit of Chinese because I wasn't really interested in learning Chinese. Ever since I was young, I didn't like the Chinese. I'm not sure why, I just thought that they looked plain.

A: So, you know a little bit, did you learn from your father?

B: Yes, from when I lived with him.

A: Because he was Chinese?

B: Yes. Living together forces you to know at least a bit, it is unavoidable.

A: I see.

B: I also didn't know because I lived in a Chinese community with about 10 Chinese families as well. We were the minority while we were living there.

A: I see.

B: It's like when Vietnamese come into Khmer communities. When we lived there, we lived according to Khmer customs. So we didn't know any Chinese, because we only talked with Khmer people. When I went to school with all my friends, it was all Khmer.

A: So, do you have any relatives who live in foreign countries?

B: I have a nephew or niece, a cousin, and a second cousin. Two of my nieces or nephews were in Australia, but one of them came back to Cambodia. And a few of my second cousins are still in Australia, two or three of them. But those are my second cousins.

A: And so those people who are in foreign countries are all in Australia?

B: Yes, they are in Australia, except for another one of my cousins who is in Canada. At the end of 1979, she fled to Canada.

A: I see! Now I would like to ask you about your marriage.

B: Oh! I was married in 1973, in September 1973 during the Lon Nol era.

A: I see.

B: In a store! In a shop, at that time in the area west of here, what was its name? What shop? I forgot, it's been a long time.

A: In Kampong Cham?

B: Yes, in Kampong Cham. Oh, [it was called] Seam Mao Choenh! It was someone else's shop, it was a big shop near Phnom Bros Phnom Srei.

A: And how old were you and your wife when you both got married?

[Video #1 Concludes]

A: So, I'll ask you again, how old were you when you were married?

B: I was 24, I was married in 1973 during the Lon Nol era.

A: And how old was your wife?

B: 23.

A: 23. And—

B: You didn't ask me, but I'll tell you anyway. I was married for only 18 days before we were separated by the war when Pol Pot came. They came and sent my nephew to be in the market—Kampong Cham market. After that, my wife was at a place called Stat, at her sibling's house, and I did everything I could to bring him back. And when Pol Pot's army started bombing us more severely, they left the houses and went outside. Her parents went to Prek Chan, all the way to Chamkar Leu. They went in a circle from there, they left Chamkar Leu, which was where my older sibling's house was, my older brother. They didn't know him, but the people who traveled there asked for my brother when they got there. They asked for my brother who lived there. They were there for almost a month, and then the Khmer Rouge sent us further—they didn't allow us to stay there because they were afraid that we would run back.

A: I see.

B: And after 3 months, I left, I left after [everyone else did]. At that time, they had 70,000 soldiers working at the factories. I left from there through the fields and went through Vihear Thum. Once I got to Vihear Thum, the Angkar [the Khmer word for “organization” referring to the Khmer Rouge] had us ride a boat. They sent us to Peam Chi Kang village. We slept at Peam Chi Kang village for one night with all the criminals there, they were in chains. We only slept there though, and in the morning, we were sent away on bikes, we sat on the back, two to a bike. We went to Bos Khnor, it was about 7 o'clock at night when we got to my older sibling's house. I was there at my brother's house for about half a month, after which I put in a request letter to go see my wife.

A: So, what is her name, your wife?

B: Her name is Pav Sinon.

A: And when you met her, how did you get to know her? That is, before you got married?

B: Oh, my older cousin used to go buy water spinach and taro to eat—he bought them from my wife, and so they knew each other. They knew each other and loved each other, so he had me go propose to her.

A: I see.

B: And at that time, we didn't love each other at all, we were just friends. We didn't love each other, that's how we thought.

A: I see.

B: Then when I got married, after [just a little bit], we were separated for three months. I didn't even know her face. We were married for only eighteen days and then didn't see each other for three months—I forgot her face.

A: Because you were only together for eighteen days?

B: Eighteen days.

A: And before then, you didn't really know each other either?

B: Nope! Not at all. Then after that, during the Khmer Rouge—well, I've started to go on

tangents. All of this happened when I was older. I have a lot of other stories from when I was younger, but I've summarized them all, I'm too lazy to relate all the details.

A: Okay. So now I'd like to ask one more question before we move on, about your marriage. Did you give a dowry when you got married?

B: I did. It was a small dowry, it wasn't a lot. They only considered the cost of the marriage, and I gave them the money for those expenses, and we counted that as the dowry. They didn't make me do more.

A: So how much did you give your wife?

B: I don't remember, maybe only 2 or 3 damlung. It wasn't money, it was—

A: Gold?

B: And I also paid for the wedding ceremony.

A: Okay—

B: However much that was, I paid for it.

A: Yes.

B: I didn't pay for it in dollars.

A: Yes, I understand. So, do you know how to read and write Khmer?

B: Oh! I'm a teacher too.

A: Okay, and do you know any foreign languages? Do you know any languages other than Khmer?

B: Other than Khmer, I know a bit of French, and a bit of English.

A: When did you learn French?

B: I learned it during the Sihanouk era.

A: How much did you learn?

B: I only learned for a few years, and then the war happened.

A: Then you stopped learning. So before, you were talking about your life—so could you tell me a bit more about your life when you were growing up? Like your life's timeline from when you were young to when you grew up?

B: Oh! I'll talk about when I was young now. When I was young I didn't go to school, I was very, very sick. I wasn't getting better at all. They thought I was going to die. They found a Khmer doctor for me, they didn't know what to do other than find a Khmer doctor. Back then they believed in healing magic.

A: I see.

B: But at the end, they performed a ceremony [called] the Saen Bren ceremony, a Buddhist ceremony [where they make offerings to the Spirits]. They took me—this is what my mother told me—they took me and put me under the house's veranda. I'm not sure how old I was, and when the monks came by to ask for food and alms, they had them take me with

them to take care of me.

A: Oh!

B: They came to adopt me.

A: Yes.

B: They couldn't find someone to take me in, like an adoptive mother, so they brought me to the intersection [nearby].

A: They took you?

B: When I was really young, only a few years old. When I was sick, they put me there, and asked the monks to take me, when they had come by to ask for food and alms. The monks took me and gave me to one of my aunts, she acted like my adopted mother and took care of me. That time of my life was very hard, and from that time on I've always been a bit sick.

A: So how long did you stay with your aunt? Or what was it like—?

B: No, I didn't live with her. She was just the person that took care of me like a mother would.

A: I see.

B: She was like my mother, but I didn't go and live with her every day. She just [took care of] me, other people referred to her as if she was my mother.

A: Oh, I get it.

B: And from that time, I started to be healthy again. I was healthy, and to skip forward a bit, I went to school. I was about 13 years old, and I fell into a well. The well was about 11 meters deep, full of water almost to the top. It was about 1 meter to the top.

A: You were 13 years old?

B: I was 13 years old. But I was young and lazy, I went to the well and didn't bring a pulley to draw out the water, just a metal pail on the end of a rope.

A: You just dipped the [bucket] in!

B: Every time I went there was never a problem, I went like that every day. Then that day, my foot slipped when I was lifting water out. It was too heavy and very slippery, and I fell in along with the metal pail I brought and the rope. I started to sink, and I didn't know how to swim. When I was sinking, I began to reflect on everything. My mother didn't know where I was, I probably would have died, I wouldn't have survived. [My life flashed before my eyes], you know what I mean?

A: Yes.

B: After I began to reflect on everything, I had sunk to about here, and after I was completely submerged, I had a recollection of a bad omen I had seen. I remembered asking some people how to swim, how to swim standing up, you know? They said that it was like riding a bike with your legs and moving your hands [like a bird would flap its wings].

A: How did you ask them that? Was this when you drowning in the well?

B: I asked them this before I fell into the well. I asked them—

A: Oh, you remembered from before?

B: I asked them, I asked my friends!

A: But you remembered when you were drowning?

B: Yes.

A: Oh!

B: I remembered that swimming upright is done by kicking like you're riding a bike, and moving your hands like [a bird] would flap its [wings]. I remembered that they told me that, so I did what they had told me. Suddenly, the well opening started coming closer, the well was about here. I saw the light for one second, and then I submerged again. Then I tried to swim the second time, harder this time, kicking my feet like I was riding a bike and stroking with my arms so I could get a little higher. I got to about here, I saw [the opening] for just a moment. I threw myself up there to try and catch hold of the edge of the well. [...] I tried to grab the top of the well, but my hand slipped, and I sank back down again. I sank down again, and I was almost completely exhausted. I tried again for the last time. If I didn't make it this time, I would die. This time, I made it up to my chest. I swam and stroked with all I had left in me, and I was able to catch hold of the well's edge and I climbed out of the well. I saw a bunch of people running to see me. There were probably 100 people around me, they came to see me after I had fallen in the well. And over the course of the next couple of years, a child fell into the well and died—that same well. There was also an accident right next to the well, two cars hit each other, and the driver and some others fell into the well. One vehicle hit the well and smashed it to bits and the vehicle fell in too. And for those people that fell in, they held onto wood pieces from the well. After that, some people came running over to help pull them out.

A: So, was this well next to the road, or what? If there was a car accident—

B: It was probably about 5 meters from the road.

A: If there was an accident and the vehicle fell into the well, oh! Right next to the road—

B: It didn't happen on the road, it happened on the corner where the road met a smaller road that accessed a rice field.

A: And it led to the well?

B: It led exactly to the well. It was a truck carrying wood, it had a long bed. It crashed and spun around and fell right into the well, so they had to fish it out. After that, another kid fell in and died. That's the history of the well.

A: Yes.

B: There's a whole lot of stories like that. Now I'll talk about stories from the Khmer Rouge—Oh! I haven't gotten there yet, I'm not to the Khmer Rouge period yet. I've spoken up until my wedding already. Before I got married, when I was about 20 years old, there was a coup staged by Lon Nol.

A: That was 1970—what?

B: In 1970. March 18, 1970. I remember the exact date. King Sihanouk was dethroned. There was a huge protest with people from the countryside. At that time, I went up to live at Chamkar Leu, I went to live with my older sibling in Chamkar Leu. The protestors killed a teacher, the teacher had taken a photo of the king and wiped his butt with it.

A: Oh! So, they were angry?

B: Those on both sides were angry with each other. Those [that killed the teacher] loved the king, that's why they did that. They fought each other in Svay Theab, then they went to Bos Khnor and they brought them all there. After that happened, they tied each other to light posts—back then, they were made from wood. They would put the posts down and tie them to it. And that first day, in the morning, all the cars for the protest were taken to Phnom Penh. I ran away—I wasn't brave enough to go with them. If they knew that I had done that, I would have had problems, but I knew that if I went, I would be in danger. We hid at the house and heard the sounds of people rushing around in a panic. They came from Bos Khnor market to our village. I heard people say that they didn't know what happened. Once I heard someone say that [the sounds] came from a rabid dog, others said that they came from a crazy person. As soon as it got quiet, we found out that there was a drunk man. Some corpses had been hung nearby and when the drunk man was there, one of the ropes snapped and the body fell over. That scared the drunk man, and he ran away. Another person saw him running and ran with him to where I was. It was funny to watch.

A: That was in Bos Khnor?

B: Yes, Bos Khnor. After that fighting happened, the Vietcong came, as well as the Khmer Rouge. They fought each other and raised armies—King Sihanouk created an army. Back then, after the king was dethroned, he went to Beijing. He then broadcasted a message through the radio, telling his subjects to keep up the fight and other things. After that we loved him, we followed him blindly. All the cousins my age died because they "kept up the fight" and went to war and got shot. If they hadn't gotten shot, I would have.

A: I see. Did they select you, or did you volunteer?

B: We volunteered—they didn't select us back then. When that was over, then we had the fighting in 1973—Oh! Not yet, I need to go back a bit. When the fighting was over, in 1971, the Vietnamese and the Khmer Rouge fought until they got to Traeung. I was really scared. At that time, I was working on mopeds and bringing merchandise by remorque to Bos Khnor. When I was in Bos Khnor, I didn't feel comfortable. The South Vietnamese army [ARVN] had come up. I worked on mopeds and moved merchandise by remorque and brought it to the rice fields. There was one time I looked out towards the east, just a bit farther than Speu and I saw a big, black South Vietnamese airplane coming directly towards me. The airplane came by, and then started shooting at us! One of my siblings was shot and killed, as well as my nephew who was 20 years old at that time.

A: What year was that? Do you remember the year that happened?

B: It was probably 1971.

A: Probably 1971.

B: Yes. They shot and killed them—my older sibling and nephew. And after they died and

were buried, I left. I stopped living there and came back to my house. At that time my house was in Lon Nol's territory, but I wasn't prohibited from going. I went and lived back at my house. Then in 1973, when I was married, the Khmer Rouge fought their way until they made it to the mountain, until they made it to the factory. I was separated from my wife, as I said before, and was subject to Pol Pot. Oh! It was like another Great Leap Forward among us but with Pol Pot. I should have died many times, but it wasn't my time yet.

A: Okay. Before that happened—I just want to go back and ask you a bit about your schooling. Before the Khmer Rouge—during the Khmer Rouge, how old were you?

B: During the Khmer Rouge, in 1973, I was 24 years old.

A: 24! And before then, how much did you learn in school? Before Pol Pot?

B: Oh! I got my diploma.

A: Your diploma?

B: Yes.

A: And during your elementary education, what school did you go to? Do you remember the name of the school?

B: It was called Ang Kounh Dei.

A: Ang Kounh Dei primary school?

B: Yes.

A: And you went through secondary school, like junior high school?

B: Junior high school?

A: Yes.

B: I was in junior high school back in 1963. I took my final tests in 1963. [Uses a word the interviewer is unfamiliar with.]

A: What kind of test is that?

B: My finals—they had a class back then where we took a test to decide if we could move on and get our diploma. If we passed, then we could continue learning and could become a teacher.

A: I see.

B: And then during the reign of Sihanouk, I got up to—back then, they counted grades starting with 12th grade and onwards, 12th then 11th, and so on. Once you got to 7th grade, you finished primary school and after 6th grade, you took that final exam [I mentioned earlier]. If you failed that exam, you couldn't learn anymore, you still stayed in primary school.

A: I see.

B: And I passed the test, and so I kept going to school.

A: So had you finished secondary school by the time the Khmer Rouge began?

B: The year I graduated was—

A: You got your diploma?

B: I got my diploma and stopped.

A: And then you stopped?

B: Yes.

A: You stopped, and what year did you get your diploma? Do you remember?

B: It was about 1966.

A: 1966. And from when you got your diploma until the Khmer Rouge began, what did you do?

B: Oh! I drove mopeds. I drove mopeds. I didn't have any work—at that time, we all were scraping by to find any work we could do.

A: And so, what did you do during the Khmer Rouge? What did they have you do?

B: During the Khmer Rouge, they had me dig dirt.

A: Did they have you build dams?

B: I built dams, dug ditches, planted rice, and other things. They called me to do everything. We couldn't say that we didn't know how to do it—if they had us do something, we did it. We worked at Chhrouy Chek dam for months—Chhrouy Chek in Trean commune. We carried dirt, we helped with what the commune needed. It was so difficult.

A: I see. So you learned a fair amount and got your diploma at that time. So, when the Khmer Rouge happened, were you scared? Did you hide your personal history or what?

B: During the Khmer Rouge, they never asked us what we did, they never did that. But one time, I remember, I had to pretend that I didn't know anything.

A: I see.

B: At that time, I had to go work in the dry season rice fields at Rong Krapeu—Rong Krapeu west of Kien Chrey. The village leader had me go measure land in the rice fields and find out their dimensions. I agreed to go measure with some other people and they had us measure it in hectares. As soon as I found that out, I had a sinking feeling in my stomach, and I realized I had to act like I was uneducated.

A: I see.

B: Because at that time, those who knew how to measure in hats and calculate area were educated people, and the educated people [were killed].

A: And you were educated?

B: I went to a lot of school, of course I was educated. It was hard for me to pretend to be uneducated. I was an educated person up until that time. Pol Pot looked for people who were educated. Even those who only knew how to read were considered educated, not just those who went to a lot of school or those who were upper-middle class. [Interviewee uses a word here that the interviewer doesn't know.]

A: What does that word mean?

B: I'm referring to the upper-middle class, they were one of the higher classes. [Pol Pot] hated the highly educated. He said that they took advantage of others. Once, I'm talking probably about 1977, they were at war with each other, killing a ton of people. I was working in the fields once, and at noon, we took a rest from work and went looking for some bees, we went looking for [honey]. We were looking for the bees when suddenly we met some Khmer Sar soldiers—the Khmer Sar, like whom I was telling you about this morning. We met them and they interrogated us about our background. They prohibited us from telling anyone at all, even our mothers or wives. They wouldn't let us say anything, they said that if we spoke about it, not even anyone near one hundred could tell them. About 3 days later, the village leader called me to be questioned before anyone else. I went and they asked if I had met any enemies. So how was I supposed to answer? They asked if I had met any of the enemy. I needed to answer fast—if I stuttered or anything, they thought I was lying.

A: So, you needed to answer immediately after they asked?

B: Yes, I needed to answer immediately. So, I answered right away, I didn't think for a long time. Because if I thought for a while—if I did that for too long, then they wouldn't trust me. They would say I was lying. So, I said that I did meet enemies. Then they asked, "So friend, why didn't you tell us?" [He uses the word Angkar, or organization.] I told them that when I met the enemy, they told me I couldn't tell anyone—they prohibited it, not even my mother and wife. So, I didn't dare to say anything. It was like I fell into water, and a crocodile was coming up after me, but there were tigers above me. What should I have done? If I didn't talk, I was in the wrong, but if I did talk, they would have killed me. So no matter what I did, there was danger. It's like they say, you've fallen into water with the crocodiles but if you climb out then there are tigers there. What should I have done? So, I solved it by—

[Video #2 Concludes]

B: They called me to be interrogated again and asked me if I had met enemies. So, I told them that I had, because I couldn't hide it, because they already knew. The next day, they called me in to be interrogated again. They asked the same question, 3 times, and I answered the same way every time.

A: What was the question?

B: They asked me if I had met any enemies.

A: I see.

B: I said I did, but they prohibited me from telling. That's what I told them, they asked me 3 times. I answered the same way every time. On the 4th day, they called me again to promote me to an official. They trusted me again. They trusted that I was an honest person. I told them straight about the reason I didn't tell them about meeting the enemies, because they prohibited me and said they would kill me, so I didn't dare tell. And so, the 5th time they called me—sorry, it wasn't the 4th time, the 3rd and 4th time were at a meeting with the whole village in the fields. They called me to be questioned, and I [thought I was going to] die because when they came to my house, I wasn't there. Once I got back to my house, they called me back. After that, at the 5th time, they said, "Friend, you are being promoted

to an official." They had me do a background check, and after they did the background check, they asked me how much schooling I had received.

A: I see. And they asked you this.

B: Yes. When they asked me that, I said that I only learned a tiny bit. When I said that I had learned just a little bit, they asked me what I had done for work when I was young. I said, "Oh, not much, I was just a student." That's what I told them, that I was a student. [Then they asked], "So what about your siblings and cousins? And here is where I made sure my background check would fail. I told them that my cousin worked in a factory. I told them that, and they responded, "Oh friend, you are just a middle-class person." Middle-class, meaning that we had a salary to provide for our needs, and were intelligent. So, I wasn't promoted to be an official. But I did that on purpose to not get promoted. Because if I did get promoted—

A: So, was it a trick they played to find out your history?

B: They asked about our history so we could be promoted—and they really would have promoted us! But if I was promoted, then I would have been taken by the President of the Southwestern Group [a Khmer Rouge cadre trusted by Pol Pot] and killed in front of everyone else. I knew what their plan was, so I did what I could to not get promoted, so that my background wouldn't pass. I needed to think quickly—if I was promoted, then I would die. I would die afterward. So I did what I could to not be promoted. If I was promoted to an official, I would die. Two people were interviewed for promotion; one other person passed, but I got out of it. After that, the village leader who had interviewed me and asked me all those questions took the other guy and killed him.

A: So, at that time, they promoted people, so you were an official?

B: No, I wasn't promoted, I made sure I failed their tests.

A: Okay. So after that, what did they have you do?

B: I was a normal citizen.

A: Did they use you as a rice field worker?

B: Whatever they had us do, we went and did it.

A: I see. And so your siblings and your family weren't together?

B: Nope. We were separated. I was with my wife.

A: I see. But they allowed you to be with your wife at that time?

B: They did. In the day I would go to work, and in the nighttime—

A: You went back home.

B: I went back to my house, we all went back to our houses.

A: And so at that time, what sort of difficulties did you go through?

B: There were so many difficulties, we ate little but were never full, and I worked so much, too much. They had me work through the night too. I had to go harvest rice in the nighttime, and in the daytime, we had to transplant even more rice. We didn't even see

each other most nights, near the end of the day.

A: So, when the Khmer Rouge ended, what did you do?

B: When the Khmer Rouge ended, I worked distilling liquor, like a normal distiller. I was a liquor distiller—that was my career, I also raised pigs, chickens, ducks, and other things. That was my work. I worked distilling liquor for a bit, and they enlisted me as a soldier in the army. They had a draft to select soldiers. They had it one more time, and back then, they had us put our names in a lottery. When they drew names, I lost. I didn't get it. After that, I went to a police officer I knew and asked a favor of him, and said, "I was selected to be put in the lottery to be a soldier, and I wasn't picked, I'm so scared!" And so he said, "What are you so afraid of?" He said, "What can I do so you aren't scared?" I told him because I knew him. He said, "If you want to be a police officer, come to me, I'll help you." So, from that time on, I requested to be a police officer. I was thrilled! I paid them 700 riel, which is equal to 2 chi of gold or more. But when I was a police officer, they had us—you see, the police have certain responsibilities, you know? The police officers had to take sesame seeds from those who were taking them to be sold. I didn't like having to do bad things to other people. So, I didn't seize their merchandise. When I resolved to do that—I found out that they were looking for teachers. They didn't have enough teachers!

A: You left the police force?

B: I hadn't left yet. I was in the police force, but they were selecting teachers. So, I became a teacher instead. I took a test and I passed to become a police officer—oh! Not a police officer. I passed to become a teacher instead. And so, I've been a teacher ever since then.

A: Up until today?

B: Yes.

A: So, what grade level do you teach as a teacher?

B: Elementary.

A: Elementary?

B: Yes.

A: What subjects do you teach?

B: I teach general education. I teach reading, math, history, art, humanities, there are many things. It's not like it is in middle school. They teach specific things. They take one path.

A: I see.

B: And so to summarize— [Door opens, some people enter the room, interviewee speaks in English] Oh, hello!

A: You can continue, no worries!

B: And I've been a teacher since then, and I passed and was recognized as an excellent teacher. Oh, I have a lot of stories from teaching! Even the president, the president of the general technical studies group came to watch me teach, to assess my abilities.

A: I see. And what about your wife, what did she do?

B: My wife worked distilling liquor.

A: Does she still work as a distiller today?

B: No, she stopped that job. She is with one of our daughters in Siem Reap.

A: Did she ever sell things?

B: She did, but she stopped when she went to live with our kids.

A: I see. So how long have you been a teacher, ever since you started?

B: 28 years!

A: 28 years?

B: 28 years.

A: I see. So I want to ask because you have been a teacher for so long, what has been your favorite part of being a teacher?

B: I love giving knowledge to others. I want to enlighten and educate others. Some people like to see others as ignorant, but that's not me. I want to teach others, so they have knowledge.

A: I see! And so I want to ask you about that. From when you were a kid, how has your life changed?

B: Oh! Ever since I was a little kid, I have been so lucky. I have been lucky to have joined this church. God has blessed me. How has He blessed me? I've had enough food to eat. Before, I was always worried about money. Nowadays, I am not worried about my money. Now, I can spend money and there is enough available to me. My children support me as well. If I need anything, I tell them, and they give it to me. So I don't have much hardship.

A: And have I asked you about your children yet? How many kids do you have? Do you remember if I asked?

B: Oh, we forgot [to talk about] my kids?

A: Yes.

B: I have four, two girls and two boys.

A: Could you tell me their names?

B: The oldest is Chantrea—Hout Chantrea, Hout Kunthea, Hout Chenda, Hout Vando, I have four kids. Two girls and two boys.

A: How old are they?

B: Now the oldest is probably over 40 already, and the youngest is about 37.

A: I see.

B: The third child is probably 39 already.

A: And are they all married?

B: The 39-year-old hasn't gotten married yet—doesn't like the idea of a family, still single.

A: I see. And so, I'd like to ask, are there any skills that you have learned from your parents?

B: No, there aren't.

A: There aren't?

B: My parents sold merchandise, and I didn't have any skill with selling, I didn't like it. It's like what they say, that Chinese kids don't love Khmer kids. [Laughs]

A: So what about your hobbies, what do you like to do?

B: I love being a teacher.

A: I see. Like when you have free time from work, when you aren't busy, when you are free, what do you like to do?

B: Oh! I like to read, but I'm not really ever free. I like reading books. I like playing Makruk [Khmer chess] and other things if I'm ever free. I can't ever stay still if I'm free. I can't just stay in my house and sleep until the evening. I can't do that.

A: You said that you like to play Khmer chess, could you talk more about that?

B: It's Khmer chess, it's like another game we play called Raek.

A: I know what you mean.

B: There are the same 64 pieces, but they move differently. There are 16 children [pieces] on one side, and the children on the front row are called "fish" or Pawns. Those are like the citizens, they don't have any special status. In the row behind them, there is the King, who is the very best, the supreme piece. Next is the Queen, like the wife of the King. Next is the Bishop, he is like the captain of the army. Next is the horse that the army captain [Bishop] rides. Next is the Boat, like the one the navy captain rides in [like a Rook]. All the pieces move differently. They have their own method of moving. Once you learn how to play you can play, but if you don't learn, you can't play.

A: So how did you learn how to play?

B: I learned by watching people play at first. I asked them and after a while, I learned how. I asked and asked, but it took a long while.

A: How many years did it take?

B: It didn't take that long, but it took a while before I won a game. And you have to be smart to play, otherwise you'll never win.

A: How many years have you known how to play?

B: A long time, ever since I was a young man.

A: Okay, so a long time then?

B: A long time.

A: And so other than that, are there any other traditional games you like?

B: No, I don't like any of those. They're boring, games like Bos Chhoung and Chol Angkunh. They're repetitive, plain.

A: Okay. What about music? Like—

B: I like music, modest music like Songtimong. I don't like crazy modern music without meter or order or direction—people dancing crazy, I don't like that.

A: So, you don't like modern-day music?

B: Modern-day music, the stuff they play all the time and dance crazily to, I don't like. I don't just like any music.

A: I see.

B: If there's any craziness, I just don't like it.

A: I see.

B: I don't like the musicians either. I don't like the people who produce it.

A: Okay. Do you know how to play any instruments? Any traditional instruments?

B: Nope. I only listen to music. I only enjoy music. I don't have any musical talent.

A: Is there anyone in your family who does?

B: Nope! Nobody does.

A: What about food, what food do you like?

B: I only like curry, all the different kinds of curry. You can eat curry with bread, with rice, with noodles, and it's delicious. I know how to make it, too. I don't just eat, I'm also a good cook.

A: Curry?

B: Yes, I also know how to cook it.

A: Oh, that's great. And other than curry, do you like anything else?

B: Other than curry, I like soup, it's pretty delicious.

A: Okay. And I'd like to ask a bit more about the house you lived in when you were a kid, what was it like?

B: What?

A: Your childhood home that you lived in with your parents?

B: It was a tile house with two wings. But before, we used to have a wooden house made of grass. During the Lon Nol era, maybe about 1960-something, my father built a tile house with two or three wings. It also had an upper level, it was like there was another house built atop another, it had a first and second floor like they were two different houses. The house on the bottom was made from stone, and there was another house below the other.

A: That was your parent's house from when you were young?

B: Yes, when I was with my father and mother.

A: What about now, what is your house like now?

B: My house now is a tile one, and there are some stone rooms down below.

A: And did you have someone else build it?

B: Yes, I hired them.

A: You didn't build it yourself?

B: Nope. I don't know how to.

A: I see. So, you've told me a lot about your experiences and hardships in your life, especially during the Khmer Rouge. What about your happy experiences? Like in your life, what are some experiences that make you happy, that you can't forget?

B: Oh! I was happiest when I was young. My life was the best when I was young.

A: I see.

B: That's when I was the happiest.

A: What do you mean by that? Could you tell me what you mean by that?

B: There were no worries at all. How could I not be happy? There was nothing to worry about. Is it not like that?

A: I see.

B: When I was a youth, I didn't have to think about anything. We didn't have to work, we just played and there wasn't anything else.

A: And what about religion? What religion were your parents? Or—

B: They were Buddhist. At that time, there wasn't any Christianity [in Cambodia].

A: So they were Buddhist—did they have any religious traditions at all?

B: Oh! About that—the traditions weren't necessarily religious. For instance, the month we celebrate Sen Phnov—the Chinese call it the Qingming Festival—we did that every year. That helped us remember the good deeds of my parent's mother and father. We did that in our family with my father and mother.

A: So from before you became a Christian, were you also a Buddhist?

B: I wasn't any religion. When I was young, I was Buddhist with my parents, but then when I got older, I didn't go to the pagoda or anything.

A: I see. So when did you learn about Christianity?

B: Oh! in 2000.

A: In 2000. And you—

B: In 2000, I remember the names of the missionaries too. Elder Menthrom [Romanization based on Khmer pronunciation of American name]—he was one of the first missionaries here. I only was investigating the church. I was amazed that these foreigners came to preach, and they were very knowledgeable. And after I was curious, I saw that this church taught people to do good. I was impressed by that. So [I joined] and I have been here ever since.

A: And so, when you converted, what effect did you see the religion have on your life?

B: This religion has really good principles, first of all. We are taught all of the good principles. They teach us to love each other, to not be prideful, all of those things that I like. I am someone who doesn't like to be prideful. I hate pride because I don't like prideful people, they're evil. I don't like them. That was the beginning of my belief—I don't like [pride]. And after I started to believe, I read in the Bible that God never does evil, He only helps people—poor and rich. God has never done any evil. I like that. And obviously, if our health isn't good or anything or we are lacking, God gives it to us. He gives us money to help us.

A: I see. Thank you! And my last question is if you have anything to say to your kids or grandkids, because you have had a lot of experiences and have gone through a lot. So, you have good things, bad things, happy times, sad times—lots of experience. So last of all, if you had anything to say to your descendants of future generations from your experience, what would you say?

B: To the future generation? I would like to say that we are people, we need to do good deeds, not wrong ones. That is essential! We need to do good, and not be prideful, not be oblivious to being virtuous. That is so important, just like my parents taught me to do good deeds. That is absolutely necessary. And about that very point, you've seen it, right? That is perfection. I also don't like when the rich forget the poor, for instance, when one forgets what it was like to be poor—when they receive good things but forget the hardship they've been through. They're like the principal at my school, who has a higher status because he's a school principal, and he doesn't have much of anything, but he still looks down on me like I'm a baby ant, you know? That's one thing I don't like. I've stayed with it until bigger problems developed, it hasn't just been that I didn't like him. I never liked the wrongs that those people do.

A: I see. So, thank you so much for today, for letting me interview you and learn about your life. And that's it, that's all we have!

Interview translated by Ethan Arkell and edited by Thomas Barrett.