

Interview of Seng Pisey

Interviewee: Seng Pisey

Interviewer: Matt Boyd

Summary of the Interview

Seng Pisey was born in 1985 in Phnom Penh and is the oldest of three siblings. In this interview, she takes the opportunity to share several of her most difficult stories from her childhood, as well as the miracles and euphoric experiences during her Christian missionary service and current marriage.

A: Okay! Today is the 25th of April, and we are close to Wat Bros Golah in Kampong Cham. My name is Matt Boyd, and I will be interviewing you today. What is your full name?

B: Seng Pisey.

A: Seng Pisey. And where are you from?

B: I'm from Kampong Cham, but in Phum 14.

A: Okay. And do you know when you were born?

B: I do—my birthday? July 18, 1985.

A: '85. So now you are 31?

B: Yes, I'm almost 31. In July, I'll be 31.

A: And what are the names of your parents?

B: My mother's name is Ouk Sopany, and she is a teacher. My father's name is Seng Long, and he is a teacher as well.

A: What do they teach?

B: My mother is an elementary school teacher, but my father is a high school teacher.

A: Like what kind of teacher?

B: Math.

A: Oh, math! So you must be very skilled at math then?

B: [Laughs] No, I'm not very good at it.

A: And do you remember the names of your grandparents?

B: I do, yes.

A: And what are their names?

B: My grandmother's name is Mon Somnang. My grandfather's name is Ouk Sokhan.

A: Are they on your father's side or your mother's side?

B: On my mother's side.

A: Do you know them on your father's side?

B: No, not at all.

A: Do you know any of your great-grandparents?

B: Uh, my great-grandfather's name was Mon Nae. My great-grandmother's name- I don't remember.

A: Okay. And one more generation back, do you remember any—? That's okay, that's good. You remember quite a lot. Where did you grow up?

B: I grew up where I was born. Actually, I was born in Phnom Penh, but I've lived in Kampong Cham since I was five years old.

A: Oh, I see. Where in Phnom Penh?

B: In Phnom Penh, at Russey Keo, near Highway 6.

A: Okay, close to Wat Phnom?

B: No, far from that! Outside of the city—

A: Past Chrouy Changvar bridge?

B: Yes, quite a few kilometers past Chrouy Changvar bridge.

A: So you were born in Phnom Penh and then came here. How was it when you got here? Did you like it or not?

B: At the time, when I was only a few years old, I probably didn't think about it so much, because I was so young. What was important was running around playing, and school. I didn't really care too much about where I was; I didn't really know.

A: Did you have many friends then?

B: Yes, I had friends. A normal amount.

A: What did you do? Like what kind of games did you play with your friends?

B: At that time, we had—we had this kind of game. [Gestures] We played jump-rope, muk [similar to hopscotch], Bay Khom [similar to mancala], and other games. The kids back then played what was popular at the time.

A: Right. And so you started school when you were five right?

B: Yes, when I was five.

A: Where was your school at?

B: My elementary school was at Peak Sen, near the church building of the first branch.

A: Oh okay. Near the riverside. And how was your childhood? Was it fun, or were you bored a lot? Did you like it?

B: I honestly wasn't very happy when I was young. Being five years old should have been more fun than it was, but it was a period where I was not. Why? Because when I was five years old my parents divorced and left each other. But like I said before, young kids don't think about all of that too much. I just went to school and played. I didn't concern myself

over it too much. I always felt a little sad because of it though.

A: Right. Do you have a chance to see them very often then?

B: My mother stays with me at home so I see her every day, but my father doesn't live here; he lives in Phnom Penh.

A: Oh, so you don't see him as much.

B: Yes. Every once in a while, I'll see him. Sometimes there are long gaps.

A: Oh. And how many siblings do you have?

B: I have three siblings. Two sisters and one brother. I'm the oldest of them, and then it is my brother, then my two sisters.

A: Okay. And you all live with your mom right?

B: Yes, as well as my grandmother and my great-aunt. There are six of us family members living here together [not including herself].

A: And once you became a young woman, how was it? Was it harder than before, or—?

B: It was about the same.

A: Okay, it was difficult. Because you didn't have your father there, or—?

B: Life and living in general wasn't especially difficult, it was just that in families that have separated, it feels like there is something missing. Living wasn't so difficult, but there was always the feeling that a broken family is never very happy.

A: And you started working when you were a young woman? At fifteen years old or so?

B: At fifteen and sixteen I hadn't started yet. Only when I was seventeen or eighteen.

A: Okay. What kind of work did you do?

B: Have you heard of Av Pak?

A: Av Pak?

B: Yes. It's a type of blouse the ladies in Cambodia enjoy wearing. It's a decorated silk shirt—they add tinsel and beads on the blouse. That's what I did.

A: In a factory?

B: No. They had a shop, and they needed a seamstress. I took the shirts home and stitched them, and when I finished, I gave them back.

A: And so your mother taught you how to do it, or—?

B: No. I learned myself. I just watched them do it and learned that way.

A: Did you have any skills that your mother taught you?

B: Skills—yes, there were some. Some things you can do as long as you have the right things.

A: What kind of things did she teach you?

B: She crocheted. She used crochet needles to make baby cushions and that kind of thing. But I don't know how to use two needles; I can only use one.

A: Did you ever go to university or college?

B: I stopped after high school; at the time I was preparing to go on a mission. I haven't gone to university.

A: When you were twenty-one?

B: When I finished high school, I was only eighteen. Seventeen or eighteen years old. But at the time I didn't have the money to pay for a mission, and so I had to wait until I was twenty-one. I worked side jobs to make money.

A: How was your mission?

B: My mission was good.

A: What areas did you serve in?

B: The first area in my mission was Santhor Mok. After I left Santhor Mok, I went to Ta Khmao for my second branch that I served in. After that, I changed to Chamkar Mon. My last area was Wat Phnom. Four branches.

A: All in Phnom Penh.

B: Yeah—no, I was in Ta Khmao too. I was there for a time.

A: At the time, there weren't any Sisters in Battambang or Siem Reap?

B: No, there were.

A: Oh, there were?

B: Well, the area of Siem Reap hadn't opened yet. Siem Reap opened the day I was in the Mission Home for my last day on my mission. [Laughs]

A: Oh, Elder Master went when it opened—

B: Yeah.

A: What did you learn on your mission?

B: I learned a language, but not successfully. I don't know what problem I had- I tried, but I was never successful.

A: Oh, you know [how to speak] very clearly! Was there anything else that you learned on your mission, like patience or—?

B: Oh, those kinds of things. Yes, I learned how to manage my time, how to teach, how to humble myself, patience—I learned all of that. And my mission was a time that changed me. I learned a lot.

A: Did you have any amazing stories on your mission?

B: There is one, yes. When I was in Chamkar Mon there was a young girl, maybe about 12 years old. The people around her in her village thought that she would never have the chance to walk again, because she had been sick for so long. When she tried to walk, she

was halfway sitting. Meaning that she had to sit and then scoot or walk forward. One day, we were introduced to this girl, and when I met with my companion I got a feeling that we should ask the Elders to come and give a blessing to this girl. But we had to ask permission from her guardian, on her behalf. Her grandmother was excited about it and said that if there was anything we could do for her, we should do it. Her grandmother was even willing to pay. I told her that it wasn't like that, it was just that I had felt some inspiration that she should receive a blessing. After we had received permission, maybe a week later, the Elders came to bless her. After they had given her a blessing, I had another impression that I wanted a member of her family help her to learn to walk again, like, to do massages or exercises with her every morning. The people in her family started to do just that. After two months, at the longest—oh, wait—let me back up a bit. There was a conference—during the time that she was learning to walk again, there was a General Conference. I invited her to attend on that day, three or four times. And she had promised to come beforehand. I understood that she might be feeling shy or ashamed of coming because her walking was so different. We walk upright, but she had to sit to walk. But it was amazing that she committed to coming. I held her hand and led her through a crowd of a lot of people—hundreds of them. After the conference, she continued to learn how to walk normally. What was strange was that—at the time I was transferred to another area, and I asked the missionaries that were in that area about her. They told me, “Srey Meas can walk!” She could walk.

A: Walk standing?

B: Walk standing up. She had been sick for a long time! She stayed on a mat for six or seven years, never being able to get up at all. She never had a doctor come to help her either. Her family was so shocked. That helped me to understand quite a bit—it helped me to understand the priesthood, and I learned about the love of our Heavenly Father. It was the most amazing miracle, and it's what I remember the most out of all the memories on my mission.

A: And your husband Sarin—where did you first meet him?

B: At the time, we were both members in the first branch.

A: In Chamkar Mon-

B: Yes. They hadn't separated the branches; there was just the first branch and the second branch. His house was also within the boundary of the first branch. So before the branches split, we had a chance to get to know each other.

A: And did you ever want to be in a relationship with him before you left on a mission as a Sister?

B: No. [Laughs] Not at all.

A: Did you not like him?

B: No, I didn't like him. [Both laugh]

A: So once you finished your mission, then you started liking him? Or how did it go?

B: Maybe about that time, after I finished my mission—because, when I was just a member,

I had never felt that I liked him. I never liked him, we just knew each other normally, like the other young men and young women.

A: Right.

B: I also didn't know how he felt towards me, if he loved me or what not. I didn't know because I had my own friends. We had different times, different friends, different places. I didn't have a lot of communication with him.

A: So after you completed your mission, how many years was it before you started to date him?

B: Maybe six or seven months-

A: And did you have a long engagement, or did you date for a long time?

B: I didn't have a long engagement. We just got married. [Laughs]

A: What year did you get married?

B: 2008.

A: '08. And he became the branch president in 2009.

B: Right. At that time, Seda was about 9 months old.

A: Okay—and so in your life, do you have a time that was the happiest that you've ever had? An experience that was that happiest you've been in your life?

B: The first was my mission. The second is my family—when we are together, when my kids are healthy and are smiling. Those are the times when I am the happiest.

A: And how about the most difficult times of your life?

B: Perhaps when I was a child.

A: Because you missed your dad. Well, I know that in the future, 500 years from now, that your children will have a chance to listen to your voice from today. I want to ask; do you have any words or advice that you'd like to give to them? Like, 500 years from now?

B: [Laughs] Uh, the thing that I'd like to say, is that what I want to see is them growing in the Gospel. Because when they are faithful in the Gospel, they will become good children in their families, and good people in their communities. They will be people that are beneficial and useful in their communities, in their countries, in the church.

A: Great. Is there anything else that you'd like to share, like any stories or experiences—anything else you would like to pass on?

B: I think that's it—

A: Okay! That's okay. Thank you very much. That's all the questions I have.

B: No worries. Thank you too.

Interview transcribed by Thomas Barrett and translated by Devon Crane.