

Interview of Mov Sophoas

A: Interviewer: Kong Seiha

B: Interviewee: Mov Sophoas

Interview Summary

Mov Sophoas was born in 1974 in Ampil Thum village, Kampong Cham province. Her early years were marked by financial hardships endured by her family and the tumultuous disruptions inflicted by the Pol Pot regime. Reflecting on her journey, she shares personal stories that have shaped her present life. She describes what it was like to grow up in the aftermath of the Khmer Rouge, her educational goals as a youth, and how she met her current husband. She is currently married to Kov Vongdy, a respected doctor, and is the mother of three children.

A: I'm very grateful for the opportunity I have to interview you today, to talk about some of the difficult things you have been through in your life, as well as the happy ones too. I know that this record will be a blessing for you and your family in the future. They will be able to listen to your experiences and stories and know more about the history of their parents. I know that sometimes it is difficult to talk to our children about these things, and sometimes they also have no desire to know right now. We want to interview you and keep this information so that they will be able to access it later on. This interview was organized by Brigham Young University in the United States, and your interview will be uploaded and stored so that it can be accessed forever. This has been done in other countries, but here in Cambodia we are just beginning. We are doing this to help the people of Cambodia have their personal histories and family history recorded. My name is Kong Seiha, and I will be interviewing you today. Today is September 5th, 2016, and we are at Pisey's house in Kampong Cham Province. Can you please tell me your full name?

B: My name is Mov Sophoas.

A: Mov Sophoas?

B: Yes.

A: And are you known by any other names?

B: No.

A: You don't have any?

B: That's right.

A: Okay. Can you tell me where you live?

B: I live in Ampil Thum village, Khvet Thum commune, Prey Chhor district, Kampong Cham province.

A: Perfect. But for now you have come to stay at Pisey's house near Phnom Bros Phnom Srey Pagoda, right?

B: Exactly.

A: Great. Do you remember your birthday? When were you born?

B: I was born—the day I don't remember, but I was born in 1974.

A: And where were you born?

B: I was born here in Ampil Thum village.

A: Ah, so you were born here?

B: Yes.

A: And so you're still here in your birth town—

B: Yes, exactly.

A: Okay. And do you know what lunar year you were born in?

B: Yes.

A: Which year are you?

B: I'm the year of the tiger.

A: Tiger! Oh, very strong!

B: [Laughs]

A: [Laughs as well] And how many siblings do you have?

B: I have 3 other siblings.

A: So 4 in total.

B: Yes.

A: What are their names?

B: The eldest's name is Mov Sat.

A: Mov Sat. And how old is he now?

B: He is 50 years old.

A: Really?

B: Yes.

A: How about the second oldest?

B: The second's name is Mov Son.

A: Mov Son—

B: But [the second sibling] passed away already.

A: Oh.

B: Yes.

A: How old would [the second sibling] be now?

B: I think, about 45.

A: 45?

B: Yes.

A: And who is next?

B: I'm next. I'm 41.

A: 41?

B: Yes.

A: And after you?

B: After me is Mov Sophea, who is 37 years old.

A: 37. And nowadays are they all together still, or have they moved away already?

B: My oldest brother is in Phnom Penh—

A: Right—

B: The second oldest passed away already. After that it's me, then my younger sibling who lives in Ampil Thum village, close to my own home.

A: Okay—and you are already married, right?

B: Yes, I am married.

A: And when was your wedding?

B: It was in 1988.

A: '88. With [your current husband] right?

B: That's right.

A: And when you were married, where was the ceremony held?

B: In Ampil Thum village.

A: Right here in Ampil Thom village then—

B: Yes.

A: And at the time did your parents know about it?

B: Yes, they knew.

A: Ah, they knew?

B: Yes.

A: So they arranged it right?

B: Yes, they arranged it for me.

A: And here in Cambodia they usually have a dowry. [In Cambodian culture it is common for the husband to give the dowry to his wife's family.] How much did your husband give in that?

B: He gave 5 chi back then. [1 chi is equivalent to 0.13 oz, or 3.7 grams of gold]

A: 5 chi—

B: Yes.

A: That's quite a bit.

B: Yes it was a lot! [Laughs]

A: 5 chi—

B: Yes.

A: And afterwards did he give anything else?

B: No, that was it.

A: That was it—

B: Yes.

A: Okay. I have a special question, that I think maybe your descendants would be interested in hearing. Before you were married, how did you decide that you wanted to marry your husband? At what point did you decide you liked or loved him? Could you tell us that much?

B: At that point I—because our parents organized it for us, I didn't argue with them.

A: Oh!

B: Yes.

A: So most of the time it was the parents who arranged marriages?

B: Yes, they arranged it. Because the young people in my generation followed their parents' wishes. It was tradition for the parents to arrange it.

A: Oh! What if, for example, after they decided, you weren't happy with their decision?

B: It was okay—before they set it up they talked to me about it.

A: Oh, so it wasn't a problem for you.

B: No it was fine. I went with their decision.

A: Ah okay.

B: Yes.

A: And how long was it from when he first asked and you were married?

B: He had asked for about half a year.

A: Half a year?

B: Yes.

A: And during that half year did you ever spend time together or go on dates?

B: No, not at all.

A: No?

B: No, not even once!

A: Did you ever meet each other?

B: Not even once.

A: So that means when you met in the wedding it was the first time you met?

B: Yes, we had never met or even seen each other's faces before at all!

A: Really! You didn't even know how the groom would look! Only that you were engaged to be married!

B: Yes! [Laughs]

A: And so from the time of your marriage until now, how many children have you had?

B: I've had 3 children.

A: 3 children?

B: Yes.

A: What's the name of your first?

B: My first child's name is my son Reth Mony.

A: Okay. The second?

B: The second is my son Reth Soknim.

A: Oh. And how old is Reth Mony?

B: He is 17 years old already.

A: And what about Reth—your second?

B: The second is Reth Soknim—

A: How old is Reth Soknim?

B: He is 12 years old.

A: 12 years. And the next?

B: My youngest is my daughter Reth Hanna, she is 4 years old.

A: 4 years old—the youngest. And have they started working, or are they still in school?

B: They are all still in school.

A: Still studying?

B: Yes.

A: And where do they go to school?

B: Mony studies at Lvea High School.

A: At Lvea?

B: Yes. And Soknim studies at Ampil Thum School.

A: Ampil Thum?

B: Yes.

A: And how about your youngest?

B: The smallest hasn't started yet, She's still at home.

A: Not yet—you should go learn English! [To Hanna]

B: Yes! [Laughs]

A: Okay, so now about your parents, what do you remember about them?

B: When I lived with them?

A: That's right.

B: When I lived with them I remember him [my father] taking me to work in our fields, and I remember when he took me to cut logs in the forest—I have good memories with him. Even now that he has passed away I still remember them. When he would take me into the forest to cut wood, sometimes we would have to upright our oxcart. [In Cambodia they often use two oxen yoked together to haul a cart.]

A: You had to upright your oxcart? How did that happen?

B: Yes, sometimes our oxcart would tip over on the road.

A: Oh—it fell over then?

B: The oxcart!

A: It fell over, right?

B: Yes, when one side goes up on the side [such as in rice fields, with dams that hold the water] and the other side stays low, it would tip over.

A: Oh!

B: Yes, sometimes we had to try to pull it out and fix it, and if it had wood or other things in it I would have to run it all home. Sometimes it was nighttime before my father and I got home together.

A: Oh—

B: Yes. And I farmed with him, planted vegetables like cucumber and cabbage, and once they had grown I went to sell them. That was when I was with my father.

A: Okay—

B: Yes—

A: Was there anything else?

B: No that's it.

A: And how about your mother? What experiences did you have with your mother?

B: On my mother's side—it was similar to my father but my mother didn't go to the forest or the lake with me, I could only go with my father.

A: Okay, and what was your father's name?

B: My father's name is Koem Sot.

A: Koem Sot. What about your mother?

B: My mother's name is Chok Ren.

A: Chok Ren. And how old was your father?

B: My father, when he died, was 60 years old.

A: 60? And how old would he be now?

B: Maybe 63—

A: 63? It's been three years, then?

B: Yes.

A: What about your mother?

B: My mother's name is Chok Ren.

A: Chok Ren. How old is she?

B: She is 53—no, 57 years old.

A: 57. And is she still alive?

B: Yes, she is still alive.

A: Okay great. And for both of them, do you know where they were born?

B: My father?

A: Yes—

B: My father was born in Ampil Thum as well.

A: Ampil Thum! How about your mother?

B: My mother was born here too.

A: The same place as each other?

B: Yes! Both of them were born in the same place, we haven't gone anywhere! [Laughs]

A: Yes, they call it—

B: Since the beginning.

A: Since the beginning, yes. [A Cambodian saying]

B: He didn't dare walk away from his village or home; to walk away from his thicket of lemongrass! [Cambodian saying] [Laughs]

A: Is that right?

B: Yes.

A: Ah okay. And did he [your father] ever learn a foreign language?

B: No, he never did. My mother never learned to write Cambodian either.

A: Oh is that right?

B: She never got the chance to. In those days the older people didn't allow the girls to go to school; they could only stay at home. My father knew a little bit only because he used to be a monk. He studied at the pagoda with monks.

A: Okay.

B: Yes.

A: And so had they ever traveled outside of the country?

B: No, they never went.

A: And what about the provinces of Cambodia, which provinces had they been to?

B: My father, from the time I was about Hanna's size [4 years old], drove a rickshaw in Kampong Cham. My mother never went anywhere, she only stayed home.

A: She stayed home?

B: Yes.

A: Ah! So had your father ever been to Phnom Penh, ever been to Siem Reap?

B: Us? No we've never been.

A: Not even once?

B: Yes.

A: Okay, so do you remember about any of your ancestors?

B: What kind of ancestors?

A: Like your great-grandfather—

B: I only remember that my father's father, my grandpa, was named Grandpa Mov.

A: What about your grandma?

B: My grandma was named Grandma Uon.

A: Grandma Uon?

B: Yes.

A: And do you know where they were born?

B: No, I don't.

A: No idea?

B: Yes, I don't know anything about that.

A: And for you, have you ever been to another country?

B: I've been to the temple in Hong Kong.

A: You've been to Hong Kong! Did you go by yourself or with your family?

B: I went as a family, at the time.

A: Oh great, with your family. And when you went to Hong Kong, was it fun? What places did you go to?

B: Yes it was fun. After we finished working in the temple for two or three days, we went and visited the market one evening.

A: And what experiences did you have in Hong Kong?

B: I had the experience, like—when I looked at their country, it was beautiful and the people were happy! It was different from our country of Cambodia.

A: Ah—

B: Yes.

A: So for you personally, have you ever attended school?

B: Yes, I've studied in school before.

A: And what grade did you study until?

B: I studied until the 9th grade. That was when they would give us a diploma, back then.

A: Ah, that's right.

B: Yes.

A: So you know how to read and write then?

B: Yes, I can read and write.

A: That's great. Okay, I would like to ask you more about your history from your early childhood until now. Before you were married, what kind of things did you go through?

B: From the time I was young until now—I haven't had anything I've had to go through. I haven't had anything really happen from that time until now.

A: Oh okay—

B: It's been normal.

A: So, when you finished learning in ninth grade, what did you do?

B: At that time my mother made me learn to sew.

A: Learn to sew?

B: Yes.

A: Why did your mother make you learn to sew?

B: She said that at home I needed to know how to sew a little to have a little money to buy food and things. So she made me learn to sew.

A: And so do you know how to sew fancy clothes or just normal clothes?

B: I just sew normal [clothes].

A: You don't do any fancy clothes?

B: Yes, I don't know how to.

A: And how many years did it take to learn that?

B: At the time I only learned for about 2 to 3 months.

A: Is that right?

B: Yes.

A: And after you learned to sew what else do you do?

B: After I learned how to sew I was married!

A: Married to your husband?

B: Yes.

A: And after you were married, what do you start doing?

B: After I was married, I sewed for a few years, and then I stopped to have children. After that I've mostly stopped sewing.

A: Have you done anything else after you had kids?

B: Right now I don't do anything at all; I stay home and watch my kids.

A: You just take care of your kids then?

B: Yes.

A: So if you don't leave much, what does your husband do?

B: He is a doctor.

A: Ah—a doctor.

B: Yes.

A: Okay, and how old is your husband?

B: He is 43 years old.

A: 43. What's his full name?

B: His name is Kov Vongdy.

A: Kov Vongdy—okay.

B: Yes.

A: So, is your husband still in practice as a doctor, or what does he do?

B: Yes, he is still practicing as a doctor.

A: Still a doctor—

B: Yes, and we work in the rice fields a little.

A: Yes. So you know how to farm rice then?

B: Yes, I know how to.

A: And how many hectares of land do you have?

B: I have about a hectare of land.

A: And how many meters is that?

B: A hectare—I'm not sure, I only know that it's one hectare, I don't know how many meters that is.

A: And most of the time are you farming on your own or do you lease it out?

B: We lease it out.

A: You lease it out to others—

B: Yes; I have very young kids, and so I lease it out to others.

A: And so, when you need rice you go any buy it then right? [Instead of living off the rice from their fields.]

B: Yes, we buy our rice.

A: When you were still learning, which school do you attend?

B: I was studying at—the first one I attended was the first grade at Ampil Thum School.

A: Yes—

B: When I got to the third grade, I studied at Pou Krom school; afterwards I went to Kileas School, and then to Prey Totueng School.

A: Why did you change schools so often?

B: They followed the class—when you had finished first, second, and third grade, you had finished that school, and you would go up to the next one. In 5th grade, we tested to get into Prey Totueng School.

A: Oh—

B: Yes.

A: And for your three children, what do you think about their attitudes?

B: For my three children—Mony has a good attitude, but Soknim is a little mischievous.

A: Oh—

B: Yes. Hanna is good as well.

A: So they all have different characteristics then.

B: They are all different, yes. [Laughs]

A: Yes. So from the time you were young until now, have you have a time that was the most difficult in your life?

B: I've never had that. Never met that.

A: Or have you ever been in a lot of pain?

B: Never.

A: Not even once?

B: Never before.

A: And have you ever—like before you married your husband, have you ever had other men come and ask [to marry you]?

B: No—oh! Yes, I've had them come and ask! [Laughs]

A: Have they ever been in love with you or that kind of thing—

B: Yes! There have been a few.

A: Were there a lot?

B: Yes, there were many. [Laughs]

A: There were a lot? Is that so?

B: But the kids of that generation were not like the kids now.

A: Can you tell me more about that?

B: Children before only dared to get married after their parents allowed them. It wasn't like the kids nowadays—the kids now sometimes already love each other and then introduce them to their parents afterwards. My generation wasn't like that—even if they loved each other, if the parents weren't happy with them, they were not allowed.

A: Oh—

B: Yes. That's how it was.

A: So, for example, if you were in love with someone and your parents did not approve, what would you think?

B: It would be okay; I would still follow my them.

A: You'd still follow them?

B: Yes.

A: Okay—So when you went to school, did you have enough money to learn?

B: I didn't have any. That time was difficult—even books, writing materials—there was never enough. But I just endured it at the time because my parents were farmers, so things were always in short supply. And at the time three of us siblings were also in school. So, we rode two people to a bike, so the third would have to ride another bike by themselves.

A: Right.

B: So my two brothers would take turns. I would ride with one of them at a time. I didn't know how to ride a bike at the time.

A: Ah—

B: Yes.

A: Was there anything else?

B: No, that's it.

A: Okay. Yes, and when—and so have you ever worked in the rice fields or farmed before?

B: Yes, I used to.

A: You've done it before?

B: Yes.

A: And have you ever had a business?

B: No, I've never. I've only ever farmed and grown vegetables with my father.

A: Oh is that right?

B: Yes, that's it.

A: And so you've never worked at a job?

B: No, never.

A: And most of the time, you said you mostly planted garden vegetables right?

B: Yes.

A: What kind of vegetables?

B: At the time, I grew cabbage, cucumber, luffa gourds—that kind of thing.

A: And everything that you grew, did you take to market to sell, or—?

B: Yes, I took it to the market to sell.

A: You took it to sell—

B: Yes. At that time I didn't have a bicycle or anything to ride. In the evening, we went to cut our vegetables and brought them to the house. In the morning, I carried it all to the market.

A: Oh—

B: Yeah. I sold it at Khvet market. Sometimes I went to sell in the villages too.

A: When you were selling, what time did you start and end?

B: I sold starting at 7 in the morning, and by 11 I came home.

A: Do you remember, when you were selling, how much money you made?

B: At that time I got 500 [riel], or one thousand, was a lot [about 25 cents].

A: Oh is that right?

B: Yes.

A: And how much did you sell one head for?

B: At the time, for a kilo of cabbage I got 200 [riel] or more.

A: Oh—

B: That's right.

A: And how many kilos did you take to sell?

B: For a morning, sometimes it was three or four kilos. They planted quite a bit at the time. Sometimes there was a transport going to Kampong Cham, and they would buy from us. So that was easy for us, to just sell all at once. It wasn't as difficult as walking to sell.

A: Yes.

B: Yes.

A: And after you had sold all your produce, where did the money go?

B: My mother took it to buy food. We had vegetables, so she bought the food we needed and saved some of the money for us to go to school, for clothes we needed, for bicycles to ride.

A: Ah, okay.

B: Yes—

A: And do you think your life now is different than it was when you were a child?

B: Yes, it's different. I think that when I was with my parents, I had a difficult time because of all I had to do like farming, growing vegetables, and planting. But now after I have a husband, it is not as difficult as it was back then.

A: Do you think that's because you don't do it as much and it's not as difficult as before?

B: Yes, it is not as difficult as before, because when I was with my parents we were poor.

A: Right—

B: But normally, the older people of that generation didn't give us as much as we give our children now. Even if they had money, they would not give it to us children like I do for my children. I give my kids enough. When I was with my parents it wasn't like that.

A: Yes—

B: In the mornings, they only ever gave me leftover rice to eat before school. They never gave me money to spend. If my children want money to go to school, I give it to them. If they want money to buy food, I give them something to eat or give them money to buy it, I let them eat. But my parents never did that.

A: Oh—I see.

B: Yes, that was the difference. But if we let them be like our generation, it will never end, right? We live in a modern age! It's a different time now, so we let them do things according to their circumstances.

A: Yes. And for you, were you alive at the time of Pol Pot?

B: Yes I was; I was 4 years old.

A: 4 years old?

B: Yes, during the time of Pol Pot, I was never with my mother. I was small, about the size of Hanna, and so different people looked after me while my parents went to work far away. So I never had a mother to take care of me when I was little! I was with other older people.

A: Did they mistreat you?

B: At the time, I didn't know I was being mistreated! I only knew how to cry and look for my mother. I didn't know where food or water was, and I never had enough food or water. I don't know what I ate then. I never saw my mother. Eventually I saw her come in once, one night. She snuck in to meet me, and the next morning I woke and realized she had gone again.

A: And do you know what your parents were working on at the time?

B: During the era of Pol Pot? My mother was sent to carry dirt, and my father was sent to climb palm trees and to work in the rice fields.

A: And during that time did you lose any siblings or relatives?

B: During the Pol Pot era? I lost an uncle.

A: Oh—

B: He's still missing to this day, I haven't ever heard any news of him.

A: Yes—

B: Yes, on my father's size. He was my father's youngest brother.

A: And when Pol Pot ended, where were you?

B: I was still in Ampil Thum, the same place.

A: Oh, so during Pol Pot you stayed in Ampil Thum then?

B: Yes. My mother brought me to Angkong Village for about a year, and when Pol Pot ended we returned to our district and village again.

A: And so during that time they did not take you from one place to another and to another and so on?

B: No. I was only ever with an old grandmother in one place. And when it all ended each mother came and got her own children.

A: So, when the era of Pol Pot ended, did the people that watched over the kids abandon them, or what happened?

B: No, during Pol Pot there was an older person, maybe 50 years old, that they made watch the children. He looked after the kids, maybe three or four children, and didn't go anywhere. He watched them until Pol Pot ended, and then each mother went and got each of her children.

A: So the young kids were watched over. How old before they made you start working?

B: Back then, by the age of 10 they made you start work. They made you go and catch frogs, or crabs, or even snails in the rice fields. Anything so that they wouldn't have to work cutting the rice in the fields. Anything you could do, they made you do. They just wanted to use you. They would made you clean cow dung or that kind of thing if you could.

A: And when you were young did you ever have a dream, about what you wanted to do in the future? Did you ever aspire to be anything?

B: Yes I had aspirations—

A: What kind of aspirations?

B: When I was young and still in school, I thought that if I tried my hardest I could become a teacher! But it never happened because when I took my exam for my diploma, I failed. And my parents did not give me enough of anything to do well in school and learn. I remember that at the time for our exams, my teacher made us bring in money to buy the test—he said he didn't have any money. He didn't help me at all, and at the time I didn't fight him on it. If he was going to say that I wouldn't care. And at the end of it, I couldn't do anything. When I ended school, I failed to receive my diploma, and he said, "You didn't learn that well anyway, just go home and learn how to sew or something insignificant like that," and so he made me learn to sew instead.

A: Oh—and that was when you learned to sew?

B: Yes, and after I learned how to sew for a few months, my teacher left the district to go somewhere, and I put off learning with him. I only learned a bit from him.

A: And you have never experienced starvation or anything like that, right?

B: No, I've never.

A: Right. Then about the good instead—can you think of a time or experience in your life that was truly amazing?

B: I haven't had one of those yet, a time that was truly amazing.

A: So, just averagely good then?

B: Yes, right now life is just pretty good. For my family right now, we don't have any major difficulties; even our work is not as exhausting as it is for others.

A: Yes—

B: Yes, we always have enough food to eat, and such.

A: And so for you, most of the time—do you know how to cook?

B: I know how to cook, yes.

A: What is your favorite dish, one that you love the most?

B: I like Samlar kako. [A kind of spicy vegetable soup.]

A: Samlar kako?

B: Yes—

A: And how many times a month do you usually make it?

B: Hmm—about twice a month or so.

A: And your husband doesn't get tired of it?

B: Oh he gets tired of it! He likes Samlar machu instead [Sour soup]—he and my kids.

A: Oh is that right?

B: Yes—

A: And what kind of Samlar machu do you have?

B: Just normal Samlar machu. We make it with the fish from the rice fields. My husband likes it and my kids like it too.

A: Ah, okay.

B: Yes—

A: And for you, what provinces have you been to in the country?

B: I've been to visit Siem Reap, and to Kampot before.

A: Yes—

B: Yes—

A: Did you go as a family or go alone?

B: We went as a family.

A: Do you like to sing?

B: I don't really like to, no.

A: Why's that?

B: I don't know how to!

A: You don't know how?

B: Yes—

A: And when you are free, what do you like to do?

B: I'm at home most of the time, I'm not free very often. I just take out the trash, clean and wash things, wash the clothes—I don't have much free time.

A: Ah. And what type of house do you have?

B: Mine is made of wood.

A: Wood?

B: Yes—

A: Wood like this [gestures], or—?

B: Wood like this yes, but with brick on the lower level.

A: Oh, brick on the bottom—Beautiful! And cool—and around your house, do you have trees or anything?

B: Around my house, we mostly have kassod trees.

A: Kassod trees?

B: Yes—

A: Is it cool around your house then?

B: Yes it's cool.

A: Great. Then maybe for today we don't have anything else, that's it. Thank you so much for giving us a chance to ask about your history and story. And I know that it will help your children to learn more about you. And so when I have finished this interview I will put it on the BYU school website. Do you give us permission to upload it?

B: Yes, that's fine.

A: Then thank you very much for today.

B: Yes. Thank you.

A: Yes. Goodbye!

Translated by Devon Crane and edited by Thomas Barrett.