

Interview of Chan Thearin

A: Interviewer: Kong Ry

B: Interviewee: Chan Thearin

A: What is your full name?

B: Chan Thearin.

A: Do you have a nickname or a name that you were called when you were young?

B: From my childhood?

A: Yes. Do you go by any other names?

B: No.

A: What were you called as a child?

B: Just my own name: Chan Thearin.

A: Just that one name?

B: Yes.

A: Okay. Have you ever learned a different language besides Khmer?

B: No.

A: No?

B: I never got to study Khmer and I never learned religion and I never have been to school.

A: So, you have never studied Khmer?

B: Nope, I never studied it.

A: Where were you born? And in what city, village, and province?

B: Dei Edth village, Dei Edth commune, Kien Svay district, Kandal province.

A: From the beginning until nowadays, how old are you?

B: [In the year] 19—

A: Your age?

B: Oh!

A: How old are you?

B: Seventy-four.

A: You are seventy-four years old?

B: Yes.

A: Do you remember what year you and your husband were married?

B: Year '50 something, I'm not sure.

A: Okay, that's alright.

B: Or '57.

A: What was your marriage like?

B: It was good. It was always happy.

A: Great! How many siblings do you have?

B: So many, they have all died now. I don't remember much about them.

A: So, you are the only one left?

B: I'm the only one left.

A: What number child are you?

B: I'm the youngest. My oldest sibling who just died, they had a child who also has died. They only had 3 children. Now I'm the youngest at 74.

A: Can you describe a little bit about the lives of your siblings? What do you remember about their histories?

B: I don't remember.

A: That's okay; did your family or any of your siblings ever live outside the country?

B: No.

A: They all lived in Cambodia?

B: They were all in Cambodia.

A: If I may, could I ask you about your life? About your childhood and growing up until even now? What has your struggle been like?

B: My life is full of struggle; I lived with my aunt on my mother's side. I was there a bit and it was three years, then five years, and then seven years. She would go to work, and I was left with my old grandmother. They were so old they would shake, and if they were still around, they would be over 100 years old. I don't know one hundred and what; I don't remember what year they were born. My life was hard, harder than most. Others had it easy. I had it hard. My mother died when I was 7 years old. After she died, I was left with just my grandparents and no one to take care of me. I was with my aunt; she took me in and raised me for up to five years. This is my life. [Laughs]

A: Yes. So, when you first started to know your husband, how did you meet him?

B: He just asked to marry me and came to live here. It wasn't difficult, I didn't have to move anywhere, but we worked the rice fields, which was tiring. We were farmers, [Laughs] we raised rice, and when I couldn't do that anymore it was hard on my kids. When you get old you lose strength and can't farm anymore.

A: So, you farmed, did you ever do any other jobs?

B: No, I just worked the farm and sold some things.

A: Can you compare your childhood to your current life? What difference is there?

B: These days life is easier. My kids make me food to eat. Before it was hard. When I was young, I worked hard, my grandparents were old, and they couldn't make a living.

A: When you were young and still with your family, what was your house like?

B: My house was big like this.

A: Made of wood?

B: Yeah, my old house was big and made of wood like this one, only it was a thatched roof.

A: Okay. And did you go through the Khmer Rouge period?

B: I went through it.

A: Can you describe that time and the difficulties you faced? Can you recall and tell me?

B: It was hard. They had me leave to Kratie. I left with 5 or 6 kids; I had to carry them across my back. When we stopped, they all ran, and some got lost. Some went this way, some that way. I lost them all. In the end brought them and showed them to me, I told them they had to stay with me. The kids said we could go back home; I told them no we can't. I wouldn't let them leave again.

A: So, at that time, what work did the Khmer Rouge have you do?

B: Transplanting and uprooting rice like I did on the farm. For my husband, they had him thresh the rice, he was blind, so they had him do that. I did the management work.

A: So, what was difficult during that time?

B: It was hard, it wasn't easy, and every little bit I was plugged up. I wasn't doing all that much, but I was just getting plugged up.

A: Did you have a disease?

B: Yes.

A: So, what songs do you like?

B: None. I don't know how to sing any songs. [Laughs]

A: You don't like them?

B: No, my kids know how to sing everything.

A: Do you like listening to music?

B: No.

A: What do you like to eat?

B: I'll eat anything, I'm not picky, and I like to eat all types of soups.

A: When you were young, what games did you like to play?

B: No, I didn't like games.

A: You didn't like them?

B: No because I didn't know how to play. [Laughs]

A: Can you tell me more about a difficult time in your life? What was it that you think was the hardest in your life?

B: The hardest thing was doing farm work, transplanting, and pulling up the rice plants. I did it all by myself, my kids were all at school. I pulled up those plants and transplanted them, when people were free, they would help. It was so tiring, there's nothing to compare it to.

A: Can you tell me more about that hardship? How did you get through it?

B: I got through it just by working. Now my kids let me relax, they don't let me work. Since I built the house, they won't let me do any work. They will take care of me for once.

A: Can you tell me, what was the happiest experience of your life that you can remember?

B: The best?

A: The best experience you've had.

B: There is none. It's just how it is. It's that bad and it's that good. [Laughs]

A: Right, so did you ever had a desire, or ever had a dream of what you want to do when you grew up?

B: I never had anything like that, whatever I needed to do I just did. Transplanting rice, I just did it. Selling stuff, I just did it. Pickling lettuce, I just did whatever needed to be done.

A: So, your marriage or having kids, did you imagine that you would have a good family?

B: I imagined that if I did well, my kids would do well as well.

A: Thank you for letting me interview you, are you interested or what do you think about this interview?

B: I don't know.

A: What about it was good for you?

B: I don't know. These days my life is good.

A: Do you think this interview was good?

B: It's good; every day is good now that things are easy. When your kids don't let you do any work, even if you want to do work and sell something they won't let you, you're just at home and you make food, eat it, and sleep. [Laughs]

A: So, do you think this actual interview was good?

B: It was good.

A: I want to ask your permission to take some pictures with you. Can I do that?

B: Go ahead and take pictures.

A: Thank you so much for this interview!

*Translated by Elijah Harmon