

Interview of Meas Chhailim

A: Interviewer: Kong Seiha

B: Interviewee: Meas Chhailim

Interview Summary

Meas Chhailim was born in 1951 in Kaoh Sotin district, Kampong Cham province. In this interview, she provides insights into her family background, recounts the story of meeting her husband, and discusses the challenges she faced during pregnancy amidst the Khmer Rouge era. When asked what has brought her happiness in life, she expresses her conviction in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

A: First of all, I would like to thank you for being willing to spend time today to be interviewed about your personal life history, and some of the experiences of your life. I know that this work will truly benefit your life and allow you and your family to be blessed. This is an especially good opportunity for you to be able to preserve records for your family members in later generations. Yes, so hello, my name is Kong Seiha, and am the interviewer for this interview that took place on September 3, 2016. Yes, so I would like to ask, what is your name, your full name?

B: My name is Meas Chhailim, but my nickname is “Anho.”

A: What day were you born?

B: I was born in 1951.

A: What about the Cambodian years, what animal is that? Out of the 12 animals?

B: The dragon, the Cambodian year of the dragon.

A: Yes, can you tell me where you were born?

B: In Kaoh Sotin district, Kampong Cham province.

A: And how old are you now?

B: I am 66 years old.

A: Can you tell me the story of your marriage, how did you and your husband meet, and when were you married?

B: Just like my husband said, it was in 1971.

A: Because this is your own personal record, even though I asked your husband some of these questions already, you can still answer them as well. Can you tell me a little bit about when you and your husband first met?

B: We first met in the Lon Nol generation, before Pol Pot.

A: And can you tell me about your marriage, was it arranged by your parents on both sides?

B: Yes, by the parents on both sides.

A: What about the marriage gift at that time, how was that?

B: It wasn't so much at that time, we just got married by letting our parents know, that was all.

A: So what were the reasons you decided to marry your husband?

B: Because he was polite, mature, worthy, and I was interested in him, so I agreed to take him as my husband.

A: How many years did you and your husband know each other before you were married?

B: We knew each other about a year before we were married.

A: I want to ask about your family, how many siblings did you have? How many sisters, how many brothers?

B: I have 9 siblings, 3 brothers and 6 sisters.

A: Do you still remember all their names?

B: My oldest sister is Meas Chhay Ly, then Meas Chhay Leam, Meas Tha, then [my brother] Sokhom, Meas Chhay Neang, then me, Meas Chhailim, and my younger sister Meas Lang Eang, and another Meas Lang Eng, and Meas Pich.

A: So what number child are you?

B: [Begins to Count] I am the fourth child.

A: So where are all nine of your siblings now?

B: One is near me and the other two live on the island, only three are still alive. Oh! I was mistaken, there are four still alive.

A: Do you remember your parents' names?

B: My father's Meas Vat and my mother's Hao Lav.

A: As of now, how old are they?

B: Oh! I can't remember, they would be old, probably 100 years old, I don't know. They would probably be 110 or 120.

A: So, can you describe a little bit about your parent's background? When were they born, or where do they live?

B: I don't remember because he died when I was only 12 years old. He was just 40 years old when he died.

A: What about your mother?

B: She died when she was around 70 or more years old. She just died in 1997.

A: Can you tell us about any experiences you can remember about your mother and father, from when you were young, and they were still alive?

B: I remember some, my father was born in Peam Chak, his father, Kong Meas, he was a manager, he bought rice, packed it, and sold it. Later he stopped doing that kind of work and went back to work with the French at Thma Pich. He only did it for a few years because he was sick, because he fell from a tree. Due to chronic illness, he died at the age of 40.

Because of that, I was an orphan, and all my siblings were split up. I went to live with my aunt at Thma Pich, my older sibling went to be with my father's older brother, my uncle, in Snuol. And my younger sister went to be with my aunt in Pochentong. Her husband was very capable, he flew airplanes. We all split apart. My younger brother went to learn from and live with the monks, ever since he was 7 years old. After my father died, the monks bought my brother clothes and raised him, I pity him. And later, during Pol Pot, my older sibling was taken and killed. They also took and killed my little sister, the youngest child. They called the children to go to work, and when they went, they were killed. We never saw them again.

A: Do you remember anything about your mother's history?

B: My mother was very poor, she was an orphan, because she lost her mother. Her mother died when she was young, and her father remarried and had many more children. She was very poor and had a difficult life. She just raised her children. My brother is the only one still helping my mother. Apart from him, all of her children left her, she was very sad.

A: Can you describe your life history from when you were young until old?

B: It's very sad, I don't want to talk about it. [Laughs]

A: Can you describe just a little bit?

B: I did not get a good education, only to third grade. At that time, primary school only went through third grade, then you had to cross to Kaoh Sotin [which is an island] to keep learning. I wasn't able to keep going to school, so I learned up through the third grade then stopped.

My oldest sibling was only able to learn from home, and my other older siblings were able to get a higher education than me. I didn't get a very good education, all I could do was read and try to remember things. Then I went and worked with medicine, I was hired by others. I helped make medicine for years so that I could make money to help raise my family a little bit. My younger siblings were very little, it was difficult, I was very sad. Then came the Pol Pot generation, and the mobile unit [a group of field hands during the Khmer Rouge]. At that time I was 18 years old, and I was sick, I had wrists that were skinny like ladle handles. I was sick every year, and after I was sick I had a fat body. It was miserable.

A: When you were sick, what sickness was it?

B: It was a fever, a very high fever, I was delirious, and I don't remember much. I was sick with it many times, not just once, all the way until I had my second child. The fever was so bad, and my heart was trembling, and beating really fast. It was pounding in my chest. And I would shiver, even if there were two or three people to help hold me, it still wouldn't stop. I would shiver for days on end, months. In those days, they would have us stay at the hospital, and give us medicine that looked kind of like rabbit feces, they had us take that, we took it for months. I had the chills every day, and I couldn't eat anything either. I was so thin I couldn't make any milk for my baby, and she died because of it. I was so sick, and delirious, and feverish. I was able to heal because Grandma Mop made medicine for me. But, when I had the child after that, the middle child, I got the same fever again. My husband went to find a Buddhist funeral monk because I fell unconscious. And my eyes were dark, I couldn't see anything, it was dark. It was difficult when I was sick. And do you

want to know about Pol Pot? During Pol Pot, it was very difficult, when I was pregnant, they still used me to do a lot of work. They would have me go help with planting and harvesting, and the paths we would take were not good either. We had to cross flooded sections, and plant in places that had deep water. And, when we came back, all we had to eat was plain rice porridge. And after I gave birth, just a couple of months later, three months, they would put us back to work again. They would have us go harvest, and when we harvested, they gave us a specified amount we had to do. The faster we could finish the assigned section, the faster we could come back to be with our children, but when we finished, they would add more to our section, it was so miserable. Then, when we finished that, they would have us help make dams on the river. When I was helping to carry dirt for the dam, my baby was just a few months old, and they still had me carry dirt. I got sick, and became very thin, it was very sad, and that is the reason I don't have a very good memory, I would get a fever and get confused. My heart is sick now and it causes me to have pain in my bones, because of the chills and fever, because of that, my memory is not as good as when I was younger.

A: And, during that time, how many children did you give birth to?

B: Three children, and at that time, I would just travel, like my husband said, I would just travel around and work, there were no breaks, day or night, it didn't matter, I would just go try to find ways to support our family.

A: During the Pol Pot era, did you have any difficulties in raising your children?

B: It was very difficult, and the children were all left to be watched by the older people. It was very miserable, even though we were pregnant they still used us to work, and we could only rest a little bit. Only if we were sick and couldn't get off our mats, it was so miserable, and I was a woman as well— it was so hard.

A: Can you tell me the names of your three children born during the Pol Pot generation?

B: Those three children were Pav Vanny, Pav Sinat, Pav Nai Hor.

A: Since that generation, how many children have you had in total?

B: All together, I have eight children.

A: Can you tell me more about the other five?

B: Pav Vanny, Pav Sinath, Pav Nai Hor, Bun Na, Tola, Thida, Sokha and Kakada.

A: So, going back to what we talked about before, you said that when you were younger, you learned until you finished third grade?

B: Yes, through third grade.

A: Do you still remember the place where you studied when you were younger?

B: At Koh Thmey school, then Daun Mao across the river, then Koh Santin even further across the river. Because of that I didn't have the resources to get a high education. I was an orphan from a young age when my father died.

A: Thank you very much. And, I want to ask another question, can you please share about a time in your life when you think it was the most difficult?

B: When I was pregnant and gave birth and had that fever that I talked about before. It was

very difficult. I had the chills, and the illness became very serious three times. I am grateful to God that I was able to live until today and that I have the Gospel, I am so thankful to God.

A: What is the most memorable thing that has happened in your life? What is good? What makes you happy?

B: My children and grandchildren, because they are so modest and humble, they aren't difficult, they are good young men and women. The happiest time in my life was when I received the Gospel, it was a very special and joyful time, I have been able to overcome all the worries of the world that I had before.

A: So in your experience, have you ever done farming work?

B: At the field of Tuol Ly, the farm we would make medicine at, I would wake up at night to lay out the medicine to dry in the sun. It was very bad, we would get wet. The medicine farm was worse than all the other ones, I would get so tired. [Laughs]

A: So after you worked for the medicine farm, did you work anywhere else?

B: I did that all the way up until Pol Pot.

A: And what about after the Pol Pot generation?

B: Yeah, the Pol Pot Generation. The Pol Pot generation— oh, the Lon Nol generation— at the time of Lon Nol, it was chaotic, people were captured and forced to join the military, and women to help the military, and to be courageous, and other things like that.

A: Now, the last question I have, what differences are there between your life today, and what it was before? Can you explain a little bit?

B: These days, I am so happy because I don't have as many worries in my life. It's different from before when I didn't yet have faith. I am grateful to God that I was able to get a lot better from my illness, it's like God helped ease my illness. Every day that I am able to work, I am full of joy and gratitude to God, I don't forget to thank God.

A: Have you ever travelled abroad?

B: Yes, like my husband said, we went to the temple.

A: In which country?

B: Hong Kong.

A: How many times did you go?

B: We only went once.

A: And do you remember which year?

B: [She thinks a little] In 2009.

A: When you went to the temple, how did you feel?

B: I felt more joy than I have ever felt in my whole life. I had just gotten to know the Gospel, and God helped me to travel to a different country. If not for God, I would still be ignorant, and not understand the difference between Sunday and Thursday, or other days. I would just work forever with no purpose. I have joy and happiness in my heart, even though I am

poor, my heart is full of joy and happiness.

A: Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to do this interview, and the last thing, because this is the end, do you allow us to put this voice recording on the BYU website?

B: I agree, I am so grateful that you came to help me, because I couldn't know how to do it myself.

A: Yes, thank you very much.

Translated by Edmund Ellsworth and edited by Thomas Barrett.