

# Interview of Yan Lin

**A: Interviewer: Mao Rottana**

**B: Interviewee: Yan Lin**

**C: Nhem Sokunthea**

## Summary of the Interview

*Yan Lin was born in 1967 in Krapeu Ha village, Kandal province, and has five siblings, being the second-born in her family. In this interview, she recounts several memories, from happy times spent with her father to the hardships endured during the Pol Pot regime, including separation from her family and struggles for food. Despite her challenges, Yan Lin describes the happiness she has found in her family life and reflects on the importance of education and resolving conflict.*

A: Today, I would like to thank you for allowing me to interview you about your life's history. My name is Mao Rottana, and I am the interviewer, and what is your full name?

B: My full name is Yan Lin.

A: I am conducting this interview today, on August 7, 2016. The interview was prepared by a university in the United States called BYU. This school has a program to interview about your life and the lives of the Cambodian people so that in the future, their grandchildren as well as the next generation can know the biography and story and life of their ancestors. Will you allow me to post this interview on the university website?

B: Yes, I agree.

A: Yes, this website is called [www.cambodiaorallhistory.byu.edu](http://www.cambodiaorallhistory.byu.edu). I will start the interview, could you please tell me your full name again?

B: My name is Yan Lin.

A: Do you have a nickname?

B: My nickname is Chin Sokleang.

A: What is your birth date? So, I will read her date of birth instead of her because she is illiterate. She was born on May 15, 1967. She was born in Krapeu Ha village, Ta Khmau commune, Kandal Steung district, Kandal province, Cambodia. What animal is this Khmer year?

B: The year of the monkey.

A: How many brothers and sisters do you have?

B: I have 2 brothers, 1 older brother, 1 younger brother, and 3 sisters.

A: Which child are you?

B: I am the third child.

A: Are all your siblings still alive now?

B: I do not know, because in the year '75, we were all separated, and I do not know if they are alive or dead. I went alone, I went with my father and my father died and I lived with my foster mother.

A: So, what are your parent's names?

B: His name is Chon Chin.

A: And where is his place of birth? And I will read that—your father's name is Sok Chim.

B: No, my husband put that down, in reality, his name is Chon Chin.

A: So, the date of his birth, he just remembers that he is a Khmer citizen and in 1920, his place of birth is in Krapeu Ha village, Ta Khmau commune, Kandal Steung district, Kandal province, Cambodia. What Khmer animal is his birth year?

B: I was very young, I do not remember.

A: Is he dead or is he still alive?

B: He died.

A: And what year did he die?

B: He died when we entered the Pol Pot era. He died just after 1975 when the Lon Nol era went into the Pol Pot era, he died during the Pol Pot era.

C: So in 1975.

A: What memories do you have with him?

B: Remember about what?

C: Like memories?

B: Oh, about memories, my father was a soldier, he was a commanding officer. And on the days that he would rest from his work, like for one or two days, he would come home. When he came home, he would cast his nets to catch fish. Once, he caught a really big one and then called me over, he called, "Sok Leang!" I answered, "Yes!" and he said, "Child, come here! Come look at this, what is this?" And I glanced over at it and saw a huge fish as big as a baby! And then I was so happy with my dad.

C: Yes, that is what you remember the most?

B: Yes.

A: Mom, what is your mother's name?

B: My father's mother?

C: Your mother.

B: My mother? I do not know.

A: Her name is Hor Pisey!

B: That's right, her name is Hor Pisey, but I do not know what year she was born.

A: But maybe it's in the birth certificate, it might have the year.

B: I do not remember anything about my mother at all.

A: The day, month, or year she was born, everything?

B: Yes, the day, or month, everything. I just know that the place where I lived was called Ou Baek K'am village. Yes, in Ou Baek K'am village in a big, tall, stone house. [The Khmer word here indicates any house that is rock, brick, or stucco.]

C: And do you have any more memories with grandma, with your mother?

B: Memories, I only remember that my mother lived with me. She sold Nom Ansam [rice with beans and pork or banana wrapped in banana leaves and steamed], that's it. I was at home looking after my younger siblings.

C: So you know when she died?

B: My Mom—when she was evacuated in the Pol Pot era, she and I were separated from each other. When we were evacuated during the Pol Pot era, I went with my father. My father was also separated from my mother, and everyone else so he came back and found me.

C: And you don't know if she is dead or alive?

B: I don't know. That era, I do not know.

A: So, do you remember your grandfather, what is his name?

B: I don't remember, I also don't remember my grandmother.

A: What about their place of birth?

B: I do not remember anything.

C: So do you remember where they lived?

B: I do not remember at all, and I don't even know their faces.

C: So do you know if your parents or even grandparents have ever gone and lived in a foreign country before?

B: No, I don't know.

A: So, what grade did you learn to?

B: I only studied until the second grade.

A: So, what was the name of your primary school, Mom?

B: Krapeu Ha. The school here in Krapeu Ha

A: So when you thought of the future, what did you want to become?

C: Because when you were young, you always went to school and went to learn, so what did you want to become when you grew older?

B: Ah, so when I went to school, I wanted to learn how to read really well but it couldn't happen. Why not? First, I couldn't remember what I learned. Second, I didn't have the right clothes. When I came to the pagoda, I saw that they had blue skirts, the students from my school. They had blue skirts and white shirts and red ties. All the other students had

uniforms, but I wore a sbang [monk's lower garment] to school. The monks gave me the fabric, and the monks cut it into a skirt for me to wear at school. And I borrowed a long shirt from them, it went down to the knees.

A: So that's what it was like when you were in school. When you were in school, at that time, you were destitute, right? It was hard because you had a little money that needed to go a long way, you had very little since the war had just ended.

B: Honestly, there was never any money to spend. I went to learn and never had money for rice. I just ate rice in the pagoda.

A: So, on what day did you get married?

B: I don't remember.

A: Well, do you remember which season? Do you remember if you got married in the dry season or the rainy season?

B: I was married in the rainy season.

C: And back then, was that in the generation after Pol Pot, or when?

B: After the Pol Pot era, when we came to Wat Krapeu Ha.

C: About how old were you when you got married?

B: When I was 18 years old.

C: After that, how many years was that, do you remember?

A: Yes, when the Pol Pot era ended back then, about how old were you?

B: Now child, help me think. In the year '75, I was 5 years old, I think. I left when Pol Pot came, when he was gone I came back.

C: Oh, so maybe you got married in 1988?

A: No, I was [born in] 1988. I was already born by then, so no.

B: No, in 1987, Rottana was born. I was 21 years old and had a child. Yes, I was 21 years old when I had Rottana.

C: So did you have a child immediately after getting married?

B: No, I wasn't pregnant for 3 years.

C: So you were married in 1984, that's right.

A: And where was the place you were married?

B: Here in Krapeu Ha, south of this pagoda, where I live, near the pagoda.

C: Yes!

A: So, when you got married, did your parents arrange it, or was it because you loved Dad?

B: My parents arranged it.

A: And back then you didn't love Dad even a little, right?

B: No, he is the one who organized it.

A: And the first time you met Dad, where and when was that?

B: I met him when he came to my house. He came to eat at my house.

A: So when he came to buy rice, Mom?

B: Yeah, at the time I sold food.

A: So at the time, what did you sell?

B: I sold rice.

A: [Jokingly] So you only sold rice?

B: I sold rice and sold soups.

A: Oh, the delicious kind, which is why Dad came to eat. [All Laugh] The food was delicious, and the person selling was beautiful too! And when you were married, what gifts did you receive?

B: For wedding gifts, I had maybe 15 tables of food, and the wedding lasted a night and a day.

A: Oh! At that time, eating 15 tables was not normal! That is a lot.

B: And it lasted one night and day too!

C: And did you have Ak Keh? [A type of jazz music usually played at Cambodian weddings and dances.] And what time did you have Ak Keh, Mom?

B: Oh, we had fun until light.

C: Oh well, that generation was so rich!

A: It was so happy too!

C: If you don't believe me, ask the people near here.

A: Yes it was so happy. So, how different is your life in the past and your life now? How different was it before compared to now?

C: How easy, or difficult, or happy was it before compared to now?

B: Before I had a husband and children, that time?

C: That's right.

B: Since we were married, it has been happy sometimes, sad sometimes, so it was normal. When we had children and grandchildren, it was normal. Even now it's the same, it is normal to be happy or sad sometimes.

A: And do you miss Dad?

B: He died already.

C: Do you miss him?

B: I do miss him still.

A: So Mom, what food do you like?

B: I'm not picky with food, I can eat anything.

C: But which food is the most delicious?

A: What do you like to eat? Which food do you say tastes the best?

B: Actually, since I was young until I grew up, I would eat anything, and there was nothing I knew of that I didn't like.

A: Going from what I see, the food that you eat the most is ground Prahok, right? [Laughs] That's all you make. You eat it a lot. And do you know how to make food?

B: I know how.

A: I saw you make food every day. And since you know how to cook food, who taught you?

B: I know how to cook from Grandmother.

A: Grandma was your teacher. So you know how to cook a lot of food. I know that you cook well—you cook delicious food. And what do you like to do in your free time?

B: If I'm talking about my free time—I don't have free time. I don't have free time because I have housework. I don't have free time, I always see work to do. I'm not free, but if I set aside some free time, I sit down and relax a little. But if you say that I'm free, I'm not.

A: And where do you like to go visit, Mom?

B: If I go out, I go to the riverside on vacation.

A: Do you like the countryside or the ocean more?

B: I have never been to the ocean because we didn't have the money.

A: Even though you can't go, where do you dream of going?

B: I want to go to the ocean, I want to go to the sea, I want to go to what they call waterfalls, because I've never been.

A: Oh, so the places that you like are the sea and scenery along the mountains, and waterfalls too? [Audio Cuts Out Here] Well, what traditional games do you like to play during the new year every so often?

B: At New Year, I like to sing Bos Chhoung.

A: Oh! Ah, that is the game "Bos Chhoung," they call that popular game "Bos Chhoung." Yeah, that is really good. And are there any other games that you like?

B: Bos Angkunn, but Bos Angkunn is not as fun, they hit our knees and it hurts. And I like to dance.

A: Yes, you like to dance, Mom, you are so flexible. And you like singing, so I'm interested in what kind of songs you like. Do you like romance songs, or dance songs, or popular songs?

B: Speaking of romance songs, I like them. I also like dance songs if we take them to exercise.

A: So you like taking dance songs to exercise. So Mom, please tell me about the generation

you lived in during the Pol Pot era. What difficulties did you face at that time? At that time, what was your life like?

B: Yes, at that time, during the Pol Pot era, I was in the children's unit. I'm talking about before, when they used us to work for them to carry cow dung. [After we] carried the cow dung, they let us go to eat rice porridge, thin porridge. One bowl only contained two or three grains of rice, and that rice was undercooked, it hadn't expanded at all. Yes, if we collected the rice in one bowl it was maybe one spoonful, all the rice in a small bowl like that one. And in a circle, there were 10 people, and they put salt in the middle. And later, the—they called them the child of the establishment—they saw me and they pitied me, and didn't want me to eat that rice porridge. They led me to their house—they led me to their house and served rice for me to eat. Then their mother came while they served rice—their mother came and asked, "Why are you giving them food to eat? Be careful, they'll find out, they'll take you to be killed!" I left immediately. I walked away, but their leader already knew—their leader knew, so they took me to be beaten.

C: And how did they hit you?

B: They hit me hard, they slammed down on my head.

A: They were very cruel, and at that time, eating was strict. According to what I've heard, I truly pity you, that era was really hard. Thinking about when you were in that era, I think that if I was in that situation, I would feel even worse than you and I think I would cry every day.

B: And at that time, we didn't have anything to eat. After eating the rice porridge, there wouldn't be any more food to eat, and I also didn't have any rice in my house. I would go to gather rice, and after I went to gather the rice together, they would harvest in the front and we would pick up the [extra rice] behind them. Once, the crew leader saw that we were gathering rice, me, and four or five people. The crew leader saw it and called to us—called and asked, "Why are you walking and gathering rice?" I told them that it was because there was no rice to eat in my house, which is why I was gathering rice. They said that from then on, even if we saw any rice, we weren't allowed to gather it, that's what they said. Then they walked and hit us. They walked and hit us and grabbed two people sitting together. Grabbed their heads and hit them together hard, like this [demonstrates]. It bruised them.

A: So, now in the Pol Pot era, Mom, did you ever meet any of your siblings?

B: No, I never met any of them.

C: So you were separated?

B: Yes, we were all separated.

A: And after the Pol Pot regime, what did you do to make a living?

C: After that era already ended?

B: After the Pol Pot era ended, I came back with my stepmother. We lived in our house at the pagoda. I was accustomed to living in the pagoda and served the monks until I was a little older and the monks let me learn at school. However, when I went to school, I had nothing to wear. My grandmother and grandfather did not give me money to buy clothes to

wear, even though my mother had money and she took me to the market and bartered with the sellers. If it was a little expensive, she wouldn't take it. I saw her haggle with them, and my mother wouldn't commit to buying the fabric to make a skirt for me. I wanted to walk away because my mother bartered with them and didn't buy the fabric. She didn't want to buy anything for me to wear.

A: Hmm. So, what is the thing that you remember the most from your life?

C: What do you remember most in your life?

B: Honestly, the things I remember the most are the hardships. When I was separated from my parents I sat down and cried. I remember that when my parents were there all together, I learned a lot, yes.

A: Yes, and after you were married, how many sons and daughters did you have?

B: I have had four children since I got married.

A: Yes, what are their names?

B: The first is named Mao Ratana, the second is named Mao Ratha, the third is named Mao Rosa, and the fourth is named Mao Ranya.

A: So, you have adopted children?

B: I don't have adopted children.

A: And Dad, what is his name?

B: His name is Mao Sokha.

A: What is Dad's character like?

B: He has a gentle character, he loves his wife and children, he is a person who is firm in his stance, and he loves his wife and children.

A: I also see that. He really loves you and loves us very much.

And now what do you do for a living?

B: I used to work in security, but now I have diabetes. I am very weak, now I cannot do anything. I am unemployed, I am still taking care of my disease. In one month, it is 20 dollars.

A: And how did you raise children and educate your children?

B: I raised my children to eat like normal and to have enough, I cared for them so that my children had good health. Only, with both husband and wife, we usually still didn't have enough, but my mother helps and gives money to my children so they can study because my husband is sick too. His finger joints hurt, his knees hurt, and his stomach aches.

A: And did you send your children to school?

B: I let them go to school.

A: Why did you let your children go to school?

B: Because I want them to be educated.



A: What does the value of education mean to you? I mean to say, the value of sending me to go to school. What meaning does it have for you, that you sent us to school?

B: When you ask me that, I do not know how to answer. If my children can go to school, then they will be educated. [I do it] so that they can have knowledge for the future, so that they will study hard. If my children have knowledge, then they can find a good job. If they have a job to work, they will be comfortable and can make a living by themselves. Yes, when their mother gets old, she will also have hope for her children—I can say that.

A: Yes, and what do you need to do so that your family can have happiness? Can you share a little?

B: My family has had happiness when they live with each other. There is only love here and knowing how to guide and be patient and have mercy.

A: I see that in our family, it really is like that. I see that you know how to be merciful, and you honestly love her children. And Dad, he loves his family, and he has great love for you and the children.

C: So, your husband, is he dead or still alive?

B: He died.

C: What year did he die?

B: He died around 5 years ago.

C: 2000—what?

B: He died in 2012 or 2013, around those years.

A: So Mom, what do you do so that your family is happy? And when your family has a problem, what methods do you use to resolve it?

B: The only method to resolve it is by discussing it, to discuss without fighting so that we can resolve it. If we have already counseled—talking can be done with or without anger. When we are angry, we argue loudly. So if we just counsel with each other, we can have happiness.

A: So in the past, we really did that, because you always had me talk and we resolved it. And what does family mean to you?

C: Do you love your family?

A: Like when you started your marriage and a husband, and then had children. So, how did you feel when you had a husband and had children? What does it mean to you?

B: When I had a husband and children, we had a big family. We had fun in our family, we knew how to discipline each other well, and were happy in our family.

A: So do you have some good experiences in your life to pass down and share with me and also with the next generation?

B: I have an experience about being alone. When we are alone, we do everything faster. For example, we are in the house, so we take care of the dishes, the pots, clean the house, do the laundry, look after the bedroom, fold the blankets and the bedcurtains [a Khmer term

sometimes used to refer to mosquito nets].

A: Last question, do you have any advice you want to give your grandchildren? What are some last things you want to teach your grandchildren?

B: I want to tell my grandchildren in the next generation, please know how to listen to and obey your parents when they advise you. Know how to listen to and obey your parents, strive to study hard, focus, and strive to do your other work in and out of the house quickly as well.

A: Yes, and I would like to thank you for the interview today. Everything that you have shared today, your grandchildren will continue to know and learn about your history, and we will put it on the website above. Thank you.

*Partially translated by Braeden Kilburn in November 2020. Retranslated by Hannah Breinholt and Samuel Peterson in March 2023. Edited by Thomas Barrett.*