

# Interview of Kean Hun

**A: Interviewer: Heng Sovannorin**

**B: Interviewee: Kean Hun**

## Summary of the Interview

*Kean Hun is currently 60 years old, and was born in the year of the Ox, the month of Pausha, on a Thursday. Her hometown is in Phnom Krom village, Siem Reap province, and is the second of five children. During the Pol Pot era, she was relocated to Battambang province with her mother and her youngest sister, where she risked her life to keep her sister and mother together. In this interview, Kean Hun tells a vivid story of how her mother and father were both beaten and taken to be killed but were saved at the last minute when the Vietnamese army invaded the area.*

A: First of all, I'd like to thank you for allowing me to interview you about your history. This interview is prepared through a university called Brigham Young University in America. The aim of this university is to interview the Cambodian people about their history, to preserve the history of the Khmer people so the next generation can know and learn from it. So, when I am done interviewing you, I will put your interview on the university's website, [www.cambodianoralhistory.byu.edu](http://www.cambodianoralhistory.byu.edu). Do you give me permission to put your interview on the school's website?

B: Yes, I do.

A: The date of this interview is December 19, 2020, and it is being conducted in Chong Khneas village, Chong Khneas commune, Siem Reap City, Siem Reap province. I am the interviewer, and my name is Heng Sovannorin. I'd like to ask, what is your full name?

B: Kean Hun.

A: Kean Hun?

B: Yes, Kean Hun.

A: Do you have any nicknames?

B: I don't.

A: How old are you?

B: I am 60.

A: Do you remember your birthdate?

B: I only remember the Khmer date. I was born in the year of the Ox, the month of Pausha, on a Thursday.

A: You don't remember the French [Western] calendar date?

B: No.

A: I see. So where is your hometown?

B: My hometown is here in Phnom Krom.

A: Have you ever moved?

B: I did, during the Khmer Rouge when I was sent away. When Vietnam warred with us, I came back.

A: How many siblings do you have?

B: I have 5 siblings [including myself].

A: How many girls and boys [are in your family]?

B: 1 boy and 4 girls.

A: And which child are you?

B: I am the second child.

A: Can you tell me the names of your siblings starting from the oldest to the youngest?

B: Yes, my oldest sister is Kean Yan, then second is me—Kean Hun, the third is Kean Huor, they just walked by here; the fourth is a boy, Kean Kang; and the fifth is a girl, Kean Pov—she was just sitting at my house. She's the youngest of five.

A: So, do you remember any memories or stories that you had with your siblings?

B: My siblings?

A: Yes, what sort of things did you do with your siblings when you were young?

B: When I was young, at a young age, I was small before the Khmer Rouge, during the Sangkum era. Then when it was '74 and '75, the Khmer Rouge began. They split me and my siblings apart, they didn't allow us to be together. They took those of us that were 10 years old or older, and they split us up and didn't let us be together with our parents. They took us away and put some of us in the children's hospital, and some of us in the mobile units, especially those that were a little older. [During the Khmer Rouge, they divided people into "mobile units," or groups of field hands based on age and gender.] Yeah, they put us in the mobile unit, and we couldn't look after our siblings. To sum it all up, when we were freed by the Vietnamese, all my siblings were all grown up and we all met up with our parents again. Some of them had husbands and wives, you know? We were separated from each other.

A: So how old were you during the Khmer Rouge?

B: During the Khmer Rouge, I was 18 years old.

A: So that means you had to join the young women's unit?

B: I never went to the young woman's unit; I was put in the mobile unit. The mobile unit was miserable. If I were to talk about all the stories from the Pol Pot era, two days and nights wouldn't be enough to say it all.

A: Yes, then tell me about it for a couple of hours.

B: It was indescribably miserable! My parents, my father was taken to a village called Pheak near Prek Toal. I was with my mother and my youngest sibling, they put us in O Ta Ki.

A: In Battambang?

B: Yes, Battambang, just beyond Battambang actually. At that time [we ate] rice porridge with water lily. My whole body was swollen. My youngest sibling was very young, only 6 or 7 at that time, and we had nothing to eat. She was so skinny, just skin and bones. I carried her on one side and on the other side I carried rice porridge in my hand. I would fall and hurt my hip a lot, [and nowadays I have difficulties walking]. Once, I fell and dropped my sibling and the rice porridge and was unconscious for around two hours. I woke up because I was sprawled out and my swollen body was leaking fluids. It was so miserable! And my older sister, they sent her to a place called Tuol Char with my younger brother.

A: Right.

B: Yes, we were separated from each other. I was with my mother, she was old, and my younger sister who was very young—the one that I would carry and dropped [when I] fell over. We had no food also. In the morning they had us harvest rice and carry the stalks in our arms. They had us be maids. I had to scrape poop out of the toilets; it was miserable during the Khmer Rouge! In the morning, we had a break from work. The bindweed would grow on the sides of the ditches. We would pick the sprouts out and only get the leaves and the buds of it. After you grabbed it, some of the buds would be white, some would be black. I would watch and when it was silent, I would dig a deep hole and place a small cooking pot inside with some flammable materials. I was so smart; I'll brag about myself for a moment. I knew how to cook well. I would dig a hole and put a cooking pot and some flammable materials inside. Then I would take the dirt and cover up the pot. When it was covered, I would sit and cook it. I would make a fire on top of the [covered hole] and watch it for a while. Everyone would be exhausted and despondent [after work], and I would watch until they were all gone, and things were quiet. After that, I would extinguish the fire and dig up the dirt, and the food would be cooked.

A: Oh! [Laughs]

B: It was the same with rice. When I would steal the leftovers from the head of the rice—I'll tell you everything! I would steal the leftovers from the head of the rice and climb a tamarind tree. I would climb up the tamarind tree, it was a large tree, some of the branches had been broken off on both sides. Because of that, there was a large fissure in the middle, just like for us now. It would shake, and I would cut into it with a knife, until it was deep. I would put something in it to line the hole and make a makeshift mortar in the tree so I could crush rice up there so they couldn't hear. Yes, the tamarind tree was very tall, and they were far away, so I could crush the rice and they wouldn't hear.

A: Yes.

B: Yeah, and when I was through crushing the rice, I would see the small amount of rice I had. And after I crushed it all, I didn't dare to winnow the rice or blow the husks off from there, I just took what I had. I would get down and after that—and there were large cobras there, I didn't dare to move at all when I was out there, even though they were an obstacle. Just one cobra came out and it would catch my attention and block the way, so I would turn around and come back. Yes, there were cobras in that area, I would find a place that was open, and only then would I sit down and winnow the rice.

A: Mmm.

B: I would bring [my rice] and give it to my younger sister to eat, with my aging mother. I was content to walk around and whatnot. I also ate leaves and whatnot, as long as it was edible, I ate it. I did literally whatever I could to fill my belly; after eating two or three mouthfuls and drinking a bit of water, my belly would be full. For food there was rice porridge, they would bring a large pot and that's all we got. They would put pieces of water lily and water in it so that the number of grains of rice [in the porridge] would amount to only one scoop of rice, that's it. If they saw a house with smoke coming from it, then the people in that house would be killed; they just had to see the smoke. They wouldn't let us cook anything.

A: Right.

B: Yes, and any fish that they found, they would make it into a soup and put in the kitchen, to put it into the rice porridge [later]. They would make porridge for us and put vegetables like bindweed or water lilies in it. They would cut off the head of the fish and throw it in the mud and mix it all together. My younger sibling and mother would see them throw away the head which was still fresh, and we would be so hungry that we would go and get the fresh fish head. But when they saw us do that, they stopped giving us rice porridge, they wouldn't give us any food for a whole day. And they had us stand in the sun [to punish us] for the day. The president of the cooperative there was named Theang, and her husband's name was Bik Srun. Oh, it was miserable! And my younger sister—the third sister— her leg was very swollen. I lied to them about it because I pitied my younger sister so much. I lied to them and asked the president of the cooperative to bring my sister to live with me. I lied to them about my sister and said, "Friend, please let my sister come live with my old mother. And please let her come with me, I am working at the mobile unit, and my younger sister has epilepsy." I lied, that's what I told them. But they believed it because they saw her leg and they saw that she had been without food and that she didn't even have the strength to walk. She would try to walk and trip over herself and whatnot. All her toenails were split open and swollen up.

A: Mmm.

B: Yes. And at that point, I had a lot of pity on my younger sister. At the mobile unit, they used us. They would only give us a small scoop of rice, they would use us every night to gather leftover rice, they would use us according to whatever they wanted us to do. And if we didn't go do it, then they killed us. And for those that were there at the mobile unit, some of them would cover their heads with a blanket and go to sleep and they would die for no reason. They didn't have any food; they all didn't have anything or enough to eat. They were so tired; they couldn't do anything, and they would develop a fever.

A: Right.

B: Yes, so they would cover their heads with their blankets and go to sleep and die. My younger sibling was also scared of ghosts, she would cry and cry. I didn't know what to do. I tried every trick I could. I told my mother, "Mother, mother, if the president of the cooperative asks you—don't tell them the truth. If they ask if my younger sister has epilepsy, then go along with what I said and tell them that she had epilepsy." I whispered and told my mom that. My mother was so afraid of them, she would tremble and shake. After I told her that, she told me, "You need to be careful about lying to them, they might

look into it, and take you away and kill you." Back then, I was only 18 years old, but I was really small. Yes, I had a really tiny figure, nobody would believe that I was 18 or 19 years old. They didn't believe me.

A: Mmm.

B: They had taken me and put us in the mobile unit—they put my younger sister in the mobile unit, and they put me in the children's unit and had me move cow excrement. That's how it was! Yeah, I was so small. I had talked to my mother, that why she told me to be careful lying to them, just in case they investigated it, because we were under the watch of the leaders of the cooperative. My mother cried, I told her not to cry, and to just not tell them. We took the risk; my mother pitied my younger sister because she was scared of ghosts and was always hungry. Not only that, but she was also crippled. And my sister—the third sister, she was so scared of the [Khmer Rouge leaders], honestly, she was so scared of them. I also pitied her, which is why I went and made the request. I went to ask the president of the cooperative and all the other leaders of the cooperative, saying, "Oh please friend, please let my younger sister come with me so that I can look after her, she has epilepsy." At that point, she was lucky that she survived, she would have seizures on the ground and would only break her fingernails and toenails, you know?

A: Right.

B: Yes, if she would have had a seizure while she was in the water, she would have died. So, I requested that she come and live with our mother who was getting old. When I asked, I pled and cried and begged and the president of the cooperative and everyone else had pity on me. They put in a request to have my younger sister—the third sister—come live with my mother. We were there for about a month, and then they sent all my siblings—they brought them from the fields in Boeung Chhouk and put them in the mill where the mobile unit was, the mill at Ou Ta Ki—they called it the Ou Ta Ki, Ou Ta Kai mill.

A: Yes!

B: I didn't know what to think or do. In the future, my mother would be—my mother was very old, and there were only two of us, my youngest sister and I, my youngest sister was so small. My mother knew she was going to die, she was close to death. I consulted with my sister, just the two of us. One of our brothers was with our older sister, so I discussed with her, just the two of us, and I asked her what she thought about us running away. That's what I suggested, and she responded, "Oh sister, I am so scared." I responded, "Sister, you don't need to be afraid. I'll be right here with you." Oh, I'll tell you about my history, though I want to cry. I had one of my mother's dresses, my mother gave me one of her dresses. Anyways, I ran away with my sibling—I didn't just run away by myself. I'll tell you everything. We stole some rice in a small food container about this big. We couldn't fit anything inside the container, so we filled it to the brim with rice. We watched until they were asleep and then we stole some rice grain, about 10 cans of uncooked rice, we took it so we could bring it to our mother. The cooked rice I had in the container and the 10 cans of uncooked rice I brought for my mother wasn't all that much—yes, it was about 10 cans. Yeah, I packed it in a shirt—back then, the shirts were black, they used to dye them black. I packed it in the shirt and tied it to my waistline. Yeah, and for the rice, I tied a cloth to the rice container so I could sling it over my shoulder. And with the other hand, I walked and

led my younger sibling. My younger sister—she really was my younger sister, but she was bigger than me. I led her with one hand, and I walked, thinking “By the goodness of mother and father, please help us!” We ran away, we were absolutely silent and went to Kamping Puoy Dam—which is the dam that is connected to Ou Ta Ki, the dam over there. Yes, [we went to] the dam, we were completely silent. The forest canopy hung down around on all sides. We left it all behind, I didn’t miss anything—I didn’t miss anything. We were completely silent, it was midnight when we ran away—when I took my younger sibling and ran away. [I thought], “By the goodness of mother and father, please help us.” A pack of wild dogs started howling—a whole pack of them. I got down—I got down, but my younger sibling and I didn’t have anything to cover our heads with, just our mother’s dress. I put my younger sister down on her chest, and we covered our heads with our mother’s dress, and I [kept thinking] over and over, “By the goodness of mother and father, please help us!” We waited until they were gone, when their howling stopped, and then I took my younger sister, and we kept running. We ran until we got back to our mother who was at Boeung Chhouk by the time it was light again.

A: Oh!

B: And that next day, that evening the president of the cooperative followed us, they were threatening that they would shoot and kill us. They brought a rope; they came to tie me up and publicly humiliate me [the way they would make a monkey do tricks]. I told them, “Friend, if I don’t argue and if you take me—if you want to send me away, I’ll go. But friend, please pity me and bring my mother along too and I’ll go. And if not, please friend, kill me and my mother and us children—all of us. If you make me leave my mother I won’t go, my mother is so old. What’s more, my sister has epilepsy, and she is small. All she can do is cry and hold on to people’s legs.” But then, they had pity on me, so they let me mother come with me too. And when the Vietnamese invaded here, they were taking my mother away to be killed. They had tied her up with both her hands behind her back. They called her over and put her on a cart. They drove the cart away and put their eyes to the road ahead. I saw those who were in the mobile unit, the mobile unit working in the pine tree mill there. Yes, some of them were [running around] carrying woven baskets on their heads, some were carrying shallow baskets on their heads, some of them had ropes, and some were grabbing whatever they could. I left and stood right in the middle of the road they were travelling—the road with the cart. As they passed by, I asked them, “Friend, friend! Where are you going?” They were driving the cart that was taking my mother away! It was one of the cow carts.

A: Right.

B: The cows kept plodding along, they were about as close as from here to the road, they were coming from the huts we were staying at. Yes, so I asked them that, I asked them “Friend, friend! Where are you going? Everyone is running around with baskets!” That’s what I asked them. Yes, and at that point they told me “Oh friend, don’t be afraid anymore! Chantaraingsey’s army has come to liberate us! Turn your head and look at all tanks rolling in!” I cried out, I yelled for my cousins and my neighbors and everyone around.

A: Yes.

B: I said, “Everyone! Chantaraingsey’s army has come to liberate us!” They had us go get

rice or whatever we could from the mill to eat. The crowd were loudly rushing around in a panic. My older [cousin] frantically told me to find something to go kill that man Bik Srun from the cooperative, the one that had beaten and taken my mother to be killed. At that point, he had run away and was nowhere to be found but my mother was still tied up, she had endured it all! I ran over to my mother and untied her. I felt bad because they had let us take rice and whatever we could, you know? And they had yoked some cows to a cart so that we could climb up on top and they would give us a ride—but no, how could we be so dumb! The cows and the cart, where did they go? At that point, I had hurried over to untie my mother and once I had the ropes off her, I threw my arms around her. After that, I led her back to go get some rice for us to eat, but when we got there, we found that the cows had disappeared with the cart. But for all the men among my neighbors and siblings and cousins that they had brought together, they hadn't said that they wanted to take a cart to carry the rice and everything else, you see! No, they were content to carry it by themselves, every person would sling one package over their shoulder. We all ran after my older sister who was at the rice fields in Thuol Char, my older sister. And for us, we ran from Ou Ta Ki, from the rice fields in Boeung Chhouk to the rice fields in Thuol Char—those aren't close to each other at all! From here, we probably went to the Kravath bridge, that was closer to it all.

A: Yes.

B: I ran! Oh, back then I ran, and I didn't even feel tired. I felt so overjoyed! Oh, my history was so miserable. I could talk about it for two more hours into the nighttime and I couldn't share it all. I hoped that my father could get up and come, when the Vietnamese came in to Prek Toal, once they had completed [the invasion]. My father's ribs had swollen up on one side too, when he was here, they had beaten him. But his life wasn't over yet. They had tied up my father and beaten him until his one side had swollen up and they said that he was dead. But he wasn't dead, and when the Vietnamese came in, they [the Khmer Rouge] had nothing to do but run away and leave us behind, and we hadn't died yet.

A: Yes!

B: Thus, both my father and my mother survived, and they lived to celebrate it in this very generation. It was miserable, we suffered so much; nothing could compare. That's why nowadays I tell my children and grandchildren that this is a happy and bountiful era. I tell them that if they were born in my generation, they would be happy with this era. There is much peace and prosperity, and I tell them not to go down the wrong path at all, because my history has been full of tragedy already, I'm fed up with it. Nowadays, I don't know what to say. I remember seeing that some used to say—oh, dear Lord, I'll tell you—they used to say that because Hun Sen joined forces with the Vietnamese, they [the Vietnamese] were everywhere. I remember that I just believed what everyone else said. But nowadays that's not how it is. I remember that according to those crazy people, we were in a bad state because of Hun Sen; there were Vietnamese everywhere. But if there wasn't Vietnamese intervention, then we wouldn't have lived to this day. If we didn't have Hun Sen, I'm not sure if we would have all died or not, you know? That's why I always remember to have gratitude for Hun Sen. He helped a lot. If we didn't have him, I don't know what it would be like. It wouldn't be like today, that's for sure. Some people are angry with Hun Sen for making laws to allow the Vietnamese to enter Cambodia; don't be mad at him. We need to

be grateful for him, because without him, we wouldn't be here today. That's what I want to say. That's all I have to say for now.

A: I see. So, what's your mother's name?

B: My mother's name is Sras Hang.

A: Sras An?

B: Sras Hang.

A: Sras Han.

B: Hang, Hang, like a shop they sell things at.

A: Oh, yes. So where is her hometown?

B: My mother's hometown is here, but my father's is in Prek Toal.

A: What's your father's name?

B: My father's name is Kaoy Kean.

A: So, what kind of people were they? Were they mean or kind?

B: My father was kind, he was a monk for 8 years, my father was kind. My mother was a little bit mean, but only to her children and grandchildren. She was only mean to her own children and grandchildren, but she was never unkind to other relatives. She never argued with them.

A: So, what did they do for a living?

B: My mother and father—from the beginning my father was a fisherman, he fished by casting nets and using fish traps. My mother didn't do any work, she was at home, she never did anything.

A: So, have your parents ever told you about their history, how they fell in love? Or about when they were young?

B: Nope, they never told me anything. But as husband and wife, ever since I was old enough to notice, I never saw my parents fight, to be honest. I never saw them fight with each other, not even our relatives and neighbors and the bigger kids [saw them fight]. But I was smart; I remember that if I served rice to my parents—"Mom and Dad, come eat!" they sent each other. My mother would say "Go call your father first!" and I would call to my father, "Dad, come eat!" and my father would say, "Oh, call your mother first!" There would be a box [of food] per person; one was over on that side and one was over on this side. That's how I knew that my parents had been in a fight, if they hadn't been in a fight, then it wasn't that way. When it was time to eat, I would serve rice and my mother would say, "Hey, our child is serving up the rice" and sometimes my father would say, "Come here, it's time to eat, our child is serving up the rice." If they had been arguing, they would have me call the other parent—my mother would tell me to call my father and when I called my father, he would tell me to call my mother. That's how I know they were having a disagreement. And for us children, we were ready for anything, we put up a wall, and we remained quiet and followed [our parents]. But they would never argue in a way that we could overhear it. If they argued, then they would seem unhappy and be apart from each other.



A: Do you remember your grandparents' names? Your grandparents on your mother's side, what are their names?

B: I only remember my grandmother's name, but I don't remember her family name. I don't know. Her name was Loem.

A: Loem was your grandmother on your mother's side?

B: Yes.

A: Do you remember your grandfather?

B: But for my grandfather, his name was Sras, my grandfather. That's why my mother took her grandfather's name, Sras Hang. On my father's side, my grandmother's name was Heng.

A: What about your grandfather?

B: My grandfather's name was Kaoy.

A: Kaoy and Heng?

B: Yes.

A: Were all 4 of them alive when you were born?

B: No. My grandmother was dead, my older sister was the only one born while she was alive.

A: Oh, so they had passed away already. So, you've never seen your grandparents?

B: Nope, I've never seen them. Only in pictures.

A: I see. So, they probably all had the same hometown, right?

B: Yes, my grandma and grandpa on my mother's side. There are a lot of people on my mother's side. On my father's side, they are from Prek Toal. When he got married to my mom, he came here. But he and all his relatives and grandparents are all from over there.

A: So, do you have any siblings or relatives who live abroad?

B: Nope.

A: You don't?

B: No.

A: I see.

B: Just one of my cousins; he was lost during the Khmer Rouge. They sent him to live with us [for a bit], but when the Vietnamese came in and broke up the regime, we never saw him. I don't know if he is alive or dead. If he's alive, I don't know where he went, I'm not sure. He has been gone ever since. His name was probably Khun, Sokhun. He has been lost until the present day; his father was named Mean.

A: So, what is your husband's name?

B: His name is Run.

A: What about his family name?

B: Yun Sarun.

A: So how many years have you been married to him?

B: For a long time. It's been 10, 20, maybe 30 years.

A: How old is your oldest child?

B: What?

A: Your oldest child?

B: In their 30s.

A: So, you've been married for about 30 years.

B: Yes.

A: So, was your marriage arranged, or did you get married according to your own heart?

B: My parents arranged it.

A: So, is your husband from here?

B: No, he's from Battambang, Moung.

A: He's from Moung?

B: Yes.

A: So how did you meet him?

B: He came as a soldier. He came and worked as a soldier, and we saw each other. [He] asked my mother and father [for my hand in marriage]. My parents allowed it, and they arranged it.

A: So, he was from Battambang, and he came here as a soldier?

B: Yes.

A: So, what memories do you have with him before you were married? How did you get to know each other? Or how did he interact with you?

B: We didn't interact, he met me and then he asked my mother, we never really got to know each other. We didn't date or court or anything like that.

A: You never hung out or spent time with each other?

B: How could we have done that? At that time, it was still hectic. We were still in the socialist era; Pol Pot was still at large and there were Vietnamese soldiers and Cambodian soldiers [everywhere]. We were still in the midst of war. We didn't dare do anything; my parents didn't allow me to go anywhere, we weren't brave enough to travel anywhere.

A: I see. So, do you remember how much you received as a dowry?

B: No, I don't remember.

A: You don't remember?

B: I don't remember, and my parents never told me; I never asked them about any of it.

A: So why did you choose to get married to him?

B: He wanted me as his wife, and both my parents and his parents allowed it, and he was a good person, so I went along with my parents.

A: Did you go to school as a kid?

B: No, I didn't go to school. If we went and got an education, then during the Khmer Rouge we would be killed. When we got older, we didn't know where to go to school.

A: So, do you know how to read and write?

B: No, I don't know how.

A: So, do you have any close friends that you grew up with, that you still know?

B: I did, but they've all died. There was one close by, but they died a few months ago.

A: Oh. What was their name?

B: Their name was Nheb, Lem Nheb.

A: That's your friend?

B: Yes.

A: Do you have any memories with that friend?

B: I do, from the Khmer Rouge. We were starving, we didn't have anything to eat. They sent us two away, when the Vietnamese came. We were sent to fish and do other things, just us two. We were in houses close to each other, and when they called us to do something, they would send us two. I've never had anyone else [to call my friend]. I called her a very close friend; we were very friendly with each other, and so were our mothers. But we wouldn't ever hang out and travel far like youth do nowadays. But we were very close; we would share food and eat together, that's it.

A: So, during the Khmer Rouge, what sort of work did they have you do?

B: Oh! It wasn't just work—they had us clean out outhouses and toilets. They had us cut down trees and carry the branches in front of us and take them to be chopped up into bits. Then we would take the poop from the outhouses and mix it together, and then go and scatter it over the rice fields so it would grow. They had us do that in any field that they had planted the rice in. And when the sun came up, they would have us pickup leftover rice stalks in whatever rice fields had been harvested. They used us for everything. They had us carry dirt, we would go and carry dirt. We did whatever they needed us to do. We followed whatever they said. We had no rights. If we complained even a bit, we would be killed. You've never suffered like that; if you were born at that time then you'd understand.

A: So, you harvested fields, fished, and other things at the time?

B: We harvested so much! Like I said, they had us do whatever they wanted. And we knew that if we didn't do it, they would come and kill us. For instance, imagine that they were using you nowadays—if you were to scoop out a toilet, now it would take three or four people or so. I don't normally think anything is disgusting or smelly anymore. We would go down and take [the waste] out, we would scrape it out and put it in a basket and mix it with

wood that we had chopped up. We didn't dare argue or fight. If we fought, we would be killed. I didn't dare to say that I wouldn't go or that it was smelly, because they would have killed me; they wouldn't have allowed me to live. It was ridiculous. If you were born during that time, you wouldn't be able to describe it. That's why I am constantly telling my grandchildren, "You have so much peace and happiness every day; so much happiness, it was miserable during my generation." Also, [back then] there was someone who passed away named Soeu, she was very old back then. She didn't have anything to eat, so she became very feeble and was in pain. She would eat sand because she said that if you ate sand and then rinsed your mouth out with water then at least your belly would be full—at least then you wouldn't be hungry. Oh, we suffered so much. We would eat whatever we saw. All the people who have survived until the present day, their lives are so valuable!

A: Yes!

B: Yeah, all the remaining people died already. Back then, they sent us to Preaek Norint, I [remember] crying from 11pm to midnight. And we closed the door, so it would be silent. Nobody ever dared to speak, [the Khmer Rouge] spies would hide under our house and listen to us. They were scared that we were saying things or that we were cooking rice or whatever. But in the evenings, we would open the door quietly and tear apart parts of the leaves of our hut, which was close to the mouth of the road. We would tear holes in the walls and look out, we would tear it apart and stick out heads out and watch what was going on. And at 11 or 12 at night, or at 1 in the morning—just remember this—they would tie people up by their hands, one after the other tied together with rope. One rope would have about 14 or 15 people attached to it. Yes, and they would beat them and take them to be killed, they would do it behind the hill at Preaek Norint. Go and see for yourself, there are piles of bones of people they've killed. In a night, they would kill 14 or 15 people. In the morning, they would pile their [bodies] up, look for firewood or whatever, and set fire to it. As it burned, they would toss more bodies up on top and burn those too until the bones turned bright white. That's why I keep saying that it was miserable.

A: I see. So ever since you were a kid until now, what work have you done to earn a living and support your family?

B: I worked hard doing anything I could. Sometimes I fished, picked vegetables, and sold them or scavenged for recyclable trash. My husband was crippled by the Vietnamese.

A: Why was he crippled?

B: He stepped on a mine when there was still fighting during the era of the People's Republic of Kampuchea. At that time, he came to the village and stepped on a mine.

A: So, from the time you were young until now, how has your life changed?

B: It has changed, but also hasn't. It's just been like this. I've never had much. I couldn't get poorer than this, and I've never been well off.

A: So, when you were younger, did you ever have any dreams of being something when you grew up?

B: I did, but it wasn't possible for me. I didn't know the alphabet. If I had a foundation or anything, then I could have gone and had a career. I could have sold things. But I don't

know the alphabet or numbers or anything. It's hard for me to make a living like that. All I had was fishing; people rented my fishing tools and things. Even when I'm old and out of strength, I pick vegetables and rely on the monks too.

A: So, let's talk about your favorite things. What food do you like to eat the most? Or what soup do you like eating and have ever since you were young?

B: When I was young, I loved Samlar machu the most, as well as sardines and braised fish, and Kha [braised pork and eggs], things like that. I especially liked sour soup.

A: I see. So, what kind of music do you like to listen to?

B: Usually, I just listen to whatever is on [or what others are playing]. The ones I like listening to are old songs.

A: Which artists?

B: Songs by [Sinn] Sisamouth, Keo Sarath, Noy Vanneth; old songs. I don't really like modern songs, I can't listen to them, they're all produced to make people dance in weird ways.

A: I see. So, can you play any instruments?

B: I can't, how could I if I don't know the alphabet?

A: So, when you were a child or a youth, did you ever go play games at the wat during Pchum Ben or Khmer New Year?

B: I only went and watched, I never played.

A: Why didn't you play?

B: If I don't know how to play, what's the point in playing?

A: So nowadays, how many kids and grandkids do you have?

B: I have 4 kids, but they are all married and have gone different places. One of my daughters, she sells good just nearby, that's one of them. One other daughter, I had her go stay with her aunt, because her aunt doesn't have any children, so she's with her aunt. If they were all here, there would be three daughters. [In reality,] one daughter is here and one son is here. And one other daughter, she got married to her husband, they went to Thnal Dach, she's the youngest.

A: So how many grandkids do you have?

B: I have so many! My oldest daughter has 4, another daughter has 6, another daughter has 6, and the daughter that is at Thnal Dach has 4. But for one of them, there are 3—from the first wife. After which the later daughter just found out she was pregnant. [Her verbiage is ambiguous if this last individual is a daughter, or a daughter-in-law.]

A: Yes, that is a lot.

B: It is a lot.

A: So, we are to the end; is there anything you would like to say to your kids, grandkids, and future generations, or do you have any words of advice to give to them? About how they

should live their lives and what kind of people they should be?

B: I want to tell my kids, grandkids, nephews, nieces, and all my young relatives in my last message that the era of today is one of peace and prosperity. Don't let it become like the past; we have so much happiness and peace. To my grandchildren, children and nephews and nieces—walk on good paths, not on wayward ones. Walk on paths that are in accordance with the law. Don't walk on wayward paths, because they are terrible, so terrible. I am scared they will suffer like I did during the Khmer Rouge, that it will be miserable for them like it was for me back then. They used us like cows, like buffalo. But nowadays, nobody can use us like that. We have freedom to walk if we want, to soar if we want, to eat if we want, and to purchase what we want—nobody can tell us not to. I want to tell my kids and grandkids to work hard and strive to earn a living. In my generation it didn't matter if we worked hard; we were still poor. Whatever we were able to receive, they took it all. They didn't even let us wear good skirts, they had us wear skirts that were [in bad condition]. So, I'd like to tell my kids and grandkids to work hard so you may have enough, so that you won't be like your mother who has been familiar with having nothing her whole life, whose life history has been bitter.

A: Yes. I would like to thank you for spending your time interviewing with me. I wish you good health, good luck, and happiness with your family.

B: Thank you kindly, thank you kindly.

*Interview translated by Ethan Arkell and Thomas Barrett.*