

Interview of Ton Chanly

A: Interviewer: Leng Theavy

B: Interviewee: Ton Chanly

Summary of the Interview

Ton Chanly, born in 1965 in Damnak Pring village, Kampong Cham province, is the oldest of two children. In this simple interview, she shares several life experiences and her personal family history, while highlighting the importance of family unity, pursuing education, and being virtuous.

A: I would like to thank you, Mom, for allowing me to interview you. My name is Leng Theavy, and I will be interviewing you today. I am interviewing on August 13, 2016. This interview was organized by a university in the United States called BYU. The university has a program to interview and record the biographies of the Cambodian people, so that in the future your children and other people can know about the story and history of their ancestors. Mom, will you allow me to post this interview on their website?

B: I agree to it being shared.

A: This website is called www.cambodianoralhistoryproject.byu.edu. I'd like to start the interview. Mom, could you tell me your full name again?

B: My name is Ton Chanly.

A: And do you have any other names you go by?

B: No, I don't.

A: When were you born?

B: April 6, 1965.

A: Where was your birthplace?

B: In Damnak Pring village, Mahaleap commune, Koh Sotin district, Kampong Cham province.

A: And what zodiac year were you born in?

B: I was born in the year of the snake.

A: How many brothers and sisters do you have?

B: There are only two of us, and both of us are girls.

A: Which child are you?

B: I'm the oldest child.

A: And are all your siblings still alive?

B: Yes, they are all still alive, both of us.

A: And where is she?

B: She's in her hometown in Damnak Pring village, Moha Leaph commune, Koh Sotin district, Kampong Cham province.

A: What is your father's name?

B: My father's name is Chheun Toan.

A: When was he born?

B: His exact birthday was never recorded; all we know was that it was in 1934.

A: What zodiac year was he born in?

B: He was born in the year of the mouse.

A: Is he dead or still alive?

B: He is still alive now.

A: And what memories do you have with him?

B: I remember that when I lived with him, I was happy, and that he loved all of his children.

A: What is your mom's name?

B: My mother's name was Khoem Lai.

A: When was she born?

B: She was born in 1930.

A: And what was her zodiac birth year?

B: My mother was born in the year of the monkey.

A: And where was she born?

B: Her birthplace was Damnak Pring village, Moha Leaph Commune, Koh Sotin district, Kampong Cham province.

A: Is she dead or still alive?

B: She died in 2014. She was 71.

A: What memories do you have of her?

B: When I lived with her, she loved her children very much, and educated them. She always taught and corrected her children to do good.

A: What is your grandfather's name?

B: My grandfather was named Mao Khoem.

A: When was he born?

B: I can't remember the date, but I remember that he was born in the year of the tiger.

A: And where was he born?

B: He was born in the same place—Damnak Pring village, Moha Leaph Commune, Koh Sotin district, Kampong Cham province.

A: Is he dead or still alive now?

B: He is dead.

A: And what year did he die?

B: I can't remember which year it was.

A: And what memories do you have of him?

B: I remember that when I lived with him he loved and educated his children. He always lead his children to be good, and to learn and know things.

A: What was your grandmother's name?

B: My grandmother was named Sear Non.

A: When was she born?

B: I can't remember.

A: Where was she born?

B: She was born in Kaoh Soutin village, Kaoh Soutin commune, Koh Sotin district, Kampong Cham province.

A: What was her zodiac birth year?

B: She was born in the year of the pig.

A: Is she dead or still alive?

B: Right now, she has already died.

A: What year did she die?

B: I can't remember. I've forgotten, it's been too long.

A: What do you remember of her?

B: I remember that she loved all her children and grandchildren, and that she corrected us and taught us to be good people in our societies.

A: And have any of your relatives ever gone to live in other countries?

B: No, none of them have ever lived in a foreign country. They've only ever been in Cambodia.

A: And how many grades did you go to in school mom?

B: I only learned until the second grade. I studied at the time of Pol Pot.

A: Do you remember what primary school you went to?

B: I went to Damnak Pring village primary school, in Moha Leaph Commune, Koh Sotin district, Kampong Cham province.

A: And Mom, when you were little, did you ever dream about what you wanted to become in the future?

B: I didn't dream much because when I studied in school, I wasn't able to learn very well.

A: Then, have you ever farmed or worked in the fields?

B: I have farmed a little, nothing too big, just enough to take care of my family and myself.

A: And are the rest of your family businesspeople?

B: They are just farmers and cloth weavers, there are no big business people.

A: And when were you married?

B: It was—March 16, 1987.

A: And where were you married?

B: We were married at the Damnak Pring village house.

A: And when you were married to dad, was it because you loved each other beforehand, or was it organized by your parents?

B: Our parents arranged it.

A: And where did you meet dad for the first time?

B: We met while I was weaving fabric under the house.

A: And do you remember what day that was?

B: No I don't remember.

A: And when you were married, was there a dowry given?

B: Yes there was a small dowry given. On my husband's side they gave something small. Our village and commune had heard about [the wedding] and came, and the elders on both sides of the family came. They filled 20 tables.

A: And how is your life different between then and now?

B: In the past I was with my parents, but now we have our own family and have separated from them. And so we have to work and make a living, so that our children can have a good future.

A: And what kind of food do you like mom?

B: I like simple food, Khmer food.

A: And do you know how to cook?

B: I know how to make simple Khmer food. I make soup for my children every day.

A: And who taught you how to cook?

B: I learned it from my mother. My mother taught me.

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

B: I like to do housework.

A: And where do you like to go for fun and to relax?

B: I never go anywhere, I just stay at home and take care of the children.

A: And what kind of music do you like to listen to?

B: I like to listen to calm and peaceful songs.

A: Mom, could you tell me about life during Pol Pot? What kinds of things happened?

B: During the time of Pol Pot, he made us work. We were sent far away from our parents, to live in a work group of children.

A: And during Pol Pot, what kind of things happened?

B: There were never any bad situations, it was just kind of normal.

A: And after Pol Pot ended, how many of your siblings were left?

B: The two of us were both left.

A: And which of your other relatives survived?

B: I had a lot of my relatives of my parents that survived.

A: And after Pol Pot ended, what kind of work did you do?

B: I stayed home and cooked the rice and food, and raised the children. I didn't take on any other work.

A: From the time you were young until now, what do you remember the most in your life?

B: What I remember the most was living with my family, with good parents, with good children. That's what I remember the most.

A: After you were married, how many children did you have?

B: I had five.

A: What are their names?

B: My oldest is my son named Leng Pheakdey, my second is a daughter named Leng Theary, the third is a daughter named Leng Theavy, the fourth is a son named Leng Dara, the fifth child is a son named Leng Por Chey. Two girls and three boys.

A: And do you have any adopted children?

B: No I don't. All of them have been my own children.

A: And what is dad, your husband's, name?

B: His name is Hun Leng.

A: And what kind of person is he?

B: He is very meek and gentle, he is a good and honest person. He is never mean or overbearing.

A: And right now what does he do for work?

B: He sells for a living; he sells soy sauce to earn money for his children to go to school.

A: What ways do you have to raise your children?

B: I just correct my children and teach them to avoid the things that are unacceptable in society. I try to help them avoid wrongdoings.

A: And did you make your children learn in school?

B: Yes, I made them go every day to learn and educate themselves for their future.

A: Why did you send your child to school?

B: I make them go to school because I wasn't very well educated, unlike they do nowadays. I want my children to have the knowledge to make their lives easier. I don't want their lives to be as difficult as mine has been; I want them to have their choice of careers.

A: What do you do to help your family have peace?

B: We have to know how to love and educate our children well, so that they can have peace and happiness.

A: When your family has problems, what methods do you have to solve them?

B: I have to help pacify everyone and help resolve the problems and help them love each other in our family.

A: What meaning does your family have to you?

B: It is enormously important to me. Nothing is more important in life.

A: And what good experiences would you like to share with those of the next generation?

B: My experience is that we must lead our children to do good and educate them well; don't let them walk down incorrect roads, but instead help them do good. They should listen to the advice of their parents and teachers.

A: And do you have any advice for those of the next generation?

B: I would advise them to please work hard and study and take your knowledge into the future so that you can provide and take care of yourself.

A: I'd like to go back a bit to talk about the time of Pol Pot. During that time what did you have to eat?

B: At that time we never had enough to eat. We didn't have enough of anything. We had a little bit of soup, it was a very small amount. It wasn't at all like now; these days I have plenty of food to eat.

A: And when Pol Pot eventually ended, how did you feel?

B: When the time of Pol Pot ended I felt so happy and glad, because I could eat enough again, and I could sleep easy. We had enough food, enough of everything again.

A: Mom could you describe more about living during the time of Pol Pot? What bitter and sad experiences did you have during that time?

B: A bitter experience was when they made me go far away from my family and my parents. The parents were kept by themselves, and the children kept by themselves. That was a bitter time. They didn't let us meet with our parents.

A: And how was your life during the time of Lon Nol?

B: During the time of Lon Nol, I was very young, so I don't remember it very well.

A: Could you tell me more about your children when they were young—what were they like?

B: When my kids were young, it was hard to teach them. They often left home to have fun, and I had to warn them not to go out too much. But my oldest never disobeyed me too much.

A: Can you tell me about Pheakdey, the oldest, when he was little?

B: When Pheakdey was little, he helped out to sell at the store, he always helped and followed us. He was hard working and diligent. He helped even when he was tired from walking and selling.

A: And what about your second child?

B: My second, she was hard working and diligent as well. She's worked to help us quite a bit, even when she was in school and still studying. She always wanted to help her parents.

A: What about the third and fourth children?

B: The fourth child also helped to work, but our life was a little easier than in the past. It was unlike his older siblings, when we were very poor. He helped out at home when he was home, and still studied hard at school.

A: What about the youngest?

B: My youngest is the most difficult of all of them. He doesn't know very much, doesn't know how to do very many things, and isn't very smart or intelligent. We always have to look over him, and he can't help with work. He only thinks about fun! When we take him to school I always sit and worry that they'll hit him or make fun of him.

A: Of the five of your children, which one listens to and obeys you the most?

B: They all listen to me, but the first, second, and third children, they listen to me the most. The fourth doesn't as much.

A: And which of the five is the most rebellious?

B: The fourth child is the most rebellious! [Laughs] I try to lead him, but he doesn't want to follow.

A: And how has your life been from when you were first married until now? Have you had any big problems, or anything that has been very difficult for you?

B: Since I've been married, I haven't had anything too difficult, but families always have troubles. They are sick and they get better, get sick and get better again. Dad gets sick a lot, but recently he's been a lot better and has had enough strength to go out and work again. When we had our first and second kids, he was constantly sick. Those have been the only problems we've really had.

A: Lastly, is there anything else that you'd like to say to the next generation?

B: I would just like to advise the next generation to study hard and learn, to build your future. Don't fool around or act spoiled, don't do things that aren't proper in society.

A: And what paths do you want your children to avoid?

B: I want my children to avoid the things that aren't good, that aren't acceptable in society. I want them to do good deeds instead.

A: I would like to thank you for our interview today. Everything that we've talked about today will be saved for your children and grandchildren, and those of the next generation, so that they can hear and know about your history. We will put this recording in the website we talked about before. Thank you.

Translated by Devon Crane and edited by Thomas Barrett.