

Interview of Kim Sopheap

A: Interviewer Nhem Sokunthea

B: Interviewee Kim Sopheap

C: Chhoeun Sovandara (Her Husband)

A: Sister, please tell us your full name, what is your name Sister?

B: Miss, my name is Kim Sopheap.

A: Do you have a name they call you outside of your home Sister?

B: I don't have one.

A: When you were young did you have a nickname given to you?

B: No.

A: No, you only have the one?

B: Pheap, that one always yes.

A: Your name is Sopheap?

B: Yes!

A: What is the date you were born sister?

B: The 15th of July in the year 1980

A: In what village were you born?

B: In the village Baray, Khum Baray, county Kompung Lao, Prey Veng province.

A: Yes, so what is your Khmer zodiac year also?

B: I am the year of the goat.

A: Goat? What animal Sister?

B: Hey—I am monkey, 1980 is the year of the monkey, yes, the monkey.

A: So, that one is correct?

B: Yes!

A: Yes, so your current residence, you are in what village and county?

B: My current residence is village Baray.

A: Are you there every day?

B: Yes!

A: That is your residence currently?

B: Yes—this is where I am originally from, my mother's county is Kampong Thom, Santuk district, Kampong Thom province.

A: Yes!

B: From then up to the present time, I am in Baray village, Kampong Leav district, Prey Veng province.

A: Yes, so you were born in Kampong Thom or Prey Veng?

B: When I was born, I was in Kampong Thom.

A: So put down in the history this difference.

B: Because I came from that long time ago, when I was little, I was only just born.

A: Oh!

B: That's right!

A: Born in Kampong Thom?

B: Yes!

A: That's right!

B: That's right!

A: So for you, how old are you now?

B: I am 37.

A: 37 If you were born in 1980, now it is 37, now it is 2017, so it is almost 37.

B: Nearly 37 and still missing months, so what?

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

B: My mother, Ou San, she was born on September 17, 1949.

A: She was born in Eke village, brother?

B: Village, which village—I don't remember, just know that Santuk district, Kampong Thom province.

A: Yes, that's okay.

B: Yes!

A: So, your mother, she was born in which Khmer year, the year of which animal?

B: I don't know because I never asked her.

A: From the time you were little until you were grown you never asked her?

B: Yes, I never asked "mom, what animal are you", she would just answer lies anyway.

A: Lie?

B: That's right, she wouldn't know what animal.

A: So, when she lied, what year did she say? Just in case she was telling the truth, you know?

B: When was she born—how did she say it, like the ancient way, you know? She said "the

tamarind sprouts young" [...]

A: Really? So, Ma'am, what kind of person was your mother?

B: My mother was very intelligent because she was very persistent. She has been separated from my dad since I was in the womb and she only had me.

A: I see.

B: Because she struggled to support me, and she worked as a soldier as well.

A: A woman working as a soldier?

B: Yes, she worked as a soldier. My mother was very sorrowful.

A: Right.

B: When I knew, sometimes I went with her and the soldiers would shoot and so I always ran quickly and hid in a tent, or ran and hid in their cave.

A: Really?

B: Yes. And, like, I made rice from a measure of raw rice to give to the soldiers. The soldiers, they went to fight each other—so they gave their measure of rice to me so that I could also give them a measure of rice.

A: Oh!

B: They went to Bor Pailin among other places.

A: In what era? And what year Ma'am?

B: I don't know, when they were close to breaking up and the soldiers would go last of all. She didn't take me to Bor Pailin, she feared being defeated.

A: I see.

B: So she took me and kept me at home and sent for my grandma.

A: I see.

B: And she went to Bor Pailin.

A: Right!

B: Right, I didn't know when it was, suddenly the time came she took me back, and that's how it was.

A: I see.

B: And we came to Prey Veng

A: I see.

B: Even to this day my mother is pitiable and she is almost 80 already. And she still works too. She still rides a bike around and works at the Provincial Development Department of Prey Veng.

A: Even now?

B: Even now. She has worked ever since she left from being a soldier till now. She came to Prey Veng Province and requested to work in the hospital, the place where they work on sanitation and health and such.

A: I see.

B: In time she stopped working at the hospital, the salary was too small. She requested to come work in the Department of Development instead, and working at the Department of Development the salary was also small. But she just knew how to work until this day. She still always serves. Now she is almost 80 and she even rides her bike to work.

A: Of course. Yes, so, Ma'am, for your father, what was his name?

B: My father's name is Kim Teang.

A: Kim Tiang. Do you remember his date of birth?

B: I don't remember because I have been separated from him ever since I was in my mom's womb. In all that time my mom has never told me either.

A: Right. so, like, has your mother ever told you about what kind of person your dad was?

B: My mom has told me that my dad was a very smart and intelligent person, but I also know that he currently lives in Kampong Thom province. But he has never come to visit me, ever. I wonder about him with a broken heart.

A: And you have never gone to find him yourself?

B: I have gone to find him before. I went and met my grandmother in, er—Kampong Chheu Teal. I have gone to his hometown also, but I have never seen my dad's face.

A: And you won't go to find him again?

B: I don't dare go to his house; I don't dare go to my dad's house. When I got to his hometown, I went to see my grandma. Uh, at that time I met my uncle, Kim Chai. Uncle Kim Chai is younger than my dad.

A: I see.

B: Uh—come to think of it, I didn't have anyone with me to find him, so I didn't dare try to face him. So I didn't see my dad face to face, but I left my phone number for him, but he never came calling.

A: And when you went to find him, how old were you at that time?

B: 35.

A: At age 35 you went to find your dad?

B: Uh, I had two kids already.

A: You went to find your dad? So, your grandma on your mother's side, what is her name?

B: Her name is Grandma Chit.

A: Chit what?

B: Ou Chit.

A: Is she still living?

B: She already died. My mom is over 80 years old, how could she be outlived?

A: So, do you know her date of birth?

B: I don't know.

A: In what era, from what time? I think your mother was born in 1947, so your grandma may have been in the Sangkum Reastr Niyum, in the French era.

B: In the time of King Sisowath, because King Ta [Sisowath Monivong? Because King Euv is King Sihanouk] was not dead yet, it was a different King, probably his father Ta Tuot.

A: Right, right.

B: My grandpa was a soldier at that time and served King Ta Tuot, so my mom always followed his lead; if dad was a soldier, she was a soldier like him, always.

A: Yes, so your grandma, she, uh—her birthplace. Where was she born, do you know?

B: I don't know.

A: Her hometown or village or anything?

B: Maybe Kampong Thom all together.

A: I see.

B: Santuk District, Kampong Thom Province.

A: Yes, so your grandfather on your mother's side, what was his name?

B: My grandfather's name was Grandpa Ban, but I don't know the rest of his name.

A: You don't know?

B: Yes!

A: Have you ever heard anything about your grandfather from your mother?

B: I haven't. I have only heard her say that my grandpa was very intelligent. He was very persistent and he always worked as a soldier, even till he was old and died.

A: He was always a soldier?

B: That's right. As far as that goes, he didn't really have any kind of inheritance or anything at home, so he went along. He worked as a soldier—he isn't still serving in the army, so he didn't really have anything to leave for his children to inherit, for future generations.

A: But he was only a person from Kampong Thom?

B: Right, he was from Santuk District, Kampong Thom.

A: So that was your grandfather on your mother's side. How about your father's side, how much do you know about your father's side?

B: I don't know anything at all.

A: Do you know the names of your grandma or grandpa?

B: No, I don't know. I just know Grandpa Pheav and Grandma Vorn. My mom told me that much. She said their names were Grandpa Pheav and Grandma Vorn. That's right, his mother was Grandma Vorn, and his father Grandpa Pheav.

A: So, you now have two children, is that right?

B: Three kids.

A: So, do you remember, what was the date of your marriage?

B: The 15th of March, 2003.

A: Where did you get married?

B: I was married in Kien Svay.

A: So, in that marriage, did you love each other for yourselves, or did your parents arrange it for you?

B: We found each other on our own.

A: You found each other on your own?

B: And then told our parents.

A: So then you entered engagement?

B: Yes!

A: So the man's side brings things to the wedding for the woman's side, like money, or land, or a house or things like that?

B: It was money, yes.

A: Right, so, how many brothers and sisters do you have?

B: I have only myself.

A: Just you alone? Okay. You don't have anyone else?

B: That's right!

A: So, do you have any relatives, like uncles or aunts that have ever lived in other countries? or are they all in Cambodia?

B: I don't have any that have left.

A: You have none?

B: Yes, I have lots of family, but I have never searched them out and also have never known them either because I came to live in Prey Veng, just my mother and I.

A: Right.

B: And so we've been separated without really knowing about each other.

A: And so, when you left, like, left your hometown in Kampong Thom and came to Prey Veng, how did you earn a living with your mother?

B: When we first came, I was very little. My mom worked that job with the government. She

requested to work in the hospital and also made a little selling treats and snacks and such and when I knew how to walk, sell, and trade, in the evenings I went out selling pickles. In the morning, I went to school, during the day and early evening, at 1 or 2 I sold treats. Around 4 or 5, I walked around selling pickles in our village.

A: What kind of pickles did you sell?

B: I sold pickled beans, cucumbers, and all sorts like that. My mom make the pickles and gave them to me to sell and walk around trading pickles for raw rice, and on Saturdays and Sundays, I went to work harvesting rice for others.

A: I see.

B: Transplant seedlings in different places.

A: Right, so have you ever woven floor mats?

B: Yes, I used to work as a hired hand, a weaver for other people, weaving scarves, which I know how to weave.

A: Using a foot pedal and throwing the string back and forth?

B: That's right. I wove scarfs and afterward I went to work in a factory.

A: Right, I see. So, until what grade did you attend school?

B: I attended until 5th grade.

A: 5th?

B: Yes!

A: Do you know how to read and write?

B: I know how to read and write a little.

A: Yes, I see.

B: I can do some.

A: So, like, where did you go to school? What was it called?

B: Uh, it was called "the New School" at the time in Baray village, Baray commune, Kampong Leav district. They called it "the New School" but now it has some other name. They have changed it. When I was there we all called it the new school because they had just built it.

A: Yes, so when you went to school did your mom ever give you money to pay for your schooling?

B: I never knew about money. In the morning, I would eat cold rice, then go to school. When I went to school and came back, or if I didn't go then I would sell and trade, selling candy and other things; rice porridge, or other little things, cleaning porridge dishes, selling candies. And in the fall, I went and made pickles to sell and used that money to pay for school. In that time we paid the school, paid the school and bought books, and I had to come up with the money on my own.

A: I see.

B: I'd buy candies and sell them for a small profit and save for pencils and books and paying for the school year.

A: I see.

B: I never spent money, I've never had money to spend.

A: So, about your dreams, when you were in school when you were little what did you want to be when you grew up? Is your dream still only a dream?

B: My dream since the beginning, I thought that I wanted to learn and get a comfortable job.

A: What job did you want to do?

B: A teacher, or some kind of doctor. I wanted it, but it just wasn't part of my destiny. I didn't have the opportunity, being an only child.

A: Because it was just you and your mother—is that right?

B: Yes, that's correct.

A: So what is your favorite food? What do you most like to eat?

B: I don't really have a specific one, whatever food it is I can eat it.

A: You're not really picky huh?

B: I'm not picky, I like everything.

A: Do you know how to make all kinds of food?

B: I only know how to make Cambodian food because I live in Cambodia. I don't know how to make modern food. If you're talking about food from the countryside I know how to make it all; vegetable stew, sour stew, I can make lemongrass paste, I can do it all.

A: And who did you learn to make food from?

B: I watched and my mom told me, and when we went to other people's houses they told us how they made it. I learned to follow what they said. Yeah, so I know how to make lots of things.

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

B: I like to listen.

A: What genre?

B: I like the older stuff because it has lyrics that tell lots of stories, lots of them are very sad.

A: Who is your favorite singer?

B: Like Nay Vannet, Him Sivan, people like that.

A: From your generation?

B: That's right; my generation.

A: Do you know how to play any musical instruments?

B: I don't know how to play; I just like to listen.

A: I understand. Like, the house that you live in, in your hometown, what is it like? Like is it a wood house, or a stone house or what?

B: It's a wood house. Would you like to see a picture?

A: You even have a picture? You even remember to keep a picture. When you built the house, did you hire a carpenter, or?

B: We hired a carpenter. Before I was in a small house, like I just said. [...] Once you took the roof off that was it, because it had been eaten badly by termites, eaten badly by termites. My mom sometimes worked on it herself.

A: I see.

B: In America they have never known about it, if they knew if they knew they would think of a hut. It is a wood house that has just four roof posts. We cover it and make a shelter with steel sheets and we can live there for 4 to 10 years.

A: Right.

B: Just recently in 2013, '14, 2015, '16, that big house was made into a stone house, but the wood is the same.

A: Right, right.

B: And there is still no wall yet.

A: How is that?

B: We don't have any money, it's just covered with zinc.

A: And your mom still lives there like that?

B: Yes, she still waits every day.

A: Yes, so how is your life different, like your current life and your life before, how are they different from each other?

B: Honestly, before was fine because I was just with my mom. Now I have a family, and even though I have a family, life still isn't easy. It is still hard because every day is very difficult; we live in a rented house.

A: Right.

B: We rent someone else's house and are still separated from each other. The children are in the province because we left them in our rental house; we can't support them well enough.

A: I see.

B: So we take them to school in the province and are separated from each other. My family struggles too, but because we understand each other, my husband doesn't drink coffee, he doesn't go mess around with other women, and because of that our whole family is happy.

A: I see.

B: It's just that we lack money, but eating and living are easy.

A: Right.

B: Easy on the heart.

A: Yes, so, the time in your life—the time in your life that was most difficult was when?

B: Every day that is very difficult is because we are separated. Sometimes my mom is sick, so at midnight I have to go to her. She only has one child and that's me and every day I leave my 2 kids with her so she has to work and watch my kids also, it is very hard for her. And it is also difficult for me because I am separated from them like this. And I live in Phnom Penh every day, renting a house. Renting a house is very hard.

A: Right.

B: It's messy.

A: Yes, what about you, what kind of business do you have today to make a living?

B: We rely completely on my husband's salary because as the wife I don't have job other than to watch kids.

A: Right. So, I know you were born in 1980, so you didn't quite get out of the war in the time of Pol Pot or Lon Nol. But, like, after that there were still some left right?

B: Yes!

A: So can you tell me what seemed to be happening in the generation you encountered? Also, what did you hear about the war from your mother?

B: I used to hear the sound of bullets. Sometimes when I would go to sleep, my mom would wake me up suddenly and tell me that bullets were raining over our house.

A: I see.

B: Yes. Sometimes they quarrel and make war. During the war they would attack villages by surprise and fight hard, then run and sleep only deep in caves.

A: In 1900 what?

B: In 1900 something.. Because I was so little I only remember that we were so afraid.— That's what I remember.

A: I see.

B: When my mother dragged me into the cave, it was very difficult, very scary.

A: Yes, when you mother told you about Pol Pot's time, what was it like? What was life like?

B: Speaking of that, it is very difficult because there was never any comfort, we were always afraid.

A: I see.

B: Right. And walking back with my mother to where the soldiers were, that was hard. I never knew what comfort was like. I only heard the bullets as they shot each other each day.

A: I see.

B: Yes.

A: So during the Pol Pot era, what was your mother like?

B: When I was in the Pol Pot era, my mother said that she was a doctor in the Pol Pot era.

A: I see.

B: So she walked and helped them a lot.

A: I see.

B: Yes, she is called the outstanding woman, yeah, she helped them in every way.

A: I see.

B: She was very tired, has never laid down and hid, she helped them a lot.

A: She saw a lot of hard times right?

B: That's right. She didn't know how to see the light of day. She's said that sometimes she had to swim across the river and stuff. She went to help the soldiers. They shot each other and the shot things. They were very dangerous—so she went to treat them. She would swim across the river back and forth. It was very difficult for her. Sometimes she said she had a very hard time.

A: I see.

B: She still hasn't found comfort, even until today.

A: I see. Do you, like, what do you have that you remember most in, like, your life? Do you remember a time in your life more than others?

B: Remember a time that was difficult, or a time of comfort?

A: A difficult time.

B: Very difficult? It was very difficult when we ran in fear of being shot. I remember it clearly.

A: Like, what is it that you remember most? Be it difficult or easy, what is it that sticks in the center of your heart that you cannot forget?

A: Right. What I remember is when we were very afraid. When we were terrified, especially my mom wasn't there. When she was gone with the soldiers, you know? And she left me alone, that was terrifying. I was very afraid when I heard the sound of gunfire, and especially when I was in the province and the Vietnamese came.

A: I see.

B: By the time it was over, all I had was to go to school; to go to school and watch them study. Suddenly I heard the bell, and I quickly ran to find my mother, but I couldn't find her anywhere. I didn't know where my mom was, I was terrified. I remember that.

A: Yes, of course. So, what is your husband's name?

B: Chhoeun Sovandara.

A: Do you remember what day he as born?

B: He was born in the year, on the 11th of January 1978.

A: Yes, okay.

B: He was also born during Pol Pot's time. He escaped Pol Pot too.

A: Was he born in the time of Pol Pot also?

B: Yes, he was very pitiable as well. I've heard my mother-in-law say that.

A: Like, uh—what village was he born in?

B: I don't remember. Why don't you ask him yourself?

A: Mr. Vannra, what village were you born in?

C: For me, I was born in Dak Van village near Ang Ta Som, Takeo province.

A: Takeo province? Yes, and what district?

C: Trapeang Pring District.

A: Yes got it. So, Ma'am, what kind of person is your husband? Describe it all for us to see in front of your husband; gossip a little!

B: He is the best person! In my heart every day he is wonderful!

A: I see.

B: Since he married me, he has never made things difficult for me.

A: I see.

B: So in the management, both outside and inside the house, he is very diligent. He provides for the family well.

A: I see.

B: He can take care of his children. To be honest, he can take care of everything.

A: So after you, how many children do you have now?

B: Today there are three kids living, one of them is not here.

A: How many girls, how many boys?

B: 2 girls, 1 boy. The boy is in the middle.

A: So you can tell us the names of your children from you to the youngest?

B: Their names are Chheun Sovanrasmey, Srey Chan and Chheun Pich Mony and Chheun Kantha Monima.

A: I see. So, do you, like, for all your children that you, like, gave birth to, do you send them all to go to school?

B: Yes, they all can go to school.

A: I see.

B: At the moment, if the first child is in 7th grade and the second child is in 5th grade.

A: Of course. For what reason do you send your children to go to school?

B: I want them to know; I want them to have a future with knowledge.

A: To know a lot, right Ma'am?

B: That's right.

A: So for your life, what does education mean for your life?

B: It is very important, if you do not learn, everything is meaningless. Like, if we don't know how to do things, life is very difficult.

A: It's hard, huh?

B: That's right. I'm not educated; don't let children be without knowledge like me. So we have to make a genuine effort for children to learn and know.

A: Yes, so what advice do you give to your children every day? Like how do you bring them up? And lead them to walk what kind of path?

B: Let them walk in a good way because in the morning they go to school. After they have prayed they go to school and make an effort to learn and listen to their teachers, and sit without messing around. Sometimes they come home and tell me they fought each other. I tell my kids not to fight each other. Kids need to focus on learning; they need to take great knowledge forward to make their career more easily.

A: Right!

B: But if your kids don't know, it will be very difficult for them. I tell my kids that every day.

A: Yes, so what do you do to make your family happy every day?

B: These days my family doesn't have much money, but we have happiness because sometimes we don't have any money at all, but we make rice porridge with fish sauce, soy sauce to a duck egg and whatever we have. We don't argue with each other, or my kids. We eat and go to sleep, what are we supposed to do, we don't have much anyway.

A: So in order to be happy like you, don't care too much or avoid anything; you have been able to make your family happy even without money?

B: We think that when we quarrel, when we get after each other harshly and loudly it is exhausting without benefit. If just think about eating, we eat to be strong. In the morning, we walk and think that we will go find money and work and such, and the kids strive to learn and listen to their teachers. They learn and do whatever to know to go and work. This has made it, so my family never quarrels with each other.

A: I see.

B: That's right. We understand each other, like I left my husband in Phnom Penh for a month or something—I never came to see him, so he has honesty and has never gone messing around with other women. He worked hard to earn money to send to his wife, and for me to use that money to support my children, for clothes, food, and such. These days it is so important.

A: I see.

B: So I'm very prepared. I have never taken and wasted money on anything.

A: Yes, of course. So, this is the last question. It is the last because this recording will give something, like, to your children that they can listen to at a later time. So, what advice to you have to guide the next generation? And for them to become what kind of people?

B: I want them to be—to become good people, to listen to the admonishment of their parents, to listen to their teacher's advice and the words of the elders so that they won't go wrong. Children have endure and learn because their mom's life was difficult and I don't want my kids to be like their mom because the country is no longer in war. From the time you were born all you know is learning, so you must press forward in learning; there is nothing more important than learning. Learn to know, when you know you have knowledge and you can do big work so you will get a large salary and you can spend in ease and live comfortably. That's all I want my kids to know.

A: So thank you very much for giving me an interview today. And I will go to the website I mentioned above, so thank you very much.

B: Yes, thank you.