

Interview of Bout Bunrein

A: Interviewer: Nhem Sokunthea

B: Interviewee: Bout Bunrein

Summary of the Interview

Bout Bunrein was born in 1969 in the capital of Phnom Penh. In this interview, she reflects on memories of her family and upbringing, from the good memories to the difficulties of the Pol Pot regime. She has five children and did everything she could to provide them an education, despite harsh life circumstances and the subsequent death of her husband.

A: I am grateful that you have allowed me to interview you about your history today! My name is Nhem Sokunthea, your interviewer. What is your full name?

B: Bout Bunrein.

A: Today we are going to interview you—it's August 5, 2016. This interview has been arranged by BYU. This college has a project to interview Khmer citizens about their history so that the next generation can hear and understand about their history, story, life, and the history of their ancestors. May I please have permission to put this interview on the BYU website www.cambodianoralhistoryproject.byu.edu?

B: Yes.

A: Great! We will begin this interview! Will you please tell me your full name again?

B: Bout Bunrein.

A: And do you have a nickname?

B: No.

A: Is the name they call you still Bunrein?

B: They call me just Bunrein.

A: And what day, month, and year were you born?

B: I was born on a Sunday, on June 2, 1969.

A: Great, and where were you born?

B: In District Five of the city of Phnom Penh.

A: How old are you today?

B: Today, I am 47 years old.

A: 47 years old! In Khmer years what year were you born? For example, the year of the rat, ox, tiger, rabbit—

B: Oh, the year of the dog.

A: How many siblings do you have?

B: I have six brothers and three sisters.

A: Where do you fall in your family?

B: I am the fourth child.

A: The fourth! And now where do your siblings live?

B: Two have died.

A: Two died!?

B: And now there are only seven of us. All of us live together except one who lives in Phnom Penh.

A: And do you live in the same house, or what?

B: We live in different houses.

A: But you live near each other?

B: Yes, near each other.

A: And what is your father named?

B: He is named Bout Chon.

A: When and where was he born?

B: I think he was born in Phnom Penh.

A: What year was he born?

B: I do not know what year he was born.

A: In your birth certificate they have written his birth date, can you look here to find it?

B: The 11th of September in the year 1940.

A: Yes, that's right, and where was he born?

B: In the village of Kampong Rokar in the Commune of Pot Sar in the District of Bati.

A: And what Province?

B: The province of Takeo.

A: Do you remember what year he was born in, in the Khmer Zodiac years?

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

A: The year of the snake?

B: The year of the snake.

A: Okay so is your father alive today or has he already passed away?

B: He has already died.

A: What year did he die?

B: Let's see, I think he died two or three years ago already, two years ago.

A: Two years. Now it is 2016, so he died in 2014.

B: Yes in 2014.

A: According to what you remember about your father, do you have any memories of him that you can share with us?

B: As a child, I loved him and when he left us it was sad.

A: And what is the name of your mother?

B: She was named Baen San.

A: What day, month, and year was she born, and also where was she born?

B: Wednesday the 9th of December in 1945, in the Phum Kampong Koa in the commune of Put Sar, in the district of Bati in the province Takeo.

A: And your mother was born in which Khmer Zodiac year?

B: The year of the goat.

A: Is your mother alive today or has she already died?

B: She's still alive today.

A: Okay so now how old is she?

B: She is now 74 years old.

A: What do you remember about her, what memories do you love of her?

B: As her child, I loved her.

A: Yes, and do you have any memories of her when you were a small child, of how she loved you or something like that?

B: Sorry, what?

A: Like what do you remember that was good about her?

B: She never fought with us, and we loved her.

A: Do you still have peace with her today?

B: Yes, we have peace together.

A: Okay so now thinking about your ancestors, what the names of your grandparents on your father's side?

B: He was named—I don't know. The name of my grandmother was Yuan.

A: Your grandmother was Yuan.

B: Yes, and her husband was named Grandfather Bout.

A: Grandfather Bout?

B: Yes.

A: Do you remember the day, month or year of their birth?

B: Nope. Not at all.

A: Okay. Do you remember their Khmer Zodiac year? Like the year of the rat, ox, tiger, rabbit—

B: Not at all. How am I to know if they died before I was born?

A: Yes, how are we to know?

B: We don't know.

A: So you don't know him?

B: I don't know him.

A: And do you know the year he died?

B: He died in the age of Pol Pot, I don't know what year.

A: Okay, so for your grandparents are your mother's side, what is your grandfather's name?

B: He was Grandfather Nuan.

A: And your grandmother?

B: Grandfather Nuan, Grandmother Long

A: Were your grandparents alive when you were born?

B: No, just my grandmother.

A: And what is your grandmother like?

B: She is good, she's proper.

A: Yes.

B: She really loves children. She died when we left Phnom Penh in '79. It wasn't yet 1980. It was in the middle of the year that she died.

A: So she died in 1979?

B: Yes.

A: And what do you remember about your grandmother? Do you remember playing with her? Do you remember her teaching you discipline and whatnot?

B: She was never really with me because she was with her grandchildren that were in another province until she became sick and that is when we went to her. Yes, she was weak.

A: Yes, and for your family, have any of them studied outside of Cambodia?

B: No.

A: Only in Cambodia?

B: Yes, Cambodia.

A: Okay so for your education, which grade did you learn to?

B: I only learned to fifth grade.

A: Only the fifth grade and at which school?

B: I learned at our Preak Ho school.

A: Preak Ho school! When you were in school did you learn a lot, in mean, were you smart?

B: I learned a lot from the teacher I loved. When a lot of us stopped going, the teacher was very sad. If we had kept going to school, we could have become teachers or something like that.

A: Yes.

B: But when there were too many of us, we had to help our parents find work because two people working wasn't enough for us. We had to help watch out for our siblings.

A: Yes, because of life.

B: Yes.

A: Yes and for you, did your family always work as farmers?

B: Yes, we did a little bit but then we argued and then we divided it a little bit by a little bit and sold it and now there's nothing left.

A: And how did your family make money? In the beginning?

B: We did work by racing motorcycles.

A: Racing motorcycles?

B: When we were done, we went to the house like normal and put a little money away.

A: And do you remember the year you got married? Year, month, day?

B: Um, 1992.

A: Do you remember the month?

B: What month? I've forgotten.

A: It was a long time ago.

B: Yes, a long time ago.

A: And then regarding your wedding, did you love your husband or was it an arranged by your parents?

B: We loved each other.

A: And then you were married?

B: Yes.

A: Therefore, when you first met your husband, and loved him, do you have a story about that?

B: There were no problems. We cared for each other, loved each other. We were young, we didn't have a room and our parents didn't like us very much.

A: And how did you first meet?

B: We grew up near each other.

A: So you grew up near each other and fell in love?

B: Yes.

A: Okay, so regarding your wedding did you have a dowry from your husband?

B: Yes, we had.

A: You had! So in regard to the giving of the dowry was it given as silver, gold, animals, or rice?

B: It was money.

A: Money!

B: Yes it was like more than a thousand, it was a lot!

A: Therefore, how is your life today compared with your life in the past?

B: Before we lived in our mother and father, we worked, it was hard. When I had a husband, he went to work to get money and provide, so it was easier and then they all died and it was hard again. Now it is easier!

A: Yes.

B: Easier.

A: I know because I live close to you but it's okay because our lives sometimes feel like we always encounter trials. Now your interests have changed day by day. For example, now you like different foods. What food do you like today?

B: For me, I like meager, simple meals.

A: Meager meals! [The word here, transliterated as "Kriam Kroah" is food typically eaten by older people, sometimes dried out food and fish.]

B: But my kids like grilled food, fried food, that's it! For me, no way! I like fish.

A: Fish! Do you make it yourself or do you buy it in the market?

B: I usually buy it.

A: You buy it! So when do have free time what do you like to do?

B: When I'm free, I like to sit around.

A: You like to chill? Do you like to do anything other than this?

B: We like to talk and do whatever.

A: And so when you were free from work, like when you were done with housework, did you have a favorite place to go or wanted to go with your kids?

B: We wanted to go to Kampong Soam.

A: So for this interview I have one more question for you, what kind of music do you like?

B: My favorite song I like to sing?

A: Like Nak or roman or evan sontimon?

B: I like the song they dance to, the songs young kids like, I don't know.

A: Do you know how to sing?

B: Nope.

A: You don't know how to sing?

B: Yes

A: So you have one song that you like to listen to?

B: I like novannat him sivon and akaem.

A: Akaem! And do you know how to play any instruments, or do you have children or grandchildren who know how to play?

B: I don't have.

A: You were born before the Pol Pot Era, right?

B: Yes.

A: So can you tell me about the Pol Pot era, did you have events in your life that you can tell us about?

B: In the Pol Pot Era, I was small, about 7 years old. They gave us things to dig with. It was so hard—it wasn't easy at all! They wouldn't let us go home and they made us make tires that were small. I was 7! It was so terrible! It was not easy.

A: Do you remember what kind of food they gave you?

B: It wasn't enough, we were hungry. At the time of rest, we would sneak away and get food to steam until we had to work again. If the president saw us he would hit us or kill us. Really though, if we took any time for ourselves, they would kill us.

A: During the Pol Pot era, what province were you in?

B: I was in the District of Bati, the province of Takeo.

A: Did your siblings have similar experiences as you did? What were their lives like at that time?

B: They were bigger, so they went to a different city. Ours was small and so we didn't know where they had gone.

A: Did you ever hear from them?

B: Nothing.

A: What was the worst experience you had in that era? What time was the hardest?

B: The whole era. They made our life miserable. Now, life isn't hard. We eat, we go to work, it's easy. We even have time to hangout.

A: How many of your siblings are still alive today?

B: When we split from one another, there were five of us. When we went to Vietnam there

were still five of us. After that, my mom had four more kids so now there are nine total!

A: After the Pol Pot era, how did you make money?

B: My mom sold stuff and my dad was the president of our village.

A: And what did your grandma sell?

B: She sold treats like oranges.

A: In your life from when you were little to now, what time in your life stands out to you above others? For example, a time when you were the happiest and a time you can't forget.

B: When my children and grandchildren have work to do.

A: After you got married, how many kids did you have?

B: I have five kids.

A: Can you name them from the oldest to the youngest?

B: The oldest is Vonak Tida. The second is Vonak Vatu. The third is Vonak Makara. The fourth is Vonak Liho. The fifth is Vonak Vanot.

A: Was it hard to raise your kids?

B: No, they were easy, they are good. They listened to their parents.

A: Good! Did you have any other kids?

B: No.

A: What was your husband's name?

B: Ron Vonak.

A: What kind of person is he?

B: He's good. Very patient, isn't crazy.

A: Has he ever made your heart break?

B: No!

A: Today, do your kids take care of you or are you still the head of your house?

B: Today, my kids take care of me. They go to work.

A: That's good because your kids are all grown up. Today, who do you live with?

B: I live with all five of my kids.

A: Where is your husband?

B: He is dead.

A: How did he die?

B: He was sick.

A: What year did he die?

B: 2010.

A: Do you remember the day or month that he died?

B: He died in 2010 on the 25th of May.

A: How did you take care of and educate your kids from when they were young while your husband was alive?

B: They were good, they always listened.

A: And your husband never made it difficult?

B: No, he was good.

A: Did you send your kids to school?

B: Yes. Three of my kids now have jobs.

A: Why did you think that sending your kids to school was important?

B: It cost me a lot to send them to school. My oldest child was \$5 a day. The younger ones were over \$2.50. It was expensive considering we still had to eat.

A: So why did you send your kids to school?

B: I wanted my kids to know, to understand, to do good.

A: How did you help your family have happiness?

B: I sent them to school so they could get good jobs so we could have money and happiness.

A: How did you advise your kids?

B: We loved them and didn't let them go down bad roads. Some kids don't listen to their parents, but all my kids—boys and girls—listened to me and helped me.

A: Sometimes in our families we have problems. When you had problems, how did you solve them?

B: We help each other, borrow from each other.

A: What does your family mean to you?

B: They are good, they have good jobs so we have money to spare. It is good and easy.

A: Do you love your family?

B: I love them all.

A: Do you want to live with them forever?

B: Yes, forever.

A: Okay, I have one more question for you. Like I said before, this is going to go onto a website and so your descendants can hear about your history. What do you want to tell them about your life experiences and what advice do you have for paths they should go down?

B: I don't want my kids to make wrong choices. I want them to have good jobs, a good education.

A: Thank you for letting me interview you!

Interview translated by Elizabeth Cook in April 2018.