

Interview of Leab Theaut

A: Interviewer: Eng Dalin

B: Interviewee: Leab Theaut

Summary of the Interview

Leab Theaut was born about 1981 in Kouk Krouch village, Siem Reap province. In this interview, Leab Theaut recounts several life experiences from her upbringing to her short-term emigration to Thailand. She met her husband while working in Thailand and had two children with him before they separated. Despite her hardships, she currently spends all her time working to care for her children.

A: First off, hello, and thank you for allowing me to come and interview you today.

B: Yes!

A: I came to interview you regarding your personal history.

B: Yes!

A: So, my name is Eng Dalin and I come from a university in America named BYU.

B: Yes!

A: This interview is on the fifth day of September in 2018. So, my school is having us come to interview regarding the oral history of the Khmer people, and about your personal history! And the village you're in, what is this village, the village and commune?

B: Which village?

A: The village?

B: Nae Kouk Krouch village.

A: Kouk Krouch village, and what commune?

B: Ne commune, Puok district, Siem Reap province.

A: Puok district, Siem Reap province?

B: Yes!

A: Oh really? Kouk Krouch village?

B: Yes!

A: What district?

B: Puok district!

A: I remember Kouk Krouch village, but what commune again?

B: Puok commune!

A: Puok commune?

B: That's right, Prey Chrouk commune.

A: Oh! Prey Chrouk Commune, Puok District, Siem Reap Province.

B: Yes!

A: And your name, what is your name as well, your full name?

B: My name is Theaut!

A: And your family name?

B: Leab Theaut.

A: Leab Theaut?

B: Yes!

A: Yes! And how old are you now?

B: 37 years old.

A: 37 years old?

B: Yes!

A: Do you have a nickname?

B: I don't!

A: Did anyone ever call you anything else?

B: No, no.

A: No then?

B: Yes!

A: So, your name is Leab Theaut, and you are 37 years old?

B: No, not Leab Thoeuy, Leab Theaut.

A: Leab Theaut?

B: Yes!

A: Yes! Do you remember the year you were born, what year as well?

B: I was born in a year, born on a Thursday, I was born on that day.

A: So, your birth!

B: On Thursday, that's right.

A: Thursday?

B: Yes, that's right!

A: Do you remember the year?

B: I don't remember the year.

A: So, what year, of the lunar calendar—like, the year of the Mouse, the Ox, the Tiger, the Rabbit, do you remember what year?

B: I don't have the memory, I don't remember.

A: Yes!

B: I remember! But my birth year—

A: So, you were born in the year 1981?

B: Yes!

A: Yes! Are you 37 years old?

B: Yes!

A: Yes! About the place you were born, where were you born?

B: I was born here.

A: Born here?

B: Yes! In this district.

A: And what about the house, where is the house that you were born in?

B: That house is in the back.

A: In the back!

B: This is my hometown.

A: So you are a local?

B: They demolished it already!

A: Yes!

B: Now, they're making a big house.

A: Yes! And how many siblings do you have?

B: I have five siblings.

A: Five siblings, what are you in the birth order?

B: The second, oh, the second, that's right.

A: The second child, right?

B: Yes, the second child!

A: I see. So, do you remember the names of your siblings, can you recall the names of your siblings?

B: Loeu and Loeng.

A: What about the family name? Can you recall the family name?

B: Leab Loeu.

A: Is Leab Loeu your only oldest sibling?

B: Yes!

A: Yes!

B: Leab Theaut is the second, Leab Loeng is the third, Leab Thoeuy is the fourth, and Leab Lin is the fifth.

A: Leab Lin, the fifth?

B: Yes!

A: Leab Lin, yes! What about you, where are you in the family?

B: The second.

A: Oh, the second!

B: Yes!

A: Yes, the second child! So, when you were a child, I want to ask about your memories of your childhood, you know?

B: Yes!

A: As a child, what did you and your siblings like to do together?

B: What did we do? We worked on the farm and in the fields.

A: You farmed, then?

B: Yes! Close to the field.

A: You would go to the fields together, right?

B: Yes!

A: Was it fun?

B: It was fun!

A: As a child you went to the fields and did what?

B: Yes!

A: And at that time, you mostly went to fields to do what?

B: We went to the fields to work in the fields, that's what we knew to do, we'd go there and then go home.

A: So you would go to the field to transplant rice and such together?

B: Yes!

A: Was it fun?

B: Fun!

A: Catching snails and such too?

B: We'd catch snails, catch crabs.

A: Oh, really?

B: Yes!

A: Did you ever go fishing or transplant rice or such with each other?

B: Yes, [we] fished!

A: Did you ever cast nets or anything?

B: We would cast one down to find [fish] and such.

A: Oh! Did you go together?

B: We would put frogs in.

A: Oh, really?

B: We'd put on fishing gear, and put down some fishing rods [that were fixed to the ground].

A: All five of you?

B: All five, that's right.

A: Oh! All five of you?

B: Yes, it was so fun.

A: Yes, really?

B: We'd use fishing rods!

A: And so, what is your mother's name?

B: Nae Theng.

A: Theng!

B: Here and there—you want me to say it? Oh, my mother's family name?

A: Yes!

B: Her family name?

A: The name Nae Theng?

B: Oh, it was Chhlat—Chhlat Theng—oh! Chhlat Theng, yes, Chhlat Theng.

A: Chhlat Theng then, and what about your father as well as your mother?

B: Mother's name is Nae Theng.

A: Theng!

B: Mother's name is Theng.

A: Yes! And what about your father?

B: My father is Leat, Leat.

A: Yes! Your father is Leat?

B: Yes, that's right!

A: What about you?

B: Leat, my father's name is Leat.

A: So, your father is named Leat?

B: Yes, that's right!

A: And where are the two of them now, your mother and father?

B: They are here.

A: They are here?

B: Yes!

A: Then, where did they go then?

B: They are there!

A: Oh! Over there. What are their occupations, your parents?

B: My father raises cows.

A: He raises cows?

B: Yes! A yoke of cows.

A: He raises cows. And what about your mother's life, what does she do every day?

B: Yes!

A: And now, how old is she, as well as your father?

B: I don't know, I don't know about my father's age.

A: And what about your mother?

B: My mother—my father Leat is about 60 already.

A: He's about 60 already?

B: Yes!

A: And what about your mother?

B: My mom is probably a little over 50—now that I think of it, she is two years older than my dad, so she is 65, that's right.

A: Yes, they're all about 60 then?

B: Yes!

A: And do you know which province she was born in?

B: In this province!

A: Really in this province?

B: Yes, that's right!

A: So, is she the older sister? [Referring to Someone Nearby]

B: No!

A: How does she know that?

B: Because she stayed with us, you know? When I was little, she was old, so I would come over to play.

A: Really?

B: Yeah, I would come over and play.

A: And what about you, when you were a child, what did your parents do for a living to raise their children?

B: They worked in the field, that's right.

A: What things did they do?

B: They only kept the rice field and watched the cows and other small things.

A: Yes! Look at the cows and nourish them—?

B: Yes!

A: Did he raise pigs? What else did he raise?

B: He did raise pigs.

A: How about chickens? Did he raise chickens?

B: Yes! He also raised chickens too.

A: Such a normal, simple lifestyle!

B: Yes!

A: Yes, so you remember the names of your father and mother, what about the names of your grandparents on your mother's and father's side?

B: On my mother's side, my grandmother was named Moeun and my grandfather was named Leat.

A: Your grandfather's name was Leat, what about your grandmother?

B: My grandmother's name was Moeun!

A: Grandmother Moeun?

B: And my grandfather's name was Leat!

A: Is that on your mom's side or dad's side?

B: Yes! It's on my mom's side.

A: Okay, what about your dad's side?

B: On my dad's side, it was Grandfather Leouy and Grandmother Kay.

A: Your grandfather was Leouy and your grandmother was Kay?

B: Yes. They've died, on Dad's side.

A: Yes!

B: On my mother's side, they've also died.

A: Oh! So, do you remember what your grandparents did for work before?

B: I don't really know actually.

A: Their children and whatnot?

B: They worked in the fields.

A: They just worked in the fields and that stuff?

B: Yes! They raised ducks, raised pigs, and cows just like each other. They came to raise them.

A: And another thing! About your family, like your siblings, is there anyone that are living in other provinces, like, outside of the country? Or any other provinces, you know?

B: There are, there are!

A: Like, in Kratie province or in Prey Veng province?

B: No, there are none there.

A: And you didn't have any siblings go to Thailand or anywhere?

B: I have some that went to Thailand, yes, some in Thailand.

A: That's right, Thailand is not too far away.

B: Yeah. There were two that went to Thailand. These were the ones that live here—two younger siblings, they are in Pailin province.

A: They went to Thailand!

B: Yes, they went to Thailand!

A: What was the reason they went?

B: They went to work.

A: To work in construction?

B: Yes!

A: Oh! In Thailand, most of the time, do they receive a high salary?

B: Yes, they get a high salary. There is a lot of work, it is plentiful, which is why they receive a high salary. If work wasn't that way, they wouldn't go.

A: Are you afraid of them cheating you though?

B: No, if you do that work, there are not really stories of being cheated, no.

A: Oh, really?

B: Yes.

A: Oh, also, what is the name of your husband?

B: Chuong.

A: Chuong?

B: Yes, that's right!

A: And what about the surname?

B: His name is Chi Chuong.

B: His name is Chi Chuong?

B: Yes.

A: Chi Chuong. He's smart, isn't he?

B: Yes.

A: Uh, and another thing, what year were you married? Do you remember? And what era too?

B: I don't remember!

A: You don't remember?

B: I didn't get married.

A: You didn't get married?

B: We just got together.

A: Oh really? I see. So, you loved each other and got together?

B: Yes.

A: So where were you when you met one another?

B: We saw each other in Thailand, we got together at the Thai border.

A: You were in Thailand?

B: Yes!

A: Oh!

B: No, I went to find work near Thailand and then we got together.

A: So at that time, what kind of work did you do in Thailand?

B: Oh, planted rice like we are here, and we planted with hired Thai people.

A: There were hired Thai people?

B: Yes!

A: After you already spoke Khmer, did you learn any other languages? Do you know Thai?

B: I only know a little bit. Just enough to buy stuff, ask for stuff.

A: So you can speak Thai?

B: Yes!

A: Can you speak a little?

B: No!

A: And how many years did you live in Thailand?

B: A few years, two or three. I remember though, the people they took to work were only Cambodians.

A: Oh! They only took Cambodians?

B: Yes. If there are Cambodians there, they can speak Thai.

A: Oh! Most of the people in this village go to Thailand?

B: Yes.

A: So they go to Thailand?

B: Yes.

A: Have you ever studied before?

B: No, I only watched my younger siblings but I didn't read.

A: Oh!

B: I tried to watch them, but I didn't learn.

A: So you hadn't done any school, not even first grade or second grade?

B: No, I did not study at all.

A: Oh, I see! And ever since your youth, what food do you like?

B: Oh, the food I like is Samlar Kako, Samlar Machu, Khor.

A: For that, I just want to say that this is for the interview, I would like to ask that in regards to your personal history.

B: Oh!

A: So as for your preferences, about food I mean, what are they?

B: Yes!

A: Yes, so Slar Kako?

B: Yeah, I like Slar Kako and Slar Machu Kroeung.

A: And is there anything else that you really like a lot? Or have you only ever seen them make soup?

B: Yes, that's right!

A: So, Slar Kako, what else?

B: Slar Angkanh.

A: Slar Angkanh?

B: Yes!

A: What is Slar Angkanh?

B: They make soup out of Angkanh leaves.

A: Is it delicious?

B: Delicious!

A: Oh!

B: They put coconut paste in.

A: Oh! They also put coconut paste in that?

B: That's right!

A: And they put in small fish or big fish?

B: That's right, they put grilled fish in, big fish.

A: They put grilled fish?

B: Yes!

A: Oh! Is it delicious?

B: Yes!

A: I want to ask, is there is anyone in your family who knows how to play a musical instrument? Like, do any of your siblings play the drums or some other instrument? Does anyone know how to?

B: No one plays, no one knows how to play.

A: They don't know how to play?

B: Yes!

A: And you know how to weave, do you know?

B: I do not know how to weave.

A: And what about ang rot [bamboo fish traps], do you know anything like that?

B: That, and mats and stuff, no.

A: You don't know how to make mats?

B: I do not know how to.

A: You don't know how to?

B: Yes!

A: Why?

B: I'm sure.

A: You do not know how, and what about your mother, did she ever show you?

B: No!

A: Most of the time, I'm here in this village, some of them make mats, you know?

B: They make mats, yes! But I stopped going to Thailand to watch the younger siblings. I

didn't chop anything or sew the mats.

A: So, what about your mother and father, like, did they ever take you to visit different places, like Phnom Penh, did you go and visit together?

B: No, I never went.

A: You never have?

B: Yes!

A: So, I want to ask about your life problems, you know? You usually had to look after your younger siblings and things, right?

B: Yes! I watched my younger siblings.

A: How come? Did you have so many siblings or did you just have one?

B: I had a lot of siblings and we worked hard to learn and look after cows. My younger siblings also—

A: Are these your younger siblings?

B: No, they are in that house and they all are married already.

A: Oh really! I want to ask a little bit about your life before you got married. In ways was your life difficult, can you describe it because—it's like this, we want to know about your life, how was it hard, you know?

B: I work to make a living!

A: What are the difficulties in your life?

B: I'm depressed.

A: You're depressed?

B: Yes!

A: From what before?

B: It's hard, I want to get married, it's hard to love others, it's hard to get along with my mother.

A: Was it when you went to Thailand?

B: I was angry with my mother, I was angry, so I ran away to Thailand and met my husband.

A: What happened, what is the reason you were angry with them?

B: She—she, it's like this—I wasn't really watching my siblings or anything else. When I left, there was a little conflict, and I went to Thailand and met my husband.

A: So, you went to Thailand?

B: I watched my younger siblings and hit them, but they didn't stop crying, I watched my sibling cry and it didn't stop, and I was mad, so I ran away to Thailand and met my husband in Thailand.

A: Oh! At that time—?

B: I was downhearted, yes.

A: Yes! At that time, when you went to Thailand, how old were you?

B: When I went to Thailand, I was 30 years old.

A: 30 years old?

B: Yes!

A: And how old were you when you had your family?

B: I had my family when I was in my twenties.

A: In your twenties?

B: Yes!

A: Oh! Like you—wait a moment, you're talking about when you were watching them and whatnot?

B: Yes! I was watching my younger siblings.

A: You were watching your siblings—and then?

B: I was watching my younger siblings and they wouldn't stop crying, my mother reprimanded me, and I was mad at my mother, so I ran away to Thailand and got a husband.

A: So your mom scolded you like that?

B: Yes!

A: Like—?

B: Playing, I also cried, the ants bit, she hit me and also punished me, that's right.

A: She hit you?

B: Hit me!

A: Did she hit you hard?

B: Yes, she hit me hard! So I ran away to Thailand.

A: Where do you go?

B: I went with [...], I went with some of my siblings here.

A: You asked to go with them?

B: Yes!

A: And when you arrived in Thailand, what did you do immediately?

B: Worked in the field transplanting rice.

A: You went to transplant?

B: Yes!

A: And how many did you do in one day then?

B: One hundred and fifty a day.

A: One hundred and fifty baht?

B: Yes!

A: If you think about it in Khmer money, how much is fifteen thousand baht?

B: Fifteen thousand, if we think about it in Khmer money, uh, I've forgotten how much that is worth.

A: One hundred and fifty baht in Khmer money?

B: Yes! Nowadays it is expensive.

A: And when you arrived, was it immediately difficult?

B: Difficult!

A: Like you were alone?

B: Yes!

A: Right when you arrived in the country of Thailand?

B: Difficult!

A: Can you describe some of the difficulties?

B: Oh!

A: And did you miss home, did you miss anything?

B: No I was only angry at my mother so I ran away, uh! After two or three months—after two or three months—after about one month came I began to miss, I missed them. I could see that others were happy, but I was sad.

A: Yes!

B: Yes!

A: And when you were in Thailand, did they not mistreat you?

B: No, there was no mistreatment.

A: No mistreatment?

B: No!

A: And when you went to go transplant rice was it for a company or was it for a boss?

B: I worked for a boss, I just followed my older sibling here.

A: When it was time to transplant, did they call to transplant?

B: Yes!

A: And besides transplanting, what else did you do?

B: In addition to transplanting, I also weeded the potato.

A: You weeded the potatoes?

B: Yes!

A: Speaking of, did you follow this plantation?

B: Yes! I followed the plantation.

A: Did you also work in construction?

B: I did construction work, I've done it before.

A: Where did you do it?

B: I did it in Siem Reap.

A: Siem Reap?

B: Yes!

A: Yes!

B: I did it for not yet a full year.

A: And what about when you went to Thailand—like, you had begun your family already, right?

B: Yes!

A: So you married your husband when you went to Thailand, and how many years was it when you had your family?

B: I went there for a year when I had my family, it was just barely one year—

A: You had just gotten there?

B: Yes!

A: How many months had you been there for when you met [your husband]?

B: I was there for five months.

A: It had been five months when you saw him and fell in love with him?

B: Yes.

A: Oh really?

B: We loved each other and took each other.

A: And where was the ceremony?

B: The ceremony was in Thailand.

A: In Thailand, yes!

B: Yes!

A: And did you tell your mother then?

B: I told her and she went too.

A: Oh! So your mother went to your wedding too?

B: Yes!

A: And after all that until now, where is your older brother right now?

B: He went to do business in Thailand.

A: He didn't come back?

B: No, he didn't come back, and he's got a wife in Thailand already as well.

A: Oh is that right?

B: Yes!

A: He got married as well?

B: He got married as well.

A: Oh! So how many children do you have now?

B: Two children.

A: Now two children?

B: Yes.

A: How old are they?

B: The older one was born in the year of the ox.

A: The year of the ox, about how old is that?

B: Probably a bit smaller than this. [Interviewee Gestures]

A: Do you know how old the child is?

B: How many years old, probably 10 years old, my oldest one.

A: 10 years old?

B: Yes.

A: And what about the younger child?

B: The youngest one was just born.

A: Just born?

B: Yes! The little one is two years old.

A: Two years old already?

B: Yes.

A: So what do you every day?

B: I'm raising my younger siblings and my children.

A: So, what is your daily job that you do to raise your children?

B: I don't have any business; I can't really find any [work] so I can only look after my children these days.

A: Just watching your children?

B: Yes!

A: Are you raising livestock like cows and pigs?

B: I am not raising any livestock, no pigs or cows.

A: So that's not your cow?

B: No, this is not my house, my house is over there.

A: So your house is in the west?

B: Yes!

A: Oh! I thought that this was your house!

B: No!

A: So then when—

B: This is my relative's house, I'm just coming to visit.

A: And about your husband, has he gone for a long time?

B: Yes! He has another wife.

A: And how do you know that he has another wife?

B: He called. He was playing on Facebook and called me so I found out.

A: And he doesn't long for his children?

B: No, he doesn't long for them, he's heartless and decided to get another wife.

A: Oh! Is it because you did not go live with him and came back to Cambodia?

B: That's right, when he came to Cambodia it was still [...] and it was a burden, so he went back.

A: So, what about you these days, I'd like to ask you a bit about your history. I'd like to ask about your life now, what obstacles have you overcome, could you tell us a little bit about that?

B: My struggles are my husband having another wife and not having enough money for my children, that's it really.

A: And what else is difficult?

B: Nothing else is difficult!

A: When I look at you, it seems those are not your only difficulties, you have many difficulties but you—

B: Yes, that's right!

A: For example, are you able to speak about them?

B: That's not my only difficulty, it's everything, everything is difficult.

A: And currently do you have a rice field you work in every day?

B: I have a field in one place—in one place, but the rice is all dead, I've got nothing to raise

my children on.

A: Oh really? So besides farming for your own rice field, do you help transplant or do paid labor work anywhere?

B: I don't.

A: No?

B: There is no one looking [for help], so no.

A: [You're] just staying at home?

B: Yes! Just staying home, still watching—

A: Is it because you just gave birth?

B: Yes.

A: So then do you go fishing or anything?

B: I go fishing to help raise my children.

A: Do you go fishing every day?

B: I find crabs—I find crabs, find snails, to help raise my children and earn money for my children to buy pastries and food.

A: It's very difficult, right?

B: Yes! Very difficult.

A: Oh! Is that normal when people separate or get a divorce?

B: Yes.

A: It is very difficult, isn't it?

B: Yes.

A: Do you feel that you still love your husband or how do you feel?

B: I don't love—he broke up with me. But I can also be heartless and want to find another husband too. I need to care for my children which is why I don't want to remarry but I only want to remarry—

A: So do you have someone else?

B: No!

A: You don't have someone yet?

B: Yes! I don't have one yet.

A: But are you interested in finding someone?

B: Yes!

A: You want to find another husband?

B: Yes!

A: To beat him at his own game?

B: Yes, that's right!

A: Is that right, so your husband that's living in Thailand, what does he do?

B: He works in construction.

A: Doing construction work?

B: Yes!

A: Oh! And you don't want to go find him in Thailand or anything?

B: Find him—for what reason if he has another wife? And he might want to abuse me if I try.

A: Oh! Really? Yes, so what religion do you follow every day? Buddhism?

B: Buddhism.

A: Do you follow Buddhism?

B: That's it! My religion is just like everyone else in Cambodia.

A: Like us Cambodians?

B: Yes!

A: Oh! So where have all your children gone?

B: My child is at home, my house in the west.

A: Your child?

B: Yes!

A: So how long were you together with your husband?

B: More than ten years.

A: It was more than ten years?

B: Yes! We just broke up.

A: What year did you split up?

B: We broke up this year.

A: This year?

B: Yes!

A: Yes! So lastly, do you have anything you'd like to say to your son, should he avoid anything, should he keep striving to do something, or anything like that? This is if he ever hears your interview, would you like him to know anything? If one day your son hears what you are saying, what do you want to say to your son?

B: I'm not sure what to say.

A: Something that your children should know?

B: Yes!

A: Your words, you know?

B: I'm not sure what to tell him.

A: What should he avoid, why should he try so hard, why should he avoid alcohol and gambling?

B: Yes things like that, I want to tell him that.

A: Would you like to say it?

B: I would like to tell my son to earn a big living and help me, that's right.

A: To study hard?

B: Yes! Study hard to gain knowledge like others and don't be like me. Don't be uneducated like his mom.

A: Anything else?

B: That's it!

A: Do you want your child to keep trying and never give up?

B: Yes, strive to learn and work hard to help his mother raise his younger sibling.

A: Oh is that right?

B: Yes!

A: Yes! Thank you very much, I hope your son hears the words you sent to him.

B: Yes!

A: [I hope] he works hard because he has a responsibility to help with his family.

B: Yes!

A: I hope that your son has as much perseverance as you do.

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