

Interviewer: I would like to thank you for giving me permission to interview you about your life history and the story of your life. My name is Nhem Sokunthea and I am interviewing today, and what is your name?

T: My name is Yoy Thuon.

S: Today we are interviewing on August 4, 2016. An American university called BYU provides this interview. The school is doing a project in which they interview Khmer people about their history in order to provide this information for future generations so they will know about their family history. Do I have your permission to upload this interview to the website and send to BYU?

T: Yes.

S: The website is called www.cambodianoralhistory.byu.edu. Now let us begin the interview. Can you please state your name again?

T: My name is Yoy Thuon.

S: And do you have any other names that you go by?

T: No.

S: So they call you Ming(Khmer title for Aunt) Thuon? And what is your date of birth?

T: I was born in 1970 on the 7th of February.

S: And where were you born?

T: In a village west of a temple.

S: Which province?

T: The city of Peam, Prey Veng Province.

S: How old are you?

T: I am 47 years old.

S: According to Khmer Zodiac years, what year were you born?

T: I don't remember.

S: Like the rat, the ox, the tiger, etc. do you know the animal that you were born in?

T: Oh! The monkey.

S: Okay so the 9th year of the 12-year cycle.

T: Yes.

S: Thank you! Okay, continuing on, how many siblings do you have?

T: There are 6 children in my family.

S: How many brothers and sisters?

T: All of us are girls.

S: So all girls! Where are you in your family?

T: The fifth child.

S: And now are all your siblings still living and if so, where?

T: Now there are only four of us still alive.

S: Where do they live?

T: The three others live in a village called Svay Rolum village number 4, Saang city, in the Kandal province.

S: So whom do you live with now?

T: I am living with my family.

S: Yes, okay. And what is the name of your father?

T: My father's name is Yoy Hak.

S: Yoy Hak. Do you remember where he was born?

T: He was born in Bung Preah. Oh sorry! He was born in Dey Thoy. (?)

S: Which part?

T: Close to the mountain in the Prey Veng province.

S: Prey Veng. Do you remember which year he was born?

T: I don't remember.

S: Can you remember the Cambodian lunar year that he was born?

T: I can't remember.

S: Okay so what about your mom? What is her name?

T: My mom is named Sok Prum.

S: Sok Prum. Where was she born?

T: Chak Khlanh in the Prey Veng province.

S: Which city?

T: Peam as well.

S: Can you remember the birthdate or year of your mom?

T: No.

S: Or the Cambodian lunar year?

T: No. I have never asked.

S: Okay. So back to your father—he died already, right?

T: Yeah. He died.

S: When did he die?

T: He died on July 4, 2004.

S: So how old was he when he died?

T: Um, he was 74.

S: So if we subtract that age from the year, what year would he have been born?

T: 1920 (this is incorrect, it should be 1931).

S: Yeah. So for your mom, how old is she now?

T: She's 81.

S: So what year would she have been born?

T: She was born in 1925. (Also incorrect. It should be 1935)

S: Do you love your parents?

T: Yes I love them very much!

S: Is there any fond memories you have of your father?

T: Speaking of my father, he was a very meek and calm person. He never bad-mouthed or talked back to anyone. He never cursed at his children, never called us bad names or spoke down to us, and he never hit us even with one hand. Although I was born truly poor, and poor people tend to be harsh, I love my parents so much. They were wonderful towards me and were very good people.

S: Yes. And what about your mother?

T: My mother is good, but sometimes she is easily upset. But she never was upset toward us children. My father was very tired because he didn't have any sons. Our family is all girls.

S: Wow! Lets talk about your ancestors. Do you remember the names of any of your ancestors?

T: My grandfather is named Ta Yoy. But I can't remember his full name; I've forgotten it! (Ta is the title used for grandfather)

S: And your grandmother?

T: My grandmother's name was Yay Heng. (Yay is the title used for grandmother)

S: Yes. Which side of the family are these grandparents?

T: They are my father's parents.

S: What about your mother's side?

T: On my mother's side my grandfather was named Ta Sok and my grandmother was named Yay Trav

S: Do you remember when any of your grandparents were born? Like what year?

T: I wasn't born yet. My mother's mother I wasn't yet born when she died. But my father's mother I was born before she died.

S: Where are they from?

T: in Chak Klanh.

S: In Chak Klanh! In the same city of Peam too.

T: Yes.

S: Okay, and you were around when they were still alive; do you know which Khmer year they were born?

T: I don't know because they never told me. But I was born before my father's parents for just a little.

S: So could you share about what you remember from them?

T: My grandfather, from what I can remember, he opened a business of buying and trading corn, beans, etc. And what I remember from my grandmother was that she was at home.

S: And did your grandparents ever take you to go play or do things with them?

T: No!

S: No, just spoke and joked with each other like normal?

T: Yeah, we would go play at their house like normal because the lifestyle in that day there wouldn't be a place we knew to go and play or do activities. We only knew to farm.

S: Okay that will end our discussion of your ancestors. Now I will ask about your schooling. What grade did you learn to?

T: I learned to the fourth grade.

S: What year was that?

T: Um... I learned in the year... '82

S: In 1982. Where did you go to school?

T: I learned in the temple school next to where I was born.

S: When you were in school, do you think you were a quick learner and a good studier?

T: When I was still in school I wasn't smart. Because back then I was tired from working on the farm, and I didn't have time to study because I had all girls in my family and after school we came straight home to watch the cows.

S: Yeah.

T: And after watching the cows we could come in and get water from the irrigation... like we were young boys (laughs). I never knew convenience.

S: When you were little, what did you hope to be when you grew up?

T: Oh when I was little I wanted to be someone who learned a lot and was very smart. I hoped to be a doctor.

S: A doctor!

T: Yeah I loved the idea of being a doctor! But I didn't do as I desired.

S: (Laughs) Yeah. It's okay! Have you ever worked in farmland?

T: Yes I have. When the water would rise in the rainy season, we would go fishing with nets. When the water would dry, we would fish with poles. We would plant beans and rice and corn. In the beginning of the year we would plant corn, then when the waters would rise, we would fish, and when the water would go away again, we would plant beans.

S: And does anyone in your family work day-to-day jobs?

T: Since I was little no one in my family had businesses or work or trade. We've only been farmers and country people.

S: And no one has worked? Has anyone worked for the government or anything?

T: No.

S: Okay. So when you were still in school, did you ever learn another language?

T: No. Just Khmer.

S: Can you read and write?

T: Yes now I can read and write a little bit.

S: And you can read every word?

T: Yes.

S: Okay very good. Reading and writing are very good skills. And I know you are married, so when did you marry?

T: I don't remember the day or the month, but I know I got married in '86.

S: In 1986. So for your marriage, did your parents arrange it or did you choose to marry out of love?

T: My marriage was not out of my own love. My parents arranged everything.

S: And if you didn't do as your parents said?

T: If I didn't do as my parents said, they would tell me that I was disobedient. They would say that I was proud and that I would have burdens the rest of my life. My husband today is the same one that our parents arranged for us.

S: What is your husband like then?

T: He has very meek characteristics. He doesn't know how to read and write, he doesn't yell or talk back. He just works.

S: When you were married, did women have any requirements towards men?

T: Women didn't have to give up anything except themselves. My parents took me to my husband's side of the family and made me get married because they said they had just married one daughter and with so many girls they couldn't wait for more time to marry their daughters. My husband's side of the family forced us to get married and said if you love each other and you cannot wait, marry yourselves then! And they took us and married us.

S: (Laughing) So they wouldn't wait any longer? Your husband's side forced you! Very funny! But it is a true story!

So looking at your life from the past and comparing to now, how is it different?

T: From my experiences, I don't think I've ever understood the world contentment. I only have known sickness, trials, and sadness because when I was young I helped my mom and this made me tired. My mother was poor and we had to budget with all my siblings who were all girls and none of us had learned much. Once I was married with a husband life was still hard and tiring either in finding a home, finding work, or in everything we do it was always difficult like we had to carry something with us.

S: Yes life is very difficult. I would like to move to the next question, which is about your likes and interests. So what do you like to eat?

T: If I think about it I don't know if I can choose!

S: Think about the food that you think is the most delicious!

T: The most delicious food... for me it is lemongrass stir-fry. I really like that stir-fry!

S: Oh I see you have that made right now! It's because it's your favorite.
And do you know how to cook all types of food?

T: Yes.

S: Where did you learn to make food?

T: I learned from my older sisters.

S: Could you tell me how to make the food that you like? For example how do you make stir-fry?

T: Stir-fry... from the beginning you take the meat and you have to cut it into small pieces. Then you take all the spices and ingredients and pound them into a paste. Then you put all the ingredients into the pan with oil. After that take browned garlic and cook all the ingredients, add anything else that sounds good.

S: Do you add any vegetables?

T: If you like to add them I would add yard-long beans.

S: Wow sounds delicious. Just hearing that makes me hungry!
And in your free time what do you like to do?

T: Besides working, I like to read especially the scriptures. I always come home and take my scriptures and read one or two pages. I also like to clean and organize my home. I like to be home and make it look nice. <...>

S: What about when you have free time with your family? Are there any places you guys go to do something entertaining?

T: I've never been someone who likes to go out for entertainment. My family has always been the same way; we don't go out for entertainment.

S: Oh really?

T: It's because first off we don't have the budget for that, and second off my family doesn't like to go out.

S: Oh all right. Do you know how to sing?

T: No!

S: Do you like to listen to music?

T: Yes.

S: What types of songs do you like to listen to?

T: I like sad songs.

S: Oh sad songs! So from those songs, which singer do you like? Who is your favorite celebrity?

T: Well I don't like any of the celebrities today.

S: (Laughs) So whom do you like from the old era?

T: The old celebrities I like are Pen Ron and Sin Sisamuth.

S: Oh those two are very famous.

Do any of your sisters know how to sing or play any instruments?

T: No, not any of us.

S: Oh. Okay so you were born before Pol Pot came into power, right?

T: Yes.

S: Yes. So could you tell me a little about the situation of your life and the things you had to face? Where did you have to go live?

T: I lived in the same place. ... In Peam in the village west of the temple in the town of Peam in the Prey Veng province. During the Pol Pot era I didn't get a very good education. I would go to the school and the teacher would sit up on a stand and teach us one or two words or some of the alphabet. We would go pick morning glory into one or two bundles and chase away birds. During this era we were suffering and it prevented me from learning well in school.

S: How was the food situation for you during this time?

T: Our situation got to the point where we didn't have rice or grain to plant. My older siblings and family would go pick lotus tubes; sometimes we would have to blend it with our rice. Sometimes we'd get red corn and grind it up and mix it with our rice. We suffered a lot.

S: Were all of your siblings in situations of difficulty during this era or did some have freedom?

T: Some of my siblings were already young ladies and only two of us were young children. My sister and I were still too young and couldn't be with the young women, but they would still use us to lift dirt or things.

S: Yeah.

T: It was so difficult then. Completely different from today.

S: I heard during that era that they would kill people very fiercely, right? Did you ever see something like that happen?

T: I never saw them kill anyone with my own eyes, but I would hear about them killing people by taking their necks and the stem of a sugar palm leaf and using it like a saw across their necks. Or they would hit people on the head and let them fall into a well or a hole.

S: Just hearing about it makes me have goosebumps!

T: In my mother's hometown there is a jail called Toul Sleng where they would kill people.

S: So they had another place like that in your mom's hometown?

T: Yeah that's the name they call it now.

S: During that era, what was the hardest part in your life?

T: It was the time that everything was broken up... I don't remember exactly what they called that era...

S: Lon Nol era?

T: No not the Lon Nol era... I don't remember but people were being run out of their hometowns and leaving their houses...

S: Why were people running away from their homes?

T: There was fighting and bombs going off.

S: Oh yeah that was the Lon Nol era.

T: Yes that era. So we would have to run and my father and sisters would have to be carrying things on their shoulders and head. At night they would sleep wherever they were. We were living in suffering.

S: You close your eyes and you can still imagine the suffering right?

T: Yes... so much suffering.

S: The regime was so difficult. Have your siblings and relatives and parents all been freed from this system?

T: Yes they've all been freed from it.

S: (I think she was implying whether or not any had died from this era) Do you have any siblings or cousins or relatives that during this era?

T: Oh! My aunt on my mom's side, my uncle on my mom's side, another aunt on my mom's side.

S: So many died!

T: Yes... so many died. From what I know, more than anyone who died were on my mom's side. Three or four people after the evacuation were placed on a boat and were hit and thrown out.

S: How does this whole era make you feel?

T: If I think about this era, I feel so sad. I feel like looking back on this era, and thinking if it were to happen again, I feel so bad for the children. Now I pray that we can avoid war because during that time there was so much suffering. There were meetings that we would go into and they would force two people to be together. My older sister was married during that time and she had never met or known the man they put her with. They never loved each other but just forced them to be together.

S: How did you feel after the Pol Pot regime was ended?

T: I was happy because we were freed from suffering and from hunger and thirst to some degree. It was like we were given a new life.

S: Yes many people say it was like they were resurrected. After this era ended, what did you do?

T: Like I said before, I worked on our farm until my parents prepared my marriage, then I lived with my husband and started a family.

S: What event in your life is one that you will never forget?

T: A memory that I can never forget is during the Lon Nol evacuation. It was so much suffering and after that ended we were in another type of suffering that was new where we didn't have anything to eat from night until day we would have a little rice and it was always dark.

S: For you, were the Lon Nol era and the Pol Pot era different or were they the same?

T: They were both the same for me. Both were full of suffering... we would eat only rice porridge, and I was never full.

S: Was there a lot of food and they just didn't give it to you?

T: If there ever were any food that was really good, they would take it from us and give it to people like the presidents or leaders of the communities and their families. We never really ate any meat. We ate a lot of broths and vegetable soups.

S: So after you were married, how many children did you have?

T: For my children that were actually born and lived to see the sun, I have four.

S: What are their names?

T: My first child is named Chum Socheat. My second child is named Chum Sothy—that child was only alive for three days. My third child is named Chum Sophanna. My fourth child is named Chum Seyha.

S: Oh your second child died three days after his birth?

T: Yes.

S: Do you have any children that you've taken in as your own or adopted?

T: I have one adopted child that I have known for about two years. Now they have gone back to their hometown.

S: What is their name?

T: Their name is hard to pronounce... I don't remember it well.

S: You don't remember? What did you call them?

T: I called them Seyha like my own son.

S: What is your husband's name?

T: His name is Sam Chum

S: So for raising your children, how have you raised them to be good and moral people?

T: Now I only have two children left in my home... my daughter and my son. I love my children and I have disciplined both my children to have good character and morals, even if we are poor. My children know to listen to me and they don't run around and play with their friends too much.

S: That's great. Have you had your children go to school too?

T: Yes. My daughter learned up to seventh grade, but she would cry and say that she couldn't learn and retain information like she wasn't smart enough. So now my son is still in school and still learning. Even though we are poor or whatever, he still pushes forward and learns Khmer and English.

S: Very good. So when you were young, you wanted to be a doctor. So now do you want to support your son to become a doctor as well in order to fulfill your own dream?

T: Yes!

S: You'd like him to be a doctor. Why do you think that studying is good for your son? What value does studying give to him?

T: Studying and learning has value for everyone. If one learns as much as they can, they will know many languages and they will be sophisticated within their community. But it also is according to the person because some people who are very educated will have a large income but will change their ways and become a bad person in the blink of an eye.

S: So how do you try and help your son or your descendants not follow this road?

T: I always tell him "son please try to learn as best as you can. I don't have a lot of wealth to give to you. I only have enough to pay for your school expenses, but I work hard for you to go to school. Please learn your best and stay on the right path so you can be of value to your community."

S: That's great. And what do you do to ensure that your family has happiness?

T: Everyday I want my family to be happy. My children, husband, and I work hard so we can have a house, enough food to eat, and enough clothes to wear. I want my neighbors in this village to know that my family is righteous and we are good people and we are happy. When others see my family I want them to see that we don't have bad thoughts or feelings or do bad things to our community.

S: Very good. What value does your family have in your life, and do you want to live with them forever?

T: I never want to be apart from my family or my husband. Even though he is not a bright person, he is a calm and meek person. Some people will say that living with someone who is uneducated is difficult, and it is true, but whenever he is upset or angry I try to be patient. This helps to keep peace in our family; if we fight or argue, I don't want our neighbors to hear and think that we argue and dispute like dogs. We try to keep problems out of our lives.

S: So do you have any methods to help your family to be happy?

T: I try to make enough money in our family to keep peace. In fact, my husband he drinks and he can be insulting, but not me. I don't fight back and it is sometimes difficult. Sometimes I will cry when I am sleeping and alone so my children don't see and don't worry. And I always try to be patient.

S: And for our last question of this interview, I want to remind you that this is for the future generations to remember and have a history from their past. So what would you like for your future generations to know about your good experiences that they can keep with them forever?

T: I want to advise my children that if they one day have families of their own they need to live in harmony together. Don't lesson each other's value, don't fight with one another, and don't be hard towards one another. Take your mother as an example because I always tried to be this way. Don't be prideful with your siblings and your neighbors. Do not walk down the wrong paths in life. If your relatives or siblings try to get you to go down the wrong paths, you need to help straighten them out. If you have good character and choose the right paths, I will be happy and I will do well toward my children.

S: Thank you so much for your interview. I know that future generations will listen to your voice. Thank you for today! That is all I have.

T: Yes! Thank you so much as well. Good luck with your project!