

Interview of Chab “Nike” Chheang

A: Interviewer: Dana Bourgerie

B: Interviewee: Chab “Nike” Chheang

Summary of the Interview

Chheang “Nike” Chab was born in Battambang province and fled Cambodia at the beginning of the Khmer Rouge era. He recounts being separated from part of his family while escaping and being sold by his father to a Thai family for a bag of rice. Following his immigration to America, he embraced Christianity and spent thirty years before unexpected events led to reuniting with his family, allowing him to reconcile with his father just a year before his father’s death. Despite his many hardships, Nike describes finding fulfillment in his family and religious beliefs while navigating a new life in America.

A: So thanks for participating. First of all, tell us your full legal name, what was on your government ID? I know that you came young and you were orphaned, was there a legal name that you know?

B: I was given a name by birth, just Chheang.

A: Chheang. And so that’s what you were known by—

B: That’s all I knew when I left the country.

A: So no family name attached to it then?

B: Um, when we were doing the interview to come to America from the refugee camp, it was required that we have a last name. So, I didn’t know the name that—the last name that we go by, or that we ever go by. So, they asked for the last name, so I just remembered my Dad’s name. So I just remembered that it was Chab.

A: So, you took his given name as your last name.

B: Yeah my Dad’s first name as the last name. So it was Chab Chheang.

A: So is that what is on your government ID here?

B: Yeah, the Driver’s License, Birth Certificate, it was that one.

A: Do you have a passport?

B: Social Security, and Passport.

A: Okay, were you called any other names when you were young?

B: Uh, when I came here to America, yes. I was given a nickname of Nike.

A: Nike. And how did that come about?

B: It was because—

A: Does it have anything to do with the shoe, or?

B: [Pauses] Yes, it definitely had to do with the shoe. I was playing a lot of basketball when I was younger, and that kept me out of a lot of trouble. So, church ball—church basketball.

And we were competing at the Ximeno building here in Long Beach. One of the coaches was the Young Men's leader, so he was coaching us at basketball too. And he's out of this ward actually, Atherton, and his name is Bishop Thompson—he was Brother Thompson before that. And we were running in the basketball [game], and he couldn't call me by my real name—he couldn't think of my name, so he looked at the shoes I was wearing and he said, "Okay, from now on, you'll be known as Nike."

A: And that caught on?

B: That caught on.

A: So does everyone call you Nike mostly?

B: Mostly Nike, yeah.

A: So do you remember any other childhood names that you had, or nicknames?

B: No.

A: No? So in the US you've been called Nike for a while.

B: Yes, since 1986—

A: How about school? What were you called in school then?

B: School—my friends that played ball with me that were members of the church, they knew me by Nike.

A: What did the teachers call you?

B: The teachers called me—

A: Your legal name of the United States?

B: My teachers don't really call me—

A: [Laughs]—call you anything! Or maybe Nike. So, did you—have you other languages besides Khmer? When you were in refugee camps, did you ever learn Thai at all, or Lao?

B: That's one thing I really regret—is that, in the refugee camp, we were given the opportunity to learn Khmer—how to read and write and all of that. Because we couldn't do it during the Khmer Rouge era, it's not legal. If we were educated, we were executed. And, uh, I didn't take the opportunity because, you know, I worked instead of educating myself. People tell me—adults told me to go to class and go to school and learn the language and reading and writing, but I didn't do that, I went to work instead, earning one baht per day selling porridge.

A: So did you ever learn to read and write in Khmer?

B: When I came here to America, yes, I really regretted it, so I felt like I need to do something. So, I went to the Bayon market in Long Beach, and bought myself some books, literature [on] how to read, I learned the alphabet and how to read and write. I don't write that well because some words are not the same when you say it, it sounds different.

A: But at least you have basic literacy now.

B: Yeah.

A: And so, how old are you now?

B: I am now—legally, in the United States, 48 next month.

A: So, do you think that's not your actual age, or—?

B: That's the age that I given—was a guessing age when I applied to come to America from the refugee camp in Surin and the guy looked at me, like, "Uh, you look like 12 years old."

A: So you weren't sure—when you came you weren't sure you were 12. So it's not something you talked about growing up, about age or birthdays.

B: It's not important, there's no such thing as birthdays.

A: Because most Cambodians count the first of the year as birthday, right?

C: Or Khmer New Year.

A: Or Khmer New Year, or whatever?

B: Something like that, yeah.

A: So you don't know what Zodiac year you were born in or do you claim one?

B: Um, I talked to different people and some say that I was a chicken, some say I was a snake, some say I was a rabbit.

A: So you're not sure, but you don't identify with any of the Zodiac years necessarily. So what year of birth shows on your passport?

B: They asked for the date of birth in the refugee camp when I first applied to come here, they make [it] up and say—"Uh, since you're 12 years old" they say, "Okay, what day? What month?" They just say, "Oh, April. April is number 4—"

A: So, April 4th, and then what year?

B: So they say, "What day?" and since April is the 4th month, "April 4th, okay."

A: Yeah. And then what year?

B: I'm stuck with that date of birth.

A: So, what's the date of birth on your passport?

B: April 4th.

A: No, the year, sorry.

B: April 4, 1970.

A: '70. Okay. So, are you married?

B: I am.

A: So, do you have children or—?

B: I have 4—3 boys, 1 girl. The oldest, he's serving his mission in Japan, in the Tokyo South Mission.

A: And so, do your kids speak Khmer?

B: I wish. I tried.

A: But no, not so much?

B: They don't have any interest. Learning the language, they don't understand the importance.

A: So, but your wife is Cambodian speaking too?

B: My wife, she speaks a few words of Cambodian but, she's fluent in Thai.

A: Is she ethnically Cambodian?

B: She's Thai.

A: Oh, she's Thai. But she's—how did you meet?

B: Oh yeah, that's a long, long story, but—

A: Give me the short version. [Laughs]

B: When I was in the refugee camp—well, before the refugee camp I was traded to a Thai family in Thailand. And they took me and then when they ended up in Surin and I saw these Thai girls, they were going to school, they dressed up in uniform, you know, white and blue and I was like, "Wow, they look very cute." And I said, "One day I want to marry a Thai woman." [All laugh] And not knowing what—what I said back then was—

A: It was going to come to pass.

B: It stuck with me, ever since.

A: So, but you don't know Thai yourself.

B: I know Thai.

A: Do you speak Thai reasonably well?

B: Yes.

A: So you speak Thai with your wife at all, or—?

B: When she wants to speak Thai, yes.

A: [Laughs] Sometimes in the right situation, right?

B: Yes, yeah.

A: Okay.

B: She doesn't believe that—

A: So you actually met in the refugee camp?

B: No, I—

A: Oh, I see you just you started to think about Thai young women at that point. Did you meet her here then?

B: I met her here in Long Beach City College at the Long Beach Institute.

A: I see.

B: Yeah, at a fireside.

A: Oh, that's great. It's a good place to meet. So, do you know, did you know—remember your parents?

B: I know their first name, their last—I mean their first names.

A: What were their first names?

B: My Dad's name is Chab, which translates as a bird. And my mother's name is Hak, I don't know any meaning to that.

A: But you don't know a family name or a surname. Do you have any idea what their surname or family name was?

B: I found out now. My mother's name is Hak and then Lei and my father's name is Chab and last name of Plong, which I didn't know that.

A: How did you find that out?

B: Since I came to America, I was alone for 30-some years and I've been praying and asking Heavenly Father saying, "I'd like to have an opportunity just to meet my parents, my family, especially my mother, once again, just to let them know that, well, I love her. To thank her for all the things, you know, she's done for me." I've been praying for 30-some years. And after my mission, I came back, got married to my wife, who is Thai—and this is the part where I tell the long story—is that not knowing beforehand that, you know, the wife that I married to, she had relatives in Thailand. When we came, we went back to Thailand to visit their relatives, two, three different times. The first two times they said—they asked me if I wanted to go look for my family members by going to the Thai embassy or Khmer embassy in Thailand. And I refused the first two times, and the third time I say, "Oh, I'm running out of places to visit in Thailand. So okay, let's go take a stab at it." The day that we went there to the Khmer embassy, [we] talked to the people that work there, which are Khmer, and I ask them for help. I give them the information that I have—the name of my parents, my brothers and sisters. They looked at me, they said, "Sorry, I don't know where to start. Don't know how to help you, but we do have a young lady who come all the way from Cambodia, just to visit us today, maybe you can talk to her." So, I went and talked to the young lady. Her name, she [was] called Da, she called herself Da and I talked to her, giving her the information that I have in regard to my family, the location where they possibly could be at. And she ended up saying, "That's where my family's from!" I said—you know—she said, "Give me \$75, you know, I'll take a taxi down there and I'll look for your family for you." And I say "okay," so I just didn't think about—I didn't think that I was going to have any hope, anything—but, two days later I was in northern Thailand like four or six hours away from the border of Thailand and Cambodia. [She lived in a place] called Aran. That's where she was at, and she called me and said, "Hey, I found your family." And I was confused, excited, mixed emotions, like can it be real? Is it just somebody just claiming to be my family, because they needed money? You know, so I say, "OK, give me two days." We drive back down to the border and then we met—and as soon as we got there, the border [was] getting ready to close and it was pouring rain. We wait for the rain to stop so we can get out and go meet each other. The rain never really stopped until, like, the evening before the border closed, like half an hour before the border closed. They were on the other side of

the border and I'm on the other side, which is Thailand. Finally, I say, "We gotta go, the border's gonna close." We walked out, the minute we walked out, the rain stopped. Right?

A: Huh!

B: So [we] got a chance to go out to the other side, got permission from the guards and security. We—we talked for—I went over there and we talked for a little bit. And the first thing—my dad was trying to approach me, I recognized it was him. Totally doesn't look anything like him, but I recognized the tattoo and his face. You know, like, it changed a lot after 30 years. I saw his tattoo on his neck and his chest, and I recognized that. And I noticed him out of the corner of my eyes, and while I was talking to my sister, which turned out, wasn't my sister, it was my half-sister. And I look over there and I saw him walking around me and trying to say something. And he opened up his mouth, and he couldn't say anything. He was speechless. And I know what he's thinking. I know. I know what he wanted to say, and I understand how he felt. Because for him to trade me to a Thai family for a bag of rice, you know, he doesn't understand that I understood.

A: So back up, let's back up a second. You didn't quite tell us about that before. So he traded—he actually traded you because he was in poverty—?

B: Yes. Well, during the war, we were running from our home. And first I separated from my Mom after a day—my Mom and my oldest brother—separated. Gone. We waited for them for about 3 days, 4 days at a place called Chomnong. And they never returned, so bye Mom and older brother. They went on a canoe, we went on—the canoe was leaking, so we didn't get on the canoe because it was leaking. So they went toward Vietnam, and we went on land. And we [were] supposed to, I guess, meet at a certain location. And we waited and waited. She never showed up, so we came back to the original place, which—?

A: So at that point, who—who were you with at the time?

B: I'm not with my dad. My older brother, not the oldest, but the older brother and three sisters.

C: And this is before the Khmer Rouge?

B: This is at the beginning.

C: So the beginning?

A: What year was this?

B: This is the Vietnam War. I believe it's '76.

A: '76. So that's how you separated from your family. So your dad then ended up trading you. Did you become a servant in the home then, or—?

B: Um, not really. At first, we just separated from my Mom and my older brother, and then when we went to the border of Thailand, the war was catching up with us. We went toward Thailand and then, uh, while we were running around, days and nights for very, very long time, no one knows really what time, what day or what year it is, you know, we've been running for a long time. We were starving, we were hungry, we were thirsty and we don't have much to eat. Like a lot of the food that we have, we just gathered as we go, you know, worms, crickets, insects, you know.

A: So you remember that very clearly.

B: Oh yeah, it's very hard to forget, it's pretty vivid. And I got really sick, and when I got really sick, my stomach's like I'm eight and a half months pregnant or—

A: Was the water really bad too?

B: We don't know if it was bad or good. I mean, I drank some really dirty water sometimes. I thought it was water, but it was like animal pee.

A: Oh!

B: You know, it's in a pot and I'm just so thirsty, I just went at it and it was kind of muddy, cloudy and don't taste anything like pee until I'm all done.

A: So you—so you knew your family pretty well before that. I mean, you have good—you have memories. Do you remember the names of your siblings? What were the names of your siblings?

B: Yes.

A: So, what were their names, could you tell us?

B: My oldest went with my mother. His name is Ploy, and I found out that he stepped on a landmine in '95 and blew him to pieces. This is after the war, yeah, some Khmer Rouge place a bomb in front of his path.

A: So that was after you were separated, but you found this out later.

B: This is after I—this wait of 30 years—

C: In '95 you said?

B: Yeah, in '95.

A: Yeah, so when you when you learned about—when you reunited with some of the family you found that out, that he had died.

B: Yes, yes, I found out afterwards.

A: And how about your other siblings? What were their names?

B: My oldest sister is, we called her "Bok" during the war, but I found out her real name after we relocated each other. Her real name is Soeum. And my sisters, two sisters—well, the next oldest one is my brother Chhay, which is now Chhaya. He's working for UNICEF company now. And my older sister is Soeum and then my next sister is Chhuth. And then Pov, Pov is the youngest, so she's the one after—

A: And so you've reconnected with all these.

B: Yes.

A: And are your parents still alive?

B: No, during the time when I met them at the border—because it was so, so little time, I told them saying, "You know what? We're out of time now, I will visit you in two years." And one year went by, and my dad died. And I was informed that he was on a motorcycle, in the back of the motorcycle being taken to my hometown where we started—where the war

started, in Soeur.

A: So, tell me again, where were you born?

B: In a place called Soeur.

A: Okay.

B: Close to Chomnom Roum Kor, in Battambang province. And I didn't know all this before, like, I didn't even know the name of the town, but—

A: But you think you were born there though?

B: Yeah, I know I was born there.

A: You know you were born there.

B: So, my dad was on his way back to town to see my mother, and on the way there, someone cut in front of him, cut in front the motorcycle. The motorcycle went out of control, flipped, and he landed on the ground, and the motorcycle flipped and landed on top of him. Damaged him internally, and he didn't have the money to go to the hospital, so he was bleeding internally and then he died, before I got a chance to go back. But my mother, she passed, I believe, 2003. Yeah, I believe 2003. Um, I'm not sure on that date.

A: So tell us a little bit about, you know, how you felt over the years knowing what happened to you and how it happened? Was that hard for you to accept or—?

B: No. Especially after I received the gospel in 1986, I'm beginning to understand Heavenly Father's work and because of what I understood from reading the Book of Mormon. I began to put two, one and one together, you know and—

A: And you sort of thought it was meant to be, or—?

B: This is the work that Heavenly Father is doing, and I believe that it is a blessing because so many times that I could have died from drowning, from poison, from disease, which I didn't.

A: So before you met the church and accepted the gospel, were you bitter or was it the church that helped you gain perspective, or were you bitter before then, or—?

B: No, I was never bitter.

A: You never were, even before you met the church?

B: Right. Well, because—I was a little confused, but because I was so young, I didn't understand.

A: Oh, you didn't think about it that way.

B: I didn't really process all this and put it together. Yeah.

A: Okay. We might come back to that, but do you know where your parents were born or were they also in the same village?

B: I know they were born in Cambodia, but I have no idea—I never really had a chance to talk to them. I know—the first thing when I saw my mother was when I asked her, I said “Mom, do you know how old I am? What day I was born, what month?” So, I told them that

I'm guessing that my age [was] about this age, and she said, "You're about right."

A: Okay.

B: That's all I—

A: And do you know anything about your grandparents?

B: I know one—if it's, if I'm correct, I know that we have a grandparent called—one is Kong. And the Grandma, I don't know. I believe maybe that's where my mother got her name from—it's Lei. So, Kong and Lei.

A: Maybe.

B: Yeah, maybe.

A: But you're not sure.

B: Yeah, I have not had the opportunity to go back and do some more, I guess, questioning.

A: So do you know at least which province they were born in?

B: Me—province—you mean, I know—I'm close to Battambang.

A: So you think probably around Battambang.

B: Yeah, I'm an hour and a half, or two hour motorcycle ride from Battambang.

A: So were they farmers?

B: We were strictly farmers.

A: So it's a good chance that they might have lived in that area for a while then.

B: Yes.

A: Okay. And so, what else do you know about your family, do you think as far as you know, were they in Cambodia for a long time or did you have any other ethnic backgrounds? Vietnamese, Chinese, or anything like that, that you know of?

B: Not to my knowledge, um, I know that my dad was a boxer and that's how he met my mother. And I found this out later, through a lady who's here in America.

A: So, so the traditional Cambodian boxer? Traditional style or—?

B: More like a kickboxer.

A: Like Thai kickboxing?

B: Yeah, Thai. More like Thai.

A: Yeah. And so, that's how he met your mother. How does the connection with mother and—meeting mother and boxing?

B: Somehow she found when she went to watch them box and—

A: She liked to watch boxing?

B: You know, I never really got to talk to her—

A: So was that—but that's where she met him. So maybe she must have had some

connection with boxing.

B: Yeah.

A: So, let's go back to sort of how you grew up. I mean you were sort of—you were split from your parents early at 12. Did you have formal education at all when you got to Thailand, did you go to any kind of school?

B: No, I got to learn one alphabet [letter] in Cambodia and then the war broke out. I learned the letter ñ.

A: [Laughs] Just ñ.

B: Yeah, very useless, yeah.

A: I know ñ too, so—

B: I know. One day, and that's the end of it [school].

A: But when you came here? So you didn't really go to school in Cambodia or Thailand then.

B: Correct.

A: And so it wasn't really until you got to the United States where you started to get a formal education then?

B: Yes.

A: So, what do you—do you remember being on the farm and growing up there? Did you do work on the farm?

B: Oh yeah.

A: Was it rice? Or what kind of work did you do on the farm?

B: Well, oh, where we were at, mainly farming rice.

A: So were you out in the fields? What were you doing?

B: Yeah, out in the fields, I'm hunting, I'm gathering, I'm searching daily for—

A: What did you hunt?

B: For fish, fruits, vegetables, anything that's edible we find.

A: So were you poorer than most of your neighbors, or about the same?

B: We were all pretty poor. We're all about the same.

A: I see. So did you own some land in your family?

B: I have no knowledge, during the war, or before the war. As far as now, yes we own [some].

A: So it sounds like your life was pretty difficult. Do you remember some fun things that you did, even despite the difficult life? Do you remember any games? Did you like playing with friends or—

B: Oh yeah.

A: So what do you remember about—sort of games you played and the fun you had?

B: [Laughs] Here we go. Um, besides climbing coconut trees and picking tamarinds off tamarinds trees and other things, we do have some fun. Every year I watched people, grownups and adults—they were going through a New Year's celebration, they were dancing and singing and all that, and I wanted to be a part of that and that stayed in my head for a long time. But the game that we were playing, we call—there's one game that I remember called Bos Lo. Which is like, a small—we create a hole in the dirt about the size of a quarter and we would use money—coins and we would try to toss the money into the hole from a marked distance—a marked position. And if you can get the money into the hole, you get to keep those. That's one game, and the other game was “rubber band.” Somehow, I don't know where the rubber band came from, we had some rubber bands and we drew a big old circle and put the rubber band inside. With the sandal that we have, we use that to try to toss it from a marked distance, again, I don't know maybe 20 feet or so. And we toss it at the rubber band. If the rubber band was hit by the sandal and it goes outside the circle, you get to keep the rubber band.

A: I see.

B: Yeah. The other one we played was “rubber band” too, but we hung them up on a stick, like this, and we rolled up [another] rubber band and we mark a location, and we shot at the rubber band that was rolled up and on a stick. If you knock it down and it moves out of that circle, you get to keep that. And the one other thing that we really like to play was the marble game. We drew a line on the dirt—I don't know how, how or where we got the marble from, to me it was really amazing—look, a marble could have different shapes and sizes and colors—beautiful. So we got the marbles, each of us [would] have a certain number of marbles, so we drew a line, and then we drew a rectangle shape around the line. You put the marble inside, line them up one by one, and we play for three or four—we all put them all in there. And then you mark a distance, and from that distance it's like a snake. Like, there's the head and then there's a tail. If you hit the head and it knocks the head out of the triangle—I mean, the rectangle shape, you get to keep all the marbles. But if you hit it right in the middle you only get to keep from where you hit down to the tail.

A: I see.

B: So, it's pretty fun.

A: So, you had some good times. Did you mostly play with other boys or did the girls play too or—?

B: No girls, they—girls, they played other games.

A: They played their own games?

B: Yeah, they had other games to play.

A: So, what did your house look like growing up? Was it a traditional Cambodian house? Was it raised up or—?

B: You could call it traditional, I mean, four sticks—

A: Well, I mean, the raised-up type—

B: Raised up, yeah.

A: Pretty simple though.

C: Bamboo?

B: Yeah. Bamboo and straws, roofing.

A: Did you have to help fix it up?

B: I was too young back then.

A: Yeah. So, a little back to the challenges a little bit before the end here. So, you said you were traded for a bag of rice to a Thai family. And was it to sort of serve—did you have to be a servant in the house? What did you do when you went to the Thai home?

B: Oh, well, the reason my Dad traded me—I didn't know—but I did talk about it before it happened—he had asked me a question, he said, "Do you want to go live with Thai people?" And for me, something told me several days before that I wanted to. And when he confirmed that, it kind of confirmed my feelings, I said, "OK." So we traveled all day long across a mountain to the other side of the mountain. And then we met a Thai family, and my little sister Chhuth—the sister after me, and then there was Pov—the youngest. Chhuth went with me, and my Dad and a few other Khmer people went also, to look for food and all that. And when we got there, we met a family and he gave me to a Thai family—a couple—has one daughter, a very young couple. And he in turn gave my dad a bag of rice, I'm guessing maybe about 50 pounds. A bag of rice, and he gave my sister of a neighbor family.

A: Oh, so your sister was also given away?

B: Yeah. And he worked the rest of the day, tried to earn some money or some food, and at the end of the day when before the sun set, he started going back to the rest of my family on the other side. And when the evening came, he started his trip. And my sister Chhuth saw him leave, and she started crying very, very hard. And she was pulling away from that family that she was given to.

A: So it was just you and your sister were given to families, two of you.

B: Yeah, two—me and her to two different families, yeah.

A: OK, so not in the same area. Did you ever see each other?

B: The same area.

A: Oh, so did you see each other sometimes?

B: Well, when my Dad left that day, my sister started to cry. [She] cried so hard that the Thai family that took my sister in felt really bad. So, they let her go, she ran after my Dad. And from what I saw, out of the view of my eyes, she hadn't met my Dad yet, he was already into the mountain.

A: So she probably didn't find him.

B: Yeah, she probably didn't from that day, the thing that was in my head was, "Did she die? Did she get eaten by animals? Did she suffer? Did she ever get back?" You know, for 30-some years, that was in my head.

A: Oh, and did you—and you met up with her again later?

B: When—yeah, when I found my family—

A: When you reconnected again.

B: Yeah.

A: So, what did you do in that home? Did you help out with things, or what did you do?

B: Farm.

A: So basically you were sort of a worker—

B: Working, yeah, picking cotton from the cotton field.

A: Did they treat you okay?

B: They didn't really bother me, they just tell me what I need to do.

A: You just did your work, they left you alone.

B: Oh yeah, I worked—

A: Did you find friends there, or—?

B: No, I didn't know the language, so I didn't really have friends. People looked at me really strange and they know I'm not Thai. They know that I'm Cambodian. The law states that in Thailand you're not allowed to have Cambodian people live among you. If you find out they can—

A: They can get fined or something.

B: They break the law. The soldiers will come and who knows what they're going to do. But we were not allowed to live among them.

A: So, you've already talked about some fairly serious challenges in your life and things you've been through. Can you think of some other things that that you went through that were really difficult and how you dealt with them over the years, and—?

B: That was the thing—Heavenly Father—I didn't realize it until after I received the gospel a while afterward. He didn't make me feel like it was a burden. I was going through the motions, but I was going through pretty light. I didn't really have much of a consciousness that this is suffering, you know. Although I didn't have any food—we were starving, we were thirsty—but every day, every time we go out, we always find something that's sufficient for the day and not to live—

A: So, you'd live day-to-day.

B: Yeah.

A: So, was your family, were they Buddhist? Were they practicing Buddhist?

B: Before the war, they tried to take me to the temple and they would drag me by my arm to the temple and we see some kind of sprinkling water from the monk. That's what I remember. I'm guessing that's what we'd call Buddhism baptism. You know, I [was] never really into it.

A: So your family didn't go to the temple much, or you don't remember too much of that.

B: We were away from the temple out where we were at. We were strictly farmers and we were distant from the city.

A: Did you practice any like ancestor rites? Did you have, like, a spirit house or anything like that?

B: They do have—my Dad, I remember, he built some—just a piece of wood with some roofing.

A: So, kind of a simple spirit house.

B: Yeah.

A: Did you do some rites there?

B: I was too young.

A: You didn't remember that. But, so, Buddhism wasn't a big part of your life then.

B: No, not really.

A: Okay.

B: I'm glad that I didn't. It would have been tough to convert.

A: [Laughs] Well, what's really interesting to me [as you were] talking is you seem to have had a really good sense of your purpose early on in life. You seem to think that God had a purpose for you [since you were] very young, right. Which is very unusual for somebody at that age. Can you talk—um, what other things that, you know, if you were thinking, what do I want my kids to know, about who you are? And what—you know, your life experiences, what would you pass on [to your children]? What if they were sitting in the room here? What would you tell them? What would you want to tell them about your life?

B: Every day, this is a concern of mine, not that I have my kids. I just want them to follow the commandments, because the only thing that's important in this world, is each other, family, and what we do as far as obedience. You know, how obedient are we? You know, are we obedient enough to qualify ourselves for his kingdom that he's prepared for us? And that's why now I take them to seminary each morning. You know, it is difficult, it is early and all that, they are reluctant, but I give them choices and they made the right choice so far. And I just want them to understand the whole purpose that—you know what? We live here as family. We try to do our best here and then in the next life, hopefully we'll be together and that's why we got married in the temple.

A: So, what would you consider—I think I know the answer to this, but what would you consider the most important and best memories of your life?

B: Oh, you know, I wish I had money when I was younger, I don't have to work so hard so I can spend time, you know, with friends and families, you know? And—

A: So, what's your work now? What kind of work do you do?

B: In 1998, I finally got accepted by the Los Angeles Sheriff Department and I'm a deputy sheriff.

A: Oh, so you work in law enforcement.

B: Yeah.

A: And you work locally in this area, or all around LA?

B: Um, I'm in Downey, but I work all over. Where before [I was in] LA north, LA, and then west LA and then here locally.

A: So, anything else? In a minute, we're going to ask you to show us some of the things you brought, but is there anything else you sort of want to share with us?

B: [Pauses] I wish that, you know, I don't know how Heavenly Father chose me to come here to America. I'm still clueless, you know, because I'm not—I'm not anywhere close to being smart. You know, I didn't make the right choice for education when I was younger, you know, I wish that my brother would have been here instead of me. But he chose me out of all my family member to receive the gospel. You know, I went back and tried to share with my family, the gospel. And I went to the church in Battambang, brought them some Book of Mormons so they can read. So, my wish is that if they ever look at this video and they ever find out about the video that they need to know that Heavenly Father is real, heaven is real, Christ is real, it's not Buddhism. They need to follow Christ's commandments. And that—they would be accepting of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That would be one of my main goals, I guess.

A: Well, thank you and maybe we'll wrap up this formal part of the interview.

For a more complete version of Nike's life story, please look at the book *Out of the Killing Fields, Into the Light: Interviews with Mormon Converts from Cambodia*, by Penne D. Conrad. This book was published in 2011 and features another compelling version of Nike's story as narrated by himself.

This interview was transcribed by Thomas Barrett, a former missionary to the Cambodian branch in Long Beach and friend of the Chab family.