

Interview of Eam Pov

A: Interviewer: Nhem Sokunthea

B: Interviewee: Eam Pov

Summary of the Interview

Eam Pov was born in the Year of the Dog and currently lives in Phnom Penh. In this interview, Eam Pov focuses on sharing many of her life stories from her childhood until the present day, briefly touching on each of the different generations she has lived through.

A: So, today I would like to thank you for allowing me to interview you about your life history. My name is Nhem Sokunthea, and I'm the interviewer. So, what is your full name?

B: My name is Eam Pov.

A: Eam Pov. Today is August 11, 2016, and we are conducting an interview. This interview was prepared by a university in America called BYU. This university has a program to conduct interviews about your life history and the Cambodian people so that future generations can study and find understanding from the history of their ancestors, their stories and lives. So will you allow me to put this interview on the website of the university, BYU? Do you agree to allow that?

B: I agree.

A: Yes, alright, and this website is called www.cambodiaoralhistory.byu.edu. So I would like to start the interview. So, could you please state your full name again?

B: Eam Pov.

A: So, do you have any nicknames?

B: No.

A: You are only called Pov? Like this?

B: Yes!

A: So, do you remember what year you were born?

B: Uh—I forget—I forgot my birth year, but I'm 73 already.

A: 73, so you were born in the 1900's—so maybe your children would know if they subtract your age of 73 from the year 2016. Then they can know what year you were born in. So, do you remember according to the Cambodian year, what animal year you were born in? Like the mouse, ox, tiger, or rabbit—?

B: I was born in the year of the dog.

A: Right!

B: Born in the year of the dog.

A: The year of the dog. How many brothers and sisters did you have?

B: They have all died. I am the only one left.

A: But when they were still alive?

B: Five people, four boys and one girl.

A: Five people, okay. So, when did they die?

B: Some died during Pol Pot's time, some from the Collective.

A: Alright, so, from the time of Pol Pot you are the only one to survive?

B: I'm the only one, and my kids.

A: Okay, and so which number child are you?

B: I am the fifth child.

A: The fifth, okay. So, do you remember your father, what his name was?

B: His name was Som Eam.

A: Som Eam?

B: Yes!

A: Okay, so, is he living or deceased?

B: Uh—he died a really long time ago.

A: When did he die?

B: He's been dead since, uh—before the Lon Nol coup.

A: Okay. So, when he died, how old was he?

B: He was 70 or older.

A: 70 or older also. So, he was born a long time ago. And so, do you remember the birthplace of your father? Where was he born?

B: He was born in Kampong Trabaek district, Prey Veng province.

A: Alright. So, what memories do you have with your father, such as what kind of person he was, so, what kind of person he was and how affectionate he was toward you?

B: Uh, my parents loved their kids immeasurably. I can't even describe it.

A: Right!

B: And the kids honored Father equally as their own lives.

A: Right.

B: Yes!

A: Because he was good.

B: Right!

A: Yeah. And at that time what did he do to support you and your siblings?

B: He built wood houses. He worked wood to build houses and such.

A: Okay. So, do you remember that your dad, your father, in what year, month and animal year was he born?

B: Tiger, the tiger.

A: The tiger, the year of the tiger. Okay, so, what about your mother? What was your mother's maiden name?

B: Prom Phun.

A: Prom Phum. So, do you remember your mom, what year was she born?

B: I don't know.

A: So, what is the animal year of her birth is what?

B: Ox.

A: The year of the ox. Alright. So, do you know where the birthplace of your mother was?

B: The same district together.

A: The same district together?

B: Together with my dad.

A: Alright, what was the previously mentioned district?

B: Kampong Trabaek district, Prey Veng province.

A: Okay. So, about your mother, in what year did she die?

B: I don't remember.

A: What period was it?

B: Ever since before the coup.

A: Alright. So, as you remember, she was born during the rule of King Sihanouk?

B: That's right.

A: So, what do you remember about your mother? What kind of person was she and what was her way of parenting you like?

B: My mother parented me well, and that's why I was determined to be as good as I am today.

A: So that had influence on you.

B: And when we were sick, we didn't have a riel.

A: Yeah.

B: Only relatives and close neighbors, they brought things to help take care of ourselves.

A: Yeah.

B: I don't have any money.

A: Right.

B: I only have but twenty thousand, thirty thousand, forty thousand riel.

A: Right.

B: That's including my kids and everything, honestly without hiding anything.

A: Okay. So, for your grandfather on your father's side of the family, what is his name as well?

B: His name is Som, yes.

A: Grandfather Som?

B: Yes, Som Eam.

A: Your Grandfather?

B: Yes, my Grandfather on my father's side.

A: Alright. Do you know in what time [period] was he born?

B: Uh, I was born after he passed.

A: Do you remember your grandfather's birthplace? Where it was?

B: They were all born in the same place—all of them.

A: In Kampong Trabaek district, Prey Veng province, right?

B: Right!

A: Alright. What about your father—did he ever mention which animal year your grandfather was born in?

B: I don't know.

A: No; and you were not born before he died?

B: Not before.

A: So, on your father's side, what was her name as well?

B: Huh?

A: Your grandmother on your father's side?

B: I forgot already.

A: That's alright, but he was born in the same province. Now, your mother's side for a change. What was your grandmother's name on your mom's side?

B: Uh, shucks, I forget that as well—

A: Okay.

B: Asking things like that, sometimes I can remember, sometimes I can't.

A: That's alright. What about your grandfather instead? Do you remember your grandfather on your mother's side?

B: I just told you a second ago.

A: I mean your mother's side. A second ago, was your father's side, now how about your grandfather on your mother's side.

B: Oh, on my mother's side huh?

A: Do you also not remember?

B: Prom.

A: Grandma Prom?

B: Grandpa Prom.

A: Grandpa Prom, yeah, alright. So, for him, he also lived with everyone else in Prey Veng,?

B: They were all there, but he died already. Whatever you do, I still can't remember.

A: Not a problem. So, are there any of your parents siblings still living? Your siblings or other relatives? Do you have anyone living in other countries?

B: No.

A: No, okay.

B: Well. If they break away from us without us knowing where they went, how are we supposed to find out?

A: Yes, of course. So, what—during the old society, [at the time of Lon Nol] to what grade did you learn in school?

B: I do not know.

A: You never went to school?

B: I never learned.

A: Did you ever learn literacy in anything?

B: No.

A: Not at all. So, you didn't ever learn anything at all?

B: Right!

A: So, for you, like, your dream when you were young what did you want to become when you grew up?

B: I didn't have anything I wanted to be, I just wanted to thing and work to help my parents; they were getting old.

A: Right.

B: I tried to help sell things, and work, so all I knew was to work till I was old.

A: So, you didn't have any specific goal? All you knew was to try and survive?

B: Right!

A: Okay. So, did you ever have to work in the fields?

B: I worked here and there and visited Phnom Penh to work also.

A: Yes, okay. Did you ever grow corn or anything?

B: No.

A: Only rice?

B: Only rice.

A: Did your family do other work?

B: What?

A: Selling things, goods and such?

B: We did whatever we could find. My husband went to find a job in construction. We did whatever, selling things, watching people's kids, raising whatever we could until we were old.

A: Okay. Yeah, so, how about when you were married? What year were you married in?

B: I don't remember. I was married when I was 15 years old.

A: You were married at the age of 15?

B: Right!

A: What time period was that during?

B: In the time of Sihanouk.

A: In the time of Sihanouk as well. Alright. So, do you remember when you got married, you married in what village?

B: In Phsar Daeum Kor.

A: In Phsar Daeum Kor. In Phnom Penh.

B: Yeah, that's right.

A: Yes, so, where did you and your husband first meet?

B: We met each other in Phnom Penh.

A: Yes, of course. What made you fall in love with him?

B: [Laughs] What could I do if he saw me and fell in love with me from then on.

A: And the marriage, did your parents arrange it for you, or did you love each other of your own accord?

B: [Laughs] There wasn't anyone coming to drag us into it hand and foot. We married legitimately.

A: Of course.

B: In that time, we had to seat fifteen tables.

A: Oh! That's really cool!

B: There was a theatrical duo singing and playing and everything—

A: Awesome!

B: Yeah, even the owners of the sawmill stopped by here and there.

A: So, at that time was your family well off?

B: No. We were poor. We were just normal.

A: Right.

B: Like we are today, but my siblings and neighbors were very skilled and helpful. They felt for us and loved us, and always helped out.

A: Oh, okay. You loved each other because you were close neighbors?

B: Right!

A: That's really great. So, in comparing your life in the past to your life presently, what are the differences between the two?

B: Uh—it really isn't different, it's like things are just the same.

A: How is it the same?

B: It's the same activities; we find what we eat, and it's just like normal. It's just the same.

A: Right.

B: We're very lacking one day, and another day. A different day we aren't lacking as much, so we're not lacking as much.

A: Right.

B: It's just the story of the problem of life, that's it.

A: Yes, of course.

B: If we're sick, we're sick; or broke, we're broke. We're just waiting to lay down and die, that's just how it is.

A: Yikes—!

B: If you're well off you just keep plugging away and live a little more.

A: Of course. So, what kind of food do you like to eat?

B: Huh—for food, generally speaking, I eat anything; whatever it is I eat it.

A: But which one is the most delicious for you?

B: I don't know yet which one is delicious. I'm already old, when I was young, I just ordered things.

A: So when you were young, what did you order most of the time?

B: Nothing much really, Vietnamese sour soup, or whatever soup was available, deep-fried things, stir fried things, making Beef Lok Lak or something small.

A: Yes, well those things are yummy.

B: Whatever we made, that's what there was, didn't matter if it was tasty. We would just get together and make it.

A: Of course. So, do you know how to make all those foods?

B: I know a few.

A: So, who did you learn to make those foods from?

B: I just had to learn. When I went to other people's houses, I would watch them doing whatever they made well and would take from their example.

A: Right.

B: If they made it well, I would take from their example.

A: Right.

B: Whoever did a sloppy or bad job, I avoided taking from their example.

A: Right.

B: That's all.

A: Of course. So, for the times that you are free, what do you like to do?

B: Huh, nothing much. When I was younger, when I had free time I would just embroider cushions, images of birds, or flowers or whatever. I was just surviving.

A: Right, that sounds lovely. So, you know how to sew as well?

B: When I was younger.

A: Okay. So, in your free time, where did you most like to go for fun as a family?

B: We didn't really go anywhere, not even the water festival. We would go to the riverside once in a while though.

A: For water festival, have you ever gone?

B: Yes.

A: Okay, so, do you like to listen to singing? Or what do you like to listen to?

B: I didn't really listen much—I was too busy trying to think about what to do to save our lives and live till we were old.

A: I see, are you able to tell me about the time you had during the war period, and the time you lived under Sihanouk? What was your life like when the coup happened, the coup that put Pol Pot into power? Could you summarize what your life experiences were as that event happened?

B: When the Pol Pot era came, it affected everyone.

A: I see.

B: It was something that we all went through together, and it didn't just affect any one group exclusively.

A: I see. And now, for you, what did you go through?

B: It's hard to fully describe if you didn't see it yourself.

A: I see.

B: They took us and killed us, they took us and did all sorts of things.

A: I understand.

B: On top of that, they'd issue commands and just take, take.

A: I see.

B: In the nights, we didn't dare speak up. We were still just scared of them taking and beating us or killing us, things like that.

A: I see.

B: Yeah. In the mornings, they'd take us to go work. We had no choice but to do it or else we'd be beaten.

A: Right, I understand.

B: Yes, that's it.

A: So, during the Pol Pot era, what did they use you to do?

B: Uh, sometimes I would harvest termites, sometimes transplanting things, throughout that time, whatever they wanted to use us for, we had to do it.

A: Yes, I understand.

B: Yeah, the commanded us.

A: So, when they fed you, what did they give you to eat?

B: Eh, just normal. There were times when food was lacking, and times when we had something to eat, it's just that it wasn't good food. I don't know.

A: I see.

B: It's just that there wasn't enough, not like today in my home.

A: Yes, I understand.

B: Yes.

A: What about the time of Lon Nol, how was that?

B: We were still in Phnom Penh then. We were just there, finding enough to get by and doing what we could.

A: I see.

B: Go ahead and eat.

A: Okay, so like, at that time was there, like was there any bombs dropping or other things like that? Did you have any of your family members or relatives that were bombed or shot or anything?

B: No, I didn't.

A: I see.

B: Not at that time.

A: So, did you ever hear shots being fired?

B: When I heard them I ran and ducked and everything. The bombs burned up the Phsar Daeum Kor, and many houses were destroyed completely.

A: Oh, and what about the people who were living there?

B: They all ran out. They ran away and just the houses were burned.

A: Oh. That must have been so awful, during the war?

B: Yes.

A: So, when you had survived the Pol Pot era and are alive to this day, how do you feel?

B: It's nothing much, just normal. If we are living, all we can do is make an effort to provide for ourselves that which we eat.

A: Right, but what about the time when things first broke out, how did you feel?

B: I don't know, I felt only fear.

A: I see.

B: We didn't know anything when the Vietnamese entered the country, so we were just afraid.

A: I see.

B: We were afraid of two things.

A: What were you afraid of?

B: After we were free from Pol Pot, we didn't fear that message.

A: Right.

B: We couldn't know if the Viets were good or what, we just couldn't know, you see?

A: Yes, yes.

B: We were scared because of that, but from then we haven't been afraid of anything more, even till today it has been normal.

A: Right, because now the country is settled already.

B: Right, the country is settled now.

A: So, like, your remaining siblings and relatives, who among them survived the war period?

B: Uh, there are none left. My siblings are all gone; I'm the only one to survive.

A: Wow.

B: I also have a cousin, but they are back in their hometown already.

A: I see.

B: As far as that goes, I'm on my own.

A: I see. So, about when your family died, in what time did they die?

B: Uh, my siblings, some got sick and died, some died in the war, some were not killed by Pol Pot, but died in the collectives.

A: I see. So, after the Pol Pot regime, you got married to your husband, and, uh, what did you do to provide for yourselves?

B: My husband worked as a builder, building houses and other things, and I sold and traded things.

A: I see.

B: Yes.

A: So, you just ran your business from then on?

B: Yes, I sold vegetables and such.

A: Yes, so, in your life, what do you remember most clearly? Something in your life that you will never be able to forget?

B: What do I remember? I remember both my difficult times, and the times I was better off, that's all.

A: I see.

B: Just keep enduring life, that's all.

A: I see.

B: Yes.

A: Like, those difficulties and times of ease, what were they like? What did you experience?

B: What did I experience? There were difficulties, and comforts; it was a burden and exhausting, and we exerted ourselves to survive. We had children, and grandchildren, and raised our children, and raised our grandchildren as well. That's all.

A: I see.

B: Yes.

A: Alright, so, like—the next question, so after you married your husband, how many children did you have?

B: I had a lot, but there are only five left. Now a dozen.

A: Twelve people? Are they all living, or?

B: No, only five are left.

A: There are only five, so do you remember the names of all the children?

B: I remember some, but not all of them.

A: So, can you briefly describe what you remember?

B: Uh—I forget, I have forgotten a lot.

A: Yes, that's alright. Now, how about you tell me the names of your living children instead.

B: The surviving children are Oeun Vanthan.

A: Yes.

B: Oeun Vuthy, who is called Touch.

A: Yes.

B: Uh—Oeun Oun.

A: Yes.

B: Oeun Rithny.

A: Yes.

B: Oeun Sophorn, and that's all.

A: Yes, alright. So, are your children married yet, or not?

B: They've married already, except for two of them.

A: All but two. They don't want to take a bride huh?

B: One just got back from work a little bit ago and is now somewhere around here. This is the motorbike they just rode home.

A: I see.

B: Well, he has not found a wife yet because he has no money. He needs to earn money.

A: Yes, so, what was your husband's name?

B: His name? Cheat Sam Oeun.

A: Cheat Sam Oeun. So, about your husband, what kind of person was he?

B: Hmm—very gentle. He never made trouble with anyone, never fought anyone. My husband was very gentle.

A: I see.

B: People from all over all loved him, everyone loved him.

A: Yes, of course. So, as a provider, like, in raising your children and all, like, did he provide enough for you?

B: We were fine.

A: Right.

B: Never lost cash or lost coins.

A: Yes.

B: Right!

A: He loved his family in that way?

B: That's right, he never flirted with other women or anything, he wasn't like that.

A: He knew only to have fidelity, right?

B: Yes, yes.

A: So, your husband died in what year?

B: Uh, it was more than ten years ago by now.

A: Okay. So, he just died more recently?

B: Right!

A: Let's see—if he died more than ten years ago, that was 2004 or 2005, right?

B: Yes, probably around that time.

A: Right. What was the cause of your husband's death?

B: He was sick. He was building a house and slipped. He fell and was in a lot of pain from then on.

A: So, it was in providing for his family that he became that way, right?

B: Yes, yes.

A: That is truly heartbreaking. People's lives are so difficult.

B: Right!

A: For your family and yourself, what kind of work do you do? Do you have a job or—?

B: What do I do? I just stay at home and make and grow rice for my children to eat.

A: Okay.

B: I try not to get sick, even though I am.

A: Of course. So, how do you bring up and provide for your family?

B: I provide health and happiness, and show them how to be good, not letting them do anything that is wrong or against the law.

A: Yes, alright.

B: Right!

A: Yes.

B: And also to be like I desire for them to be.

A: Yes, of course.

B: Not indulgent, not fighting, not mean spirited, like doing things to other people like they would do to themselves.

A: Yes.

B: That's all. I raise my children just in that way.

A: Yes. So, about your children; did you send them to school to learn all together?

B: They learned a little, each child went just enough to know a little for themselves.

A: Okay. Do they know how to right, or what things do they know?

B: Uh, they learned to write a little. For some it stuck and for some it didn't, you know? It comes from us being needy, unknowledgeable, and we're poor also. You know?

A: Yes.

B: We couldn't endure it.

A: Yes, of course. It is very good that you sent them to learn, even a little; even if they couldn't stay and learn everything.

B: They know enough to know how to blame us.

A: So, like—what was the reason that you thought it was good in raising your children and letting them, well, sending them to go learn?

B: Yes, that's how I raised them. Normally we know to scold them and raise children according to the discipline of the parents.

A: Yes.

B: Whatever happens lead them to walk the good path, and don't lead them to walk any path that isn't good.

A: Of course.

B: That's all.

A: Right, of course. That is great. So, what did you do in order to lead your family to have happiness?

B: Uh, happiness comes after discipline, because we never know if we can make an effort together, or not make an effort together; we don't always know what to do.

A: Of course.

B: It depends on our strength and what we have.

A: Of course.

B: Using our strength is all we have.

A: Yes. So, if someone was in the wrong, how, would you counsel them?

B: If they're in the wrong advice can only be offered. If not so from the beginning until now, things would run even till this moment.

A: Are you mean spirited with your children?

B: No, not mean. I'm gentle, but I act a little mean towards them, so they'll respect me.

A: Okay. That is very good. So, does your family really rest and always have joy?

B: We don't always have joy; we have our bad and our good.

A: Right. So, when your family has problems, what solution do you use most to resolve them?

B: Depending on what they do, there is a solution for the situation.

A: You don't hit them with a stick?

B: Uh—no, but if they quarrel a little, then I tell them to stop, and if they won't not stop, then I spank them and they run away, so it's over.

A: If they're arguing too much, give them a spank.

B: That's right.

A: Have you, like, in your life—do you love your family?

B: [Scoffs] If you don't love your family, who do you love? Even you know how to love your family.

A: Of course.

B: I also know how to love my family as well.

A: So, from your good experiences in your life, do you have anything you want to share with your posterity and the next generation? Because, this interview will go to your children and future generations, and they will hear and listen all together and such.

B: What do I have to share if now I am poor; what treasure do I have to share—?

A: Like, share from your experiences, you know?

B: I can share my thoughts: to lead my children to work hard to earn, work really hard. Make an effort to earn and save money, save some coins. Do not spend excessively, do not strike others too much.

A: Yes.

B: And do not indulge in alcohol, gambling, or anything like that.

A: Yes.

B: Yes, don't let your child do anything like that. That's all.

A: Yes, of course. So, this is the last question I want to ask you. What advice do you have to give to the next generation of your grandchildren to lead them—to lead them to avoid which paths in life?

B: Avoid the paths of prison and of chains.

A: Yes, why forbid them and not allow them to walk on these paths?

B: Oh, that road, don't walk it. If you say you have friends on that path, look at those friends; they don't look to be having an easy go of things. Get yourself out of there.

A: Yes.

B: If those friends are good, like they don't instigate trouble with others, don't glut themselves, don't get drunk; then go ahead and be friends. And if things aren't going well, remove yourself.

A: Yes.

B: Do not give up, do not be stubborn, but be strong, you know. Don't say that your mother is bad.

A: Of course.

B: Don't say that your mother is cruel.

A: So they have to discipline themselves. So, what advice do you give him to escape from such things?

B: That's not a problem, these days are just as I'd hoped.

A: Yes, of course.

B: Yes, they haven't been a problem. They have never given me a difficult time we all just go with what we have been given.

A: Yes, of course. So, what are the last words that you have for your posterity? Those that have not yet been born, because you will have grandkids and they will have grandkids, going on and on and such.

B: Right!

A: What path do you want for them to take?

B: Walk on the path as I described before; what else?

A: Of course.

B: But my grandson is just as I'd hoped. He is this tall [gestures] and has grown up to know how to speak and is the oldest grandchild by a year.

A: Yeah

B: He calls everyone "Elder."

A: Yeah.

B: Yeah, that's all.

A: Yes, that's great.

B: Right!

A: Because you'll lead him to know his elders from those younger than he is, to know those above and below, and such.

B: One, just one year older than the rest, and they are just one year younger than him. Just one year.

A: Yeah.

B: He is the oldest every day and the boss of the younger siblings and such, but they love each other as siblings.

A: Yeah.

B: Well, their relatives, cousins, you know.

A: That's great. Thank you very much for today's interview. And everything we said, your posterity will hear about your own life when they want to understand and find out about your life history. And we will put it on the university website, so thank you very much.

B: Yes, yes.

This interview was translated through the collaborative efforts of several volunteer translators.