

Interview of Yeum Din

A: Interviewer: Cheang Sieav

B: Interviewee: Yeum Din

Summary of the Interview

Yeum Din was born in 1952 in Khpob village, Kandal province, and is the oldest of two children. This interview is a fast-paced conversation between Cheang Sieav and Yeum Din, who spends the duration of the interview sharing details about his family history, his interests, and his life in general.

A: First of all, thank you for meeting with us to talk about your past experiences. All of these interviews have been prepared by an American university called Brigham Young University (BYU), because BYU is aimed at preserving Cambodia's history so that future generations can know about their parents' and ancestors' history. Once we're done with this interview, they will all be put on the school's website, www.cambodianoralhistories.byu.edu. Is it okay if I put this interview on our website?

B: Sure, no problem, go ahead with the interview!

A: Okay, my name is Cheang Sieav. Today is June 1, 2018, and we're at—what's this village called?

B: Khpob village!

A: Khpob village?

B: Koh Oknha Tei commune, Khsach Kandal district, Kandal province.

A: What district was that?

B: Khsach Kandal district.

A: Khsach Kandal district, yes?

B: Kandal province, Koh Oknha Tei.

A: Oh, yes.

B: I just know the commune, and the district.

A: Okay so, what is your full name?

B: My name is Yeum Din.

A: Yeum Din—and do you have a nickname?

B: Yeah! I don't have one, no.

A: What about when you were a child, did you ever have friends or relatives who called you a different name?

B: No, they just called me by my real name.

A: Oh okay, and how old are you?

B: I am 66 years old.

A: What day, month, and year were you born? Do you remember?

B: No, I don't remember. I know that the year was 1952, but I don't remember the day. I just know 1952.

A: So you don't remember the month either?

B: No, I don't remember.

A: So what lunar year were you born in?

B: The year of the snake.

A: Oh the snake?

B: Yes! That year, that's right.

A: And where were you born?

B: I was born here.

A: What village—?

B: Khpob village!

A: Khpob village, and Koh Oknha Tei commune?

B: Koh Oknha Tei commune.

A: Koh Oknha Tei commune, and what district?

B: Khsach Kandal district, Kandal.

A: Oh, Khsach Kandal district, Kandal province. And for you, how many siblings do you have?

B: I only have two siblings including myself.

A: Were they a girl and a boy, or were you both boys, or did they die?

B: Both of us were boys, but one passed away already. I am the only one left.

A: Was he your younger brother or your older brother?

B: Younger brother, I was the older brother.

A: Oh, and what was his name?

B: His name was Yeum Dim.

A: Your younger brother?

B: Yes, Yeum Dim.

A: Oh, do you have any memories of him before he died?

B: What did you just say?

A: Like, when you were both kids, do you have any memories of you two together?

B: Oh, no. He died when we were very young, I don't know. He was healthy until he died.

A: Oh, and what was the cause of his death?

B: He was sick, it was a normal sickness.

A: Oh, and when he died, what year was that?

B: I don't remember, don't remember at all—

A: But how young was he when he died?

B: He had a wife already, I just don't remember how old he was.

A: Oh, is that so—?

B: Yes.

A: Oh, okay.

B: I don't remember my history from the beginning, I don't remember.

A: Okay, what was your mother's name?

B: Her name was Suon Yuon.

A: Thuon Yuon?

B: She was named Suon.

A: Suon Yuon, right?

B: Yes! And my dad's name was Bou Yeum.

A: Your dad's name was Bounng Yeum?

B: Bou!

A: Oh, Bou Yeum? So, how old would your mother be by now?

B: She'd be in her early 80s by now.

A: She'd be in her 80's?

B: Yes, but she passed away already.

A: And how much older was your father than your mother?

B: Probably around four years older.

A: Four years older, so he would be in his 80s too then?

B: Yes, he would be older than 80, a little over 80. And my mother would be over 80 too.

A: Oh, yes.

B: They both passed away many years ago.

A: When did they pass away? Do you remember?

B: My father died in the generation of Lon Nol, the generation of Lon Nol.

A: What about your mother?

B: She died in this era.

A: Oh, she just recently died right?

B: Yes, it's been over 10 years now.

A: Oh, okay! And for your mother, where was she born? Do you know?

B: She was born here.

A: Born here?

B: Yes.

A: And what about your father?

B: He was born here too.

A: Oh, in the same village as each other?

B: Yes, in the same village as each other.

A: So, when your father was alive, what did your father do to provide for the family?

B: He was a farmer, he did a lot of farming and things like that.

A: And that was to provide for you and your family, right?

B: Yes, he didn't do anything else besides farming and working.

A: Was he gentle or harsh?

B: Oh, my father was very harsh!

A: And what did your mother do to help your family?

B: She would help on the farm, she wove things and stuff like that.

A: So they worked together?

B: Yes, that's what they did.

A: And was she gentle or harsh?

B: She was very gentle and sweet, my father was the only harsh one but only when we would get into trouble.

A: Oh, yes.

B: For example, if we went opposite to his directions, it wouldn't be right. But if we followed his directions and followed him, it was not a problem.

A: But if you followed him, it was okay?

B: Yes, he wouldn't hit us.

A: Oh, yes. Do you have any memories when you were with him, like going to the fields or playing anything together?

B: No, when he died, I was still small. I was nine years old when my father passed away.

A: Oh, yes.

B: Back then, I don't really remember any stories with my father. If I remember anything, I

remember that nights we had festivals and almsgiving ceremonies, he would take us to ride horses or watch performances and whatnot at the pagoda.

A: Oh, you rode horses with him?

B: Yes, I would hold onto his neck.

A: Oh, you would ride on his neck with him! I thought you meant that you rode real horses with him.

B: Oh, no. They call that game horseback riding.

A: Yes! And with your mother, what stories do you have with her?

B: My mother—living with my mother was very bitter because my father died, so I lived with my mother. I was always with her.

A: Yes, and she passed away more recently? So you lived with her for a really long time, right?

B: Yes, she was always with me.

A: But are there any stories or things that you can remember with her?

B: I just remember her helping and taking care of us ever since we were little, that's all.

A: Right.

B: She also never remarried, my mother.

A: Oh, good.

B: Yes, my mother didn't have another husband until she died.

A: Oh, and what did she do until then?

B: She would weave things; skirts, scarves, and things like that.

A: Oh, okay.

B: And she would do a little bit of farming too.

A: Oh alright. So, did your father ever tell you his history when he was a kid or what he used to do?

B: My father?

A: Yes.

B: My dad was a farmer, he worked in rice fields and farms but he wasn't an official like them. He worked on the farm.

A: What about your mother? Did she ever tell you about her history when she was young?

B: She lived here and worked in the rice fields, in that generation.

A: Oh, right!

B: In the Popular Socialist Community generation, they didn't really have government officials.

A: Oh, yes.

B: It's not like this generation, this generation has an abundance of government officials.

A: That's true.

B: But back then it was normal. You wouldn't know, but your mom would know—back then, women weren't really allowed to go to school.

A: Yes, that's right.

B: That's how that generation was—

A: That's true.

B: They were scared they would write a letter to their lover.

A: They were afraid—?

B: Yes, women from my mother's generation didn't know how to read or write.

A: So your mother wasn't allowed to learn either?

B: Yes, they wouldn't let her learn.

A: They were afraid they would write letters to their boyfriends?

B: Yes, you know already—the old people used to say that.

A: Yes, true.

B: Yes, and your generation works very hard to study and learn.

A: Yes. They give everyone equal rights now, right?

B: Yes! Those who don't go to learn is their decision.

A: If you don't have knowledge, you won't have a job.

B: Yes, but back in the early days, parents wouldn't let their daughters go to school. They only let the men go.

A: The women would wait for a man to marry them, right?

B: Yes! They wouldn't let them come to learn anything.

A: Yes. So, for example, if a woman was poor and ugly, she wouldn't have anyone who wanted to take her and be her husband, right?

B: Right—hey! Actually since the beginning, even if she had an ugly face they would take her.

A: So someone would have to marry her?

B: Yes, that's right. That's why the parents would have them engaged, they would do anything to have grandchildren.

A: Yes.

B: They wouldn't just look at you, they would look at your parents too.

A: Oh, really?

B: Yes, that's how they've done it since the beginning.

A: Oh, yes.

B: Yes, at least if you were attractive, it's all the better for you.

A: Yes—

B: Don't think that if you weren't white they wouldn't give you a wife.

A: Oh, yes.

B: Yes, even if you were black and ugly, as long as you knew how to work diligently, you knew that they would give you a wife. After working, you would get engaged, but you wouldn't get engaged quickly, not like now. You would go serve the girl for a year first.

A: I've heard them say that you have to please the household first, is that right?

B: Yes! You had to please the household, and whatnot.

A: What did you do to get to know the household?

B: Yes! If you didn't please the household, you would have to stay with the girl's family for a year so they could see your characteristics and—

A: Oh, that too?

B: Yes! That's the way it was.

A: But at that time, you didn't get married yet, right?

B: Yes! Not yet.

A: But they would have you go to live with the girl's side of the family to observe your characteristics first?

B: It's not like now, because nowadays we think that you only need to confirm your engagement, and that day, you can go off with each other.

A: Yes!

B: For you, before you get engaged, first you ask, "Do you take me, or not?" That's right, from the beginning, that's not how it was done.

A: Yes, so they were strict, right?

B: Yes! From the beginning, they were very strict.

A: Oh, yes! So, uh, what about your grandparents on your father's side, do you know their names?

B: I don't remember—my grandparents on my father's side—his parents.

A: You don't know their names as well?

B: Hey, I remember the parents—the grandfather on my father's side. I remember his name. But I don't know his history—like, what he did.

A: But what are their names—your grandparents on your father's side?

B: I only remember one of their names, I don't remember their family names.

A: Oh, yes.

B: Uh, on my father's side—his father's name was Grandfather Pou, and then his mother's name was Grandmother Yon.

A: Are those the grandparents on your father's side?

B: Yes, on my father's side. But the grandparents on my mother's side are named Grandpa Suon and Grandma Chab.

A: Oh, yes.

B: That's all I remember, but I don't remember their family names.

A: But your grandparents on your mother's side, do you know where they were born and what they did?

B: They are back at their hometown. Both the husband and his wife.

A: All of them—including the grandparents?

B: Yes! All of them on both sides.

A: Oh!

B: Yes, since the beginning, my grandmother on my father and mother's side were on another hill, they just lived in adjacent villages.

A: Oh, yes.

B: But my grandfather on my dad's side—he lived in this house.

A: Oh, yes?

B: He sold small goods at the house.

A: Yes, but what about your grandparents on your mother's side? Do you know what they did before?

B: They just farmed—believe me, back in that generation, there was nothing to do but that.

A: But were you born in time for your grandparents on your mother's side? As in, born before they died.

B: I was born in time, but I was still young.

A: You were born in time for your grandparents on your mother's side?

B: I was born in time for them all.

A: On the father's side, were you born in time for them as well?

B: I was born in time.

A: Oh!

B: I was just small. I remember their face. It's not clear but I was small.

A: Do you know how old they would be now, or do you not know?

B: Oh! I do not know, because I was too small.

A: Oh, yes.

B: Which is why I can remember, I know that I knew my grandfather clearly, because back then, I was with my grandparents—there was only one boy, that was me.

A: Oh, yes.

B: The only child.

A: Oh, yes.

B: Sometimes my grandfather on my dad's side would take me to visit, sometimes I would go visit my grandfather on my mom's side.

A: Yes, that's right.

B: Yes.

A: So, for you, do you think that you have come and lived here for a long time?

B: I, uh, I've been there ever since I was born until now, I've never gone anywhere else. Even in the Pol Pot generation, I was there too.

A: Oh! You have always been there?

B: Yes, I was always there in Koh Oknha Tei, since the Pol Pot generation, they switched the village.

A: They changed when the Pol Pot [generation] ended, when you came back?

B: Yes, when I came back!

A: Yes, do you have any children or grandchildren, or siblings who have gone to live outside the country?

B: I don't have any.

A: But on your wife's side is there anybody?

B: On my wife's side there isn't anyone.

A: Oh, everyone is in Cambodia?

B: Yes, everyone is in Cambodia.

A: What is your wife's name?

B: Her name is Hel Vun.

A: Her name is Her Vun?

B: Her name is Hel Vun.

A: Oh, Hel Vun, and do you remember the day you married your wife—which day, month, and year?

B: I remember the year, 1972.

A: In 1972?

B: Yes! Hey, look at that, the generation I got married was in the Lon Nol generation.

A: The Lon Nol generation was in the '60s right?

B: No, it was about in the '70s right?

A: Oh, because we entered the Pol Pot generation in '75, right?

B: Yes, the generation in '72. I was in 1972.

A: In 1972?

B: '72—I was married in '72.

A: So, you've been married for 46 years already, right?

B: Yes, I was married in '72!

A: And what about your children—how old is your oldest child?

B: My oldest child is more than 30.

A: He is over thirty?

B: Yes, I have six kids.

A: Oh, okay.

A: I have four sons and two daughters.

A: Oh, yeah, but what they do now?

B: Some of my children drive, some go to work at a factory, my daughters are home weaving and whatnot. Some of my sons went to work in the factories and others drive motorcycle taxis.

A: But do they have families?

B: All of them have a family but the youngest son who doesn't have a wife yet.

A: But now you are with their children and grandchildren, how many grandchildren do you have?

B: I watch them, but I forget. There are two—four—

A: You have too many, huh?

B: Four—six—seven.

A: Seven grandchildren?

B: Yes, seven of them, only one boy.

A: So, all the rest are girls?

B: All girls.

A: So, the grandchildren are all girls. So, do you think that when you got engaged with your wife, did you get engaged according to your heart, or because your parents arranged it?

B: Hey! It was the parents in that generation, it never was according to one's heart. No—it was the parents.

A: Oh! Yes, but back in that generation, was there a gift you sent, like a dowry?

B: There was in that generation, but I forgot.

A: You forget, but back in that generation, did you give money?

B: During the Lon Nol generation, we spent money!

A: But the money was valuable, right?

B: Yes! But it could be cheap, too.

A: So, the money was cheap—?

B: Yes! In the Lon Nol era, money was less valuable, right?

A: But gold, was gold valuable or not?

B: Gold? Gold was also less valuable in that generation.

A: Oh, yes!

B: In the Pol Pot era, though we didn't use money.

A: How long do you think you have known your wife, ever since you got engaged to her?

B: Back then, when she came here, I didn't know her. She came here looking for her mother and father, but they never came. She asked my parents if we could get married.

A: Oh! But—?

B: In that generation, it was not as easy as it is now. They never asked, "Hey, do you like me?" No, that didn't happen in that generation, it was strict!

A: Oh, yes.

B: Yes!

A: But like, how many years did you know her back then?

B: I do not know, maybe about two or three months.

A: Two or three months?

B: Yes!

A: But you had your family arrange the engagement?

B: Yes, that's right!

A: But do you have any memories of spending time with each other?

B: No, no, because at that time I wanted—my mother wanted to find me a wife.

A: Oh, yes.

B: But she was not satisfied, not satisfied.

A: Oh, yes.

B: When she saw my wife, she was satisfied, she said that I could be with her, that she could trust and count on her—you know?

A: Yes! What about—were you ever educated when you were young?

B: I just learned until grade—they call it third grade, which was equal to eleventh grade. I learned only three classes and finished because my father had died.

A: Oh, yes! But back then, where did you learn?

B: I learned here at Kbal Koh pagoda.

A: But what was the name of the school?

B: Wat Kbal Koh Primary School, in Oknha Tei.

A: In Koh Oknha Tei, huh?

B: Yes, I learned at the school from the teachers, the monks taught.

A: Yes! But in that generation that you learned, did you ever have close friends as well, that you grew up with?

B: Yes, I had friends too.

A: Did you learn with each other?

B: Yes, but some are dead now, some are still alive.

A: But did you have a lot?

B: Yes! Many, I had a lot of friends.

A: Oh! So, could you tell me a few of their names—do you remember? Or where are they nowadays?

B: Some went to Koh Thom, some are also there, some are also dead.

A: Oh!

B: Yes! It's hard, it's hard to describe because there are too many.

A: Yes! But do you have any memories with them, with your friends?

B: I didn't have any, in that generation, I didn't have any—it's not like now, I didn't have any memories like you have now. We didn't go or come back from school together, and we couldn't drink with each other.

A: But, for example, have you ever gone to the fields together, or played anything in the school together?

B: We played, in the school it was normal, we played ball and whatnot, we had that.

A: Oh!

B: But about drinking alcohol or drinking whatever, and even smoking cigarettes—we didn't do that.

A: Oh, yes.

B: Don't even mention drinking alcohol or smoking, we couldn't do that either.

A: Oh, is that so?

B: Yes, oh! In the past, the discipline was strict, but now when the children see a teacher, they keep their hats on, they don't take it off. [The interviewee here uses a metaphor to refer to the lack of respect in the present day.]

A: Oh, yes.

B: The current generation of teachers, aren't like teachers before. They don't hit the children.

A: Oh, yes.

B: But it is like they don't really respect the teachers like in my generation.

A: No because the generation is now very bold.

B: Yes! And what would you think, if you wanted to miss a day of school, but your mother wouldn't let you miss, even if you cried because of school. There was no such thing as stopping for a day or two, if you thought that you wanted to stop, they wouldn't let you stop, because the teachers were too cruel, the teachers' discipline was too cruel.

A: Does that mean that during that generation, the students all studied really hard?

B: Yes! They were extraordinary in that generation.

A: They were well educated?

B: Yes! They were extraordinary.

A: But were you well educated in that generation?

B: I was not very skilled, I did not know a lot because I was an orphan.

A: Oh, is that so—?

B: Yes! For orphans, they think ahead, and think later. When I was twelve or thirteen, I knew how to think for myself.

A: Oh, yes.

B: And at that time, I had a lot of younger siblings. Back then, when they were little, there were a lot of them. But now, they all have died.

A: Yes! Do you know any languages other than Khmer?

B: No, I only know Khmer.

A: What about Vietnamese or Thai, do you know those?

B: Oh, I don't know those either. I don't know anything besides Khmer.

A: Oh! So, from when you a child until now, what kind of work have you done in your life?

B: Me, right?

A: Yes.

B: I used to work as a farmer, later I went to work for the state for about ten years to be the village leader.

A: Oh, yes.

B: At the end of this second term, I stopped.

A: You stopped being the village leader?

B: Yes! I stopped because I was already pretty old, and wanted to let someone younger do it. Even if they wouldn't let me stop, I still would have asked to stop, just like a monk who retires even if they won't let him.

A: Yes, right.

B: Because I started forgetting a lot.

A: Oh! Yes.

B: Sometimes the lifestyle felt like a trap and I had done it for many years, so I let someone else take a turn.

B: Do you think, in the past have you ever sold goods or raised animals?

B: I raised cows, I had six or seven.

A: What did you raise?

B: I raised cows, just cows and horses.

A: Oh! So you didn't raise chickens, ducks, buffaloes?

B: I did raise chickens but only to eat them.

A: Oh! So did you raise a lot of cows or just a family of cows?

B: Oh! I raised them as a family, nothing too big.

A: Oh, okay.

B: [I wasn't part of] an association, no.

A: Oh, yes.

B: I would just raise it, and then I had to sell it and then go buy more. If one had a baby, once it got big, I would sell it too.

A: You just bought and sold, and bought and sold?

B: Whenever it gave birth to a child, if we could sell it we would, if we didn't have to, we wouldn't.

A: Oh yes! What changes have there been in your life?

B: Oh! There hasn't been any change except for being a farmer, for me.

A: So from when you were young until now, until you had a family, do you think that your life has changed a lot?

B: It has changed! For example, when I was young I would only wear shorts.

A: Oh, yes.

B: But, now I wear long pants wherever I go.

A: Oh, is that so—?

B: Yes! In the past, the area we lived in didn't have those standards. Now it has changed so that they have the same modern standards.

A: Oh, yes.

B: So we will change accordingly.

A: Yes! What do you think, how is your current well-being or health?

B: No problems, my health is okay, my well-being is good as well.

A: It's normal?

B: Yes! It is normal, not too low or too high.

A: Oh, yes.

B: About the same as them, or you, but those that have more, they have more as well.

A: Yes! That's right. So, what kind of food do you like to eat?

B: Me?

A: Yes!

B: I like prahok the most.

A: Oh! Prahok, huh? What about soup, what type of soup do you like the most?

B: I like Samlar Machu sour soup.

A: Samlar machu, is that right?

B: Yes! Samlar machu.

A: Oh, yes!

B: Machu Kroeung soup, I like it a lot!

A: What about when you were a child, did you ever like to play games, or hang out with friends?

B: From before?

A: Oh, yes.

B: Originally, I did not really like to go out, because all they had to do was the Ak Keh Theater, the Luong Theater.

A: Oh, yes.

B: Yes! At times like the Pchum Festival, we would go to the pagoda and see them.

A: Oh! Is that right?

B: It wasn't like nowadays, how was I supposed to go out and have fun?

A: Now there is a lot of wild dancing?

B: Now, the young people [do that] now.

A: But the games like Bos Angkunh, Chaol Chhoung, tug of war, or Leak Kanseng, or any

games like that?

B: We played them, we played Bos Angkunh and games like that during New Years.

A: Did you play in your village, or where did you play?

B: We played in our village, or at the pagoda, sometimes at another village.

A: Oh! Because the pagoda is close by?

B: Yes, the pagoda was close!

A: Oh! So, do you know how to sing?

B: Me? No, I don't.

A: But do you like to listen to music?

B: I like traditional music.

A: What type, traditional or modern music, which do you like?

B: Traditional songs.

A: Oh, yes.

B: Everything on my phone is traditional, no modern [songs].

A: Yes! What about listening to Buddhist Dharma, listening to the monks, do you like that?

B: Yes! I like listening to Dharma too!

A: Oh, yes.

B: I like to listen to sermons by monks, if they are accurate, but if they aren't correct, then I don't listen to them.

A: Yes! Oh is that so?

B: There is one monk I don't like at all.

A: Why don't you?

B: The monk, Lok Des, he doesn't follow the doctrine at all, the doctrine of the monks.

A: Do you know what he is like?

B: I don't know. He is far away in, Takeo province I think, but I usually listen over the radio.

A: Oh yes?

B: As soon as I hear him, I turn it off.

A: Yes! Is there anyone in your family who knows how to play musical instruments?

B: No, there isn't.

A: Not Siem music, Khmer music, or Pinpeat music?

B: No, no, no, none at all.

A: So, what do you think your household was like, when you were younger compared with today—I mean, how was it like living in your parents' house when you were younger, and

how is it today?

B: Oh! When I was younger and living with my parents, I lived in a thatch house, it was small.

A: Oh, okay.

B: With a bamboo frame.

A: Oh, yes.

B: It had bamboo columns placed to support another [column].

A: Yes! But now, what is your house like?

B: My house today, it's better than when I was living with my parents.

A: Yes! So, for your home right now, who built it?

B: I did.

A: So, you know how to build a house?

B: No, but I was just the one who designed it.

A: Oh! Yes, so is there someone in your family who knows how to build a house, or build other things?

B: No.

A: So, there isn't?

B: Yes! There isn't.

A: So, for your house, do you know what materials they used to build it?

B: Wood, it's made of wood.

A: Made out of wood?

B: Yes! It is zinc roofing.

A: Yes! Yes, so do you think you are fluent or good at any specific skills, are there things you can do well?

B: Me?

A: Yes.

B: The thing I am most skilled at is plowing fields, I can do that. Do you know what that is?

A: I do know what it is.

B: I can do it, I know how to plow.

A: Yes!

B: I can plow, and other things.

A: Yes! Do you think your parents taught you any specific skills?

B: What could my father teach me, if he passed away when I was only nine years old?

A: Oh! So has your mother ever taught you any skills?

B: My mother, she taught me skills like a man would have, and she also knows how to weave.

A: Oh, is that so—?

B: And when my children got bigger, she helped teach them as well.

A: Oh, yes.

B: She did that, but how was she supposed to help me because her skills were for women and I was a boy.

A: That's true.

B: So, I—

A: What about making rope, or palm sugar, or using rattan to make mats?

B: Yeah, there weren't—in my hometown there weren't any palm trees, or things like that.

A: Oh! Yes, so—

B: Palm trees were just planted in that district, there weren't any there in 1979.

A: Is that so?

B: Yes! Originally there wasn't even one palm tree in that district.

A: Yes! Oh, what difficulties have you had in your life from your childhood until now?

B: I have met difficulties!

A: When you were young, what difficulties did you meet?

B: I met the difficulty that my mother and father were poor, sometimes we would just have rice with salt.

A: Yes, is that so? Also, along with that, your father died when you were still young right?

B: Yes! We couldn't find food, sometimes when we had meals, we would get just one scoop of rice for three or four people, and water with salt.

A: Oh! Because you didn't have much?

B: Yes. We were destitute.

A: Yes. How old were you during the Lon Nol era?

B: In the Lon Nol [era] I was a young adult already.

A: Oh! So you were already pretty old?

B: I was already 22-23 years old then.

A: But, at that time did any difficulties happen in your family?

B: Nothing really, just that from the Lon Nol generation on, they would have taken us to join the army.

A: [They would] take you to be a soldier, did they use grenades and other explosives?

B: Yes! They would throw shells at us, and we would run.

A: You would run from the bombs?

B: We wouldn't dare sit down, the soldiers would catch us and make us join the army.

A: But, when they would take people to be soldiers, from what age could they take you?

B: They would take those from 18 to 30 years old.

A: But you were old enough?

B: Yes, I was old enough, 22 or 23 years old, I was old enough.

A: So, did they take you?

B: No, they couldn't because I would escape.

A: You were always on the run?

B: They would come and go.

A: But who was coming to take you?

B: Lon Nol's group.

A: Lon Nol's group?

B: Yes.

A: So they would walk through each district and village?

B: Yes! Through each village.

A: Oh! What about the during Pol Pot, how old were you?

B: During the Pol Pot generation, I was around 30 years old.

A: But, at that time, did you have a family?

B: Yes, I already had one.

A: Oh you already had one?

B: If I didn't have one, I would have already joined the mobile unit.

A: But since you had a family, what would they have you do?

B: They had me plow the land and look after cows.

A: But, at that time did they let you live with your family?

B: Oh! We rarely saw each other.

A: You were still separated?

B: Yes! Sometimes I would go to the fields, and my wife would be with the unit.

A: Oh, okay.

B: In the time of Pol Pot, they wouldn't really let us meet each other.

A: Yes. But they let you meet up every few months, right?

B: Every three to four months, we could meet once.

A: But when you were relocated, where did they have you go?

B: They relocated me from that village, to another, it was still the same district and village, but at the head of the island.

A: Oh, yes.

B: Only that I didn't go to Battambang with them.

A: Oh, yes.

B: Yes, and during that early period, we couldn't own cows or goats.

A: Yes.

B: So, for example, I would give you my cow, and you would give it to someone else, and so on.

A: You traded?

B: Yes! We didn't have individual rights.

A: At that time did you have any children yet?

B: Back then, during the Pol Pot generation, I did not have children yet.

A: Only once Pol Pot was over, then you had kids?

B: Let's see, at that time I had one child, in 19—something, I can't remember. I think in 1986? I had my first daughter.

A: 1986 was after that period, was it 1976?

B: Yes! In 1976.

A: Yes!

B: Then, I had one daughter.

A: The oldest child?

B: The oldest, but she passed away already.

A: Oh, is that so—?

B: Yes, yes. At the end of 1979, I had another child.

A: What did she die from?

B: She had a high fever.

A: She didn't die because of Pol Pot?

B: No, she died because of a fever.

A: Died of fever?

B: I didn't have medicine, or anything like that.

A: Yes. Oh, what about the food in that time period, how was it?

B: It was miserable, if you talk about food, it's all over. There was boiled tragoun [water spinach or swamp morning glory], or sometimes nothing.

A: Oh! But I heard that at that time they didn't have a rice for people to eat?

B: Just plain rice porridge.

A: Oh! Rice porridge?

B: Yes, it wasn't like you ate one bowl of porridge and you were full, you ate it, and you weren't full at all. It wasn't like the porridge that you eat one bowl and you are already full.

A: Yes!

A: They would measure it, for example if it was you, they would only give two bowls, two ladles, that was all.

A: Oh, yes.

B: Yes! It was watered down; you would gulp it down. One night, your stomach would rumble like a dog. And when we got home, we would eat tragoun like we were eating pork.

A: Yes, at that time what work did they have you do?

B: I would plow fields with cows.

A: That was it?

B: Yes! Just that and [I] carried water to the spray on the gourds as well.

A: But I wanted to ask, were the rice fields big?

B: We worked on a vegetable farm, there wasn't any rice, just a farm.

A: Oh! Is that right?

B: The farming we would do was more than our strength allowed, we wouldn't just work until we finished one hectare, we would do two or three hectares.

A: Did you work alone?

B: Yeah, I would work with two or three people, and two or three yokes of cows.

A: Oh, okay.

B: We only had our own strength.

A: What about your family, what did they have them do?

B: The girls would grow tomatoes, and corn, and other things.

A: Oh, yes?

B: They would do that, and I would plow the fields.

A: But, at that time, where did they have your wife go?

B: She went to work on the farm as well, but the farm for women.

A: But in a commune close by?

B: Yes, in the same village, only that she would farm inside the village, and I would be on

the outskirts of the village.

A: Oh! But they wouldn't let you see each other?

B: Yes, they did not let us see each other, the women were in a separate place from the men.

A: Oh! So, like in the Pol Pot era, your mother, did they have her go to a different place?

B: She was with the old people.

A: They had her with the older people then?

B: Yes! They had her help watch the children.

A: Oh! So only after the end of Pol Pot, then you were allowed to meet together again?

B: Yes! Only then could we meet again.

A: So, how did you meet back up with each other? Because at that time there weren't any phones or anything.

B: Yes! There weren't.

A: But, how did you know where each other were?

B: I would say that it was destiny and luck, some people are still apart, even to this day.

A: Is that so?

B: Yes! Some people are still separated until this today, some from their mothers, some from their fathers, some from the wife, kids, or husbands, they lost them.

A: They can't find each other?

B: Yes, they can't find each other, but I got back together with my wife and children when it was over.

A: Oh, yes?

B: When it was over, they had me go to the east lake, just past it, to a place where they kept the prisoners.

A: Oh, yes.

B: I would climb one tree, and then I would walk to another and climb it, all the way until I was outside the forest.

A: Yes.

B: When I turned to the east, all I could see were prisoners, I was here, and they were just about the same distance as that hill over there, probably only about 150 meters from each other.

A: Oh, okay.

B: And I climbed up a tree to look.

A: Yes, yes, yes!

B: And when they said that the Vietnamese had invaded, I travelled through the night to

come.

A: You went to find the Vietnamese?

B: No, I walked past them, not just me by myself, but hundreds of people, all from that lake.

A: Oh, yes.

B: Coming and going, just all going home.

A: Oh! So—?

B: They came, even with the risk.

A: Do you think that when Pol Pot was over, did you have other difficulties?

B: When Pol Pot was over, at the beginning it was difficult, we didn't have plates or spoons or pots or anything.

A: At that time, you didn't know how to make a living?

B: I couldn't yet make a living.

A: But in that generation, just as it ended, they didn't have any money yet?

B: Still no, yes.

A: They still traded rice and other things?

B: The rice we ate, and the seeds.

A: Yes!

B: Oh! The rice we had to eat was miserable, we couldn't go and buy other rice, or trade it.

We couldn't go get it, we would go steal it from when [those from] Phnom Penh came.

A: Oh! For that rice, did they have it in a storehouse, or what?

B: They had a storehouse.

A: You would go steal it from them?

B: Yes! We would go take it from the Vietnamese, sometimes they would chase us, but they would never shoot at us. They would just chase us. What else were we supposed to do if we didn't know Vietnamese?

A: Yes.

B: But I did know one person who knew Vietnamese, but he would only give one package of rice per person. One person could only take a little bit, and we had to give some to others, and we would tell him what to say in Vietnamese.

A: Yes!

B: And that rice was not very good either, when we got it it was swollen, the ants would eat it.

A: Oh! Because that rice was pretty old?

B: Yes! It was old and stored in a warehouse.

A: Oh! So, do you think that when you had a family until now, have you had any difficulties?

B: Hey! At first, it was difficult, it wasn't easy to build a way of life for my family.

A: You just had enough to get by?

B: Yes, it was not normal.

A: Yes!

B: Miserable before, miserable after as well. I can't fully express everything in my heart about how it was.

A: Yes! Don't you think you have been through a lot of hardships from when you were little, all the way until now—how did you overcome all those obstacles?

B: Oh! It was difficult, especially during the Pol Pot[era], the only difficulty left is the day I will die.

A: Oh, yes.

B: So, to this point, I try not to think anything bad, I had good luck and was able to live through it, and now I have all this.

A: Oh, yes.

B: I could have been killed by Pol Pot.

A: Oh yeah. When do you think you were happiest in your life?

B: The happiest point was when our district didn't have any war anymore, we were very happy.

A: With that said, have we have stopped having difficulties of that kind?

B: Yes! Ah, we no longer have those difficulties, and we can sit here together quietly, with the river lapping the shore.

A: Oh! We would have had to run before?

B: Yes! We would have to go find a place to lay down and hide. One time I was with my wife and everyone left our village. How was I supposed to know, when I woke up and didn't see anyone, I saw everyone was gone, and they were walking at the

A: You kept running away with each other?

B: Yes! We would lie here in the dirt. It was miserable, that generation, very miserable.

A: When you were a child, did you have any dreams, or wishes about what you wanted to do when you were older? Like, any desires?

B: No, at that time I had no dreams or desires to do anything, in that generation. How was I supposed to if my parents were that poor?

A: Oh, is that so—?

B: Yes! It could not be.

A: What generation were you a student, what year?

B: Oh! I forgot, I can't remember when I was a student.

A: Oh! But you just know that it was in the days of Lon Nol?

B: Yes! In the days of Lon Nol.

A: Oh! Yes, and if you wanted to give one piece of advice to the generations that will follow you, what advice would you give?

B: I would tell them to work hard to make a living, and help our country, so that there are no more wars.

A: Oh, yes.

B: Don't forget about themselves, and don't get involved in drugs or other things like that, that's what I want to tell them.

A: Yes! Do you want to tell them anything else?

B: Yeah—no, that's all. And regarding your trade or occupation, you have to earn things for yourself, don't go do illegal things.

A: Yes.

B: Yes!

A: Finally, I would like to thank you very much for being willing to discuss with me about your personal history, I will put this interview on the university website so that all of your descendants can get to know you better, from what you just talked about.

B: Yes.

A: Yes, thank you very much!

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