

KHOU XIONG

Interviewer; Linda Rossi
Translator; May Herr

The following interview took place in Khou Xiong's home at 2837 Delaware Street S.E., Minneapolis, Minnesota on November 13, 1991.

1. *When did you come to the U.S.?*

I came to the States May 11, 1979.

2. *How old were you when you came, and how old are you now?*

I was 48 years old when I came, and now I'm 61.

3. *From where did you come?*

I was born in the the village of Panwa, Pakaw, in Laos.

4. *Who sponsored your emigration?*

My son, Toua Vang Herr sponsored my emigration.

5. *Where did you first arrive?*

I came to Wisconsin, before moving here. We lived there approximately one month. We move here because my son wanted the higher education here and he wanted to continue his education. When he moved, we just moved, we follow him because we don't speak any English.

6. *Do you still have contact with your sponsors?*

I see in my sponsor my children every day, if they need advice, they come to me and if I need help, I call on them and they can help me.

7. *How many of your family members came with you?*

Six within my family. My husband and my children.

8. *How many of your family members have joined you since you first arrived?*

I have alot of family members that came, like relatives and like that. A lot of them. My sister and my brother-in-law, they are the most recent and the closest to me.

9. *Have you studied English? Where? For how long?*

I learn English at a church. E.S.L., at North Minneapolis. I learn for three years and I cannot learn anything. I get a lot of headaches so I just stopped going.

10. *Who in your family speaks English best?*

My older son and sponsor Toua Vang, my daughter, May and my son Kao.

11. What was your occupation before you came here?

I was farm girl when I was still young. When I got married my husband was a soldier, and I was a housewife and did a lot of work for my husband's soldiers.

12. What is your occupation now?

I have no job right now. I stay home and do the housework. I do my needle point and show to people. That's all I did everyday. I don't have a job. To sell the needle point we don't go so often, we go twice every three or four months. Only the friends tell us where to go. If there are any shows, then we go. It's not like a job we go to every day. In the past, there was a store at UpTown on Hennepin Avenue and I used to take my work there. I take my needle point there, and show there, and they help me sell some. But the two American ladies that work there and help me sell, don't work there any more. There was still some Hmong ladies there now, and they don't accept my work. They show their own work, so they don't show my work. I also do not know where they move to. The work that I do, it's not mine. Half of it, is the peoples. I do 25% of it and the rest I have to send back to the people back in Thailand. They are so poor so they send these things I have to sell and send them back the money. It makes a little bit of profit for them.

13. What did you think life would be like here before you came?

It's really hard for me because of the language. I don't know how to drive, so every day I'm stuck in the house. Whenever I need to go somewhere I have to call onto my children to take me to places. They are good, but they work. Sometimes I can't get through to them and I have only my husband to help me.

There are a lot of teenage problems in this country. I have a lot of conflict with my children because they are my stepchildren and they don't listen to me so much. In my country I have two of my own children and I also adopted ten children. I don't have any problem with that, raising my children. Now I only have four children to deal with and I have so much problem because three of my children are my stepchildren. I don't think they respect me as much as their father and so when they do something they ask for his advice. If I say no, they will not listen to me. Things are really hard for me right now. My ten children I adopted, a couple of them have died and I have two more back in Laos and some in the States. Two have died from illness. There are five of in the States, two daughters in Wisconsin and one in Michigan. Two sons are here. Three are back in Laos. They record a cassette and they send to me, and they write to me and I write to them. I haven't seen them for twenty years.

14. How does your life now compare with what you anticipated?

I think that this country is really good. I like it. Back in my country there's a lot of stress because of the war. There's a lot of bombing and I have a lot of children, so there's a lot of stress. I came here and they gave me social security right now. I have my own money. They give me my own money to spend and to pay for my rent and everything. I haven't heard bombing or gunshot for a long time and I like it here.

(I asked her what she missed back home and she wept for a time). I miss May's father a lot, my first husband that died. Before he died he built a house for me. I miss my house.

The house is still within my heart. I miss him very much and that he have to die and not be able to come to this country, and see all the wonderful things. He died in the war when he was in his 40's.

When I was still back in Laos with my husband a lot of people consider us wealthy. Within our own family we only have two children, and then I'm not able to have any more children. A lot of relatives say we are wealthy, so they give us their children. That's how we end up with ten adopted children. They say, "We are really poor. We are not able to give our children the things they need, so we want you to have our children". So, we end up with ten adopted children. We enjoy it. We accept the children as our own, within our home, and love them, and give them as much love as we can. We also help the parents. Everybody was giving us children. I'm really glad we can help.

15. What is the most difficult part of your adjustment here?

Most of my children listen to me and do what I want them to do in the house. The thing I don't like about this country is when they go to school and see what their friends do in school, they just do what their friends do and they forget what I told them not to do. That's the most difficult thing for me.

16. What has been the easiest part of your adjustment here?

The easiest thing for me is that in the home there is a bathroom, the water and the stove. Everything is in the house. As long as there is food in the house you will not starve. In her country you have to cut wood, you have to carry your own water from the well into your house. The easiest thing for her in this country is this.

17. What do you wish most for your future here?

I'm wishing for a home and that I can live in and I can do whatever I want. If I'm too tired to clean, then nobody tell me what to do. Right now I'm living in the projects. I'm so worried. If there's a hole in the wall the land lord will come and see it. If the wall is dirty I will have to wash it because they will say I didn't clean my house. The outside, I will have to keep everything clean. It's not that If I have my own house I would not do that, but I would like to have my own house, so she can do freely what I want to do. Now if I want to change something I cannot. I have lived in this project for ten years now, since 1981.

Before this we lived at 239 Irving in Minneapolis. The house was broken up and we called the landlord to fix it, but he never came. Then a social worker came to the house. Maybe she call him. One day we all went to school and he came to fix the house, but he doesn't cover the furniture or our bed or our clothes with anything. All the paint and the scrapes of paint are on our clothes, and on our bed, so we called the social worker. She brought some lawyers over, and that's why they bring us to live in this project. We lived further down on 27th avenue, but we move here. All our children get the order to move. They need our house for a larger family, so we move here. We don't have a social worker anymore, we don't have anymore problems. If we need help we just call the social worker that's giving us help with A.F.D.C. At that time I don't know how the social worker know everything. I don't know who she is, but she was helping us. One day she just came and they have found a house and they just move us.

Must be one of the neighbors come over and see it and report it. The lawyers and social workers we don't know. There were four lawyers there. The house was closed by the

government and he was not to rent. He was ordered by the courts to pay us back everything we had paid for rent.

Compared to this country, the thing what we women always wish for... we wish for wealth. We want to have our own money, because there's always a home. We don't have to buy land or anything. We just go to look at the land and then we like to build our house there we just build it. We don't have to pay for anything.

The thing that we really wish for is to have our own business, like a store or something. That is the thing that women like myself always wish for. Right now I'm still wishing that someday I can open my own store, so that I can watch over my things. I cannot drive or go anywhere, so I'm hoping I can own my own store and I have everything within my reach. There's a lot of things that I need help with, to keep my dream. My children all have debts, because they have to support their family and they owe a lot of money. When we go into the bank to borrow money to buy a house or a store for me, they're not qualified because they have their own debts to pay. Hopefully one day things will be possible. Right now things are not possible, because all the debts they have to pay back, in order to make my dream come true. Right now we're dealing with a house and hopefully we can get that house. My wish right now, is for my children to help me. Right now I have seven sons live within the Twin Cities and one daughter. I have three more daughters live out of state. I hope when I get a closure for the house that I really like, right now, my children can pitch in and help me each month pay for the rent.

18. *What grades in school have your children reached?*

My daughter May has graduated from high school. She start school at the University of Minnesota for one year. She got married after that. Then after four years, she went to Minneapolis Technical College and she finish her L.P.N. course, there. My son Toua also graduated from high school and he go to Minneapolis Technical College for a year. My son Kao graduated from high school. He's working now. My younger son Ge is still in high school.

19. *Who do you talk to when you need advice?*

Usually, I talk to my daughter May and my son Toua. If I need something, they speak English better, and know what to do.

20. *Have you had any problems with laws in this country? Specifically, marriage, welfare regulations, divorce.*

No, I haven't had any problems.

21. *What kinds of changes have you made in the foods that you eat?*

I eat the same as in my country. I'm old now. I eat rice and meat. I also have to have something really light to eat such as, boiled vegetables, salt free and sugar free, something like that with my foods. I do like American food. I like almost everything, but when we first got to the States the only American food I will eat is the 'Whopper'. I don't like sweet things. I like something that's light. I remember when I first got to the States,

the one thing that I really like is the 'Whopper' and ice cream. Those are the only food that I first try and really like.

22. *Has your family had any problems relating to teenage marriage?*

No, my children doesn't have any problems.

23. *What makes a good husband for you or your family?*

I like somebody talk really nice and I respect him and love him as he love me and respect me. He help me. We help each other with things. The best thing is talk really nice. Nice words, that's the best thing. I want to add that my husband that died is really nice to me and love me really much and talk really nice. This husband (Xeng Sue) love me the same thing and likes me and do everything for me. He's younger than me and he love me as much as my old husband and I'm really happy.

24. *Do you celebrate birthdays?*

We do celebrate birthdays, but not like in this country. We don't use candles and cake and like that. Every year when it comes to the birthday, we kill a chicken and eat. We have a song and we sing and we're happy our children lived to that year. We do celebrate, but not with cake or candy.

25. *How do you feel about the changes regarding respect for parents/elders and responsibilities for young people?*

As for the children that grow up in Laos, they listen to me. I say do this and they do this, and I say do that and they do that. They never say no. In this country the children are different. When they grow up here, they say they only go one place and they go so many places. They say they'll only be gone for one hour and they'll be gone for three or four hours. I stay home and worry and look out to see if the car is coming or not. I'm worried all the time. I get a lot of headaches. Right now it's the winter time, the streets are so slippery. If my son Ge go somewhere and he say I'll only go to this place and then be back, I say ok. I figure that will only take him one or two hours and then he was gone for three or four hours and she's so worried maybe he get into a car accident because of the roads and everything. So she get a lot of headaches.

26. *How do you feel about the weather here? Do you enjoy the change?*

I like the summer. I like the summer because I can take vacation, like go and visit my relatives. We can go as far as to Florida and everywhere. In the winter I'm stuck at home every day because of the snow. I cannot go anywhere, so I like the summer, so I can go places. My husband takes me everywhere I want to go... to lots of places.

27. *What if any experiences have you had with descrimination?*

I don't have any problem with discrimination. I think the American people are really generous and nice. I'm so old and cannot learn, but some of my teachers will tell me that I'm doing really, really well and that I'm young and I will learn more. Everything I did,

they will praise me, and that makes me really happy. I have a lot of self-confidence because nobody talk against me. They just praising me all the way through and I'm happy.

28. Is there anything you would like to add to this interview to share with others?

One thing I want to add... to leave to all the Hmong women, is that they must be faithful, and respect their husband, their own parents, and their children. Do not flirt around or fool around. A lot of women have been having affairs with different men. I hope that in the future we will keep in mind that we have to respect our husband as ourself and not do things like that anymore.

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