Xeng Sue Yang

Interviewer; Linda Rossi Translator; May Herr

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

US CHAIL

1. Where were you born?

I was born in Laos.

2. When did you come to the United States?

I stepped foot in the U.S. May 11,1979.

3. Did you come directly to the Midwest?

I first came to Wapeca, Wisconsin.

4. Who sponsored your emigration?

My sponsor is my son and my daughter -in -law, Toua Herr and They came ahead of me by two years to this country and they helped me.

5. Do you still have contact with your sponsor?

I see them every day. They used to live in this project and now they have moved to south Minneapolis.

6. How many of your family members came with you?

My family members are all together six. My daughter May, my son Ge, and my son Kao are all my family. When we first came just the six of us, but also have different family. My wife, she is my second wife and she has some children back in Thailand and some are here. I have my own family back in Thailand and some of them come here already. But when we first came just the six of us.

7. Have you studied English? Where? For how long?

I studied English when I first came to the States, from 1979-1984 and then I stopped going because I cannot learn anything and so I just quit going back to ESL class.

- 8. Who in your family speaks English best? My daughter May and my son Ge.
- 9. What was your occupation before you came here?

In Laos I was a C.I.A. soldier . I work for C.I.A. from 1960 to 1975 when the war came and then we came to the States. When I was still a teenager it first started as I was a student for three years. By the time I was fifteen I became a C.I.A. soldier when the North Vietnamese came and invaded our country. In 1962 I came to Thailand and learn how to be a paratrooper. Then I went back to Laos and became the leader and teached some of the soldiers that,too. I have to be a leader and a teacher in Thailand for 18 months and then I go back to Laos and worked with the soldiers. In 1964 I went back to the village of Long che and teach some of the soldiers leadership. I also came back to Thailand for six more months as a leadership again and then took the soldiers back into war.

In 1965 I was shot for the first time. I was unconscious for more then 24 hours. I was carried by my soldiers for 48 hours on their back and then the helicopter came and take me to the hospital in Sa wa. That's where I rehabilitated. In 1966, 1967 and 1968 I was shot again. I was promoted to captain, with 111 soldiers in my group. From 1968 to 1969 and 1970 I came back to Thailand again to learn some more skills and then I go back to war again. We just keep fighting and fighting until 1975 and we just lost our country and we all came to Thailand.

At that time I'm not so worried about my life because I'm a good person. When the war came it's not that I want to fight but I have to fight for my country. I'm not fearful for my life at that time. It's better that I've lost my life for my country then that I lost his country to the enemy.

10. What is your occupation now?

Right now I don't have a specific job. I work in the community and help get my community back together. If there are any problems from within, I help solve them. I help younger children become a leader, so they can help my culture keep going and we don't lose most of our culture.

Because I have been shot so many times, I lost most of my memory and everything that I learned inside. I lost half of it, so I cannot write. My English, I can speak a little bit, but not very good. I cannot write English very well, that's probably why I don't go back to school.

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

I want to explain why we came to this country and how I felt about it. It was because at that time President Kennedy was the president and he came to our country. He say that we have to fight the war and help him fight the war against the enemies. If we win, then we will stay in our own country, but if we lose then we lost our country, and the people of America will bring us to the United States. There was like a signed consent that we can do that, so at that time we lost our country and that's why we came. My first thought was, that it doesn't matter which country I go to. When I go, that country and those people will become my people. They will become my family and they will be my leader into that country.

When they signed the consent form it was in 1962, and that's why I came to this country. The people are welcoming me and they open their arms to me. There's a lot of help within the community. The American people will help me, such as you and Charles help me and make a life for me. I'm happy about this.

12. What has been the most difficult part of your adjustment here?

The most difficult thing for me is that when I was back in my country I was the head of my family, and a captain. I have my own chicken, pig, cow, and I don't worry about anything. When I came here I became like a little child. I have to learn again about the laws. I cannot punish my children as I would like. That is the most difficult thing.

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

The easiest thing is when we got into the States a lot of people help us. You can go into the store and buy things, except you have to have the money. Everything is easier, except the work is different. The language is different. Everything is different and that makes it hard. You cannot have your old job when you were back in your country. You have to learn a new job and do everything new. That is the hardest part. You have to become like a child again, to learn to walk again. When I was still back in my country it takes me three years to learn how to read and write Laos and read and write Thai. When I came to the States it's so hard for me to learn English because of all the words.

I was shot four times and I was unconscious for more than 24 hours. I lost half of my memor. Right now I can still hear noises within my ears and I cannot concentrate. I went back to school to learn how to read and write every day. If my teacher say that tommorow I'm going to have a spelling test she will tape the words so I can learn them at home. I repeat these tapes so many times until the tapes cannot work anymore. The next day I go and she say the words and I cannot spell or write. It happens like that for five years. Most of my teachers give up on me and say I need some time off. Take some time off and see how things go and then come back again and see if you can learn. But I am hearing a lot of noise within my ears and I cannot concentrate. When I was young, I learn how to play my instrument. My teacher would teach the instrument only one time. After I go home I can repeat all of that. I can learn all that, but now half of my memory is lost.

14. Does this inability to communicate in English ever create situations in which you are frightened, particularily after your community has endured the war to now face our American crimes?

Right now I'm having a really short temper. If things go bad like criminals, and they invade my space I will not be afraid to shoot them. I will do to them as they do to me. If I have something that I have worked so hard for, I will not hesitate to shoot them. Because I'm smaller than an American, that will not be an issue. I will not be afraid because of this. I will not be seared of him, as I will be of the law, what they will do to me.

I like to share things. If I am good he will be good to me. And if I am bad he will be bad to me. And if the time comes, it's a matter of life or death I will not be afraid of him. If I die I will not be afraid because I tried my best. I share a lot of things. If I'm with a really good man and I only have one can of pop, I will share it with him.

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

The things that I'm wishing it's a home for my family. Right now I'm living in the project. Whatever I do the landlord is watching over my head. How many people I bring into my house, they think I am hiding them and they are living with me. If relatives come over and the neighbors doesn't like it they call the landlord. I really wish for a home for my family, I can do what I wish within my house, anyone can come to visit me. I know that I came to the States I don't live here just for a few days, I live here forever. Even

back in my country we just stay, we go and hunt in the jungle we will make a little camp for us. I am living here now, so I want a house.

16. How does that compare to your previous wishes for the future?

Comparing like the wish I have in my country.... what we always wish, is to have a good home, good family, good friends, and good neighbors. We raise our animals. As today, you come to visit me. In my country I would go to the barn and get a chicken and will cook, because I am happy that you are visiting me. We will make a feast and I will call my neighbors and they will come, because we are happy you are visiting us. Plus, within my house, within my country, we hope that we will have a lot of visitors, like two or three a day, because that brings us a lot of good luck.

17. What grades in school have your children reached?

I was still young back in Laos and I have only one son. When the war came he was in third grade. When we got to the States he was registered into the school. Also my daughter May and sons Kao and Ge, they also started school. May finished high school in 1985 and then went to the University of Minnesota for a year. She was married and quit school for three or four years, and then went back in the nursing program. My son Toua graduated from high school and then went to a technical school for two years, but he didn't graduate. My son Kao graduated from high school. My son Ge is still in high school.

18. Who do you talk to when you need advice?

When I have something to do or talk about, I will call on my family members, such as May and all my sons, and we will talk about the situation and see what can be improved. I also have a lot of friends, but the only friend I trust is Charles Numerich.

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

I haven't had any problems, such as, with marriage or divorce. Back in my country I never have any problems with the law. The difference about the laws in this country which I'm really against are; in our country you have to be proven before found guilty. In this country the law put the woman first. If the wife call the police, they just come and put the husband in jail. It's like he's not proven guilty.

In my country I have dealt with a lot of divorce cases, because I was a mayor of the village. A lot of people came to me and they say that their husband do this or that to them. I will call the husband. The wife order me to go and capture the husband and put him into jail, but I will not do that until I hear the case. In the States if the wife calls the police they just come and take the husband away. I do not like that. My family has not faced a situation like this before. But I have alot of friends who have faced this. In my country that is one thing about divorce, is if the wife come and say her husband is beating her up we can legally put the husband in jail. If we then find the husband is not guilty, then the wife will have to pay a fee of; a cow, a pig, two chickens and one egg. Then, she has to ask for forgiveness and he take her back. If you have put a husband in jail it makes him

lose his self confidence and then a lot of people doesn't look up to him. You either have to prove him guilty or innocent before you do anything. In this country a lot of things have happened. The wife doesn't like the husband. The husband will just go hunting, and the wife will call the police and lie, and the police will believe the wife and just take the husband away. This I really don't like.

20, Has your family had any problems relating to teenage marriage?

No, not within my family I haven't had any problems.

21. What kinds of changes have you made in the food you eat?

Within my family we eat the same. We never change. Whereas, if we go somewhere else and we get hungry we will stop at Burger King and get a burger or a hotdog, but within my house we never change. I like American food.

22. What makes a good wife for you?

I look for a wife and it's good and I have as much respect for her, as she has for me. We do things together. Our money will be in one place. Not like you have to have your own bank account, but all things are together. The main thing is that she respect me and I respect her. Helping and doing things together.

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

I don't know about a lot of other families. My children respect me as the father and I respect them as my children. We don't have a lot of problems. Whatever they do they ask my advice, and if I don't like it, they don't do it. Their respect for me as a father is very good, so we get along well together.

24. How old were you when you came to this country and how old are you now?

When I came to the States I was 32 and now I'm 44.

Do you have anything you would like to add to this history?

I want to thank you for coming today. I consider you as my sister, because my sister is back in Laos right now. Today you come into my life, and you are like my sister, who just came back to see me and I'm really happy. I have my good friend Charles to help me deal with everything in this country, and now I have you. I welcome you into my family and I will help you and hope you will help me in the future.

The last thing that I want to say, is that, I'm a person who knows a lot of things about my customs and my culture. I want every children to know that I am the one who know everything. I play every instrument; the flute, the "geej" and the "ncaas". Also the marriage songs, the funeral songs, and everything. I want the American people to know this and to welcome my people and keep encouraging and funding, so we can keep our culture alive and we have something to look back to.