

Several pages of the original transcription of the Testimony of Loeung Bun have been corrected. They were corrected on 4/23/02 by Beatriz Menanteau, at the University of Minnesota Law School.

The corrected pages are the following: 2; 3; 4; 5; 7; 8; 9; 10; 12; 14; 15; 16;17; 21; 22; 23.

TESTIMONY OF LOEUNG BUN, on August 11, 1992, at the Cable Access Studio, St. Paul, Minnesota. The testimony of Loeung Bun was interpreted by Mr. Yo euth Yan. The examination was conducted by Mr. Wood Foster.

MR. FOSTER: This is the Khmer Archive Project of the Minnesota Lawyers International Human Rights Committee. Today is August 11, 1992. I'm Wood Foster. I'll be the interviewer tonight, and I'm interviewing Loeung Bun who is a Cambodian male, 62 years of age. He lives at 225 Charles Avenue in St. Paul, Minnesota 55103, and Loeung will be speaking in his native tongue, and the interpreter tonight is Yo euth Yan who is seated next to me. Loeung is seated on my far left. We're going to talk about Mr. Bun's experiences under the Khmer Rouge during the 1970s followed by his immigration to this country.

EXAMINATION BY MR. FOSTER:

Q, Okay. Loeung, you are 62 years old, is that right?

LB: Yeah, a little bit older, 63.

WF: 63 years old? Okay. Tell us a little about where you grew up.

LB: I was grown up in Mongkol Borei south District.

WF: Okay. Where is that relative to Phnom Penh?

LB: Far west from Phnom Penh and close to Thai-Cambodia border.

WF: Okay. And did you live there all your life?

LB: When I was seven years old, I was born at Ruessei Kraok, Mongkol Borei, Battambang. When the war broke out between Thai and Cambodia, at that time, Thai and France fight against each other in Cambodia and we moved to Baebrea, a small remote area.

WF: Did you stay there?

LB: At that time, my mom was very sick, and she sold the gold to get some money, and about three months, France sign a treaty and gave Battambang territories to Thai. I became a person who live in that areas with Thai for six year, and then my mom pass away at that time.

WF: What year was that?

LB: 1931 I guess. I'm not sure, 1931 or 1937.

WF: Okay. It was after the French treaty with the Thais?

LB: Yeah.

WF: About how old were you when your mother died?

LB: I was about seven years old.

WF: Okay. So this is early in his life. And then he was in Battambang at that time?

LB: Yeah, I was living in Battambang Province.

WF: And did you stay there for many years? Is that where you had your education?

LB: Yes, I have been living there until the Prince Norodom Sihanouk tried to bring the territory back to Cambodia.

WF: When was that?

LB: 1946.

WF: And it did come back to Cambodia?

LB: Yeah.

WF: And you stayed there and lived there?

LB: I have only one year school.

WF: One year of school in Battambang?

LB: Yeah.

WF: And when did he leave Battambang?

LB: In 1946 when my father passed away.

WF: And where did he go then?

LB: Since that time, I have no any assets of property to keep up my life, and so then I start learning about music.

WF: And you became a musician?

LB: Yeah, the first I start with the small band, musician band, and then with the Theater's band.

WF: What kind of instruments do you play?

LB: The first I start with the Tro-u. Later on I can play Khim, Troso and Banjo and Saso.

WF: These are not instruments that I'm familiar with except for the Banjo. Are these all stringed instruments?

LB: Yeah.

WF: Like guitar, that sort of thing?

LB: Yeah, but there is no guitar.

WF: And what kind of music were you playing?

LB: I play for the theater show.

WF: And is this how you made your living then up until the time the Khmer Rouge took over?

LB: Yes, I been living up to the musics for 35 years.

WF: And were you playing your music mostly in one town, or did you move around?

LB: I went around from place to place. Sometime I spend three months at a town, sometimes five, sometimes a year, depending on the theater show.

WF: But what was your -- was your home town that you would come home to?

LB: During those travel, I would go from place to place, and each place they have set up the shelter for us and set up a room so for each families, and those times, there's about 40 people who is a member of a performer.

WF: Is he still talking about the period before the Khmer Rouge now, or is he talking about after the Khmer Rouge?

LB: He asked me about the Theaters, so it's not -- from my understanding, it's not the Khmer Rouge yet.

WF: So this is before the Khmer Rouge?

LB: Yeah.

WF: Okay. And did you have a family?

LB: During the last 35 year I play - - I perform in that band and have a girlfriend. At that time, the district officer would not allow me to marry that woman.

WF: Again, my question on that is was that before the Khmer Rouge?

LB: Before Khmer Rouge.

WF: Did he eventually marry her?

LB: No.

WF: But he's married now according to the information I'm looking at.

LB: The first lady that I loved, I was not able to marry her because the district officer did not allow me to do so, and up until I broke up with her, then I got in touch with the second person whom I married today in 1958. I marry her in 1958.

WF: And is she here in the United States with him?

LB: Yeah, accompanied by - - with two other - - two daughter.

WF: Okay.

LB: And a son was separated in the Khmer Rouge Regime.

WF: But the two daughters are here?

LB: Yeah, one just moved to Boston.

WF: Okay. Where were you living when the Khmer Rouge took over?

LB: By the time the Khmer Rouge took over Cambodia, I was a musician and also a retailer at the Sisophon.

WF: I didn't understand the last, also upon -

LB: Retailer.

WF: I'm just not -- okay. If I understand, you were both a musician and a grocery retailer?

LB: Yeah.

WF: And you had your wife and two daughters at that time and a son?

LB: Yeah.

WF: Describe, in your own words, what happened after the Khmer Rouge took over. What happened to your family? Where were you sent?

LB: I would like to extend a little bit here because after I tried to engage the woman that I loved to be my wife, and because the district officer did not allow me to marry her, and this person not just not allow me to marry her, this person tried to take away -- take her away from me, and he want to kill me, too, and I escape to Seam Reap.

WF: To where?

LB: To Seam Reap Province.

WF: And when was that? What year are we talking about?

LB: I'm talking from 1951 to 1958.

WF: So this was long before the Khmer Rouge?

LB: Because all of the suffering and pain still exists in my mind, I feel a lot of suppressed from this person tried to overpower me, and I want to escape from him, and I want to join the jungle troop.

WF: So Loeung himself went off into the jungle?

LB: I did not go to the jungle.

WF: But he did flee from this man?

LB: Yeah, and I went to Phnom Penh to live in Phnom Penh.

WF: And this was sometime in the late 1950's?

LB: Yeah.

WF: And it was in Phnom Penh that he met the second woman and started a new family?

LB: Yeah.

WF: And what year was he married or when was his first child?

LB: The first child was a boy. He was born only three months, and then he pass away, and the second child was born in 1959.

WF: In Phnom Penh?

LB: Yeah, Phnom Penh.

WF: Did you stay in Phnom Penh during the '60's?

LB: I stay in Phnom Penh only '59 to '60 and then move around from Battambang, Pursat and Kampong Chnang.

WF: And again, doing the music?

LB: Yeah.

WF: And also at some point he started with the retailing?

LB: No, I do not - - I did not do any business, retail business.

WF: Okay. Well, I would like to move up now to the point when the Khmer Rouge took over.

LB: In 1969 and 1970, there was a coup d'état.

WF: And I would like Loeung to describe what happened to him and his family when the Khmer Rouge first took over.

LB: From 1970's, I came back to Sisophon, and I was a musician and I also retailer, grocery retailer, and then in 1975, Khmer Rouge took over.

WF: Okay.

LB: During that time, the Khmer Rouge said, well, everybody have to move out of the Sisophon Districts in three days, otherwise the American army can bombard us, American jets can bomb to the town.

WF: So they were told that the town would be bombed by American jets?

LB: Yeah.

WF: Were you made any promises about being able to come back?

LB: The people do not - - did not prepare for the food, for the life. The did not have enough food for the family because the Khmer Rouge cheat them.

WF: Where did the family go?

LB: We push cart, a push cart along the Sisophon Rivers to Bung Trav.

WF: And how did you live when you got there?

LB: When we got there, the food last only three days, and after three days we have no food left for families to eat.

WF: Were you living out in the open, or did you have shelter of some kind?

LB: We tried to set up a small shelter. Sometimes we live in a house which is abandoned by the people, you know. And the last three months, the next three months, the Khmer Rouge tried to search for my name, and they found my name. At that time when the Khmer Rouge tried to find me, I was afraid because in 1970's, I was involving with the - - small group who were asked to settle and protect the village, and because of that duties, I was afraid that I would be accused of doing so to serve that - - by that time, but the families district, the Khmer Rouge soldiers told me I going to tell you to perform a musics. I was thinking that if I was not going, I will make - - I would make trouble, and that guy took me to see a Khmer Rouge cadre, and the Khmer Rouge cadre say you cannot take this guy. You can take anybody else, but you cannot take him. The Khmer Rouge cadres said to the soldier that if you want to organize your band, we also want to organize a band, too. Then that soldiers went back to the boss, and they got the big stamp on the letters, and he brought the stamped letters to the Khmer Rouge cadres, and then the Khmer Rouge cadres said let them go with this guy, and at that time they allow only me to go with the soldiers, but I request to bring my whole family along. Then we came back to stay in Sisophon District again. At that time I was so afraid because some of those musicians were former soldiers. Later on, those former soldiers, because - - to me because of the policeman they had send, and later on those former soldiers were found by the Khmer rouge and the Khmer Rouge took them away, took them out of the band, and those seven people in the group were taken out. One is (Vau, Rin, Chet, Vun) and other three who is a family member. They were taken to [Arrabacko], which is a remote areas. The next eight day, those people were beaten to death. I considered myself was - - I was a lucky person at that time. I though about because of the God who had me because I have musical talent, music talent, and I was also considered as a high-class person and also a Vietnamese person. I still consider myself a lucky person because I have a music talent, and those people cannot take my music talent from me, even I teach them, they cannot take all of my talent. I taught the children from eight years old to 12, and another group from 12 to 18, and those people cannot learn all of musical because they cannot tighten the string of the instrument.

WF: What happened to the band after the seven members were killed?

LB: After those seven member were taken away and killed, only my family were left.

WF: Was his family still with him?

LB: My wife was sent to O'ambell, and my daughters were separate, and so does my son -- so did my son.

WF: So all of them were apart then?

LB: Yeah.

WF: What happened to him after that? What can you tell me about where he went and what he did?

LB: By that time, I did not have enough food to eat because the food is limited, very restricted. One band was assigned to farm 50 acre. This farming works have been assigned when we do not perform. The band were assigned to play in Zone Five, such as Battambang, Phnom Srok, Phnom Som Pow, Thmor Pourk.

WF: Were there new people that were assigned to the band?

LB: There was no any new people in the band except me. Before the performance start, I was the organizer, and I organized about a half hour before the performance.

WF: Loeung, tell us the story about the Khmer Rouge performances during the music and what would happen to some of the people in the audience.

LB: At each performance the Khmer Rouge kill about 150 and 200 people. Of each playing show, they play about politics. They ask one person perform or act as the Khmer Rouge, and a lot of others, four or five actors, perform as army officer, a colonel, seconds lieutenant, first lieutenant. When they caught those officer, they announce that this is anonymous people, and his people stir up our government, and then they put them - -they tie them and they beat them and they chain them also.

The Khmer Rouge set up the spies in the audience, and when the audience sees the performance and they react to the performance, show, that anonymous person, and this is the officer, and then when the people saw the officer and they act they hate the officer, and they kind of support the anonymous person, that person is why, but the person who react when they see all this anonymous person behave or act in a bad or wrong way, then the audience hate that guy, then the Khmer Rouge soldiers come. They will not come and grab that person right away, that person just come and tickling that person; would you please come with me, and they disappeared. Two trucks covered with canvas day and night when they see this truck come back and forth, this truck carry the prisoner to be killed.

WF: Well, I think we got most of that on the tape, but I want to make sure that there was a portion that was missed. I just want to ask Loeung to re-explain about the play and about how the Khmer Rouge soldiers would pick the people out of the audience if they reacted wrong, just to be sure that it's all on the tape.

LB: I would like to explain that the Khmer Rouge cadres announce about the performance. They would assign the people to a certain space, a certain area, and they will announce to the people there is a performance at this place and such and such. And then after the performance, the Khmer Rouge soldiers keep the eye on the people, and on the scene of the show, there is most of the time about an anonymous person, and this anonymous person act -- sometime act as bad guy, and the audience yell from the crowd that that guy should be killed, that guy should be killed, and then the Khmer Rouge come behind and sneak and whisper behind their ear and take him away. This is the technique the Khmer Rouge used to kill the people and take the people away, and the people disappeared one by one, and this is because of their reaction that they die or they were killed, because of the mouth spit it out.

WF: And how long did this go on? Was this something that happened many times?

LB: Each place, perhaps there's two performance for each place, because the reason for this performance, they want to find out who really believe the Anka, the Khmer Rouge, and who does not believe the Khmer Rouge.

WF: It was some sort of a loyalty test?

LB: Yeah, if the people keep repeating when they see anonymous person, the actor, anonymous actor, and repeat after that guy and behave after that guy or support that guy, that they considered those persons loyal to the organization. The Phnom Penh people were relocated (or evacuated) to Sisophon. There were many people from Phnom Penh to Sisophon. Every performance and at each performance they assign a certain area; at this time this village going to come to see the show, and at this time, that village going to come to see the show. In 1978, there is another Khmer Rouge group from southwest came to take over from the northwestern Khmer Rouge, and this southwestern Khmer Rouge leader tried to eliminate all of these performance show. I forgot to tell you a little bit in 1976 when one of my son was having a mental illness. My son really was loyal to the Khmer Rouge tendency because before 1975, before Khmer Rouge took over Cambodia, my son, that one was abused by the soldier because he was a cigarette retailer and the soldier came and grabbed the cigarette and came and beat him, and that make him mad and he want to join the Khmer Rouge. Then I tried to persuade him not to go with the Khmer Rouge, and later on he like the Khmer Rouge music, and when he start acting performance, then the people really like him and he used to perform much, much better, and the people admire him a lot. And I don't know what's happened because of that, maybe the people were jealous and tried to use the black magic to make him crazy. Then I was separate from him until 1979.

WF: No, we're not fully understanding. It sounds as though, Loeng, you were doing the music and these plays for a period of several years?

LB: You talking about the Khmer Rouge?

WF: No, when he was doing these plays where the people would be killed and so forth, how long did that go on? Was that just once in a while, or did that go on every day for a long time?

LB: Once in a while, maybe a play, put on a show for one night, and then rest for 10 days, and then play another night and again.

WF: And each time people would be killed?

LB: Yeah, because their desire, because they desire to watch the reaction and to find out the loyalty.

WF: Did anyone try to warn the people?

LB: Nobody there talk about that. I learned all of these, even perhaps the last maybe the 10, 15 events because I did not learn in the first play. There is another of my colleague who is a performer also told me about that. That's what I learned from him.

WF: So for some of that time, he didn't know what was going on?

LB: No, and when that guy told me and then I look at the -- look through the wall, then I saw they took the audience.

WF: So at some point he learned what was going on while he was still performing?

LB: Yeah, something like that because at the beginning of the show, there were a lot of audience in the show, but at the end of the show, the people see disappear, less people.

WF: So did you ever witness anybody being killed?

LB: No.

WF: Were any of the people you knew taken away and killed?

LB: Yes, in the band there's two people that disappeared, and these people were told by other people that the high organization, the Anka, need to see you, and the people, when the high organization or the Anka asked to see them, to know that, they will be taken away and killed.

WF: When did you leave Cambodia?

LB: August 1979.

WF: And tell us the story of how you got out.

LB: In 1978, the Khmer Rouge from another Region, stopping the show, and I moved to Snoul District. When I was not performing with the band, I became the farmer, and in 1979, the Vietnamese invaded Cambodia. After the Khmer Rouge invaded Cambodia, we tried to make a living. I tried to make a living. I went fishing and we tried to support a life for a few months, and then we had no success, and then we move on. And we move from Snoul back to Sisophon, and on the way to - - back to Sisophon, I saw a lot of people; some of them were without clothes and starved to death on the road. From January 1979 to July 1979, I cannot make - - I could not make my living on music because the wedding music is not - - not a profession that I can make money to support my family. And at that time, some people told me if you don't have anything to support your family, food for you to eat, you can go to Vietnam and ask the Vietnam troop to get some food. And then when I went there, the Vietnam say I do not need you to be here, and they want to arrest me. At that time I saw and I learned about the people who left Cambodia for Thailand, and the first wave of refugees that fled into Thailand were transported to [Prah ViPear (or Prah Vihear) Mountain] and those people were dumped by the Thai authorities and some of those were killed. I want to come to the borders at that time also, but I was afraid I would not make it. Luckily, later on Mr. Kong Salas asked me to become the member of the musician with his band. I was with Mr. Kong Salas' band for about 11 day or 12 day, 11 to 12 day. At that time we were on we walk on feet and we were across a lot of dangers, we were robbed. We slept in the forest, and the next morning we got to the new camp. The next day I went to see Mr. Kong Salas. Mr. Kong Salas told me that you can stay here, I will provide you some rice. I gave that rice to my older sibling, and my older siblings took this rice to my family back in Cambodia, and I told him to bring the rest of our families to the border. When the families got to Koch Khjoonjg Camp with Mr. Kong Salas, then there's a situation happened, a bad situation happened. Mr. Kong Salas' soldiers and the Thai soldiers got a fight - got into a fight and the Thai launched artileries, about 13 shell into a Koch Khjoonjg Camp, and I overheard that there was about 100 people were killed by those artillery shell. I run away from that camp to another camp called Old Camp and stay there for overnight, and the next morning I played with another band, Mr. Tschun, and I got some rice to feed myself. The next 13 day, this band got into a fight with another band. I escape to a new camp. When I got to the new camp, I really want to come to Khao I Dang Camp. At that time the liberation force did not allow the people to get out of the camp. The next 20 day, the Khmer Rouge fought the new camp, fought against the liberation force at new camp. I was sent to sleep on the field for overnight, and the next morning we got on the bus to Khao I Dang. At that time I was separated from some of my family member. When I get to Khao I Dang Camp, I help other organization to organize the musical band. I organized a lot of script, theater show, traditional show. At that time I did not get any money or any financial, but I got the rice and some food. I forgot to tell you about my son. He was okay for about 10 day, and then he relapsed and he throw the dishes about the places.

WF: When did you come out of Thailand?

LB: In August 1980, I got out of Khao I Dang Camp to Kampot Camp, and I was living at the Kampot Camp about a year, and then I was transferred and moved Chhunburi Camp.

WF: When you came out of Cambodia into Thailand, was your wife and your daughters with you and your son?

LB: On the first tour, I came with the brothers and a son, and the next trip we got all our families member.

WF: How long were you separated from your wife and your daughters when you were in Cambodia?

LB: It was not very long. We just separate only in the different places because my daughters live with the woman team, and so I was separated from my wife and asked permission to see her about 10 days.

WF: When the Khmer Rouge took over in 1975, how old were his daughters?

LB: I guess Sarume, maybe 15 years old, and Saren, 12 years old.

WF: And his son?

LB: Maybe 18.

WF: Okay. Tell us about your coming to the United States. When did that happen and how?

LB: When I got to Chhunburi Camp, they allow me to study for three months. December '81 I got to United States.

WF: And was this a difficult experience for him?

LB: Yeah.

WF: Why?

LB: Number one, we never met the people who are really kind, like you, and we met the people like the Khmer Rouge who would kill a lot of people, and we had no experience come across from country to country, especially to here, and I would not believe that I come to this country. But finally I believed that because of my music talent that bring me here. When I got to Khao I Dang, the people advice me to submit my application to any band, and at the time my son become very serious mental illness, and he wanted to return to Cambodia. And when my son decide to return to Cambodia and I have one name left, and then I help one guy to come to the United States with us. And because of my sympathies of this gentleman and my kindness, I take this guy along with me as considered as my son, and because after this guy face a lot of hardship, and I tried to help him.

WF: Did you settle in Minnesota right away, or were you somewhere else before you came to Minnesota?

LB: Yes, I came to Minnesota right away and I had moved – I have moved about five home during a period 1 stay in Minnesota.

WF: Did you have a difficult adjustment period?

LB: Yes, I have a lot of difficulties because my sponsor did not help me very much. He was not helping me, not just not helping me, but he also suppressed me. He sponsor me to come to the United States. Maybe he want to use me as his slave. I have a bad feeling about him, but I will not judge him. Let the God make a decision and judge him for me.

WF: Since that time, has your life become easier? I have difficulties from the time I got here, December '81 to '83. And then '84 I moved to another house at Orendells. I have a lot of difficulties at this place because the owners of the house, they ask me to pay more money. I did not get a security deposit back, and not just that, I also was charged another couple hundred dollars extra, and the total amount is \$900 for the charge. And I believe that I do not make any damage, and I believe that I do not - - I am not supposed to pay anything to him, but when I get to that house, I take from somebody, from the Cambodian family, that Cambodian family leave and they relayed to me - - that Cambodian guy told me that you pay me \$300 because I pay a security deposit \$300, an when you move out of this house you will get \$300 and that was my money and now I take your money. And at that time I know nothing - - I knew nothing about. The house glasses - - a window broken, and at that time winter and very cold, and I came to a church at state capital the guy named Daniel, and I talked to this guy, an this guy talked to the owner to fix the broken window, and the owner said don't worry because this guy really ignorant guy, so you don't have to help him; we going to charge him more when we move out, and you don't have to help them because these people are refugees and we don't know where they are coming from. And he told that guy, Daniel, don't tell them about him, but later on Daniel told me everything, and he teach me how to protect myself against the landlord. The first time he advised me to write letters to a Cambodian in California, and that guy wrote me the letters to support me. And another thing, he explained to me to write a notice to the landlord one month before you move out and make a copy of that letter. When I move out that house, I wrote the letters to the landlords one month, and I wrote two letters; one for myself and one for him. At the end of the month, at the first new month, I took the keys and gave the keys to the landlord, and I asked interpreter to ask the landlord for me what's going on to my security deposit money, and he told me that that's okay, you just give me your new address and we mail it to you. By the time they send the letters to us, they charge \$900.

WF: Sounds to me a though Mr. Loeung has a few legal problems. I think we're getting a little afield now and I want to thank you, Mr. Loeung - - or Loeung, I want to thank you for taking the time today. Your experiences are recorded and will be useful to future people who want to know what happened in Cambodia.

LB: I am very pleased for the organization to have me here because I never think such a thing happen. I am 63 years old now, and I've seen only United States who does this. I am very, very happy for this project because this project can be a bridge for the next generation.

WF: Well, thank you very much for your help, and this will be the end of the interview.

LB: Thank you.

Khmer Oral History Project  
Minnesota Historical Society