Several pages of the original transcription of the Testimony of Choup Lat 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: 3; 9; 10.

TESTIMONY OF CHOUP LAT, on July 31, 1992, at the Cable Access Studio, St. Paul, Minnesota. The testimony of Choup Lat was interpreted by Ms. Dany Eam. The examination was conducted by Ms. Sharon Jacks.

MS. JACKS: My name is Sharon Jacks. I'm a volunteer with the Minnesota Lawyers International Human Rights Committee, Khmer Archives Project. It's July 31, 1992 and we're here at st. Paul Cable Access to interview Choup Lat, from Cambodia. And his Interpreter today will be Dany Eam.

EXAMINATION BY MS. JACKS:

SJ: Choup, should I call you Choup or Mr. Lat or Mr. Choup?

CL: Choup, yeah.

SJ: Choup is fine?

CL: Yeah, fine.

SJ: Okay. So should I start?

(Discussion off the record.).

SJ: Okay. How old are you, Choup?

CL: I am 62 years old.

SJ: Are you married?

CL: I am married.

SJ: What is your wife's name?

CL: My wife name (Simone Chong).

SJ: Does she live here with you in Minnesota?

CL: Yes, she live with me in Minnesota.

SJ: What other family members live here with you?

CL: I have my two son and my two daughter who live in Minnesota, too.

SJ: Do you have any family members still living in Cambodia?

CL: I have two brother who live in Cambodia.

SJ: Are you working here in Minnesota?

CL: I used to work here before, now I quit this job because I got accident.

SJ: Where is your home in Cambodia?

CL: My -- I have live in Battambang and in Maung Russei.

SJ: What job did you have there?

CL: I was a farmer over there.

SJ: Which family members lived with you in Cambodia before the Khmer Rouge?

CL: Before the Khmer, I live with all my kids, my wife except one of my son who moved to Phnom Penh because he had a school over there.

SJ: Where did you live under the Khmer Rouge?

CL: I moved to Khum Don.

SJ: And who else lived there with you and your family?

CL: I lived there with my three kids and my wife.

SJ: Describe the conditions that you experienced under the Khmer Rouge?

CL: In this time I feel it's so difficult to tell you about my experience because in that time we lacked everything, no food, no medication, no nothing.

SJ: Could you tell us a little bit more about that?

CL: In that time with the Khmer Rouge, I don't have enough food to eat, but I had to work so hard. Sometimes my family got sick and I had to left them behind and went to work.

SJ: Where were you in 1975 when the Khmer Rouge came into power?

CL: I was at Battambang Province.

SJ: Were you allowed to stay in Battambang Province, or under the Khmer Rouge were you forced to go to another area of the country?

CL: First of all, they told us that whoever –that whoever live in the village and if you want to go back to village you can go. And then they took us, you know, back to where we lived, they moved us to other place, we don't know where is it.

SJ: And what did you do at this new place or in this new village where they took you?

CL: They send us to the farm and then after that we - we tried to build a shelter by ourselves, small shelter to fit with the member of our family. Then after that we -- they force us to go to work.

SJ: So all of your family members were there with you?

CL: In that time they split us apart. My wife, I, and my children work different place.

SJ: Did you live different places also?

CL: They force me to go to work different place from my wife. And we left three children at home and one of my oldest daughters is about -- one of my old daughters who live with my two sons and my two son, one is about four years old, another one three years old, and my older daughters, is very, very sick. In that time I left, I and my wife have been forced to work far away from home and we left three kid at home, two my daughters and one son. In that time they are very, very small, very young. One of my daughters had been very, very sick since she was very skinny.

SJ: And so both you and your wife were working in the rice fields then?

CL: Yes, we work in a farm but sometime they force us to work other place, and many months and we never have a chance to see each other.

SJ: Did they allow either of you to go and visit your children?

CL: Yes, they allowed me to go to visit my kids one during the lunch time and we had to walk many miles from field to where they live. It took us many hours to walk. When I got to home, I just saw them and I had to leave right away, otherwise, you know, they going to punish me.

SJ: Were your children forced to work also?

CL: My daughter had been forced to work, too. And then after that she was very, very sick. And then they want to send her to the hospital but I knew that in that time there was no -- they had no medication, no nothing in the hospital so I begged them to keep my daughter at home.

SJ: And was she able to get some sort of assistance then, medical assistance?

CL: My daughter didn't get any assistance at all from the government.

SJ: But did she get better?

CL: In that time she was very, very skinny and because she doesn't got enough food to eat, but sometime I knew when my daughter got more food, she looks better. But, anyway, she never got enough food to eat and she got skinnier and skinnier, and fortunately she is still alive.

(Recess.)

SJ: Choup, could you tell me a little bit about the conditions under which you lived? What was your house like?

CL: It's not a house but we tried to build a small shelter in the forest and we all sleeping on the ground.

SJ: And did all of the families live next to each other there in the forest?

CL: Yes, we live next to each other.

SJ: And did you prepare your food there?

CL: I didn't cook at the place where I live. The government cook for us and they share out the food.

SJ: And what did you eat each day?

CL: I ate rice soup, with fish and with vegetable, and sometimes we have no nothing, we eat rice soup with salt.

SJ: How many hours a day did you work?

CL: I had to work about between 12 to 15 hours a day.

SJ: Did he say anything else? (To interpreter.)

THE INTERPRETER: No, that's what he count from what time to what time, so I -- I put the time together.

SJ: Okay. Thanks. How was the Khmer Rouge, or the government, how were they able to enforce that and to control all of the people in the villages and insure that they worked so many hours?

CL: I didn't know for sure in that time but I assumes it might be Chinese government behind them and maybe the Chinese government want to kill Cambodian people and use Khmer Rouge to do that. That's what I assume.

SJ: what about the Khmer Rouge, did they have soldiers watching people work, or did they do anything in order to insure that people were following their orders?

CL: They placed army, the armies, and when we did something wrong, they ask us and having a meeting with us and then if we still got something wrong, they would kill us.

SJ: Did you ever resist the Khmer Rouge or oppose them?

CL: They forced me to go to work and sometime I did something wrong and they asked me to come to meet with them and they told me that what I did wrong, because they give me so many things to do that I cannot fulfill that requirement. So they warn me I had to finish my work and that if I didn't finish, they warn us.

SJ: And did they ever use any physical force against you?

CL: I myself didn't get any physical force, but out of my friend, I saw them, you know, had been beat and killed.

SJ: Could you tell me about one experience that you had under the Khmer Rouge that stands out in your mind?

CL: I have a terrible experience with the Khmer Rouge. I remember that I live without medication and lacking of food and sometimes they force us to work different place and I feel so scared and there is sometime even I didn't want to go, but I forced myself to go.

SJ: To go where?

CL: To work. Many different places.

SJ: Can we stop here for a minute

(Recess.)

CL: Yeah, he saw that, he saw got tied up -

SJ: We'll start over. I'll ask the question. He'll turn the tape on. Okay? What sorts of brutal acts did you see the Khmer Rouge commit?

CL: I had friends who work next to me and he faced to starvation and he went to steal and he got caught and they - - I saw they cuff him and sent him away and he disappear. I never saw him again.

SJ: Did you ever see the Khmer Rouge do anything with your own eyes?

CL: I saw that the Khmer Rouge had done to people that they forced to work without giving them food to eat or any medicine to cure when they got sick.

SJ: When did you finally decide to leave Cambodia?

CL: When Vietnamese took my country over, and I didn't have anything at all, I didn't have house or I didn't have any food, so that's why I decide to leave Cambodia.

SJ: And where did you decide to go?

CL: In that time I heard that there was a person who locate in the Thai border. So when I heard it, I left the country and went to Thailand to get help from the United Nation.

SJ: What was your trip from Thailand, excuse me, from Cambodia yeah to Thailand like? What was your life like during that trip?

CL: I spend many days to make my trip to the Thailand, and in that time my kid had been very sick and I had a bag of rice and so I cook that little by little to keep us alive, and then eventually I got into the camp.

SJ: Did you feel like your lives were still in danger when you were escaping to Thailand?

CL: Yeah, I think that in the time during my escape my life was in dangerous situation.

SJ: And when did you finally get into Thailand, in what year?

CL: I got in the Khao I Dang Camp in 1979. And I saw American soldier with a big truck and they called the people, got in the truck, and in that time I got in the truck and come with them and a few week later I got to the United States.

SJ: And did you come directly to Minnesota?

CL: Yes, I come direct to Minnesota.

SJ: Why don't you describe a little bit about how your life is here in Minnesota today?

CL: When I got to the United States, I had a sponsor. Then they send me to school and I study English because I feel I depressed and sad because I could remember things so after 6 months I left school and went to work at ... in 1982

SJ: And are you feeling better today in Minnesota?

CL: When I just got here, I had nothing. And now I feel very much better because all my kid got a good job and they have a house and they have their own money they can spend. Now I feel better.

SJ: Thank you Choup.