Several pages of the original transcription of the Testimony of Channy Som have been corrected. They were corrected on 3/13/02 by Beatriz Menanteau, at the University of Minnesota Law School. The corrected pages are the following: 7; 10; 12.

TESTIMONY OF CHANNY SOM, on August 11, 1992, at the Cable Access Studio, St. Paul, Minnesota. The testimony of Channy Som was interpreted by Ms. Thaly Chhour. The examination was conducted by Ms. Leigh Bristol-Kagan.

MS. BRISTOL-KAGAN:

We're here as part of the Khmer Archives Project that is being sponsored by the Minnesota Lawyers Committee. Today is August 11, 1992, and we are located at the Cable Access Studio in St. Paul. I am Leigh Bristol-Kagan. I'm a social worker and a volunteer with this project of the Minnesota Lawyers Committee. With me are Thaly Chhour who will be interpreting, and Channy Som who will be telling her story for us. Thank you. Thank you for coming.

EXAMINATION BY MS. BRISTOL-KAGAN:

LBK: Channy, I'm going to begin by asking you just to identify yourself. What is your name?

CS: Channy Som.

LBK: Where do you live now?

CS: Should I start?

LBK: Where do you live now?

CS: Now I live at Maynard in St. Paul.

LBK: And with whom are you living?

CS: Now I live with my sister and my brother.

LBK: And how old are you, Channy?

CS: Now I am 32 years old.

LBK: And how old is your sister?

CS: My sister is 37 years old.

LBK: And how old is your brother?

CS: My brother is 25 years old.

LBK: Channy, do you have any family members still living in Cambodia or in camps in Thailand.

(Discussion off the record.)

LBK: I wanted to ask you about any family members of yours who are still living in Cambodia?

CS: Now I have my father live in Cambodia and also my brother. And another older sister and another younger sister.

LBK: Do you have any relatives who are still in camps in Thailand?

CS: Yes. Now I have another sister who live inside site II.

LBK: Thank And I would like ou to tell me what you do now in St. Paul?

CS: Now besides school I work full-time at caterer.

LBK: At where?

CS: Marriott.

LBK: As a caterer at Marriott?

CS: Yeah.

LBK: Thank you. Okay. And then we want to go back to your experience in Cambodia at this point. And to begin by asking you – to begin by asking you where you come from in Cambodia?

CS: I live in Battambang, my home town, and I left there and I moved to the camp.

LBK: Which camp did you mean?

CS: The first camp that I live in is in Nang Samit.

LBK: That would have been after the Pol Pot time?

CS: Yeah.

LBK: I want to go back to right before the Pol Pot time. And I understand you came from -- I want to go back to that time. You came from Battambang then, is that right?

CS: Yes.

LBK: Okay. And at that time, how old were you and what were you doing?

CS: In 1975, I was 15 years old and I was a student.

LBK: And at that time who -- with whom were you living who were members of your family? Sorry, my question is awkward. Who were the family members that you were living with at that time?

CS: At that time I live with my father and mother and also my brother and sister.

LBK: How many brothers and sisters were you altogether at that time?

CS: I have two brothers and I have three older sisters and also a younger sister.

LBK: Thank you. And then I would like to ask you to talk about what happened after 1975 after the Khmer Rouge took over at the beginning of Pol Pot time. What happened to you then?

CS: During 1975, they told me to move away from my home town.

LBK: And you went away from your home town to where?

CS: I left from my home town about 30 kilometers.

LBK: And did you go into the jungle or the forest at that time?

CS: Yes, at that time I was in the forest.

LBK: Were you with your brothers and sisters?

CS: At that time we left together.

LBK: Would you tell me what happened after the Khmer Rouge took over in 1975? Then you go ahead and don't wait for me to ask you if you went with your brothers and sisters.

(Discussion off the record.)

LBK: And I want to ask you now, Channy, what happened after the Khmer Rouge came to power in April of 1975? Tell us what happened?

CS: On April, 1975, after the Khmer took over, they asked us to move out of the town right away. All the family have to move. All the family have to move because if we don't move according to their order, they would persecute us.

LBK: Excuse me. What would they do to persecute you?

CS: They would kill us if we don't do according to their order to leave.

LBK: Thank you. Please go on.

CS: When they came to ask us to leave, they came along with the guns and they told us to leave right away and they told my father to leave right away. You don't have to pack any food because after three day you can come back. But my father still trying to pack some food for the children. After that they came back and told us that you have to leave within 15 minutes. Because of the force, we, my father and us have to leave where they told us to go. We have to go where they tell us. We live in a small village, and they told us to go only one direction with many people. So we all went together and it was crowded and hot. We don't have water to drink, and my brother and sister got sick and we don't have medicine. The first day that we left, we did not go really far because it was crowded. We only went about five kilometers, then we find a place to stay. And the next day we got up and we moved to another place again. After that I remember that we — we had a hard time because we didn't have food in order to move from place to place. And we all had to walk not on the big street, walk in the mud in order to find a shelter. But in the forest we don't have anything but wood so my father decided to find wood and build the shelter. Then we all decided to stay there together for about a year.

LBK: Excuse me. When you say we all decided to stay together there, who was "we all"?

CS: All the people from the same village.

LBK: Thank you.

CS: But not for long. It's about three months they took my brother and sister to some other place. Then my brother and sister were separated from that time. And we start to to have no food from that time, not enough food.

LBK: No food, not enough food, no food, which is it?

CS: Not enough food.

LBK: Very little food?

CS: Yeah. One person we only got two spoons of soup rice. We don't have salt and any meat to eat with. Not only that, even we don't have enough food, we have to go to work every day. I live by myself. I live with somebody that I did not know. We went to live in the group. And after that we knew each other, they try to separate us again from the group to go to live with another people - - with other people.

LBK: So are you saying that as soon as you got to know somebody in a group, then you were separated from the person whom you got to know?

CS: Yes. So we had to move from one place to another place and we have to do the work that they assign us to do which are all kind of works.

LBK: Could you give some examples of the kind of work?

CS: A My work is not - - was not different from other Cambodian people. We had to do like during farm season, we had to cut rice, plant rice, et cetera. We always have some new work to do and they never give us enough to eat either. We work seven days a week. We never have time to rest. When we say "we, that means personally me. Hard work is not a problem but separate from the family it's hard, especially when the family got sick. We would not be at work to go see them. And also they did not have the medicine. And also my family and I always worry about the killing. They might take us to kill.

LBK: So the pain of being away from your family was as bad as the hardship of the work?

CS: Yeah, the pain that we were separate from the family is very painful than anything.

LBK: More painful. And the worry that they might be killed, is that –

CS: Yes, yeah. We don't have enough food to eat and we did not have enough time to rest, not even those. We were worried because we were in the group. And then suddenly people disappear and we don't know where they took them to. Sometime they kill the people they let us see, and they told us that not to do what that people have done. If you don't do what I order you to do, I will kill the same as those people who I was killed them.

CS: Its affect my feeling, its affect my mind because I never see these in my life.

LBK: Absolutely.

CS: It's the one thing that made me scared, and we did not know what to do to get rid of it. Every day we always feel afraid and hopeless because we don't know how to escape it. So we have to live according to faith. If we die, we die. If we don't -- if we can not survive, we die. But we still have to go to work for them. We work one day, we live one day. So we have to work for them way we do.

LBK: Do you want to take a break?

CS: Okay.

(Recess.)

LBK: Channy, is there any particular experience or anything that happened that especially stands out in your mind when you were in the midst of all these things that were going on?

CS: I remember one thing that I would never forget is that in 1976 that they kill somebody. They kill one man during the meeting because they want to let all the people in the meeting know how they kill that person. The reason that they kill him was that they accuse him that he rape seven young women. Before they kill him. They tie his hands to the back and they told the people in the meeting that they had to kill because he did not obey the rule. When they decide to persecute him, they only did it to him because the other victim - - I don't see the other victim there?

LBK: Okay. That's still not quite clear in English. Lets see if we can make sure we understand.

CS: Let me do it again. Before they decide to kill him, it's only him was there and I did not see the other victims.

LBK: His victims?

CS: His victims.

LBK: Okay.

CS: So I feel like the way that they want to kill him is not right but I did not dare to say anything. After they finished the meeting, they took him to other place about 30 kilometers, about 30 miles. After they finished the meeting they brought him to other place, it's about 30 meters. Then they let all the young people to go and see how they kill that person. I also went along with them because they forced me to. And when I got there, they already dig the ground. Close to that hole I saw two young Khmer Rouge waiting over there. I wonder why didn't they have any guns. After that they just beat him with bamboo stick and threw in the hole.

(Recess.)

LBK: Okay, continue.

CS: After that they -- after they kill him, they cut his stomach and took out his gallbladder. All the young people and I were really afraid and then we went back home. Then they took the dead body to bury. After that we always feel hopeless. But fortunately we got to get back to our homeland and have some freedom.

LBK: In the end, do you mean?

CS: It's in 1979, when the Vietnamese came in to Cambodia. But peace in Cambodia still not really habit yet, and also the food and the medicine not enough. So we decided to come to Thai border because I have an older sister who had asthma and need medicine. Every day that she cannot live without it. Life in the camp it's a little bit better but still we did not get to have education.

LBK: You're referring to the refugee camp now, is that right?

CS: Yes. It's a lot of confusion because we have Vietnamese group and the Liberal Khmer group. Sometime they both fight or attack each other and we have to move from place to place.

LBK: Channy, we will have to make a conclusion in about five minutes.

CS: Okay.

LBK: What else would you like to say about your experience?

CS: You want the whole experience or just a little a little - -

LBK: I would like whichever is important to you right now.

CS: In my life I have lost so many things even in Cambodia, even in the camp. So from my experience, it's very bitter even in Cambodia and in Thailand border. But today I am very happy that I came to live here and build my life.

LBK: We're very happy that you are here, too.

Khilling Colin