

Several pages of the original transcription of the Testimony of Yo euth Yan have been corrected. They were corrected on 2/17/02 by Beatriz Menanteau, at the University of Minnesota Law School. The corrected pages are the following: 1; 2; 9; 11; 12; 14; 15; 16; 17; 18; 22; 26; 29; 30; 35; 37; 38; 39; 40; 42; 43; 44; 45.

TESTIMONY OF YOUTH YAN on August 13, 1992, at the Cable Access Studio, St. Paul, Minnesota. The examination was conducted by Ms. Paula Ritchie.

MS. PAULA RICHEY: I am Paula Richey and we are here on Thursday, August 13, 1992. I am a lawyer-interviewer volunteer in the Khmer Archives Project. The project is under the organization and auspices of the Minnesota Lawyers International Human Rights Committee. With me today is my good friend Yo euth Yan, who I will be interviewing. We are in the Cable Access Systems offices in downtown Saint Paul.

EXAMINATION

PR: Yo euth, would you state your address, please?

YY: My address is 1653 Bush, Saint Paul, Minnesota 55106.

PR: Are you married?

YY: Yes.

PR: What is your wife's name?

YY: My wife's name is Leang Meak, and I have two children. Chune is eleven, Chuna is nine.

PR: Okay. Do you have any family still living back in Cambodia?

YY: Yes, I have my mom, my two sisters and a brothers still inside Thailand; not in Cambodia, inside Thailand. Now they are in Phanat Camp.

PR: That is the name of a camp in Thailand?

YY: Yeah, that is the name of the camp. Called holding processing centers.

PR: Okay. You are employed here in Saint Paul?

YY: Yes, I am employed by Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services and am a paralegal.

PR: A paralegal there?

YY: Yeah.

PR: Do you do anything outside of your job for recreation or for some kind of community work?

YY: Yes, I do some activity, like playing volley ball or soccer with the young people in the communities.

PR: We are here to find out about the kinds of life experiences you had in the years 1975 to 1979, under the Khmer Rouge Regime in Cambodia, so I would like to turn your attention then to Cambodia and ask you first of all where you were living in April of '75?

YY: 1975; April, 1975, I was living in Battambang City where I went to school there.

PR: What school did you go to?

YY: Called Battambang School, high school.

PR: High school?

YY: Yeah.

PR: Was your family there in the same town or were they elsewhere?

YY: My family, my mom and my parents and my sibling were not there because by that time we were separated by the war and my parents and my sibling were moving to Posat Province and I was in Battambang Province.

PR: Who were your siblings? How many siblings did you have?

YY: I have seven siblings, including me. Just sibling -- not seven.

PR: How many brothers, how many sisters?

YY: Four brothers, five four brothers and two sisters. One of my youngest brothers was starved to death in the Khmer.

PR: So are the others living?

YY: Yeah, they are living.

PR: Your youngest brother was the one who died then?

YY: Yeah.

PR: Tell me what your ethnic origin is; are you Khmer?

YY: Yes, I am Khmer.

PR: So you were in Battambang city in April of 1975. What happened in April? What was the first experience you had with the Khmer Rouge Regime?

YY: I think at the New Years when the Khmer Rouge came to power in 1975, April, 1975, it came to a town, and then they used the loudspeaker to announce to everybody in town, they announce that everybody have to come out of town immediately because United States jet going to bombard the town in the next few days. And another announcement was for the student, any student in town have to come to the meeting at the Technological University. And others, military officer have to come to the designated area, if you live in this part of town you have to come to this specific place set for military officers.

PR: Were these loudspeakers on vehicles going around the city?

YY: Some are on vehicle and some...from the wall...from place to place.

PR: Did you go to the student meeting?

YY: I went to a student meeting.

PR: What did they tell you there?

YY: At the student meetings, they told us that while everybody have to move out of town for awhile, perhaps seven day or more than that, depending on the situation, when we clean out of the city, clean all the mess of the city and everything, and there is no more enemy in the city, then we can bring you back to a town and you can continue your education.

PR: This was the Khmer Rouge saying that, they wanted you to get out?

YY: Yeah.

PR: So they could clean the city and then you could come back?

YY: Yeah.

PR: Did you believe what they told you?

YY: Yeah, because I believed that, because we were so happy at that time. The war is over and now we are peace.

PR: And so where did you go?

YY: After that, then we were packed, we were told to pack all our belonging and then I was awhile to one more areas close to my home town. It's about eighty kilometers from my home town, with my second cousin.

PR: Did you walk?

YY: Yeah, we walked.

PR: How long was the journey?

YY: I forget. I think about two day and one night. Maybe two day and one night.

PR: You were with your second cousin?

YY: Yeah, I was with second cousin.

PR: Were there many people on the road with you? Were you alone?

YY: Yeah, there were many, many people on the road. Because all of the people in town, they said while you live only for a few days or short time so you don't have to bring all your belonging. Just go by yourself and you will come back.

PR: How did you know to go to the village that you went to? Who directed you to go there?

YY: They say, well, on the loudspeaker, they announced that you can go to your own native town. When they got to my own native town, said no, you cannot stay here. You cannot live here, you have to go further.

PR: What did you see along the road?

YY: I saw a lot of dead bodies, dead bodies. And some of them were full of maggots. A lot of maggots and just couldn't believe.

PR: How did these people die, could you tell?

YY: These people were shot to death. Some shot on the head and some were in the abdomen.

PR: Were they mostly men?

YY: Mostly man. And the dead bodies swell really big; swelling.

PR: On this journey, did you see women and children, as well as men, walking?

YY: Yes. Everybody from a baby to the adults. And some people are pregnant and deliver the babies on the road and some have no luck and then pass away.

PR: Did you see some babies dead?

YY: Yeah.

PR: When you got to the village, close to your home village and they said, no, you can't stay here, you have to move on, did they tell you specifically where to go?

YY: Yeah, they just direct us, they put us -- told us the direction, you have to go to this village. This is designated area for your group. Then we went to call it DocTong Village. That is -

PR:- DocTong ?

YY: Yeah.

PR: When you got there, what happened to you?

YY: When we got there, then the Khmer Rouge leader came and said, well, since you don't bring much food along with you, so you can come with us and you can get some rice. And they share the rice with us, just a small amount for -- they said one bowl this big (indicating), for fifteen day. Said, well, you have to manage this bowl of rice for fifteen day.

PR: And how did you live? What kind of housing did you live in there?

YY: Then we were live on the field, open field. We don't have anything. We were provided by the Khmer Rouge leaders with the ax and the knife. And they said, here is the ax and knife and hoe; you can go to the forest and cut the wood and build your shelter.

PR: And what did they put you to work doing?

YY: About fifteen day, they said while you were single and you are -- because I was nineteen by that time, I just graduated from high school, they said since you are single and you are the front force you don't have any family to be with, so then we will send you to the front force with the team, youth mobile team.

PR: Are you saying front force, f-r-o-n-t, front force?

YY: Yeah.

PR: With the youth mobile team?

YY: Yeah.

PR: Okay. How many people were on the team or in the team?

YY: In my small village there is about thirty people, thirty youth.

PR: Were they all males?

YY: Male and female.

PR: Male and female about that same age?

YY: About the same age.

PR: Thirty of you on the team. What kind of work was the team doing?

YY: Then they sent us to the area which is really far from the village to build a dam, to dig the dam and to build a canal.

PR: What kind of terrain were you in, what kind of land was this?

YY: This is a mountain land, because we call it Phnom Pet; (Phnom mean mountain).

PR: Where was the dam situated, on the mountain or at the bottom or where was it?

YY: I think on the foot of the mountain, on the foot of the mountain. And we carry - - we push the wooden carts up the mountain in the morning and when we got to the mountain, we break the stone into pieces, and we put the carts and brought back to the dam and down to the river.

PR: So did you make one trip a day up the mountain?

YY: Not one trip. We have to make, I think, six trip a day. Three in the morning, three in afternoon.

PR: And you were on hilly terrain when you were doing this, up and down?

YY: Yeah.

PR: Men and women both were doing this work?

YY: Yeah.

PR: How many hours a day did you work?

YY: By the time I got up, I believe five o'clock, because still dark, predawn, but we don't know what time. Predawn. And then until the sun set in evening.

PR: And what kind of food did you have? Not kind of food, how much food did you have?

YY: We were provided about this much of rice, this much, just half can of rice for each day (indicating). So we have to find some other sources for our meal.

PR: What were those sources?

YY: Well, we have to pick up some leaf of tree and small animal or insects in the forest, because in the mountain, for plenty of insects and small frogs, lizards.

PR: So you would go out in the forest after you were through working and hunt these things, find these things to eat?

YY: Yeah.

PR: How many days a week did you work?

YY: We work every day, we work every day.

PR: You never had days off?

YY: No, we never had any day off.

PR: Did the Khmer Rouge ever talk to you about their politics?

YY: They talk about the "Anka", the organizers and the parties. They talk about a party every night. After dinner they blew the whistle and then all the team have to come to central center for the meeting.

PR: And at the meeting, they?

YY: They talk about politic, they talk about how to build a country and now we build - - we come to this far, we can complete this project, and we have to build a country from the empty hands to prosperous countries.

PR: How did you receive that message? How did you feel about what they were telling you?

YY: I was hopeless and I did not know what to do. I just follow what they asked me to do.

PR: Did you believe what they were saying?

YY: I was not believing what they told me to do, because I look at the situation that they didn't provide us enough food to eat and how can we survive, how can we rebuild a country.

PR: How did you survive? Did the hard work and the deprivation of enough food, did it -
- what happened to you, to your body because of that?

YY: I was become skinny and I had malaria. I had malaria because I was not having a mosquito net and so I had malaria. And then the Khmer Rouge leader send me back to my village for treatment to the hospital in my village, the Khmer Rouge hospital, just like a shack in the village.

PR: And did you get medicine there?

YY: I got some Khmer Rouge medication. But I don't know what kind of medication. But did not help me at all and I was unconscious when I got back to my village. At one time I work up and I realized and I saw my uncle, my second-uncle stand - - stood by me. And then he said, oh, and then he tickled me and said, oh, you know, and then I can smell something from my mouth. I can smell that was the bad excrement and bits of leaf from tree and perhaps coconut fruit. And I didn't realize the others.

PR: Had your uncle put these things in your mouth?

YY: I believe he told me he pound into pieces and put into water, so like a liquid, become a liquid.

PR: Did he think that would help your malaria? Was that the idea?

YY: Yeah, that was his idea.

PR: Did it?

YY: Yeah, it did. And about a few days later, I become better. And about seven day, I asked the nurse, the Khmer Rouge nurse, to leave the hospital. And I was barely walk by that time because I was very skinny and I used a cane. I was nineteen years old and I have no muscle at all. I used a cane to carry my body to my village.

PR: Let me ask you, let me take you back in time for just a second. When you were working in the youth team, the mobile youth team?

YY: Yeah.

PR: Did you see any of the people who were working on the team die?

YY: Yes. My, one of my friend, not just one, I think four or five, six of them were dead of malaria. One of my close friends was, he was high school student. And I think he graduated from high school about the same year that I graduated. And he passed away a few days after me, after I got out of the hospital.

PR: Now, after you came out of the hospital, you didn't go back to the mobile youth team, correct?

YY: No, I did not.

PR: Where did you go then?

YY: I was at this time, they say since you are so weak, you can stay in the village with the villagers, with the second force, the people who got married. They said that those people are second force, not a strong front force. So I stay with them, I think - - I couldn't tell because I didn't know exact time. Awhile, until one day I recall a lot and then I heard, I knew they want to take me away and kill me.

PR: You found out that somebody wanted to take you away and kill you?

YY: Yeah.

PR: Tell us, who told you that?

YY: When I got there, they took my watch away and said, well, now, this is Anka, need the watch. "Anka" need the watch. So would you please give it to "Anka". Then I carry a lot of mathematic book ...

PR: You were telling me that somebody came to you and told you that you were going to be killed. Now this was after you had recuperated from malaria, correct?

YY: Yeah, that's correct.

PR: And who came to you and told you that?

YY: The head of the village, the head of the village. A small village that I live with, was assigned by the Khmer Rouge after, the head of the village. And he came to me, said, well, now I learned that your father was taken away by these people and now these people came to us and they asked about you. They said this guy is Mr. Yom's son and then the guy said, why we were so afraid to tell and just tell him the truth, that, yeah, and - -.

PR: What did they tell him, that you were your father's son?

YY: Yeah.

PR: And then what did they tell you about your being killed?

YY: They said that, well, you are not safe to stay here, you are no longer safe to stay here because I think in the future these people are going to come after you.

PR: Now, why would they kill you because you were your father's son?

YY: Because my father is - - was - - a well-known person in the areas.

PR: Why was he well-known?

YY: Because he was chief militia commander of militia... and he was a merchant, he was a merchant also, because the Khmer Rouge hated that class of people.

PR: Both the militia and the merchants?

YY: Yeah, because he fought against the Khmer Rouge along with the Lon Nol soldier.

PR: Lon Nol?

YY: Yeah.

PR: And so you were warned. Now the person who warned you was doing a brave thing, wasn't he?

YY: Yeah. He warned me. And then later on he said, well, you have to leave and I can write you the fake letters, permission for you to travel, and you can go and find your mom and your sibling.

PR: Do you have any idea what year this was that this happened?

YY: I think this is in 1986, but I am not sure. I think early 1976.

PR: Early '86?

YY: I'm sorry, '76.

PR: So you got this letter of passage or permission to travel and where did you go?

YY: I left the village early in the morning and nobody know that I left the village. I left with the old lady because I, at the time, fortunately for me, there was a lady, old lady, came from a zone four to find her son. And her son was in the team, the same team that I belonged to. And she came to take her son back to "zone four". By that time, the head of village said, well, now is time for you, its time for you, you can go with the lady and you can walk along with her and then when you get to zone four, you can go to your mom, to find your mom, because your mom is in zone four, but just different village.

PR: Now, what happened to your father?

YY: When I came back and when I met my mom, I think at night, because I came at night, and I, when I came - - when I left the village, on the way to the zone four, when I came across the highway five, there is a Cambodian - - we walk along highway five from

O'Kreart to Pray Sway, and then I saw the guy rode the bicycle from Prey Sway direction and I look at this guy and say, oh, I know this guy, I know this guy. And I stop this guy. And then I knew him right away and I asked Mr. Wang, Mr. Wang, do you know me? And he said no. And I said, do you know Mr. Yom, and Seun. And he said, oh, yeah. Your mom. Then he surprised and said, are you Yoeth? And I said yes. And he said your mom live close to me. And I said, can I come with you to my mom, because I was on the way to zone four and I want to find my mom, but I have no idea. He said yes. Then I didn't go along with the old lady and her son anymore, I come with this old man. And then when I got to my mom's village, I think around midnight, and then he knock at my mom's shack and said Seun, Seun, I brought important stuff, thing, for you; good thing for you. Please light your lantern, light your lamp and wake all your children up and prepare the meal also. Then my mom got up and light the lamps and my -- all my siblings woke up and my mom got up and cry, and -- .

PR: I bet you were very, very glad to find her?

YY: Yeah.

PR: Do you want to stop for a minute, Yan?

YY: Yeah, that is okay.

PR: Do you want to stop for just a minute?

YY: Uh-huh.

PR: Was it through your mother that you found out what happened to your dad?

YY: Yeah. And then my morn woke up and my siblings, my older brother, (Yarn) who is now in Thailand, got up, and my sister now in Thailand, and my two brothers who are now here. And got up, and then my morn just cried, and we all cried in the middle of the night. And she said, well, your dad is gone. Your dad was taken away by the "ankas" fifteen day after we got here.

PR: They just came and took him out of the house?

YY: Yeah.

PR: He wasn't seen again?

YY: Yeah. And she said, well, at one point when she got back from the trip, because when my mom and my dad were brought to this village and they allow my father to get out of the village to find some forest to build the shack, my father was not finishing his shack. And he was taken away. And at one point, I can remember right now, he told my mom that would you please take care of children because I know I was not coming back. I know that.

PR: How long did you get to stay with your family?

YY: When I got back to my mom and I stay with my mom, because since that night, very, very heavy raining. Then next morning, I got malaria again. I got fever and chills. Then my mom said, well, I can report to the Khmer Rouge leaders in the village about this because then to get some food, portion of food for you to eat. And next morning my mom report to the leaders, the village leader, the Khmer Rouge leader, and then in the morning, every morning, the Khmer Rouge nurse came by from house to house. Come to visit from house to house, the way that the Khmer Rouge practiced, to make sure that everybody go to work. Anybody sick, they can give you some medication, and to find out if they are really sick or just pretend sick. And when they got to my mom shack, I was in chill. Fever and chill, and they gave me some Khmer Rouge medication. It looked like rabbit excrement. So looked like rabbit excrement. So they gave me that medication and they gave me (Quinide) from China, a pink pill. I took that for seven days. And then I got better and then my older brother was in youth mobile team and said, well, you should go with me. Don't have to wait until the Khmer Rouge told you to do, you can come with me to work. Then I was with my brother for a couple months with his team, because my brother team was assigned to transport the rice from zone seven to zone four by boat because full of water from zone four to zone seven. So I just sat on the boat and my brother and his team rowed the boat because I was real skinny by that time.

PR: So how long did you get to stay with the family and work with your brothers?

YY: I was with the family, with my mom about fourteen day, I believe.

PR: Then what happened to you?

YY: And then I was with my brother's team and then later on they said, oh, all the front force have to join with the zone four team, zone four team. Then they - - all the people, all the youth all the youngster who are not married in the village, the whole village gathered together, were gathered together by the Khmer Ronge leaders and then were sent to the zone four. They call it youth mobile team. And I was with that team, I think, until I was sent to concentration camp.

PR: Okay. When you were in the zone four youth mobile team, what kind of work were you doing?

YY: At first I assigned to do farming work, build dike and canal and plant the rice, pull the seedling rice. And my malaria keep coming back all the time. At one time, I got high fever and chill and I stay home. I asked the Khmer Rouge leader to stay home and ,they said, well, you can stay home. Later on, they say, well, some people who are sick, is not really sick, just pretend to be sick person. Then this people are not useful to "anka"; they said the enemy of the "anka". We should get rid of these people. And one of my group leaders came and told me that, well, you shouldn't stay home anymore when you can go

to the field, work every day. When you get fever and chill, you can stay - - you can sleep on the dike instead.

PR: Sleep on the dike?

YY: Yeah, and bring your blanket along. So I bring a blanket along.

PR: You were telling us, Yo euth, about working in the zone four youth mobile team, and you had malaria, and you still went to work?

YY: Uh-huh.

PR: So that you wouldn't get in trouble with the Khmer Rouge --?

YY: Yeah.

PR: -- who were running the team?

YY: Yeah.

PR: Can you tell us about the kind of work you were doing? Farm work, is that correct?

YY: Yes.

PR: And how were you treated by the Khmer Rouge? Was it different than the kind of treatment you had before in the first front force team? Were the conditions better or worse or the same?

YY: The condition was the same. But at this time, I was not breaking the stone or pushing the cart from the rivers to the top of the mountain. And at this time, it's just dig the canal and build the dike. Get up the same time, predawn, four in the morning or five o'clock in the morning, till sunset.

PR: Were the food rations about the same?

YY: The food ration about the same, about the same.

PR: Were the Khmer Rouge -- how did they treat the workers? That is, were they hard on them or did they treat them well?

YY: The Khmer Rouge never treat anybody well, except the parties or perhaps the people in the group, the people who joined the team in the revolution. The people they call new people. Those people were treat harshly by the Khmer Rouge. Any place anybody go, because the Khmer Rouge, sometimes the they use the whip, the Khmer Rouge team company, team company leader, carried a whip with them most of the time. If anybody

did something wrong, not just - - not really big mistake, you know, like you goes to get a shower and you just a little bit late, they would kick you and whip you.

PR: Were you ever whipped?

YY: Yeah. But I was not whipped at this time, but after, later on.

PR: How long did you work in that youth mobile team?

YY: I was with the youth mobile team, but first I was assigned to do farming and later on I was assigned the fertilizer team. So I was assigned to fertilizer team, I believe, in 1977.

PR: You worked on that team for awhile. You mentioned that you ended up in a concentration camp. How did you end up in a concentration camp?

YY: When I was with the fertilizer team, I carries all the excrements of human beings and make fertilizer. Cut the leaf of trees and mix together and all the maggots swimming around. And we have bad smell every day. But you get used to, just do the job. And later on the Khmer leaders said, well, we need a team who really work hard who can help "anka" zone four, and we need strong people who can carry the rice sacks. Then they point out to the people and the team. And say, oh, we need ten people who work really hard who can carry the rice sack, because the rice sack is about eight kilogram for each rice sack. And they look at me and they look at the other people. Because I carry, when I was with to the fertilizer team, I carry the excrement, human excrement, big gasoline can cut into -- split into two -- and I carry that. And very, very heavy. And say, well, this comrade can carry the rice sack because he is really strong. And point, this one. And I was ... and then they sent me to the transportation team in zone four. I was with the transportation team about just a short period of time. Then the northwestern leader was accused the enemy of the central party and they send the southwestern people to take over the whole regions. And then when the northwestern people - - no, southwestern people, they call (Nearaday) came to take over the whole regions, then they say, oh, these people belong to the previous zone leader so we should move these people from this area. Then told you have to get out of this area for awhile until we set the things smooth. We put the thing in smooth transitional way, then we will take you back. But now we have to send you to this area to work for "anka". That is when I end up in concentration camp.

PR: So that is where they sent you was to a concentration camp?

YY: Yeah.

PR: What happened to you there in the concentration camp?

YY: When I got to that place, I didn't realize that I was in concentration camp because I thought I was just youth mobile team. And I start realize when they carry weapon. The Khmer leader carried a gun all the time to guard us anyplace we go. And they carry the whip all the time. And when we got there, they told us, now, you are not -- you cannot do

what you want to do, you are not youth mobile team anymore. Now you are in this camp. You need to be reeducated. This is reeducated camp.

PR: What did they do to you?

YY: Then they asked, I think four or five thousand, all of us, to dig the dam and build the road, dig the well, plant the rice, build the dike, build a stream, the water stream.

PR: So it was sort of more of the same, really?

YY: More of the same. But this camp, the soldiers, the Khmer Rouge soldiers guard us all the time. And this really harsh, really harsh treatment from the Khmer Rouge at this time at the concentration camp. In the morning, you have to get up when the Khmer Rouge blew the whistle. You have to get up and then they order you to take a shower at

4:00 in the morning. And your body is not really sensitive to the waters because you are very skinny and you hardly walk. Young man like me, when I got up, I have to put my hand on both knee to get up. And we barely walk. This camp, a lot of my friends were killed, a lot...one of my friend was (Phin Ngan), his name was (Phin Me). He was Lieutenant Governor son, Phin Ngan), Battambang Province.

YY: And others, two or three was former militia officer, also my friend also; my friend, too. And those were killed, beaten to death on the rice field.

PR: Did you see that happen?

YY: I did not see what happened, but because, when I was in concentration camp, they separate me from the rest of my team, my former team. The Khmer Rouge came and point to everybody, and then they point at me, do you know how to plow the field? I said yes. And, do you know how to tend the cattle, the ox, the buffalo, water buffalo? I said yes, I can tend the oxen, but I am afraid I am not used to the water buffalo. Then the Khmer Rouge leader says, well, you can do it. So then they picked me out from the team. And then my friend, (Phin Ngan's) son, Lieutenant Governor son, his skin very light, was real light. And he was stayed there, he was not with me. And I was with another team, what they call plowing team. Plowing harrow team.

PR: So did you learn about his death from somebody else that was there and saw it?

YY: Yes, because in day time we were in the front team, but at night we came to the same shack, we stayed in the same shack at night. So I learned when my friend was taken away one night when I came back from plowing the field. One friend came to me, Mr. (Meng), Comrade (Meng), Khmer Rouge called Comrade (Meng), came to me and said (Phin Me) was taken away today and we don't know where. Since then, we never see him, you know, saw him. And later on Mr. (Doeun), our Comrade (Doeun) was not taken away, he was beaten to death on the rice field with the head of the how.

PR: Know why?

YY: The head of the hoe.

PR: Do you know why he was beaten to death?

YY: He was carrying seedling rice for another team to plant on the field. And he tripped his leg and fall into the field, the farm field, and fall into the (seedling) the plants, the rice plants, and broke a few rice plant. And the Khmer Rouge say that is the enemy.

PR: And they beat him. By doing that, he was an enemy, and beat him for that?

YY: Uh-huh.

PR: You were in the concentration camp for about a year?

YY: Yeah, I think about a year. And when I perform my job, I saw a lot of dead bodies in the farm field. Because run a harrow, my plow and my harrow, I can see the dead bodies and flesh of dead bodies come out from the...

PR: The rice field?

YY: Yeah, the rice field. And some, I saw red water come out, red water. And then I saw the bone, the bone come out. And then I have to get off from the harrow and pick - - I have to pick up those bone and put on a small hill nearby. And I was with this team when I tended the water buffalo in one the grass land, I saw the (club) of, (club) that the Khmer Rouge soldiers use to beat the people to death. And I saw the leg of people out of the ground, sticking out, and the clothes. And I was so shocked and I think maybe my friend or somebody who was killed here. And the wolf came by and eat all those flesh.

PR: The animals?

YY: Yeah.

PR: Wild animals?

YY: Yeah, wild animals.

PR: How did you escape from the concentration camp?

YY: Until the Khmer Rouge took -- until the Vietnamese took over the whole country. And this concentration camp, I was beaten by Khmer Rouge and here (indicating), my scar on my left eyebrow, is a scar.

PR: Why did they beat you?

YY: One morning, they told me that when the whistle blew I have to get up and run and dress up my clothes and run. I was a little bit late and the Khmer Rouge, when they blew the whistle, one Khmer Rouge blew the whistle and the others carried a whip along and hit. Anybody that didn't have to get up and run. If you don't run, you are going to get whipped.

PR: And that is what happened to you?

YY: That is what happened to me.

PR: Do you have anything else -- do you have any other memories of the concentration camp that stand out in your mind?

YY: I have a lot of memories at this concentration camp. I was beaten and I saw the people were killed because a lot of my friends asked me to leave, to escape from this concentration camp. And some of them escaped safely. I met them by the time the Vietnamese took over the whole country. Some of them were not safe. One morning, when we got up and then the Khmer Rouge announced by a loudspeaker, we caught the enemy, we caught one enemy trying to escape from the "anka"~. Would you please gather around in front of young women center, women shack. And then everybody gathered according to the order, and we came and the Khmer Rouge brought this guy, put in front of everybody about three or four thousand people -- and then he chopped this guy with the knife. He opened the abdomen in front of a lot of people, a lot of youngsters. And he pierced his knife into this guys eyes. And this guy scream in pain. And I can see. And he, Khmer Rouge, kick on his head and twist him around.

PR: You know, you have described such terrible, horrible things and I can't help wanting to ask you if, after awhile, when things are that bad, do you ever sort of get used to it to the point where it no longer horrifies you? Or did you -- was it always horrible to see these things happen? What I am asking is if you ever sort of got to the place where it was so common to see horrible things that they no longer got to you?

YY: Some point, I feel, because I do not put my life in value anymore, I just say to myself, well, I just live from day-to-day. And maybe this day that is him, maybe tomorrow that is me. And I don't care. I am not taking care of my body anymore. I just let it go. If they take me, then that is my life, that is the end of my life.

PR: So the feeling was sort of like hopelessness?

YY: Hopeless, give up all the hope.

PR: Then when the Vietnamese came in in '79, and over-ran Cambodia and defeated the Khmer Rouge, that is when you were liberated, sort of. I don't know if liberated is the right word?

YY: Yeah.

PR: What happened, did everybody take off into the jungle or was it orderly or mad-house?

YY: I did not realize that the Vietnamese invade Cambodia. By the time that the Vietnamese came, I was sent to a jungle, to deep jungle. Up north, close to the mountain they call (Pahall), very far away from the first place, the first concentration place. And when we got there, the people around the village, the people around that concentration camp were afraid to talk to us. They never came to us to talk to us at all. Even, I met my second cousin, the one that I escaped from him in 1976 I met him. He came, he walked by, I don't know, accidentally, I saw him. I said to him, (Dorn, Dorn); he didn't even look at me. He just walked by. He passed away, he passed by.

PR: Why do you think he did that?

YY: I learned that later, when the Khmer Rouge fall apart, when the Vietnamese took over the whole country, he said everybody in surrounding this area, the Khmer Rouge leaders told the people in the surrounding area that you don't have to talk to these people. If you talk to these people, you have a connection with them, then you will be suspicious; you will be spied by the Khmer Rouge.

PR: Do you think he knew it was you when you - -

YY: Yeah.

PR: He did?

YY: Later on, I met him, too. And I was so skinny, I was tending the water buffalo and he was casting the net into the stream to catch the fish. And he didn't - - he just glare at his rice pot, and I went there and got the rice. And then I got the rice and I walk away.

PR: So you didn't talk because he was afraid of being associated with you?

YY: Uh-huh.

PR: Right?

YY: Yeah.

PR: Eventually, did you hook up with your family again?

YY: Yes, I went - - I think in April, 1979, and I hook up.

PR: Where did you find them or how did you find them?

YY: When the Vietnamese came, I didn't realize the Vietnamese came, because I saw a lot of Khmer Rouge track. Khmer Rouge vehicle in a long procession. And I realize, of, maybe something wrong with the Khmer Rouge government. And I didn't realize that the Khmer Rouge fall apart. I heard through the Khmer Rouge about fighting Vietnamese and asked all of us to join the military. And said they are known to us, well, if any want to be soldiers, come and join us. We can feed you, we provide plenty of food for you. And at that time, I didn't care. I said, well, I join. I said, you give me food.

PR: Did you join?

YY: No. Then just -- end of the meeting, we heard the tank, the tank moving, the tank sound shake the ground. The Khmer Rouge vehicle passed just, I think, for about ten minutes and then we heard the tank. Sound of the vehicle I think three day, four nights, something like that, pass. And I realize, oh, this is something wrong. The Khmer Rouge must fall apart. The Khmer Rouge must fall apart. And then the Vietnamese tank came and they shoot at the Khmer Rouge and Khmer Rouge spread into the mountain, close to the mountain at that point, and they ran to the mountain. And then the Vietnamese tank ran up to them and shoot at them. And we got back and all of my teammates, the people who are in my team, got together and I couldn't walk and we said they call Economic Center, Khmer Rouge Economic Center. That center have plenty of all kind of food: fish, rice, and tire. I think needle and sewing machine, the truck, the cow. All the livestock were raised there. And we all ran into the cage and catch the duck and chicken, and we kill and make food. And we were there, we celebrate. We were there about 7 days, we don't care when the Khmer come back and kill us. We didn't think about that. I did not think about that at all.

PR: Had the Khmer Rouge that were running your camp, had they taken off, had they gone?

YY: They gone, they run away. When the tank - - the Khmer tank came. And I saw the Khmer Rouge throw away the bicycle and I told my friend, I want to get that bike, I want to get that bike. Maybe I can ride that bike to my village and we can celebrate. We are liberated and we survived again...

PR: So you had this great huge party using up the Khmer Rouge storage camp?

YY: Uh-huh.

PR: Where did you take off for?

YY: Then I stayed until I have enough strength, about seven days or more than seven days. I have enough strength, and I am strong right now. Then we move. Then the Vietnamese soldier come back from the top of the mountain with the tank and shoot and said, (dee, dee, dee, dee), and (dee) mean go, go. Then we pack and we move to - - and say you go this way, this way, this way. And the Vietnamese soldiers pick you up if they

see anybody who really good shape, (Pol Pot, Pol Pot), they say, (Pol Pot) ... and they catch that person if anybody is good shape.

PR: Looking good?

YY: Yeah.

PR: So did you head out for your home village or go off to Thailand?

YY: I head out for my home village for the first time. But on the way to my home village, I meet a guy and that guy came and I keep asking them is they know where my family live, my family pass away or were killed. And I asked this guy all along the way because by that time some people who were liberated before us, perhaps late 1978, December, 1978, they came to gather all the stock, all the stuff, they used the ox cart to carry all the rice. They took all the rice back to the village. And I keep asking those people who come to collect, to gather all the belongings. And then I met a guy, guy said, well, I know, I know this guy. And I asked him, do you know this guy and then I asked about my father and where my home town is. Oh, I have a friend who used to live in Anokob village. And I said who is he, and he says, Muth. I said, oh, that is my third cousin. Where is he? He says he is up there. He point to me, and come with us to collect all of the rice. I say can I see him? When I walk to him, he didn't know who I was. And then I said, I am Mr. Yan son, and yom and (Seun Yan) son. I am Yoenth. And said, oh. Then he know. And said, I know, I can take you to your mom, because he didn't call my mom name. He call mom. So I came with him to the village where my mom and my siblings stayed. And we were there in that village for, I think, until late 1979. We head for refugee camp.

PR: You all left together?

YY: No, no. The first time, reason that I left Cambodia because my older brother, the one inside, in Thailand right now, he was accused of liberation force, liberation network, what you call Khmer freedom, Khmer liberation friend.

PR: Uh-huh.

YY: And he joined with that network and he was accused by his friend, who worked for Vietnamese authorities, and my brother was arrested. And then this guy send my brother to Battambang jail. And my brother escaped from jail and they say, oh, we can come up to his brother's. So then the news spread to me right away that my brother was escaping and these people want to arrest me because I was a scapegoat. And they want to arrest me. And they told me, you have to leave. And my mom said, well, you have to leave then. You don't have to stay with us.

PR: So you went across the border to a camp in Thailand?

YY: Yeah.

PR: From that camp you got to Minnesota, then?

YY: No, I stayed in - - went back and forth, went back and forth. I went to they call old camp, (Mak Moon camp) and then to kind of move around to (Nong Jamit camp) and then move to -- I did not stay at (Nontang camp) very long, a few days a few nights. But I was living in (Mak Moon) perhaps one year and then a new camp, Samit camp for - -

PR: How were the conditions of the camp, camps?

YY: Condition in the camps was not really good for me in the first time and I did not have any money, any things to support my life. The first time, I have to, because there are a lot of people come from Cambodia and get into Thailand buy goods from Thailand and sell to Cambodia. So then I not know what to do. And then I think, oh, my mom gave me some gold. And then I sold that gold. I got about seven hundred baths and I said maybe I can use this money to build my business. Perhaps I can get into Thai village and buy some stuff and sell to these people. Then I keep thinking about that and then I practiced that. And I went to a Thai village and bought the rice from a Thai village and sell it to Cambodia and made profits. And my money keep getting more and more than. Then I keep buying different goods from the lowest to the expensive bicycle, recorders, and I make money until 19 - - I got shot by the Thai robber. I got shot on my back here. And then my older brother in Thailand right now said you shouldn't do that anymore because it's very dangerous, because sometime people were killed by Thai robbers, and kill by Thai soldiers. And some beat by the robbers, the gang bandit in Cambodia. So you don't have to do that. Maybe you can stay in the camp with me.

PR: Did you do that?

YY: Yeah, I did that because -

PR: So how did you get out of the camp into the United States?

YY: I got married in 1980, and then I said I am not in that business anymore, and I worked with (ARC). I found a way. Then I speak a little bit of English at that time, so I learned from this people American Refugee Committee ... make friend with (Jean Jachman) and she help me to buy a book and stuff. And one day I learn about my brother-in-law. He wrote letter to my wife to, yeah, to my wife and to his older brother who is also now in Minnesota. Oh, (Lon) is in Minnesota, at that time my older brother-in-law was in (Khao I Dang) and my mother-in-law come back from Cambodia to visit us in the camp. And accidentally my older brother-in-law came from (Khao I Dang) to visit us in the camp and he met my wife and my mom, my mother-in-law. And then he talked to my mother-in-law and told my mother-in-law, oh, (Lon) is in Minnesota, United States. And I was approved by the INS - - I hope I can join him very soon and would you like to come, would you please come. And my mother-in-law said, well, I have a youngest son in Cambodia, and also your dad in Cambodia. I have to go back to Cambodia and bring all these people. Then my mother-in-law went back to Cambodia and brought all of them and they got to (Khao I Dang) and then I followed them later. I came to (Khao I Dang) in

1984, and about a month, we were recognized as legal refugees. And before that you have to sneak under ground, live like a squirrel, live like a frog in the well.

PR: So, but you were then recognized as refugees in '84?

YY: No, we just sneak into the camp and be illegal in (Khao I Dang).

PR: Then how did you get the great kind of status to come to the United States?

YY: Then in 1986, United Nation high commissioner for refugee in Thailand say these people could be interviewed...high commission refugee and Thailand say that, oh...these people could be if they have agreement with the United States also, I don't know - - these people classified as refugees so they could be interviewed by United States and these people have relatives in United States. And my brother-in-law here works so hard with Senator Rudy Boswitsch and Senator Durenberger. And then he file a petition for us and then we join them there.

PR: Okay. Do you like it here?

YY: Yeah.

PR: Do you like the life here?

YY: Yeah, I like very much.

PR: Do you ever think that you would like to go back to Cambodia?

YY: Well, to me, I have bad enough experience and now I am a citizen of United States. So at some point I want to go back but not to live there, to visit my own people, to visit the country.

PR: Do you feel more or less at home here now then?

YY: Yeah. I felt here is more like my home and Cambodia is my native country. But because my trip, just come back from Cambodia, so - -

PR: You did?

YY: Yeah. I just come back from Cambodia, so I feel like I am not safe to go back.

PR: How do you find - - do you think things are not going well there, the U.N. has not brought things under control?

YY: Well, I have no comment on that.

PR: Okay. But while you were there, you didn't feel completely safe, is that correct?

YY: Yeah, that's correct. Because everything is not set in good place, so. Everything is not just - - even education is not there, sanitation is not there, social service is not there. Administration is not there.

PR: Do you have any idea what is going to happen to your family that is over there in Thailand?

YY: I hope they will join me very soon by the end of year because I file petition for them already and they were approved by the regions INS in Nebraska. And I hope to be interviewed by the end of this month, so I hope they will come to the United States very soon.

PR: I hope so, too, Yo euth. I really do. Thank you so much for taking part in the Khmer Archives Project. I really appreciate your coming. I know talking about some of these things is very hard, because it brings back some awful memories for you. But we do appreciate it very much.

YY: Yes, that is my pleasure.

PR: Bye, bye. That is it.

Khmer Oral History Project
Minnesota Historical Society