

Interview 10 - Part 1

- Q: This is February 8 in Boston. We're interviewing Ms. S.S. Thank you; thank you very much for coming to Boston. This was an effort for you. We appreciate it very much. As I explained to you today, we will be going through a series of about 10 interviews. And these interviews will be archived at the Schlesinger Library of American Women's Oral History at Harvard University at Radcliffe. What I'd like to do is begin the first interview talking about your personal family background. What you should do during the interview, I mean, *Svang* and myself will primarily listen. This is your opportunity to tell your personal history. This is not a clinical interview or anything like that. What we'd like you to do is basically just to freely and honestly as possible, just tell us what comes into your mind. There are no right answers; there are no wrong answers. This is your history.
- A: Yeah.
- Q: And so...
- A: I'll do my best.
- Q: We will try to interrupt you as little as possible.
- A: Okay.
- Q: Well the first question is, we'd like you to tell us a little about where you grew up. And if you can just describe just a little about your family background and who you are and where you grew up. Do you understand what I am saying?
- A: My family background. That means I have to talk about my family, my parents also?
- Q: It's up to you. Let me give you an example. We'd like to know if you had any brothers or sisters. Say you were talking to someone, an American for the first time. And you wanted them to understand a little bit about your childhood. How you grew up. What kind of family you lived in, a little bit about your mother and father. How would you describe your situation?
- A: I think I'll describe it from the start. I'll say, remember, like I talked to you yesterday about when I was little and I was rushed into the underground during the Japanese war. And that was how I remember, but I don't know how old I was because I was born in 1942. So at the time I was maybe three years old.
- Q: So you were born during World War II. And were born in a small provincial town?

A: No, I was born in the city. But somehow my father was assigned to a post in a small village. As maybe compared to here what you would call a city count, a city man or something like that, a small city wide something. I don't know what it's called but it's an administrative post starting when he graduated from the law school. And they would assign people to work in these small villages first. And so I was born in the city but my birth certificate was registered at the village he was assigned to. I think my childhood was very happy, with close family ties. I don't remember very much. As I was growing up he was assigned to another post, a governor of a province. Maybe at that time my memory was a little clearer because I remember playing in the yard, and we had a lot of servants. It was an easy, easy life. My parents are very outgoing people and always have friends. And the people like to come over to our house to stay for a long while. They like to come and talk and just be acquainted friends, very close relationship with my parents. I remember my father is a very strict person. If he is asleep for example, if he takes a nap or something like that, the children are supposed to play outside and not make noise, not talk loudly in the house. It's a very loving family, but still really strict in such a situation. Because you know if he works and he has friends, the children are not supposed to interrupt or anything like that. We walk in the house real slow, close the door real slow, so we don't make any noise or anything like that. And we go out a lot because of his involvement in the political situation since an early age. And like I said, he has a lot of friends coming over to the house. The children mostly have time with the parents during the weekend when he liked to take us all out to have rice noodle soup, and we spend a long time together, like a weekend picnic, things like that. My mom is probably more in the background because she really is just a housewife person. She's not involved in anything much. Well, my father likes to take a lot of pictures of us with his... really sad to have everything lost, like a lot of movies about the children, everything about the children. Even if we have a lunch or a dinner, or we take a bath somewhere, take a shower, we are nude at the time, we are still small, he liked to keep the pictures and the movies. And he was very, very affectionate. But somehow I think because of his work you can say maybe he is a workaholic also in a way, he works a lot. So he is kind of separated from the children too that way.

Q Now did you have any brothers and sisters?

A: Yes, I myself am the second child. I have a big brother, just two years older than me, and another sister younger than me, so we're like twins because we are so close together. And then two other brothers, and that's my family life. And we are a family that is so close together.

Q: Close?

A: Yes, very close family. We never have a... well, the children have fights, but never a big fight where the parent has to interfere or anything like that. Maybe

some argument or something, somebody has to give up, but there is a feeling of affection of one another. So we still have that kind of relationship now. I lost one brother during *Pol Pot*. He was killed. He's a second brother, so that was really sad.

Q: So you lost two brothers?

A: No, one.

Q: One. Younger brother you lost?

A: Younger brother. And the reason we lost him is because at the time he was in Cambodia. My big brother lived already in France with his wife. So that is how he escaped. My younger sister who is one year younger than me, her husband was assigned to a Hong Kong post as a counsel general. So that's how she got out. And another brother, he was trained in the military, in the service. I think they had at that time some kind of change... yes, military services to train, so he got out. They already were outside the country at the time. My brother and I were the only two people who stayed in and that is why he couldn't escape.

Q: I see, I see. For American people, this is, what I'll ask you will probably give away who you are. But for American people, very few Americans have an understanding of the different types of families in Cambodia. So, you actually come from a very interesting background because of your father's relationship to the government, and the history of it. Would you mind giving us some idea? Because you know for you it would be easier to understand you as a child if we also had some idea of what kind of background your family came from in terms of your Cambodian situation.

A: Yeah, well my mom and my father are both from the royal family. Royal family married between each other a lot, but not close relationship marriage kind of thing, not like first cousins, things like that. But because of the big spread of birth we have intermarriage that is not very close. So both of them are different branch fill. Like my mom is from *Norodom* branch with cousin of *Sihanouk* right now. She's very close to the *Sihanouk* side. I think my mom has only one living relative.

Q: *Sihanouk*? From that side?

A: From that side.

Q: I see.

A: And my father is from *Sisowath* side. So another of the branch that is related.

- Q: Now how would they... was *Sisowath* and *Sihanouk* brothers of each other? *Sihanouk's* father and *Sisowath*?
- A: No, what happened was *Norodom*, the king *Norodom*, is the oldest brother, he was crowned. He had children but no one survived to take the throne. So he gave the throne to his brother, who is *Sisowath*. And *Sisowath* also had children and his children were crowned. *Sisowath Monivong* is the grandfather of *Sihanouk* right now. It's kind of a little bit complicated.
- Q: So your father, what would be his relationship to *Sihanouk*?
- A: He's a cousin.
- Q: He'd be a cousin, I see. Because *Sihanouk* would come from the *Norodom* side. And your father would come from the *Sisowath* side. So they were...
- A: They were cousins.
- Q: And in Cambodia, is there another branch of the royal family? Are these the two main branches?
- A: These are the two main.
- Q: I see. Was the *Sihanouk* side in modern history always the leader, the main monarchy of Cambodia? Or was there a time when the *Sisowath* was the...
- A: No, supposedly we have the system like in Europe, because the children will take over the throne, and all that, after the father dies. And supposedly the *Sisowath* side should be the living branch. But *Sihanouk* was put on the throne by the French. It was not really his job to be there. But because of the political situation he was put there.
- Q: Because your father should have been there. In other words, your family....
- A: Our family.
- Q: Would it have been your father or another brother?
- A: No, it would have been *Sisowath Monivong*, The king *Monivong*
- Q: Yes, yes.
- A: Should be. But he was educated in France. He was in the military academy and he was a real tough person. So at the time, the French didn't want him to be there.

- Q: I see, because they felt that he was too threatening because he was too independent. What year was this?
- A: I don't remember the year.
- Q: That would be in 1940... thirties and forties. I actually have a book that...
- A: What year was he crowned? I don't really exactly recall...
- Q: We can look it up. We have a text on this.
- A: I was too young.
- Q: So your father, in terms of *Sisowath Monivong* how do you pronounce his name? *Monivong*. Your father, what was his relationship to *Sisowath*?
- A: Okay, *Monivong* has a brother. And the brother is related to him I think. My grandfather is like a brother to the King *Monivong*.
- Q: I see. Your grandfather, your father's father was the brother.
- A: Yeah, it's like King *Monivong* and his brother.
- Q: And the father was the son. I see. So when you were born in 1942, Prince *Sihanouk's* family had already assumed power in Cambodia.
- A: He was already...
- Q: His family was already, I see.
- A: Because he was crowned when he was eighteen years old.
- Q: I see. And did you ever meet *Sisowath Monivong*? Did you ever meet him?
- A: No, he already passed away.
- Q: He already died, I see. And so your father really then grew up in an environment as you say, at that time, Japan was occupying. Do you remember the Japanese at all?
- A: I don't remember the Japanese; I just remember my grandmother talked a lot about it. And like I said, I remember we went underground sometime because of the bombing.
- Q: So you remember some bombing in your childhood?
- A: So, I don't see the face, or anything like that.

- Q: Did your father under Prince *Sihanouk*'s family then have an equal relationship? Or was he considered a government official. How did that work out? How did the two families relate to each other at that time?
- A: I think in terms of the family, it's a very good relationship. My father is a working person. He is really caring, very honest in his work. It doesn't come in his mind to do anything differently, like to take the throne or whatever. If I remember, he's always talking about *Sihanouk* in a very caring way. And the country is supposed to go this way and that way, because he had more education, he graduated from law school. And he has always been involved in a lot of political matters in the country.
- Q: So, growing up did you feel you were in a special family, or was there something about...
- A: I was in a special family for a lot of reasons. Unlike other royal families that maybe stay in the background and are not very much involved because they are already royal family, so it's just kind of not really significant. But my father's life, it's so much out. Everybody knows him in the whole country.
- Q: He was very involved.
- A: Yeah, very involved. Very known person. Very liked. I think he's very special.
- Q: You liked that as a child about your father?
- A: I'm proud.
- Q: You're proud of him.
- A: I'm proud.
- Q: So he really was a significant figure in Cambodian society when he was alive. So people knew him and he was popular with the people.
- A: He was popular with the people because he started his life at a very young age in a small village where the villagers liked him. When he was a governor, governors liked him. So on the ladder going up to the administrative way he is always liked by the people because of his honesty, because of his work, his contribution to the country. He is very well known. And later on when he was assigned to the outside, like ambassador to Japan and Mongolia, to Peking, China, they still like him even during the communist...
- Q: Yeah, sure. So growing up for you, did your father and mother say to you, "You are a member of this family, you have a special role in life." Or did they say...

- A: No, I think that part of the life my parents keep it maybe to themselves. They bring us up as normal children. In a lot of ways, when we were young, my brothers and sisters and I we went to the public school compared to going to a school that was all for princes and princesses, not like everybody else. So we went to public school, I told *trine* last night that all my friends are poor. They are not rich friends.
- Q: So you went to public school?
- A: Yes, very exposed at an early age to a normal life like everybody else.
- Q: Was this a value of your mother and father? Was this a principle they had, that you should know the ordinary people?
- A: That's right.
- Q: So it's very normal, affectionate.
- A: Would you say that your father had a different influence on you than your mother? If you look back as a child, what was the...
- Q: I look back and he had a lot of influence on the whole life of the children. I think my mom... I remember my grandparents from my mom's side. They said that my mom didn't like to go to school very much. She skipped school. She didn't like to go there. She's not involved. It's not very stressed at the time of the early age, you know education was not really so important. So she liked cooking, she liked to entertain. She liked to have friends. And that's her life. Do for influence in the house I think my father has more influence and she's more like the entertaining person, greeting the friends and all that.
- A: So what would you say if your father was here today and we could talk to him about his children, what would you say was his attitude about raising you as a young woman? A young child? And how do you think he might have thought differently about you than his sons? These are really two questions. Let me ask the first question. Say your father is here and we said, when you were thinking of raising your daughter, what were your goals for her? What were your ambitions for her? Could you tell? What would your father say to me today?
- A: I think his ambition would probably be the children's ambitions. Because in terms of education he let us be free to choose. If we wanted to go to Europe, for example, to study, because my sister went to London to a boarding school to study, and my brother chose the old schools to go study. I don't think he made any difference between a girl and a boy being educated. But for a girl probably marriage is important for the family. And that he will make sure we don't fool around. But in terms of freedom of choice for education, he supported us.

- Q: You could be... your father would encourage you to be educated. If you said you wanted to be a doctor or something, he would say...
- A: He was very encouraging to be a doctor.
- Q: This would be a little different than a lot of fathers in Cambodian culture towards women, don't you think? One of our historians said that for instance, she was not taught how to read and write by her parents because she would write letters and have some kind of relationship before marriage. So we have many even upper middle class women who were not educated. How would your father think about that Cambodian tradition?
- A: He never talked about it. Having the girls know how to read and write or something like that. He always encouraged it.
- Q: So he encouraged you?
- A: In fact, I wrote to him. I never wrote anything in Cambodian because of my background, maybe I never told you. In Cambodian I know very little because I just finished certificate, what grade is that?
- Q: Up to grade seven.
- A: Yeah, that's my Cambodian... We come from twelve to one and then up to grade seven. We finish grade seven because of certificate. So my Cambodian level stopped there. I was educated mostly in the French way. I went to French school and all that. And I wrote to him and my family just in French. And he was really proud when I wrote.
- Q: Now in your family, was the main language Cambodian or French?
- A: Well we talked at home in Cambodian. But we write to each other in French.
- Q: S, do you think in your family, being a member of the royal family, was there any communication to you that you are Cambodian. In other words, did your father try to inculcate in you in a special way Cambodian values, or Cambodian traditions? Or was he...
- A: Cambodian values.
- Q: Was the family influenced by the French?
- A: No, no. Cambodian first. He is very conservative, I would say, in that matter of a Cambodian person. It's hard to put it, why he was so liberal on one side, you know, having us educated in a public school and all of that. And yet, he'll keep the conservative side like with greeting old people, speaking very softly and in a respectful way to people, just a very conservative person. And we do have

friends, friends of my brother coming to the house too. But he didn't seem to put a restriction in that way, like to say, okay, you boys should not come because I have girls in the house.

Q: I see, I see.

A: But they kind of understand, it's not being said, there is no restriction put on the house, but it's just like a natural value we had to keep face to the family, being good person, a good child.

Q: Yes. So your father didn't have to say it. You knew you had to do things in a dignified way.

A: Yes. Because maybe more silent way of life in that matter, that nobody go out, anything like that.

Q: Right.

A: I don't know if I explain it right.

Q: Yeah, yeah. Do you think your father felt that in his role in society, his family had to show a little appreciation? In a way, approach life in a dignified Cambodian way? You know, sometimes parents will... what I am trying to say is, I'm wondering how much your father felt that he had standard that the family had to uphold, because of his special role in society?

A: I don't think he had a certain standard. I don't understand what you want me to...

Q: No, I know. I mean sometimes he'll say, well, this is our family tradition, and you have to behave in a certain way. Or, the only question I was asking is whether or not your father would say, you know we're in a special family so you need to behave in a certain way. I don't know if he ever communicated that to you.

A: No, no, he never did in that way. But I think because of his strict manners of life. Because everything he does is kind of strict. We were kind of scared of him in that way too, that we don't go off.

Q: he would scare you to behave yourself.

A: Yes, but we don't really have in our thoughts that we had to really try to do something good. It is just natural. It's not like, oh you don't do this, because he's going to beat you up or something like that, no.

Q: Well, it's very interesting. So your mother, how does she enter into your life as a child raiser?

- A: Well I think my mom is always in the background, a shadow, more shadow. And she is always complying with my father, what he says. Although she has her own liberty of doing things at home on her own without any restrictions. But she doesn't have a lot of voice. She provides everything for us, very comfortable. She sees everything we need, our needs are being met all the time. Like a mother, maybe, she is more concerned with having jewelry, going somewhere, wearing jewelry. Things like that, because she has a lot of children, so she has to take care of everything. She only has two daughters, so everything she buys, she is always saying, "this color for *Santa*; this color for *Olary*." All the time, "this is for her marriage." And she keeps everything in order for us. She always plans, but in a more silent way. We don't have to ask her what, whether... we ask her for money though. My father does not take care of that. Like if we wanted to buy something or go out, or do something, well she is the provider of the pocket money. I don't remember her impacting much of me.
- Q: Yes.
- A: Because, you know, maybe because I am not very close to her. Usually they say the second child is not very liked. And maybe I am the one. When I was born my complexion is darker than everybody else in my family. My sister is a lot lighter than me, my brother is a lot lighter than me. And only myself, and I am a girl, and I think I am pretty ugly because of my complexion. So, my relationship with her is not very close. But my sister is very, very close to her. So maybe it is a choosing of her owned.
- Q: Sure, I see. I see.
- A: I don't know.
- Q: The complexion, what does that mean?
- A: My skin is darker.
- Q: So what does that mean?
- A: I don't know what it is in her mind, but probably... I don't know, I cannot say it, you know, care for her. But we don't have anything special. But usually like you know in the family, we have a different kind of skin color. It's not like you are less than another person, but it's probably more like you are ugly.
- Q: Well, I noticed that it depends on the social class too. The skin color, in other words, it seems like in upper class families, that the people think that the whiter skin is more beautiful. Is that the prejudice?
- A: That's the prejudice. I don't know where they got that, but ah...

- Q: Most people like the light skinned, not the dark skinned, right?
- A: Yeah.
- Q: On the other hand, right, it was true under the *Khmer Rouge* period that the pure Cambodian was considered the red skin, the dark skin.
- A: The dark skin.
- Q: It's a contradiction, right? That the real ancient Cambodian was the dark skinned?
- A: You are probably a change from the perfect child, that is my brother, who is really lighter and until now people take him as Vietnamese because he's really light skinned. And then, compared to me, different, so different. Even when we went to school people don't think that I'm his sister. We went to the same school and they don't believe it.
- Q: I see.
- A: I don't know how black...
- Q: It's interesting. It comes up a lot in these discussions, the color of the skin.
- A: And then you will find it real strange too, like we have different shades of tower in the old group.
- Q: Well, clearly what you are saying is you were very close to your father.
- A: I'm very close to him. Like I said, education, thinking and all of that.
- Q: Now, let's just shift a minute towards Buddhism. When you were a child, how religious was your family?
- A: Very religious.
- Q: Can you tell me a little about the...
- A: Well, I remember, this is, maybe I should mention, well my mom was real sick when I was born. May be that is why she couldn't nurture me, breastfeed me. And so I was mostly staying with my friend's mother a lot. We stay in the same house, but she's the person who takes care of me most of the time. And my sister, when she was born my mom was well, and she could breastfeed her. Maybe it was our relationship that contributed to the closeness too. And so in that matter, she was severely sick. So my background, remembering about the Buddhism is my grandmother, she was very religious in her way. She never missed a prayer,

morning evening, morning, evening. And as a child sleeping with her, I already know incantation.

Q: At a very young age.

A: Very young age. Everything I know. We have a monk coming to the house in celebration of a holiday. He comes to the house one day a week. My father, my grandparents always make offerings. They pray together at the time. So I would say it was very religious.

Q: Now in your family, did you have a monk that was a family monk? Or would you go to the town?

A: No, there is no differentiation of monks. It's not for the family. But we do have in the handful a place that my father built for the monks, like a temple to be used for the people, but he built it.

Q: Where is this? In *Phnom Penh*?

A: In *Phnom Penh*.

Q: I see. Is that still there?

A: Still there, still there.

Q: You know that temple? Yes? So your father built a temple and your family would use it. But the common people would use it too.

A: Yeah, the common people would use it too. But in a holiday like that there is no distinction. All the monks that are assigned, they come over. And in the house he also had a shrine that he put the old Buddha and old *date*, so sometime if he has to pray by himself in one room, it was about this size, then he has the shrine, for himself. And he never missed a prayer either. Because he was raised, by my grandfather from my father's side who always prayed morning and evening?

Q: So your family was a very religious family?

A: Very religious, yeah. But again it's only my father's side. My mom, she doesn't like it. Although she does...

Q: Was not a religious side?

A: Yeah, she does of convenience sometimes. But she's not really into it.

Q: I see. So would you say then the Buddhism had a big impact on you as a child? Cambodian Buddhism?

- A: It impacted me in terms of understanding what is caring and what is honesty in your way of life. It's not like everything had to be involved in that but in terms of being a good person, maybe some concept that we would be involved in too. It really has an impact in some way, I would say.
- Q: Do you have other influences that you have seen? You talked about your father; you talked about Buddhism as big influences. Were there any other influences as you were growing up as a child? Nature? Art? Music or teaching? Teachers? Or French culture? What would you say were some of the other big influences on your development as a young woman?
- A: I don't know. I think that I was influenced in a goof way though because I like art. All kinds. You know, really curious since an early age. French teaching is also an influence. Because I read a lot of French books since an early age too. In fact, in my family not many people like to read. I kept my own library because my father would order or buy something and I would read it and keep it because I liked to save all the books. I went to his library in his office; I also checked out the books that we read. So it's... maybe myself I don't have a specific area, but I would like an art, like music, you know, a different area.
- Q: Well, we're continuing our interview on side 2. So you were talking about, most of these books you didn't read in Cambodian?
- A: I didn't read in Cambodian...
- Q: Can you read the Sanskrit writing?
- A: I can read but I don't write though. I read fluently but I don't write. It's not something I had to learn really.
- Q: It's been hard for me to get a picture of Cambodian intellectual life, in the sense that there were libraries of books written in Cambodian? Were most of the books in French? I haven't been able to get a picture.
- A: It depends on your interest. And my interests are mostly books in French, because I read more fluently and speak more fluently. But I'm also interested in books like Cambodian poems and Cambodian stories.
- Q: Yes.
- A: Like I don't know anything about it. I really value that very much, because when I read it I thought a lot of those things have value, but people don't pick it up.

- Q: But also, the Cambodian authors. It's been hard for me. There must have been great writers, Cambodian writers and poets. So these would be available to you as a young...
- A: Very, very.
- Q: The poems would be in French or Cambodian?
- A: The poems in Cambodian. Mostly Cambodian. I loved that.
- Q: Do you have any of these books of poems now?
- A: No, no I don't. I tried to get some people to order what is being saved, or whatever we have there. But I think that is an influence that is not completely westernized in a way.
- Q: But who were, give me an example, who did you remember as a child was a great Cambodian poet who would come to your mind?
- A: I cannot think.
- Q: It's been very hard talking to Cambodians in America to get the picture of how their culture was written down in the books. Because even the paintings, it seems most of *Khmer* art was sculpture. Is that right? There wasn't a tradition of landscape painting like in China? Is that right?
- A: No there was not.
- Q: There was not, thank you. So most of the great art would be mostly works of sculpture?
- A: Sculpture, mostly. Not painting. I the book of the poet in Cambodia, maybe its not so much of a memory of a name because Cambodian people sometimes have no known person.
- Q: So they would be wonderful poems, but you would not know the name of the person who wrote it.
- A: But mostly people would pick whatever part that is beautiful poem for something, like the monk, Samdech Sangha you know.
- Q: Yes.
- A: Monk. *Samdech Sangha, Samdech Chuon Nath. Samdech Sangha Chuon Nath.* He is very intellectual. So he combines all the people's works.

- Q: Is that right?
- A: Yeah, and then put it in a book. His name. That is more significant. But to pick out a Cambodian poet, not many memories about that. I don't...
- Q: Were novels written? Did Cambodians write novels or mostly folk stories and tales?
- A: Novels for my personal interest, I don't like to read novels in Cambodian because it's more like a... not very good language when it comes to a love story, something like that. For my personal thing, but maybe somebody else might think differently. But you know compared to what is written in French in a love story, a Cambodian story seems to be a little bit...
- Q: Do you remember as a child or a young woman any great stories in French or English or Cambodian that influenced you? Any writers or stories that you were impressed by...?
- A: I'm sure that I have. But right now nothing gets into my mind very much. Because, like I said, the trauma and the pain, so many things. These things don't seem very important anymore.
- Q: Sure.
- A: So you just kind of erase.
- Q: The Buddhism? Do you remember more of the Buddhist stories? What memories of the stories do you have with you now?
- A: I don't know if I have a Buddhist story.
- Q: What about your father's stories? We'll get into this later. Do you think you'll remember that you have in your mind stories or things that your mother or father, or your grandparents said to you, or your teachers when you were young?
- A: I get a lot of stories in terms of Buddhism a lot, but it probably transferred just a bit here and there from whatever the Buddha life is going through, and then pick out some certain part of his life. Let me see if I remember. I have to think a little bit...
- Q: Well, we'll come back to that later. That's okay. Do you think looking back now that you think about your mother and your father and your family, etc? Do you think about your father every day? Is he a living presence in your mind?
- A: He's very present. Although we know he is not there anymore. But like he's present a lot in terms of being a very good person that we are proud of.

- Q: So you think about him a lot?
- A: Yeah.
- Q: Do you see him talking to you? What do you think about that?
- A: Oh.
- Q: Favorite scenes?
- A: Favorite scene is not talking.
- Q: Not talking?
- A: In fact, I don't really dream of him very much. Except when I feel very sad and would dream of him.
- Q: You would dream of him?
- A: Yeah. And maybe in Cambodian way we have a kind of belief that he's there to protect in some way.
- Q: So he's your protector?
- Q: We don't see him in usual daily life, but sometimes when something happens in my life that I think is sad, then I would dream of him. But he does not talk.
- Q: He doesn't talk? When you were a kid he didn't talk to you much?
- A: He does not talk much then too. He does not talk so much. That a father would talk compared to here. I don't think so.
- Q: You don't think so. So he was a presence. He communicated his values. But he did it without talking too much. This is very good, very interesting.
- A: He ah...
- Q: So he was a very strong person who communicated very deeply his beliefs. But he doesn't say too much to do it.
- A: He doesn't say too much. Either we sit around for lunch; he was talking about his work. He was talking about what people he think about. Mostly more like adult talk rather than children talk.

- Q: You must have enjoyed seeing all his friends coming in and out of the house. He must have had many interesting friends. He must have always been doing something with people.
- A: All the time.
- Q: So your house was very active.
- A: Very active.
- Q: Was there any visitor you were especially excited about as a child?
- A: Well, the story it is, the good and bad, as the bad friends come in to and go sit and all we don't like to have them in the house. Like you know friends that we like to have and like to listen to the story and we don't talk about things. For me, there is a separation that way.
- Q: Sure, sure.
- A: But I don't think we have any voices you know interfering with his friends. Although sometimes we complain that you know they didn't have much time with the children.
- Q: He didn't or the friends didn't?
- A: No, my parents.
- Q: They were busy.
- A: But you know every time, especially my father, after all the friends were gone, everything was gone, and it was time to sleep, he would come always to check the children.
- Q: So he would come every night?
- A: Every night he would open the doors and see if they are all there, counting, sleeping. So he was always the person who went around the house and saw that everything was in order. So he was much of a presence.
- Q: Very much of a presence. Now when you were young, what do you conceive to be the happiest moment of your life? When you were a child.
- A: I never think back about my life so much. What is the happiest life? You mean by myself or with the parents?

- Q: No, I mean when you think back to your life. What to you do you remember was a very, very happy moment of your life? There must have been one or two events that happened, that when you think about it, it brings a lot of joy into your mind.
- A: I don't know. I'm really a quiet person as a child. Lot of people get frustrated because I don't really speak too much around the house, just in a certain period of time of the day I would. But usually I was quiet, just reading a lot. Spending a lot of time listening, observing. I enjoy too listening to people. I don't remember really a significant period of time that I feel special. Because as a normal life, playing with my family, you can see that it is joyful because I think that we have a lot of close relationships with cousins too who are not living so far away. And I would go back and forth, playing, visiting each other, spending time with each other. I have a very close friend that comes to the house and sleeps and talks. What else can I think about... I don't know, in my mind, maybe a letter.
- Q: Now as you think back when you were young, what would you say was the saddest? Do you remember a very, very sad moment as a child?
- A: I don't think so.
- Q: You don't think so.
- A: I don't think so. We didn't experience any losses during that time of any family members, or any abuses or anything around the house that would make me sad. Probably separation, my parents sent my sister and I to go to school in Vietnam. People went to boarding school, this Catholic school. And it's probably a scary moment, a scary time to be away from home. And we didn't know any period of a boarding school and all that.
- Q: How old were you at that time? When you went to the boarding school.
- A: About eleven or twelve.
- Q: And for how many years did you go to the boarding school?
- A: Oh two years, two or three years.
- Q: In *Hanoi*?
- A: They sent us to the north of South Vietnam, but not in North Vietnam. It's called the *Dalat*.
- Q: That was a little scary? How old did you say you were?
- A: Two years.
- Q: How old were you?

- A: Eleven.
- Q: So between eleven and thirteen. Was that a tradition in your family to go to Vietnam to be educated?
- A: Oh, probably especially in my family because my father was educated in school there too. Because there is a big French school there that he went to. Later on, he sent my brothers. Two brothers, my older one and my younger one to go to the same school that he went to. And then for the girls' school it was some different place. So probably in his mind he would think that was the best place we could get an education. But I don't remember any sad time, not really.
- Q: Now where is your mother, your father, your family now?
- A: My mom is in Long Beach. My father, I was assumed they killed him. That's all I knew about it. But nobody knew of his death or how he died or what happened. And the last contact we had with him was during 1975 when the communists came into Cambodia. He went to the French embassy. And at the time the *Khmer Rouge* threatened to cut off the lines, the supply of water. They knew my father was there. So they threatened that if you don't release him, everything is going to be cut off. So, my father, that is all I heard from all the people who were with him, he decided to leave on his own, to give up, to go with the *Khmer Rouge*. And that's the only time that everybody knew what happened.
- Q: And the rest of your family... your brothers, your sisters?
- A: My older brother is actually living in France. But he's coming to visit us back and forth. My sister is living in Long Beach. My younger brother is going back to Cambodia and working with the *Sihanouk*, the *Funsipech*.
- Q: I see.
- A: Yeah.
- Q: And in Cambodia, are there a lot of your relatives left? Or are they mostly in the United States or in France?
- A: Only one uncle is alive in France, and a lot of cousins.
- Q: A lot of cousins, I see.
- A: Because my father's family died except for an uncle who lives in France. So that each family has one family member left, a son or daughter. It's not most of them, like he has eight siblings all together, and only about two or three are left, here and there.

- Q: We are kind of coming to the end of this interview. Do you have any memories or dreams of your family that you think about a lot? Anyone, your mother, your father, your grandparents?
- A: I don't know. I kind of do not think about it a lot. Maybe in a way just kind of accepting it, you know, what happened, for my father especially. He feels a bit of emotion. He was not going to leave the country. He told everyone that no matter what happens I'll stay right here in my house and die in my country. So whatever you do, just do it. So it's like knowing what happened, accepting the fact that he's choosing to be there. And it's not so much of a dream. Maybe it's just kind of trying to hide, or to forget.
- Q: What about now as time has gone by, what do you think of his decision?
- A: I think his decision is a little bit... I don't know what else, what kind of word to...
- Q: Harsh. Why do you say you don't think it was harsh?
- A: It's like he chose because of his love of the country. Because he feels that he was betrayed, so he chose to be there. And to die. And not escaping. My grandmother, I was very close to her. And it feels really sad to know where, nobody knows where she died.
- Q: So your father's mother stayed behind too.
- A: Yeah, both.
- Q: What about your mother's parents? Did they die in Cambodia too?
- A: My mother's father died before the communists took over, so he had a very nice funeral, we were all there, all of the family. But my mom's mother, nobody knows.
- Q: Does the *Sihanouk* family know anything about what happened to your family? Does anyone know what happened to your father, your grandparents?
- Q: They know nothing. Sometimes there is a hope. But I think just a false hope that maybe he is living in a forest somewhere, in the mountains somewhere.
- A: Sure, sure.
- Q: Why would the *Khmer Rouge* be against your father? Why would he have been angry with the *Khmer Rouge*?

- A: I don't really think that the *Khmer Rouge* is against my father practically. He's just one of the figure of the old regime that they had to exterminate, like other people.
- Q: I see, I see. So he represented the old regime. Now I don't know the history very well, but he was associated with the *Lon Nol* government, your father?
- A: Yeah.
- Q: He was the...
- A: He was the one, probably after the *Sihanouk* was kicked out of the country at the time in 1967 or 1968, around that time. He was the one who put *Lon Nol*, prime minister at the time, then chief of state. They were both close friends. They went to school together. They were very close friends. I don't know the reason, probably they would think because *Long Nol* was in the military. Although he had a military, he was a minister of the whole country. My father chose *Lon Nol* to be a representative of the country. Probably for some reason I don't know about.
- Q: Well we are coming to the end of this section. Is there anything you'd like to, anything about your childhood you'd like to share with us?
- A: Just about happy times, happy times going with the family, going to the seashore, playground, all of that.
- Q: It was a happy childhood?
- A: It was a happy childhood.
- Q: Sure, sure. We're coming to the end of the first interview. What's your reaction to this interview so far?
- A: Well, it's kind of emotional to think back because I never really think about my life, as something. You know, not really think about it. But it's like passing through, year after year. But then when you really think back on what happened its kind of emotional.
- Q: Well, one of the things that you'll see is that as we systematically interview, this comes up, you'll have a very interesting review of your whole life. I don't know, were you prepared for this? Maybe now you are thinking, wow, I should have stayed in California?
- A: I thought about it.

- Q: I think you will be fine. I think by the end of the week it will be an experience. What do you think?
- A: Probably, I don't know. I just, once in a while, I don't think I see anything special. Not really, you know, not for me. Just like a normal life.
- Q: Sure. But as they say, we've interviewed people, foreign women, farmers, etc. It's a unique experience to actually sit down a whole week and review your life. It brings up a lot of very interesting thoughts, some painful, some happy.
- A: Some happy. There are a lot of happy times. Not sad times, the sad times don't really stick out in my head. But mostly happy times that I remember. But its just like, even though we don't have close contact with my parents, in terms of his involvement with outside life, we still have something together as a family that maybe you understand more. But I really can't explain.
- Q: So this is the continuation of the second part of the interview on February 9, 1993. Now you mentioned that... why don't you just continue. You said you had some thoughts from yesterday and please just continue.
- A: Yeah, I was thinking about the sad part that you asked me about yesterday and I remembered it. And I just wanted to talk about it. It was a kind of situation that I had with... I don't remember how old I was then, but at the time my parents went to Saigon, like a trip or vacation, and my mom brought back a doll, and it was only for my sister. And we just had a ... just the two of us. And I couldn't understand why she had a beautiful doll and I didn't have one. So that was a sad part. I think I cried.
- A: I still want to cry. That's about all.
- Q: Did you feel... what did you feel? Can you remember what you were feeling about the doll? Why did it make you sad? I feel like I want to play with the doll too. I was just a little girl who wanted to have toys. And then I really felt jealous. Why I didn't have the same thing? Something to play with? And I remember I had to ask my sister to play with her toys. I should have had my own too. So that's my memory.

Interview 10 - Part 2

Q: So now we have our beautiful microphone here working. This is February 8th, we are doing interview number two and S.S. was talking about how the problem of survival has made her feel in some ways that she has lost her past as she thinks about the kinds of questions we are asking her. This interview number two is a history of the marital relationship because marriage, both the customs of marriage and the tradition of marriage, is so important in the life of a Cambodian woman. So we asked all of our oral historians to sort of talk about how they met their husbands, how it was arranged, did they use a fortune teller, things like this to sort of describe the history leading up to the marriage and then also to give us some ideas about the ceremony, because there is such an interesting wealth of cultural traditions associated with the marriage. Do you think you can share that with us?

A: Yes. It's different, although maybe the planning is not different from the ordinary people, because the value of the woman to be a virgin at the time of the marriage is very important. I think you find that everywhere in the Cambodian social life. It is not different. The arrangement probably is not different. Mine was arranged, like everybody else, and what happened was that at a certain time, I was reaching my sixteenth birthday and a lot of people wanted to ask me for marriage, I learned that from other family members. Somebody is interested in you and they want to come and see you or sometimes they would arrange for him to go to the seashore. The man who would want to marry me was a friend of my parents, but they just want to look at me, but a lot of things happen before the marriage. I want to try to think of which one is first. I think my husband was the one I met first, maybe just by coincidence. He was educated, he was actually a royal prince too, I can probably talk about him in the past tense because he died. But he was educated in France in the agricultural field and I met him. He was engaged first to my cousin, and somehow, the person he was engaged to was also my best friend and was in the royal family too, but she was my cousin and my best friend. So somehow, they were separated because he suspected that she was having an affair with somebody else, just because she was together with somebody else for some kind of Chinese celebration.

Q: New Year?

A: New Year, no. Vietnamese New Year, not Cambodian New Year. Not Chinese. I'm sorry. I hope you don't get mixed up with Vietnamese New Year, and then he went together with my cousin. I was just in the background because I had been with my family and somehow I was pushed around a lot and fell down and he was the one who picked me up. He picked me up and said, "Are you okay?" I was still young and really shy, and this was the first time a man touched my hand or anything and so it was really scary. Maybe that is just a coincidence, but we thought it was some kind of omen or something like that. But later, when they were disengaged, his mother came and asked me for marriage and my father didn't want to. He didn't want to me to marry a prince. That was not in his mind.

He wanted somebody to get married with just a common person. And he said that from the first time but my grandmother really had a lot of influence on my parents, and she said, "Well I want her to marry a prince, to have someone in the royal family, not getting lost," and so he was the one who was chosen to be my husband.

Q: Why did your father want you to marry a commoner?

A: I don't know why in his mind, really. I never asked him or we never asked him as children. But that was his plan, that he didn't want us to be involved. In fact, from the first time, we were never brought up to go to the royal palace for any ceremonies; we kind of stayed away from the royal court. Every thing was that way, like education was the same thing and then life is the same thing as we were growing up. We were supposedly involved in some kind of ball or some kind of celebration, but he never wanted it that way. So my marriage, my husband was kind of a special arrangement too, that's how we got married and I was married at sixteen without knowing my husband at all. You are not supposed to know each other anyway until you get engaged and then two months after the engagement is the marriage. But during that engagement he came to the house and talked, but always with other people, around other people.

Q: And after your first contact with him, his father asked for your hand in marriage, asked your father?

A: No, his mom because his father was King *Monivong* and he died.

Q: Oh, I see, his father was the King *Monivong*, and so he died and the mother asked.

A: The mother.

Q: Asked your parents? Asked your father or mother or both?

A: Both. Usually that is the tradition. But there is always a middle person, right? I think it is the same, like close family or...

Q: Sure, sure.

A: Somebody comes and asks first. So I think that is about all about the marriage. So many things.

Q: As a sixteen- year- old girl, was that exciting for you to think about being married, or were you afraid?

A: I was very afraid. It is not exciting. I was not prepared. I didn't know anything about marriage at all. I don't think I was told anything about how it will go, to be married.

- Q: You were never told anything?
- A: No, no. Life experience.
- Q: And your husband, was he younger or older?
- A: No, he was...
- Q: He couldn't be younger because you were sixteen. How much older was he?
- A: He was nine years older than me.
- Q: He was twenty- five.
- A: That is about normal age of marriage between family, Cambodian family, about right.
- Q: So when your father and mother told you about the marriage, was that a shock to you?
- A: It was scary, it was not a shock or anything, it was just scary because they already had decided. In my mind I didn't want to get married because I wanted to go study more, that was my plan, but if I refused then I would have only been thinking of myself, and then my grandmother might not be happy and maybe they would think I already had an affair with someone and that is why I refuse some arrangement of marriage by my parents, so that's...
- Q: You couldn't refuse?
- A: Yeah, I could but I never thought it that way.
- Q: Did you have any premonitions? Many of the Cambodian women said they had dreams. Did you have any dreams that prepared you for this marriage or did you see a fortune teller or do anything to...
- A: No, I didn't have any dreams at all about it, except the one that I told you about, but it was really a coincidence.
- Q: What dream was that?
- A: No, no, it's not a dream, the hand.
- Q: Oh the hand, I see. You never had a snake dream getting you ready for marriage?
- A: I don't think so.

- Q: The snake didn't come to you?
- A: The snake didn't come. No, I didn't have any dreams, or if I did, maybe it was not really something I thought about.
- Q: So did you think this man was your *ku-preng*?
- A: Well, that is what the elders, my parents, my grandparents thought.
- Q: but did you think the man was your *ku-preng*?
- A: No, I don't think so.
- Q: Well because that is something very personal, your feelings, not what your parents...
- A: My feelings, yeah.
- Q: Now, how would you describe the quality of your relationship with your husband? You were a sixteen-year-old woman with a twenty- five-year-old man, right? And then you started your household?
- A: I lived with my parents after marriage until I had one child, so they still watched over everything.
- Q: How many years were you married?
- A: Before...
- Q: All together. How many years were you married, did you live together with your husband, how many years?
- A: Oh, I lived with him until the day I came to France.
- Q: I see. So you were married. So how would you describe the quality of your marriage? Were you close to your husband? Was it an affectionate marriage, a distant marriage?
- A: Well, I don't know because being so young I was not prepared to love anyone, or maybe I was just accepting what happened but it's not like someone you really feel excited about, someone you want to meet and you want to talk to. It's more like submission, I think. He probably loved me, I don't know because it was never talked about, like a Western way, like I love you or something like that. But the way he acted, everything, probably he loved me. He was caring towards me, and the reason I say that is because sometimes I would get really angry, really

nasty for no reason, and he never said anything, he just walked out. I told *Svang*, he said that some spirit is inherent in me, so he just walked out.

Q: Well, looking at the marriage of your mother and father, did you think you would have with your husband the same kind of marriage, or was it going to be a different kind of marriage than your parents' marriage?

A: I would that that it is different, comparing to my parents.

Q: In what way different?

A: I feel different, more involved with my children, not having someone, although my husband was really outgoing also as a person, he had a lot of friends coming over to the house the same way as my father. He liked to have friends and he had a good heart and he was honest in his work, he was really a hardworking person so people liked him too. But the different thing is that I helped him too, in terms of consulting each other. I don't know if my mom had consulted with my father, but I see her more in the background, and for myself I see me being more involved with the children, maybe because I missed that in my life.

Q: So you were very involved with your children? How many children did you have?

A: I had five children.

Q: Yes, five children.

A: And was your husband involved with the children, more involved than your father?

A: Yes, he is very close with the kids.

Q: He is very close?

A: Yeah, although he has a life of his own, a political life too, but I think his side of the family is very close to each other. They always are together, they always celebrate things together so they are more close than my family.

Q: Now are you still with your husband or you separated?

A: My first husband, no.

Q: The first husband, the prince.

A: Yeah. What is your question?

- Q: No, I mean do you still live with your first husband?
- A: No, when the Communists took over in 1975 I went to France with my three kids, my older ones because I have five children.
- Q: Sure, sure.
- A: But just to put them in school and then come back. But when I left, one month later the Communists took over and that is how we were separated.
- Q: And so you were separated from your husband and then did you...
- A: And he died under the Communists.
- Q: Under the Communists.
- A: But still nobody has seen his body. The nanny and my two kids that were with him all the time said he was taken to *Marhoughe* Hospital, but then after that nobody knows.
- Q: Now you had five children with your first husband. Are your five children still alive then? They all live with you in California?
- A: Yes.
- Q: I see. So you left the country with your children, three children, two were left behind with your husband, they both survived?
- A: They both survived, yeah.
- Q: Now your husband must have died a very young man, how old was he?
- A: He was born in 1933 and if he died in 1978, maybe 1976...
- Q: So he would have been 42.
- A: Maybe 1976 or 1977, somewhere around there.
- Q: Late forties.
- A: Early forties.
- Q: Early forties, yeah. If your husband hadn't died, what do you think would have happened to you and your husband? Say the *Khmer Rouge* didn't come to power, would he have been like your government, would he have had an official job? What was his goal in life?

A: Well, before our marriage he didn't have much of a goal, except to be working in the agricultural field because he graduated from there, but then after he married me he went to law school and the same steps that my father took, he kind of followed in his footsteps. He was very interested in government and before he died he was a Secretary of Agriculture.

Q: I see, the Secretary of Agriculture.

A: But he also had a degree in law school and he was a supervisor in law, law school, director of a law school.

Q: So how would you describe him? Would you say the marriage was hard work, was it fun?

A: Marriage, I would say that the early part is very, very fun but the later part, after the war with the Communists, before they came, but during that time, long time, it seemed upside down a little bit because too many people were free, because of the power and all. We were talking about that yesterday, he betrayed me, he went out a lot. He liked his friends, he liked to drink, he liked to gamble, all that.

Q: Under the conflict with the Communists he had a lot of freedom?

A: Yes, he had more freedom.

Q: What about your father, what did he think of this? Was that something your father would have liked or not liked, or would have been indifferent to him?

A: He probably would not interfere.

Q: But would he have been happy your husband was doing this or he wouldn't care?

A: He probably was not happy, but he didn't say it.

Q: Your father wasn't happy but he didn't say it?

A: He didn't say it because, again, his choice is the children, all the time and whatever decisions they make. My brother was divorced from his wife and after that in my family we had two divorces when he was there, so he saw what happened and what our lives were all about.

Q: But would your father see your husband as a good traditional Cambodian? Was your husband a Buddhist? Did he follow the strict Cambodian tradition like your father?

- A: He is a Buddhist, he's not so strong like my father, he was a Buddhist also. He is not so strict, but he had more fun times, he likes to be around people, he likes to play more, go out, not like my father. He never went out to nightclubs and things like that.
- Q: What about you? Did you go to the nightclub or have that kind of fun, or were you home with the children?
- A: I would be home because it was not a good thing for a woman to do.
- Q: Now, you were saying that the war with the Communists period turned everything upside down. As the events proceeded with the American bombings, could you feel the tension developing politically as the country moved toward *Pol Pot* takeover?
- A: I think there was a lot of movement at the time, since 1970. We couldn't stay together because he had to be out in the province because he was governor at first, so he was more free to go out. This is a period of time out and then there is a change, my husband was the governor so he was out on the field a lot, really staying on guard all the time, so he sent his family to the city to be safe, so that's why we were separated for...
- Q: Did you feel the tension as a mother, as a family? Could you sense the tension building up? How did it feel as you look back at that period?
- A: It felt scary all the time, I had to be on guard all the time, I had to be prepared to run, so I would wear pants instead of traditional sarong at home, usually we do that at night, but I was always prepared to get up and go and then bombing every day. It was not safe for the children.
- Q: So you heard the bombing?
- A: The bombing. A lot of bombing. A riot, a lot of riots, a lot of student movements protesting against the government, things like that. In fact, my home was bombed also.
- Q: Your home was bombed too?
- A: We had one dropped on the roof but nobody was hurt.
- Q: And your father too, he was threatened...
- A: He was threatened very much.
- Q: He had to be protected?

- A: He had to be protected all the time, people coming to check in and out, military type of thing, but there was a lot of danger, we had to take precautions. I would think that there was a lot of tension everywhere, the country, the people everywhere.
- Q: At that time did you have any feeling that the Communists could take over? Was that fear people had? Or do you think that they never predicted the *Khmer Rouge*?
- A: I don't think it was ever predicted, that the country would still be okay even though we had fighting and bombing like that. My husband felt that we should have a plan to put the children in a safe place or something like that. He said, "When the Communists come, because I am not a corrupted person, I never take any money from anybody, I'll just work under the Communists." So that was what he thought.
- Q: He didn't think the Communists would be dangerous?
- A: No, no.
- Q: Did your father think the Communists would be dangerous?
- A: I don't know about that because he didn't talk about it, but the fact that he didn't want to get out of his home, he talked about that. He said, "if the Communists come to my home and take me, I will just have my gun and then they shoot me and I shoot them."
- Q: What about the Americans? Did your family have any relationships with the Americans at the time?
- A: Yeah, a lot, but more secretive relationships.
- Q: More secretive?
- A: More secretive. My father, until the last minute, the American Ambassador waited for him to get out.
- Q: Is that right? Waited to help him.
- A: Yeah, to help. He sent many, many times during the times.
- Q: To take him out of the country, I see.
- A: To take him out. Because we were not so far from the Embassy, about two minutes.

- Q: So your family was close to the American Ambassador? In terms of spirit too? It seems like your father had a good relationship with the Americans.
- A: Good relationship. And that's why he felt betrayed too, because he expected that the American government would be protecting, trying to help Cambodia.
- Q: Yeah, sure, definitely, sure. Well the American bombing was very controversial. They bombed a lot, the *Ho Chi Minh* Trail early on; the secret bombings of President Nixon, there were a lot of reports that many Cambodians were killed by the American bombs very early on. At the time did the Cambodian people know that the American bombing...
- A: The Cambodian people knew and that was the first thing that put them out of power, because they denied that Cambodians were killed.
- Q: They denied that Cambodians were killed by the Americans?
- A: By the Americans.
- Q: Sure, sure, sure.
- A: And that is what...
- Q: The Cambodians in America never talked about this, whether they blame America for the *Khmer Rouge* coming to power. Did you ever hear anything? I have never been able to understand what the Cambodians think about the American bombings, the secret bombings of Cambodia.
- A: I don't think that America is a factor of how the *Khmer Rouge* came to power. It was just a bombing for the Vietnamese infiltration at the time, the North Vietnamese.
- Q: That *Ho Chi Minh* Trail that ran through Cambodia?
- A: Yeah, and we were protesting *Sihanouk* allowing them to have some kind of place to retreat to, and so we thought that was the factor but not the American bombing; although politically they will try to contradict that, saying the Americans were trying to kill Cambodians and all that, but I think that in a way the people that were involved politically knew what happened and that was...
- Q: So your father had a more positive view towards the United States, more clearly?
- A: Yeah.
- Q: And what was the understanding of the Vietnamese? Why did *Sihanouk* allow the Vietnamese to use Cambodia on the *Ho Chi Minh* Trail? They sort of allowed the

Vietnamese to carve out a piece of Cambodia to come into Vietnam to fight the Americans.

A: Well I really don't know because as a Cambodian woman, at the time I was not very involved...

Q: So you weren't politically...

A: Politically involved or have any say in that.

Q: Now as the government moved towards the end, with the April, was it 25th, 28th, I can't remember.

A: April 17th.

Q: Seventeenth, yes. You left a month before that with your family to Paris, right? But you didn't leave because you were afraid the *Khmer Rouge* were going to take over, so why did you leave, why did you go to Paris?

A: Because I wanted to put them in school. At the time we didn't have many schools open.

Q: Because of the war?

A: The bombings.

Q: The bombings, the schools were closed?

A: Each day depended on the rockets, so the school is open one day and closed one day, or two days, but it never was a full year of school and so my kids were already in high school and then I thought, we cannot do it like that because they need to have educations and so I took them to France, and that was what my main reason was.

Q: So you had no idea that four weeks later the country would fall?

A: No, because I was not prepared to bring anything out because, I told someone the other day, I just brought my three Cambodian skirts and a sweater, because it was not really cold in France at the time, so I didn't need to have a lot of clothes and I wanted to go back afterwards.

Q: As you look back, what do you think it was that made you leave one month before. Do you think that was...

A: It was some kind of protection from God I think, because I had a dream too, a dream that I did not understand at the time, but it was something that never

happened, I remembered it so vividly after I got up. I was sitting on what you call chariots, like a Ben Hur type of chariots with horses.

Q: A chariot. You were sitting on a chariot in your dream?

A: I was on a chariot in my dream and it was just running through, there was nobody conducting the chariot, it was just running through the city of *Phnom Penh* and there was a lot of fire everywhere. All the houses were on fire and it took me through *Phnom Penh*, and I said, "Stop, stop, stop, there is a lot of fire!" but it didn't stop. It took me out in from of the royal palace. It was calm at the palace. And that is one part of the dream. And then another furlough, my family was sitting together on some kind of land and then there was an officer, then the window closed and I couldn't see my father, I couldn't see my husband, and then after that I felt in my dream, the earth moving apart. You could feel that it is moving apart. But then when I look back I feel that it really is a dream about how right now we are separated in different lands. That's the way I interpret it.

Q: Sure, sure. So that dream you had just before your trip to Paris?

A: Yes. And my father told me that he had a dream too that he had a shrine, a Buddha shrine in his bedroom and that it was moved. So the prediction was that he would probably be going somewhere but he didn't know that it was moving out of his room.

Q: This was just before the *Khmer Rouge*?

A: Right before.

Q: Now, as you look back at your marriage, what would you say was the best time of your marriage and what would you say was the worst time of your marriage?

A: The best time was the very big wedding, everybody came.

Q: When you got married was the best time? The big celebration.

A: Big celebration because the whole town was coming, we got movies, we had the theater.

Q: What town was this?

A: In *Phnom Penh*.

Q: So you had a big, big celebration in the city?

A: In the big city.

- Q: Tell us about your marriage. How many days did it last?
- A: It lasted for two weeks the celebration.
- Q: Two weeks!
- A: The celebration before the day of the marriage, the actual day is only one day, but people come to the house constantly for two weeks and then the house was set up real special, it was just like lots of mice, and the people moving around celebrating too, because we had movies for them, we had a theater, we had music.
- Q: So all the people in *Phnom Penh*. Do you remember your marriage? You were probably young.
- A: Young too, maybe.
- Q: If I were living in *Phnom Penh* would I know you were getting married?
- A: You would know, you would know.
- Q: Everyone knew, it as a big event.
- A: Big event, yeah.
- Q: Was there parade down the street?
- A: No.
- Q: You were married in the temple, right?
- A: Usually the marriage ceremony is at home.
- Q: Now you didn't live in the royal palace, you had your own estate.
- A: Yeah, like an estate. We had a home but we had to go to the royal palace to celebrate, not because we are in the royal family but because we had to get the benediction from the king and queen.
- Q: And who were the king and queen?
- A: It was *Sihanouk's* parents at the time, so I was married royally in the throne.
- Q: You were married in the throne room.
- A: In the throne room. Big event. It was a happy time, exciting, although for me, I was not prepared to be excited, but it was still exciting.

Q: Sure, sure. Now probably you don't have any pictures from your marriage.

A: I do have one. My sister...

Q: You have one picture.

A: One picture of myself, married with my husband, both of us in marriage clothes and I gave one to the children, to each one, to carry.

Q: And would you have dancing, ballet, everything?

A: Yeah, yeah. The whole town, everyone was invited. So many people in the big event, like three cooks, we had to buy the Chinese chief cook at the time. Three of them came just to serve the people that we invited, the whole town.

Q: So it was exciting. *Phnom Penh* is a big town.

A: I don't know, I don't remember anything. I was really so happy, apart from that, from becoming a wife, it is not like you really love your husband or anything at the time, so it's not something that you are really excited about. When my first daughter was born it was not really like an exciting event for me, I was still so young.

Q: Well you must have been like 17.

A: Seventeen. So it's not like something really exciting to me. The sad part was probably the last part of the year that I told you about, when we got separated, when he got involved in so many things and he was away from home, so that was the sad part.

Q: So at the end, before you left for Paris, that was sad because your husband wasn't home much.

A: Yes. The marriage wasn't working right. I was worried about him a lot, being away from home, being exposed.

Q: So you were afraid he might be killed or hurt?

A: Yeah.

Q: I see.

A: But that was my feeling, he didn't seem to be that way. He was going out more, having more fun, going out with friends, things like that. We were kind of drifting apart in the last part of our lives.

- Q: Do you think, looking back, that he did that because he was under a lot of stress or he was afraid, how would you interpret his behavior, what was the reason for it?
- A: I think the reason was that he had too much power; everyone else was just waiting to please him.
- Q: He became powerful?
- A: Powerful. Whatever he said, whatever he liked, people just wanted to please him. If he wanted girls, they brought him girls, if he wanted this, they brought him this, so it was kind of easy, and he would forget.
- Q: Your father was a very powerful man, but he was different? The power didn't go to his head?
- A: No, no. I heard a lot of stories about him too having some friends, girlfriends, but he never actually had an open relationship or was away from my mother. He just stayed home, but sexually he had some affairs too. I think that is a part of the Cambodians. That's why we always say Cambodian men never stay.
- Q: They never stay with one woman?
- A: No.
- Q: They never stay faithful? Is that right? Sure, sure. Well it's been interesting in history because royal *Penh* have said the same thing no matter what their backgrounds, so this must have been very accepted.
- Q: ...saying that it is a common practice doesn't mean that it doesn't affect the women. I mean, some people will think, if everyone does it, it is culturally acceptable so women don't care. But do you think that is true, do you think the Cambodian woman, it hurts them...
- A: It does affect them.
- Q: Hurts them or makes them sad.
- A: It does affect them.
- Q: In what way do you think?

- A: Some people found out about it and they got into a really big fight, some people don't find out about it but still have a fight. Either way, if I am a woman and I found out that my husband had some kind of affair with another woman, and I knew where the other woman lived, I would go and fight because you have power, you can kick that woman out of your husband's life. But some people don't find out about it, they don't know what to do about it.
- Q: But does the situation make you depressed or did you worry about it, or you just said, "Well, all Cambodian men do this, no problem."?
- A: It makes me very sad. During the last part, I was pregnant with my son too, I felt very sad, very depressed and I wanted to separate, but I didn't know when to talk about it.
- Q: I see. So you were planning a separation?
- A: I was planning because I was not happy anymore and I didn't think that we should be together just to save face and just to be entertaining other people when inside it was not right. So I was planning to tell my father and I was planning to make some arrangements to separate.
- Q: And did you have a concept of love by that time, did you think that as a woman you could find love in your life from a man or did you feel it was more just getting away from a bad situation?
- A: I don't understand your question.
- Q: How much did you think, "If only I found a man who was faithful to me and loved me, I would be happy." Or did that never enter your mind, because of the arranged marriage? See, I am wondering where, when, if ever, you were able to develop your own concept of what a love would be between a man and a woman.
- A: Definitely. I would develop, as our life goes along that a wife and her husband should be more together, consulting each other, respecting each other.
- Q: You wanted that? You believed in that?
- A: Yeah, yeah.
- Q: So as you got older you wanted to have a model of love.
- A: Model, yeah, model that was a respectful life.
- Q: I see, and do you think your husband had the same model? Do you think he developed the same model that you did?

A: I think that his model was probably to have a wife, a nice wife who is faithful to him, taking care of the house and being there for the children.

Q: So he had a different attitude?

A: Kind of different attitude. I would say maybe he took it for granted after a while that it had to be that way. There is nothing more. But I have a different concept of respect for each other's feelings. It is very important.

Q: Now would you say that in your first marriage there were any special Cambodian traditions or religious traditions that you and your husband celebrated or family? Were you like your father, a very traditional family or did you try to maintain the Buddhist tradition in your family?

A: The Buddhist tradition we celebrate together as a family, some celebrations, special days, ceremonies, we all celebrate together and he would be there too. So in a way, it is not like he is on his own for celebrations or special occasions.

Q: It wasn't one of his principles?

A: No, no. He just went along with the family.

Q: He went along. But for himself it wasn't a big principle.

A: No, no.

Q: What about for you? Did you feel you were able to express your traditional nature, your traditional beliefs?

A: Yeah, I was. In fact, during the sad part I had, during the relationship problem with him, I went to the Buddhist temple a lot. I guess maybe that was the only way, was crying, refuse in prayer.

Q: So the prayer helped you.

A: It helped and he was really upset with me for doing that.

Q: Why? What do you mean upset?

A: He said, "Act your age. Why do you go to the temple? Why do you pray?"

Q: Because you were too young, it was only for old people.

A: Yeah, old people. So it's not for him, it was something he didn't want me to do at the time, but I did it anyway because I felt comfort in my depression. There were not many people to talk to when you had family problems.

Q: There weren't many? Why was that?

A: I think there is nobody accepting talking about the family problems, there is a shame if you don't get along, and even a close friend or family is not going to understand your feeling and why you feel that. This is also very difficult.

Q: The embarrassment.

A: Embarrassing, yeah. But would your husband have feared that your father would be mad at him for not treating you properly, or it didn't work that way? Your father would not get involved in your marriage?

A: No, no.

Q: He'd keep away from it.

A: He'd keep away. He never got involved in the children, once we got married. My brother got married and had children and later on was separated from his wife and he brought another girl to the house that was not accepted to the family, but he didn't say anything at all. He just kept quiet, although he showed that he didn't like it but he didn't say anything bad about it.

Q: He figured it was your business.

A: So, it is an experience, a family relation.

Q: What do you mean, it's an experience?

A: Well it's an up and down time...

Q: Do you think you were disappointed in some way? Do you feel that you were disappointed in this situation?

A: I feel disappointed.

Q: You felt disappointed?

A: Yeah, disappointed in a way that it is not the life I wanted to have and it was just given to me, because of tradition.

Q: Right. This was given to you as a sixteen-year-old girl. You had no choice.

- A: No choice and I wanted to do more in my education. I wanted to study and it was cut short.
- Q: Cut short. Do you think you have learned anything about men and marriage in terms of the future? Do you think that this gives you an opportunity to have a better relationship with men or do you feel disappointed in men?
- A: I'm still disappointed because I was married the second time...
- Q: You married the second time.
- A: Second time with Mr. Smith...
- Q: With an American?
- A: An American man. That's out of love.
- Q: How long ago was that?
- A: About twelve years now.
- Q: Twelve years. You're still married?
- A: I'm still married to him but we are separated.
- Q: You're just separated. I see. So you remarried.
- A: I remarried but it was still a disappointment. I didn't think it would be because I thought maybe the first time because it was an arranged marriage it didn't work out right, and since the second time was out of love maybe we could make a better happy life. But being married to an American is also like coming out of a dream.
- Q: Sure. Another dream.
- A: Another dream.
- Q: Sure, sure.
- A: A lot of differences.
- Q: Sure, sure. You don't have any children with Mr. Smith?
- A: I do have one son.

- Q: Oh you have one son. And then did he help raise your five children? Did they live with you?
- A: Well, in fact, he really liked my kids a lot.
- Q: He liked your kids a lot.
- A: Yeah, and he never had any problems with them. He was a good friend to them and they didn't have anything to complain about with him except me.
- Q: Except you. They complained about you, not him, they liked him. So you married twelve years ago out of love?
- A: Sure, love.
- Q: It hasn't been easy though?
- A: Yeah, it was love and it was good for maybe two or three years, and then it just crumbled again..
- Q: Crumbled again,
- A: But I stayed because of my son. He was still young, so we could raise him together.
- Q: I see. So what do you think it is about love that is so complicated?
- A: I don't know. I am fifty- one years old and I think that it is so complicated. It's just about trust, a person that wants to dominate another, there is no communication, no respect for one another...
- Q: So you think men want to dominate women?
- A: Yeah.
- Q: Most men.
- A: Most men. There is no respect. For example, my life with my husband, Mr. Smith, he doesn't like me to do things that I like to do, and he wants me to do things that he like to do, so it's one way. And in fact I let him do the things he liked to do because I respect his life. He has a very different lifestyle, he likes to by things at the spur of the moment, and a lot of other things, reading at home, he like to read, to watch sports, but he doesn't want me to do the things that I like.
- Q: Like what do you like to do?

A: Like a birthday party, I just want to be with my family, and he didn't want to be together with me. He just wants to be by himself, not together when I have some occasion or something.

Q: Sure, sure, sure.

A: He does not like me to pray.

Q: He doesn't like you to pray? Why is that? He doesn't want you to do your Buddhist- is he a Buddhist?

A: No, he does not have a religion although he was baptized when he was young, he said. When he was joining the military he went to *Lydia* and he turned himself to a Muslim and then when I was doing my Buddhist practices he said he is Jewish so he is going to the Jewish temple. I guess maybe just to do something.

Q: Now is he an older man than yourself or younger?

A: He's younger than me.

Q: Six years younger.

A: Six years younger.

Q: Was he married before?

A: He was married before. He has a son. But that didn't...

Q: Didn't work out.

A: Didn't work out.

Q: So you fell in love with this man, you were married, you have a son and you are a little disappointed with the outcome. You feel it didn't work out. Is he from the same social class background as you?

A: No, he was not and maybe that is a mistake that I made too, believing that love can do everything, can change everything.

Q: Was he from a poor background, working background?

A: He's kind of middle class...

Q: Middle class.

- A: Middle class background. Very small family, not very expanded family like where I come from, and I guess a lot of differences.
- Q: Is he an educated man? Is he a college graduate?
- A: He is a college graduate but has a little bit more, he likes to talk about himself in a way that everything he does is good, and I don't like that part of him.
- Q: Well but you think it is an easy thing, crossing cultures plus you are crossing classes. In other words, you are...
- A: That's true.
- Q: So you're from a very educated, aristocratic family. I'm wondering whether you're American or Cambodian, how difficult it would be for you, for an American to understand our background. Do you feel he appreciated your father, your family? Was he interested in Cambodian culture and your history?
- A: He's not interested, that's why I found out kind of late. He was a very nice person before our marriage, but turned out to be uninterested in Cambodian language, he didn't want me to speak to my son in Cambodian at home.
- Q: Oh I see, I see.
- A: He said he didn't want to do all of those things because he said, "You are Cambodian, if you speak Cambodian to Jonathan (that is our son) then he's not going to be able to study English." And I said, "Well he's been in school all day long already, and he speaks to you in English, so I have to speak Cambodian so he can learn about our language."
- Q: Does your son speak Cambodian? Did you teach him?
- A: Right now because we have been separated for two years and my son is living with my husband, he probably lost a little bit, but I used to speak with him and he was taking the prayer. When I got married I speak in Cambodian.
- Q: Sure, sure. How old is your son now?
- A: He is twelve.
- Q: He is twelve. So as you look towards your third husband, what would you be looking for?
- A: I would be looking to just be independent in my life.
- Q: Independent.

A: Independent. I'm not looking for...

Q: Love. You are not looking for love.

A: No. I think I would. I feel I am old enough now and I don't want to be engaged in another relationship that I have to learn to know another person all over and adjust to another person.

Q: Right, right.

A: I am finished.

Q: Well a lot of Cambodian women I know, they enjoy being single because they feel the man oppressed them in some way, like they were slaves. They like freedom. Does this make any sense to you?

A: Yeah, I do feel the same way. I like the freedom of being single because it's hard to understand each other if you get married, again with a person from a different class. Maybe America does not feel the same or whatever, but it's hard with different backgrounds.

Q: That is true.

A: And then you have to learn, especially in the Cambodian way, when you go out into society, you have to have certain manners, and then when you talk and if you bring some people that don't know how to talk it is going to be really hard.

Q: Yes, if they brag and stuff.

A: Yeah, Americans may be more accepting because of the fact that you are different, but still it's not...

Q: So would you consider a Cambodian man again if you could find the right one?

A: Well this is kind of speculation. I don't want to be with a man period right now.

Q: Sure.

A: But if I had to speculate, I would want to be with an American man or somebody different from my own background.

Q: Why is that?

A: It's the fact that I cannot find anybody older than me that would be educated or maybe understandable...

Q: Sure, sure.

A: I would probably have someone of a different background and that would be real hard. I would prefer different if I were to marry again.

Q: Sure, sure.

A: It's just a speculation but that is my feeling. I'd prefer to have somebody different.

Q: And it definitely would be difficult to find a Cambodian man around your age who came from the same social class. There aren't too many in this country.

A: Very few and they are already married.

Q: Sure, that's right. But there are plenty of very educated, very nice American men, very respectable, don't you think?

A: I would think so. It's not that everybody is bad, it's just that you come to a certain period of your life that it is scary to be involved again.

(Conversation ends here- new conversation starts up.)

Q: It's a life story, so you're going to tell us about...

A: For some reason he likes it and I don't know why he likes that, but all of the children have three, my brother's name is *Chak Riya* and my younger sister is *Olary, Lichhavy, Sirirak* and mine is Santa, I only have two. I said I don't like it. But everytime.

Q: He liked that name.

A: He liked that name for some reason and he said every time I had a baby, name your baby your name. I said I don't like it, and every time he would choose a name that is similar to mine.

Q: Is that right?

A: Santa something. Santa something. But I never chose it. I refused to use that name, and for some reason, he didn't tell me, but he probably thinks it's the best one.

Q: And it means peace.

A: It means peace.

- Q: In Sanskrit. And your father was in love with that name.
- A: I was so very disappointed because I only got two consonants, like the Santa, and I don't like it. I want to have three like everybody else.
- Q: Now do you like your name?
- A: Still not. People ask me, do you like it, do you want to change your name? I say no, I don't want to change my name, I think it is easy.
- Q: It's a beautiful name and it is very special. So your father, ever since you were a child, he loved your name?
- A: He loved it.
- Q: Maybe he loved his daughter. Maybe you were his special daughter, what do you think?
- A: Maybe, but he never showed it in any other way.
- Q: Men are like that. Maybe instead of saying, "I love you, you are my special daughter," he was saying, "I love Santa."
- A: I love Santa.
- Q: My favorite name in the whole world.
- A: And I can't...
- Q: What do you think of my theory?
- A: I think it is a good theory, and in Cambodian tradition, when you have a baby you have to name it according to the day he or she was born, so the letter of the day is different. And he chose my name anyway, which is for Tuesday, but even though I was born on Wednesday or Friday or Saturday, he still found a way to use my name that would be if I was born on Tuesday. So it is really different. Every time he chose a name, Santa something, and I didn't choose it, he was kind of disappointed.
- Q: He was disappointed. It's a very nice story. So all of your children are named Santa?
- A: No.
- Q: Are any named Santa?

A: No, because I didn't...

Q: You rebelled against your father.

A: I rebelled...

Q: Well probably because you wanted to be the only Santa. Maybe you didn't rebel because you wanted to be special.

A: No, I didn't want to be special. I thought that I was not special, that is why I was given a name differently than the other children.

Q: It's a very nice story. See what fun it is to do this oral history.

Q: Today we would like to continue on interview number 2 and we would like to talk about the wedding ceremony.

A: The wedding ceremony. It is something special. I don't know, it's a little bit special from all the regular weddings because we had a lot of preparation and the way we had it and the clothing was also different. I had special traditional clothes that were made especially for that event. My mom made sure that both girls, my sister and I, had special new sets of traditional wedding clothes. Usually people borrow from each other or rent them, but this was kind of special. She made it different colors for my sister and I, and then the *sbaiy*, I don't know how you call it; it is like a scarf that we wrap around. It is specially made, hand made, about a year before that. I don't know why she wanted to so long before, maybe to plan ahead of time. The skirt was also already chosen in a different color, a special gold color and then a special thing is that we are not supposed to wear green because it is a bad luck color. So it was not green. But somehow my evening dress had a little bit of green too. I don't know why, she chose it so I had no...

Q: Did it worry you that the dress was green?

A: No, it didn't bother me because I was not superstitious, but somehow the old people were talking about it...

Q: Oh, the older people were worried?

A: Worried and yet they chose something to worry about. So for me, I don't care. It's just a thought, that if you are worried then why give it to me? That is so simple.

Q: Why did they give it to you?

- A: Yeah, why give it to me?
- Q: If it was bad luck...
- A: It was bad luck, yeah.
- Q: Why did you think they gave it to you then?
- A: I don't know...
- Q: You don't know?
- A: I don't know. I was still too young to know or maybe just kind of passive.
- Q: Passive. But for an American listening to the story, what would you look like? Most Americans have seen the traditional ballet dancers. Was it like a ballet? Did you have a crown?
- A: No, no crown, just jewelry, but the jewelry was also in gold. It is just simple; maybe for *Svang* it was different. Usually they don't use real gold, it is just the color of gold but it is not the real gold, and for me it is old gold.
- Q: For you it was real gold?
- A: Real gold.
- Q: For you it was just gold.
- A: Yes.
- Q: When I go to Cambodian weddings in this country, the woman usually has five or six different dresses she is wearing. Did you have to change clothes constantly?
- A: No, just for one set of clothes to have a haircut and one set for the traditional ceremony with the monk. Then we went into the palace, the royal palace, to have a benediction from the king and queen and I had an evening dress that is all. Simple, simple. Sometimes here and there there was something extra, that's all, but it was not really necessary. The wedding itself was also special in a way that all the *Boku* was the master of ceremony from the royal palace. He did *Plum Saing*, some kind of special blowing shell, it is a special ceremony just for the royal family.
- Q: A blowing shell, what is that?
- A: It's a shell, it is the shape of a big shell, you know the shell, right?

Q: Yes.

A: And they have some kind of hole...

Q: Oh, I see, it is a seashell.

A: A seashell...

Q: A seashell.

A: And then they blow it...

Q: They blow it.

A: They blow it. It's just special, like a certain set after the monk gives the benediction they blow it and after the ceremony of offering they blow it. Also they have to do some sort of pouring of water on the hands, for a special benediction. Do you do that too, no?

Q: No, no, not really. We only use the string to tie...

A: That is only the string to tie but before that is the blowing...

Q: Of the water?

A: Water, the water. And then that is one part. When we went to the palace after the presentation to the king and queen, we were married as a royal family, she knew us anyway but it was just regal stuff, we were formally married and then after that the king and queen came up to the couple, myself and my husband, and poured the water on us again and then gave us flowers, small roses, that you can take out and ...

Q: Like a blessing.

A: A blessing, yeah, over your head and on my husband's head and on my head.

Q: Did you know the king and queen very well? Had you met them before?

A: Just normal life before. But it was kind of special a time, and after that we came down and signed in the royal register our wedding certificate. It has to be registered in the palace, so we did that.

Q: Is that palace still in *Phnom Penh*?

A: It is still there, yeah. So I don't know what else I can remember about that. I was a special time; there were so many things.

- Q: Now the custom, it was a two- week wedding, you had a lot of celebration.
- A: We had celebration before that.
- Q: Oh, before the wedding. I see. So like the puppet plays, theater and movies for the people in the town.
- A: Yeah, for the people.
- Q: And would the people give you gifts? Do they give gifts?
- A: Oh the gifts! Thank you for reminding me. There were so many gifts, big roomful of gifts that you don't know what it is. The whole room was filled with gifts, big boxes, small boxes, whatever. There were so many.
- Q: In other words, just from you...
- A: It takes a long time.
- Q: Was it from the people or from your family or from everyone?
- A: From everyone, my father's acquaintances and people he used to work with that like him. Everybody.
- Q: Did the American ambassador come to your wedding?
- A: Yes.
- Q: Who was the ambassador at the time?
- A: I don't know.
- Q: You don't remember, but he came to the wedding?
- A: All the ambassadors, all the foreign people that were stationed in Cambodia came.
- Q: It was a big wedding. It was a big event. And did you understand what was going on as a sixteen- year- old woman? Did you appreciate it?
- A: I didn't appreciate it, to tell you the truth. It just did not matter to me how they did it. It was so big to me because I was a young girl and I saw so many people at one time and there was so much attention given to me.
- Q: Now was there a proper behavior that you had to have towards the guests or your father's friends or the king? I mean, did you have to be extra polite? How much could you say to these people?

- A: I think because my husband was in the royal family we would get more politeness from other people that come and wish us luck. So it was just being there and greeting, saying thanks to all the people that came.
- Q: So you had this great event and then you had to go off with your husband and be married. Was that a letdown, in the sense that all of a sudden, after you have this huge ceremony you are a married woman? Was that a shock to you in some way?
- A: It was a really big shock for me. I don't think I was ready for love or anything. I didn't understand. It just happened to be there and then to be married, it is a shock.
- Q: What was the most shocking thing about it?
- A: I think the most shocking thing, probably I am old now and I can say it, but it was kind of uncomfortable to have a sex life that I didn't know about. I told someone in Cambodia yesterday that it was like what here you call abuse.
- Q: Sex abuse?
- A: No, no. It's not, I don't know. I found a word yesterday, but I can't find it now.
- Q: Well to go from being a pure virgin to all of a sudden having sex and not knowing about sex, was that shocking to you?
- A: It's a shock; one day you are a virgin, the other day you have to make love to your husband. To make love and then be hurt in a way that I don't want to be, it is just like an invasion.
- Q: You had no preparation?
- A: No.
- Q: No one taught you? Your mother didn't teach you about sex?
- A: It was not even talked about, how you are going to be, they just leave you in a room with the husband and then...
- Q: But in the Cambodian culture, I don't know how it is in the royal family, but is it assumed that the woman will serve the husband's sexual needs completely? In other words, are you like a servant, not a servant, but are you supposed to give whatever the husband wants?
- A: I think that is assumed. It is assumed and most of the time, at the end of the wedding day, you had to submit to your husband.

Q: You have to submit?

A: Yeah.

Q: But basically you go from being completely inexperienced, knowing nothing about sexual relationships and all of a sudden you have to submit. That must have been a shock to you, right?

A: I feel, I don't really know what the right word is to describe it, but I feel not clean or not really joyful to have a husband.

Q: I see. Who taught you that you have to be submissive to your husband? How did you know that? How does the Cambodian woman know that?

A: It is not that anybody taught or said anything openly about it, but I guess maybe just from so many years of traditional kinds of girls that marry so young.

Q: But do you think looking back, now that you are older, you live in another country, you had another marriage; do you think that the sexual relationship that you understood was mostly a relationship of having a baby? Is it mostly a relationship of a woman submitting to the man's needs or do you think that there is a highly refined sense of love and affection in the sexual relationship of men and women? I mean, that's not sex, it's a relationship.

A: It's just a relationship, to have a baby, just to be a mother, to continue the family tree.

Q: So the man doesn't think that this is my beautiful, young wife and I'll be very sensitive to her? They don't think that way?

A: I don't think in my case.

Q: You don't think there was a sensitivity?

A: Yeah, yea. In my case, maybe somebody else has a different experience, but I don't have a good experience with that.

Q: So you didn't feel that consideration or sensitivity to you as a young woman entered the picture. In other words, that had nothing to do with the relationship at that time?

A: I cannot understand.

Q: In other words, you can either say, a man can say this is my lovely young wife, she is very young, she is not experienced sexually, I have to be very sensitive. Or you can just say, I have my needs.

A: That's the way I feel.

Q: That is how you experienced it. That the man had his needs.

A: That he had his need.

Q: I see. Do you think in an arranged marriage this is common or do you think there is a change over time? Do you think there are Cambodian men who are very sensitive to women in this way?

A: Well some of my friends, sometimes you talk about these experiences between women to see if the same thing happened. But it's not true. Some people are very sensitive to the wife...

Q: Some are?

A: Some are and they wait until the wife is ready or accepting of the situation. Like the case of my cousin, she married after me. She is older but she married after me and she talked about that, that her husband didn't force her into having sex the day of the marriage.

Q: I see, he waited.

A: Yeah, he waited. So it was different. So I cannot say it is the same with everybody.

Q: Do you feel that, not that this one event, but did you feel that in some ways it disappointed you as a woman to have a situation where, so young, to start it so young, a situation where a man wasn't very sensitive to you? Do you think that's been a disappointment to you?

A: It's been a disappointment, yeah, in a lot of ways. It's just like, do it and not thinking about anything else. It's just very disappointing.

Q: Because I am wondering... what you are really saying is a very interesting thing from a man listening to it, how much, how little men are taught to be sensitive to the woman sexually. I mean, this is not, even in American culture, I don't think it is common for the father or mother to teach the boy to be sensitive, to be compassionate. I don't think this is even common in this culture. It's interesting. You wonder how people learn these things.

A: I really don't know. He was, from what I know... after my marriage I learned that my husband, because his mom remarried two more times, so she has three husbands all together and my husband is the one that is the oldest one of the first marriage, or not marriage, she was the king's concubine or something like that.

Q: Concubine, that's right.

A: It's not a marriage, so although the King loved her because she was still young, at the time she was seventeen or eighteen years old, but she didn't love him. It was because she was living in the royal palace that he chose her to be and so she had my husband, and from the family I heard that she didn't like him very much either.

Q: I see, she didn't like the husband.

A: Because she didn't like the King because she was so young and the King was sixty- three years old and she was only eighteen, seventeen, eighteen years old.

Q: So this is your husband's mother, she was a concubine of the King?

A: Yes.

Q: I see. So he had a very young mother.

A: Very young mother and then after that when the King died, she left him with a lot with the grandparents and so he didn't have a very close relationship with her either. I don't think, because then she remarried one more time and had another daughter, and then she remarried again and had four children, but I think the last marriage was a very true marriage for her, because although her husband left her with four children and had another wife, she was still going with him. So, I thought that was her love and that's why she didn't separate.

Q: Well, do you think now, looking back, that there is a possibility that a woman can have a true love, find a man that they really...

A: I think that's a possibility, yeah, I think, but I don't know from experience yet because of so many... but, maybe I am afraid to experience, but...

Q: You think it is possible.

A: I think it is possible. I am sure that it is possible. It's just the way that you want to release yourself to experience the feeling again and to try again, but I don't think I am ready.

Q: You don't think you are ready?

A: No.

Q: Well are there stories in Cambodian culture about true love? I mean, are there, for instance, many young girls in this country, and boys, who read these romantic novels. American kids read a lot of stories. When you were growing up were there romantic stories, like the classic French stories? I think it is French, about the frog and the princess, there's always the princess who finds someone who is really ugly but the frog turns into the prince. She kisses the frog...

A: And he becomes a prince.

Q: Yeah, do you think you'll ever find your frog?

A: I'm not looking. All my friends ask me that.

Q: You're not looking?

A: Yeah, I said I am not looking so I don't know.

Q: But when you were sixteen years old did you have a romantic notion?

A: I don't read a lot of romances. I don't like it although...

Q: You didn't like romances?

A: I don't like romances.

Q: Why is that?

A: I like more mystery works, fiction; it's more action type books that I read. In fact the book that I share, that my husband and I shared, because we used to get from the library a big stack of books like that all the time, and I would finish in one week maybe ten or twenty books because I read one a day. And then my husband, sometimes when he liked something and he wanted to read it would be like, who reads first, and in that way, I think we had similar traits in reading.

Q: So you never liked the romantic sort of novel?

A: No.

Q: It doesn't appeal to you?

A: It doesn't appeal. When I saw a Cambodian book, a romance book that the cover said love or something, I didn't like to read it. Not because of any hold back or fear, but because I don't think its true really. It's not true what is written.

Q: I see. So these romantic novels, since you were young you knew they were not true.

A: Not young, young but I read... I didn't have that distinction during the time of my marriage because I was still so young to read a lot of books, but I knew my preferences, that I liked certain things better than others.

Q: When in a young woman like yourself does a sense of identity emerge as a princess? I mean at what point do you think you finally said, I'm different than the average Cambodian. I am a princess and this means... I don't know what it meant to you but it may mean a lot of things about how to live your life, about your responsibility to society. I mean, clearly your father was a man who, knowing who he was, took his responsibility to his country as very important, that was a very important part of his identity, right? He felt a deep commitment to the Cambodian people. So in your particular case did it ever emerge that you felt you had a special commitment or that you had to do something special for the people or that you had a role to play in Cambodian society? Did this ever come into your mind?

A: I didn't feel that way because it was kind of natural from the young age that I had people around me all the time and respect, you know, a lot of respect from other people as I grew up and married and all that, but I felt like something is missing in me, like I want to do more, but I don't know what.

Q: I see. But as you look back you didn't have a sense that you were special when you were younger and living in Cambodia?

A: No, I didn't have that sense of special thing.

Q: Why do you think that is?

A: It was just an environment that I lived...

Q: It was normal so you didn't think you were different?

A: Yeah.

Q: Do you think that now in your life, do you feel that because of your personal history, your family's history that there is something special that you can do for your people?

A: So much, and I don't. I realize that I feel that way. Sometimes I tell myself that I am a woman, I may not be able to do it late in life like this, not like at the age of thirty or something. I would have more contribution but I feel like I live life already, but I have a sense of responsibility...

Q: You have a sense of responsibility.

A: Towards my country. A sense that, looking back I'm the only one who feels more like walking towards my father's path in a way, like I have the same commitment that he had and the same sense of honesty and hard work. I don't know what else, in so many things that, I look at his quality and his sense that in the family, because he had contributed so much to the country and none of the children would continue his work, at least. I feel that. I feel that I need to keep that work for him.

Q: So how are you going to do this? Do you have any idea? You may be doing it already. How will you continue the work of your father?

A: I have lots of ideas, my contribution to my work right now and my involvement in a lot of social programs that we have. Back in California I have a lot of contact with the people. A lot of people know me. I don't have big figures because over there I don't have any programs that I run for my self or anything like that, but I get invited to a lot of conferences to speak, and people still want to get me for things, but they hesitate to get me involved because of my background as a princess.

Q: Why is that?

A: I think for them it's like the feeling that you have to associate with a princess during the democracy time after the Communist time when all of the royal family was down. It's not appropriate I think.

Q: Oh, I see. They are afraid to associate with you because politically it may be dangerous.

A: Yeah, it may be dangerous. But for me I don't feel that way. I thought about that. A lot of people I knew didn't want to talk to me again in the same way that they used to talk to me, I mean professional that I used to know. But I said I cannot regret my birth, because I was born the way I was born and I have something to contribute like other people too and I have to really emerge as a person and not as a princess.

Q: Sure. But I would imagine two things would be going on. First of all a lot of people may also use the fall of your family, they may think, these people think they are important, but now they are not important; so they may not be abusive, but they may take advantage of the situation too. Have you ever had that situation, where they don't want to think of you the way they used to, where now they feel they have some power; they may feel that in respecting your background they may lose the power, right?

A: That's right.

Q: Is that true.

A: Yes, it is true.

Q: But then there are a lot of other people who may, I would imagine, also be afraid that you may gain power because of your family. So both.

A: Both ways.

Q: So how do you deal with that? I mean in a sense that is hard. You can either withdraw and say I don't want anything to do with politics or you can emerge as a new person.

A: I can deal with it as it comes along, especially like I have become a lot wiser and I know what step I can take, and I look based on my decision and my wisdom to approach things in a different way, and not in a negative way, or to come out too strong or whatever. But I am not afraid to withdraw because I don't think that is the right way to deal.

Q: Withdrawing you don't think is the right way?

A: No.

- Q: But would you say that over the past few years that you have had to withdraw a little bit, since the war? I mean, have you had to go into yourself a little but as a response to the war?
- A: Yes, a lot, because it is hard. During that time, back at that time I think didn't feel comfortable being known as a princess. I think I just wanted to have my name vanished somewhere because it is not a very good thing to live around people. They just want to put you down, or talk badly about you, about your family, which really hurts, so that was a period of time that I stayed away.
- Q: And why would they want to talk against your family?
- A: It's mostly associated with *Sihanouk*, everybody that associated with *Sihanouk* and knew royal family were the people that put the country down, that brought disaster to the country, because he committed treason, didn't like the people, got the people killed, so he himself was doing it, but we suffered too.
- Q: Yes. Although your father was different. He was very different. But the people cannot distinguish.
- A: I think people still recognize him but they didn't talk about it at the time very much, although amongst themselves they mostly knew that he was different.
- Q: Well it's interesting too, I mean, do you feel in a way that your family can fade from history at this point? Have you ever thought that? If you are not involved, if you and your brothers and sisters are not involved in what's going on now do you feel your family tradition will just eventually disappear?
- A: It probably would disappear and with time, because mostly people now in the country are new, new generation, not many people remember what happened, like a specific person, like my father, like somebody that worked hard for the country. They probably don't remember that, but they remember other big events, like killing and things like that.
- Q: Sure, sure.
- A: And I think that it is not really that I want to bring the history back, but it is just like a commitment as a person, a Cambodian person to the country. It is like a sense of responsibility to do something. I don't care if the history comes back and says, you know you are the daughter of this and this and you try to keep your family line up or something. No, I don't think that way.
- Q: You don't think that way?

- A: No. I don't think that way. But I think that I don't know how I can put this... I don't think I want to bring my father's name up so the people can remember him, like he used to be this and that. But somehow in myself I want to keep his work, at least somebody is still working for the nation, for the people. I cannot put it, maybe it is kind of confusing to me.
- Q: But I mean, you are in a very important historical situation because in terms of the tradition of your family, if you don't do it, who will? Will your brother do it? Or your other sisters? I mean who is going to carry on the tradition of your father?
- A: Nobody.
- Q: Your brother, what about your brother, he's been working...
- A: My brother is working with *Sihanouk* for a long time but I don't think he is carrying on my father's work, in the sense of working for the good of the country. He just stays on the side that is winning. So he's on the side so if he goes to the right, he goes to the right, if he goes to the left, he goes to the left. But I feel a little bit different because I feel that what is right I want to keep, no matter what.
- Q: No matter what faction.
- A: Yeah, I don't worry about who does that, says things, but...
- Q: So how will you do this? How do you plan, how do you see the immediate future?
- A: Immediate future? I will work step by step whatever opportunity I have to really show my work and then help the people to understand what life is and to teach them how to respect themselves people and not just going with the situation of the country. For example, a farmer does not understand that he has some kind of qualities besides just going to the field and bringing in the rice, but as a person.
- Q: That is very interesting.
- A: Yeah, so that is the goal of my work.
- Q: You want to teach each Cambodian person to appreciate their value?
- A: The value of their life, of themselves.
- Q: And you think they lost this?
- A: I think they lost this because...
- Q: How was it lost?

- A: Because of this whole submissive, they are being told to do things and they are being told to do this and that, just doing whatever these people say and they are making plans for them. They don't, and then that is a part of not having an education, that is very important and when you don't have an education you just cannot think of yourself as a person.
- Q: And do you think that you partly learned this, having to be submissive and passive yourself as a young woman, maybe you learned this yourself.
- A: I learned it from my own experience and I can tell, I never hide my experiences from other people. I told *Svang*, everybody knows about my situation with my husband, my first husband, my second husband, because I think people appreciate what you are going through instead of looking down at you, because then you speak about experience, real experience.
- Q: Do you think there is any fear, do you have any fear that the Cambodian people, the Cambodian nation is going to lose its special identity, the good things about it?
- A: I feel a lot, yeah.
- Q: What are your fears?
- A: It's just the way that the government didn't really care about the people, the old people. This is more maybe about politics and this can be a long way of work or maybe people may not realize it when I die, it is still a long way. But I think that the people just think about how to set it up in a big hierarchy, without thinking about not looking down on how the people live, like not building from the bottom up. That's the way I feel.
- Q: Well let me ask you a tough question. We saw this in the refugee camps and it became very shocking to us, not matter what faction you are looking at, not just at the *Khmer Rouge*, most of the abuse of the Cambodian people, the men, women and children in the camps, was by the Cambodians on the Cambodians, not by Thais or other people. I found this shocking. How do you understand this? I mean why, there seems to be very little love or appreciation of the average person, the common people. Do you understand this? How do you think the Cambodian nation got to the point where you have the power structure in a way that does this to the people? There was raping, there was rape in the camps. These are Cambodians on Cambodians. How do you understand this change?
- A: I think the changes have a lot of factors before that. It doesn't just happen that the people become violent or become abusive. You know previously, under *Sihanouk*, there was also a lot of corruption, even before the Communists took over, and that is why they were so eager to have the *Khmer Rouge* come in to the

country to change something that was already bad. But it didn't happen, so when they came they killed a lot of people and that made them lose a lot of trust with the people, so they suspected each other. They just want to think about themselves, the image at least, their only interest was in what they can get. They lost a sense of being a person.

Q: Do you see with the *Khmer Rouge* group as more of the same? Were they different from the earlier period or... The whole thing that has been very hard for me to understand, whether it's in the past, the present or in the concentration camps in the country that there is the Cambodian exploiting the Cambodian, hurting the Cambodian.

A: Well, it came gradually. It had already been started in that way, a lot of frustration. I think maybe *Svang* can remember too in the time that she worked. She is a professional and I stay home so she has more frustration than me being a working person and having to survive and take care of the family by bringing home something. It is gradually coming out that people just exploit each other; just think about bribery and all that. There are not many honest people anymore...

Q: There aren't many honest people?

A: No, not honest. And I'd like to bring that back, through the work, through the understanding, through education. The *Khmer Rouge* didn't want the people to go out and have an education outside the country. He wanted them to only learn Cambodian, like he told the people that already had professions to go back in the field and work in the field and just give up their profession, and he wanted to have the people learning just the Cambodian language. Some people were, at the time, really thankful to him because all the people could learn something that they didn't know before. It was good. But the bad thing is there was no advancement.

Q: No advancement?

A: Yeah, no advance to the country, no contribution. It's like going back, stepping backwards.

Q: Right, right. Do you think there is a possibility that the Cambodians are threatened by losing their identity, losing their traditions, their good traditions as Cambodians?

A: Very much.

Q: Why do you think that?

A: Because nobody is going to keep up any good traditions anymore, just with the confusion with all the involvement from everybody else, like the *Khmer Rouge*,

and I hope maybe you don't put... because I don't want... But it is like an explanation, like so much involvement, so many factions.

Q: Sure, sure.

A: And so it is going to be lost because they try to bring something different to the country, not keeping up...

Q: What about religion? People say that in every village people are trying to bring back the pagoda, no matter how poor they are. Do you think religion needs to change?

A: I think the religion is also reformed too much.

Q: I don't know, maybe I got a different idea from *Svang*, but I think that we got to the point of more passive attitudes towards religion. We just sit there and then get the offering, especially the monks and then the people. The truth, religion is also about honesty, but nobody wants to say it is the truth. I cannot say the people are going to kill me if I don't speak out the way I know many thousands of Cambodians feel. But I feel that the religion says, being a monk is to spread the good teaching. There is tradition. I don't know much about Buddhism, but there seems to be one type of Buddhism where the monks are very active in public life, social life and they are based on Buddha. But then there is another one where they are very much in the temple and they do not go out. I think it's not just that they have never been told, I think it's just observance of old tradition that the monk has to be in a temple and have a reserved attitude and not be very contributing to the country. I think the monk can also contribute in his own way to the country by teaching, teaching the good, at least maybe going to the house and teaching the recitation of Sutra. Not many people know that they don't have to think so much about their offering, because some people cannot afford it, but they still want to because they have a bad life already, so by having the feeling of offering, they feel that something good is going to happen, but it doesn't always happen right away for these people.

Q: The other thing is, Japanese monks were telling me that the priests, the Buddhist priest that was criticizing the government recently, was murdered by government troops. I found this very disturbing to hear because how can... another Buddhist, Cambodian Buddhist monk told me that the same thing, that the Buddhist monk is involved in the society and trying to get people to do the right thing. They have a lot of people that want to kill them.

A: I don't think so.

Q: You don't think so?

A: I don't think... because this has never happened before, the teaching of going out. I don't know in the village or something like that, but most of the time, as I know, growing up until now, 51 years old already, I see more reserved attitudes towards teaching.

Q: You think the Buddhist monk could be more active, it wouldn't be dangerous?

A: No, I think it wouldn't be dangerous as a group to do something. At least it is a contribution in the sense that it is not a bad thing to teach people to find themselves, in addition to education. To contribute to the society is a Buddhist teaching also, but nobody thinks about it that way.

Q: Now take your situation; do you think if you are more active that there is more danger for you because of your family background or your views? Could you go to Cambodia now and honestly express what you think?

A: I cannot express like that, but I can through my work. It has come to the wisdom side of me that you can do something and you don't have to talk too much about it.

Q: Probably smart.

A: I think to show it through my work is enough.

Q: But do you see yourself doing humanitarian work or political work or cultural work or educational work, I mean where would you like to put your energy?

A: I like to put my energy most in the education. I was thinking about that but I think humanitarian is the primary before you get to that.

Q: Now you are a specialist in mental health, right? You have a background in mental health; do you see any role for yourself in helping with the mental health situation in Cambodia? First of all what would be your focus?

A: My focus. Well I don't know Cambodia right now with the present situation at home. I don't know how destitute they are, I just heard about how people leave and I get frustrated like everybody, but I am not seeing what happened with my own eyes. If I got to work I think my approach would be more humanistic, to maybe organize, to teach people to organize their lives and then just to look at themselves to see what skill they have in themselves to offer, because everyone has something to offer.

Q: Sure, sure.

- A: And then I will work on a different part of a person, what they really need to add to their lives that they are missing. That is my feeling, a thought, but I don't know.
- Q: Well, it's a very important, it's a very interesting philosophy. Do you feel now that you are in a good political situation where you could do your humanitarian work if you wanted to, do you feel ready?
- A: I feel ready. In fact, I put a resignation last year to go back to Cambodia, and this was interesting, maybe you should know a little bit about it. It's more political I think. When *Sihanouk* went back to Cambodia and set everything up, I thought maybe I could contribute in some way because of my background of royal family. I wanted to work on his side, rather than the other side. But somehow indirectly his son, the Prince, already wrote to me that he welcomes my coming to work with him; and I was ready, ready to resign, put out my letters and everything, but then *Sihanouk* changed a little bit of the policy of the royal family. He said that the people who were working under the *Lon Nol* regime are friends of the Princess or whatever, and they would not be part of the royal family to him. So the title...
- Q: I see.
- A: But that was his way of revenge, anger towards the old regime.
- Q: Well he seems to change his mind a lot.
- A: He changes a lot.
- Q: You never know what he will think tomorrow.
- A: But I, it does not stop me, but it stopped me from going right then and there, but...
- Q: I see. Slowly.
- A: But it does not stop me from going back in the future in some other way, because I think that this is a factor of life and I don't want to be there to be a princess. It's not my way. I want to be there as a person contributing to the country, just like other people that are doing that.
- Q: And do you think they would allow you, do you think they would always think that you were a princess or do you think they could accept you as just yourself?
- A: They can accept me as a person, I am sure, but I can use my title to do something else for personal contact, that is what I think.

- Q: Well, but you are sort of in a tricky situation, because on one hand you are a princess, because of your father's history, there is still a lot of feelings about that, but on the other hand it also gives you power. It gives you some power and influence, so it is a delicate situation.
- A: Delicate situation. There are a lot of people that know my father and like him, and I think for my part I just show what I have, my skill as a person, instead of remembering whose daughter I am. That is not the right thing.
- Q: Well you have to prove your own confidence. In other words, you are not just a title, you are not just a princess.
- A: Not a title.
- Q: Sure.
- A: Well that is how I feel more confident in myself, more secure in a way, to speak out. For me, my personality emerged late in life.
- Q: Sure. It emerged late in life.
- A: It was late life.
- Q: Sure.
- A: Sometimes I wonder how long I am going to live. I am sixty years old, but I had a fortune teller, this is something aside, a Chinese fortune teller told me that I would live to be ninety- six years old. I said, "how so long?" So I pray that my memory does not go wrong. At least I have something to give before I die.
- Q: Well you have a lot of work ahead of you.
- A: I don't want to get crazy or get confused before that, but I am excited too. I don't really have a big goal, like reaching out to thousands of people or something, because I am content with each and every person that I touch, you know, it's more important. It's not a big scale of dreaming, it is realistic. Every house, all the people I talk to I would want to give the best. So what else? It's a good feeling.
- Q: It's a good feeling, sure. You're ready. It sounds like you are ready to do something.
- A: I'm ready. I just have to find a way. So it's really nice to go back. I really feel a lot of anxiety about how much I can see, to be faced with my home, my father's home and all that, but I heard from my brother, he told me that we cannot even go near the place where my father used to live. My house is just in front of his, like we kind of looked into each other.

Q: You couldn't go... why is that?

A: I think the big guys live there now, which is good. You know, I try to tell myself sometimes, this is crazy, but it's like an angel sent somebody to live there to take care of the house instead of just leaving it to have weeds growing, nobody to take care of it. Maybe it is something good, somebody that is really big in the government that knows how to live and knows how to take care of the house and keep the house up. We may not have it, but that is a good feeling.

Q: *Svang*, do you have any questions?
Yeah, Do you plan to arrange marriages for your children?

A: No, no, my mom is here and she wants very much to arrange the marriages for my children, especially my daughter. She tried to arrange that when my oldest daughter turned 17 that she had somebody. She told me, "oh, so and so wanted to look at your daughter and he has good status, a home and a good job and all that, a secure life." But I said, "no, I want her to study more and want her to be able to choose," which I did, I kept my promise to myself that the happiness of my children is more important than the place that I have, towards some kind of relationship before marriage. And my daughter chose her own husband. He is from Thailand. He didn't have a high position, high professional job or anything, he is just the manager of a Jack in the Box, but he has been working there for a long time and has good benefits and all, and they saved money and bought a house, which is good. I think that she is happy with him. And my second daughter chose her own husband. He is from Japan. I have all kinds of people around me. He has a very nice family, very nice. I told my boys too, I don't care if it's black, I don't care if it's Mexican, I don't care if it's white. As long as you are happy with that person and you want to get married, I will help you in your marriage, because in our tradition the family has to help in some way with money or other arrangements and that's my part, to have the children happy. In fact, in my prayer, I pray every morning and evening, that my children will have a good life, will have happiness and will have a good education, and in the future will be good children to contribute to the society, a good person for the society.

Q: Did you teach your daughters about relationships that you missed in your...

A: I talked about that, yes.

Q: Before they were married you also talked to them about...

A: But they came here at an early age, early teens, so they have been in high school and sexual education was taught, so they knew.

Q: So they knew?

A: They knew. But I talk freely to my children about things like AIDS.

Q: AIDS, yes.

A: I have a nineteen year old son who needs to out and do things too and I told him, "You are free to do whatever, that is a part of a man's life, to have an experience, but whatever experience you have, think about yourself first. You don't have a job so you cannot have a baby or have a consistent relationship because you are not going to get anywhere without an education. It's okay to bring your girlfriend home." I told him that it is okay so at least the parents can know what kind of person you are associating with and we can tell you from our experience. It's not that we don't want you to be happy but as older people we know what kind of person you associate with. It's okay to bring them home and also to protect yourself and to go on with your education, you have a long life before you. You don't have to rush right now and back a good decision about your marriage. So I am talking freely with my kids.

Q: Is it helping, do you think?

A: it is helping, yes, it is helping. I feel that it is a responsibility as a mother to teach your children what they don't know and not to hold back.

Q: Yes.

A: Like Jonathan, he is only thirteen years old and he said, "Mommy I am going to ask Daddy, I want to go see the high school dance that they have on the weekend." I said, "Oh Jonathan, you want to dance already? You are only thirteen years old." He said, "Oh just watch." I said, "You have a girlfriend? Somebody you like to dance with?" "No, I just like watching the girls dance between themselves." So I don't talk too much about it until he says something because I don't want to impose myself when he is not ready.

Interview 10 - Part 3

Q: This is the third interview. Now this interview is a little bit different. It will be a little bit different for you because we might get a background of life just starting during the *Pol Pot* situation. So what I would like you to do is if you could develop your own personal history from up until the Communists took over during the *Khmer Rouge* period. We could start out with your history and then talk about your family's history because you weren't in the country at the time, but still, we want to know what happened. So basically, this is the question I want to start off with: When the Communists took over the country in April of 1975, do you know what they did to the people, I mean did you have any idea of what went on?

A: Yes, through the news. I was in France and then it started, the presence of the Communists, not so in the country when I was inside but when I was outside the danger was more imminent. You just don't see it that way when you are inside.

Q: Why is that?

A: It's a lot more news that you hear, a lot of talk, it is constantly in the news, the talking about Americans preparing to leave Vietnam and Cambodia, that there is nothing more to do there, and about the troops and all that. It's just constant talk over the radio and on TV programs. I had just left *Phnom Penh* on the seventh of March and my leaving Cambodia also was very difficult at the time, because I was supposed to go to France with Air France, and usually the planes leaving Cambodia go directly to France, but it couldn't because of the rockets. The Air France flight didn't land so I had to change my schedule to leave Cambodia in some other way, and at the time I didn't know how I could leave to get to catch the train in Bangkok, and with my three children. Everybody was so fearful because *Pochentong* Airport was bombed so much at one point. I had a friend who was an *attaché* military in Bangkok. He came to visit *Phnom Penh* and he said "oh I am going back to Bangkok today on a cargo plane." It was not comfortable because you have to sit on the side, like a...

Q: Sure, sure.

A: So you know that was the only seat they had because the middle was only for cargo, to transport something. I have never been through that before, that train before. But I had to leave to catch a plane from Bangkok to Paris, and he came in the house and said, "You have to be prepared. We will come and get you right away and we are going to take off right away because of the danger. So my family, my three kids and I, we got prepared and he came, a military man and his chauffeur. We got in a jeep and he said you have to wear a bullet proof vest, and everybody put on the bullet proof vests, and there was no good bye hugging. I thought, it is okay, I will see you again sometime. It was like, rush, rush, rush.

And then he just rushed us into the jeep and rushed to the airport, right to the plane door, put us in the plane and the plane took off right away.

Q: And he was Cambodian or Thai?

A: He was Thai.

Q: He was Thai.

A: Yes, He was with the Thai military there. But that was what happened on my first experience of leaving the country.

Q: So were you able to say good- bye to your husband and your family or you just left quickly?

A: It was just a very quick good- bye. It was very quick and I saw a lot of my household, my kids, my ten year old boy that I left there, my mother and father, came out to see us by the jeep going to the airport, because they could not come to see us off like it used to be, usually when you make a trip the whole family goes to the airport with you and sees you on the lane, but that was not the case this time.

Q: So you went to Bangkok and then you flew to Paris?

A: Yes.

Q: And you had relatives in Paris? Where did you stay in Paris?

A: I had no problem. My older brother lived in Paris since 1973, and my uncle, my father's brother, lots of cousins, all living there.

Q: So you had a lot of relatives.

A: Yes, a lot of relatives.

Q: So you arrived in Paris, you went to your family's home and then what happened?

A: Well that is when the news of the danger started and then I tried to get in touch with my husband, after arranging for the children to be in school and all that, I tried to write him a letter. I tried to call over the phone to tell him to send the other two children right away, to Bangkok or to Laos, because I have family in Laos too. There was a station there as an embassy, personnel. But the compound was not connected. I think my sister called also, she tried to call from Hong Kong, to tell my father to please leave because the danger is very, very near, so please get out, and she said, "Santa asks you to send the children out too, right away." But he didn't listen to what my sister said, he just hung up the phone. Probably he didn't realize there was so much danger in his mind. He had so many

things to worry about that he couldn't think about being out of the country at the time. So that is our experience under the Communists, and then things happened so quickly, it was just one thing after another. We found out on the news about him going into the French embassy, we saw a picture of him, and I saw my brother and my husband also in the picture being...

Q: In France. I see, escaping...

A: No, at the time...

Q: Seeking asylum.

A: Yeah, seeking some kind of refuge there when things were so bad. And that was the last time we got a visual, or heard anything from them.

Q: What was that life being, as a wife and seeing these things on television, hearing the news, how did that affect you?

A: It is not so much of fear at the time because it is still so new. Although we don't have contact it is just a hope that the country is chaotic, but that things will get better maybe, there was still a hope. But later, after the news of the people going out to the fields, much, much later, I think about three or four months later, we learned that the Cambodians were being sent to the fields, evacuated from their homes, then I think it was not impacting so much then. It was not worry, but it was not a big sadness or depression, it was not touched yet.

Q: Now how did it feel to see your father, husband and brother on television? What was it like when you saw that?

A: It was a feeling that they would be safe, being in the French Embassy, that was at first, maybe more of a happiness to see him taking refuge. And that was what we talked about, "oh he is going to be safe," and we still had confidence that the French government would protect the people that were staying in the Embassy.

Q: Did you have any contact at that time with the French government? Did they talk to you about your father? Did they say now we have your father? They didn't talk to you at all?

A: We tried to contact and tried to contact them. Nobody, even the consulate general that was assigned to *Phnom Penh* could contact him, nobody wanted to talk, it was like everything just crumbled. The people that you used to talk to, you used to know, they are just not there for you to talk about anything anymore.

Q: I see. So when did you first realize that the Communists, that the people under the Communists were being killed? How did you realize that?

A: I came from France to the United States five months later, when I realized that we were going to be stuck here for a while. I didn't know how long we were going to be out of the country, but that under the Communist regime it was not going to be easy to go back. I already had that thought, that it was not going to be easy, how are we going to go back. I was like some kind of loss of direction, like the people who were supposed to make decisions for me were not there, like my husband or my father was not there to make decisions, so it was just like wait and see. But my sister, when she came from Hong Kong to join us, because they had to close the embassy there, and she said, "I am going to the United States, do you want to come with me because that is the country I want to live in from now on. I don't want to live in France." And I said, "Well I don't know because I don't know the United States. I don't know how the life is there. And with my kids and I that we all speak French, we don't know how we are going to adjust to that." At one point she was really amusing, she said that she had an American friend who told her that if you have nothing to eat at all the American government will give you help. That is the policy and it's like a whispering ting. And I said, "That's good." So I kind of prepared myself in case I don't have anything, I cannot find a job, I don't have work and I have nothing to eat, the government will help me, so that is my decision to come to the United States.

Q: But don't you think your brother and your family in Paris would have taken care of you? Were there any problems there? They wouldn't have supported you? They could have, right?

A: They could have in a way, but it is just a personal feeling that you have to take care of yourself and your family. I wasn't prepared to stay out of the country; I just came to put the children in school; so it was no plan for long time living.

Q: Yeah, but you didn't think, "Gee I'm here with my family, why go to America?" Why did you... because you didn't have any family in America, right?

A: No.

Q: Well why didn't you stay with the rest of your family? To me it doesn't make sense.

A: It's just, again, there are a lot of things, I know France a long time. It's really a hard country to live in, first of all, and I don't like the cold weather. I don't like how in the cold air I saw a lot of people, friends of mine, looking for a job, and they had a lot more education than me and I look at them and said, if I live there and I have to support my children without anything that I have right now in this situation, I wouldn't have been able to do it.

Q: I see.

A: It was going to be very, very rough for me when I compared it to whatever other people have, and they still were struggling. So it's just like a simple, basic resolution of...

Q: And you had no money with you either?

A: I had some money, but it was not very much because it was not a plan to do anything. Usually we just send money to the children once they are in school and put for a year, terms like that. It was not a long term way.

Q: Now you are, what is your situation? I mean, you are in France, you see your family go into the Embassy, the French Embassy under the Communists and then when did you first begin to realize that something might have happened to your husband or your father or your children?

A: No, I still had hope. I still kept hope, even though maybe my father was being held prisoner somewhere because of his knowledge and his high position, that he would somehow contribute to them in some way.

Q: But under the *Khmer Rouge*, did you get any letters from your family, your husband?

A: No, nothing.

Q: No, you didn't hear anything?

A: Complete silence.

Q: Did any strangers or people coming to America or Paris give you any information? You didn't hear anything?

A: I didn't hear anything and they didn't know anything either. They didn't hear anything about what happened.

Q: So they just disappeared.

A: Just disappeared, yeah. Until later, when I heard about my husband, it was only through my children that escaped.

Q: So when did you finally hear from your children?

A: I heard in 1985.

Q: So you didn't hear anything from your children and so what happened to your children during this whole thing? They're living with you now, right?

A: Yes.

Q: So what was their story?

A: Their story was that when the Communists came, even into the French Embassy, and the French Embassy kicked them out, my husband and all the people that were living there, everybody except the French prisoner; they walked, like everybody else, to the field. They walked, just walked wherever they found a way, and at the time my husband had Cambodian identification, he kept it and at one point the Communists checked people out and when they saw it they put him aside, like he was going to go somewhere. Well then with the confusion, that's the story my children tell me, with the confusion, he escaped, and then at that time they had already been separated. The thousands of people were just walking, walking, walking, and you couldn't find anybody, but he tried to look for them and found them later on, on his way somewhere, and from that point on they were together until the end. My kids say that my husband was really having a hard time working under the Communists, but they liked him in a way because he was skilled in agriculture, and so he cut the trees and did a lot of agricultural work that required skill they didn't have, and then...

Q: And how old were your children under the Communists?

A: The older one was ten years old and the other one was only eighteen months.

Q: Eighteen months. So it was a ten year old and then the other one is only eighteen months, so somehow they survived.

A: Somehow they survived.

Q: And then your husband died at the end or was he executed?

A: My kids don't know what happened to him exactly, except that he was taken when he was real sick, his body was old and they took him to a hospital, a Communist hospital, and then they couldn't find him anymore.

Q: So in this whole experience, how did the eighteen-month-old child and the ten year old survive the Communist regime?

A: I think they had a lot of help from their nanny. We had one nanny that was looking after the children during that time and she was with them until the end and she came to the United States too, in 1985 all together.

Q: So she's in the United States?

A: Yeah, and that is because my younger son, the eighteen-month-old that was under the Communists, he didn't know me as a mother and then she didn't tell him until

after she got out of the country that he had another mother, you know, I feel emotional. She said, "I'm just your nanny, your adoptive mother." And he said, "Oh you are probably trying to trick me because you see some rich people in the United States and you want to trick me and give me away, and so I am not going with her. I am going to stay with you." And that is why I had to go through a lot of red tape to say she is the adoptive mother for my children and then the government allowed her to come also, at the same time. She would have come anyway, but at a different time. But because of that special relationship...

Q: Is she close to you now?

A: She's close, yeah. She's almost sixty years old already, but such a great woman, hiding, providing for them everything. They had a lot of protection from her part and I just feel so grateful because not many people would have that kind of feeling towards somebody else's children, other than their own. But somehow she pulled through until she brought the kids outside.

A: The rest of your family, your father, you said he voluntarily left the Embassy?

Q: Yes.

A: You don't know, he disappeared, no one ever saw him again?

Q: Nobody. Some people tell different stories about how he was decapitated or had his hands cut off or something like that, but there is no sure story because so many people died, they were not people that knew him, so the story didn't really matter, it's not true, or maybe it is true, but not from my part. I just try to ignore it and the fact that he already had chosen his life to die and we all know he said it before it happened, that he was not going to run away from the country. The way that he died, we try not to find out. It's probably better to just accept the death that he chose on his own, than to know how he died. It's sad. I'm missing a part of me. Something is missing. It happened so fast. There was no good-bye, or preparation or anything. It was all just like one name, in the memory, but the person is not there. That is the feeling, but we all just accept it. I think my brother was the one that hurt so much more than me, because he didn't go out at all for almost a year and he was wearing black clothes for mourning. He was very close to my father because he was the first born.

Q: When was this that he wore the black clothes?

A: In France.

Q: Oh, in France. But your brother escaped the *Pol Pot* too? He didn't live...

A: No, he came in 1972 to France. It was before that.

Q: So he took your father's loss very painfully.

A: Very painful.

Q: Does it still bother him now?

A: I think there were a lot of things, because he and my father had history of not getting along in the last part, before he left for France, because he didn't marry the wife my parents liked for him very much.

Q: So his situation at the end with the father was difficult.

A: Yeah, he felt bad. They probably didn't have time to talk to each other, so we all miss...

Q: Now was your mother in hiding, any other brothers and sisters lived under the Communists, so your grandparents lived under the Communists?

A: My brother, one of my younger brothers died during the Communists. Yeah, he died, but he was not one that I knew because he was already married to a German lady and they had two children together and then they got divorced and he got remarried to a Cambodian woman, who is also a relative in the family, and she escaped the Communists and reported the story that he was killed.

Q: And your grandparents, they were alive under the Communists, your...

A: Only my grandmothers. On both sides my grandfathers had died before. My grandfather from my father's side died when I was young of cancer. But my grandfather from my mother's side died about two years before the Communists took over. He was eighty- five years old and he died of old age.

Q: So did your grandmothers live under the Communists?

A: My grandmothers from both sides lived under the Communists and we didn't know how they died or where they died or who was with them. It's really painful. I thought a lot about my grandmother that I was really close to. She really gave me a lot of things, not material things, but care.

Q: And I can't remember, your mother came with you to Paris?

A: My mother is the kind of person that is always scared about little things. She's really fast to get excited or fast to do things, and the reason she got out at that time was because, I don't know because I wasn't there at the time, but maybe *Svang* can say a little bit about Cambodia at the time. What she said was that the people were walking on the streets before the Communists came and she said she was afraid that something might happen, so she went to a friend's house and took

all her jewelry with her and made all her preparations to leave the country for a short time. And at the corner was a general that she knew, she considered him like a son because my parents married him to his present wife, so she went to his house and he said that he was preparing to leave the country. She asked if she could go with him because she was very scared, and he was supposed to take his mother-in-law, but out of respect for my mom, he left his mother-in-law at home and took my mom instead. Then she got into a crowded helicopter and she told me the story about how a lot of people couldn't come, and that is how she escaped and she just left my father because of her fears of being there.

Q: And it was okay with your father for her to go, he accepted that? Or he didn't know?

A: He didn't know.

Q: What happened to the general's mother-in-law? Did she stay behind?

A: She died, probably on the fields too. He never talks about it in a regretful way, like he had to make a choice or something like that. He believes in fate too, like maybe it wasn't her fate to get out.

Q: And then did you know that your mother had escaped? Did she come to Paris?

A: No, not at all. We thought she died too, at the time of being sent away like everybody else too, but a month later she was in a camp somewhere in Bangkok. It wasn't right away, but one or two months later, and I couldn't believe it until I heard her voice, I called her to find out and she talked over the phone and I knew it was her. And she was still talking about how lucky, how quick she made a decision to get out and how she escaped and sometimes I get mad at her that she left my father behind, but then, she didn't support him all the way. And also because she is a woman, if she had stayed she would have suffered a lot too and not have been able to care for herself. A lot of my family has been through that, my closest sister, my brother who died, he was very close to me too and he always told me, "Santa don't worry, I know the way to get out. If we are in trouble just stay with me." He's the one that told us that he knew how to get out and then he couldn't get out. And I blame that a lot on my mom.

Q: Why is that?

A: Because he was already out, he was already in Bangkok to visit his children in Germany, and my mom set up a marriage for him, an arranged marriage because she wanted him to marry a Cambodian woman. And he said, "Mom I am going to marry as you wish, but let me go visit my kids first." But she didn't want him to and so because of the power that my parents had, they sent somebody to Bangkok to look for him and bring him back just for the wedding. He was married on the

28th of February. And then on the seventh of March I left Cambodia, just after his marriage, and then he didn't get out.

Q: So he, if he hadn't gone back to be married he would have been in Bangkok?

A: And he would have been out, so he would have been alive, but because of her sense of how to do this, or how to do something for her pleasure, its hard to say that, but I say it all the time, sometimes she just did this for her own pleasure, to see somebody her married.

Q: So in a way you are a little disappointed in your mother's behavior?

A: Very disappointed.

Q: Because she didn't support your father and she brought your brother and then ran away herself.

A: Yes. She just ran away from home. All her life she just makes very bad decisions. She didn't think much about her own life or anybody else, like her children's lives.

Q: Well do you think that if you were in Cambodia and you knew the *Khmer Rouge* were going to come and take over the country in a week, would you have stayed behind with your husband and your father or do you think you would have left?

A: I probably would have stayed.

Q: You probably would have stayed?

A: Yeah.

Q: Why is that?

A: It's just like a sense of doing something together, like sticking together, a sense that if he said, "okay, you know I don't want to be there with the children, it is better that you are out and I will be by myself," maybe some kind of talk, some kind of plan together, maybe I would get out, but if there is no plan then I would not escape. I know that I wouldn't go in there and die like everyone else, that's for sure. I don't have much of a part during the Communists, about my family, about my own story. In a way it's hard to go through that, but it's so fast that it happened like a dream. It happened so fast you don't even have a sense of absorbing something and thinking through it. The pain is not like it comes and then it goes, a little bit comes and then goes. It's not like all the way always there because there is always an uncertainty, a hope that this is not true.

- Q: Sure, sure, sure. Did the other parts of the royal family contact you through this or the others? Were they worried about your family?
- A: At the time, the *Sihanouk* family and my family were like enemies in a way, like now it is my turn to be in power.
- Q: Because your father was on the...
- A: Yeah, so it is my turn, so you have to suffer through whatever happens, there is no communication.
- Q: There was no communication. So they weren't trying to be helpful. Or helpful to find your father or protect your father?
- A: No, not that way. They are happy, in fact, *Sihanouk* said many times that my father was...
- Q: A traitor.
- A: A traitor, yeah.
- Q: He said your father was a traitor because he supported the *Lon no*.
- A: Yeah, they think that he was a traitor; he is still talking about it now. When he went back to Cambodia just recently he was talking about it and my brother said, "You know, my father already died and he cannot be here to talk to you about what happened, so you shouldn't talk about him in this way." But at that time he was not in power yet, he was not on the Supreme Council yet, like now, so this time that he is back and talking about it, nobody wants to face him.
- Q: So he is still mad about that?
- A: He's still mad.
- Q: But why was he so mad? Did he have a personal relationship to your father? I mean, were they close friends at one time, or...
- A: I think he is very jealous of my father, for his national fame and work and he was already internationally known, not only in the country, but also outside the country he was very respected. There was nothing that he could find in his actions, except if he said he was a traitor. That's a really bad action for the people to know, that this person is a traitor, so what else...
- Q: The thing that I don't understand is how does *Sihanouk* know any of the *Khmer Rouge* like *Pol Pot*?

A: He knew them.

Q: He knew them. Did he understand why? Did your father have any understanding of why they believed in what they believed? Did he have any sympathy or any appreciation for why they were so radical?

A: I don't think that at the time they were so radical, because he was not leaving there to say something at the time. I think he believed, like everybody else, that there was a lot of corruption and that it was a group of people that were against the corruption.

Q: He believed that too?

A: Yeah, he believed that and he is very honest. He is not corrupted himself, so he is just not seeing that they could come and kill people. I think that history would have changed if he had been alive, he would have had something to say and found something to do, but they didn't give him the opportunity to do anything. They knew that if he was killed right away from the French Embassy that would be the end of it.

Q: Well, also, did he understand the Mao cultural revolution, I mean...

A: He was the ambassador in Peking for two years. He was ambassador of Mongolia. He was a good friend of *Chou Eng Lay*. *Cho In Ly* sent somebody from the outside to tell my father to get out.

Q: He did?

A: Yes, as a friend, *Chou Eng Lay* respected my father as a person, like himself, working for the people, but from a different point of view. But as people, they still respected each other.

Q: Because the other complicating thing was the *Lon Nol*. I don't understand. I have to go back and look at my history, but General *Lon Nol*, what was his relation to the royal family?

A: No, he was just a general.

Q: But who picked him? Did the Americans pick him or how did he get picked?

A: *Lon No* got to power because of my father's support. He was not a known person; he was just a military person in a small province at that time. I don't know, we had to fight the resistance a lot and then he was the one that...

Q: ...I think it was probably the same way.

- A: ...Like a formation, if you can say, from a picture that my father made, a sketch of him, he created *Lon Nol*, because he was a good friend. They went to school together and he believed him to be a good person when they were young, they were good friends.
- Q: Because they say that at the end, I don't know the truth, that there was a lot of corruption under the *Lon Nol* government.
- A: There was a lot of corruption and my father was not a part of that. With his power he tried to tell him not to do a lot of things that were not right, like creating more military without any career work, and he disapproved of his "wife," or the prostitute that he put up as his wife. So in the end they didn't see each other well. In fact, *Lon Nol's* brother tried to have my father killed at one point, and there were a lot of student riots. Before they protested they requested to have a conference with my father. They invited intellectual doctors and lawyers, went to see him personally and they came out with a very different picture of him from talking to him than the person *Lon Nol's* group was making him out to be.
- Q: *Lon Nol* escaped, right? The Americans took him out and he didn't die in Cambodia. Did his brother die in Cambodia or did he escape too?
- A: His brother, I think he died.
- Q: I think so. Now, I would imagine that during this your father must have been close to Americans.
- A: Very close.
- Q: He was very close.
- A: He was always close and kept in good communication and all that.
- Q: Have you had much contact with the Americans since, those who knew your father, since you have been in the United States?
- A: No, because I don't know anybody in the government and I don't want to approach them because there are so many confusing things. Also there is a feeling of shame, having to leave the country and living in someone else's country. There are just a lot of mixed feelings; there is still shame in being a refugee.
- Q: Well I appreciate your comments. Has this ever been an issue for you, having gone from being a source of power, or close to the source of power for a country and from a special family, to the all of a sudden losing of a lot of that? Have you ever thought about how your life changed so dramatically? I mean, here you are as the daughter of one of the top people in Cambodia, modern Cambodian history,

you get on a plane to go to Bangkok to go to Paris and all of a sudden everything is different. What do you think about that in your life?

A: It is really a scary feeling at first and then when I was coming here to the United States, I said, "What else can I do from there? I have to leave somehow, I cannot be depressed and just think about what happened. I had to think about my kids first and what I could do for them, and there were not a lot of choices. I had to work to get myself known, to prove that I know English, that I know how to write and read, that I may not have experience but I can learn. I didn't have experience.

Q: Sure, sure, sure.

A: But you have to start at the bottom of life and you cannot walk into an office and say, "Okay, I can write and read English, take me!" And so I really put myself down at the bottom of the line like everybody else without thinking about my status or anything, just thinking about being a person first. So I started to work at a real low paying job, when I would come home I would cry, and I went to school to try to learn something, learn better English.

Q: Because when you came to America you didn't know how to speak English?

A: I did, but I didn't know if my English was good enough to work. It was just an insecure feeling. If I was going to be in France I was not afraid because I know that language fluently, but here I was very insecure so I had to put myself down to work myself up again. That's my philosophy and I'll try to do anything

Q: What does that mean, you put yourself down?

A: It's just that I work at a very low paying job in a very...

Q: You accepted that.

A: I accepted, yeah.

Q: Was that to...

A: Because there was no help.

Q: There was no help.

A: No help and I didn't know how to get help. In 1975 when we came here we didn't even know where the refugee service was or who to contact. It was just complete blindness.

Q: And there were no friends or family here who could...

- A: No, nothing.
- Q: Was the Cambodian community helpful to you or did they ignore you?
- A: There were not many Cambodian communities. There was no community. There was not one Cambodian family here.
- Q: I see. So you had to start from the bottom.
- A: Yeah, there was no community at all at the time.
- Q: What about your children? Was that easy for the children?
- A: The children, I think they were going through a lot and they didn't talk about it. They had to change schools, they had to come from the French system to the American. My older daughter had just finished high school and she didn't want to go any further. She just felt stupid and wanted to find a job.
- Q: Was it ever hard for them to say, "Look, we come from the royal family and here in America our mother has to have a low paying job." Did that ever bother them?
- A: It's hard for the family. We try to talk to each other a lot and I didn't tell a lot about myself to the kids, to tell you the truth. It's like a secret about myself that I don't want to...
- Q: What is a secret?
- A: A secret about how much I will bring home and how much I get paid.
- Q: Oh you kept that a secret.
- A: Yeah, I kept that a secret and so we have more of a feeling of pride, and that is all out of love.
- Q: Why do you keep it a secret?
- A: I think maybe I don't want them to worry about what I am doing and I feel uncomfortable talking about what I am doing, and so it is a lot of mixed feelings, and shame.
- Q: Shame. What does that mean, shame? Shame of what?
- A: Shame of working in a low job and being able to find a better job. But again, I had to start myself on something to have a history of working in this country. I am going through a lot of situations when I think about it; a lot of times that I cried because I had to eat lunch by myself, I had to bring lunch from home to eat.

It's really difficult and then I cry when I have to mop the floor, I cry when I have to cook. It's like everything you have to do for yourself. It's not a hard job but it's like you find yourself doing everything and you think you used to have a maid at home. Each maid does one thing. The cook is just the cook. The chauffer is just a chauffer and I am doing all of this by myself. It's funny, but I cannot help but to think that way. I was cleaning the house and I said, "What did I do in my past life to experience this thing?"

Q: Look, you are a sixteen-year-old girl getting married, look at how different it has been. You are sixteen years old, getting married with a huge wedding, big, big wedding for two weeks and then what, ten, fifteen years later you're mopping an apartment, your apartment in Los Angeles, right? What do you think about your *karma*?

A: About *karma*, maybe I didn't do something right. My fate, maybe this comes from a Buddhist philosophy that I didn't put enough fortune in my past life and so I had to end it and now I am going back to the bottom again. So it's probably more of a way of accepting it, to know you did something wrong so now you have to suffer. It's more acceptance; if I didn't think that way it would be really hard.

Q: Yeah, sure. Because do you think that there was any period when you just felt completely hopeless, when you said, "I can't believe this situation." It's too fantastic to even believe that I would go from my life in Cambodia to this.

A: I didn't think about that, about extreme hopelessness. It's more like I have to get through this, I have to somehow get up, like you fall and you really want to get up again in some way. It's not a feeling of down until you don't know what to do. I always have a second mind looking around, listening, finding, get into a community college and find out what is being offered. There are a lot of things I do and I did at the time to get myself together.

Q: But do you think this is a part of the *Khmer Rouge* plan, to put everyone at the bottom again? In other words, do you think that part of their philosophy was to destroy the world, the people...

A: To me, their philosophy is just to kill the people, the intellectuals, so they can have more power in controlling the population and they can do anything they want with the country. They say when you get into war you have to owe somebody something for their help, so during the Communists I heard a lot of lies that the population was going to China or Vietnam, where they were exploited. So the people cannot complain because they do not know, they are just afraid.

Q: Did you ever personally see anybody murdered or tortured?

A: No.

Q: You never witnessed this?

A: No.

Q: During the *Khmer Rouge* period what was the worst thing that happened to you? What was the very worst?

A: The feeling of waiting is the worst, the waiting to know what has happened to the family, the hard feeling of hearing that my father was killed.

Q: When did you finally hear that?

A: I don't remember exactly the specific time, maybe a year later, not too long, but just about a year after 1975, maybe 1976.

Q: Were there happy moments during this time, anything that you remember that made you happy or joyful?

A: No joyful times. The time with the children was very joyful, just to live together, we had a good time being together.

Q: So you had fun with your children?

A: Yes, yes. Special time. I feel happy in a way with my work, my struggle that I am going through, looking back to see other people like myself and they have a family, children, husband, and they are happy, but my happiness is different because I don't have anything. I don't have my husband, I don't have any support, but I pull through with my kids going to school and all that. I feel proud.

Q: Sure, sure.

A: I feel proud of my accomplishments and that is happiness.

Q: Well you have a lot to be proud of. There used to be a say that, I don't know if this is true, that sometimes when rich people fall from power that it is hard for them to survive. I remember some Cambodian saying that somebody, and of course this is a theory, I don't think it is true, but when the Communists were pushing the village people, the *Phnom Penh* people out of the city, that the very wealthy people couldn't deal with it. The hardship was too much and some committed suicide and things like this. Does this make sense to you? Do you think that to fall from riches to the bottom is the same for a person from high status as it is from middle or low status? I mean, everyone fell down, but do you think it's especially hard for someone who is not used to living with only very basic things?

- A: It's very hard. It's very hard. It's really a hopeless situation. In fact I forgot to mention that I heard that my aunt from my father's side hung herself because she could not support the Communists rule. A lot of family went to hide in the forest but then nobody knows what happened to them. They were killed or...
- Q: I see. Did you have any other people committing suicide or...
- A: You mean here?
- Q: Anywhere. I mean, the people from the upper classes just saying I can't deal with this anymore.
- A: No, I don't know.
- Q: Well what made you so tough do you think? What accounts for your resiliency, your ability to survive?
- A: It's a hard question. Sounds easy, but it is hard. It's not easy to answer. I really don't know what makes me so tough. Maybe a lot of things, education is a part, because from an early age I was prepared from being in a public school, being involved with the social life and so it is not like coming from the top and going to the bottom right away. My life was prepared from an early age to really meet the situation somehow; maybe it made me afraid of destiny in a way. It was a shock but it was not a real shock that you cannot survive.
- Q: Well maybe your father was right to have you start out with the common people.
- A: Yes.
- Q: And not being completely spoiled by having everyone do everything for you.
- A: Yes.
- Q: Well there must have been many rich people who had other people do everything for them.
- A: Well a lot of my cousins, *Sihanouk's* daughter can't do anything, she can't. In fact, she is the one that the government put as the minister of culture. She came to visit me here sometime ago and she asked me about my work and I said, "You have to get up at a certain time, go to work, drive." And she said, "I can't do it." Her life is so different and so I feel that my father contributed a lot. Even going to boarding school teaches you about separation and it is a learning experience to be away from home and to survive and do your own thing. It's a lot of...
- Q: Sure, sure. Did you teach your children any of these lessons? Were you able to teach them?

A: With my kids I feel very proud too. I don't have problems with them being responsible people. Other kids that I have seen in the community, even kids from the poor farms, here in the United States they buy them cars and everything sometimes. They are not just responsible but I think my kids maybe learn from watching me.

Q: Mopping, they probably watch you mopping and they say, "I'd like to mop myself. It looks like a lot of fun."

A: Well I teach them in a way too, they have to. When we came here they had to wash their own clothes, they had to do their own thing, they had to go to work and earn money and go to school all at the same time. So all these things I teach them.

Q: I think these are important for any social class, rich or poor.

A: Yeah, but sometimes people don't see it that way. They want to provide for the kids, but not me. I say you have to live in whatever the situation is right now, and I cannot spoil you. If I have a chance I would, but right now I can't, so you have to learn all these things, get yourself up and get life experience, so I cannot complain.

Q: You can't complain?

A: I can complain though with my kids?

Q: You can, if you want to, you complain?

A: Well that is true.

Q: You can complain if you want to, right?

A: Yes.

Q: But it doesn't mean anyone is going to listen.

A: Yes.

Q: We're sort of coming to the end of this part of the interview. The next part, interview number four, one of the things we will talk about is about more is about the practices of the *Pol Pot* regime. Even though you didn't live under them you must have theories about them, I think everybody does. It's very hard for a non-Cambodian to fully appreciate the behavior of the *Khmer Rouge* movement and their philosophy, their principles and their behavior, because for most Americans they see the Killing Fields and they just think they are simply crazy men doing

things, but we all know that is not true. There is more to the *Khmer Rouge* than the fact that they are just monsters. So why don't we pick up on that. So tomorrow we will move ahead and talk about your attitudes, opinions and your understanding of the *Khmer Rouge* movement. Okay, how does that sound?

A: That's good.

Q: Do you have anything else you would like to add about your own personal experience and your family's experience during the *Khmer Rouge* period? Is there anything that you missed that you think is important?

A: I cannot think of anything right now.

Q: *Svang* do you have any questions? Sometimes when you ask a question it brings out a memory. Well, I mean, one of the important questions is the question of identity. Do you think that your children understand your father, your father's values or your husband's values? Do they feel part of a bigger tradition or do they feel mostly American? Through this whole process do they have some understanding of what went on and who they are and that their family tradition is?

A: I would think, well, actually we never talk about that. My second son, the one who came from Cambodia later, he talks about going back, getting a degree and going to work in Cambodia sometime, but my daughters never talk about it.

Q: Now if they were in Cambodia and your father was still alive, would they be considered the prince and princesses? What would be their title?

A: They would be.

Q: They would be. Do they know that? Do they appreciate this, or you don't talk about it?

A: I guess that is my part because I don't want them to feel that they are princes or princesses.

Q: Why? You don't talk to them about it?

A: I don't talk about how they are special people, that they have a title, a past.

Q: Why is that? Why don't you talk to them?

A: Because they are probably better off living and working. If they work they don't have to really struggle to have an identity, and people maybe know them or maybe do not know them as a part of the royal family, except if they see the name, then they will know that they are a part of the royal family.

- Q: But they don't know that? Your kids don't know they are a part of the royal family?
- A: They know, they know.
- Q: But you don't talk to them about it.
- A: I never talk to them about it.
- Q: And what about your father and husband? Do you talk to them, particularly about your father? Do they know him?
- A: Not much.
- Q: Why is that?
- A: It's never come up to talk about him, to remind them of the memory or anything like that. It's a part of my life, a cut off part of my life.
- Q: You cut it off.
- A: Like me and my past, it is just me, maybe it is kind of silly.
- Q: What about your mother, does she talk to them, their grandmother? Does she talk to them about her background, about her husband, your father?
- A: I don't think so. I don't feel like my mom loved my father very much in a way. I think she is probably happy to be away from him, because he has a more controlling attitude.
- Q: She doesn't talk about the past with your children?
- A: No, no.
- Q: So what do you think, here is your father, he is a great man, you loved him very much and you don't talk to your children about their grandfather.
- A: They know, they know from the heart, they respect him when they talk about their grandfather, in the way he did this, he did that, they had a good time with him, being together, watching TV and all that. They knew what he was like, what his life was like in a sense, but it is never an open talk.
- Q: Why is that?
- A: I don't know why but it never comes up to talk about the family life back home.

Q: Why?

A: It's just like a piece that was closed, too painful.

Q: Does it depress you too much or you want to protect them from danger?

A: That's the right word. It is more like protection, a kind of feeling that this is a special thing, a special person and a special time. But my sister and I we talk about it a lot.

Q: But eventually there will probably be some point when your children, how old is your oldest child?

A: Well she is older now, she is 33.

Q: And she doesn't know much about her grandfather?

A: She is the favorite. She is the favorite granddaughter of my father. In fact, that is another part. When I had my first child, my oldest daughter, my father had never slept with the children before, he was very tough on that because the baby cried and all that, that is what my mother said. But then, when I had the baby he took my daughter to his bedroom all the time to sleep with him, and when he was assigned to China as an Ambassador he asked me if he could take my daughter with him. My daughter was two years old at the time and so he took her, my husband and I let him take her.

Q: So he was close to her. Does she miss him?

A: She probably doesn't remember him very much, she was too young, but she was constantly with him, she was kind of spoiled too because...

Q: He spoiled her?

A: He spoiled her. He took her to the big state dinner. He was the only ambassador that took a grandchild.

Q: But you don't talk about this with your daughter?

A: No, it is a special thing, I don't know. It never came up. It probably will.

Q: ...We are interviewing S.S. on February 10, 1993. I just thought to end the third interview and one of the things that is very interesting is that we have had a number of historians say that they didn't share with their loved ones, their families, their experience. If you could tell it, why did you just say, the private

story? You called it the private story. Can you try to explain what you mean by that because, what did that mean to you, a private story?

A: I think it is just the feeling that the children are still young, so they probably would not understand fully what is really important. That is why I never share and also because it is private in a way, it is hard to explain this. But it is just something that you value. It is not the right time to open up yet.

Q: I understand. I understand.

A: I can't understand myself why, but it just doesn't feel like it is time.

Q: You don't feel it is time?

A: I don't feel it is time yet, yeah.

Q: When is it time do you think?

A: The time, I would think maybe if they are interested in going back to Cambodia.

Q: So they have to show interest before you tell them the story? But how would they know about Cambodia unless you taught them about it?

A: That is true too.

Q: I mean, if you don't teach them about it, how would they know anything about it?

A: It is so painful for me and then for them too to lose everything and it is just a feeling of pain still, it is not going away yet.

Q: I see. So it is hard for you to talk about it?

A: Yeah.

Q: It's so painful. But when you talk about it do they suffer, do you feel, have you seen any real suffering?

A: I don't feel that they are very interested, like they want to keep the story behind themselves too, in a way that they don't show any interest.

Q: But are they ashamed of being Cambodian or do they want to hide being Cambodian or do they want to hide the *Pol Pot* period, or do they want to hide that they were from a royal family, or nothing?

A: It's a combination; being from a royal family is also very difficult for them at times.

Q: Difficult. Why is that?

A: It's difficult in a way because they cannot associate with the Cambodian people because they came here at such a young age and in the first wave, in 1975, so they grew up a little removed from the Cambodian society. There were no refugees coming in. So once they got out of school, their lives took another turn, I don't know if it makes sense, but seems that way. I don't think it is a shame they have to be Cambodian, but they don't seem to be very interested in Cambodian matters per se.

Q: They don't seem interested?

A: No, especially my two kids that came later. They don't want to talk about Cambodia. I asked them if they remember anything from the trauma and the older boy talked a little bit about it but not much, and the youngest one just said, "I forgot."

Q: He forgot. Are they proud of being Cambodian, your children, or do they think they are Americans?

A: They think more like Americans. They want to be Americans.

Q: Can they read and write Cambodian?

A: My three kids, the two girls and one boy that came first.

Q: I see, the two that came later...

A: Well the older one also studied a lot of Cambodian before he came to the United States.

Q: Do they have friends who are Cambodian or mostly American friends?

A: I think mostly American friends. In fact, their lives don't seem to be with any Cambodians at all. Their lives seem to be...

Q: What about you? Do you have a lot of Cambodians coming to your home?

A: Maybe too many. I am also involved in something.

Q: So you are very involved with the Cambodians but your children are not, but they live with you, right? They all live with you?

A: No, no. They live the American way too. They want to, you know...

- Q: They don't live in your home?
- A: Not anymore.
- Q: All of them? You live by yourself?
- A: By myself now.
- Q: I see. What about with your husband, Mr. Smith, they lived with him, right?
- A: They used to, yes, before when they were still young.
- Q: And was that an American home or Cambodian home or mixed home?
- A: More mixed home I think, because it was mixed in a way that my husband did not like people to come over to the house. So at that time, when I lived with him I didn't have Cambodians coming to the house, but I myself was going out to places. We lived in a way of cooking Cambodian food and all that in the Cambodian way, which was my husband's share also, but aside from that there was not much of the Cambodian way going on.
- Q: Well getting back to the private story, is there a word for this in Cambodian? When you say private story is there any tradition for a woman to keep her suffering private, do you think?
- A: Not necessarily. I don't think that, it's just myself, my own character.
- Q: Your own character.
- A: Yeah, my own character.
- Q: But when you say private story, how would you say that in Cambodian? Is there a saying for that in Cambodian? Or is that an American way of saying private story?
- A: I cannot distinguish if it is American or Cambodian. It's just a feeling, it's my story. It's the way I used to live and there is nobody I want to share it with yet, not even my children.
- Q: But how would you say that, if you were going to say that in Cambodian what would private story be?
- A: It's the same meaning. It's a story of me, my story, personal story.

- Q: Women use that term a lot, personal story, do you think? When would you use that term? Would you use that term for anything else besides describing your past?
- A: Maybe with things involved with marriage and the children's problems, or something like that.
- Q: You kept it personal?
- A: Yeah, very personal.
- Q: So if your son was having problems, you are not supposed to tell your mother about it or your grandparents. You keep it to yourself.
- A: Yes.
- Q: Is that a tradition?
- A: It works out sometimes but it's not like the American way of just sharing right away what you have.
- Q: You are supposed to keep it to yourself.
- A: Until maybe the appropriate moment.
- Q: Sure, sure. Now I showed you this textbook and it had your father's story in it. How do you feel as the daughter of your father that your father's history is lost to your children? How do you understand that? Is this the end of your life here? Is this the end of...
- A: That's true, that's true. When you put it that way, it is like a digging out in myself. I feel like just let it end there.
- Q: You are the end?
- A: Yeah, I'm the end and not the continue...
- Q: Why do you think that?
- A: It's hard to explain still. It's just like, again, I am not ready to share.
- Q: Not ready to share? But you feel it is okay if your family comes to an end? If your family tradition comes to an end, it is okay?
- A: Not in that way, not in that sense. I don't want to end it myself but it continues, the story through my children. It's still not the time I feel, and I don't know when

will be the time. I think maybe I really need to continue myself that line first, instead of jumping, like saying, "Okay, your grandfather this and this and he is so great."

Q: I don't understand. What do you mean by continue the line? What does that mean?

A: Like working and then following his values...

Q: I see, I see.

A: Maybe that way, I am still thinking about that. There is no organization of thought or anything, you just tell a story to the children that your grandfather used to be this and this and this. They can read it in the book or find out themselves when they need to, because it is in the history book everywhere too, everywhere in French and English.

Q: Yeah, sure.

A: But the important thing is how they can feel it, they have to think that way. I don't know if I can make you understand this. But it is like a continuance of tradition feeling.

Q: Well hearing you talk it sounds like until now, the taking of the tradition might have been a burden, might have been too painful, you weren't ready, it sounds like, to follow in your father's footsteps. Pretty big shoes, right?

A: Big shoes, right.

Q: For any of you and your kids to step into, right?

A: Very big. We are not ready at this point. He had his whole life from a young age to build up a reputation and all, and we just started from nowhere just all of a sudden. It's not...

Q: This is always a great question. Whether your father had a tragic ending or not, we can talk about the influences, but how do you follow, how does a child or a grandchild follow in the footsteps of a great man? Is it possible do you think? Your father was such a giant. He was such a big man.

A: It is not possible. It is not possible.

Q: How does a young woman, as a woman...

A: As a woman, no.

Q: How do you do it?

A: I have thought about that a lot of times myself, how am I going to do it, to keep up his name, not be forgotten forever, just to be in history. Again, it's the work that I want to do and the values that he passed down to me to be a good person and to really work. Maybe I am the only one of his children that feels that way.

Q: Do you feel that maybe this is too big of a burden?

A: I don't think so. I don't have the ambition of being prime minister or something like that, but at least to be one of the children that carry his work in some way.

Q: Yeah, sure, and I'll leave this and then I just want to continue, that is what I don't understand, this is confusing for me, did something happen that you and your children, I mean, your family should be very proud of your father, he seems to stand out. And yet, in a way, although there is a lot to be proud of, it is sort of hidden. In other words, it is sort of like a secret. Not a secret, but it is a private thing. Your father is sort of in the shadows still, right? I mean I hasn't really emerged.

A: I don't think he is so much in a shadow. Maybe I didn't explain it right. That feeling that we don't talk about it between us is not like something that is not known. He's already very open to the children and grandchildren because we are such a close family. So in a way, although they were still young children at the time, and I was very young too, only 33 years old, still young and never involved directly with his work, but just having observed a lot of people coming in and out and being very interested in listening, but he is very open with the children...

Q: No, but what I am trying to say, and this is not a criticism, is that you could either say, "Your grandfather was this and we are very proud of him and I want you to be like him and take on the responsibility of our family tradition," or you can say, "We are very proud of your grandfather but we don't need to talk about him that much." Or you cannot talk about him at all. Where do you fit in these three different schemes? If I was in your home and sitting around with your children, would they say, "I am a prince of the royal family. My grandfather was a very important man and I am going to go to law school and carry on his tradition." What would your children say? Would they say that or you don't know? You see, I am confused about how you deal with your own family tradition within your family. And this is not a criticism or anything. I'm just trying to understand.

A: No, no, because we live differently from you, so it is kind of hard, but I feel more like understanding the feeling without saying much because the children know the history also. It's not something that they don't know, although they were still so young. They know what happened. And to talk about it more would not be so much to say something about his work but an understanding of the feeling.

Q: It's assumed.

A: It's assumed. Yeah, although they don't talk about it, like sharing. I never really talk about it, but we talk about what he did, what his involvement was, his work, my oldest son asks a lot of questions about that. He is curious, but I never really open the conversation.

Q: You don't. You don't open the conversation? Why, again, I am trying to understand that?

A: I don't know. I don't know. It's just, if they would come up to talk about it...

Q: But I bet you think about your father every day, right? How often do you think about him?

A: I think about him when I read a book or I do something and I think about what he used to say.

Q: How often does he come into your mind, do you think, on a daily basis?

A: Not on a daily basis, but more and more often as I go along with my work.

Q: So he comes up a lot but you don't have anything to say about it, right? In other words, you are very involved with your father still but for some reason you don't talk about him, so you don't have any idea why? Does it make you sad to talk about it? I'm just trying to understand.

A: No, it's not sad to think about it, but it's more, again, proud and pride and private. It's not a sad feeling. I think I'm more proud than anything else.

Q: And private.

A: Yeah, private.

Q: Because if you shared, what would happen to his memory if you shared?

A: Probably nothing would happen, there is no big thing that is going to happen or something, but probably the children will know more about him in a way.

Q: Is that good you think, or bad?

A: It's good.

Q: You think it's good?

A: It's good.

- Q: So before I end here, what do you think about these questions I am asking you? Am I giving you too hard a time?
- A: No, you are not giving me a hard time. I just have a hard time explaining what I feel, but sometimes I don't think about the feeling I have, but I just have more thoughts...
- Q: But do you think these are questions that are appropriate questions for this interview?
- A: I think it is appropriate for you to want to understand more about it, about how I feel. I never think about myself that way, about why I don't think my father and share with the children. I never thought about that much to myself.
- Q: It's also that we are doing an oral history, so one of the important questions is how in a person's life is history passed on from generation to generation. Clearly your father's history is in this book written. In other words, he is already a part of history.
- A: He is already a part, right.
- Q: But in terms of the personal relationship with the family to the history, it is interesting to know...
- A: How it will be passed on.
- Q: how it will be passed on, just on a personal level. Because your children will read the books and...
- A: I share my involvement with Cambodia and I tell them that I am going back, that I think about going back to Cambodia some day to work with the people and they say, "What for, Mom? There is still a lot of trouble." I said, "You know, I need to do this for the people, for the country I was born in and where a lot of my life still is."
- Q: And also memories, and I want to end on this: Some cultures, like in African culture, this is the tribal culture where people pass on history through oral tradition, not through writing but through talking, as long as the family knows the name of the person, the history of the person, his spirit is still in the world and then once the memory is gone, generations later, that person leaves the world. And so the question I have is, in Cambodian culture, how do people think about the relationship of the memory of a loved one that is lost, what is the relationship between remembering and respecting and being in touch with someone who is gone, not just a king or a prince, but any person? How do you think about that?

A: It is true, I don't know if I understand your question, but we have memories about a family member, we get into conversation, but it doesn't seem that we have a lot of conversations about that, but somehow through prayer, celebrations, his name, my father's name is always on the top and there are pictures that hang in the house.

Q: And this relationship of this to his spirit, do you think there is a direct relationship? Do you think that his spirit is still present?

A: His spirit is still present, not in a way that we believe in reincarnation, that when a person dies it depends on the life, that person wants to be either reborn or rebirth. But for my father, I always think that he is not having another reincarnated life yet, because sometimes through dreams his presence is still there.

Q: He hasn't been reincarnated yet?

A: Yeah.

Q: We'll talk about it more in another section.

Interview 10 - Part 4

Q: Today is February 10, interview number four with Santa. Do you know anything about the *Khmer Rouge* politics in your life?

A: No, I don't know because I think that I was still young and at that time I was not very interested in the politics. I was not directly involved but it was just more like hearing what people were talking about. Some of my friends about my age had husbands that were involved in the *Khmer Rouge* at the time. They didn't favor the present government so much, but directly I didn't know a lot of people.

Q: Did you know anything about *Pol Pot* before 1975, who he was and how was his philosophy?

A: I heard his name and I knew that he did not favor the present government, but I don't know about his education exactly or whom he is married to or what his involvement to the *Khmer Rouge* is.

Q: You said before that your two young children were in the *Khmer Rouge* regime, when you sponsored them to come to the United States, did they talk about their life under the *Khmer Rouge* to you?

A: The oldest one talked a little bit, just to mention that it was a very hard life, it was very scary, his life was in danger everyday, but the youngest one didn't want to talk about it or said he forgot what happened.

Q: With whom did they live with during the *Khmer Rouge*?

A: They lived with the nanny, the woman that took care of them since they were young. They did talk about their father and how hard he worked under the communist regime and that there was no food to eat. They didn't have anything to wear, there was a lot of sickness, like diarrhea that they had because of the bad food that they ate. Mostly we heard about the hard work of their father, my husband, and they said that he didn't have any clothes to wear and he had to cut trees at the time. They were still young at the time and they wanted to have the food that he ate and so he had to give the children his little portion. There were a lot of tears that he cried, but they didn't understand why he cried.

Q: Did you know when your husband died or was killed and how did your two children survive under the *Khmer Rouge*?

A: My husband was kicked out of *Phnom Penh* in 1975. It also was the exact time of his escape because I told you, he was escaping during a checkpoint and they found out that he was high- class society, so he was held, but then he escaped

again, when there was a lot of confusion he escaped. I don't know the exact time of his death, I just roughly figured out maybe 1976 or 1977.

Q: Did your people see him killed?

A: Nobody saw him. There was a man, he was sick; that was all I knew about him. His body was very swollen and they took him to the hospital, the Communist hospital, and when the children and the nanny went back to ask if that person was still there they told him that he died, but nobody saw his body or knew how he died, if he died of sickness or if he died of a killing, that is still a mystery.

Q: How about your children, your younger children, you say, eighteen months old, who took care of him and how did they survive? Did they know anything about their title, that they are from the high class?

A: My oldest son knew that he was in the royal family but not my youngest one because he was very young. We are really grateful to the nanny that helped them all the way through. I don't know how she did it, how she saved food for them, she did a lot of hard work to have some food to share with them. She worked in the kitchen during the Communist time, cooking for the high ranked Communists, so that's why she always had a little better time than the rest of the people and she did that for my children.

Q: Is this the time she tried to protect your two children by hiding their titles?

A: Oh yes, she never said anything about them being born in a higher class or something like that. It was just a normal conversation, they had to call her mother and then they just did everything normally, to hide their identity. But then they want to know why there is a Communist time and what happened in their mind.

Q: Do you know about that?

A: I think my personal feeling is that the people were also suffering at that time; there was a lot of corruption and unfair treatment. They had a very, very poor condition and nobody was really concerned about anyone else. There is this one group that we now call the *Khmer Rouge* that seems to be against this government because they don't like to see this happen, so they have a different philosophy to clean up the country to protect them against *Sihanouk*. At the time *Sihanouk* was so much in power that he just did a crazy thing, he just thought about whatever he wanted to do at the time, playing movies and theater and joking, joking about people that really work hard and I think that contributed to the *Pol Pot* era.

Q: Do you know why the *Khmer Rouge* killed their own people? Do you have any idea about this?

A: I don't have much of an idea. I don't understand why they killed their own people either, it was so much the ways of the intellectual people that we have, we don't have many compared to other countries, but the extermination was a way to scare people not to revolt, and also to eliminate the intellectuals so they could have more control over the country. That is my feeling. I wonder that myself a lot, why kill the innocent, why kill the children, why kill the farmers, even the farmers were being killed, not only the city people, it was everybody. It was just a scary method they used to intimidate the revolution. They probably didn't put a lot of thought into the fact that nobody in the country was going to live, and if you kill all the old people there is nobody to govern the country anymore except for themselves.

Q: You said when you first arrived in the United States in 1985, and you talked to both of your sons who stayed in Cambodia, how did they feel among the other three siblings that came to the United States before them and left them in Cambodia and had to go through all this life from 1975 to 1985. How did they feel when you talked to them?

A: They went through the *Pol Pot* time and it was very, very hard. It was not so much sad first because they were going through a hard time. But for them to talk about the situation is very difficult, they want to ignore that period of time, but the feeling of coming here is also very difficult in a way. Ten years of time over there was kind of lost. There was no education, there was a very difficult life, and compared to the older brother and sisters they felt like they were not so lucky and they have the feeling of anger sometimes, it is not so easy. They feel like the others don't understand them. If I say something or hear their brother or sister say something that is not nice, or tries to direct them in the right direction of living, like "why do you do this and why do you do that, why do you act this way, you're supposed to act that way in this country." They feel very frustrated, angry a lot and they did have some problems living together, my older daughter and my older son that was in Cambodia. At the time he was close to eighteen years old and that was why he was still able to come, he was not a major yet, he was still a minor. So it was very difficult, they didn't talk to each other for a year because he was angry with my oldest daughter for not understanding his feelings, so it was a bad time, but right now it is okay.

Q: How did you deal with those feelings?

A: I try to explain to him, it was not something that was meant to hurt you, it's not mean what your sister said, it's just caring for your situation and we just want you to do well and to really try to understand the living here. I think with time he will learn, and I try not to interfere so much in terms of who is right and wrong, but just to explain both sides, that you have to understand your little brother, he just came and he really had a bad life in Cambodia and he is really angry, and to explain to him also, that there is no mean intention in saying it.

Q: How did you find out that both of them were alive?

A: That was in 1979, I think, during the time the Vietnamese had already entered Cambodia. The way I found out that they had escaped was because first I sent a poster all over Cambodia to the camps and tried to find my children and asked who knew about them and to send me information. They escaped to Vietnam in 1979 and they drove to France because that was my first location after I left Cambodia, so they thought I was there. So they sent a letter to France, to my uncle's address and tried to find me and that was how I first got in touch with them.

Q: At that time was it easy for you to sponsor both of them? How did you sponsor them? Please tell us about the sponsoring, how did you do it to get both of them here?

A: It was not so hard because when I first came to the United States I already had reported that my husband and two children were missing at the time and I gave them the specific state and time of our separation, the last time I had seen them and when they came over I went back to the immigration office and got a petition. I guess they looked it up in the records and thought things looked right, like matching information, so the immigration authorized for me to sponsor them from Vietnam.

Q: Both of them were in a Thai border camp?

A: No, after that, after I sponsored them they went to Vietnam after a month. I filed for a petition and all that and then after a month I lost news of them again. I didn't know anything until November of 1984, and they told me later, after they had come to the United States that they were put in jail by the Vietnamese government. So the nanny was in jail and chained because she was an adult, but my son who was still young at the time, eight or nine years old was free to go around, and he was the one to bring them food and all that. My older son escaped from the jail, I don't know how, it was not said at the time why he escaped, and he went back to Cambodia and worked hard to save money and then came back and bribed the jail people to get his nanny and his brother out. And from that point they lived in Cambodia for a while and tried to find another way to the Thai camp. Until 1984 they were living in Cambodia somewhere and I didn't know where exactly because we didn't have any more communication until 1984, and when they came to the camp my older son remembered my address from when he received a letter from me in Vietnam, and finally when he arrived in the Thai camp he wrote to me that they were safe and they were living in the camp. I forgot the name of the camp but it was blown up by a Vietnamese rocket one month after they came. I think that is how we got in touch, but the letter didn't come because I was moving around a lot too at that time, so they sent it to the old address and they sent me several letters and I never wrote them back because I didn't know about the letters until they wrote to my sister. They had memorized

my sister's address too and she never moved. She was at the same address and that was how she communicated them to me. She told me, "Oh, I received a letter from your children in the camp, they are still alive." We were so excited and I didn't believe it, I just didn't believe it, until I saw the letter and I found out what happened. She said, "I cannot read Cambodian so you have to come and get the letter," so I went right away to get the letter, to read it, it was so exciting. That's how we got in touch.

Q: You said your older child memorized your address or your family address, that means they didn't keep your letter...

A: They cannot keep my letter. It was burned right after read it. They were in Vietnam and they just memorized the address and then burned the letter.

Q: Why?

A: Because of the fear that somebody may get the letter and find out who they were. So it was a complete hiding from their part too.

Q: Did they ever tell you about their life in the Vietnamese jail?

A: They didn't have the freedom to talk, to go around a lot. Life was just the jail life that they talked about because the nanny was chained, her ankles were chained, and they had to go to the bathroom in the same place, they had to go get water. My little one, my little son did all this, like going out and asking for this and for that. He was free to go around because he was still young and that was the only story I heard, just that it was a really rough time. There was no beating, they just didn't have any freedom.

Q: Was your older son chained too?

A: That's what he said, that he was chained, but he didn't talk about that very much, he was very secretive about himself, his story. Maybe he didn't want to talk about the hard time, he would just try to forget himself and go on. I think I have to respect his feeling, although for ten years of separation I was not there for them. I was not there for them during their hard time and sometimes I feel like I am invading their privacy until they want to talk and share. I did ask, but the story I get is not like a story, it is just "oh, I have been through this and I was under the Communists and I didn't have anything to eat or I was sent to the storage room." They wanted to test him to steal and then try to punish him, but even though he was very hungry, he didn't steal any corn at the time, he told me. They released him in the morning and found that he had not eaten any corn at all, and that was his test because they wanted to do something to find out if he was a bad boy. The stories I got were like that, here and there, it's just not together and although I want to know, it's not like I am not interested in the story, but as a mother, I don't want to feel like I am digging at the pain in them. I want to respect them for what

they are going through and I feel really sad that I was not there to care for them, and I feel like in a way I lost my right to be a mother, a close mother to them, a real mother. They feel really close to her, their nanny. If they have something they ask her instead of me. Although I feel like it is a loss in a way, a feeling of loss that my two kids have another mother, it's kind of like your husband having an affair with somebody else, but it is also respecting the life they had together, their life of suffering they had with her is a lot more memorable than the life they had with me. They were so young that they didn't know much about who I was at the time; they were eighteen months and nine- years- old, so in a way, it is hard to say as a mother, I wonder to myself, "Are these my children?" So it is really a sense of loss. It's hard to explain. But mostly I have to respect their feelings more as human beings, respecting what they want to have and how they feel, and accepting that even though I am their mother, I cannot have the same control like with my other three kids, I could say things more freely with the other three than with these two who were just coming from Cambodia. I don't want to hurt them in any way. Maybe they wouldn't take it right, so it is just a feeling, that's all.

Q: Do you feel hurt a lot when your two youngest children came to the United States and maybe didn't look at you as the mother?

A: I did not feel hurt, I feel jealous, like a human reaction. I feel jealous, I am the mother, how come they listen to the nanny more? It is a stupid reaction, I know better than anyone else, but you cannot help but to feel that way sometimes. I try to hold back and say, "I am not supposed to feel jealous because she is close to them, she cared for them and she has the right to be their mother more than I do in a way. They were not born from her but the life they had with her was more meaningful than their lives with me." So I don't get hurt anymore or get jealous; once I made that decision our relationship as children and mother is a lot better. It is a lot better and the nanny is happy. She tries her best. When they first came she stayed with me for about four or five months, and then all of a sudden she ran away from home and she didn't tell anyone where she was, she didn't tell the children where she was and she explained it to me later. I was angry, id didn't understand why she did that, I thought maybe I did something wrong, something that she didn't like and she didn't want to live with me, but later on I found out that she wanted to leave the children alone with me, so we could have time to build a relationship. But she was unhappy and the children were unhappy and I could see a lot of suffering and I didn't want to have that happen. I wanted to have a happy life for my children, and she has a right, she has a lot of right to be happy with my kids, and now they live together as a household. They live together and the nanny is like a mother, she plans what they want to do and they consult each other, and I am jut like a consultant in a way, they ask me, "Is this the right way to do that?" but they make plans for their own lives, which is good. We are happy, all of us. We have come to a point where we have found a compromise that makes us all happy. But again, I don't know much about what happened during the Communist time.

Q: Did you know anything about your husband's life under the *Khmer Rouge* and the relationship between your two children and the father?

A: The little bit I know is the report that the nanny brought back after she and the children came from Cambodia, that my husband, in order to hide his identity, had to change his name, and surprisingly to me, when I asked what kind of name he used, she told me it was just taking the letter "S" and then putting the last letter, "TH" and using that as his name. His relationship with the children, what I know is that the children didn't call him "papa" like the French, they just changed it to Pop, like the normal way, but that is about all I learned from them.

Q: Did you know about the relationship of the nanny to their father?

A: I don't think that the relationship was so close. It was that the nanny was the mother, but it's not like she was the mother and my husband was the father. It was that the nanny was the real mother and they don't have a father at the time. I think the way they call him Pop was like he was the adoptive father, he was the husband of an aunt or something like that so they call him father, Pop, but that is about all... I think they had to lie about the relationship to each other because it was very dangerous and they were so scared to tell the truth about being biologically related and so...

Q: Let me ask you a question... (Yeah, you can ask her more, before I asked her mostly about what she heard about her husband from the children and when she talked to her children when they were in jail in Vietnam) Did you talk about *Pol Pot*? You knew the *Pol Pot* family?

A: I don't know his family, but I knew some of the extended *Pol Pot* family, in fact he was not a stranger to the royal palace.

Q: He's not?

A: He's not because his aunt was also a concubine of the King *Sisowath*.

Q: King *Sisowath* on your side of the family?

A: Yes.

Q: Yes, I see.

A: And then she was also a dancer that is the most, the prime dancer...

Q: Principal dancer?

A: Principal dancer in the royal ballet also.

- Q: One of the things that people are interested in, maybe you can comment on this, is what a man like *Pol Pot* or the other *Khmer Rouge* leaders were like in their own families or in their own normal situations. It is hard to understand how someone could produce so much killing and at the same time be a father or a son. Can you give any insight into...
- A: I don't know anything about the way he lived or the way he grew up, except that he was educated in France and at that time he was already on the *Khmer Rouge's* side, he already was leaning towards the Communist side.
- Q: But he wasn't from the royal family himself?
- A: He was not from the royal family but he had association.
- Q: He associated with the royal family? I see.
- A: He was not a stranger.
- Q: Was he from a rich family or a poor family or a middle class family?
- A: About a middle class family.
- Q: Middle class family. But because of his connections he had access to the royal family. Was he a friend of your father's or knew your father?
- A: I don't know the relationship between them. I'm sure he knew my father and my father knew him too, his name was not *Pol Pot*. His name is...
- Q: Oh, his name is not *Pol Pot*?
- A: No, it just came out later.
- Q: How did he get the name *Pol Pot*? What does that mean? Is that a Cambodian name, *Pol Pot* or a Chinese name?
- A: No, it is a Cambodian name, but this is just my feeling, he chose this name, it is more like the people's name. It is nothing significant, it is just simple.
- Q: What was his real name?
- A: *Sam Loth Sar*.
- Q: What about...
- A: I think that his name is in a book too.

- Q: What about *Khiev Samphorn*, he was a very bright man when he was a young man.
- A: Yeah, they were educated in France, both of them, so they knew each other from that time and I think my brother-in-law knew them better because they all had their educations at the same time and he had commented a little bit about the meetings they had already had in France about Communism, but he wasn't invited and didn't participate.
- Q: Did you ask about the theory of the *Khmer Rouge*? How could these people have been responsible for the suffering of so many people? Have you ever tried to understand it?
- A: I tried, but I still have not come up with any answer. A lot of times I wonder, why so much killing, why killing the innocent, like the children and farmers too, not just the high class society suffers, but everybody. I think it was just intimidation to have more control over the people. But their goal was probably insignificant because you cannot have a country governed by Communists without people. It is just insane to me. We need people to govern, you kill but so much of extermination, so it has some other...
- Q: A lot of people say that when they see a picture of torture they wonder what is going on in the mind of the torturer. Why would someone want to be so cruel and sadistic?
- A: Sometimes I think maybe they take drugs or something like that, maybe it is not true, but they say that eating human liver makes you go crazy, but I don't know anybody that has experienced that, but they say it makes people go crazy and then they want to kill more.
- Q: The cannibalism.
- A: Yeah, yeah.
- Q: Is there any precedent for this kind of killing or mass violence in *Khmer* history? Has it ever happened before in Cambodian culture?
- A: Not the extermination of our own people. We have had wars against the Thai and the Vietnamese before. We had a resistance against the government, like the people who lived in the jungle tried to protest in some other way, like just a normal resistance... the guerillas.
- Q: But nothing like that happened before? Nothing in history?
- A: No. Nothing.

- Q: Did your father, your husband, your family anticipate that this kind of killing would happen, or if your father was alive today and we were talking to him, would he think this was a fantastic situation?
- A: I am sure that he did not anticipate that extreme behavior. Like I told you before that my husband said that he did not mind working for the Communists because he was not corrupted, so he thought that his work would be a contribution to them in some way. To be honest and straight would be their philosophy also.
- Q: So you had no anticipation of the tremendous tragedy that would happen?
- A: No, not at all.
- Q: As a Cambodian how do you feel about this? When you think about the *Pol Pot* situation, from a historical point of view, what does it say about the Cambodian nation or the Cambodian identity? Do you think anything?
- A: It is a feeling of loss and a scary fear that a country could not exist, like our name, Cambodian is going to be vanished forever. It's going to continue and we can return to a small group of people, we used to call it the *Cham*, it came from *Chumpa*, and just living in another Cambodia as a small group, that is the feeling, fear that this is going to happen.
- Q: That the Cambodian nation will disappear?
- A: Disappear.
- Q: Because the *Cham* once used to have the empire, right?
- A: Yeah, and now they have nothing, they are just nomads living in Cambodia, going from place to place. That is my feeling and it is a feeling of wanting not to have that happen.
- Q: Do you assume any guilt yourself as a Cambodian or any shame that the Cambodians did this to each other; is there any shame about the situation?
- A: I did have shame, I cannot hide being Cambodian and people know the story of Cambodia and that we came down to killing each other like that and putting ourselves down. In fact, when I went to Bangkok to pick up my children from the camp, I had to take a taxi because the Thai government was so involved in the refugee camp, when I took a taxi around town and the taxi driver asked where I was from, I had to lie and I felt really ashamed to say I am not a Cambodian. I said I was Malaysian. But I didn't want that. My feeling was not that I didn't want to be Cambodian, but that I don't want anyone to put the Cambodians down or

think that we are something bad because we have so many refugees coming to the border and living like beggars.

Q: Well one thing I am not surprised by, which I am worried about is the notion of patriotism, love for one's country. It strikes me right now that amongst the three or four major factions there is not great leader, like a Gandhi, there's no leader that loves the people. You don't get a sense in the Cambodian culture right now that there is a great leader that really want to heal the nation to help the people make a better life. I don't know if you agree with this or not but it is a confusing situation.

A: I think that you are right, in fact I have told everybody many times that if I had to vote right now I wouldn't want to give my vote to some unknown person. I just want to make sure, being here, and being used to having the freedom to really say what I want to say. I don't want to lose my voice to somebody I am not sure is going to help the people. We don't have any great leader right now. There is nobody. It is a stress on the country. But somehow something really has to be done too, you cannot put that away because if there is no structure of some kind then there is no action either.

Q: Yeah, sure, sure. What are the things about your country right now that you are proudest of at this point?

A: That I am proud of? Gosh, this is a hard question. That people are still surviving in spite of so much trauma, that they really struggle to be better. It is still a confusion, but in this country we really try our best with the little things that we have to build up again. And I am proud of that. Young people still struggle to survive and they still go to study, like a hunger for whatever is lost.

Q: And what would you say are the things about your country that are the opposite of proud, make you feel the worst about...

A: What makes me feel the worst is a sense of not having an understanding. I cannot find another word that is a strong word for togetherness, like we are still apart in a lot of ways.

Q: Sure, sure.

A: And then the loss of that. They have the ability. We have the ability, that is a fact because people try really hard to survive, and I have not been to Cambodia but from what I have heard it is a really good feeling, people are doing all kinds of trades, commerce with neighboring countries like Vietnam or Thailand, although it is very hard to have their presence there because they take more advantage of us...

Q: You mean in Cambodia.

Interview 10 - Part 2

A: Yeah. I think the people are trying to survive. The worst thing I feel is probably about the loss of identity, the loss of themselves to understand the people, their own people, each other, to be able to help each other without any disinterest.

Q: Now what is the loss of identity? What does that mean?

A: Loss of identity is like the loss of the good feeling that they used to have, Cambodia used to be called the smiling country, a peaceful country, everywhere you go you see in the books smiling and peaceful people, but it is not a smiling and peaceful country anymore. It is not true right now. Maybe I think about something else too.

Q: Svang, do you have any more questions you want to ask before we go to the next interview?

Interview 10 - Part 5

Q: Every culture has its traditions around dealing with the loss of a loved one. In your family, for instance, if there was a death of a parent or a child, now I am not talking about during the *Khmer Rouge* time, I'm talking in general, what traditions were associated with death in your family?

A: What? Can you...

Q: Say for instance, your grandfather died. Did you experience the death of any loved ones in your family?

A: My grandfather, although my grandfather from my father's side died when I was still young, I kind of remember a little bit about that.

Q: Can you tell us about that? In other words, I'm trying to get a sense of how your family would honor the death of a loved one. Would they have a ceremony?

A: What do you mean honor?

Q: Like, for instance, in the Catholic Church you have a mass and you have a priest come.

A: Well, yes, we have a tradition and I think it is not so different from other traditions. Maybe again, I take everything for granted. Maybe other people would see it differently. But my grandfather from my father's side died of cancer when I was still very young, about six or seven years old, but I remember a little bit of that time and my father told us the story about his death.

Q: Now he was the king, right?

A: No, no, no. He was just...

Q: Your father's father.

A: Yes, my father's father. That is the death that I experienced in my family. He was very religious and he knew ahead of time, he expected that this was going to come, or he had a dream, the day of his death he said, "there is a big reunion in the family." I was there, I remember, but the thing I didn't know was that my grandfather wanted everybody just to say good-bye to him and leave the room. Everybody was not allowed to stay in the room because he didn't want everybody to cry over his death. Only one friend stayed with him, and he was not afraid because he started to tell his friend about which part of his body he could not feel, it was cold and all that. So that was the experience that I heard. My grandfather from my mother's side passed away just about three years before the Communists

took over and he was the one that was very close to me. He died at the age of eighty- four and it was a very big ceremony. Everything was prepared ahead of time because the doctor said he wasn't going to survive. We just had to wait, when the time came the children were prepared, everybody had their white clothing and had prepared the cloths to cover him, prepared his coffin, the candles and everything. Everything was already laid out for that purpose, and even the curtain in the house was changed. It was really a sad feeling, but his death was expected because he had a long illness before that. It took two weeks of mourning, and I guess that is the same as most Cambodian families. During two weeks of mourning we have a celebration everyday, pray everyday and the body was exposed, exposed so the family...

Q: Could see it, sure.

A: The family can come and pray and look and cry, or whatever. I don't know what else to say.

Q: In the royal family was the body cremated?

A: Yes.

Q: Then would the ashes go to a separate temple or a special temple or grave?

A: Usually we have a burial place for the family that we call *stup-par*. *Stup-par* is the favorite pagoda that we chose to be a part of the family pagoda and the ashes were put in an urn and then buried so we can visit.

Q: So this *stup-par* is still in Cambodia in *Phnom Penh* so you can visit it when you go there?

A: I can visit, yeah.

Q: So you'll have the ashes there...

A: Probably, but maybe not. I don't know because it is not locked or anything. You can open it and during the Communist time maybe they thought that the royal family has some type of...

Q: Maybe they stole it or broke it, I understand.

A: No, maybe they thought it was gold or something.

Q: Gold, oh I see.

A: Or hiding.

- Q: Did your brother go to the pagoda? One of the things that I want to clarify is the King *Sisowath Monivong*. Is that his name?
- A: *Sisowath Monivong*. *Sisowath* is different, that is his father and King *Sisowath Monivong* is his son.
- Q: And the son, how are they related to your father?
- A: Family tree. I just briefly summarize, not so much on the tale and I told her I would fill in the missing parts.
- Q: Oh, I see, okay, where is your father here? Okay, I see, so he had a brother, so that is how you are related. Would the King's ashes be in the same tomb?
- A: No, no. It's different. Because the King has his own special place- even his brothers and sisters won't be with him.
- Q: I see.
- A: Unless another king that is his successor would allow that to happen. But we just have the regular coffin like in this picture, there it has an urn. The king would be put in an urn like that, but if you are not the king it is just a regular coffin.
- Q: Now what about the soul of the dead person, in your family tradition, what was the belief about the spirit of the person who died?
- A: We believe they all go to heaven.
- Q: All of your family went to heaven?
- A: All my family went to heaven.
- Q: Is that because you have good luck with heaven or because you are all good?
- A: I think I have special family members. I cannot say for everybody.
- Q: If you were bad would you go to heaven?
- A: No, if you were bad you are going to suffer somewhere.
- Q: But what is that? Say there are some people in your family, I won't mention any names, who have a lot of girlfriends and are unfaithful to their wives, would they go to heaven?
- A: Probably not, but it's just a belief that all who have finished with their lives would be free.

Q: But the question I have is that under the *Pol Pot* period, many Cambodians lost loved ones, they never saw them again, so from a religious point of view does that disturb you in any way? Is there any incompleteness in some spiritual way, like for instance, your father died, he disappeared, he didn't have a traditional burial. Does that mean anything to you, or do you have any thoughts about that?

A: It does not mean so much, I don't know if this is because of his heritage, his thinking, that death is not a surprise, that one living is bound to be dead someday and he had a lot of strong feelings about that. When I was young he used to try to act like a dead person, not breathing to see how he felt, if he was going to feel fear or going to feel something and then he talked about it. It is a very scary feeling sometimes, thinking about yourself as a dead person, but I think it is not an incompleteness in a way that one person doing what they are doing in their lives, they are supposed to accept it.

Q: You accept this.

A: Yeah, accepting death. But the hard part is not the death but the missing; in a way it is so sudden. And that is what I think about my children. I was just saying to *Svang* before you came in that I used to think about my children and husband, and that when I first came to the United States that was what kept me going, a hope, but also a kind of relief or sense that if they passed away, if they could not survive this trauma, this killing, they couldn't survive, the religious part of me said that they have finished their suffering on earth. So there is no more starvation, no more beating, no more sending them to the field, they are lucky in a way.

Q: Sure, sure, sure.

A: So that's my part...

Q: Sure, sure.

A: Of my thinking.

Q: Well is it part of the Buddhist concept that life is suffering, I mean, you suffer your whole life?

A: Life is suffering but there is a destiny that when you have to go, you have to go. There is no way to be afraid of...

Q: One question- a lot of Cambodians from a different background than yourself, they feel that unless they did the ceremony that the spirit of their parents could not come to rest.

A: You mean like offerings and things like that?

Q: Yes, right.

A: We did in our family on a certain special occasion, a memory of the dead.

Q: But this is not one of your mail beliefs, that if you didn't bury your husband or your father in the proper way that his spirit could not find rest?

A: No, I don't believe that and none of my family believes that.

Q: So you think he is at peace.

A: Yes. He has always said that it does not matter where you die, my father used to say that. It is not your body that is important, it is your spirit. So wherever, it does not matter. That is a part that I am proud of in a way. Maybe it sounds like you had to complete something, but he is always in my prayers, day and night, every day, so the idea is that he continues his life wherever he goes, and my husband too is always in my prayers.

Q: What about suffering? Do you think that death is good because it ends suffering on earth? What is your philosophy about death and suffering?

A: It is a very Buddhist philosophy that you suffer because you did something in your life in the past, it is always a past, present and future and so it is nothing really new about suffering, although it is hard to go through it, you don't want to be poor, you don't want to struggle. You don't want to be sick. You don't want to be beaten by your husband, but it is a part of life. My philosophy is that you just take what you have, and you do what you have to when it comes to suffering, without complaining, and then when the struggle is through you are happy.

Q: Is there any good that comes out of suffering?

A: Experiences of life.

Q: Why is that good?

A: Why? Because you know what you are supposed to be as a person through suffering, while you suffer you find out what you did wrong. Aside from illness because when you get ill that is your body that just lets go, but I mean other suffering. Even in the country I used to think that way, in a whole nation. We all were born in some time to meet this destiny. It is not like some can escape, you may be doing a lot better to be able to escape from Cambodia, but we are all in the same boat, in same kind of *karma*.

Q: Yeah, sure, sure. But your family's *karma*, does that mean something? Does it mean that they did something wrong? Do you see this as some kind of destiny for your family?

A: Some destiny, some destiny.

Q: What destiny did your family do to deserve this *karma*?

A: No, the destiny that we used to think as Cambodians as mine, it is just something that we did in the past, not something that is done up until the present. It is always something in the past.

Q: Always something in the past?

A: Yeah, in the past life, in a past existence, like you were born and you did something but it is something that is related to your past life. So it is something that you cannot see.

Q: Can a nation have a destiny?

A: I believe so. In fact in Buddhism we get what is called prediction. It was a Buddhist prediction from a long time ago, but nobody believed it. I don't know if you heard about it.

Q: No.

A: It's like at some point in time the country's roads will not have anybody to walk on them and the houses will not have anybody to live in them and the blood of people will come up to the elephant's stomach.

Q: Elephant's stomach, what does that mean?

A: Like the elephant is tall, right?

Q: So the blood will come up...

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: This is a good prediction. Did you know this as a child?

A: It was taught all the time but I never believed it, but before the Communists took over my grandaunt said, "You know, you cannot beat this kind of thing." I said, "Where are we going to go?" There are so many houses, why nobody would live there on so many roads?" But that happened.

Q: Did your father believe this prediction?

A: He knew too.

Q: What did he say about it?

A: I don't remember anything that he said about it, but it was kind of passed down. Sometimes when we know something we just joke about it and don't really take it seriously until it happens so it must be true. Someone said the next prediction is that *Phnom Penh* is going to vanish and it will be just a happy town and the Vietnamese are going to have a small place to stay in a boat. The Cambodians, I don't know how to translate, it's like we are going to live under a tree and the tree is like the *Bodhi* tree where he was enlightened.

Q: And who made this prediction?

A: Buddha prediction.

Q: Buddhist prediction.

A: Yeah, and again, it will happen, I believe so. And I say, just be prepared to live in cold water; don't buy any houses in Cambodia. That is a joke. We have to be prepared this time.

Q: By the way did *Ankerwhat* change quite a bit?

A: I've been there once or twice, not so much during my time.

Q: So your family didn't have a special relationship with *Angkor Wat*?

A: My grandfather on my mother's side was a director of the *Ankerwhat*, property that he oversaw. He used to say that during the French regime the French took a lot of treasures out of Cambodia and nobody could do anything. Lots of treasures. He was a director, but he had no power.

Q: Does that statue, the poachers from Paris...

A: Yeah, it was very beautiful. It just shows, even in the face, the sweat of Cambodia. It is so vivid in the picture, very beautiful. You are lucky to have one.

Q: The picture, you mean?

A: How did you get it?

Q: I was in Paris. I went to the museum and picked it up.

A: Did it cost a lot of money?

Q: No, two or three dollars.

A: Really? They make it so everybody can have one. I'd like to have one.

Q: Sure. The Boston Museum has American sculpture and Cambodian sculpture, about two or three pieces.

A: That is good to see what they have.

Q: Did you have that in your house? Did your family have any...

A: We weren't able to bring anything out, but we did have a lot of treasures in my home in Cambodia, in my father's home. Hopefully they are still there. The angel that is sleeping there in the house will care for everything.

Q: Now, around the grief, did you ever feel a sadness so deep, a suffering so deep that you felt you couldn't live anymore?

A: I didn't experience that. I think that the deep feeling of sadness is the loss of my father and my grandmother that I loved, and I didn't see the bodies. Accepting that they are dead, mourning for them is not quite over. I think about the time my grandfather from my mother's side died we were expecting it, so it was not a big sadness. He was an old man. He died of an illness. But the pain, the loss of my father, my grandmother, mostly my father, is still painful. I think that is a deep sadness.

Q: Around this pain, do you feel that someday you will have less pain or do you think it is just something you learn to live with?

A: I think someday I will have less pain, probably if I go back to Cambodia, although my inside says I don't want to face that, it is too painful, I don't want to learn about that. My other side says I want to see the place, not where he died because I don't know where my father, my family, my mother, my grandmother died, I don't know, but just for the feeling of being there, maybe one day to see the house, to see where we used to live, to have a good time, will have some kind of healing effect. But right now it is put away. I don't know how I will react until then. But right now that is the way I feel.

Q: Sure.

A: It is hard to go.

Q: Sure, sure. Is there anything else you want to say about the tradition of death in your family and burial? Is there anything we missed?

A: I don't think it is anything special to me; again, it is just the ceremony I told you about.

Q: ...S.S. on February 10, 1943 and we are moving to interview you. In this interview we'd like to talk to you about how you were able to cope with and survive the experiences you have had. Many of our oral historians here had to live through the Pof Pof concentration camps, which you didn't, but you suffered a lot yourself. So how did you survive this and what were the things that were most helpful to you in surviving this experience, the last fifteen, twenty years.

A: I think a lot has to do with the previous education I had, the preparation I had because my parents sent me to boarding school, and just a lot of preparation to not be surprised. It is very difficult to lose the wealth, to go out and earn your own money to support your family. It is not easy, but somehow it is not something impossible to do if you really try to do it and it is in your mind that you have the will, I am not handicapped. I can speak the language. I can learn a lot of things. And I wanted to learn that was not possible after my marriage. I can survive this and I feel a lot of gratefulness to my father for being able to give me all this education, all the support that he has in terms of values of a person's life, in every way, in a social life, having a friend so it is from the bottom. It's just not so much of a difficult thing to do. I cannot put it in the right words, the feeling that I had at that time, I felt like I had to struggle through this, I had the kind of energy to do it.

Q: Did you feel your education specifically made you stronger to survive?

A: Yeah, I think so.

Q: You were never in a life-threatening situation, right, where you felt like you were going to be killed?

A: I did, in my second marriage.

Q: You had a life-threatening situation in your second marriage? Would you like to tell us about it?

A: My marriage with my second husband is very terrible. He threatened to kill me several times and he said, "If something happens to you and nobody can find you..."

Q: He threatened to kill you?

A: Yeah, he threatened that.

Q: Was he a batterer? Did he hit you?

Interview 10 - Part 6

Q: ...S.S. on February 10, 1993 and we are moving to interview six. In this interview we'd like to talk to you about how you were able to cope with and survive the experiences you have had. Many of our oral historians have had to live through the *Pol Pot* concentration camps, which you didn't, but you suffered a lot yourself. So how did you survive this and what were the things that were most helpful to you in surviving this experience, the last fifteen, twenty years.

A: I think a lot has to do with the previous education I had, the preparedness I had because my parents sent me to boarding school, and just a lot of preparation to not be surprised. It is very difficult to lose the wealth, to go out and earn your own money to support your family. It is not easy, but somehow it is not something impossible to do if you really try to do it and it is in your mind that you have the skill, I am not handicapped. I can speak the language. I can learn a lot of things that I wanted to learn that was not possible after my marriage. I can survive this and I feel a lot of gratefulness to my father for being able to give me all this education, all the support that he has in terms of values of a person's life, in every way, in a social life, having a friend so it is from the bottom. It's just not so much of a difficult thing to do. I cannot put it in the right words, the feeling that I had at that time, I felt like I had to struggle through this, I had the kind of energy to do it.

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A: I did, in my second marriage.

Q: You had a life-threatening situation in your second marriage? Would you like to tell us about it?

A: My marriage with my second husband is very terrible. He threatened to kill me several times and he said, "If something happens to you and nobody can find you..."

Q: He threatened to kill you?

A: Yeah, he threatened that.

Q: Was he a batterer? Did he hit you?

- A: He never hit me, but he tried with the gesture. When he got mad he would. And I said, "Don't touch me!" It was very difficult. And he tried to strangle me once.
- Q: He tried to strangle you?
- A: Yeah.
- Q: Did you feel like he was going to kill you?
- A: Definitely. He was really, really mad at one point.
- Q: Was he mentally abusive?
- A: Very. Emotionally, mentally abusive. He harassed me with words.
- Q: Do you want to give me an example?
- A: I don't know a specific example. Its is everything, every little thing, everything I do...
- Q: A lot of American women talk about a batterer. Did you feel you were battered, living with a batterer? Would you characterize your home as domestic violence?
- A: I would characterize it as domestic violence.
- Q: Did he hit your children or abuse your children?
- A: No, no, no.
- Q: Just you?
- A: Just me.
- Q: Was he sexually abusive?
- A: No, his sexual life was normal.
- Q: So you would say it was hell for you living with this man?
- A: Definitely it was hell.
- Q: How long were you married for?
- A: About twelve years.
- Q: How long was it hell?

- A: I would say for about ten years. Let me see, we had a good life after the wedding for about three years to four years at the most, and then from that point it was gradually degrading. But it started earlier; I didn't see it right away. It was just a little bit of this and that, it was insignificant to me until it got really bad.
- Q: How long did you know this man before you married him?
- A: About one year.
- Q: He seemed nice when you...
- A: Yes he seemed nice, really.
- Q: Did he drink or was he an alcoholic?
- A: No, he does not drink, he does not go out, he does not smoke, he spends a lot of his life reading.
- Q: Why was he so abusive do you think?
- A: I think that he was jealous of my life and he was probably expecting to be married to an Asian woman and having someone submissive, respecting what he said and what he does, just agreeing to everything. I was not that kind of person to him.
- Q: Well this is interesting, you lived through the Cambodian revolution, you flee to Paris, you come to America and then you have your worst, one of your worst situations right here in your own home in America. What do you make of it?
- A: Yeah?
- Q: Talk about your *karma*, right?
- A: *Karma!* I don't know what horrible thing I did maybe in my previous life...
- Q: Well do you think there was a vulnerability? Sometimes people who suffer tragic situations, instead of having successful next piece, it actually gets worse for a while because they are very vulnerable. They are easy to take advantage of. Maybe you were not that strong emotionally when you came, when you married this man, as you are now.
- A: I was not strong, that is true, because I was feeling more of a need for love at that time. It is not a true love, just maybe more of a need to have somebody supporting my children.
- Q: You were desperate for help.

A: Desperate, yeah. Because again, with all the experiences and all the things that happened I had a feeling of running away from home, leaving everything behind. I wanted to die too but that is not so strong.

Q: How did you break out of the situation? How did you escape it?

A: I think through my beliefs, religious beliefs, and it does not end there. You live through this and that and then you really get a source of energy from that experience.

Q: Did you just leave home or did you walk out on him?

A: No. I just lived with him and, in fact, I was able to control my anger in a way so we stopped arguing. I became more accepting of his behavior instead of fighting back and making my son's life very miserable. He was still young at the time and he... so I was able to control myself to the point that I feel okay with him right now being away. We are still communicating, we still talk to each other.

Q: But did he accept you leaving? What did you do, tell him one day that you were leaving?

A: I think the leaving was more from his part than from my part. He was saying, "Get out of my face, I don't want to see you anymore." But I was not ready to leave, first financially, I was still helping my children out and then my son was constantly sick. I was not ready at all to leave, but he was talking about it constantly. I said I will leave, but until...

Q: So you have been separated for how long now?

A: Just recently when he was transferred to Panama, around 1991, July 1991.

Q: He is a military man?

A: Military, yeah. So it was accepted, we separated nicely. We share the same things in the house, separated everything.

Q: So he is in another country now? He is in Panama now?

A: He is in Panama. We lived in the same house before that but in separate rooms and didn't have any intimate...

Q: Are you worried that he might come back and hurt you?

A: I do worry about that. I don't know how I am going to do it, I am just not ready, but for the future...

Q: When is he going to come home?

A: Maybe in 1994.

Q: I see. Do you think he may try to hurt you when he comes home?

A: I am afraid of that, but I lived with that for a long time already and he didn't do anything. But there is still a threat that his mind could go crazy for some conversation or about something he will get mad.

Q: You're not divorced, right?

A: I'm not.

Q: So what prevents you from divorcing him?

A: That is a good question. I don't love him. I don't want to be with him.

Q: So why don't you get a divorce while he is in Panama?

A: I thought about that, but I think that the thing that is holding me back most is that I might be creating a much worse situation for myself or for my son.

Q: He gives you money now?

A: No, I don't want anything; he knows that, he was talking about...

Q: So why not get divorced then? An official divorce?

A: An official divorce, I am just afraid, like I said, again, of his reaction.

Q: So he is still blackmailing you?

A: In a way, yeah. But I don't want to push a situation to the point that it does not benefit anyone.

Q: Right, but at some point you are going to have to deal with this?

A: Yeah, slowly, probably. Maybe he has a relationship and is happy and he wants to leave on his own. That is fine with me.

Q: Well, but it is interesting, we have an expression in America that you go from the frying pan into the fire.

- A: Yeah. That is true. I have had a very disturbing life and that is why I couldn't pursue my education while in the United States because of my troubled life, so much trouble.
- Q: Well you are a counselor, right?
- A: Yes.
- Q: You are a mental health worker? Do any of your colleagues give you ideas on this?
- A: Sometimes. But maybe I was too depressed at one point; I was not ready.
- Q: Not ready.
- A: To do anything.
- Q: Okay. So what do you think? You have this big problem with your Cambodian situation and then all of a sudden you have a very messy personal situation. So do you think you are almost out of this or do you feel you are still dealing with it?
- A: I think that I am almost out. I am probably freer because I have been talking to my husband too about going back to Cambodia, things like that. Again, I was able to talk more.
- Q: What does he say when you say that?
- A: He said, "Oh you can come and live in Panama?" I said, "I don't want to live in Panama! I go to Cambodia."
- Q: Sure, sure.
- A: So he tried to get me there but I didn't...
- Q: Well let's talk about a few things related to this. You know there are different kinds of trauma, right? There is emotional trauma. The Cambodian word for torture is *tarunakarm*? So you have the physical torture, the mental torture and then you just have very bad life experiences. How do you see the difference? I don't think you were ever physically tortured, right?
- A: No, no, but emotionally yes.
- Q: Do you see the suffering of losing your father and the grief and losing your country, do you see that as a form of torture, or do you see that in a different way? What is the difference between the quality of the experience, of the Cambodian situation, versus the situation with your husband? What is the difference for you?

- A: I don't understand the question.
- Q: The quality of the trauma. The quality of the upset. How is it different?
- A: I don't think I understand.
- Q: If you had to choose, if you had to choose between the suffering you suffered under your husband versus the kind of suffering you suffered losing your father, moving the Paris, etc. Which would you choose?
- A: I would choose the suffering of losing my father.
- Q: What is different? That is what I am saying.
- A: Okay, okay.
- Q: I'm just trying to get a sense of how that is different for you.
- A: The difference is that one life, suffering with my husband is like living with a person who does not understand the value of one's life and does not respect what one wants to do with that life. He just does not see it, he kind of denies me my part, my Cambodian part of me, and wants me to just be an American, or maybe accepting as his slave instead. The suffering of losing my father is more a feeling of value because of the respect he always had for the children, to think about the children in another way so it was more peaceful, a more happy suffering.
- Q: I see, I see.
- A: Suffer, but more sorrow. I don't know if I can answer your question.
- Q: Sure, sure. Do you have fear with your husband?
- A: I do. I still have fear, because his reactions are very unpredictable.
- Q: Sure, he is unpredictable.
- A: So it is not the divorce, the divorce is nothing. It is just a paper, but the reaction, the outcome of that is not something we want to find out, for the sake of the children.
- Q: What do you think about your character, or your religion, or your family values? What do you think helps you be strong in these situations?
- A: My character...

Q: Or anything. What is it that you count on to help you deal with these situations?

A: Oh I have a lot of qualities. I am proud of myself.

Q: What are those?

A: Qualities of being nice, to socialize easily, to listen to people and understand their feelings, the qualities of religion, to respect all of the religions. I don't really mind who is Muslim or Christian or whatever, it does not come to my mind that the person is something less. It is a lot of respect. I think I have qualities, but the only thing I don't like about myself is that I am going slow.

Q: What do you mean you are going slow?

A: My reaction is not fast if somebody wants to have a major reaction, because I take time to think through it first.

Q: I see. Were you like this when you were younger or is this new?

A: I think that has been in me.

Q: Slow.

A: Yeah.

Q: So you may have felt a long time ago that your husband was a bad man but it took you eight years...

A: That is true. And again, it is not the reaction that took time, in my mind he was already a bad person, he is very stressful in his own way because of his life or whatever. He was an abused child when he was young.

Q: He was an abused child?

A: Yeah, he said his father beat him up and didn't allow him to do things, so maybe he uses his power on somebody else when he has a chance.

Q: Sure, sure.

A: So it's not the fear of him so much as it is his reaction. It is not good to deal with that, what if he is going to come and kill me or kill my son or kill everybody because he is angry. What is the point of living that way?

Q: But how do you gain freedom from him?

A: I gain a lot of freedom, yeah.

Q: You have a lot of freedom now?

A: I do.

Q: But do you think you will ever be free from him and his violence?

A: I would think so, I really hope. Maybe the freedom I would expect from him is more like a friendship freedom. It is not a freedom of a husband and wife relationship. It is more like I hope to be a friendly person to him.

Q: Now what about your family? If someone knew in your family, say your father knew a man was abusing you or your brother, or someone like this. Could they step in and defend you from a bad husband?

A: No. Everybody knows about my life.

Q: Well why is that? Is that Cambodian to not interfere with the daughter's or sister's troubles?

A: In my family we just don't interfere with each other's problems.

Q: So they may know that your husband is abusing you but they are not going to help you? Why is that? It is interesting; every culture has its own traditions. You couldn't call your brother up and say, "you know, my husband is beating me terribly, come over and beat him up?"

A: No.

Q: Okay.

A: Shame, there is shame to call somebody up. It is a shame in a way to have people interfere and kind of...

Q: No, I think you are right. I think that we see this fear with our patients. Even if someone sees a very bad situation going on with their daughter they won't interfere.

A: In fact when my husband strangled me, two of my children were home at the time, and I told them, "I almost died but somehow he released the pressure." But I didn't see any reaction from them at all. I said, "I almost died. He strangled me." But I guess there is a lot of shame to...

Q: Shame.

- A: Shame to get everybody to come and interfere with your personal life and you have to deal with it.
- Q: It makes the family look bad?
- A: Yes. I guess that is right in away. I think it is right. I try to think back with other families, not with myself but with my sister. She divorced her husband but they stayed friendly.
- Q: Sure, sure.
- A: My brothers too, my brothers that are living here are both divorced from their original wives and are remarried...
- Q: Sure, sure.
- A: But we never interfere with their lives.
- Q: Now I don't want to ask an embarrassing question, but is this an inter-racial marriage? What is the ethnic background of your husband?
- A: He is part German and American. His great-grandfather may be a German.
- Q: This situation, we have a lot of Asian women, married by American soldiers in Japan, Korean Vietnam, and there are groups, this is not an uncommon situation around the problems of domestic violence in American-Asian marriages. So you know about that?
- A: Yes.
- Q: You heard this before?
- A: I heard, yeah.
- Q: Soldiers marrying Asian women?
- A: Having very successful lives.
- Q: A lot of problems, yeah. So there is a lot of discussion about this.
- A: In fact, when I was training in mental health, it is mostly geared towards Japanese women that have problems with inter-racial marriages.
- Q: Sure, sure, very common situation.
- A: So I know there are a lot of problems.

- Q: Now did you ever feel that everything you believed in, your entire world the way you knew it was disappearing, like everything you believed in was gone, the world was strange because you had lost everything familiar? Did you ever have that feeling?
- A: I do have, yeah.
- Q: You still have this feeling?
- A: I do have that feeling, yeah.
- Q: Now can you tell me a little bit about that? When it first began and...
- A: I don't remember when it first began. It is just a feeling of how to get everything back again, just like simple things like when can we visit the house we used to live in, just the simple matters. How the people will regain the life they had, it is like waking up with this war.
- Q: Do you ever feel like you are in a dream, that this isn't real, that you are living a dream?
- A: It does feel like a dream. Maybe it is not true, maybe if you go back it will still be the same. But yeah, it does feel like a dream sometimes.
- Q: Sometimes your life feels that way? Do you ever feel like you are a character in a play that someone else wrote? In other words, like you are acting in a play, but it is not your play?
- A: I don't think so.
- Q: You feel this is your play.
- A: This is my play, this is my life.
- Q: Have you ever had any bad dreams or nightmares about anything? You don't have nightmares.
- A: I don't have nightmares. If I do, like right now if I dream- I dream a lot too, but I cannot remember my dreams.
- Q: But you have never had a series of nightmares even after...
- A: No, no, no.
- Q: Even in Cambodia with the bombing and the rockets?

- A: No.
- Q: Any memories or fantasies or flashbacks or images that come to your mind? Do you see things or remember that on a regular basis? Or does any memory stand out for you? Like during a daydream or while sleeping?
- A: Daydreams are mostly nice daydreams I think.
- Q: You daydream?
- A: Nice daydream, I thought about going back and how I am going to work with people, how to approach people, things like that.
- Q: But you don't have a lot of other memories that come back...
- A: Mostly my memories are nice memories, like a souvenir from the past, good life. We used to have days, we celebrated days, running from time to time, my father, sitting around and having rice stick soup, a lot of people come, they used to come down from his bedroom, drink coffee, things like that.
- Q: Good memories. Do you ever see your father in your mind? Do you ever have a visual image of your father, your mother or your grandparents?
- A: No, no.
- Q: Never. Does he ever talk to you, your father, does he ever come to you in spirit and talk to you at all?
- A: No. I wish sometimes. I have said, "come, something, show me the way."
- Q: Sure.
- A: He hasn't come.
- Q: What about songs or smells or anything that comes into your mind? Do you sing, find yourself singing songs that you remember as a child or at different points in your life?
- A: Well I don't know. I like music but I don't think to remember a lot of songs that I used to sing.
- Q: You don't remember?
- A: I don't remember. But the smell I feel, this may be a crazy little something, but it happens from time to time, like when I was really, really sad...

Q: What would you smell?

A: I just smell flowers...

Q: Flowers. What kind of flowers?

A: Jasmine flowers or sometimes the flower that is like the Cambodian perfume my grandmother used to wear, and it is a nice thought but I was not worried about that. I would just think it was like protection, like somebody.

Q: The smell was protection?

A: Yeah, protection.

Q: Interesting. And when was the last time that happened to you?

A: I don't remember. I haven't had sad feelings for a long time, since I separated from my husband.

Q: Now around sadness, there are a lot of different Cambodian ways of expressing sadness, right?

A: Yes.

Q: In our clinic we talk about *Pruoy Cet*.

A: *Pruoy Cet*, yeah.

Q: And then we say *Pibaak Cet*, how do you say that?

A: *Be bocha*.

Q: There are other kinds of sadness too, right? *Pruoy Baron*, many others, so now, I am asking this because I have a reason, I'll tell you, *Pibaak Cet*, what does that mean to you when someone tells you they are *Pibaak Cet*?

A: *Pibaak Cet* means that somebody has a problem that they cannot deal with, they think about it all the time.

Q: And how is it different from *Pruoy Cet*?

A: *Pruoy Cet* has a more profound meaning to me because *Pruoy Cet* is more like really, really sad. It is the kind of situation that really has an impact on your life. *Pibaak Cet* is more like when you don't have money or you cannot go to school

because of problems of transportation and all that. But *Pruoy Cet* is something different.

Q: So do you think that way? Is *Pruoy Cet* a deeper feeling of sadness than *Pibaak Cet*?

A: Yes, *Pruoy Cet* is deep inside. *Pibaak Cet* is just some kind of problem.

Q: We say that *Pibaak Cet* was like a deep sadness that people cannot see. You cannot see *Pibaak Cet*.

A: Right.

Q: *Pruoy Cet* you can see. It is more of a depression, serious depression. Is that right?

A: You can see it in the face though, *Pruoy Cet*, yeah.

Q: But *Pibaak Cet* you cannot see?

A: You can't see but because *Pibaak Cet* is lighter; people will just talk about it more freely.

Q: In our study in the refugee camp, eighty percent of the people said they were *Pibaak Cet*. Would that surprise you?

A: Yes.

Q: They felt *Pibaak Cet*. Eighty percent of the people.

A: That probably does not surprise me because they probably think so much about the way of their living that it makes them *Pibaak Cet*. Everything is missing, they don't have a home, that is *Pibaak Cet*.

Q: But about fifty percent were *Pruoy Cet*.

A: Yeah.

Q: So that is a deeper depression because they are missing everything in the camp. But then a lot of people lost their families and they are depressed. They are very depressed. So *Pruoy Cet* would be a deeper depression.

A: Deeper depression.

Q: Are there any other depressions we should know about?

- A: No, those are the only two I can think of.
- Q: We say *Pruoy Barom* is more of a word.
- A: Yeah.
- Q: Is that right then?
- A: Yes, it is right, *Barom* is like you get on a plane and you *barom* that the plane is going down or something.
- Q: What kind of depression did you have? Were you ever *Pibaak Cet* or *Pruoy Cet*?
- A: I would say that I was *Pruoy Cet* person concerning my problem because it is a long situation with my husband.
- Q: So with your husband you were *Pruoy Cet*. What about around the loss of your father?
- A: Again, it came slowly, it was not like a constant depression.
- Q: So it wasn't *Pruoy Cet* around your father.
- A: It is not *Pruoy Cet*. It takes a lot of time to think...
- Q: Slow. Did you eventually become *Pruoy Cet* around the loss of your family?
- A: It did come but it did not stay very long because of my feeling that he is going to go on.
- Q: And *Pibaak Cet*, were you *Pibaak Cet* through this at all?
- A: Yes. I was *Pibaak Cet* to find a job, *Pibaak Cet* to get a low paying job, when I first started. It's just *Pibaak Cet* to come and see you.
- Q: This is *Pibaak Cet*?
- A: *Pibaak Cet*, I don't know what kind of questions you have for me. I would say *Pibaak Cet* a little, not too much. It is not something I cannot deal with.
- Q: I see. That's interesting. So really the depression that we would recognize in America as a very deep sadness would be *Pruoy Cet*, and *Pibaak Cet* would be a lighter sadness, but also you are depressed, but it is more related to something that you cannot deal with. Is that right?
- A: At the time.

- Q: At the time. I see.
- A: You have a dictionary, maybe you could look it up and find out.
- Q: And if your son dies and it was a shock to you, would you be *Pibaak Cet* or *Pruoy Cet*?
- A: Oh, that would be *Pruoy Cet*. Very deep depression.
- Q: Very deep depression, yeah. And that is the main term for depression, *Pruoy Cet*?
- A: I use that in my therapy with my people. I use that term rather than *Pibaak Cet*. That is my interpretation but I never look up in the dictionary. It is just the way of everyday language.
- Q: And how are you feeling now, *Pibaak Cet* or *Pruoy Cet* in your life?
- A: I feel happy right now.
- Q: So how would you say happy in Cambodian?
- A: *Sabai Cet*.
- Q: *Sabai Cet*. So now you feel happy.
- A: Happy to be me.
- Q: That's good. So is there anything that we can do to make you depressed?
- A: you can. I don't know. Working maybe.
- Q: Working will make you depressed?
- A: Working with people. A little bit of depression, but not so much, maybe a little bit.
- Q: Very good. So here we are. We're moving. We have a few more interviews. We'll meet tomorrow at Radcliffe. Is there anything else you want to add or say before we end for today? Are there any other thoughts you had? We can continue this tomorrow. So how are these interviews going now? You have been through a few of them. You are more than half way through.
- A: Yeah, it is...
- Q: What do you think of this method?

A: It is good. I think I like it. It is kind of a change, my situation with you, sharing my feelings about my life.

Q: You like it?

A: Yeah, I like it. I try my best, although sometimes my memory...

Q: Yeah, sure.

A: It is kind of blocked.

Q: But has it been difficult for you to think to talk about your life?

A: Sometimes. Certain subjects get difficult. I think I remember the question you asked about, the explanation of the value of death.

Q: Yeah.

A: Oh no, no. The value about how you transfer the inheritance.

Q: Yeah, the tradition.

A: Yeah, the tradition. When I think about that a little more, I think that the tradition that my father handed to us is in a quiet way, through his example, and I never thought about going to my children and saying this is what is going to be transferred to you. It is more like a quiet way, through my example also. That is what I thought. I want to say that mostly because we are traditional, we don't say much about what you are supposed to do, but you set the example with your whole life.

Q: Sure, sure. It makes sense.

A: I try to...

Q: Challenging questions.

A: Because it is hard to explain why I do not talk about my father to my children. He never talked either. I am supposed to take his stand. He did a lot of things in a way, for example, driving, he used to say, "you drive a car and you have a lot of people with you, you are the person that is responsible for everybody else's life."

...situation, nobody, you cannot only be the boss and you will have different bosses that have different characters, but you have to be able to adjust to every boss you have. I think everybody is different but when you give an assignment to

your subordinate, no matter what, you take the responsibility if something does not go right. So these are the kind of teaching qualities to understand that he transmitted.

Q: Sure, sure. Well, we'll ask you more. You should be thinking and maybe we can write down at the end the important teachings or sayings of the parents, the mothers, the fathers, the aunts and uncles, the Buddha, so if you have a few minutes you should write them. If you remember other things your father said or your mother, your grandparents or whoever, because in oral tradition the sayings and stories and sayings of the parents are very important. Some people remember that more than anything else.

A: I do remember with the car.

Q: Sure, it is a beautiful story. So if you remember others we will ask you, be thinking about those. Over the next couple of days write them down if you can remember.

Q: February 11, 1993, *Svang* and myself are interviewing S.S. and we are just going to finish up on how you survived your experience. What was it about your coping, how do you cope with your experience? Have you ever been visited by any spirits or ghosts?

A: No, I wish. Sometimes I wasn't to see how it looks and have the experience.

Q: A lot of Cambodians have been visited by spirits and ghosts. How come you haven't?

A: I don't know. Maybe they don't like me, but I get scared being myself. I've never seen one.

Q: Now, we were talking yesterday about the ways you cope with your experience, both here in this country and during the refugee experience, do you have any other ideas about that? We were talking about your father, do you remember any more?

A: No, I didn't think about it too much though because I was kind of tired. I think that I cope by working a lot, when I work I forget everything. I draw a lot of energy from what I am doing.

Q: As you look back, do you think there is any difference in the way a Cambodian woman from your background would deal with a situation, the suffering you dealt with, compared to a Cambodian man? Do you think women have different coping strategies?

A: I think women are a lot wiser; they have more discipline and they find ways to cope with all situations. I think, I don't know if everyone back home would agree with me, the woman makes more of the decisions in most situations in Cambodia. The men are more dominant in the sense that they bring the food and have an easy time, but the decisions are mostly made by women in all situations, so women have a better way of dealing. Even the poor women have some way, maybe it is not so sophisticated, but they still would survive better than men.

Q: An interesting fact is that there were more men killed than women, I mean more men died than women. What do they say now, there are two women to every man in Cambodia? Why is that do you think?

A: I think it is because before, back in Cambodia and during the Communist time the men just brought home the bread and were strong, dominant over the women. This is just a guess, but probably the women were not so strong to the Communists.

Q: They didn't threaten the Communists so the Communists would kill the men, not the women.

A: Not the women, yeah, but they killed both too. They killed, but somehow the men did not survive because they could not survive the hardship, most of the time they could not survive the starvation, they could not survive the hard work like the women. They really tried to survive in any way.

Q: No, I think that makes a lot of sense because in the camps the women were as sick and had as terrible of an experience as the men, but they seemed to have been able to survive it. What is it about a Cambodian woman that helps her survive starvation, oppression? What do you think is happening?

A: I never thought about that but I think that they have more, what is the word, not confidence; I can't apply the English word to say (Cambodian word). How do you say that? Maybe if I say it in Cambodian maybe she will find it in the dictionary later. They have more patience.

Q: Some of the women said that they survived by completely thinking about saving their children, that they put all of their energy into trying to preserve the lives of their children. Does this make sense to you?

A: This is a factor, but it is not the only thing, because they also know how to be submissive because it is probably no far from what they were used to in their lives.

Q: I see, in other words, it was easier for them to be submissive to the Communists because...

- A: That's true and then the not talking, being deaf, ignoring everything...
- Q: Ignoring everything, I see. Do you know this concept in *Tiing Moong* personality?
- A: *Tiing Moong*, yeah.
- Q: What does that mean?
- A: *Tiing Moong* is just that you act like you are a dumb person, you don't know anything, and you're just being told what to do.
- Q: And you think the women were able to do that better than the men?
- A: Yes. But they do have to do it to get food or whatever.
- Q: But they would play dumb?
- A: They would play dumb.
- Q: Looking at the non-Communist situation, how do the women in America or Cambodia have to play dumb in their marriages? Play *Tiing Moong* in their marriages?
- A: Sometimes it is necessary so that means they are not really dumb, they are smart.
- Q: Give me an example in your life where you had to be...
- A: I think I can give an example that I am acting like I don't know anything. I am not smart in my work or anything. I have to ask if I have to, be dumb in situations, like can you help me to buy a car or to do this, or...
- Q: You really know what you are doing but you just... Why do you do this?
- A: To fool him. Not to have an argument.
- Q: Did you have to be *Tiing Moong* or any dummy personality with your father?
- A: No, no, no.
- Q: With your husband in Cambodia?
- A: Not with my husband in Cambodia, mostly with my first husband, it was because of all the difficulty in understanding each other, so I guess sometimes...

Q: Do you think it is *Tiing Moong* in its mildest form with your husband? Is it like a form of depression? Is it a form of withdrawal? Is it a form of cleverness? How would you describe it? Is it like hiding behind a mask?

A: Hiding behind a mask, but *Tiing Moong* is not in all situations, just in a certain situation that a woman has to act that way to protect something, to not have a fight or an argument, unnecessary things to do. What is your question exactly? I lost my train of thought.

Q: Well is it a state of depression?

A: I don't think it is a state of depression. It is more like acting.

Q: And when the women get together do they talk about this? What I am getting at and trying to understand is, by being *Tiing Moong*, by being a dummy, acting like a dummy, does it hurt the woman socially, does the woman lose anything?

A: I don't think so. Men mostly do *Tiing Moong* then the women.

Q: Men mostly.

A: Mostly. Because they want to get away with their affair or something, they just ignore things; they act *Tiing Moong* because they don't want to be busy or working, helping. A lot of men do, but for the woman it is more like a necessity in certain cases, like if they cannot talk to their husband and get some kind of understanding to make a decision...

Q: I see.

A: Then she probably will want to make him feel like the boss...

Q: Feel important.

A: Important. But men, I don't know if she would agree, but I think men are more *Tiing Moong* in most cases.

Q: So when the man doesn't want to deal with something he just becomes like a dummy. Or maybe he does it for different reasons than the woman does. Maybe he is doing it to escape responsibility while the woman is doing it to get some power...

A: Get things done.

Q: To get things done. Clearly different circumstances. But in the marriage, and this goes back to whether Cambodian women are being quiet and being taught to be

quiet, and I mean how much of this is tradition and how much is this abusing women, sort of the tradition of abuse of the woman, teaching her to be passive. What do you think, how much of the gentleness of a lot of Cambodian women, the very quiet, reserved...

A: I don't think that there is a view of a weakness. I think that most men like a woman to be that way, but again, if she makes the decision at home, not outside, but she has power behind it, behind the reservation, behind the quietness, she is not completely passive. She appears passive but she is not. The women make the decisions in a lot of cases. If you want to build a house or buy land, it is the woman that makes the decision to buy things in the house, all the furniture to put in it, how much money...

Q: So you don't see that as a negative thing?

A: I don't see it as a negative thing but coming here it is going to be a little bit more negative because this is not the way a woman in the United States lives. So it is going to be hard to go out and do things if you are so passive and you cannot speak out. Keeping the tradition is good but it is not so good being out of the country and having to deal with the situation here. And a lot of people, a lot of men take advantage of that.

Q: Men take advantage of what?

A: Of a woman being passive, not knowing how to speak the language...

Q: American men take advantage?

A: No, Cambodian men.

Q: How do they take advantage?

A: Because it seems to be that women coming here are more dependent on men in a lot of ways.

Q: I see, because they don't have the language...

A: Yes, and so not all the time, in my work I was men that were helping women because she was really depressed and cannot do things at home, but it is not all the time the same way.

Q: So the man in some ways can have more power over the woman because the woman doesn't have her friends or she can't speak the language...

A: She can't speak, she can't drive, and most of all she can't go anywhere by herself so men take advantage and one thing that is done very often is the marriages.

When people get married they don't go to register in the City Hall like a formal marriage. They just invite everybody, their friends and relatives come over, but if there is a problem the men say this is only my girlfriend, she is not my wife. So the wife doesn't know she is supposed to do things like that, like having a blood test, registering, having a certificate of marriage, but maybe the young people now are starting to understand.

Q: Do you think the young women being more assertive and more aggressive is good or bad? The Cambodian American girls, the younger girls?

A: It's hard to say. I still think this is not always used in all situations. You have to be assertive in your job and your work, but assertive within the family is not a good thing. You have to ask for discipline and respect from the child towards the parents and brothers and sisters, and things like that will not be understood. We still have that gap of culture shock.

Q: I heard this one young Cambodian who was young and said she liked America because the parents are encouraged to tell the other, like a husband to tell a wife or the wife to tell the husband what is bothering them instead of keeping it to themselves. She likes this, in the Cambodian marriage they are not encouraged to do that, right?

A: That's right. Wait and see, wait a few more days, things may be better, calm down, maybe you can talk quietly after a week or so and you can bring up the same matter but in a nicer way. So it is not encouraged in Cambodian families to ask what is wrong, why you are mad at me.

Q: And in the concept of partnership, do you think that the tradition in the best Cambodian marriages, do you feel that the man and the woman consciously think of each other as a partner in the relationship or is that hardly ever discussed?

A: I don't think that it is discussed openly in the partnership, but it is not a partnership in a lot of ways, the way they live. It is a partnership, there are no words said about it, like "oh this is mine, this is yours." If you bring home all your money to your wife and if made to do something you have to do it, there is no question asked, you just take it, but she is the bank.

Q: Did you feel you had a partnership with your first husband?

A: I owe him very much.

Q: Did you feel that you had a partnership with your second husband?

A: Partnership? I don't have much problem with him helping at home or asking him to do something. I would say that is a partnership, but the only thing that he has, or maybe my quick reaction to the situation and his quick reaction is the jealousy

that I cannot stand. That insecure feeling, if I go somewhere he thinks "Oh maybe she is going to have a boyfriend or something."

Q: This is your second husband?

A: My second husband. But my first husband, no, I don't think that was a partnership in a lot of ways, discussing children going to school, things like that. I think with Gary, that is his name, it more my own character that he does not like.

Q: You felt that he didn't like your character?

A: Yeah, my character, my speaking out when I see something wrong or I say it right away. He used to call me "big mouth" because I react to what he says right away, and just the jealousy.

Q: Well how come you didn't use *Tiing Moong*?

A: I used the dummy a lot of times but I think that is being too dumb for certain things, not acceptable.

Q: Too dumb.

A: Too dumb, it is just not possible.

Q: Well the notion of partnership, because you have a partnership with a partnership with a man or a partnership with a woman doesn't mean that they really respect each other or love each other, right? In other words, you can together do the chores, clean the house and things like that, but it doesn't mean you have an affectionate relationship. Does that make sense to you?

A: Yeah.

Q: So what makes a Cambodian woman's life a more affectionate relationship?

A: If the man does not help...

Q: I mean what is the quality of the man's relationship to a woman that makes the relationship affectionate?

A: I think it is just the caring behind it. It is not so much that men don't do a lot of things, the partnership is more like you can't see much but it is there somewhere, it is not helping around the house or cleaning.

Q: Men don't help that much?

A: Men don't help. I don't think it is a different way.

Q: So why...

A: But the affection is like a partnership, talking, being able to talk to each other, not every family, but most of the family, like 75% or 80% in the Cambodian family, cares for women.

Q: What does that look like, care for the women?

A: Care in a way that, maybe not the men that are fooling around, but in just a normal family they take care of the woman, understanding, respecting her feelings. Sometimes there is certain pressure on the wife and certain situations that make her mad. Women at the same time try to understand men, maybe he has pressure from work or he has a hard decision to make or he is worried about certain things. So it is more like a profound affection but it is not seen in a way like "I love you." In fact my husband Gary never hears me say, "I love you." I am sorry but in a lot of ways I did things that showed it but I never say it because it is never said in a Cambodian house, things like that. It is more action than words.

Q: Why is that? Do you think it is easier for a woman to be close to a father than to a husband?

A: In my case I think that is true. In the father you see a protection, you can say anything you want to say without hiding whether you are sad or happy, if you have any problems with the relationship you can discuss it and then he gives you advice on what to do. But with the husband there is some difficulty approaching things, maybe it is not the right time to say certain things.

Q: This is interesting because do you think this is always the problem? Do you think when a daughter has a close relationship to the father, particularly a father who is a big personality, that the other men in her life always seem small and insignificant?

A: No, not in my case. I don't know about other people, but not in my case, because although I respect my father, he used to live a life that he lived, but my feeling is also of respect for my husband.

Q: But you never made comparisons...

A: No never make comparisons whatsoever because it is not my value to make a comparison. Every person is different.

Q: You never compared Gary...

A: I never compared Gary. The only thing I compared is that he is so jealous and it is hard. I respect him in a lot of ways that he can do the things he likes to do. If he wants to read, he wants to be quiet, he wants to spend money, but that respect he didn't have in return for me was the problem. I like things differently than him and that is not understood. I cannot always do things he wants to do. Sometimes you need quiet time from work and just being by yourself, shut off, you don't have to be with your family all the time, and he didn't allow that. He didn't understand that.

Q: Sure. You don't think being the daughter of a great man affected you?

A: No, because he was never a great imposition or anything. He is just great in his humanistic...

Q: You have a father who is such a great humanist. Then these other men would seem kind of weak compared to him. They might be a disappointment to you.

A: I don't know. I never compared. I see the person. I see Gary as Gary a person.

Q: But what are your standards for maleness? Where does it come from? What is your standard for what a great man should be?

A: A great man is just to be quiet because I like to be quiet also.

Q: You like a quiet man?

A: I like a quiet man.

Q: What about a man who is sleeping all the time?

A: No, it is not asking much. I think, yes, I have some kind of protection of man. I think everyone wants to choose the right person, the right personality and I don't know, I just haven't seen one.

Q: Maybe you have to go to the hospital to find one that is not awake.

A: I don't need to find one. It is not so quiet in a way that he does not talk or anything, but in a way of understanding a person without saying much.

Q: You like that?

A: Yes. In fact I said in my next life if I have a husband, I would like for him to understand me, I don't have to ask too much. I don't want to ask, "give me this," or "I like this," although it's nice.

- Q: Well it is very interesting because this is a stereotype that the Japanese, my friend is married to a Japanese woman and after a couple of weeks something in the month will go by and she will say, "I'm very mad at you." And he says, "Why?" He is American. And she will say, "Because you should have known why I am mad at you and you didn't." And he says, "Yeah, but you didn't tell me." So she says, "No, but a good Japanese man would know ahead of time why the woman is upset and would not have to ask." That is probably what you are saying.
- A: Yeah, because compare again to the Cambodian man, he would know.
- Q: Some Cambodian men.
- A: A lot of women would say, "Why does the man ask? He knows for sure."
- Q: So the Cambodian man is a better mind reader than the American man.
- A: Mind reader.
- Q: Do you know what I mean by mind reader? Someone who can read the mind. Why do you think that is?
- A: You know, again, affection and caring would bring that kind of relationship that you just look at the wife's face and can see that she is upset about something. At least he asks why are you upset with the children or me.
- Q: But what about these men that have girlfriends? Can you be having an affair with other women and still be a good father and good husband? Is it possible to be affection and sensitive to your wife and at the same time be carrying on all these affairs?
- A: I don't believe in that for my part.
- Q: But is it possible to be a good husband and also be a good boyfriend to other women?
- A: I don't believe a person can carry so many responsibilities like that. I don't believe it. He can be a good father.
- Q: He can be a good father but not a good husband?
- A: Not if he has a girlfriend, not a good husband.
- Q: Do you think the man who is having the relationship with the concubine or the other girlfriend is actually more affectionate with the other girlfriend than with the wife?

A: Yes.

Q: We haven't interviewed any girlfriends. We haven't interviewed any women who are girlfriends but do you think that there is a closer relationship between the husband and the girlfriend than the husband and the wife?

A: All three together?

Q: No, no. In other words, the man who has other girlfriends, is it mostly a sexual relationship, do you think, or is there genuine affection, how do you understand that?

A: I think there is more affection. Usually when that happens the wife is older and they have two or three kids already, so she is not good anymore, she is not as pretty anymore so the men seek outside affection more. Then it is just being away, assuming the woman would just be a mother for the children, that she is going to be there, she is going to be a good wife. There is a lot of shame to be separated.

Q: Do you value the woman in terms of her sexuality, her beauty, she is older she is not that beautiful so he seeks other younger women. But is that mostly a sexual interest, I mean, how do you see it, why does he seek younger women?

A: It is sexual interest.

Q: Sexual.

A: To start with. And there is so much opportunity to do that because of the work, some men have more money so they want to have a good time.

Q: But what does that say to the older women, that she is not beautiful? I mean, is that true, do you think it is true that as you get older you lose your beauty?

A: It seems like that. Not the beauty, the physical beauty. Probably the beauty of sexual relationship more because when a woman has children she tends to be withdrawn a little from the sex life, it is just not the same.

Q: So maybe it is a good thing then that they are married, they have a wife, they have children, the woman gets older, uglier, lose interest in sex and they go off with a young person. Maybe this is a good thing for men, what do you think?

A: It is not a good thing for a man.

Q: Why?

- A: Because that shows they don't care about the other things and only about their own pleasure because a woman cannot do the same thing, even if she has interest in a relationship or something, she would be a bad woman.
- Q: I see.
- A: Most of the time when a woman has a relationship outside what she is supposed to, outside the husband it is like a contradiction. The man is like a goat, when you go down in the mud you still come out a goat. But not the woman.
- Q: When you were younger, much younger, did men try to have affairs with you while you were married?
- A: I never experiences that, no. Although people, when I was not with my husband, in a certain gathering where they didn't know I was married, I was something just to admire, like "she's pretty" and they tried to ask for a dance or something like that. If he knew I was with my husband then there is no more temptation.
- Q: So do you think the majority of Cambodian men, particularly men with power from your social background, as they get older they look for other women, they have affairs?
- A: Do you mean men?
- Q: Cambodian men.
- A: Cambodian men.
- Q: Do you think many of them have affairs?
- A: Ninety-five percent. Most of them. My husband had an affair too. That was kind of late already. Well he had before but not openly like the last time during the 1970s.
- Q: He had an open affair?
- A: Yes.
- Q: The concubine was...
- A: Same city.
- Q: He wasn't embarrassed by it?
- A: He was still hiding, hiding from me but I got somebody to investigate.

Q: But everyone knew about it?

A: I knew about it.

Q: Did you say anything to him about it?

A: Well I already told him from the first day we got married that if he had an affair with somebody else that my value is that you don't love me, period. I am not going to try and judge and see, you need difference, but I told him, for me, if I was bale to sleep with somebody else and hold somebody else, that means I don't like to hold you.

Q: And you told him this when you were sixteen years old?

A: After I got married. I meant it and I knew from the start that if he had an affair I wouldn't be involved because that is the step to tell me...

Q: When you found out about the affair how did you react?

A: It was sad. It was real sad and a lot of thought about what to do or to tell my father about it to be worse or to be away for a while. But it was hard in my position because he had such a high position in the government and our family's name...

Q: When you heard about it did you feel you withdrew from him emotionally? Did you feel more reserved towards your husband when you learned he was having an affair?

A: Yes. He acted differently too, so that meant it was not so sad because he hadn't really, it was a good affair for him.

Q: He had a good affair...

A: Yeah, he intended to keep her, so that he didn't have interest.

Q: Now some of these men also have children with the girlfriends and then what happens? They bring the children or they raise them separately?

A: They raise them separately. Unless the woman accepts the situation, but not many do, not many are so courageous to let that happen. And you see all the generals back home had affairs too. A lot of people do because it is so easy. It is not really something, but it happens. But for me it is a special thing because I would not stand it and in fact when I came to the United States I didn't know my husband had died, but I had already set myself that if he were to come out he would just be a friend.

Q: Because of the affair?

A: Because of the affair and I got remarried.

Q: Anything else you want to say before we move into the next interview? Any other comments?

A: I don't know.

Interview 10 - Part 8

Q: ...Interview number eight. Life in America. You came to this country in 1975, is that right?

A: That's right.

Q: Can you tell us a little bit about, can you give us an overview of your life starting from when you arrived to your current situation? Can you sort of give us a history of your life in the United States up to this point? Like you first arrived, we started when you first arrived in the United States on what date?

A: That would be August 24, 1975.

Q: What city?

A: In California, we landed in Los Angeles.

Q: Now from that moment you arrived on August 24, did anyone meet you at the airport?

A: Yes, they gave me directions.

Q: You came with your children?

A: I came with my three children and also with my sister, her husband, children and two maids.

Q: So a lot of people came?

A: Yeah, a lot of people.

Q: Did you have relatives in this country then?

A: The former wife of my brother was living in Long Beach with her three children.

Q: Well start from that moment when you got off the plane.

A: There was a lot of anxiety because I had never been to the United States before and it was a very different situation. It was not something that you do for fun, there is no vacation or visit or feeling like that. It was just like, "This is it, the place where I am going to live, for how long I don't know," and a lot of anxiety of the unknown. When we arrived the immigration office was waiting for us to do the paperwork because it was from the airplane. We were taken to a small room to process the I94 and there was a feeling of "I am really a refugee." It's like

slowly feeling different. But after that we kind of forgot a little because of the family coming to see us, to greet us at the airport and then take us to the place they had already rented for us, to our home. So it was the excitement of seeing each other and talking about things back home and what had happened. But as the time went by, I don't remember how many days, we started to settle down and figure out what to do. It was a very scary time because I didn't know what I had. I had no skills, I had no education in any skill. I could speak English but I was still fearful if someone would understand me and my English. I was not so sure of myself. So I think there was not so much to say at that time, taking the children to school, put them in school. They also had their own fears of not catching up because they never studied English before. They are complete strangers to the English language and then my two kids were put in eleventh grade and one is in sixth grade, my youngest daughter. She was supposed to be in junior high school but she didn't want to be and my oldest daughter was supposed to be in twelfth grade but she wanted to be put in eleventh grade with my son together, because they were not so sure of themselves. It was a busy time, settling down with the kids. After that we looked around and discussed with the family what we can do, and my sister had more money and she said she was going to start a restaurant business because she thought maybe she could count on her two maids to help her and I wanted to do it with her too, with the little money I have, but then she said no because she didn't want me to be partners with her since she didn't know if it was going to be successful or not. So she started her business. I didn't have anything to do yet because I still had money but I didn't know how long it would last me. I didn't have much, I had some jewelry, I had my rings, diamond earrings, two pairs at that time, and I didn't know how much money I could get from them so I started to think, to ask around if I could open my own little business because I didn't think about work at all. I didn't know what kind of thing I should be working at. So I opened my business to be partners with y uncle who also arrived in Camp Powederton. He was from Laos and so we were partners together and we didn't make much money from the business. It was a failure.

Q: What was the business?

A: It was a restaurant also.

Q: Oh, you started a restaurant.

A: Just a small Chinese restaurant, a small place in downtown Long Beach, but we didn't have any study or anything so the place was so quiet. We didn't know anything about it, so it was a failure. He left me, my uncle left the business and just left me there to run it and I couldn't run it because I didn't know how to cook and I found a Cambodian cook, but it just lasted about a month or so. So the whole time we had the business was for about six months at the most and then...

Q: Could your uncle cook? He was a Chinese cook?

A: No, his wife.

Q: So his wife was the cook?

A: Yeah, his wife.

Q: I see. And then when he left you had no cook.

A: No cook at all.

Q: So it is hard to run a restaurant without a cook.

A: It is hard, and I thought it was okay at first because I thought I would just serve the tables and all that but it didn't go right, but it was still a good feeling of owning a business at the time. I was very depressed. I talked with my children, telling them this is what is happening, and my son said that if I could not do everything just to leave it. So I thought about that for a while and just left the restaurant with a lot of loss. We left everything, the whole thing, like all the tables we bought, all the stuff we needed to use there. I thought maybe I would go to school for a while and see what would happen, learn more English. SO I was in school for about two years and still looking for a job and then I think I told you already about my low paying job.

Q: No, what was the job? What job did you find?

A: It was something easy. I didn't think it was something difficult to do because I didn't know if I would be able to hold an office job or not. I didn't know anyone so I was looking in the newspaper and they were looking for a parking attendant, working at the bank, but just a parking attendant. So I went to apply. It paid \$2.25 at the time and I took it first thing because I thought it would help me have experience in this country to have a better opportunity. I went to school and worked in the mornings and in the afternoon I went to school, to take some English classes. So that was my first job. I worked for about a year and the boss liked me because he said he didn't have any money but then when I went there it seemed like he had more money, maybe because the first guy that worked for him was stealing money. It was a government building too, because there was some floor that was rented by the City for lawyers and all that, and the bank was downstairs, there were a lot of different law offices, so many different people. And they were so nice, coming down and talking to me, getting acquainted with the Cambodian lady. I didn't know who I was but somehow I was different from what they knew. I cried a lot while working and then if there was no business I would just look at the bank because it was a very tall building and I would cry and think, comparing myself. I just to be on the top and now I was on the bottom and I cried, and then I had to bring my lunch to work, I cried and it was a miserable

feeling to be that way. I didn't have to be that way. I still had some money that I could have lived off of for a while.

Q: Were you receiving refugee assistance from the government?

A: No, no. In 1975 I didn't know there was a refugee program.

Q: So you never received anything?

A: No, no. It was like complete ignorance.

Q: You were completely on your own from the beginning?

A: Nobody told me anything. This was my first work experience and I started to feel a little bit better at work but still depressed about my low situation, but I had to hang in there because I needed it. I felt I needed to build up my own history and after that I went to work in another place doing the same thing, but at another place where I got better pay. I worked at the airport doing that checking thing that they call security. I did that at the airport. At one point I felt that the money was not enough that I was bringing home, so I had to get two jobs. So it was not paying much, \$3.50 at the time, but it was okay. I don't know what else to tell you about my... it's a long story.

Q: But it ends in what year?

A: That was in 1975, 1976, 1977 and by 1978 there was some program of refugees and I think I told someone else about my story that I was afraid to be sick and I didn't have any welfare or anything. When I found out about it I went to apply for it and it took me a long day's drive from my place to L.A.. At the time there was no refugee program for refugees only; it was for all Americans. So I went to Los Angeles, it was a very scary place but I was not scared. I didn't know if there were gangs or killings or things like that. I wanted to apply for Medicare just as security in case my family got sick. I sat down in the welfare office and looked around. I saw people that were so poor, so dirty, and I just felt ashamed of myself to be sitting there. I said to myself, "I have two hands, I have two feet, I am not handicapped. I still have some intelligence that I would be able to work." But I needed this for a while to know what else I could do, and for the safety of my children too. We didn't use it that much; we didn't have to go to the hospital for anything. I would never spend the government money on my Medicare.

Q: So they gave you Medicare.

A: They paid me the Medicare and so we got our security. After a few months I got the job training at the Los Angeles county with the mental health training, so I took it.

- Q: You started training in mental health and what year was that?
- A: In 1978. So I was feeling better about myself after that.
- Q: How did you find out about the mental health-
- A: At the time there was a job placement program for refugees, some kind of training someplace and then placement that I found out about. I did try one time to be a nurse. I went to school to be a nurse but it was too hard. I couldn't understand all the systems I had to study. I felt like I was not able to do this, so I left.
- Q: So you have been working in mental health ever since.
- A: Yes, through the placement. It pays enough, it has a good pay and I get the benefits, the health benefits.
- Q: So you have been doing that since 1978?
- A: Yes.
- Q: So you have been doing mental health a long time?
- A: Yeah.
- Q: We will talk about that in a minute. But how poor was your family through all of this in terms of where you lived and the amount of money you brought in? Would you say you were very poor?
- A: I would say middle class, but the fear of not knowing what could come, what the plan was...
- Q: I see. Where did your money come from to pay the rent and pay for the children's- it couldn't just come from your job.
- A: I had enough because I brought in almost \$800 with my two jobs.
- Q: A week?
- A: A month. But my rent was only \$250 so...
- Q: So you had two jobs?
- A: After I did the parking attendant job and the security I left the security and tried to be a donut salesperson at the donut place that was run by the Cambodians.
- Q: The Cambodians owned it?

- A: The Cambodian donut place.
- Q: In Long Beach?
- A: In Long Beach.
- Q: So it is actually donuts in...
- A: A lot of donuts at the time.
- Q: Right, I remember seeing them.
- A: So I know all the names for donuts.
- Q: So you were in a Cambodian donut place plus doing mental health?
- A: No, when I did started the mental health I stopped all of this. This was like the early times.
- Q: Early times. The parking attendant and donut shop.
- A: But then I -
- Q: Did you like donuts? Did you eat a lot of donuts?
- A: Yeah, I like donuts.
- Q: Cambodians like donuts?
- A: Cambodians like to make money on the donuts.
- Q: Did they have donut stores in Cambodia? Did they have donuts in Cambodia?
- A: No, this is the first time that a Cambodian has experienced donuts.
- Q: So I didn't know that the Cambodians have a lot of donut stores in Long Beach.
- A: A lot. That is the only profession, I mean that they like to do.
- Q: Why is that do you think?
- A: It's a family business, the family can work there and save money.

- Q: Do you think there is something about the whole in the middle of the donuts that is sort of like a Buddhist concept, life is not solid, there is always a whole in the middle?
- A: I don't know.
- Q: Do you think it is possible?
- A: Yes.
- Q: Buddhist food.
- A: Donut hole. But it was a while and I think my schooling probably stopped there in 1978 because I got a good job so I didn't know about going back to school or anything.
- Q: Now how, when does Mr. Smith appear on the scene?
- A: Mr. Smith appeared in 1980, no, in 1977 or 1978, about that time.
- Q: So tell us how does Mr. Smith figure into your life now?
- A: Well you know he studied Chinese and I went to school to study my English and he thought I was Chinese so he would talk to me, try to impress me with his lessons. So we started to talk and there was just a good feeling from the beginning, like we could understand each other and liked to talk to each other and so we dated and all that. And it took me a while to make the decision to be with him, it took a while.
- Q: So how many years passed before you decided to marry him?
- A: About two years.
- Q: In your culture would that be considered a long dating period or a short dating period?
- A: It is a long dating period. It was not good to have a long dating period either because I was not sure if I wanted to be with him because the family is something so different in our family that to have a stranger, someone that is not Cambodian in the family...
- Q: Did you meet his parents, his mother, his father, his brothers and sisters?
- A: I met his mother. He didn't have a father...
- Q: I see. So he didn't have a big family.

- A: He didn't have, only one sister and one brother.
- Q: I see.
- A: And they both didn't get married until now. They are almost forty years old.
- Q: I see. So he was a soldier at the time.
- A: He was a student at the time but he was in the Army before. It was not stable in his mind either because he changes serves from the Air Force to the Army and then the Navy. Now he is in the Navy.
- Q: So 1980 comes along, what year did you marry him?
- A: 1980.
- Q: So 1980 comes along and now you are working at the mental health center, you are married, your children move in with your husband and how does life look in 1982?
- A: Well, not so good.
- Q: Why is that?
- A: After the marriage it was like I knew another person, like he was just turning to take over, become like the authoritarian husband.
- Q: Authoritarian husband? So you only had a very brief period of happiness. I see. So when did things start? What year did you finally realize you were in a bad situation?
- A: About 1992, 1993. It started slowly, 1982, 1983, on up and then finally in 1986 we just couldn't live together anymore.
- Q: So you have been separated since 1986. Now was there a period when you first got married that you thought, "ah, things are now going to be good, I am married, my children are okay." Were you optimistic about the future at the beginning of your marriage?
- A: I was, I was. I thought maybe it was hard to live together but maybe things would change in the long run, I had a kind of hope.
- Q: Before you knew he was an authoritarian husband, were you very excited about getting married?

- A: No, I felt sorry. It took me a long time before I got married. I was not quite decided about that.
- Q: Oh, I see so you weren't excited about that? Why is that?
- A: No, no. Because a lot of things started, not the fear of the marriage but mostly my family.
- Q: What did the family say?
- A: My mother didn't like our relationship. Lots of friends were talking about it, laughing and putting down any kind of relationship with an American.
- Q: I see, so you started having trouble right from the beginning.
- A: From the beginning.
- Q: I see. I see. Now there are quite a few Cambodians that have married Americans. It is not unusual, right?
- A: But I think I probably started before everybody else at the time.
- Q: You were one of the first.
- A: Yeah, probably. Later on maybe there is more acceptance. But so many things, my standards and all that, it is really a change for a Cambodian to accept...
- Q: So why do you think you were attracted to an American man?
- A: I thought it was love and I thought love can change everything, maybe like a young girl that is a fool. Love is blind. That is what I thought, I thought what difficulty we are going to go through that. He didn't have a lot of money, he is a poor guy to me because he didn't have any home or status like that. But my belief was that I already had one marriage that didn't work, high standards man, power and all that, so I thought its okay to love a poor man because love will change. But it didn't happen.
- Q: So as you look back, you have had two marriages. You had doubts about both of them. What do you think has been the problem?
- A: The problem is just that I look to my need rather than a good, careful thought about what a marriage would be. Insecurity about myself, really true love and careful thinking about it, I didn't do that much.
- Q: No, because you felt desperate?

- A: I feel a need, I feel that I need somebody because I didn't have a lot of affection from my first marriage. But still in the last period of my life I thought I would make any more mistakes. But destiny will come into life sometimes, but whatever happens I will think very carefully.
- Q: Now do you have a new boyfriend?
- A: No, no.
- Q: Anyone you would like to -
- A: I'm not interested. Not this time. Although Gary always suspected that I had someone, but I didn't.
- Q: He suspected affairs?
- A: He did. But I think my value is more important. I didn't want my name to go down because of my need and -
- Q: Do you think Gary could accept you being with a Cambodian man now if you found a man you liked?
- A: I don't know. He probably would not accept anything.
- Q: Does he have any power over you do you think or do you think you are completely free of him?
- A: I'm completely free of him. I'm free.
- Q: So if you met another man you wouldn't have to worry about Gary?
- A: I don't have to worry about it, yeah, I don't think so.
- Q: What have been your goals as you look back, they have probably changed, but in the last fifteen years, what have been your major goals for your new life as an American?
- A: My future goal is to get a better education. I want to be able to compete, at least compete in some sort of way like who is going to get what position in that paper, to be able to better my work and my future, know what I am talking about, so I need a better education.
- Q: Your education was a college education?
- A: It's a college.

- Q: You are working as a social worker. What were your original goals when you came in 1975? Did you have any? When you first were in America what were your goals?
- A: My goal was to be making money on my own, to be my own boss and not to work for somebody else, and that is why I started the ideas of a restaurant. But when I looked around and I knew I couldn't do it on my own, being a woman and never having owned a business before and not knowing how to cook or run a business, I would not be able to do that.
- Q: I see, okay. What would you say was the happiest part of your new life in America?
- A: The happiest part of my life is my job right now.
- Q: You like your job right now?
- A: Yes, I like it.
- Q: We will talk about your work at the end of this interview. What would you say has been the worst part of your life in America?
- A: The worst part is my marriage. Although, the first time I worked in a very low job it still was very satisfying because I was proud of myself for being able to bring home my own salary, feeling like I am worthwhile in something, although I am alone working at a low job. That's okay because I like everybody else I work with, I earn it and that is pride for me. But the worst part is my marriage. It is just the worst part of my life and I don't want to...
- Q: How is that different than a low job, your marriage?
- A: The low job is still low, it is still very frustrating but it is not so painful in so many ways. It's so painful to go through arguments, through fighting. It makes me feel like I am very low as a person.
- Q: The marriage makes you feel low?
- A: Yeah.
- Q: Your husband sounds like he battered you. He has no respect for your culture, your background, he didn't care?
- A: He didn't care.
- Q: But at first he indicated that he did?

- A: That's right. That's why, after the wedding he just changed into a completely different person.
- Q: So you had no idea he was going to be abusive like this?
- A: No.
- Q: Over the next five years what would you like to see, saying you talked to him in five years from now? What would you like to achieve?
- A: In the next five years I would like to have a degree in social work complete and I am also looking for an opportunity to go back to Cambodia and work.
- Q: To work doing what in Cambodia?
- A: Humanitarian work.
- Q: Do you have opportunities now? Have you talked to any of the humanitarian agencies or...
- A: I haven't approached anyone yet but I just have looked around to see what is available but the only thing is I don't want to do any contract because I don't know what people are doing back in Cambodia. There are a lot of people there but I don't know what kind of work they are doing. I don't want to enter that and make more contributions. I don't want to be a translator. I don't want to be just working under a program that is already there.
- Q: You want to have your own program?
- A: I like the idea that I would share with someone also about what I want to do and then maybe it is possible, maybe it is not possible, but some kind of idea. I am considering the situation in Cambodia because I have never been there so I don't know.
- Q: You know what kind of people live there. Well very good, do you have any questions? I think what we will do is pull the plug.
- Q: We are continuing the interview of life in America. Since you have a very interesting background I thought maybe you could share how you got involved in mental health and give us some ideas about the meaning of mental health to the Cambodian people. A lot of Americans thing, for instance, that this is a foreign concept, that the Cambodian people don't really have mental health concepts. So why don't you start out with your personal history, how you got involved in the field, why you liked it, why you find this work interesting...

- A: Well I didn't know anything, like other Cambodians. But I had some education and I could distinguish mental health from other health, but in terms of working, therapy and all of that, I didn't have that thought in mind when I started.
- Q: Well let's stop here for a minute. In your family, would your father or any of your relatives ever think about going to therapy?
- A: No.
- Q: No they would not?
- A: No.
- Q: Say someone in your family was depressed. How would they get help?
- A: Well I remember when I was young, my aunt who had a problem with her husband, they got divorced and then she was really very depressed, she had electro-shock therapy. But I was still young.
- Q: Oh, she had electro-shock therapy?
- A: Yeah, at that time, but I didn't understand why. She was not crazy, like hallucinating and all, but somehow she was really depressed, she didn't want to come out, she was always crying.
- Q: Did it help her?
- A: Yeah, it helped, and then the family said she regained her consciousness and she seemed not to be thinking too much about that anymore.
- Q: Did your family have a history of a healing tradition? Were there any *Kruu Khmer* or monk healers or Western doctors in your family?
- A: No. Sometimes we used Cambodian healing methods, but like if somebody broke their arm, we believe in the American or French, surgery. It is not very, very strong if somebody has a surgery so we believe in that and what else. I didn't see much in my children until I grew up. None of my family went to seek any help other than Western methods.
- Q: Any special interest by your father? Any relatives in medicine at all?
- A: You mean in the field of medicine? No.
- Q: So your family wasn't a medical family?
- A: No.

- Q: I see. So how did you get interested in this?
- A: Well like I told you before, it was like someone encouraging me to go into this field. It was a need at first, within the Cambodian community there was a need. And also the job counselor that counseled me she saw in me that I like to work with people, I like people. I like to talk to them. I like to be interested, associating with their problems. But that's all...
- Q: So what is it you do? What is it exactly that you do? What is your job?
- A: My job right now is like a clinician job too. I assist the patients and then I make a diagnosis and counsel; that is all.
- Q: In the hospital or mental center, the clinic?
- A: In the clinic. It's an outpatient clinic. But I did a lot during my training also with Americans who are chronically ill.
- Q: So you work with American patients as well? You do both Cambodians and Americans?
- A: Yeah. I did the assessment in a hospital for placement. Now I work mostly with Cambodians but not when I started.
- Q: So do the Cambodians have any concept at all about mental health? What are most of the problems your patients have?
- A: Most of the problem is coming to the clinic for treatment because they don't know...
- Q: Treatment of what?
- A: Treatment of mental health, depression.
- Q: Do they know it is a psychiatry clinic?
- A: No, they don't know. They still don't really understand the concept of therapy.
- Q: They think it is a medical clinic?
- A: Yeah.
- Q: Do you fool them on purpose or is it just that you don't tell them?

- A: Well now I tell them. I explain to them that we never used that back in Cambodia because first we have very extended families and when we have a problem we usually go to somebody we trust and talk about it. Sometimes it helps and sometimes it does not, but mostly we can cope in some way.
- Q: Do they understand when you are trying to explain to them mental health? Do they understand what you are doing? How do you explain it? Say I am a Cambodian patient, who would you explain to me what you are doing?
- A: Okay. I would say that mental health is a medicine to heal your feelings because this is not a hospital where you come and get treated unless you are really, really out of your mind, which means you walk nude or you don't take a bath, things of that sort, and you cannot do anything at all at home except just sit there and cry. I would explain that you come here to relieve your feeling of sadness and when you feel sad...
- Q: And what would the patient say when you say that?
- A: They seem to understand. They didn't say anything bad but they seem to understand. I think when I first started I didn't have many Cambodian patients, but after years go by more and more people have been able to come for appointments.
- Q: Because they get to know you?
- A: They get to know people who came.
- Q: And were helped.
- A: Yeah. They hear the word, why you feel bad and how you can deal with the situation, who do you see and so on, by word of mouth.
- Q: What of what you do is the most healing, most therapeutic to people?
- A: Therapeutic? Talking, mostly talking and a lot of listening, talking and explaining, why you feel that way, the way you feel, why is that happening, why you cannot do this and mostly just directing them to understand.
- Q: You give them guidance?
- A: Guidance, yes.
- Q: Now do most of the patients know your family background?

- A: Later they do because sometimes I have a group and some people know and they call me *Jaff*, which is princess, and so they know, but it didn't change any way of talking to me or they don't feel like...
- Q: They don't talk to you in the sense of a princess?
- A: No, no.
- Q: But do you think that influences them, that a person from a high class is giving them guidance? Do they like that? Do you think that influences them that a princess is listening and caring and giving them guidance?
- A: It has some influence and it was surprising to them too that somebody with my background would be interested in talking to them and interested in doing home visitation, seeing the family...
- Q: They would find it surprising that you would go home with them?
- A: Yeah.
- Q: Give me an example.
- A: Well they feel bad if I go to a home visitation and their home is not really nice to greet me, or something like that, or their kids are really noisy, and I will say, "that is fine. I am not coming here for you to clean the house for me or anything. I just come here to see you and your family and how you are doing." Like other Cambodians they would greet with water or whatever food they have, which is normal, and I accept it no matter what condition of life they live in because I think that it comes from their heart. They are so happy.
- Q: So what do you find most satisfying about this work?
- A: I find that I can help people in some way, at least help relieve their pain, guide them through difficulty that they have in living in the United States or the things they don't understand, the things they don't understand about themselves. Things like that. I feel it's rewarding just to help people.
- Q: And does your past, your own experiences, help you to be a better therapist, a worse therapist, or it doesn't influence your therapy- your own personal suffering?
- A: My past?
- Q: Yeah.
- A: I don't know in what way it would influence me because I never think of using my influence or anything like that.

- Q: I mean your personal experience, your own personal experience. DO you think you have...
- A: Yeah, I share with them sometimes in a situation that is really hard I share what has happened to me. I say, "I came to the United States, I was depressed and I had a lot of difficulty with getting a job, I had to go to school, the same thing you have been through." So I share my experience.
- Q: Your future, where is this going to lead you, this mental health job?
- A: Well, unless I really try to get a better education to help my people, or even without the education, I would do that. But it would look a lot better when you have more understanding, more respect from the Cambodian people, professionals like myself could be more accepted in the community.
- Q: What do you mean, if you had a doctorate or an advanced degree?
- A: No. If I have a degree, it does not have to be a doctor.
- Q: So you want to have a professional degree?
- A: Yeah.
- Q: So which one are you going to get?
- A: I am working on my social work right now.
- Q: When will that be finished?
- A: When? Well I just started right now, so I would think maybe another three years or so. I am doing a complete, just to have some unit to complete my entrance to a university.
- Q: Sure, I see. So you will get your MSW degree?
- A: Yeah.
- Q: So where do you see yourself five years from now in this mental health work?
- A: I see myself making decisions on what I want to do for the people. I see myself maybe creating some programs that I would like to have for my ethnic group and just to be able to do that because right now I am just taking orders. I don't have any influence over what I want to do because of ethnic differences. I don't have much impact.

Q: Now you were saying that you were having some conflicts on your job. What were those conflicts?

A: The conflict on my job is that there is too much Vietnamese work. We are called the Asian Unit, but it is not all one ethnic group. It is only Cambodian and Vietnamese, and the Cambodian is only myself and the Vietnamese is about six or seven people and they created the unit. The conflict is with the doctors that don't understand about the Cambodians going through trauma. They feel that is not a very serious problem because from the background that they ask the people, some of them have been in the United States for ten years and are still suffering. This is not possible in the eyes of the doctors; they say it should go away with the years, just like all losses. So I have a conflict.

Q: Why are there so many Vietnamese? Are most of the people in the area Vietnamese? What is the population of Vietnamese versus Americans in the clinic's area?

A: I think there are more Vietnamese, although the number of Vietnamese and Cambodian patients are about the same.

Q: So one person treats the same amount of people.

A: Oh I treat about 150 patients on my own, which is not really possible, but I try to manage somehow.

Q: Sure, sure, sure.

A: You have to balance. And versus about 30 patients for each Vietnamese.

Q: Well how come you have 150 and they have 30?

A: Because they could not find any Cambodians with a degree. The new regulations require a master's degree in social work or psychology.

Q: I see. So how come they keep you then?

A: They keep me I think because I was there for so long that it is hard to kick me out. I put thirteen years of my life there.

Q: Do you think any of the conflicts from Cambodia and Vietnam spill over into the clinic?

A: It spills, I can say nothing happens, but it does. I feel that they have a superior life than us because they are more educated; they are taking higher positions. They have more social workers, more doctors.

- Q: Are you associated with the university of your clinic is at? Is it a university clinic?
- A: no, it is a county clinic.
- Q: County clinic.
- A: Yeah, county clinic. I don't think we have any association with the university.
- Q: Do you have visitors, speakers come from other parts of the country or from Los Angeles to speak on Asian mental health?
- A: It used to before, during my time I saw a lot of people who came in and out. I used to have American bosses that would invite speakers or would allow conferences. They encouraged me to speak about the mental issues, like we had a conference with the police because of the gang problem and all that, why this happens, to educate the population, the American population. But not anymore since I have a Vietnamese boss.
- Q: Why is that do you think?
- A: Well I think that she is working very hard towards her own ambitions of creating the Asian Unit. It used to not be Asian; it was just the whole clinic taking care of all the populations, Asians, Americans, Mexicans, blacks, whatever. It was just everybody. But this woman has a lot of ambition and she wants to create her unit and it happens I was already there so I am a part of it as an Asian. It is not easy. So we lost a lot of conferences that I used to go to, training and things like that.
- Q: What part of your professional life are you having fun with, you are really enjoying?
- A: Being with people. I get along very well with all the other workers, besides some frustration with the Unit. And my work, my assessment, involving taking history and all that from the patient is really enjoyable for me to see somebody new, somebody...
- Q: Sure, sure.
- A: I cannot find anything more enjoyable.
- Q: Do you see yourself contributing any of your work in Cambodia, doing any mental health work in Cambodia?
- A: Mental health in Cambodia? Oh, definitely. I see myself using my skill to work. I would like to do that. But maybe on a different scale, I mean not scale population wise but service wise. It is not just concentrating on treating mental

health but I would have more opportunities to help in the social living, education because there is a need for doing that in Cambodia. Right now being here, there are also good and bad sides. Once they get better where else can they go? There is not much for schools that are open, women have no educations, there are no social programs to go to. They are just confined in their houses which is like...

Q: This is the mentally ill or women? Who is confined?

A: The women. They are mostly women that come into the mental health program. Not so much the men.

Q: So the people who are confined in the house are in Los Angeles or in Cambodia?

A: In Los Angeles, in Orange County where I work.

Q: But what does this have to do with Cambodia that people are confined to their houses?

A: No, no, I am talking about Los Angeles and Orange County, not Cambodia. In Cambodia you get more opportunities to do things because there is so much need you can create a situation for them to be involved.

Q: I see, that is your goal.

A: Yeah, but in here you cannot do much because everything has to go through a certain system. Like if a person wants to go to school then there are certain things they have to do. You cannot go to an E.S.L. class unless you get involved in another Asian association or something like that, so there are a lot of things they don't want to deal with.

Q: So you think you may do some mental health work in Cambodia but you are not sure when.

A: Not sure when, that is true. I don't know when I am going to be able to, according to the situation. But I don't want to have a position that could be feeling ambitious, but I think I have to be ambitious in a way that my work has some kind of impact based on my ability to organize my own if I am going to work with somebody still I am going to be stuck in the same situation like I am here.

Q: Yes.

A: So I don't want to be that, but I can say that I am ambitious in that area. Maybe it will happen, maybe it won't, but that is my willingness to do it.

- Q: And you would feel safe going back? Is there any danger for you because of your family background going back to Cambodia in the near future?
- A: I don't think there is a danger unless everybody else feels danger, like if the *Khmer Rouge* was coming or killing quietly, kidnapping or something, but I think I don't have that kind of fear because I know I am not doing politics, some kind of politics. Soft power politics.
- Q: Do you really believe you could go to *Phnom Penh* and not have the high officials there get caught up in your family, your father?
- A: No, no. I still can do politics right away too, if I want to. He may see something different in his mind, that is okay, he has his own judgment, I have my own judgment and...
- Q: So you feel safe?
- A: I feel safe. I don't feel any...
- Q: You said your brother is there?
- A: Yeah, my brother is working with politics. In fact, he has invited me to go back and help him with the elections, but I don't want to because I don't want to get involved. At first I was feeling so excited, so passionate to go, to help people out, but then I backed out because I think that it was not the thin I needed to do because my goal is different. I don't want to be killed for politics. I want to really contribute my work to something else.

Interview 10 - Part 9

Q: We are coming to the end. Can you tell us a little bit about any of the problems you have had raising your children in America, or how you would deal with your children? You have six children living with you, right?

A: I had three at first but the other two just came and Jonathan is the one I had with my second marriage. I don't see any problems raising my children because I am a caring mother, I don't want them to go through the situation I went through before, having to hold back in their willingness to grow as a person. I don't have that problem. The only problem I have is with separation of my daughter when she reached eighteen and she wanted to be away from home like American children. I cried a lot and had a lot of fear for her being a young girl living on her own because she got a job and she wanted to see if she could make it. She didn't move very, very far from me but I did cry and I had a lot of fear for her.

Q: How has it been having an inter-racial child? Your youngest son is half Cambodian and half American. Does that raise any issues for him? Is he Cambodian? Does he see himself as Cambodian-American...

A: I think he always considers himself as an American and he does not really see me as a mom having different skin or anything like that.

Q: How old is he?

A: He is thirteen now.

Q: He lives with you?

A: He lives with my husband.

Q: In Panama?

A: He has been in Panama for two years. But up until that point he lived with us, my husband and I, the same thing. We just kept a normal household life.

Q: And do you miss him? He is far away.

A: I miss him. I miss him a lot. Especially when he comes down for vacation or Christmas vacation and summer vacation. But I think he likes his father more than me because of the special relationship that they have, boy's games, taking care of him in terms of Boy Scouts, activities and baseball games and...

Q: He is close to his father?

- A: They are very close, yes. And I think at first he also tried to be more with Gary because we had so many fights and I was kind of backed out a little but of the picture because I didn't want him to feel so much stress, having fights and fighting, so I sort of sacrificed by being away.
- Q: is he close to your other children?
- A: Oh yes, very good relationship with all the brothers and sisters and that probably doesn't have a problem. And he is close to me when he doesn't have his father around so we do a lot of things together, as a mother, my own way.
- Q: But when his father is around he is...
- A: He sticks to him, like I talk to him in Cambodian at home. He knows Cambodian, but when his father is around he doesn't want to speak Cambodian.
- Q: Any other questions you want to ask? Did you have any problems with the other sons? You mentioned about your daughter that she wanted to move away. How about your sons? Did you have a hard time with them?
- A: My son, no. I don't think I have a hard time with my son. He is living, the one that married last year, he is living at the house a lot longer than anyone else because he wanted to finish school and he didn't have a job at the time. He got a job at the school library but it is not paying much. But it is helping him with registration and all that. No, I don't see any problems with my kids myself, with my relationship because in some way I try to balance with Jonathan also, although it hurts to have him away and sometimes I wish I could have some impact, with him Cambodian and teaching him.
- Q: Well a lot of Cambodian families complain, especially the more traditional, they complain that the children are very americanized, they have no respect for the parents, and they don't follow Cambodian traditions. Have you had any problems at all with your children?
- A: My children feel very traditional, very conservative. They go to the Buddhist temple faithfully for celebrations. We get together for birthdays and things like that. I have no problem with that. I don't know what the reason is for that. I feel mostly that maybe it is my respect and love for my kids. I don't have anything to complain about with them and they don't have anything to complain about with me either.
- Q: So you don't find that they are too Cambodian, they aren't American?
- A: No, no.

Q: This here at the very end, just to fill in a few details. You came to this country in what year?

A: 1975.

Q: And you live in Long Beach, California?

A: Yes.

Q: How many people live with you in your home?

A: Myself.

Q: You live by yourself. You have five children in Los Angeles.

A: Five children in Los Angeles.

Q: And one child in Panama.

A: In Panama.

Q: Your husband has separated from you in Panama. He is a soldier, an American G.I.

A: Right.

Q: What is his rank?

A: He is a petty officer or something like that.

Q: Okay. You parents, your mother lives close to you.

A: In Long Beach too.

Q: Any other relatives live close to you?

A: My sister.

Q: Your sister lives close to you?

A: Yeah.

Q: Anyone else?

A: No.

- Q: There we have your map; we have the map of your family tree.
- A: I don't think I can have an ability to trace all... if I work on it. She is very good.
- Q: So what century, how far back did we get? How many generations?
- A: I don't know what century. I don't know. I started from the great-great grandparents. One great-great grandfather.
- Q: You started with your great-great grandfather?
- A: Great-great, maybe three greats.
- Q: So do you have anything to add? This is sort of coming to the end. So we have been here and working with you all week. What has it been like for you to do this oral history?
- A: Well, a lot of anxiety that my story is going to be kept for a long time for people to look at or hear in the future. A lot of anxiety about that.
- Q: Why?
- A: It's a different story that is so moved by the political era. It is so difficult sometimes to express a certain thing, with my father and my family that we have been, at times, very closely involved. My own story I don't mind because I feel like I just started my life in the United States. I'm just starting to work, to be a person, but my past is really very difficult to express, I feel.
- Q: Is your past a curse, a burden? I don't understand what you mean.
- A: Not a burden, it is so closely involved in the political arena. It is not a shame or anything like that. It is a pride, but it is still too much involvement.
- Q: Danger, any danger? Does the past hold for you any danger?
- A: For who?
- Q: It may not be any real danger but you are part of a historic family. You can't escape from it, right?
- A: No. But if I don't say it people wouldn't know anything in history.
- Q: You are branded. It is sort of like no matter who you think you are, you are still the product of your history, and you cannot escape it.

A: But the private part of it, like that people don't know, is like you going through your own private life, your feelings, your thinking, what it is like to be in a certain period of time.

Q: And what do you think about that?

A: I don't know, maybe if I am already dead I would not think about that when people read about it.

Q: Well are you allowed to have a private life coming from a historic family?

A: Sometimes it is not allowed to have a private life; it is hard to hide from the public. I don't know if I make it clear, but it is like a corner of your life, I still want to keep it.

Q: Private?

A: Private.

Q: So you think there are a lot of things you might have told us but you kept a secret? I'm not going to ask you what they were.

A: Do you think that I still have some secrets?

Q: No, I mean in this private life of yours, do you think that there are a lot of things that you kept a secret, from your history?

A: No, no, I don't think so.

Q: You don't think so. So do you feel exposed now?

A: I feel exposed, yes! I feel exposed.

Q: You do?

A: Yeah, that is scary.

Q: Scary?

A: That your life gets exposed to people to read.

Q: To read. Danger.

A: Danger. I am alive. But happy in a way because it is one side that people don't know about, the private life of a person. That is all I have to say.

- Q: Well do you think people will be disappointed, listening they will say, "here is the princess and her life is not any better or worse than mine; it is just a life." Does that disappoint you if that is the reaction?
- A: Yes.
- Q: It would disappoint you?
- A: Yes. Why is she going through so much in her life, the family, and the story about my husband?
- Q: Well sure, but is it another loss? Do you say, "here is the oral history, at least I have my private life and secrets, at least I have my own private source. Now I have given my oral history and in fact it seems fairly common." In other words, "I'm not a princess in my private life."
- A: I think it is true.
- Q: But where are you a princess?
- A: In the past. I am still a princess in the past.
- Q: Can you live with that?
- A: Live with the past?
- Q: No, can you live with the fact that you were a princess in the past and you think you are not now?
- A: I think I can live with that.
- Q: But what is a princess, really? What makes a princess?
- A: Just a title, the birth, the hierarchy that is passed down from generation to generation.
- Q: So I mean, you are saying here is a beautiful statue to put in a tree in the forest but no one can see it. Yet it is still beautiful.
- A: It is not beautiful because no one can see it. It is beautiful if someone finds out about it. Well you can put it that way; it makes sense.
- Q: Well maybe part of your oral history is that instead of losing your special quality maybe in a way you've been rediscovered. What do you think?
- A: That is true.

- Q: We have been looking for a princess for six years, so we found you. Maybe we discovered that you are more of a princess still than you think you are.
- A: Still a princess. That is true. Well I have discovered too, myself, in a way I had never thought about. Coming to the United States I just forgot about that life and just going on like everyone else, struggling. All the refugees are the same as me and with this interview I feel like rediscovering myself as another person that I almost want to put away.
- Q: So the part of your past you want to put away, forget?
- A: Yeah, forget.
- Q: So you have a lot of things you want to forget, you want to be special, you want to be common and ordinary. You have a lot of feelings.
- A: I have a lot of feelings, yes that is true. But I don't think that being a princess plays so much of a part in that, not anymore. Like I said, when you ask a question it is like bringing back all the things that I don't think about anymore, being a princess, starting my life as an ordinary person and going on with my goals. Does that make sense?
- Q: Well it does and it doesn't because in a way you are not an ordinary person either.
- A: I want to be because I think that being a princess sometimes is just a title, like a birthmark. You cannot get rid of it, it is still there somewhere.
- Q: But do you think that now, after all this suffering and trial and tribulation, do you think the title may be a burden? What do you need to do to earn it?
- A: To be a special person.
- Q: So you are not sure still if you are a special person or not.
- A: I'm not sure because I am working towards being a special person, but I don't think I am a special person, in my world I mean.
- Q: In your profession?
- A: My profession. That is what I believe. To be special you have to earn...
- Q: To be special you have to earn it. So to be a princess, for you to be a princess you have to earn it. You have to be very special in your work.

A: In my work. Just to be a princess as a title "princess" and not for a while. That is true I think.

Q: Anything else? Any final comments you want to make?

A: I don't know if there are more comments I want to make but in this conversation is a little hard to make the distinction of what I want to fit in there.

Q: This last little part?

A: Yeah.

Q: Why is that?

A: If you distinguish being a princess or being a special person, you cannot distinguish, I don't think.

Q: But can you take the call to destiny seriously?

A: Yes.

Q: Your father took it seriously. He had a special title too but he took it seriously.

A: Mmmm.

Q: Your husband had a special title but he wasn't as special as your father.

A: No, he wasn't.

Q: So in your case you don't know. You don't know if you want the challenge.

A: Kind of no and not no really. The challenge is to be a good person through my work so I don't feel like being a princess is just being a princess. It is just that being a princess for the society in some way is not just being a princess for the sake of the title.

Q: Sure, sure.

A: That is my value.

Q: But there is another issue too. I wonder, if your father was killed there is enormous danger for you, you could fail. In other words, it is a dangerous title too because you could have a tragic ending. It is built into being special that there is also the potential for great tragedy whether you like it or not. You could be a playboy princess or a princess like your father, but history can still be very cruel to you, right? So maybe while the commoner-

A: Doesn't care.

Q: History doesn't really care about the ordinary man. So it is dangerous. I am wondering if you also feel it is a little dangerous.

A: I thought about that a lot. But having so much fear is not going to accomplish anything, so fear is an obstacle to your work and if you really want to work you just have to put that aside. There is nothing you can do about your destiny.

Q: Right. But clearly you have more potential danger in your role than an ordinary person.

A: that is right.

Q: History can be very cruel.

A: Very cruel. But I like the challenge. I don't mind the challenge.

Q: You like the challenge?

A: I like the challenge.

Q: What is the Buddha though? He was a prince, right?

A: Mmm-hmm.

Q: He took on the job.

A: And he won.

Q: Yeah, he was a prince, right? A very special man.

A: Yeah, what I always say to my friends is there have also been great princesses, before me. There have been princesses that have built school education for the kids and princess that were really very involved in the Red Cross and really helping, concerned about people, tradition, the Cambodian tradition of creating food and the dishes, your special dishes and all that. There are a lot of people, a lot of princesses that are involved in society, but usually they don't see it that way. Usually one bad guy does something and then it is like everyone is in the same boat. My thought is that I really want to challenge, to show that the title is important for a person. Ordinary people can be bad also but nobody sees it because they are ordinary people. If a prince or a princess does something people really take it badly and I want to challenge that area also.

- Q: Plus you are unique. You will probably be, in the 1300-year history of your country, you probably will be the first mental health princess, right? Did they ever have a mental health princess before?
- A: I don't think so, no.
- Q: You could be the first princess of mental health.
- A: Mental health princess, the healing of the mind.
- Q: Ever thought about that?
- A: Yes. The healing of the minds of the people. I feel I have a destiny.
- Q: Could be.
- A: Everything is work for some kind of purpose.
- Q: Well we thank you very much. It has been delightful; we really appreciate that you took this special time to do these interviews. Thank you. How do you say thank you to a princess? I don't know, is there a special thank you or do you just say it like everyone else?
- A: You want to say it in Cambodian?
- Q: Yeah, how do you say it to a princess, thank you? You don't know?
- A: For a princess?
- Q: How do you say thank you?
- A: Do you want to say it in Cambodian? (Cambodian thank you)
- Q: (Repeats Cambodian thank you) Really, so that is the special way.
- A: Thank you.