

AN INTERVIEW WITH KIM YOU TAING

An Oral History Conducted by Vanessa Concepcion and Cecilia Winchell

Reflections: The Las Vegas Asian American and Pacific Islander
Oral History Project

Oral History Research Center at UNLV
University Libraries
University of Nevada Las Vegas

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Oral History Project

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PREFACE

“History, you want people to know, to learn, and they can make themselves better... I have seen bad and good, but I learned how to appreciate people, appreciate life. Some things are not up to me. I was born in the wrong place, but I appreciate it still.”

Kim You Taing, a Cambodian-Chinese refugee discusses his childhood during the Cambodian Wars, and how his family survived fleeing from village to village to escape the Rouge and gunfire occurring at that time. After a tragic incident where his two siblings died from drowning in the village river, his mother decided they need to get out of Cambodia to get a better life. His father who was Chinese would be captured and killed by the government just for being Chinese. Kim and his family were farmers but were forced to leave their village in order to survive and get to a place of "normal" and safety. He discusses how his family's choices were often not choices they were able to make, but rather forced to make because they had to survive.

After his family gets in contact with a American missionary, they were able to be sponsored to come to America and find their way to Seattle, Washington. In Washington, Kim would be attending school for the first time in his life at age 16, after years of running and surviving in Cambodia and Thailand. His family would be able to move to Las Vegas and become porters and housekeepers at prominent casinos at the time like Circus Circus and Excalibur. Kim decided he is not as motivated to stay in school and tried community college but starts to work as a busser at Circus Circus where he eventually would make his way to be a server at the Bellagio and be a part of the Culinary Union and advocate for other Asian people their rights as a casino worker. He now is a father and husband to his wife and 15-year-old daughter and sees himself living in Vegas for 10 more years until he can retire.

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November 11, 2021

in Las Vegas, Nevada

Conducted by Vanessa Concepcion and Cecilia Winchell

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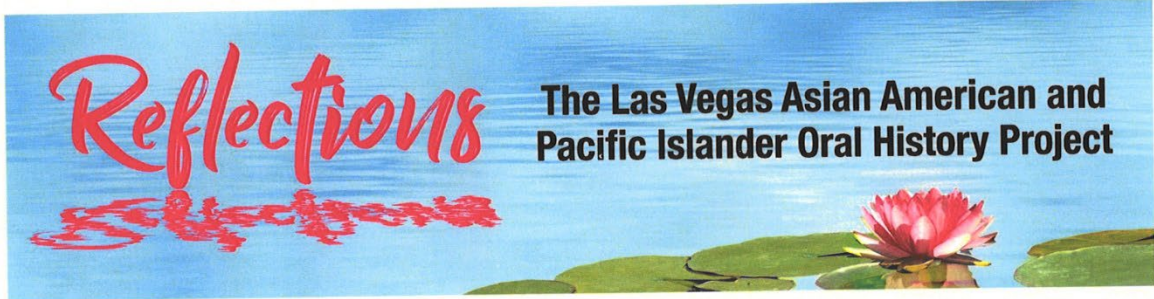
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This is Vanessa Concepcion, and I'm here today with Kim You Taing, Cecilia Winchell and Stefani Evans. Today is November 15th, 2021. Let's just start off by you introducing yourself and spelling your name out for the file.

My name is Kim You Taing. It's K-I-M, Y-O-U, T, as in Tom, A-I-N-G.

Thank you.

You're welcome.

We're just going to start off by you just talking about your childhood. You can go back as far as you want, if it's about Cambodia when you grew up, your grandparents, stuff like that.

Grandparents I don't remember. I lost my grandfather, and I have never seen him. My childhood starting when I was four years old, I remember wars in Cambodia until I'm sixteen and there is not a war. Back in 1975 that's when they have a civil war, and then they kick us all out of the city to go to the village and become farmers. Back then I was eleven years old. I lost my mom and then two brothers. Two brothers drown. They went to a river and took a shower. I was there, too. I was with my two younger brothers, me and my father when my younger brother (NAME) and my third brother also went to take a shower in the river, but he was on the other side. Then when we are all screaming and the people gathered together, then my third brother came over and see that it was our family that the brother was drowning, and he jumped in. Two of our brothers we lost on the river. We went back to report it to my mom that we lost two of the brothers, and she was depressed, and then she told us that she didn't want to live anymore, so from then on, she got sick. Then we moved on as the soldiers, what we called the Khmer Rouge, (2:30), kicked us out of the city, so we keep moving on until our destination is.

When we get to the place where we locate and live there, about a month later my mom passed away. When she passed away, we lived in the village for another three years. There is no money, relatives, no nothing. If you work, you get food. If you don't work, you don't get food. Then we don't have any medicine. There is no clothing. You eat whatever they give to you. It's not like if you want to go out for dinner, for a burger. There are no choices; whatever they give to you, you eat it. I was eleven years old, so I had to raise cattle. Our family all lived there, but separated. The commoners were dividing us. We never seen them. Sometime, maybe a year, two years, we see each other and that's it and we leave again.

I believe until 1978, my father is still alive, but we never see him. One day when I was in the sugarcane field...my father is pure Chinese that came from China. He doesn't speak Cambodian. The commoners are accusing him that he is criticizing the commoners or something they didn't like, so they arrested him and they killed him. When they killed him, somebody went to the sugarcane field looking for me. "Oh, your father has passed away." I came back. Then when he passed away, he didn't even have a coffin. There is no coffin. There is only blanket and a piece of metal to bury him with.

Six months later, I think between Cambodia and Vietnam, they are having a conflict; they're at war, and that's when Vietnam took over. When they took over, then you could say that it's freedom. You have a choice to move on wherever your hometown is, wherever you want to go. When Vietnam fought with Cambodia, we have to go all the way to the jungle to hide away from the Khmer Rouge, Cambodia. There was no light, no nothing. You eat whatever. You have to save whatever you can. Then you have to stay there for a week to make sure that the Vietnamese soldiers are occupied in the whole city, and then you can come out and be protected by the Vietnamese soldiers.

After a week, we move out to a city where we used to live, and then we are using river water to cook, to take a shower, whatever. When we go to the river, we see all the soldiers dying, floating on top of the water with all the AK-47s, and we are still using the water to take a shower, cooking and all that stuff. We don't know the word *contamination* or what *genocide* is, but we used them.

After in the invasion, we stayed there for another couple of months. Then we have three families that decided to move back to the city so that we have opportunity for normal life, back in 1970. I don't know what to call it. We get all this bamboo and tie it together. We get this floating thing on the river. Three families live in the river, let the water float us all the way to the city. One night we tried to pass the small city to go to big city so that we're safe, but we were pushing at night, and back then it wasn't safe; it's chaos. The Vietnamese soldiers thought we were the Khmer Rouge, which is the opponents. They were shooting AK-47s after us and yelling at us. We were so scared, and on top of that, three families. Finally, they realized we are civilians. We landed in the soil and we stayed overnight. That was a bad experience.

The next day we continued our journey. We go to the city. We land in the city, and we tried to set up a normal life, back to normal. Three families lived in the floating bamboo thing for maybe another six months. We go into the city. We're looking for food. We're looking for water. What we can't do is sell and convert. Back then they started using money. Gold is the main thing as money. We don't have currency. We're using gold as money. We lived there about six months.

Then one of the families decided to move to Thailand. They wanted to get out of the country because it's not safe. They wanted to move to another country. Then we say, "Okay, you guys go ahead. We want to stay here." I continued to stay there.

One day there is a Vietnamese that they have against China's government. Personally, I'm not a hundred percent Cambodian; I'm of Chinese descent. They can tell by your skin complexion. One day the Vietnamese soldiers decided to arrest all the Chinese and dump in a rice farm. I went there and found out they were arresting all the Chinese, and I came back and told my brother, and that's how we run away and escape and decide to leave Cambodia and go to Thailand.

That's in 1979 when we went to Thailand to a refugee camp. We stayed there at the refugee camp. When you stay at the refugee camp and you want to go out of the country, you have to have somebody to sponsor you, or else you're going to wait for a long time for any country in the world to come and get you. We stayed in Thailand about a year or something, and then we have a sponsor from my relative and from the church in America. When they sponsored our family, I believe it was nine people in our family, and we came to America in 1981, May 21st, in Seattle, Washington.

It's funny because I was on a plane. I didn't know anything about rule or policy. I was underage. I was sixteen. This flight attendant was asking me if I wanted beer, so I said, "Yes." I wanted to try a beer. I never tried a beer in my whole life, but I was not of age limit. The lady decided to give me the beer, and another flight attendant said, "Oh no, he's not twenty-one," so they took it away from me. I didn't know anything about the laws.

If we could go back a little bit, how long were you with your family waiting at the refugee camp in Thailand?

With my family, it's about a year, 1979. You're talking about from 1979 to May of '81 when we came to America, so about a year.

What were your perceptions being on the plane, landing in Seattle, Washington?

Something new. We're not scared. We're ready for something new as a challenge. I think is the word, challenge. We come to a new country. We don't know anything about it. We don't speak a word of English. Oh, let's go back. From the day I was born until I was sixteen, I never held a pencil. I never learned any words like that, so no education.

Were you scared?

Was I scared? Yes, back in Cambodia, yes, I am. As a kid, you don't want to die. A lot of times you have a mental problem of sleeping. I would dream about that. You don't want to die because of the war. You even pretend like you're dying because you don't want to get killed.

Let me go back there, too. Before I crossed from Cambodia to Thailand, you have to cross, but you have to pay somebody to know the place, the route to take you from Cambodia across to Thailand. If you don't pay somebody, then you try to cross the border by walking across the mountains, and there's a lot of land mines that kills a lot of people, so we paid somebody. I remember when we tried to sleep on a mountain, I was sleeping with dead people, one night, and I can hear the cannon shooting at night in the air. Then in the mountain, there is no water, and I have to drink a sip of muddy water from buffalo. I still remember that. I will never forget about that, one sip of muddy poop water from buffalo.

When you did land in Seattle, Washington, how many family members were with you?

There's nine people, one sister-in-law and one sister and seven brothers.

Where did you guys stay? Did you stay with family?

We have a relative and we have an American sponsor that they go to church. Because our family is too big, we split half and half, half of them stayed with my relative, and half of them stayed with my American sponsor.

Did you start going to school for the first time?

Yes, I go to the school for the first time, because of my age, sixteen, I have to jump into high school, which is called Edmonds High School in Seattle, Washington. We have to start from ABC, never learned, never go to school before, so it's hard.

Were there other Cambodian kids or Chinese kids in your class?

Yes, there is. There is a lot, yes.

Was that nice to have other...?

Yes, it's fun. We talked to them. That's the only language that we know besides English.

Could you speak a little more on your experience in high school and growing up in Seattle?

To be honest with you, when I go to school, I didn't know because I didn't have background. I was asking myself, what is the reason to go to school for? But nobody ever mentored me or something. But I was a pretty smart kid. I was very interested in spelling. Back then I was pretty good in spelling. What's funny is that when I started math—because I didn't know subtraction, addition, multiplication—I do everything as adding, so sometimes I would get a good grade and sometimes I would get a bad grade. I was like, how come this one has a good grade, and this one has a bad grade? Because I didn't know whether it was subtraction, addition or multiplication; I never studied this before.

Did you start working in Seattle?

No, I didn't work. Because we are refugees, we get the money called welfare from the government for eighteen months. We lived there for eighteen months. Then we it expired, back then it was hard looking for a job. My brother had a friend in Vegas, so they decided to move down here. That's why we moved down here to Vegas.

When did you move to Vegas?

December 1982.

How old were you then?

Seventeen.

Did you like Vegas more than Seattle?

It's different. I like both, but it's different. When I first came to Vegas, I had never seen so many lights, and beautiful. It's good experience.

Can you describe Vegas in 1982? What did it look like?

It's beautiful, small town. Not a lot of people that moved here yet. There is no Chinatown, no nothing. I remember one or two Chinese restaurants in Vegas.

Do you remember the name of the restaurant?

The name of the restaurant is called Cockatoo. It's right down here by Stratosphere. It's called Cockatoo. It is one of the busiest restaurants because at night people like to go there and hang out. The other one is called the Lim restaurant inside Commercial Center.

What did your family do once you came to Vegas?

They just wanted to get a job. They have no experience. They can hardly speak any English, so some start out as a casino porter, others start out as a dishwasher, and my sister started as a maid, and I am still going to school, which is Valley High School.

Was the high school here just as diverse?

It's really not that many like in Seattle. Seattle is more diverse back when I was there. Here, I kind of lose interest in learning because I don't have any of the same people like me. There aren't a lot of Asian people. A lot of American people, less Asian. I was not really interested in learning.

What were the kinds of activities you were doing at that age? You were going to school.

I would go to my school. We have three or four families from Cambodia. I like sports. I love to play basketball. We bike into downtown, watch a movie. That's my activities.

What casino was your family working at?

Circus Circus, Caesars Palace, Union Plaza, Las Vegas Hilton. I believe that was it, back then. Now they changing, too.

Was it because of your family that eventually you started to work in the casino, too, or what made you start to work in the casinos?

Like I was saying, I lose interest because I couldn't make friends because I can't speak good English. People were probably making fun of me because of my English. I have a language barrier, so it's hard for me to have friends, and there's not enough Asians to be friends with. I tried to go to school even after I graduated from Valley High School. I tried to go to the community college in North Las Vegas a couple of times. I still couldn't find any people that I could make friends to give you motivation to learn, so I start losing interest until 1987, February.

I told my brother, "I don't like to go to school no more because I'm losing interest." He said, "Okay, if you're losing interest, then go ahead and look for a job." That's when I come out and get a job. Matter of fact, he is the one that worked at Circus Circus as a janitor. He knows the manager in the steakhouse, so he got me a job, first job as a busser in the steakhouse. It's still there now at Circus Circus, back in February 1987, my first job as a busser.

Can you describe what it's like being a busser in Circus Circus?

No experience. First time when I carry a big tray with salad, I tried to go up the stairs. I didn't lift my leg all the way, and I kicked the stair, and I spilled the tray with the salads. It was embarrassing.

How long were you a busser?

About three years, until 1990, June something, 1990. Then Excalibur opened, and I know the food and beverage director. I told him that I wanted to be a server, so he gave me the opportunity to be a server at the Excalibur; it's called Sir Galahad, prime rib.

You went to server, and what was it like being a server at the Excalibur?

Exciting, happy. Tried to make money. You were making money, but didn't save money. We were kids, crazy, don't know about it. I'm always a hard worker. Back then I was happy to move up.

This is just a question I forgot to ask earlier. But you did mention in school there weren't a lot of people who were Asian that you could relate to. Were there other moments in your life where you were discriminated against?

No, it's not discrimination. It's just myself. Because I didn't speak any English, it's hard for me to make friends with real American people that live here. If I had more Asian, yes, because I do speak Chinese. If I have somebody from Cambodia or something, yes. You just feel more comfortable that way.

As you started to work in the casinos, were there other people that you could find friendships in, the same backgrounds?

My first job as a busser in the steakhouse, there is a couple of people from Vietnam, Cambodia.

Yes, it's very fun to work there. You're happy because you can communicate.

Where are you working now?

Right now, I am working at the Bellagio buffet.

Do you like it there?

I love it. Been there since they opened, 1998, September 23rd. I remember the date, too.

Why did you decide to stay at the Bellagio?

Bellagio is famous. Everybody wants to go in there and work for Bellagio. Back then, Steve Wynn was the owner. He is really, really taking care of the employees. Everybody knows about Steve Wynn; that's why they call him the King of Vegas. When he decided to open the Bellagio, I was working at the Rio. I remember I was working at the Rio, at the seafood buffet at the Rio for two years. Then my former manager went to Bellagio, and that's when I followed him to go to the Bellagio. But I did apply at Bellagio myself, and I didn't get the job. To be honest, I didn't get the job because in the interview, I think because of my language, my English wasn't that good back then. But even now, it's not that good, either. I don't know. I failed the interview. At the last minute, I found out that my manager was going there, so I asked him and applied. He said, "Okay, we'll take you there." It was a good opportunity then.

Can you describe more how Vegas has transformed in your time working here and living here?

Oh, Vegas...I don't know. I like the old Vegas because I do gamble, too. Back then, I gamble and I work. It's totally different. It's a bigger city. The population is larger. Back then Vegas was the old Vegas. People like the old Vegas. I like it, too, because you go gamble and you can get comped easy, get room, get food, go out to eat. But now Vegas is growing nonstop. It's going to continue to grow. Corporations control most of that. Some people like it. Some people don't like it. For me, I don't gamble no more, so it doesn't bother me.

Do you see yourself staying in Vegas?

Oh, for at least maybe another ten years until I retire, yes, because my goal is to work and finish at Bellagio, hopefully, and then I'll retire in the next ten years.

Now I want to ask about some traditions that you may practice. Can you describe some of the food or holidays that you might celebrate that reflects your culture?

We do. Even though I was born in Cambodia, we do carry Chinese traditions from my parents, so we do celebrate Chinese New Year, Moon Festival, et cetera. I also respect other cultures because I was born in Cambodia. I do also celebrate Cambodian culture at New Year, also, and eat their food.

What kinds of food do you eat? Can you say some of the names and your favorite?

In Cambodia? In Chinese?

Either one.

We have French beef steak. I don't know if you know about French beef steak. We have dim sum. We eat dim sum. Pan-fried noodle with (Chinese). Lobster, stir-fried lobster with scallion and ginger. Crab with garlic sauce, fried garlic. Salt and pepper pork rib. I know a lot of foods.

Do you cook some of those foods at home?

I do cook food myself, yes, I do. By the way, my wife is Filipino. I have a daughter that is fifteen years old. She is half-Chinese, half-Filipino. Like I say, I never go to school. I don't read Chinese, but I go to YouTube and learn myself, and then I also teach my daughter Chinese.

Could you talk a little bit about how you met your wife?

At the Bellagio. She used to work at the Bellagio as a hostess, and I work as a server; that's how I met her.

What's it like raising your daughter with the two different cultures? You said Filipino, Chinese, Cambodian.

It's different. It's hard. But I'm the person easy to adjust, but at the beginning it's kind of hard. It's like putting a chemical into it with two different cultures. But as you continue to live with it, you realize how you can take some, give some to make it work. It's hard, but it works out fine. We've been together almost...the daughter is fifteen...almost seventeen years.

I want to ask about how you got involved with the Culinary Union and how long you've been with them.

Getting involved with Culinary because I don't have confidence myself. I'm a person that is easy to get scared, intimidated because I want to know, what is my right? What do I need to learn not to be thinking myself stressed, to make myself calm, confident that I have my rights so I won't be able to stress too much and worry too much? That's when I get involved, become a shop steward, and learn my rights to protect myself and to educate other people.

Is there a moment in your experience with the Culinary Union you can talk about, a memorable moment?

Memorable moment is seven or eight years ago when they called me if I wanted to go to New York for a Freedom Ride or something for immigration and some other stuff about the healthcare center. We went there to see...In New York, they have five healthcare centers. Union now, they tried to create the healthcare center. They asked me if I wanted to go. I said, "Okay, it's a good experience." We went there for a week, and I get to see New York, different places, Manhattan, Brooklyn, the Bronx, and after that we also went to Washington, D.C., and I get to see the capitol. I got the chance to meet Harry Reid, who was a majority senator back then. It was a good experience.

I want to turn it to Cecilia and Stefani if they have any questions to ask you right now.

CW: I wanted to go back again and talk about your parents again. I was wondering if you knew why your father moved from China to Cambodia.

For opportunity after World War II; that's what I heard. He was originally from Tsingtao. He lived in a village, too, so he had to walk to a port to pay somebody to sneak somebody into another country; that's the way he did that. After World War II, I guess the family is poor, and he

wanted...His mom told him to leave the country and go out, so that's why he—not migrate—he's running and landed in Cambodia.

Do you know how your parents met?

That I don't know.

Do you have any happier memories from living in Cambodia?

Yes, as a kid. As a kid, from '70 to '74, all we do is live in a house. We come down. We don't have any stress. We don't have to worry. We played with kids. We play using marbles, rubber band, and we play games. We kicked the can, all kinds of stuff we're playing. It was fun. We didn't go to school, but...

SE: Before the war, none of you went to school?

My older brother did. It's like half of them because we have twelve kids. I'm the third-youngest one. When Price Sihanouk was the king of Cambodia, he allowed you to learn Chinese. My father has always believed that we are Chinese; we have to stick with Chinese, to learn Chinese. My older brother did learn Chinese. But half of us didn't learn it because back then Sihanouk was overthrown by his people back in 1970, and that's why I didn't have an opportunity to learn.

After Sihanouk was overthrown, what happened then to the country?

I was living in another city. I think it was the United States that goes to war with Vietnam, right? The Vietnamese soldiers were running across the border to Cambodia, and that's when the U.S. decided to go ahead and bomb Cambodia and kill all the people and destroy our house in the village, and we didn't have any more house. We can't live there no more because everything is all burned out. My parents decided, that's it; we have to move to the city, which is the capital. Twelve kids, we moved there to the city. We don't have anything. We lose everything. No clothes, no nothing. We have to start everything all over. We have to live at a relative's house.

You were in Phnom Penh?

Phnom Penh, yes, back in 1970 to '74. That's when the Khmer Rouge come over and overthrow us again, three different wars.

When you had to live Phnom Penh, what village did they send you to?

My father always like the place where he grew up and lived, the place that we just left to go from Phnom Penh. When we were overthrown by the Khmer Rouge, my father said, "Okay, let's go back to the place where we left." But they didn't let us go there. They were lying. First, we had to go somewhere else. It's not that you have a choice to go where you want, no. They didn't let us go there. They were lying. They took us to a different place.

Geographically where were you then?

You're familiar with the Mekong River?

Yes.

It's close to the border of Laos and Cambodia, yes, in Vietnam.

They sent you way up north.

Yes.

Was your family together at that time?

Most of the family is together except my fifth brother. He was working for somebody, and when the commander came in, he was separated for three or four years. We never seen him. He never seen my mom and dad until 1978-79 when we found him in the city, capital, and then we told him that our parents passed away.

He was the only brother that got separated from the family?

Yes, the fifth brother, yes.

How did you find him in Phnom Penh?

We went to like a swap meet where people sell. My two brothers, it was like, “Let’s go for a walk in that shop, that area. Maybe we’ll run into him,” and they did run into him, crazily.

That’s crazy.

Yes. Amazing.

Yes. When they sent you to the north, were there other families in that camp that you knew?

No, it wasn’t a camp. It was a village.

Was it a new village?

It’s a new place that we had never been there before.

Did you know anyone there?

No. It’s a good thing that we ran into people who were nice. They give us food, give us a place to stay. Some people are nasty and they don’t welcome you, but we were fortunate. We were lucky.

How much food did you have a day?

Whatever the government gave us. When we left Phnom Penh, we had to bring our food. If you don’t have food, you’re on your own; you’re starving. We seen people dying on the street, actually, moving, because of no food, starvation.

How much did the government give you?

The government don’t give you anything. During that time when you leave, you get kicked out of the city, you’re on your own, whatever you can bring and you can save. If you run out of food, you’re on your own.

Could you forage for food?

There’s no money involved.

No. Could you...

You had to go beg and ask for it.

You've mentioned a couple of times a church. What was the church?

It's American lady that my relative went to church and met them. I believe he was talking to them and said, "Hey, I have a relative that wants to come to America, but they are huge; the family is big, and I can't sponsor them all." This lady nicely said, "Okay, we will pitch in and help." She sponsored.

Could you tell us what that church was?

I don't know the name of that church, but my sponsor, I still know her name. Her name is Angela Donnelly and Terry Donnelly. We still are in contact with her. Matter of fact, we lived in Seattle, and then she got a job offer to go to Thailand for missionary. Back then, like I say, we don't speak English. The whole family doesn't speak English, so we missed contact, but she heard we moved to Vegas. One day she came back after she finished with her job in Thailand and the contract expired, so she came back to America, and she decided, okay, let me look at Yellow Book and see if I can find the Taing family. She did find it and call us. That's how we meet again.

Where are your brothers now?

I have one, the fifth brother that lives in Stockton, and the rest is all here. My older brother just passed away five years ago, my oldest one. He's like a parent. He's the one that got us everything throughout his life. He is like a parent.

I'm sorry.

Well, that's okay, life. We all have to move on.

What would you like us to know about Cambodia?

It's a beautiful country. It's tropical. The food is good. The people are so nice. It's just the government destroyed the whole culture and everything. It's beautiful. I went back to visit three

times already. I like it. I like the food. I like the people. They are nice. People are still poor, and I do help them with this and that. I believe in helping people.

Have you taken your daughter to Cambodia?

She did, 2019, with me and my wife and her, we went there, yes, 2019.

Have her cousins been, your brothers' kids?

No, they haven't been there, only my daughter. I still have one older sister in Cambodia, though, about eighty years old. She married when I was four, and we separate for thirty-five years before we met, thirty, forty years before I met her.

She never left Cambodia?

She never, ever left Cambodia. She was too old, eighty years old already. She's almost eighty, so...

But she stayed through the whole...

Like me, yes, struggle until now, yes.

Where is she now?

It's a couple of hours from Phnom Penh.

You were mentioning your birth year is not accurate. Can you explain that?

Now, Asians look young, very young, right? We got our sponsor by people. Then when we went to interview by the American ambassador, they would say I don't look like sixteen, so we have to change it. From sixteen, I change it two years younger, so I was fourteen. That's just the reason why. I guess because we look young, they say, "Oh, you don't look sixteen. I don't think you look sixteen. You look about fourteen." My brother had to go there and adjust everybody. We have a big family. He is seventy, but he's sixty-four now. We all were a couple of years younger to match it.

SE: *How did that work, say, with the military? Did you have to, when you turned eighteen, register?*

In Cambodia, there's no such law. If they need military, they'll just draft you, yes, unless you volunteer to be in and join them.

But when you were here, you were eighteen.

Yes, I did register with the select draft.

For selective service.

Yes, I did.

And you were really twenty, or...?

I was eighteen, when I turned eighteen, which is twenty years, correct, right.

When your body was twenty.

Yes, yes, yes. There you go. That's the way to put it, yes.

The last question is: Why do you think it's important to collect interviews such as yours?

It's good to know. Everybody is good to know so you can pass it on to your kid, pass it on to people. History, you want people to know, to learn, and they can make themselves better. That's what I believe in, and that's the reason why I took my daughter to Cambodia, to let her get the chance to see people that came over here and don't have the opportunity to come over here. Most kids, I believe, in America take everything for granted. I wanted her to learn how to appreciate life, and then for herself to make her better in the future.

SE: *There's a museum in Phnom Penh, the Tuol Sleng Prison.*

About the S-21? Yes, S-21, I went there.

Did you take your daughter there?

No, I didn't. She would probably get scared.

It's very dark.

Yes, the S-21. I went there. I took a picture of it. You went there? Ah, she didn't tell me. S-21, yes. You know what? To me, I'm used to people dying. I've seen it through all my life. I'm not really like some people that are scared, no. I seen people dying. I sleep with dead people and all that stuff. I drink muddy water. I went through it. The only thing I've never done is eat dead people, or people's meat. I've done everything. I eat snake. I eat dog. I eat all kinds. I'm sorry, but I had to do what I had to do in order to survive.

Can you tell us a time when you were young where you ate something that was new and wonderful?

Everything is good. I ate cat, and it was good. I'm sorry whoever hears that and owns a cat. I eat cat. It was good. Dog was good. Dog is good meat. I eat snake. It was good. I eat racoon, whatever I can find.

Did you ever feel hungry?

I'm always hungry. I always feel hungry, even now. I love to eat. I don't drink or smoke. I don't like to drink and smoke. If you were a kid, there were commoners...I want to use the word, maybe you're brainwashed. When you're a kid, it's easy to be brainwashed by the government. If you get separated from your parent, don't listen to your parent; they're not right; everything is government is right. Sometimes they bribe you. Sometimes they use propaganda, always propaganda to tell you this. Is it my fault? Maybe because I'm a kid and I listen to people, right? I don't know. Maybe it's my fault, but I'm not old enough and I wasn't educated. Maybe they teach me how to hate my brother. I have to do it, or else I'll be gone.

Is there anything else that you wanted to talk about that we didn't get to discuss?

Oh, there's a lot more. Like I say, it's nothing that I've never seen. I've seen it all. I've seen it all throughout my life. Do I have a bad life? Yes, I do. Do I have a good life right now? Yes, I do. I have seen bad and good, but I learned how to appreciate people, appreciate life. Some things are not up to me. I was born in the wrong place, but I appreciate it still. Never, ever in my dreams did I think I would come to America, never. How do I get to America? I don't know. I have no answer. Never, ever dream of America. I never, ever dreamed I would fly on a plane. Now I have the opportunity. Where do I want to go? I can go as long as you have money. I went to China. I've been to Cambodia. I've been to Mexico. I've been everywhere, so I'm happy. In America, as long as you're willing to work hard, you put everything in your mind, you can achieve everything, yes. In Cambodia, even now, you don't have the opportunity. A lot of people don't have the opportunity there. It's different. I've seen it all.

SE: Your family that is here, are they also involved in the union?

They are not involved in the union. Let me tell you why Asian people are not involved with the union. They are so frightened. They don't believe it. The reason why I became a shop steward is because I wanted to prove to Asian people; I wanted to get Asian people involved. It's not that I want to be the first in the union and get famous or something, no. I wanted to educate my Asian people like me. I'm so afraid of it. I don't know my rights. Every time I go to work, I'm afraid a manager will fire me, something I did wrong. How do I defend it? I was so afraid to be honest with you. That's the reason I get involved. Then when I get involved with shop steward, I learned a lot, and I tried to educate the Asian people, and I try even though now it's so hard. I know the Asian people are so afraid to get involved with union.

Why is that?

It's hard. You have to prove—a good example is my younger brother. I get him involved with shop steward, on and off, on and off. He is working at the Mirage. I guess he smoked weed back then, and it wasn't legal. He goes to work. This chef was thinking that he was drinking at work, so they fired him. My brother got fired. He didn't tell me anything until, thank God, as a union policy you have fifteen days to file a grievance. He waits until the last day. I don't know, for whatever. He came and told me, "I got fired." I said, "When did you get fired? Let me see your papers." I said, "Oh, you have the last day. Why did you get fired?" He said, "They're accusing me of drinking." I said, "You are at the last day to file a grievance with the union. You better go now, or you don't have a chance." He listened to me, and he filed a grievance. The case went on, and it goes onto arbitration. He won the arbitration. They paid him seventy-one thousand dollars plus his job back. Now, that's how you get Asian people to believe it. He didn't believe either.

That would make me believe.

Exactly. Asians are very hard to persuade them. I don't know for what reason. I'm Asian. But I'm willing to give myself a chance to learn. They just need to be educated, I believe.

Thank you so much.

You're welcome. I talk too much, right?

No.

Thank you.

[End of recorded interview]