

THAO, SHER

Sher Thao is a teenager, and currently a junior at Wausau West High School.

Please tell me about yourself and your family; can you elaborate?

My name is Sher Thao and I was born in Thailand. I am 15 years old. My birthday is on Sept 11th. My family size is huge, more than ten people. My father passed away on February, 2001, in the same year of 9/11.

Wow do you feel about being a Hmong guy/girl? Why? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each?

Okay, being a Hmong guy isn't so bad. I don't know about a girl though. It's not bad being a guy because I don't really know - it depends on your personality. The advantages of being a guy is that you're more likely to be respected. The disadvantages of being a guy is that you're always being relied on.

What do you know about your traditions and culture and how do you feel about them?

I know the traditions, but I don't do them. I feel that those traditions are okay, except for Shamanism. But besides all these traditions, there shouldn't be drinking wine or beer for marriages. Then it will be okay for the traditions.

How was the transition from Laos and Thailand to America?

I don't really know because I was still young, but I think it should've brought sadness to all those relatives we left behind.

How do you feel about being Americanized?

I feel that it's okay and it's good that I am being Americanized. Otherwise I wouldn't be here answering these questions.

Who do your parents feel about it?

I think my mom feels that it's okay because we're living in the U. S. anyway.

“Schooling pulls me toward Americanization while my mom drags me toward our traditional ways.”

Do you ever feel torn or trapped between the two? How so?

Well not really, but yeah, It's like you are being pulled all over. Such as when a person in your clan dies and all of your clan members should help out at the funeral. So overall, I feel trapped between two cultures.

What is it like living with two different cultures?

You can ask yourself that question, but these days American ideas influence the Hmong teens to be Americanized. Pretty much the Hmong culture is dying.

Which culture do you feel is more beneficial and why?

I feel the American culture is more beneficial because we are living in America. The Hmong culture only tells us who we are.

Are your parents more Americanized or stuck in the traditional way of life? And how do you feel about that?

My mom is actually more of being both. I feel that it's great because then she knows how we feel.

What have your parents taught you and how will you use it?

My mom taught me how to read and understand Hmong. I'll use this to translate things to people who don't understand it.

Is education important to you? Why or Why not?

Education isn't really important, but it helps me to understand life more. More education improves my skills to determine what my future will be.

"People discriminate because it always comes down to superiority and what the ethnicity is like. For example, how your skin is and what you look like."

What are your expectations and your parent's expectations for your future?

My expectation is to be recognized and known as a good person. My mom expects me to become a doctor, lawyer or just be a well-known person. Her expectation is really high for me. I'll try to meet that, but I don't know if I can.

At school or anywhere else have you ever felt peer pressured to do something? What was it and did you follow through?

No. At school when people swear, I feel like knocking them out. Now that is one strong temptation; always push against.

What advice would you give to someone who wanted help on dealing with his or her racial issues?

If they are discriminating, then I'll tell them to stop. If they are being discriminated against, I'll tell them to trust God and they'll come through.

Why do people discriminate because of ethnicity?

People discriminate because it always comes down to superiority and what the ethnicity is like. For example, how your skin is and what you look like.

A stereotype is that all Hmong are in gangs. What do you think of that? Have you ever been asked to join and why do people join?

I feel that is all wrong. Maybe the majority of teens are, but people have to venture into the minority too, to understand the people. I have never been asked, but people probably join because they don't have the love they need.

What do you see in the future for the Hmong? What are your hopes for them?

I feel that the Hmong will grow into politics and develop technologies. My hope is that all Hmong will grow. But not just that; they will grow with God by their side.

Do you have any advice or words of wisdom to share?

Yeah. All I have to say is that everyone in the world are friends. Just that we haven't seen each other before. But if you get to know them, they'll become your friend, depending on how you like them.