
THE HMONG IN AMERICA: EXCHANGE OF CULTURE

by
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I was born in Thailand in a refugee camp. In 1995 my mom, dad, myself and five other siblings came to the United States after fighting in the Vietnam War and living in refugee camp. Many people from the Hmong culture came to the United States for a new life. This Hmong immigration resulted in an exchange between the American and Hmong cultures. The exchange wasn't easy for people on either side. Fully understanding this issue means knowing background information about why the Hmong came to the U.S., knowing what it was like for the Hmong adjusting to a new society, and knowing the impact that this had on both societies.

Hmong people came to the U.S because they struggled in the war in 1960, which killed many of the Hmong people, even children. The Hmong helped the U.S soldiers because they wanted freedom and land back from the communists, but somehow the U.S. left the Hmong behind, and then they had to deal with the communists without food and supplies. They hid in the forests and find little food to eat for survival. They stayed in the jungle for months until they could cross the Mekong River to Thailand. Many people wanted to stay and save their land. They were starving because there are no food left in the jungle to keep them alive to fight against the communists.

In Thailand they lived in refugee camps. Life in the camps was hard, living conditions were not as good as it used to be and it was also very crowded. Growing a garden was hard because you had no money for it. So the Hmong had to go and work with the Thai for money. Many Hmong decided to go to America. The CIA had promised to help the Hmong get to the U.S. We Hmong had helped them and now they would not be coming back.

Once the Hmong reached America and found a place to live they faced many challenges; the language was the first barrier the Hmong had to face. They didn't know how to speak English or write it and it caused many problems. They were not able to get jobs for themselves and they didn't know how to get help in case of an emergency or how to be successful in school. The Hmong and American culture were very different from each other. We saw things differently on customs like having street markets and helping old people, looking people in the eye, putting flowers on the table when they eat breakfast, lunch, and supper. Many foods from America are different from the Hmong food.

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All these challenges were overwhelming, but as the people settled in there were challenges for the American, too. Change of Qausau is a population of 856 Cambodians, 36,809 Hmong, 5,405 Laotians, 4,505 Vietnamese and a total of 47,575 people from other countries and that's why more schools and jobs were needed. There is so much Hmong immigration and other immigration that they had to build more houses for people. I hope that soon people in Thailand will be in America.