

## Wang Chao Her

*Wang Chao Her is from the province of Xieng Khouang. While in Laos he worked in a Christian Book Center. He has been in Wausau for the past 22 years and is the past president of the Wausau Area Hmong Mutual Association.*



*Did you live in Laos or Thailand?*

I lived in Laos.

*You lived in Laos before you came here. What was your government and your homeland like, the economy and the living conditions? Were there a lot of hostile things going on, or was it good before you left?*

Well, actually the homelands and the economy were pretty much different than over here. Not much companies. Actually, they had some factories in big city. But mostly peoples, they farmed.

*How old were you when you left your homeland?*

I was about 20, 22.

*Did you have brothers and sisters?*

Yes, actually I don't have any brothers. I am the only one in my family, but I have two sister.

*Did they leave with you?*

One live in Wausau right now. One still live in Laos.

*Exactly why did you leave Laos? I imagine it had something to do with the communism that was going on.*

Actually, the people, refugees came here because they work with the CIA, or they work with the United States. And, not only the persons who work with the CIA can come here. They can count the family, you know the relative who work for the CIA and for the United States CIA, and your parents, your brothers, your cousins. Actually I'm not army, or soldier or anything, but my father worked for the [Couldn't hear].

*How did you leave your homeland? Did you come over on the plane?*

I go to school in city, and we just crossed the Mekong River to Thailand. We had to come maybe middle of the night around 1:00 or 2:00, 2:00 a.m., and we paid or we get some taxis and we come pick it up in our home, and we crossed the river.

*Did you stay in a refugee camp before you came to the U.S.?*

Yes.

*What was the refugee camp like?*

Oh, so crowded. We could not go to any where, and the soldiers watching you, all the refugee people.

They make fence around camp actually, we have a two different camp. Camp Nam Phong and that, it's an army camp. After that, we go to Ban Vinai, and at Ban Vinai they don't make fence around. But, you can not go anyway because, when you do you might get killed.

*Were you forced to live there, or did you choose to live there?*

Yeas. So we had to live right in there, whatever they said. Whatever they do you food and any other things you can just do inside camp. Unless you get some permission from the Thai government.

*Was it difficult to come to the U.S.?*

Yes, it difficult because of the United States, they really follow procedures for immigrant. So, they really get some of the people who work for the United State before other category.

*Did you first come to Wisconsin when you came here, or did you live elsewhere?*

I came right to Wisconsin. I came to Bonduel, a little town past Shawno. You go toward Green Bay, there's a little town. It's about 11 miles from Shawno.

*Did you have relatives that lived there? Is that why you went there?*

No, it is a sponsor. My sponsor lived in town with Saint Florian's Church [Hatley].

*Why did you come to Wausau ?*

Well, actually, we were looking for a better job. When I came back in 1976, they have quite a few job where they, if I start working since I can, couple weekly letter. They pay only two thirty cents an hour. So we settle in, my brother-in-law live in Wausau. He came the same time, but he came to his sponsor to the church in Wausau. His all the family came here, and we came over there so we can visit and there's a bigger city, easy to find job. I find better job over here that paid a little more, \$3.37 and better than \$2.30 so I decided to leave.

*Did the government help you find a place to live?*

I don't think so.

*They didn't help you find a place?*

When we came, the sponsor is the one that responsibility for the . . .

*Finding a home?*

A home and where going to live. So when came, they decide we live right on a farm. They have a home and one of the barns, they have five barn. They have a house and they decide to give the house and the barn for us to live there.

*What exactly is a sponsor? Were they from our government.? What were their responsibilities, and , and what did they do?*

Mostly, every sponsor is family understanding, every sponsor or every church is sponsor. Not only one person can be sponsor to have a family. To have a five family a church would say, "Okay, we like to help this family and sponsor them to come to United State." And what you got to do, would be to take care of for to see a doctor or something and take care for grocery. I'm taking for job, the other take care for clothing and for the needing. And they got to help each other, you know. So, mostly, they had to go talk about, "Okay, we have a five family we want to sponsor." This family, they have lots on list, so the people records for the family what they're doing in Laos. And, do you wantto sponsor some more family, or big family because, some family have ten peoples, and seven peoples, five people. So they decide, "Okay, we want to sponsor this family." Then after they make decisions our church's sponsor, then they have to write letter to immigration to process the paperwork. So, they started from there to sponsor family. So when the family come in immigration know this family has a sponsor. They write a letter to the refugee camp telling you, "Okay, you got sponsor now." And you just to set up the date to go. You have to go to north United State or East Coast. They have a big map, they can show you before you leave.

*Was it difficult finding where you had to come?*

No, not really, because they got you the plane tickets. If we come to Bonduel, the plane ticket, then we make stop in Seattle, Washington, or San Francisco, or Los Angeles and to change planes in Chicago and Green Bay. So when we get to Green Bay, my sponsor already in a airport already.

*So, they just put you on the plane?*

So we had names in here, and total difference in face and different people. So they know, they really have a schedules already, so they know what time the family will arrive. It's just like when you go pick up your cousin at an airport [interviewer chuckles].

*The trip wasn't very difficult for you. Did a lot of people help you out and show you around? When you got off your airplane and if there was a layover, did you have people to wait with you?*

Yes. Mostly the sponsor family. Ah, they so excited to see. They just come pick up. They already have a house and a cleanup and know how many bedrooms and everything.

*So, people were very nice to you?*

Yes, they already have foods and everything, and you know they give you a hug and take to the house.

*Do you still practice your Hmong culture?*

Yes, we still have it. Well, actually we still keep in our culture.

*What types of things do you still do? Like your food, is it the same as it was?*

Yes, food is pretty much the same. It change a little bit and because mostly the people who born overseas in our country, they still keep the same food when we have it. Some of the children that born here, they gotta prefer both, you know, our food and American food. The cultures, relationship, and the families. We still keep the same thing so far, we do it now, but we don't know something for a change in the future. Names . . . [unable to hear a few words]. Right now, another family they have maybe a few children, and they have [unable to hear a few phrases] no names . . . Those are some things that . . .

*Are you concerned about that?*

Little bit. Pretty soon our name might be disappears. People might feel that our names are so difficult to call by our friends and at school and they probably pronounce wrong. It's difficult to pronounce it or spelling and so they might prefer something that is easy for friends or, you know, like John or so easy or Anna or . . .

*Do you feel comfortable in Wisconsin and the United States?*

Yes, I am. I kind of like it. [brief chuckles] I have been here over 20 years, so, I kind of enjoy it.

*Do you think about going back to Laos, or do you want to visit?*

I might. If we have a long vacation, I might plan to go visit, but not stay. Visit already pretty much of my country, so. . . [brief laughter from both]

*Do you think the United States, Wausau, or Wisconsin has, a different influence on your children then if you would live in Laos? Are they different?*

I think very, very different. Actually, we don't really have the gangs in our country. Because the controls and children and disciplines and to know the difference. The government, they don't really give a freedom for everybody, so you have a right to control your own child. The other family, they have a right to their own child, and nothing say. We don't have a so many thing like over here, you know. That's why we don't have [unable to hear conclusion of sentence].

*Do you ever feel any prejudice in Wisconsin? Have you ever been through that, or have people pretty much treated you very nice?*

*Yes, when we just came, we do receive some, and were face with some problem. But it not really make any difference because that's very small prejudice. But the mostly populations of the United State -- refugees, situation, you know, they understand.*

*I think that's about all the questions we have. Unless there's anything else you'd like to tell about your experience that you had in Laos when you moved over, or anything that you feel different about.*

*I don't have anything [laughter]. Unless you ask me something, I don't know what it is.*

*Thank you very much.*

*Thank you.*

*Yes. It was so nice of you to stop by.*