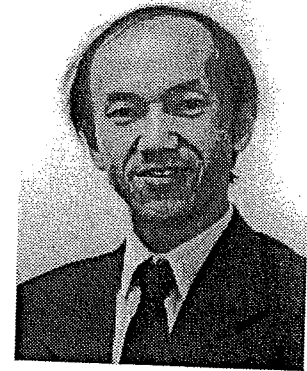


Yang Neng Her

Yang Neng Her is from the northeastern part of Laos. He worked for the United States CIA and the military police and left Laos in 1978. Yang is an interpreter and community counselor. He is married and has seven children. His father died in 1976 from yellow rain.



Yang Neng Her, how old are you?

I'm 42.

Where were you born?

In Laos.

What was your homeland like while you were living there? The government, economy, living conditions?

We didn't have a king back in Laos. And economic is free market and anyone can do anything, you can sell anything but I grew up during the wartime and we did not have to pay tax.

How about the living conditions?

The living conditions? I would consider that poor, that its not that bad.

How old were you when you left your homeland?

I was about 20.

Why did your family leave your homeland?

Because of the war, because of the Vietnam War and we had contacted the U.S. CIA. They contacted us that if we were able to win the war then we could stay in Laos, and they would give us what is supposed to be. But if we lose the war then where would they go? They would take us, and that's why we (left). The CIA lost the war in Vietnam, so when they come home we got to come with them, that's why we are here in this country. As refugees.

Was it difficult for you and your family to move to the U.S.? And why?

Yes, it was a terrible time during Vietnam. After Vietnam U.S. troops left Laos we have to hide out in the jungle so that the Communists wouldn't be able to capture us. After that we had to find a way to escape to Thailand and we did, we did make two trips. The first time we found out that there were a lot of people dying and starving. The second time we decided to have a smaller group so we did make it. At that time we escaped mainly with men not women. I left my wife and my two children behind.

How did you leave your homeland? By boat or walking?

We escaped into the jungle and we walked for 15 days and nights. By the time we go to Mekong River we were, we...used, (Couldn't hear) continue to help, float us to swim across the Mekong River.

Did you come directly to the United States?

No, I came to Thailand in the refugee camp first.

What were some of the difficult parts of the journey to U.S.?

I have to prepare because back in Laos we never had a record of how our name was spelled out. We didn't keep a record of birth dates. So, we have to prepare ourselves to which, and how we should write our names and we had to collect information on when we were born. And how parents and grandparents name, and its very difficult for non-educated people to prepare for the interview to get into this country.

What were your first impressions of the United, the U.S. and Central Wisconsin?

When I first get there I realize that everything is completely different than what I used to see back in Thailand and Laos. For example, the economic is totally different because back in Laos and in Thailand when we walk out you see fields. When we get to this country nothing like that. It seems like everything is in the wood but with streets, and houses which is completely different from what I used to see. Back in Laos and Thailand we used to walk, but in this country everything have to be on transportation like on cars, bus, and so on.

Did your family experience any discrimination upon your arrival?

I would say yes because when we just moved into our new house, someone drop a garbage of trash into our door. Which make us really unhappy and after that many other things going on. For example, people talk about how the Asian eat dog and cat.

Did you know a lot of people before moving to Central Wisconsin?

Not really, I only know my family; my brother and his family; and my cousin and his family.

Were you financially assisted by relatives or other agencies upon your arrival?

When I first arrive in this country, I did not get help. For example, I when I first arrive in this country the club that sponsored my family they have some funding that help us pay for our rent for couple of months. After the third day they come over to pick me up to work and I told them that I am not ready to work yet, because I'm still not awaken. I told them I am not ready to work so, they pick me up the sixth day to go out to work and I support myself from my job. After that they give public assistant to my mother, but not my family.

How did you learn how to ride a bus or go grocery shopping?

I made many mistake. For example, when I take the bus I just go to them and I ask them if I will go to such and such place and they say sure you can get in. But, after I get in I didn't know where to get off, so many times I have been lost. I learn by mistake, then I find my way back for a couple times then I know how to take a bus.

How about the grocery shopping?

The grocery shopping in the city that I first arrive there was no transportation, so I have a co-worker that show me how to work. After work he brought me home and he ask me do I need to go shopping? So I say yes, and he brought me there and he told me about the different type of the food. There were five people in my family, so each type of food I pick five. That's what my experience in shopping. After that I need fish sauce or noodles or something like that I ask my friend if there is Oriental food store in town? He brought me out there and every time I didn't even know what American call fish sauce. So he brought me out there to Oriental food store to get food.

What were some of the greatest challenges when you came to Central Wisconsin?

Want to talk about central Wisconsin? When I moved to Central Wisconsin in 1986 I wasn't fluent in English. I plan to go to North Central Technical College for more education. That is the most challenge to me.

In what ways did your family change after arriving to Central Wisconsin?

After moving to Central Wisconsin my plan is to attend more school so, I can tell my life have been change a lot by attending school. It changed my career, after working, and because when I first

arrive in United States I worked in company where after I graduate from school here in Wausau, I can work in the office to help people.

How are the members of your ethnic group different in Central Wisconsin then they would have been in your homeland?

Back in my homeland, everyone had black hair and speak the same language, except the Thai and the Laos. But even though we are different, we still look similar to each other. When I arrive in Central Wisconsin most of the people are white. And it's totally different from what I used to see.

What customs, food, habits, dress, and language do you still maintain from your culture?

Well, I still maintain the language and my culture and food because, I know that it is good. Even though for example, food, even though I eat the American food I still have to eat my rice. That keeps me most comfortable and keeps me from being hungry. My language is my first language in my life, so I have to keep it even though I can change my citizenship. But I cannot change my color on my body. I can not change my shape, so I have to keep my own language and be any group I am proud to be Hmong.

Are most of your friends from your same ethnic background?

Yes.

How do other people view your ethnic group?

Well, they might think that my ethnic group is strange from what they are used to see. It's strange for them. But they also look strange to me.

What language do you speak at home with your family and friends?

At home we speak Hmong, actually we speak Hmonglish at home. Meaning, Hmong and English mixed.

What are parts of your culture would you like to see preserved for the future?

For my culture I think I will remain to keep my culture. That is a strong culture, which we love one another, to care for one another, and that is a good culture.

What do you think Central Wisconsin will be like 20 years from now regarding your ethnic group?

Well, I would think that since we only been to Central Wisconsin for 20 years, I believe that 20 years from now Central Wisconsin will be double the number we have now. But we could live peacefully with every other ethnic group.

What do you think it means to be an American?

Well, I am also proud to be an America.