

## Nhia Soua Xiong

*Nhia Soua Xiong joined the war effort early on in 1961. He served as a soldier and came to the United States in 1993.*



My name is Nhia Soua Xiong. I'm 57 years old and I was born in Hai Thong, Laos on March 14, 1942. I didn't get to go to school in my country because we had very few schools. When I was 16 years old I became a soldier under Kia Tou Vang. We started to fight because in 1961 Americans (CIA) came and lived in South Vietnam. Then the CIA soldiers said the North Vietnamese would bring weapons and kill the American soldiers in South Vietnam. That's why an American general came and talked to General Vang Pao that they needed our Hmong to join the CIA to fight the Vietnamese. We were to guard the main road. The weapons would be brought down to the south. We guarded roads 6, 7, and 13. We also guarded the Ho Chi Minh road that led to the south. We saved American soldiers in Sam Neua and the American pilot that got shot down on the border between South Vietnam and Laos. There we helped and fought together with the American soldiers to stop the North Vietnamese from invading South Vietnamese by using Laos as their base. We were such a small group of people that helped the Americans to fight against the big and strong country of Vietnam. This was one of the hardest things that caused a huge number of our Hmong soldiers to die. So many died that we couldn't count. The leaders and generals would know how many of us died while fighting but we as soldiers just kept their orders in mind and kept fighting for the Americans and for the safety of Laos. We fought against North Vietnam until 1973. That's when the contract was signed. Then the CIA soldiers left Laos in 1973 and the North Vietnamese soldiers came and lived in Laos. They thought that we were CIA soldiers and so they killed us as if we were animals. That's why in 1975, we knew that the government's rule was not right. Then most of our people moved out to Thailand. Then when the North Vietnamese got there, they didn't treated us equal, but they said we were CIA soldiers. The bases of the CIA in Thailand are American and weren't ours. Then why would the North Vietnamese kill us? It's because we fought against the North Vietnamese along with the CIA base in Thailand. We got chased out because of that base. All of the government left Laos in 1976. Then the North Vietnamese came to Pha Phy and Pha Khao. There they killed the people from 1978 to 1981. Thousands and thousands of citizens of Hmong descent died there including at Long Cheng. They killed us, as we were animals. We knew that we couldn't live there any more so some of us moved to the camps in Thailand from 1976 to 1988. Most of our Hmong died because they fought along with the Americans. We thought that we were American soldiers, so when they left Laos we all would be killed, so that's why we decided to follow the Americans home. That's why we came to Thailand and then to U.S. For me, the Vietnamese around the jungle chased my relatives and me, and there I got caught and sent to San Tiau. I escaped there and then I hide in Phu Fa and then wandered around the villages there until January 3, 1989. Then I came to the camp of Ban Vinai on the 4<sup>th</sup> of January 1989. I lived there until July 27, 1991 and then they sent us to the camp of Ban Napho. On March 27, 1992 I came

to Phanat Nikhom until February 1, 1993. In United States here, I would like to say to the Americans and the leader of CIA that when we fought along with them, we didn't betray them but we helped them with all our heart. We didn't want to see one of their soldiers die and we did all we could to help the CIA and their soldiers. Then how come when the CIA left, they leave us behind? We didn't know the rules when they made the deal back then. We just want the American government to let us live as if we were Americans. Now we can see that some American citizens are respecting us and we are very happy for that and will never forget how they respect us. Those who do not respect us don't realize that we helped the CIA and their soldiers to protect freedom and human rights. Here some of them didn't think we are important. I just want them to give us the rights as the others get. We came here because we gave our lives to help protect them for 15 years in the past. It's not that we see this rich country so we come here just to live and eat their food and take over their wealth, but in the past we lived our own way of life and didn't have to beg others for goods. We counted the U.S. as a good friend and that's why we helped them no matter what. We just want them to respect our children just as they respect theirs. We also want the government to watch over us and settle the problems when there are conflicts between other American citizens and us. I also want the government to understand a little bit about our culture and traditions. About our Hmong culture, we won't cross the line about the American laws. As for our marriage rules, when a man marries a woman, his parents will tell a mature man to go and tell the girl's parents that their son has their daughter and they will be married so don't they worry about her. They would come back after three days to do the wedding for their marriage. When the son gets home with the girl, he also has to tell his parents about the marriage and so on. In our marriage rule in the past many young girls as young as 14 were already married in which they agreed to do so. We can't stop her because she decided to do so. After three days, we will have two men and a young man and a young girl go with the son and daughter to end the marriage wedding. Then on the way to the girl's house they will stop and talk to the old grandparents that died, that today we got this girl to be our daughter-in-law. As we believed, they would know and so they would help protect the girl as well as the son. They would call for the dead grandparents and god to come and have a feast with them together while they are watching over the son and daughter for their new marriage. (Some other culture might think we prayed for devils, but actually that's not the case.) When we got to the girl's house, we have to kneel down for all the members of the girl's family and all the son's family members. The two men who led the boy and girl to the wedding make the marriage decisions. They would decide what is right and what is wrong or is it fair or unfair. They are like the priest. When they are finally married, the girl can't go around with guys and do any disrespectful thing toward her husband. That would ruin the ancestors in the family. Then their problem would rise between the living family members and the dead family members by making a living family member sick or so on. One problem about this is between the police and the Hmong. When the mom went off and caused the problem to the dad and then divorced the dad, the court made the man pay for the kids until they are 18 instead of the mom paying for it. These decisions cause many unusual problems for our culture as far as I can see. During the marriage we would pay a large amount of money to the girl's parents. I just want the government to come together with us and talk about what should be done to make it fair between the law and our culture in the future so our children won't get into trouble like we do today. We know that if they marry early they won't be educated so that would be a problem for them here in U.S. that's why we want the children to understand that they need to finish their education first. You should know that we as your parents struggled hard to get here so you children can go to school and

learn. We don't have a country, so you should study hard in school as we parents have dreamed. Now it's a chance for you children to catch up with other people. One thing you have to keep in mind is education. Education is what we as Hmong are far behind from the other people. It will be a long time before you catch up with them but it will pay off. We aren't people who beg from others for wealth and food and goods. We have never sat around. We always worked hard to get a good life. Now we don't want to wait and depend on other people to feed us. We have a problem because when we were about the age to go to school, we had to enter the war and that's why we are not educated.