

Kao (Mai) Chang Yang

Mai Chang Yang lived in Phou Fa in Laos. She came to the United States in 1987. Her real name is Mai but her name was somehow changed when she came here. Mai helps out at the Neighbors Place which is a community center.



What's your name?

My name is Kao Chang Yang.

How old are you?

I'm 48.

When you came to the United States, what year was it?

It was 1987.

Where did you live in Laos?

We lived in Phou Fa.

Was there anyone in your family that was involved in the war?

In our family, my brother was in the war.

How many years have you been living in Wisconsin?

We've been living here for six, no wait, seven years this year. No, ten years. Yes, ten years this year.

Do you work here in the U.S. ?

I don't work at all because I can't drive.

When there was a war in your country, were you scared?

During the war, we were all very scared. That's why we moved here.

When you lived in Laos, what did you raise and what kind of crops did you grow?

We farmed, raised pigs and chickens, grew corn and crops such as that.

When the Vietnamese invaded your country, what did you do?

We came to this country.

When you were running, what did you eat?

We ate rice and whatever else we brought with us.

When you were running, did you run at night or in the morning?

In the night it was too dark, so we traveled mostly just in the morning. When we had to go a distance, we would move in the night too.

Did you ever get caught by anyone?

No, No one ever caught us.

How old were you when the war started?

I don't know how old I was.

If you were a woman who lived in Laos, what were your expectations?

You just farmed and raised the animals

Did they let you go to school?

In Laos, back then, there was no schooling like right now.

How did you cross the Mekong River? Were there any other people with you?

When we crossed the river, the Thais came over to get us. It was just our family though.

Did anyone die?

No, no one died when we crossed.

When you got to Thailand, did you think that it would be better in Laos?

When we got to Thailand, we forgot all about the Vietnamese who were chasing us.

When you reached Vientiane, what did you eat and what did you do to get money.

When we got to Vientiane, we used the money that we brought with us and the Thais gave us food and shelter.

How often did they give you meals? Daily? Monthly?

They gave it to us in days, not in months. They would give you two meals a day.

What about clothes? What kind of clothing did they give you?

Yes, I still have brothers in Laos. None of them came over to the United States.

Why didn't they come?

They move too much, so they can't come.

When you came did you have kids with you?

Yes.

How many?

Just two. Two boys.

Were they still young at the time?

Yes. They were still quite young.

Do you miss anything in Laos?

All you do in Laos is work hard.

If you had a chance to go back and live in Laos, would you take it?

I think that in this country I'm too dumb. I can't work so I think that if the country was all good again in Laos, I would rather go and live there.

Were the women in Laos expected to do a lot of things?

Yes. In Laos, they had to know how to cook, sew, be a good wife and everything.

In a Hmong family back in Laos, how many children were there usually in one family?

In Laos, there were usually ten kids.

Do you know why they had so many kids?

They had to help out their parents with the farm.

Wasn't it harder because the more kids you have, the harder you would have to work to support them?

In our homeland, there wasn't much school. Even if they did go to school, they would only be gone for a couple of hours, not a whole day. The kids then would have time to help the parents with other work.

When you lived in Laos, what did you do to get money?

In Laos, you would sell your animals for money.

Did you ever get to go to school?

No, but there are schools in Laos. After you finish high school you would go on to college in another place.

Is it true that in Thailand teachers would hit you on the hand with a stick if you gave a wrong answer?

Yes. The teachers were like that. That was their way of disciplining the kids.

In Laos, when did you go to school and when did you wake up?

In Laos, we woke up very early. We had no watch to tell time but we usually woke up early in the morning. When we got home, we had to start dinner right away and we had to go feed the animals. Then we would go to sleep.

Do you think that the Hmong kids today are lazier than the Hmong kids in Laos, or are they about the same?

This land is different from my homeland. When the kids wake up, they just get ready to go to school. In my land, the kids woke up to go to the garden or to make breakfast for everyone, not just for themselves. That's the only difference.

When you got to the United States, was it hard for you in any way?

The only hard part was that you didn't know their language and you didn't know how to drive.

Did you have sponsors or something in order to get here?

I had a daughter and my husband was already here.

Did you go to school here in the United States at all?

Yes, once I got here, it was very confusing and sometimes even stressful, but still I went to school.

Do you think that kids would have a better life back in Laos or here in the United States?

I think that in Laos, all you could do is farm and make a life with someone. You can't exactly go to school. All you do is try to make money to support your family.

Okay, that's all. Thank you very much.

Thank you.