

Mor Yang

Mor Yang lived in Namoum in Laos. She was in 2nd grade while in Laos. Mor left Laos in 1984. She has been in the Central Wisconsin area for ten years. She is a receptionist at the Wausau Area Hmong Mutual Association. She has three children.



What's your age?

I am twenty-five years old.

What do you do?

I am a receptionist, secretary.

What's your educational background?

I have gone to Wausau East High School and graduate in 1992. I was thinking about going to college, but I didn't because I have a family to support and don't have the chance to go.

How many brothers and sisters do you have?

I have four sisters and two brothers.

What's their first names and approximate ages?

I don't know exactly, but I will guess: Chai Toua, 49, Chao, 45, Leng 41, Chue, 40, Pao Mee, 36 and myself.

Where were you born?

I was born in Laos, in a city called Phau Hay.

What was your homeland like while you were living there?

It was war. You heard gun shots all the time. As a child, my family moved one place to another as often as once a week. As I remember, our people did not even have time to plant crops or raise any animals.

What was the government like?

There was supposed to be a central government where both sides, the Pathet Lao and the Royal Lao joined together to find a common peace to all the Lao people. In fact, the Pathet Lao took control over the government and declared the government as Communist government. This system of government took a lot of lives, especially the Royal Lao and Special Guerrilla Unit soldiers that were set up by the U.S.A. This government system took away lot of rights from it's people. The Hmong people called them rebellion against the new Lao government.

What about the living conditions?

When the Hmong people fought against the new government...we suffered a lot. We had to moved daily, lived in a hut made out of banana leaves to cover the rain. A lot of people were dying of starvation...killing by the government soldiers, or dying of sickness and diseases.

How old were you when you left your homeland?

I was about fourteen when I left.

Why did you and your family leave your homeland?

Because of the war. My father was a soldier during the war and he was killed. We couldn't stay because I have a brother and the CIA wanted my brother to be a soldier, too.

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

Very difficult.

Why was that?

Because when we first came, we didn't know any English and we have no job. I and my family stayed on welfare for about two years. We had very little family to support our family. It was just so difficult, but after awhile my brother got a job and it was better.

How did you leave your homeland?

How? We escaped with a friend who lived in the same village. His father in Thailand hired two Thai people to come and get his son. so we came with him.

Did you come by boat or walking?

We walked from Vientiane to the Mekong River. We crossed the river with a small boat.

Did you come directly to the United States?

No, we have spent about three years in a camp in Cheing Kham. And then we came to the United States in 1987.

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

The most difficult part of our journey was when the two Thai people were trying to find a boat for us. They took all our money and said to us...when they left us it was about 5:00...You stay here and we will go to find a boat for you to cross the river. When they left us it was about 5:00, we will be back about 9:00 p.m. But they had gone for a very long time and not return. We were very afraid that they lied to us and will never return. We have waited and waited. Finally they came back about 2:00 a.m. That's a lifesaver.

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

It was very nice in Wisconsin here. When we first came, they didn't have that many people in Wisconsin and it was nice because there were fewer gangs. We first went to Spokane, Washington and finally we came here in 1988. I think Wisconsin's a great place to live.

Did you and your family experience any discrimination when you arrived?

No, no one.

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

Not a lot, only a few families.

Were you financially assisted by relatives or other people when you arrived?

Yes, we got a little help from the government and we were sponsored by my mother's brother. They helped us with clothing, food and etc.

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

By our sponsor, they taught us how to.

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

Living conditions is one thing, and to learn the language is another. The biggest problem my family faced is to adjust to the new live. The weather is also a problem.

What ways did you and your family change when you moved here?

In the USA, people who could not work depend on the government. Where I was from, you have to work and find food on the table for your family. My brother had to learn English and then work. It was very frustrating for my brother because he could not do the thing that he was taught to do. Instead, he had to learn a new tool, learned to be a child again. As now, everyone is happier than before.

How did you and your family change when you moved here?

I guess we have a lot of change because we have time to go to school and speak better English and can support our families by ourselves. We don't wait for anyone to support us.

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

I guess back in our homeland we have more respect. And in Central Wisconsin here we have the same respect. We were more assimilated into the whole community than in Laos.

What customs, food, habits, dress, language, phrases do you still keep from your culture?

I guess even in this country we still keep most of the things we have back in our homeland. Especially the food and the Hmong traditional clothes such as shaman, right now we still keep this.

Are most of your friends Hmong?

Yes, most of them are Hmong.

How do other people view your background? How do other people view your background?

Asian people are a huge population. Hmong people got blamed for something that we did not do. There were some people who asked me if the Hmong people are primitive. This is not true. Some Hmong are farmers where they used slash and burn agricultural types, and some lived in the big city, serving the government. One must learn to understand the Hmong people's background in order to know them as a friend.

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

Mostly Hmong.

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

I guess language is the most important part that we have to keep in the future because if we don't keep, our children might now be able to speak Hmong, also the food, clothing. It is very important to keep our culture. I try to speak Hmong tomy children at home as much as I can. The Hmong people are very respectable people. The younger ones must look upon the older for spiritually, and the older ones would look upon the younger for prosperity. Children are taught to follow the foot steps of their parents. Good deeds are necessary among the Hmong people.

What do you think Wisconsin will be like in twenty years from now regarding to Hmong? How will the Hmong be?

I think the most important part of the Hmong is to keep our language and culture, so in twenty

years from now our children will still know how to speak Hmong and know the culture and can tell the difference between Hmong and Americans. My vision is that my children will grow up just like you and me. We are all American.

What do you think it means to be American? When you crossed the Mekong was it hard to cross?

To be an American is beyond unthinkable. To save one's life is what people were talking about when we left Laos. Can you imagine, you left all your life long belongings behind, crossing the Mekong River as a matter of survival. When you tried to cry, but no tears coming from your eyes. This is very hard for me, personally.

For other people, why was it that difficult? Because they didn't have any money or something?

Money is not the main problem. The main problems was that the communist government patrolling the Mekong River and whoever tried to cross the river would be killed. The other thing was that it took more than ten days to travel through the jungle to reach the Mekong River. During this journey, many people would die of starvation, land mines, diseases or sickness or battle with government soldiers. Many people also drowned in the river when they attempted to cross to Thailand.

Okay, I think that's all.