



Pa Kou Yang

Pa Kou came to America from Thailand. She did not go to school in Thailand because there was only enough money for her older sister to go.

Can you tell us a bit about yourself like your name and age?

My name is Pa Kou Yang. I am 11 years old. When summer's done, I'll be 12. I like to joke around with my friends. I have five sisters and three brothers. I came from Thailand so I am Hmong-Thai.

Where in Thailand were you born?

Just in Thailand. I'm not sure where in Thailand.

What are your sisters' names?

I have three older sisters. The oldest is Mai Xue, then Mai See, and Mai Hnue. Then the younger ones are Pania and Mai Hlee.

How about your brothers?

The oldest is Tou Lee, then Kho, and the youngest is Pao.

Are they all in high school?

Some are in high school and some are in elementary school.

Are any of your older sisters or brothers married?

All of my brothers are still young.

So, your older sisters are still in high school?

Yes.

When you were still in Thailand, what did you think of the idea of coming to the U.S.?

In Thailand, we didn't have much money to buy clothes or for the New Year. So my mom said that we should come to America. Her brothers and sister were already in America and we could live with them so we could have a better life. So then we just came.

Before you came, what did you pack to bring with you?

We packed our Hmong clothes, regular clothes, food so we wouldn't get sick, and lots of other stuff.

"At home, I do my homework, help baby-sit my younger siblings, and cook food for the family."

Did you just put them in bags?

Yeah.

When you registered to come here, what did you do?

When registering, only my parents went. But we all went to the checkup where they checked if we had any kind of disease and also give us shots so we wouldn't get sick. If we were sick, they would give us medicine to eat until we were healthy enough to come to America.

You went to school in Thailand right?

No, I didn't. We didn't have enough money so Mai Hnue and Xue were the only ones who got to go to school.

So they were the only ones in your family who went to school?

Yeah.

Were you and your siblings born in Thailand?

Yes.

What year did your family come to the U.S.?

We came sometime in the fall, like in November, but I'm not sure what year we came.

In Thailand, what did you like to do?

I liked to play with my friends, play house, and pick flowers to make into hats, bracelets, and necklaces.

How did you make them?

We'd first get a sharp stick and yarn. Then we would string the flowers onto the yarn.

Did you want to go to school when you were in Thailand?

Yes, I did want to go to school in Thailand.

You said it cost a lot to go to school in Thailand and that you didn't have enough money for all of you to go, so how much did it cost?

It cost around 40 to 50 bak.

When you came, did your mom's sister sponsor your family?

We came by ourselves because my father already knew a little English. Then my mom's sisters came to pick us up and they took us to their house.

Have your parents gone to school before?

My father had but my mother had not because she had to take care of my two younger brothers.

How long had your dad been in school?

I think about three years, but I'm not sure.

"The Americans are different because of their hair color... Some Hmong-Thai teens don't like dyeing their hair red or blonde because they think that means they're in a gang."

What did you think on the plane coming to America? Were you happy or scared?

I wasn't that scared. I was happy. We were excited about coming to America to see what it was like and to see if we would like it here. When we got here, we did like it.

When you were on the plane, did you feel sick or want to vomit?

On our first landing, I did throw up.

Were there a lot of people who came with you?

There were, but when we got here, they all went their own ways.

What places did you land before you landed in Wisconsin?

I'm not really sure but I think it was some place in Japan or China.

How long did you stay there before you got on the next plane?

When we got there, they taught us numbers in English, some other language, gave us ko pa rice, and took us to use the restrooms. When we flushed the toilets, it was really loud and kind of scared us, so only a couple of us used them.

Since you've been here for a couple of years now, what do you think about the American culture?

I think American culture is good because you can do good things. But in the Hmong culture in Thailand, there are many arguments that happen, so I don't like it as much.

What do they argue about?

I think they argue mostly because one is jealous of another.

Do you like the school that you go to right now?

Yes, I do. When we first came to America, I went to John Marshall Elementary and was in fourth grade.

What else did you like to do in Thailand?

We went to play on Thai property and gathered la ka m to eat. We also had this monk that told us to work for his nom poe because he was rich. He then gave the monk 100 baht and then we each got 10 baht to buy clothes with.

How many times did you work for him?

Just one day.

What other kinds of activities do you like to do?

We like to talk to boys, go pick mangos to eat, make papaya salad, and drink soda.

Have you dated yet?

No, I haven't.

Since you came here, what do you like to do?

Well, my father wants us to learn many things so we can help support him and my mother in the future.

Are you happy that you are in America, where you are able to go to school?

Yes, I am happy because it's different from Thailand.

What does your dad do?

My dad works at Kolbe. He works the second shift so he comes home when it's already dark.

How about your mom?

My mom takes care of my younger siblings at home.

How long does your dad work each week?

I don't know.

When your father first tried to find a job, was it hard to find one?

He said it wasn't that hard because there were some people that helped him.

Are you thinking of getting a job anytime soon?

I want to get done with high school and college and then find a job.

What do you want to become after college?

I want to become a nurse so I can help people.

Did you go to many parties in Thailand?

I didn't go to many parties, but my older sisters went.

The parties are usually at night, right?

Yes.

When boys go talk to girls at night, what do they bring with them?

They bring flashlights with them.

Have you heard of any legends in Thailand?

Yes, I have. I heard that there are many ghosts in Thailand and that you shouldn't go gather bamboo by yourself because ghosts might come and take you away. Or ghosts might come play with you and take your spirit away and you will not know what to do.

Do you know any more?

I did hear many legends, but I forgot them all.

Had you ever played outside at night?

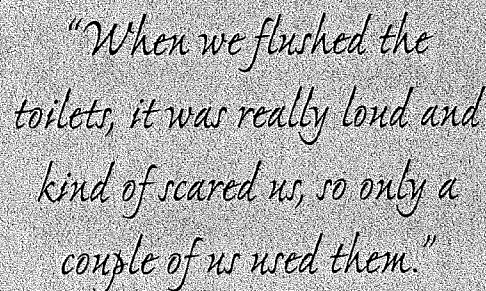
I had, but I was always with my group of friends and when it was time to go, we would all go home.

I heard that in some towns. There are people who guard and make sure you sleep at a certain time. Can you tell us a bit about that?

Yes. There were many guards guarding us because we were about to come to America. So they were making sure that everybody's lights were out at a certain time or else they'd catch us and take us away to get punished.

How do they punish you if you get caught?

I'm not sure, but I guess you get hit or something. There was this one time where this guy lied to the



"When we flushed the toilets, it was really loud and kind of scared us, so only a couple of us used them."

guards and said that my dad and my uncles had were staying up late and doing something. The next thing I knew, they were getting beat up. But it was a good thing that we worked far away from there so my father didn't get beat up. After that, my parents told us not to go out and play so much or else people might come and take us away or get beat up, too. But there are a few nice guards who helped us.

How did the nicer guards help you?

If they saw us, they would tell us that we should be heading home or else something might happen to us and nobody would be able to help.

So it must have been very hard for all of you.

Yes it was.

When you were in Thailand, did your family own a garden?

Yes, we did own a garden. There was this one family that said we shouldn't garden but they wanted us to garden on the other side of their garden and they would pay us a hundred or a thousand baht. We didn't want to in the beginning but they kept on asking us. So, my mother said that since they were our relatives, we should let them so we went to garden on the land next to theirs. We planted flowers, papayas, bananas, cilantro, and a lot of other things; then we would go sell them. After that year, we didn't plant anything there because the soil wasn't that good there. We went to plant in a different place but whatever we planted were getting stepped on, so we just kind of stopped. After that, we came to America.

Do you own a garden here?

Yes we do. Our garden is far so I don't really know where it is.

What time do you wake up to go to your garden?

Well, here we wait until noon or go in the evening to water the plants and take out the weeds. In Thailand, we went whenever we wanted.

What time did you wake up to make breakfast?

When roosters start crowing, then my two older sisters would wake up and make breakfast for my parents to eat.

How different do you think American teens, Hmong-American teens, and Hmong-Thai teens are?

Americans are different because of their hair color and Hmong people have black hair. Some Hmong-Thai teens don't like dyeing their hair red or blonde because they think that means they're in a gang. My father said we shouldn't dye our hair another color other than black because people might say bad things about us.

What is the difference between clothes here and clothes in Thailand?

Well, clothes in Thailand have Thai words on them and clothes here have words we don't understand on them.

In Thailand, did you sew?

Yes, I did, but I was just doing it for fun because I didn't really know how to yet.

Since you came, do you still sew?

No, I don't. I come to school instead.

Did you sell the things that you sewed in Thailand?

My mom and my older sisters were the ones that sold them.

Did you sell anything that you sewed in Thailand?

My mom and my sisters were the only ones that sold theirs.

How much did they sell their clothes for?

They sold them for maybe 20 or 40 baks.

How much time did it take to sew one thing?

I think about a month or so. I'm not sure.

What did they sew?

They sewed the parts that go on Hmong clothes and that's all I really know.

How are the bathrooms in Thailand?

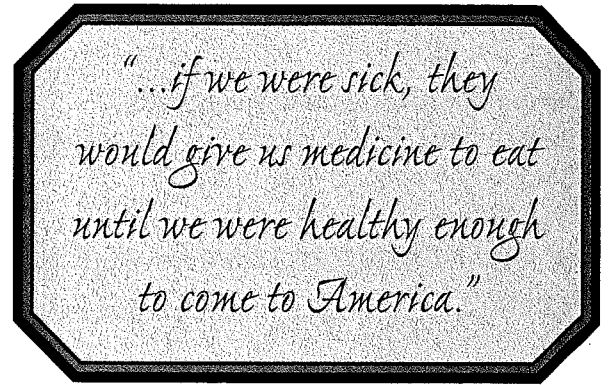
Well, we had our own vee and then after we would use it, we would wash it out with water. It's not loud like it is here.

What do you do when you're not at school?

At home I do my homework, help baby-sit my younger siblings, and cook food for the family.

Do you know any myths or legends that you would like to tell us about?

Yes, I do. There once was this couple that loved each other very much. Then the guy lied to the girl that she should wait for him because he was going to garden for a couple of days; then he would come back to marry her. So she waited for him because she loved him. After he was done gardening, his mother said that she would find a girl for him to marry. He replied that he was going to go marry his girlfriend, but his parents refused to let him marry his girlfriend because she was poor. After that, he married another girl. Later on, he still thought that his old girlfriend would be waiting for him so he went to visit her. But she missed him so much that she died, turned into a ghost, and haunted all their neighbors who then moved. When the guy arrived, he asked her parents if the girl was there and the parents said that she had died. But the guy didn't believe them, said that they were lying, and left. The old girlfriend heard that her boyfriend had come back, turned herself into a pretty girl, and was feeding some chickens while waiting for him. He saw her and said he was going to wait until nighttime to come and talk to her. It was finally night and dark so he went to talk to her. When he got there, he saw that her house was really scary looking and that something smelled really bad. After he went inside the house, she said asked why he went for so long and that she missed him so much. The guy replied that he had been helping his parents with their garden and that he came to marry her. The girl was very happy when she heard this. It suddenly got colder so the guy told her to get a fire going so they could warm up. The girl said not to, but the guy started a fire anyway. But as soon as he lit the match and the fire was made, she turned into a pile of slime water. Then something from the slime water came up, put out the fire, and there were sounds of dripping water. Later the guys told the girl to get a fire going again because it was getting cold again. So he lit another match and started another fire. But as soon as the fire was made, the girl turned into another pile of slime water. Immediately after that, the fire was put out. The third time he made the fire, he saw that her face was rotten, the fire went out again and the same thing happened to her as before. The guy got scared and lied. He said he had to go use the bathroom, but the girl said that he already saw who she



really was and was just going to run away. He answered back he didn't see her; he just really needed to use the bathroom. She then said that he could just pee right outside her house. He said that would be too embarrassing and she said it wouldn't be. Then he told her that if she was scared he might run away she could tie a sash around his waist and when she wanted him to come back inside the house, she could just pull on the sash and he would come back in. She thought about it and said that they could do that. So she tied her sash around his waist and held onto the other end while he went to use the bathroom. While he was pretending to use the bathroom outside, he found a mosquito, a big bottle of water that he put upside down, and tied the sash around a pole to make it sound like he was using the bathroom while he was getting away. After a while, the girl asked if he was done yet. The mosquito answered in place of the guy and said he wasn't done yet because back then, all the mosquitoes and insects could talk. She asked again and the mosquito answered that he wasn't done yet. After a long wait, she pulled the sash to tell him to come in because she didn't hear anything, but he was not coming back. She went out there to look and saw there was only a mosquito talking back to her so she killed it and ran after the guy. The guy had run through a valley and hills on one foot. He finally got to a ha pao that smelled really bad but he hid there. The girl ghost got there and said that he should just go with her or else if she finds him, she's going to eat him so he'll die. But the guy was really scared so he just kept still. She listened if she could hear anything and thought that he had already got home so she went back and said that she would find him tomorrow. When it was dawn, he ran home. When he got home, he got very sick because the ghost girl had scared his spirit away. The parents got a Shaman who helped him get better. The Shaman gave him a new name and said everybody had to call him by only his new name or else the ghost girl would be able to find him. Then one day while they were picking fruits, a boy called him by his old name and his old girlfriend came. He was so scared that he couldn't move and she took him to be her husband. That's the end.

"I heard there are many ghosts in Thailand and that we shouldn't go gather bamboo by ourselves because ghosts might come and take us away..."