

## Thai Yang

*Thai Yang lives in Sheboygan, Wisconsin with his wife and three children.  
He is a pharmacist. He came to America when he was 10 years old.*

### ***What was it like when you first came to America?***

When I first came to America, I was about 10-years-old. It was very different compared to Thailand and Laos. When I first came to America, I saw cars, airplanes, motorcycles, and other things. The technology here is so different compared to Thailand and Laos. It was very different when I saw people from different cultures. It is very diverse here.

### ***Was it hard to learn English once you started school?***

Yes, it was very hard because when I first came to the U.S., I had to start from scratch. I had to learn the ABC's and things like that. I wasn't able to go back to first grade. I had to start at the grade that I was supposed to be in. It was very hard. However, after I learned the basics, it got easier for me.

### ***As you continued living in the U.S., did you start trying to fit in? Why?***

I felt much more comfortable with the Hmong people, usually just people that I was related to. However, I did try to make friends with American people. It was hard because I couldn't speak English that well. I made friends with American people because I was good in math, so I could help them and they could help me improve my English.

### ***When you first came, everything was hard for you, and now you're a pharmacist. What inspired you to become a pharmacist?***

I had a relative who was very smart. At first he was a medical doctor, and now he is a lawyer. I looked at him and saw that he had a very good life. I wanted a good life like him and I tried to be a medical doctor, but it was difficult for me. So I became a pharmacist because it is similar to a medical doctor. I really liked science and math in school, so choosing to become a pharmacist was easy for me.

### ***How many years of school did you have to take in order to become a pharmacist?***

Normally, it's a six-year program. You go for two years of pre-med school and if you do well, you can apply for four years of med school. For three of those four years, you learn about pharmacy. In your last year, you basically experience what you do as a pharmacist. That makes up a total of six years. But for me, I first went to college and got my Bachelor's degree in biology and chemistry. I worked for two years after that, and then decided to go into pharmacy.

### ***What kind of classes did you have to take and were they hard?***

Biology was very hard for me when I started college because it required a lot of reading and reading wasn't my thing. I was good in chemistry, calculus, and physics, but biology was just hard.

***What do you do as a pharmacist?***

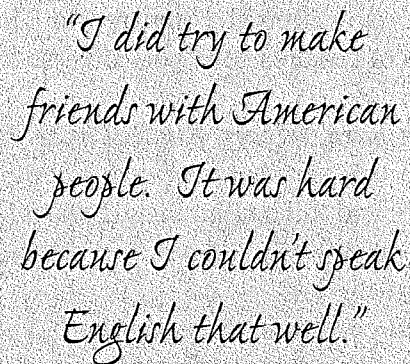
There are a lot of jobs available as a pharmacist. I work right now in a community pharmacy at Walgreens. Basically what we do is take the prescription from the doctors. Then we give the person the amount of medication that the doctor ordered. There are a lot of things you have to think about when filling a prescription though. You have to worry about the person's insurance because they might not want to pay for certain medications. You have to call the doctor and ask if there are certain medications they can't take. You have to make sure you're looking at the right drug, and you have to make sure you don't give your customer the wrong amount of medication. Many doctors don't know about the drug interactions. If there is one, you have to notify the doctor and ask them to change their patient's medication. That way, all the customers will be satisfied, and they won't sue.

***Are there any words of wisdom you would like to say to the kids of this generation who would like to go into the field of medicine?***

I would like to recommend the students who like math and science to look into becoming a pharmacist. The good thing about becoming a pharmacist is that a lot of people are looking for them, so if you choose to become one, after you graduate you can easily find a job. You don't have to work in a community pharmacy. You can work in a hospital, for companies that make prescription drugs, and many other places.

***Do you think the Hmong kids of this generation will be as successful as the Hmong who first came to America?***

Yes, in my opinion, definitely. I believe they can be successful because they were born in America and had the chance to go to school from the beginning. They can also speak English better than my generation. However, when you look at the older generation, they tend to think education is more important than the newer generation does. That is because the older generation didn't have chance to do things like the newer generation now does. If the newer generation works hard enough, they can be very successful and get high position jobs.



*"I did try to make friends with American people. It was hard because I couldn't speak English that well."*

***If you think our generation can be successful, what do you have to say about the Hmong teenagers who are in gangs?***

There are a lot of teenagers who are in gangs, but there are also a lot who aren't into those things. If the gang people try hard enough, they can be successful. There are a lot of teenagers now that do want to be successful, so if there are gang people, there are always going to be people who want to be successful.

***Do you think the Hmong coming now have it better compared to the Hmong that came in the 1970's?***

Yes, I think the Hmong people who just came recently do have an easier and better chance at getting a good start in life in America. When the Hmong came in the 70s, they only had each other and they had to help each other out. The Hmong who just came now do have it much better compared to the Hmong who came earlier.

***Since you are one of the Hmong who came in the 70s, do you still practice Hmong culture, or are you changing into the American culture?***

I'm kind of drifting into the American culture because when I first came, I was exposed to American

culture. I also do want to keep the old Hmong culture though. For me, it's balanced. I'm drifting into the American culture, but I still believe in some of the Hmong culture.

***Many people now are drifting into the American culture. What do you think is the reason for this?***

We came to America, we go to school, so we're exposed to different cultures and we have to be able to adapt to change. If we were to stick with the Hmong culture here in America, it wouldn't really work because Thailand and Laos are very different compared to America. We want to keep our old culture but we must also blend in.

***What do you think Hmong teenagers can do to keep the Hmong culture alive?***

One thing they can do is learn how to read and write Hmong. That's one way you can keep it alive. There are also other things like the cultural ceremonies. They can keep up with funeral ceremonies and other ones. Even though we want to be in the new cultures, we should listen to the elders and keep our old culture too.

***Twenty years from now, how do you think the Hmong culture and people will affect the United States?***

I think we will still be a minority, so I don't know how big of an influence we will be in the United States. As our population grows, we can start to influence Americans with our culture and hopefully we can get people involved with politics.

***Is there any thing else you would like to say?***

We are Hmong people. We will always be a minority group wherever we go. We have a lot of history that still needs to be discovered. Our history isn't really written down, but is passed down from the elders telling stories or telling us and we do have a long heritage. We also have fine arts with making clothes, and music with the "keng." We have a long history, and I think many people are starting to uncover it.