

**UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL
SOUTHEAST ASIAN DIGITAL ARCHIVE
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT, 2019-ONGOING
UML 17**

Thel Sar, Oral History #19.02

INFORMANT/NARRATOR: THEL SAR (TS)

INTERVIEWER: SUE J. KIM (SK)

DATE: APRIL 18, 2019

SPEAKER

DETAILS

TS: I had involved a lot of work... in the past.

SK: Oh, okay. Great. Okay. All right. So, this is Sue Kim, and I am co-director for the Center for Asian American Studies, and Project Director for the Southeast Asia Digital Archive. Today is Thursday, April 18th, 2019, and I am here with Mr. Thel Sar, at UMass Lowell. We're in the College of Fine Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences, 820 Broadway Street in Lowell, Massachusetts. So, thank you so much for agreeing to share your experiences with us.

TS: Thank you for letting me being part of it.

SK: So, I thought we would just start... could you tell us about where you were born, and where you grew up? We can start there.

TS: Yeah, I can be briefed with that. So I was born in Cambodia.

SK: What year?

TS: In the late 1960s, and I lived in Cambodia through the Holocaust, Khmer Rouge. And then I, you know, when the Vietnam invaded Cambodian, I was left Cambodia to come to America. So, I lived through, and I was one of the few survivors in my family. And on October 1981, my aunt brought me to America, uh, my grandmother. And so I had lived with my grandmother. First place I lived was in Jacksonville, Florida. Yeah, I lived there briefly. And then I went to Virginia; Arlington, Virginia. Went to high school there. And after high school, I went to college in Swannanoa, North Carolina.

SK: Where did you go into... where did you go in North Carolina?

TS: I went to a college called Warren Wilson College, which is located near Asheville, North Carolina.

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- SK: What did you major in?
- TS: My major was in the General Education, specializing in helping Southeast Asian, mainly the Cambodians.
- SK: Oh, that's fantastic!
- TS: Yeah. So when I graduated from college, I went back to Virginia. In those times, in Lowell there was influx of Southeast Asians, mainly the Cambodian immigrants came to Lowell, Ma. And with the influx, there's a lot of crime. There's shortage of a professionals. So I was pretty much recruited to come up here, and to work with Southeast Asian youths.
- SK: So you... where were you at the time? Well-
- TS: After I graduated from Warren Wilson College, I went back to Arlington, Virginia. And lived there... Stayed there very briefly then in September, 1991 I came up here to Lowell, MA.
- SK: From Arlington?
- TS: Yeah, from Arlington, Virginia. I was interviewed for a job with the CMAA of Greater Lowell as a youth counselor. My job mainly, trying to create activities for youths because back in those days we didn't have much activities for Southeast Asian youths, so they mainly hung out with groups, and were alleged to been called gangs. So the DA... there's a lot of murders, a lot of violence. So they wanted to create some fun activities for the kid. So my job was to bring them together, and come up with some activities...
- SK: Oh, I see. I didn't know that you were youth counselor at CMAA. So, that was from about-
- TS: September 1991 until July 1992, when I went on to work for the Department of Youth Services for the State of Massachusetts. I worked there for about nine months.
- SK: Where does... for the record, in the '90s, where did the Department of Youth Services, where did it fit? Was it related to DSS or-

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- TS: No, the department has its own separate department. It's a department of corrections, pretty much. It's a Social... Department of Correction for kids under the age of Eighteen, when they... committed crimes, they'd go to the DYS instead of the adult facilities.
- SK: And how did you get recruited into-
- TS: So I... so we... there was shortage of professionals, and [crosstalk 00:04:49] and so, when I was working for CMAA, I went to court lot to watch trial at the courthouse, and with my degree, the department of DYS wanted me. In addition, because of my language skills, I speak Khmer, and I can write and read... fluently. So I was a good candidate for the job.
- SK: And who's... before you started working for DYS, when you were still with CMAA, whose trials generally? Was it the kids you were working with? The family members?
- TS: Yes, it's... kids that I had worked with in the past. And then some of the... so they needed some kinds of representation from the community at the courthouse. And I was sent there to be a liaison, so if people showed up at the trial, they could get me helped them... translated to them so they could understand the processes. So my job is to make sure that people who... well, the victims, the friends, and families, they have good knowledge of what went on.
- SK: So, since you were involved with that, then you started working with Department of Youth Services, and so what were your duties? Or what was your position?
- TS: Well, a couple of times when I was with CMAA, when they ran into problems with language, they asked me to help. So I would go to juvenile detentions and helped in translation. So that was... they said, "Look, we really needed you to..." so that's how I started, the interview, and got position.
- SK: So, the position then was-
- TS: A caseworker.
- SK: Caseworker? Right. I see. And so, what was your job like then?

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- TS: Well it's... I'm from very conservative family. I was like, my job was to... So I mainly worked with the Cambodian youths and the parents. When youths committed crimes, they adjudicated them. And then they sent by the court to the Department of Youth Services; my job was to investigate their backgrounds, and also looking into ways to help them... you can't lock them up for life, so you tried to help them to assimilate back to the community when they finished their sentences. And so my job was to make sure that they... when they lived in the community, they followed the conditions sat by court and the department.
- SK: So this is... so were you a probation officer at this point?
- TS: No, not yet. Not yet. My probation officer job..when I was still working DYS, you also had to go to court as well. Because when kids were arrested for serious crime and appeared in court they would be sent to DYS detentions; I went court to get information of their background and to report to the department. Sometimes, court ordered treatments. And some time just to be there to write down of new court dates or new status of the cases. So I was there as a liaison from DYS, and that's how I was at the courthouse. The court was also did not have Southeast Asian worker as well. I was recruited to go into the position as well.
- SK: In the '90s, what were the biggest problems or issues that you saw coming up, either on the side of the law enforcement or, or on the side of the families, or the community members?
- TS: I think; it was discrimination. This community was not prepared to receive such large group of people. And this community had a long history of discrimination. People in the community did not treat the new comes with welcome but hostile. There was lack of services. There was very little help, and those newcomers knew nothing. So we had to work hard to help them understanding the systems. We had to confront many wrong doers that it was not right for them to treat people unlawfully.
- TS: There was lack of facilities such as schools and playgrounds. Everything they did was against the law. Until a group of people say to them, "Look, we are not stupid. We're not dumb. We know that this is illegal, so you have to treat us right do the right things". And the leaders in the community started to do more to help the

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newcomers. In one situation, we had to take the city to court in order to force them to integrated kids in schools and build more schools. They agreed to build new facilities to accommodate new students and hired people to represent the population.

TS: And the kids, they had a lot of free times in their hands. Schools did not provide good services. Many kids skipped schools and hung out on the streets. They started label those kids as gangs and criminals. And I refused to label them... I've been working here for so many years. I refused to recognize that they're gangs and all that.

SK: So court cases goals were to fight racism and discrimination.

TS: Yeah.

SK: What were some of those instances?

TS: Southeast Asian kids were called by bad names and they pushed them around for no good reasons-

SK: By other students or?

TS: By white kids and Hispanic kids. These Southeast Asian kids took pride in their cultures; they took pride in themselves they were tough kid too because they had gone through so much in their lives, in the camp (prison like). So their mentality is like, "No, I'm not going to take this, and I'm going fight back". And the police was not helpful, the kids "I'm going to take control of this place, not you", and then that's how gang started.

SK: That's a good. How would you describe the relationship between the police and particularly the youth, Cambodian youth at this time? In the '90s.

TS: I think, again, the police didn't have good relationship with Southeast Asian youths. The police said, "I'm going to step on you, I know you", and they did it as far as they could to violate those kids right. There was no hope; "If I did these things, maybe I can suppress this people, and there's nothing going to happen". I did not think this was right ways to treatment our youths. I'm getting very emotional because I think that-

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- SK: Let me get some...
- TS: It's okay.
- SK: Very good.
- TS: So we came here to live. We were survivors from Cambodia. We were legal immigrants. We did not buy our way here. The ways they treated us was not fair. We knew that. We refused to take abuse. We came together and said, "Look, we're not going to take this". But we do this systematically and legally. We had enough educated people to work with. We needed to change from inside, outside, and all around. We needed to be humble enough to make changes. So, my role with the DYS and all, I pulled kids in and say, "Look, to give respect and get respect, you got to do something to make sure that they don't... you don't want them to look down at you, you'll need to do something meaningful".
- SK: Yes. Did you work as... When you were with the DYS caseworkers, did you work a lot with the attorneys?
- TS: Not as many, but I worked with a lot of therapists and [crosstalk 00:14:29] but again, I wore many hats. So I was always very active, even though I worked with DYS, I opened Khmer Sunday School; I coached soccer, and did a lot of other stuffs. We knew it was a struggle.
- SK: You mentioned Khmer Sunday school. What, what-
- TS: So when first I came here, a lot of kids did not grown up in Cambodia. However, they wanted to learn Khmer language and culture. So I started Khmer Sunday School Program by myself. Even though I wasn't a Khmer teacher, I was able to teach them, and then recruited teachers. We became a big program, hundreds of kids attended.
- SK: Where was this building?
- TS: We had to use the old temple in North Chelmsford. We had many volunteers, and we became very successful.
- SK: How long was that school?

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- TS: 10 years.
- SK: And also you were... because you were coaching, what-
- TS: I had coached for a few years. I coached soccer and basketball.
- SK: Was it through an organization or, just...?
- TS: Lowell Youth Soccer and highlander youth basketball.
- SK: So, this... you were a caseworker in maybe '92 to '93 or something?
- TS: Yeah. '92 to '93.
- SK: And then in '93 became a [crosstalk 00:16:48]
- TS: Probation officer. March 1st, 1993.
- SK: So how did that happen? I mean, [crosstalk 00:16:54]
- TS: I'd been working with a lot of people, and one day someone in the Probation Department approached me and asked me if I wanted to work for the court, "Look, we need someone like you". And so he encouraged me to apply, "There's a job posting, why don't you apply?" So I applied. I was interviewed by 3 judges and was hired two weeks later: 3/1/1993.
- SK: How did your duties change? Where... Were you doing things that are very similar? Or did it change what you were doing?
- TS: It's almost about the same, but I didn't have to travel much. I was in the courthouse.
- SK: Lowell District Court?
- TS: Yeah, Lowell District Court. But again like I said to you, I always wore many hats.
- SK: So what were some other ways that you did that? Was it individual... conversation?

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TS: I interviewed people and helped with translation. I directed people to the right places to get help. I helped recruit new workers. I spoke to community.

SK: So, when you mean by kids, you mean... Because you talked about that you work with both; the defendants... and the victims...

TS: Yes, I worked with defendants and victims to make sure they understood their rights.

SK: You're like an advocate, and a navigator for them in the courthouse.

TS: Yes.

SK: One hat.

TS: Yes, one hat.

SK: I've spoken to some attorneys, like defense attorneys, and they talked about like, who are not Khmer. And they've talked about how difficult it was to communicate to sometimes the families, right? The defendants, but also the families, but also the victims, if there was a language issue. So, did you participate in those process? I think the legal processes are so complicated already, right? And so I can't imagine trying to explain all of this sort of complicated legal stuff in two-year-old court languages.

TS: So, my goals are to make sure every one walked out the court house knew that they were served well.

Unknown Speaker: Open up.

SK: Oh, hey?

Unknown Speaker: I just wanted you to say goodbye.

SK: Okay.

Unknown Speaker: I'm last one here. Hello?

TS: Hi.

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- Unknown Speaker: I didn't want to go into...
- SK: Okay, bye!
- TS: So I think that a lot of times, a lot of attorneys did not give enough times to Southeast Asian clients. They made up excuses because of languages. There's always a way that they could work with people.
- SK: So, specifically working with probation, is that after a sentence has been...
- TS: So, individual was arrested, the police job is almost done. They documented their reports. The next morning, or the next day they brought the individual to court, and probation took over. Probation officers interviewed the individual and reported to judges. Cases decided and found guilty. The individual placed on probation. Probation Officer assigned to supervise individual. There are many types of conditions: drug testing, GPS, and Scram and much more.
- SK: What's Scram?
- TS: Scram is a machine... breathing... alcohol testing machine. So we can monitor it from anywhere. And GPS, just like the car, you can see the people walking around. So that's... our job is to make sure that... so we do all that
- SK: And when you monitor them, afterwards, is it sort of regular checking or...
- TS: So it's different levels. Some are more severe, and some are less severe. A couple scenarios, like assault and battery on somebody... they probably get a split sentence. They get two years house of correction; one year to serve, one year suspended. And the suspended sentence is the one that they are on probation. Typical order of probation conditions: drugs counseling, mental health counseling and many others. And so we make sure that they do all those things. If they failed to comply with the order then the judge, their probation would be revoked and sent them to jail.
- SK: So you really are caseworker from the moment that they're arrested [crosstalk 00:27:13] all the way through to the end of the probation?

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- TS: And then we prose... at the same time if they violate the probation, we prosecuted them. So we acting like a prosecutor as well. And we also do a home visit. Make sure that they... yeah.
- SK: What were the... What was the... Who are the people that you were working with most in the '90s right? It wasn't like...
- TS: I'm specializing in Southeast Asian probationers because the judge could impose 20 different conditions, and if they did not understand then they could not do the right things, then they could go to jail. So I was assigned to work with them. I was successful in helping them.
- SK: It was mostly young... Was it youth or all ages or...
- TS: So, back then it was older people.
- SK: Like, thirties, forties?
- TS: No, 20 to about 40, 50.
- SK: And what were some of the...
- TS: A lot of domestic. Gambling... not nearly enough number of drugs.
- SK: What kind of gambling? Actually, I just came out from another interview, but the attorney...
- SK: Then how did things change like the late '90s to the 2000?
- TS: There's a lot more changes now a day. So there is less Southeast Asian now. Now this has a lot with... still domestic. There's a good number of domestic violence, and then it's also not as much gambling, but not as much drugs either... it's OUI; driving under influence, a lot of that.
- SK: So, what other kind of things sort of... like your experience, or your working... your experiences with working with the community, did things change? As we moved into the late '90s and the 2000s?

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- TS: Yeah. There's... There are families who were struggling to assimilate in the US.
- SK: What do you mean?
- TS: You had a lot people from countryside in Cambodia who were not educated because of the service was not good... those kids dropped out of school and committed crimes, generation after generation.
- SK: Are struggling.
- TS: Struggling and still of course. They had a lot of kids in troubles, and their kids trouble.
- SK: So there's... there's the generation-
- TS: Generation.
- SK: I see.
- TS: And then... my son, he is doing research, so his finding is that... over the summer, did on gang-
- SK: What is he? A student or... here, where?
- TS: He's a student at Wake Forest University.
- SK: Oh, Wake Forest? Your sweatshirt. So is he... what's his major?
- TS: He majored in psychology.
- SK: He did research?
- TS: Research on gang.
- SK: In...
- TS: Southeast Asian Gang. So he interviewed a bunch of gang members
- SK: Around here?

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- TS: Yeah. And he interviewed with different ages.
- SK: That's fantastic!
- TS: He is the senior, and he going onto Columbia University for his graduate school.
- SK: For graduate school?
- TS: Yeah.
- SK: Congratulations! That's wonderful. That's great. We need more researchers on Southeast Asian American studies, but also researchers who are Southeast Asian American for-
- TS: He's going to be... he's doing clinical psychology.
- SK: That's great. That's wonderful. What kind of things did he find?
- TS: So he saw... he found out that a lot of these kid parents were not around. Parents disconnected with schools, and no mentor... lack of mentoring. So those components led kids to struggle on their own.
- SK: Have you seen an impact of a lot of the youth services that have arisen in Lowell in the last few decades? Like Teen BLOCK, or UTEC, or Boys & Girls Club?
- TS: They do, they do. I think that the... I have to give them a lot of credits, and I think they make a lot of efforts. But at the same time, I think they are not very organized and appeared to be isolated from each other. I have a task to do, and I'm just doing this on my own. There is so much need. And I think... and I... So, this is something that I see. Even UMass Lowell hasn't put a lot of effort into it. Because I think they feel that we are incapable of doing the job to maintain our own greater goods. So they don't give a hand. And when you go and don't give them a hand, they make it very... Let me give you an example. So the changes took place in the '90. So the leaders who were representing the community... two decades later, 2000, this 20 years, they fired every one of those guys. They made it a point you have to pass this process or that process in order for you to stay employed.

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- SK: They fired, sorry, who-
- TS: Teachers. Back in the day they hired Khmer teachers to teach. Then a lot of those teachers were fired.
- And then now a day 97% of teachers and staffs in Lowell Public School are Caucasian. I think the last time I heard them saying was that they went to recruit diversity teachers were South Carolina; Columbia, South Carolina... completely make nonsense.
- TS: And that's why I help find a Community Public Charter School in Lowell, MA. I was part of that. I was a board member and chairman for ten years. And the city was not happy with that.
- SK: What were the characteristics or what did you feel like you could do with the Charter School that you couldn't do otherwise?
- TS: So, we brought in people representing the populations in the city, so they understood the needs, and they made effort to meet those needs, and they knew how to motivate, not just kids in school, but they motivate parents to get involved in school. They don't just stop saying, "Hey, I saw your kid here". They go to houses and say, "Hey, your kid is doing well." They make the people feel like one family.
- SK: And because the Lowell public schools were not meeting the needs of the community, you had to work elsewhere?
- TS: I can talk about my family, about what I did with us, all that. While I was at the probation department, I went to school here, got my Master at UMass Lowell in Community Social Psychology. I was working with Doctor Joyce Gibson, and since they move on, Linda Silka... I don't know where she is right now, but-
- SK: She's retired. I know that she's still around.
- TS: So she... they were very supportive.
- SK: Did you know Robin too? Robin's still here.
- TS: Robins and I were in same class. Yeah. She's really nice. So I got involved, and from the data they collected, I saw that the data was

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useless to the school, because I know that they will not... I mean they make some attempts, because they got extra money... to use that money, but they didn't do a good job and tell them... So I... from that data, I work on my own family in many ways, and I told you I (unclear) school with CMAA. So they... in community there's infighting ...

SK: African-American. So believe me I know...

TS: Politic all over the community too, but I tried to stay out with it, and focus on what's most affective... So for my role as probation officer is to make sure that the kid who wanted to go into law enforcement, making sure that if they wanted to do intern at the courthouses, they could do it. In terms of kids who wanted to become police officers I asked currently police officers to help mentoring them.

SK: That is fantastic.

TS: So we have good relations with them. And also attorney and anyone who is different, I want them to feel welcomed, and I fight hard for that.

SK: It sounds like you've done a lot of work, to help change the law enforcement... the makeup of the law enforcement. Like you're saying, the schools have to change. [crosstalk 00:37:48] Have you seen any progress in trying to get the law enforcement to make that systemic change?

TS: So, from my conclusion, they know where to feed the hungry mouth.

SK: They know where to feed the hungry.

TS: And a lot of times when people who got fed they were happy. They stopped caring about anyone else. Then they stopped helping.

SK: I saw something in the news, online news in 2017, there was a People of Color Criminal Justice Conference that you spoke at. Can you talk about what that was, and what the goals of that was, and what you did there.

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- TS: So I don't know how they got me to talk about... that, but I was very straightforward with them. I said... I didn't... I think it's very challenging, the way... I wouldn't call it conspiracy, but I think it's the culture that kind of lay these ground that... you got to prove more, you got to prove more. And so-
- SK: You mean Southeast Asians have to prove more? [unclear] in order to be better... in order to get the same treatment.
- TS: So I spoke... the other day, I spoke at the Lawrence Academy in Groton, MA, and my prediction is in the next 20 years, most of these prestigious boarding schools, there's going to be like 60% of Southeast Asian in the school, because we got money, and then we're going to send them to the best schools. Because I saw South Korea, I saw Japan, China. A lot of times, they do not think you are qualified to be where you are. So they make it hard for you to move forward.
- TS: You've got to do the work. Show them how hard you work and then they will respect you, because if we don't do that, that's not going to help us. I suggested that
- TS: And then the people who I work with, will come back and say, "You saved my life."
- I knew an Indian American lawyer. And before she became a judge, she was a lawyer, and she did not know this court well. And I used to ask her and say, hey, and I told her you go in front of this judge, this is how you should do this and that.
- TS: And so when she became a judge, and she is like, Wow! And then when she learned about my family, myself, and how I was... I'm not important to these people's eyes, but I do important things for my kid and myself, so I only can do these things because I learned and worked hard. I grew.
- SK: When you were working... when you started working the '90s in Lowell District Court, were you the first Khmer... probation officer?

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- TS: I was told I was the second probation officer, the other person, he only lasted there briefly. He left, but I didn't even know that he was...
- SK: What about now? How would you say-
- TS: So now there are more of us. There are more Probation Officers. I recruited more.
- SK: Do you think that we have, in terms of both the police department, but also probation officers and attorneys... I don't know. Enough is not the right word. But-
- TS: Are well represented?
- SK: Yeah. Are we well represented?
- TS: We are not. We are not. I don't know whether in 20 years or 100 more years, no. I think, like I said to you, there's plenty of people here that can do the job, but they don't give them a chance. Not a chance. Not even a chance. They feel that...
- SK: Like the... there's a parallel between like the schools and like law enforcement agencies about that there are people out there who can do the job, but there are not-
- TS: They did not. I gave you the example. I used to coach, and winning is not just something in my blood, but it's just something that I work so hard at, you know, and in coaching, they'd rather give it to somebody else than... But I say to them, I say, I said, "There's no roadblock that can keep me from going forward", because I will go forward, and I will make my way far and beyond.
- SK: What else has changed, and what hasn't changed? In the instance from the 1990s to now? So you're saying that there are some more probation officers, but we still need more?
- TS: The leadership. So we are lack of leaders of everywhere. Everywhere.
- SK: You mean... within the community or everywhere?

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- TS: A leader, it's not the people in front of you that you know, and you see that, that you think is a leader. Leader who's done well, who established and accomplished who have visions, and I don't think they call on them to help with the community. So, they don't call on those guys. They call on somebody who will say, "Don't worry. I will say you've done a good job. Keep doing what you do". And I think that's where things... I give you an example. I don't know how many times this gentleman screw up. I rather not mention name. He had violated every ethic rules, he has his hands in every politic meeting, and he's the best, I guess to the city. You ask me, I always say... When you want somebody to lead you, let's... you know, you gave him one time to make mistakes, but if he keeps making mistakes, I don't think it's a good idea to have that individual keep leading. That's just an example, and I think this community, put a blind eye on a lot of... these are so many... I've known so many people done well, but they are not going to exhaust all energy to catch fire ... So there are a lot of times we step back.
- SK: What about in relation to the Lowell District Courts and stuff like that. How would you describe in terms of community members' relationships to the court system? Has it improved?
- TS: Excuse me one sec. Let me text my wife a sec.
- SK: Oh, yeah.
- TS: Because I put an alarm at home, so I want to make sure that...
- TS: Sorry about that.
- TS: She's working DCF.. was known as the department of Social Services before.
- SK: So you are very civic family?
- TS: I think so.
- SK: So do you and your wife and your... you said you have a son. Do you have any other-

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- TS: Two sons. I have two sons. One's working in Boston. He's working in a financial investment company.
- SK: Do you think that the understanding of the Lowell district courts of say then the complexities of community members has improved?
- TS: I play a good part of it, because it's... We haven't gotten any complaint from people. So, I think we have good relationship, and I think they know how effective I am working with people. So I think they allow me facilitate, and I don't think we have a lot of problems with Southeast Asians.
- SK: Have you had any experience with people with orders of deportation?
- TS: Oh, yeah. I've done... I do, I do. Over the year, so I knew a lot of them. But I have also been telling them that they would be deported if they stopped appealing. And I think some of them stopped appealing, so they get deported.
- SK: And also just because the ground changed under...
- TS: Yeah, the ground changed. It's...
- SK: Because there was no repatriation agreement in the '90s.
- TS: I have a good knowledge of all these things, but again, you can only do so much. And the one who approached me, who asking me to advocate for them, I was very successful in stopping that process.
- SK: So, what are some... As we were sort of going towards the end, what are some other... because you that there are other challenges that still face the community in relation particularly to the law enforcement, but maybe just overall. You've mentioned like leadership issues...
- TS: I think a lot of... I think we as community, I think we still... because a lot of the infighting, because of lack of transparency... There's a lot of thing happening, but I don't think it connected well. And, with that, I think we become more suspicious of each other. I think it just because of this community. I think that's a challenge.

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And I think not enough kids are going to colleges. I think UMass hasn't done much to help. I think my son, the last time, I think his finding it was like I think with 15 to 20% of the kids that finish college in four years, and they might go back, but I doubt it. And I think if you want to make a difference, I think they would... their respond with, "You go and do it". I think their resource they waste it on keeping people going further in life.

SK: What do you mean?

TS: So I... Let me see. My kids went to school, in Lowell, and then I found the data with UMass Lowell, they're not doing a good job, lack of parent participations. And I think the kids... They think that the kids will never get as smart as them. Only a few can get smarter. And so I said to them, "Getting involved with these things give you so much more knowledge." So my children were exceptional because I told them... I learned from different people that high school in Lowell, MA is not a good place to have foundation for colleges. So I made sure my kid didn't go to high school in Lowell.

SK: Where did they go to high school?

TS: My younger one went to Groton School, in Groton, MA and my older one went to Central Catholic for two years. Sport, academic, and family were the keys thing. And at Central Catholic, he was recruited to play soccer at Lawrence Academy in Groton, MA.

The younger one who went to Groton school traveled the world. He's fluent in Khmer and Spanish. He's a good writer. You can read his blog color... "Khmer Odyssey."

SK: That's great!

TS: You can learn a lot about family, and he's a... Both of them are exceptional soccer player, and both of them are... the one... This younger one is also a musician. He can play 10 instruments. But he all... Both of them are grounded. At home, they clean, cook, and help out. And the older one... so when he went to... The younger who went to Groton schools and Wake Forest University, so he went to India, France, Italy, Peru, and Spain, and Cambodia. So it's all funded by the schools. The older ones graduated from

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Lawrence Academy got recruited to play soccer in Kenyon College, Gambria, Ohio.

SK: That was a very good school.

TS: So both of them... and then the... So after Kenyon, he got a job, two days before graduated. A job, an investment company. And from there... and so he is there now for over a year. And I told my kids, because... so my kid always... I keep telling them, say, "I'm not paranoid, kid" they say, "Why, Dad?" Because you seem like you (unclear) they discriminate, they racist against... I'm not, I'm not. They say, "Well, how come?" I say, "Look, if people look at you again and again and again and, do some facial. So any time you know they are thinking of you the wrong way about you.

TS: And then sometime you even overheard conversations or jokes. And so my kid keeps saying, "That's not true". I say, "When you get older, you'll know". So both of them run into discrimination. So now they were like, "Dad, you were right." So I say to them, I say, "So how are we going to overcome that?" They said, "Well, work hard. Work hard". My older one is... he's doing well. So he does that. And on the weekend he fixes houses. He has a girlfriend whose family owns has some apartments. Very ambitious...

TS: And the little guy, he goes to Columbia University for his Master. And then he's going to seek a PHD. And I told them. Look, we can't change the way people think, but if you have all the answers, and how hard you work they will ask you. They will ask you. And that is when they start asking you, and they will impress of how hard you work, and how much you know. And so those are the... And we remain humble. In the summer, when the kids are home, I always make sure that they serve the community. Make sure they get involved, make sure that they give back.

SK: Have you ever spoken at the UMass Lowell... That we have a School of Criminal Justice and Criminology?

TS: No.

SK: I think they would be interested to talk [crosstalk 00:58:29] because you work with this particular... specifically as a case

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worker, Cambodian and [crosstalk 00:58:33] these Asian American.

- TS: I have a lot of students who... who's interned at courthouse. So I taught a lot, mentoring them. And recently, I've been speaking to the kids at the Lawrence Academy and Groton school.
- SK: I think I just... I saw on the paper that Lowell Police Department, they just had a swearing yesterday or a couple of days ago, with four new police officers who were all people of color. So there's slow change.
- TS: Now they need leaders. Someone who are in the circle. Because I think they... From what I've seen from the outside-
- SK: Lowell Police Department?
- TS: Yeah. UMass and all, they need somebody to sit in, who can effectively give them a good sense of the community itself.
- SK: They need more people from the community in those leadership positions?
- TS: Yeah. They, shouldn't just... Like I said, use the same person to advise them. I have families that I know who sent their kids to Stanford, Harvard, and many other good schools. They did some things right. And I think they can say, "Hey, what did you do? How did you do it?" And I think get back to where I am, I think a few years ago, they keep saying, "Do you really know what you are doing?" I think nowadays they start asking me, "Can you teach me how to do it?" With what I had learned from what I did with my kids, I told them, I say it wasn't as easy as walking in the park. We worked hard, and I think I learned something to get them to there.
- SK: It only took 20 years for people to recognize.
- TS: But end of the day, I remain humble about that. I think the only thing I can show them is the hard work.
- SK: So is there anything that we haven't talked about that you want to make sure that... From your experiences?

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- TS: I think in your role, you can do a lot too. Do a lot of integral... We have all these things. How can we let the kids know in this school? Reaching out to them, and become their mentor. I think over the years, the most effective thing that I think that helped a lot of this kids was by-
- SK: Mentoring.
- TS: Mentoring. And I think if you're like Head of Department... I think by allowing kids to have access to you. To see that, "Wow, look! I got a chance to get into this place and I can be there". And I think that would... The access to all the... It's the lack of access, is how a lot of kids they... I think this is enough. There's so much more that they can... And they have potential. They had the same abilities as anybody else. But I think by advocating them, allowing them to know about this normal potential, can allow them to go anywhere ... Sky is limit.
- SK: So, that's great. I actually had one more question just in terms of... For your caseload in the '90s, did you... was it mostly from Southeast Asian Americans? Was it mostly Cambodians, or did you also have like Laos, Vietnamese.
- TS: I helped everybody. But I think most of them-
- SK: Most of them are Cambodians.
- TS: Yeah.
- SK: What about today, in the 20 teens, right? From 2010 to today, would you say the number of your Southeast Asian American cases has changed?
- TS: Yeah, yeah.
- SK: Is it less?
- TS: Yes, a lot less than before. [crosstalk 01:03:05]
- SK: Now you work with just sort of all different-
- TS: Yeah, yeah, all different races.

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- SK: So it's interesting.
- TS: You see the changes.
- SK:O kay, great. Thank you very much.
- TS: I want to show you just a few things.

Interview ends