

**UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL  
SOUTHEAST ASIAN DIGITAL ARCHIVE**

**TITH, VERA T. AND WILLIAM A. ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW, 1993  
UML 16 (Oral History #93.7)**

**NOTE:** This is the transcript for oral history tape 1 of 1, side 1 of 2.

**CONTENT WARNING:** Mentions of war, death, and other situations readers and listeners may find distressing.

**INFORMANTS/  
NARRATORS:** VERA T. TITH (VT)  
WILLIAM A. TITH (WT)

**INTERVIEWER:** SHEILA L. KIRSCHBAUM (SK)  
**DATE:** FEBRUARY 13, 1993

**SPEAKER (TIME)  
DETAILS**

SK (00:07):

This is Sheila Kirschbaum and I'm interviewing Vera Tith and her husband William Tith at their home on February 13th, 1993. I'd like to start with some basic information about where you were born. You were both born in Cambodia, were you?

VT (00:37):

Yeah.

SK (00:40):

And, were your children born there?

WT (00:40):

Yeah.

VT (00:41):

My children... My son born there in 1979. There's the Khmer Rouge, you know, left from the communist, that is the time that the communist leave.

SK (01:00):

And, was your daughter born here?

VT (01:02):

Yeah.

SK (01:07):

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You have two children?

VT (01:07):

Yes.

SK (01:11):

When you say he was born in '79 after the communists leave, what did that mean for you? How did your life change after the communists left?

VT (01:23):

For me, because since communists occupy in 1975, so that's why my son named Samnang which means lucky. In English, it means lucky because he's very lucky. Because we both marry before communists began. We both married, and after that, the communists start, in 1975. And we didn't have my son on that generation that's very hard. We don't have enough food to eat, we worked very hard. So, we don't have my son yet. When the communists tried to leave, that's my son was born. That's why we put my son's name Samnang, which means lucky.

SK (02:14):

Is Samnang a common name for the children that were born after the communists left? I know There's a child in Julie's class.

VT (02:20):

No. Samnang, which means lucky, that mean very lucky. That mean like that. Yeah.

WT (02:25):

It's just some parent that we believe in some... We just put it. Just give the name away. That we are just thinking about we are just left from communists.

SK (02:44):

It meant something special.

WT (02:47):

Yeah.

VT (02:47):

Yes, sometime lucky in different way. Like my son's name Samnang. It's lucky because he not born on that communist. You know?

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WT (02:58):

Hard time.

VT (02:58):

On that hard time. Because, when we saw on that time, if we have children on that time, very very hard. You know? Not enough food to eat. Was very hard. That's why we put name. And some other Cambodian child name Samnang in different way because maybe in that family they have something very very hard, and on that time, they have their child, they put that Samnang because they left from you know the hard thing which mean that...

WT (03:29):

Like people, they live in the camp. They waiting immigration to call into the United States. But on that time, they wait and wait. They don't have no name to come to the United States. And then his wife become pregnant. Okay? They still no name to come to the United States yet. They wait and wait and wait. So, after that child born one day, they put born and then they have the name, come.

VT (04:12):

Come to the United States.

WT (04:12):

And then they give the name, Lucky.

VT (04:12):

Samnang. Samnang. Yeah. Which means that.

SK (04:13):

Lucky.

WT (04:13):

Yeah.

SK (04:13):

Wow.

VT (04:13):

Yeah. That's very good, it's important.

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WT (04:13):

Different, different way to give the Samnang or Lucky name.

VT (04:18):

Like Samnang, which mean lucky.

SK (04:27):

Yeah, I can see why.

VT (04:28):

Yeah.

SK (04:29):

Does your daughter have a special name that means anything?

VT (04:34):

My daughter, when she was born in 1983, at Lowell General Hospital, they gave me the book you know to choose the name, but my husband combined my name. So that's come out Deanna. So Deanna, before my name is Dee, so he put it down combined together. Deanna, we saw on the booklet, Deanna, so we took that name. So I thought all night, "That's very good." Meaningful, too, for Deanna. I see on the book.

SK (05:08):

Mm-hmm (affirmative). So her name is Deanna?

VT (05:11):

Yes, Deanna.

SK (05:17):

It's very pretty.

WT (05:17):

D-E-A-N-N-A

SK (05:19):

D-A...

VT (05:19):

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D-E-A-N-N-A

SK (05:20):

Oh.

VT (05:22):

Which mean very firm love, with you know my name, too.

SK (05:28):

Because your other name is?

VT (05:31):

Yes, Dee. D-Y.

WT (05:32):

D-E-E

VT (05:35):

No. Before we changed. D-Y. D-Y is called... You too, if you see D-Y, you not call Dee, you called Di. Right? See? You say Di. When I became citizen, my husband say that's a good time to change. So that's why I choose Vera. I don't know Vera, which means, which... I say "Oh, that's good time." Because I go anyway, and I spelled D-Y, they called me Di. So that's a good time to change, too. That's why I changed my name to Vera.

SK (06:06):

Oh, that's interesting. So you chose that the day you became citizens?

VT (06:06):

Yeah.

SK (06:11):

And did you choose William when you became citizens?

WT (06:16):

Yeah.

SK (06:17):

Is A-N your original name, then? Your Cambodian name? Wasn't it An?

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WT (06:23):

Oh. Yeah.

SK (06:26):

What was your name before you chose William?

WT (06:28):

They have to call me, that's why I change.

VT (06:30):

They have to call-

WT (06:30):

Savooun.

VT (06:30):

S-A-V-O-E-U-N. Savooun. That's hard to call. You know?

SK (06:30):

S-A-V-O-E-U-N?

VT (06:31):

Yeah.

WT (06:31):

When I was at work, somebody tried to ignore my name.

VT (06:31):

They had to call, "Hey, you!". But that's what I call the easy name. You know? Let them call easier. That's why he choose William.

SK (07:02):

How does it make you feel, though, to give up your Cambodian name and take an American name?

VT (07:09):

For me, that seems like okay, because it seems like in here, it's easy for them to call. Like just I mentioned, my husband, when he go to work, some people have to call, too. So that's a good

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time to say, "Oh, maybe put that name." But, we don't mean like, "Oh, we change names." Because my eyes still the same, my nose still the same. [inaudible] then my body's still the same. So, just change name. Easy, the two way. Easy for the people in here, and easy when go to work, too. So it's no matter. It's not a, "Oh, why we change name in here?" Seems like I think, from my understand, I think they're very good too. Because easy for them, and easy for us.

SK (07:59):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

VT (08:01):

Yeah.

SK (08:01):

One of my fathers, I think it was his great grandmother, changed the name, for the same reason. Just to make it easier. They changed the last name. Well, I know Vera, you're a teacher. Have you been a teacher ever since you've been here, or were you in Cambodia?

VT (08:19):

Yes. I teach at Cambodia for two years. And when I escape to Thailand, I teach like... Thailand, almost two years too, in Thailand camp, because I stay there and...

SK (08:36):

What did you teach?

VT (08:36):

Teach young children in Thailand, and I teach...

WT (08:38):

French.

VT (08:42):

Secondary school. You know? Like [inaudible]. Because in Cambodia they have vacation too. Seem like a [inaudible] in [inaudible]. I teach that. Yes. I have background in that. Yeah.

SK (08:55):

You taught French too?

VT (08:55):

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Yeah.

SK (08:55):

Wow.

VT (08:57):

Because in Cambodia, learn French. So that's why move them in English. That's why I came United States. The first time, I don't know English you know very well, but I know a lot vocabulary in French, then just pronunciation little different. That's why, because I understand. When I heard the word, I can like, "Oh, that is mean like that." Because it look similar to the French word. It looks similar. Just pronunciation.

SK (09:21):

That's [inaudible]. People will ask me how to say something in Khmer. I'll say I cannot do that. But I can say it in French.

VT (09:21):

Yeah. Oh. You look at like, demonstration. In French, "démonstration." The same exactly spelling. But just the same pronunciation. See?

WT (09:48):

Different.

VT (09:48):

Different pronunciation.

SK (09:49):

The English language has a lot of words from French.

VT (09:55):

That's right. So might be having easy to...

SK (09:57):

Yeah. And then French and Spanish are a lot alike. I think that's why [inaudible].

VT (09:57):

Yeah, that's right.



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SK (10:04):

So did you have difficulty speaking when you first got here?

WT (10:15):

Yeah, we learn [inaudible] in Cambodia.

VT (10:15):

Then secondary school. At a secondary school that's why I know some English make me easier come to United States. Because I know the word too.

WT (10:26):

...from high school, and college.

VT (10:28):

When I was away.

SK (10:29):

Mm-hmm (affirmative). [inaudible].

VT (10:30):

Yes. Everyone did when you go up to high school. They have one that was one hours a day. But everything, every subject is in French. So I took one hours a day in English.

WT (10:43):

When we get upgrade, we learn more French and can go [inaudible]. When we beginning from to upgrade, Cambodian more, learn French [inaudible] until we finish school 100% with all subjects, French. All subjects, 100%.

SK (10:43):

Did you go to college in Cambodia, then? And did that make you-

VT (11:22):

I complete in there, but unfortunate I come here, no proof. That's why I study really hard.

WT (11:30):

They destroy everything when the communist control.

VT (11:31):

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Empty hand.

WT (11:42):

How they move--

VT (11:43):

Don't have anything.

WT (11:43):

They move all the population out from town to outside. To the farms. You know? Two to three hours.

SK (11:48):

And did they consider you dangerous because you were educated?

VT (11:51):

That's why the point that I want to share too.

WT (11:55):

They [inaudible], because we saw keep eye on [inaudible] we moved before the communist control [inaudible], and we saw what's going on [inaudible].

VT (12:09):

Only black, that we can wear. Only black.

WT (12:12):

A dress-

VT (12:12):

Wear black clothes, black pants, black shirt. Only black. You don't have any color.

WT (12:18):

Black shoe.

VT (12:19):

If you have color, have to be like a... You know? What it's called? Like, the [inaudible] of the tree to make your clothes black. You cannot wear color. No way.

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WT (12:37):

Oh. You mean like, if they don't provide black clothes enough, and then we have color clothes, they can boiling the peel tree.

SK (12:41):

Bark of the tree.

VT (12:41):

The bark. Yeah. That.

WT (12:41):

Yeah. Yeah. And we put it inside. Then after that, we put in the [inaudible], to make it black.

SK (12:42):

If you had color clothes, they thought you knew how to make dye?

WT (13:10):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

SK (13:10):

To cover your clothes with?

WT (13:11):

When they just said like this, then when we go change to black color, you still...

VT (13:19):

Your mind not follow them.

WT (13:21):

You mind still [inaudible] something, which you're going to [inaudible] one thing. And one spoon of rice.

SK (13:37):

So now, do you like to wear colors? You have [inaudible].

VT (13:41):

Yeah. Usually.

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WT (13:42):

It seem like that is still communist never change. They change the idea because the Vietnamese control. And then they know the idea that Cambodian people don't like the [inaudible]. They just make freedom about wearing [inaudible], and something. But the rule still communist.

SK (14:16):

So, when the Vietnamese army invaded, that made things better for you eventually. Right?

VT (14:16):

From my understand, it just Vietnamese invade in Cambodia, but on that generation, seem like Vietnamese have something in their mind too. It's not just come for help us to on that time, Khmer Rouge. Because that time, Vietnamese want to be occupied from, I understand history, that... You know? That's hard. It's not just on that time, I say, "Oh, Vietnamese come, and Khmer Rouge are gone." I don't know, because I don't like politics at all. That's why I don't care about. But they say Vietnam come, and we are free from communist on that time. But I'm not sure about that politics. You know? The politics changed somewhere else. But I don't know. But I still heard on the news and on the tape, I saw on the movie last time, tourist say when Vietnamese came and Khmer Rouge are gone, those two seem like together. Khmer Rouge come, Vietnamese out, Vietnamese come, Khmer Rouge out. Seem like politics to each other.

VT (15:28):

That's why my husband and me, keep thinking about it. How we get free too. You know? When this come, the other out, when the other come, the other out. So that's why free never come to Cambodia. Poor Cambodians in the middle. You know? The play around, it seems like-

WT (15:47):

A game.

VT (15:48):

Like a game. That's what I saw. You know?

WT (15:50):

And I feel bad for the UN. When they are to help Cambodia out. But I heard on the news, some UN was killed by...

SK (16:10):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

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WT (16:10):

They don't find out. They didn't find out who kill them. But I just feel so sorry. You know? What's crazy, they don't put UN, they don't respect UN, they just kill. I couldn't believe it. Because UN just come and help every country. They should understand like a Red Cross. When I study in the war, when they saw the Red Cross truck, they cannot shoot, but they shoot. They don't care.

VT (16:48):

That's hard to believe, Sheila. That's my opinion. That's hard to believe. Who do what, and who killing. And sometimes, when we saw the news, seem like I don't blame. Like, all news is perfect. Right? Sometimes, sometimes wrong too. You know? Seem like the killing. We don't know, Khmer Rouge kill, or who kill, or Vietnamese kill. Like, United Nation go to help. We don't know. Sometime, in mind for instance, like two people, A and B. A want to kill C, but A don't dot it by himself, because A want to be like that. A give money to B. "B, you kill C." So the point is, C is to get money. But the main idea come from A. Did you agree that?

WT (17:44):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

VT (17:45):

That's what I keep in mind. That's hard to see who kill who. That's why the wars still around and no peaceful.

SK (17:55):

Feel like you can't trust anybody.

VT (17:57):

That's hard. You know? Hard to be trust. That's why I look at Cambodia, and it's very, very sad. Look at all the pictures. I went there, and very sad.

WT (18:08):

To me I believe they don't even like it, how it was [inaudible]. They don't want to know. And see, we are outside here and [inaudible] when the Vietnamese out, because we chase them to the [inaudible]. They took everything they saw [inaudible]. They took every single thing from my country to their country. But first, they took the gold within the [inaudible], and when are ask them to change, they said no. That's a soldier died [inaudible]. But we know they took it. Everything. Machine, rice, gold.

SK (19:01):

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Did you have a job where you did check vehicles then?

WT (19:04):

Yeah. We had it, but they don't make, because they more power than us.

SK (19:05):

Right, right.

WT (19:05):

Yeah.

SK (19:12):

So, what was your job at that time, in Cambodia? What were you doing for a job?

WT (19:27):

Oh, me? Electrician.

SK (19:27):

Electrician?

WT (19:27):

Yeah.

SK (19:27):

Uh-huh (affirmative).

WT (19:27):

On the...

VT (19:27):

That's '79.

SK (19:27):

Pardon me?

VT (19:27):

In '79. 1979.

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SK (19:27):

'79.

WT (19:27):

Yeah.

VT (19:27):

When the Vietnamese come, that's '79 that they come. That is why I saw on news they invade Cambodia. But they take a lot of things from Cambodia. That the point, that's what we see.

WT (19:42):

And one more thing I would like to tell you too. When I was there in last summer, with my family, and I just heard [inaudible], they say that they wanted the Vietnamese soldier out of Cambodia. They say, yes. And then they change the clothes from soldier to regular. They still more Vietnamese in there. And the Cambodia soldier said, all these soldier. But just they change the clothes.

VT (20:22):

Change the clothes. No soldier, now regular people.

WT (20:25):

Yeah. See? And right now, if you not Cambodian, Cambodian still know which one is Vietnamese. If you went there, you don't know which one, because they...

VT (20:36):

The same skin.

WT (20:36):

... they are the same color right now. Before they put the hat, we can ID. Now they don't wear the hat. They make similar to Cambodia until listen to them and listen the action. They speak similar. Especially, they talk to Vietnamese and to Vietnamese, usually they spoke their language. Now they don't speak. They speak Cambodian to themselves.

SK (21:06):

Oh.

WT (21:06):

Yeah.

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SK (21:15):

They want to stay.

WT (21:15):

Yeah. They going to stay there.

VT (21:18):

The bottom line, we have to understand each other. No matter what Vietnamese, no matter what Cambodian. Every country understand to each other. You know? Don't want to be more powerful, more money, more rich. That's why I keep still in my mind. I say, "What they want to do?" But all those, they want to be more powerful, more money, take all things. That's why the war start. What they need for? I don't believe in those things. Like everybody, I don't believe that way. Why they need war. And look there. It's not peace. I went there, and my tear cry all the time. I cry, say, "What should I do now?" You know? Because I think that way. If all the people think that way too, maybe no war, and we all together. That's why I love Demonstration School very much. That's why I [inaudible] the children grow more and more. A lot of people like the Demonstration School. I think it's no war at all, because they seem like they love, they joy, they understand each other.

VT (22:33):

Look at this. Hard to [inaudible] to someone, but like we came in United State. Very good country. You know? They seem like control, very good. But over there, we want to share too. We don't want only Cambodian in Cambodia. Not only Cambodian people. Any country can join together. But don't make the problem. Right? You know? Maybe we do together, loving together. That's why the way that we are joined together. Like in here a lot. Look at in here. Seems like a lot of things going up on the news. You know? Killing, shooting, that's why other guys, they say, "What should we do for people?" That's the main point.

WT (23:22):

Vietnamese people, when they going to do in their country and, when the government [inaudible], I see in Cambodia too. But after that is gone now, they said like a flower, it bloom. They come in, get the citizen. But they get the politics from their country. When the war, they just fight from outside and inside, like a flower. See? That's why. Not like in here, a lot of different people, they get the citizen, they love the name. They love the United States. They, "This is my country." Everyone said that. But Vietnamese, they just want my country. Because they follow the leader, named-

VT (24:16):

Pu Ching [spelling?].



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WT (24:18):

Pu Ching [spelling?]. Wrote the book.

VT (24:19):

We know the story.

WT (24:21):

After he die, he wrote a book. "You have to take Cambodia, control Cambodia." He want to [inaudible] the power.

SK (24:39):

So he still has that influence? He influences people through his writings still?

VT (24:41):

Because they have on the writing, from the [inaudible], we should be [inaudible]. But seem like that from we they know that. This summer, I went. You know?

WT (24:52):

Didn't you see Kerry?

VT (24:53):

Yeah. John Kerry?

WT (24:55):

Yeah. You see that they went to Vietnam?

SK (24:58):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

WT (25:00):

They so smart and they do it quick, that they... They do like this. Vietnamese politics like this. Dirty. They so twist, very fast. In the United States, [inaudible] I trust them maybe, I don't know for future. Because they change so fast so fast. You know? When they go there, John Kerry went there, they smart, they show the government, they show the American guy, the soviet guy, they show the [inaudible]. Just drinking. Yeah.

VT (25:38):

That's why I give example for you like A, B, and C.

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WT (25:42):

[Inaudible] just looking at the last time, how many hundreds that American soldiers die in Vietnam. Right now, I still look at cartoon or movie. You know? I still miss a little bit, people. Vietnamese play game so much.

SK (26:03):

Would you ever go back to Cambodia to live?

WT (26:04):

I don't know.

VT (26:07):

For my dream, yes I do.

WT (26:12):

[inaudible].

VT (26:12):

Because I really in peace, that's why we waiting. That's why last summer, I brought my son, my daughter. All, we went there. We want to show how Cambodia is. Seem like, look really small. It's not like just before 1975. Before that, very peaceful, and very, very good. You know? That's very wonderful place. But after 1975, up to '79, everything destroy. From '79, it seems like now I went there, still not peace also. It's not the same before. But my dream, I say because we hope that the more we try, sometime, it might be good. We don't know. But my dream, I want to go back to.

SK (27:07):

Was it dangerous for you to be there when you went last summer? Or is it safe for you to travel there?

VT (27:13):

I saw by my eye, very scary. Was lucky, that's why we came back here. We keep say we are lucky. How many people went there? almost 60, yeah? Some got accident, some got stole. Different kinds. You know? But for me, we went from capital... Because my hometown is far from capital. How long we drive? How many hours? 12? Or eight hours? We drive...

WT (27:49):

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No, that depends. Before, we drove about six hours, because the roads is good, the highways are good. But now, it's very bad.

VT (27:54):

You know? It seemed like a [inaudible].

WT (27:54):

A lot of hole. You know? Because the...

VT (28:04):

Broken road, or broken [inaudible].

WT (28:05):

Because Khmer Rouge broke the bridge. And the roads broken. They don't build. And took so long to go there. But it's not too good. Not safe at all. When see a [inaudible], my family come back. She said, "Oh, you guys so lucky."

VT (28:29):

Mm-hmm (affirmative). It's very hard.

WT (28:31):

Because she went there before me. Not safe at all.

VT (28:33):

It's scary.

SK (28:36):

How did you get out of Cambodia?

WT (28:40):

When? Before...

SK (28:40):

When you first left. Yeah.

WT (28:42):

There's a path turn through. Vietnamese control the border. Many lane. Inside border, and plus, they live in the forest close to the Thailand border. We had to [inaudible].

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VT (29:02):

Crawl. Mine. They put mine. They don't want Cambodia cross to Thailand. Vietnamese put mine.

SK (29:09):

Vietnamese didn't want?

WT (29:09):

Of course not.

VT (29:11):

Yep. Oh, look at my mother. My mother-in-law cross the mud like this, Sheila. Mud. And very, very sad. You know? That's why I have one niece, they have two children, now three children still there. We have five people to come United States. We have name. But my mother, she says she misses... You know? She don't want to leave. She wants to go back to Cambodia. That's why she came after me in 1983. '83, that my daughter born. Three months, then she came. And my niece still there.

SK (29:47):

That's-

VT (29:49):

That's my mother-in-law.

SK (29:51):

Your mother-in-law? Uh-huh (affirmative).

VT (29:51):

Yeah. She died by the time that I go work at the Demonstration School.

SK (29:56):

Oh.

VT (29:56):

Yeah.

SK (29:56):

She was here?

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WT (29:58):

Yeah.

VT (29:59):

She's here.

WT (29:59):

She came in '83.

VT (30:00):

But she came after me. I came '81.

WT (30:04):

[inaudible].

VT (30:09):

Yeah.

SK (30:10):

So, you and you, and and your son...

VT (30:14):

And my son.

SK (30:14):

... came in '81?

WT (30:15):

Yeah.

VT (30:17):

Yes, '81.

SK (30:17):

Together?

VT (30:17):

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Yeah.

SK (30:17):

And then your mother came in '83?

VT (30:18):

Came after.

WT (30:20):

When we was at the camp, we have [inaudible]. That's why [inaudible]. And when we have name, she don't want to come. She wake me up. She want to go back to country.

VT (30:44):

[inaudible].

WT (30:45):

She said she want to die in Cambodia.

SK (30:46):

Your mother did?

WT (30:46):

Yeah.

VT (30:46):

Yeah.

SK (30:50):

But she changed her mind, and she-

WT (30:51):

Yeah. When I come here two years, and then they have a lot of problem in the camp, [inaudible]. You know? The people for [inaudible].

VT (30:56):

[inaudible]. That's hard to leave. With my niece we decide very hard...

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WT (31:15):

And when my mother come, [inaudible] to come to the United States, two men took my niece away from her. Seemed like that they steal her, but over here they call...

SK (31:29):

Kidnapping?

WT (31:36):

No, not that. [inaudible].

VT (31:36):

Take away. They took it out. Because my niece... how old she is? It's 11 or 12. Yeah?

WT (31:46):

[inaudible] they come down here, 16.

VT (31:53):

Yeah, they took it out. So that's why she came alone. She came United States.

SK (31:57):

Who? Your niece?

VT (31:59):

No. Now my niece still in the camp now.

WT (32:03):

My niece [inaudible]. Because the two guys took from my mother. They don't want my niece come.

SK (32:10):

In Thailand? So she [inaudible].

WT (32:12):

Yeah, they took from the Thailand camp to the Cambodian camp.

SK (32:17):

They took her back to Cambodia?

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VT (32:20):

Because, seems like they want money. Something like that. But they took it out, and my mom still alone. So that's hard. You know? That's not easy get there, and we went to pick her at the airport.

WT (32:34):

But when I was there last summer. I asked one person to go from Cambodia to get my niece to me. They spend \$100 go there, and \$100 go back to [inaudible].

VT (32:53):

That too far. You know? Too far from the Thailand camp and from my house that I live. That's why they go to [inaudible], they want to see.

SK (33:04):

So, you didn't see her when you were in Cambodia?

WT (33:06):

Yeah.

SK (33:08):

Oh, you did see her?

VT (33:08):

Yes, that's right. We-

SK (33:09):

But you had to pay \$200.

WT (33:09):

Yes.

VT (33:09):

Yes. \$200.

WT (33:10):

[inaudible] had a long [inaudible]. Plus, people that [inaudible]. They had to sleep one night from [inaudible] to for my niece to see me.



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SK (33:29):

So she's not free to leave the country there? They're still holding her?

VT (33:33):

Yeah. Now-

WT (33:34):

See, I went to a international before my mother dead. Before my mother pass away. And Captain Flynn. Yeah. Captain Flynn.

VT (33:51):

Yeah, Captain Flynn.

WT (33:54):

She work for the [inaudible]. She said I cannot leave my [inaudible], because [inaudible].

SK (33:54):

Oh.

WT (33:55):

They just want mother...

VT (33:57):

The rule change.

WT (33:57):

... or father, or brother, or sister.

SK (33:57):

Immediate family.

WT (33:57):

Yeah.

VT (33:57):

Mm-hmm (affirmative). That's why we wait, and wait, and wait. So we cannot get [inaudible].

WT (34:06):

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But right now, I heard we can sponsor from Cambodia to United States. I just talked to my wife this morning, and she's still have one brother, two sister, and two....

VT (34:29):

One niece, one nephew.

WT (34:34):

Yeah. To her [inaudible].

VT (34:35):

That you already [inaudible].

WT (34:36):

We have picture. We have picture [inaudible].

VT (34:49):

Sad story, Sheila.

SK (34:50):

Yeah. Yeah.

VT (34:50):

That's why-

SK (34:50):

It's hard to imagine.

VT (34:56):

Now we leave all [inaudible]. This all that we can show.

WT (35:04):

Let's see.

VT (35:04):

We [inaudible] a lot together. This is my sister, here.

WT (35:11):

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Yes. [inaudible].

VT (35:12):

Now she's teacher too, over in Cambodia.

WT (35:13):

[inaudible] when I went there. And she told me her [inaudible] is in college.

VT (35:13):

In Cambodia.

WT (35:13):

[inaudible].

VT (35:13):

Yeah. In Cambodia.

WT (35:23):

[inaudible].

VT (35:26):

Oh. My uncle. He is very tall. [inaudible].

WT (35:31):

This the college.

VT (35:35):

[inaudible].

WT (35:40):

[inaudible].

VT (35:41):

[inaudible].

SK (35:47):

It must have been hard to say goodbye to her, to come back here.

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WT (35:49):  
[inaudible].

VT (35:49):  
Oh, Sheila. All day cry. Especially my daughter, my son.

WT (35:53):  
See this? All these people, uh when I went there we uh make celebration. Yeah. With all the-

VT (36:01):  
They so happy...

SK (36:02):  
Why?

VT (36:02):  
... to see us [inaudible].

SK (36:03):  
[inaudible].

WT (36:03):  
Yeah.

VT (36:03):  
One month very quick. Very quick one month.

SK (36:07):  
Yeah. They [inaudible].

WT (36:09):  
[inaudible] cook, chef.

SK (36:09):  
Wow.

WT (36:20):

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They so happy to see us, and we come close. "Oh, they are people from United States. Oh. Look [inaudible]." They used to say that. These are people in front of the airport. When I went to come back to the United States, and I took a picture. See.

SK (36:42):

Mm-hmm (affirmative). All friends and relatives of yours?

WT (36:45):

Yeah.

VT (36:45):

No.

WT (36:46):

No, it's just-

VT (36:47):

It's not all mine. Different people. You know? They come to wait, to see. They have their brother, sister, [inaudible]. You know? Sometime go to ask "Did you heard this name, that name?" Because they miss to... very, very-

WT (37:01):

See? These are my wife's sisters too.

VT (37:03):

Just married.

WT (37:07):

Just married after we come back. We cannot wait, because we just have one month vacation.

VT (37:14):

[inaudible].

SK (37:35):

Wow.

WT (37:36):

And then we cannot wait.

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SK (37:36):

Oh. But she sent a picture?

VT (37:36):

Yeah.

WT (37:36):

Yeah. She sent these two pictures.

VT (37:36):

This my uncle, this my aunt.

SK (37:36):

[inaudible].

VT (37:36):

There is my brother. [inaudible].

SK (37:36):

Oh.

VT (37:36):

Where? [inaudible]

SK (37:43):

Are you still an electrician here in the United States?

WT (37:46):

No.

SK (37:46):

Doing something else now?

WT (37:47):

Yeah.

SK (37:50):

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I think you might have told me [inaudible], but I forget. Are you starting your own business?

VT (37:50):

Yeah.

SK (37:57):

Or, were you trying to start your own business?

WT (37:57):

Yeah.

VT (37:57):

Because now, Sheila, my husband will get... almost 12 years, right?

WT (38:03):

No, 10.

VT (38:03):

10 year. And got laid off, now we know. I keep telling him. "Go to school." You know? No one can steal education. [inaudible] you know keep like a trick on us. And he got laid off. See? That's very...

WT (38:18):

The one that I'm talking about. That's [inaudible] with my mother and sister to come.

SK (38:18):

Yeah.

WT (38:18):

And then...

SK (38:40):

So did you have to start from the beginning with your education?

VT (38:44):

Yes. I became the first Cambodian teacher in Lowell, in 1985. So I study courses you know every semester. So now, it seem like 120 credit a lot too. But I keep take every semester. One, two, or three. But last year, the year before, I took a lot. Like, complete 10 courses, eight courses.

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But now, Dr. Pearson told me, just two more. That's it. So when I have a degree, I can go to get certified too. Because before you get certified, you have degree first. But they cannot give, because I don't have any proof. And they invite other experts, come. You know?

WT (39:35):

Most of the camp...

SK (39:35):

Hold old were you?

VT (39:39):

Very skinny.

WT (39:41):

Skinny. [inaudible].

SK (39:42):

That's still in Thailand?

WT (39:47):

Yeah.

VT (39:47):

Yeah.

SK (39:48):

While working here?

WT (39:48):

That's one teacher.

VT (39:51):

My husband. Yeah. And I teach young children that come. You know? We have \$10. For one day. Right? \$10. Thailand money. \$10. They call it, \$10. So my husband get \$10, I get \$10 every day. You know? That's why. To survive, at that camp.

SK (40:11):

What year did you leave Cambodia and get into the camp?



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VT (40:16):

'79. '79.

SK (40:19):

So you spent two years-

VT (40:20):

Spent two years, yeah. So I start teach over there almost two year until the name call, that's why I left to United States.

SK (40:30):

And some groups sponsored your coming here?

VT (40:34):

We pick, from I heard, I fill out the form, because a lot of American people went to the camp. They ask more information. They ask me to want to be like one more they understand French a lot. Or English, some. So I work with a agency, Like, a hospital, a lot over there, they need me too. But lucky when I go to interview with the school, they say they want to take me to teacher, and the other one want me to be a nurse over there, because I know I was a midwife in Cambodia also. So seems like one want me, they want me but... finally I teach, because my husband sport teacher, and say, "Oh, teach." And I had my son too on that time. So we both went the same. You know? Teaching. And we get money from that.

SK (41:25):

So your husband taught sports?

VT (41:25):

Yes.

SK (41:26):

And he was an electrician, too?

VT (41:34):

No, in Thailand no electrician. He electrician in Cambodia.

SK (41:38):

Cambodia. Yeah.

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VT (41:40):

Yeah. He get a good job. Like, in here too. Everything, he can do it. That's very good.

SK (41:45):

That's good..

VT (41:45):

Yeah. Have a lot too. You know? If you car really expensive. Seem like little thing he can by himself. So that's very good.

SK (41:56):

Now, did you have any choice about coming to Lowell or...?

VT (42:00):

Oh. The point is, I came the first time, I came to New York.

SK (42:06):

Oh.

VT (42:06):

Yes. The first arrive at New York, February 18th. I remember. I never forget. '81. And I came New York almost one year before. Very hard at New York. I live at Brooklyn. My son often sick, sick, sick. And I took subway. My husband came early. Two weeks he had go to work, because they don't provide welfare or food stamp. So he go to work, because say, "I have only one son." So that's why he go to work very far. You know? Take subway, and 15 day in United States. \$3, something he work there.

VT (42:50):

And after that, friend in mine live in Lowell. He call and say... because he know my background. Because usually, I learn in Cambodia. Have a lot education. And he say, "Come here." Because hear everything I told, because I have a hard time. Take subway, bring my son, go to the clinic that's very far, change different train. You know? Almost very, very hard. And he call, and I told about life in New York. And he say, "Come here, because in here, they have education, easy to go to hospital, easy you know to go everywhere."

VT (43:28):

So we decide. Say, "Oh, maybe we can." And after that, is why we came in Lowell in 1982. January fifth. Yeah? January fifth, I came in Lowell. So, came in Lowell, that's why I say, "We

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cannot survive, because we don't have any welfare and food stamp." I decide to go to work, too. And on that time, '81, '82. It's very, very hard to get a job. So they took me, interview me [inaudible] they choose only me to work at company product for glasses. Because I can understand. Hard to find a job on that time.

VT (44:11):

So after that, I worked at the Prince, because I have Deanna. And my son go to school, and he missed school. He missed school one day, because the bus didn't pick up. So I make a phone call at Greenhalge School. So I make a phone call to say... Because the bus didn't pick up, I drop my son to school. And that time, that's really that I start to be a teacher. And Miss [inaudible], my son teacher, had problem with the Cambodian kid. They cannot understand what parents say. On that time I brought my son in there, he said, "But you have to speak Cambodian with the other parents, because they cannot communicate." So I talk, and I tell English that she say, "Oh, you..." She asked me about my background, "What do you do?", and say, "Oh, you should apply, because they have job opening. They want to looking for Cambodian teacher."

VT (45:08):

So she call right away. Because Mr. Gallagher... She spoke with Mr. Gallagher, principal at Greenhalge. And she called to [inaudible]. And one day I worked over there. I have good salary too, at Prince. And they call me, interview on Friday, and they let me work on Monday. I get job, that's why I became a first teacher. And after that, I teach Vietnamese, Laos, Cambodian. At one class. You know? So they don't understand. I cannot speak much. I know how to count in Chinese, in Vietnamese, or in Laos. But not much word. You know? My husband know a lot. Like, different languages. He know a lot. You know? The word to find. You know? That's very good for him too. That's why I start teacher in 1985.

SK (46:02):

That's great.

VT (46:03):

That's right. Look at that story. I still do my resume on that, because I never forget. So I write down, because... You know? Who knows? That is for my children to see what happened. You know? The sequence of life. So I already write down, that's why I took classes. Sometimes they ask about writing on our lives. Very, very share. And when you see the sequence look at, that's sometime I have free time, I lay down, and with my husband, and we thought about it. How we all now. You know? Seem like it's amaze. We don't think we have everything, and we do.

VT (46:51):

Look at our life. We supposed to be killed on that generation. We so skinny. My husband work very hard. You know? Now he's very hurt, still hurt. A lot of things he hold. Because you cannot

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say no. If they say you have to do, you have to do. But me, lucky. I'm lucky on my generation. I'm so lucky too. And that's working so hard. Because, seem like I don't know. That's why I say my life very, very lucky. When I work with my parents, I'm very lucky too. Because I have my sister do all the work. And very good, because only one for me is study. I really love study. That's why I say, I still remember my parents. Especially my father. Because he say, "No one can steal your education." He worked very hard for me. You know?

VT (47:48):

Because, in Cambodia, because my family is not rich, but it's not very poor. In the middle class. But Cambodian people, if you a girl, you cannot get high education. Most have to be stay home. Some that have high education, very rich. You know? Seems like. Or lucky. For me, very lucky. You know? Seem like I finish school in my country, and I go to capital, I finish study. And I have name. Some people support me to go to more education. That's why I finish my education very high in Cambodia. And lucky, and all the communist generation very lucky too. And I never lie on that time. I always tell the truth, because he say...

**End of tape 1 of 1, side 1 of 2.**