

"Chee Vang's Immigration Journey"

I was born in a village called 'Mon-ya', Laos on August 5, 1946. I have six siblings total, but two have passed away now. I have two brothers who know live in Laos, even after the war. My parents passed away before the Vietnam War began, and during that time, I was married to Pa Ying Vue, a soldier. We were married for about a year, until we had our first child. We have had a total of five children, three daughters and two sons. Before we fled Laos, my family and I traveled to the village 'Plum Pu Na Thon' preparing to cross the Mekong River. The night we were going to cross, I gathered bamboo, plastic bags, and rubber tubes to ensure that my family and I would safely cross the river without being caught or fear of drowning. My husband was already off to war, leading a troop of 12 men to help the CIA American troops and General Vang Pao fight against the Lao troops. The night we crossed the Mekong River, it was about 11 o'clock at night when my family and I crossed to Thailand. When we finally got across the river, we walked the jungles of Thailand for five days without food or shelter. After the 5 days of walking, I decided to settle in the jungles in a safe area for my family to rest and try to live in refuge and hiding until conditions were safer.

We lived in the jungles of Thailand for about three years. During those three years, my husband Pa Ying was killed in action. We held a small funeral for my husband in the jungle where I lived for the traditional 3 nights. From there, I decided to move my family into the refugee camps. The Thai government placed my family and me in the 'Nom Kai' refugee camp around the year of 1977. From there we lived in the camps for about a year and a half only until we were approved to immigrate to the United States in 1979. The refugee camp had poor living conditions with fenced barbed wires, long food lines, and crowded barracks.

On the day of my interview, it was with an American man named Jerry. The interview process was long and tedious. I can remember him asking me questions about my parents' name, my village, my siblings, my husband's name, his whereabouts, my husband's family's whereabouts, and my children, and the list goes on and on and on. However, once the American interviewer discovered that my husband was killed in action while working for the secret army, the door opened for me and my family to gain access to the United States. We were sponsored by a Hmong man, Mr. Thao, who helped my family immigrate to the United States because he didn't want my children to starve and suffer a poor life in Thailand since they no longer had a father around.

When we landed in the United States, we lived in Des Moines, Iowa. The government funded our living by providing us with money and funds to pay our electric bills, rent, groceries, clothing, and basic needs. We lived in Iowa for about two months until we moved to Tulsa, Oklahoma and lived there for about three to four years because we had some relatives down there. From then, we moved to Lacrosse, Wisconsin and lived there for most of our lives, for about 10-12 years. My daughters were already married at this time and my two sons were still bachelors.

I now live with my youngest son, Xai Vue in Hudson, Wisconsin. He is now married with three children, and I help watch their children for them. Looking back at my life and my journey, I've come a long way. I struggled as a single mother, and I managed to raise all of my children to be fairly well human-beings. I am happier now living in America because my family is no longer poor and can take care of themselves because the living conditions are better here than in Thailand or Laos. I am very grateful for all of the people who have helped me when it was just me alone with my children, and I can truly say that life in America is a blessing.