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On my license I was born on March 2nd, 1972 in Laos. But this last weekend, I went to a funeral and my cousin was there and my cousin said she was married in February 1972. And when she was married, I was about 8 months already so, I think I've gained one more year. So to be safe, I think I was born in the spring of 1971.

So, probably a little village in Laos, you probably can't find it in Hmong words (is from Lao.) The only memory I have of it is me climbing down the steps into the waterhole, where we get the water. You know the spring water where it comes out and we get the water to use, so um, I was born there. And then after when the communist took over in around '75, we left Laos and my dad was a Nai Kong (Sergeant), so he kind of knew what was going on. And I found out why we left in 1999 when I took my mom and dad back to Laos. And on the way there, my dad and I had a lot of time, so we talked a little and he said the reason why he left was because of his position.

He got two visits from the Communist Lao that took over. And the first visit, they came and kind of talked to him. The second time they came, two guys came, it was an older guy and younger guy and they just, you know, kind of wanted to chit chat with you so my dad made a point to ask the young guy, "So, I know what the older guy does, what do you do?" He's about 16 years old, so the guy says, "oh my job is I train to kill people", so he told my dad that and my dad says, "We got to go". So in the middle of the night, we packed everything and left. And I didn't know my uncles and everybody also came with us, not until I went back to Laos and I sat with them and then they told me and they said that they came too. And half way through, in the middle of the night, they got scared and went back to the village before everyone found out but my dad couldn't stay, so our family continued on the track. And you know in Laos, they have these check points, so my dad had the proper paperwork and his excuse was he was going down there for the festival. There was some festival around that time, so umm, he was able to go through the check point. We were on the taxi mostly all the way down to Vientiane. And then we

hang around Vientiane for a while, and then my dad hired couple Lao or Thai, Thai Issan maybe. They had farms on the other side of Thailand, and so our plan was, we were going to dress up as servants or workers; workers who work for the Thai farmers, right. But we couldn't go as a whole family because they would know, so the plan was my brother and sister went first, then the next day I went by myself. I was probably like three or four. And the whole trip I remember getting on the boat and the next thing I remember was I was playing with another kid next to a house that was on a stilt and either it was that night or I just went to sleep, or I took a nap or whatever with either the next day or just that evening, I didn't know. They took me to a bus stop to the side of the road and the bus came. The bus stopped and they put me on the bus and I went to the back of the bus. And my mom and my three brothers, no my mom and my two brothers, younger brothers, on the bus and they took us to Nong Khai. And then we stayed there for a while. I think we stayed there for a week and then my dad showed up.

'75, you know probably to spring of '75, and then we were the first few families that moved into Ban Vinai when they opened. I remember me and 2 other kids, they would pay us a couple bahts to dig up the post holes, you know those holes...so me and two other kids, we dug a hole for the post so, I helped build Ban Vinai as a 5 year old.

My dad is Nhia Zong Thao and then my mom is Koua Yang.

No, that was just when we moved. Total, in total, we have five sisters and five guys, so three brothers and four sisters. I'm number three. So it is my oldest brother, my sister than me and then the rest of the kids. My youngest sister was the only one that was born in the US. There were three siblings. A brother and two sisters, who were born in the camp in Ban Vinai, and the rest were born in Laos. Yeah, we were one of the fortunate families that everybody made it. You know cause, it reminds me of whenever I think about my family like that, I'm reminded of my friends. And I have Hmong friends in Junior High, and I couldn't understand, why back then, but I do know; a lot of those friends did not have a mom or a dad, or they were living with their brother or their cousin. A lot of those times was because, you know, they died on the way here, so now, back then you couldn't connect the two, but now you are kind of like, "oh ok, now I know why this guy did not have a mom or a dad".

Oh man, you know that in the camp, you can't even afford to dream, right? You'd be lucky you had enough food that day, or water or whatever, so you couldn't afford to dream. And you come to the US, and you know, I had to learn my ABCs in second or third grade, and when I got here it was towards the end of the school year already, so they started me towards the end of second grade. I really learned my ABCs in third grade, and so you know, you were surrounded by everybody who was poor, right? All your friends were poor, and 90% of your friends were in the projects, you know, so you hang in the projects. Everyone was poor. You know, you see a used car and one of your older friends has a used car, you were like wow, pretty thrilled he has a car. You know, you'd be lucky to have a bike, you know it was just normally those things you didn't dream about, stuff like that but as I got older, I knew I wanted to go to college. I didn't know what for, but I knew I wanted to go to college regardless of what I wanted to study or what I wanted to do, to go to college, but for sure I didn't know what I wanted to do and you know our parents they didn't know. They had no guidance, they only knew how to farm and they

can't really guide you and so you kind of figure out in college that there are some possibilities of what you can do and you know even me. I picked the college that I picked, University of Minnesota Morris. I went there because I liked the campus, right? I didn't even know what they were teaching there. And they took me on a campus visit through some high school program, and I saw the campus and I'm like "it's pretty cool, I like it so I'll go here." And I didn't declare my major until the end of my freshmen year. And I was in my dorm and I was flipping through the program, 'cause you know the school had a pamphlet, and they tell you all this stuff, it says here are our majors and you must declare one. And I'm like, "oh shoot I have to, so I just picked one, which was political science. And within four years I graduated with that. But I did enough art work, you know, I was into painting. Ok, the reason why I was into paint and to drawing pictures and stuff, the reason why I was really into that stuff was, in the camps, we were really poor so we didn't have anything. So we had a stick and there was sand, so we would draw in the sand, we would draw scenes of helicopters shooting tanks and armies, it was almost like the 'Paj Ntaub'. And we draw all those scenes everywhere. And then you wipe it clean and start over. And then we came to the US, we didn't have toys, we didn't have money. We had paper and pencil. So then my brothers and I drew a lot. I'm sure a lot of the Hmong kids did too, because we were poor right? So it was one of those deals. And then when I went to college, that stayed with me. And I took a lot of art classes as electives, and by the end of my 4th year I had enough to get a minor. But if add a couple more, a couple more classes it would've gotten a major and so I stayed my 5th year and got my major in Studio Art. The emphasis was in painting. Got out, didn't know what to do, so we did theatre right? It was almost like joining the circus.

We came on March 12th, 1980. So I remember those days, March 12th, 1980. And there was a big snow blizzard, and we came to Minnesota, yeah we came directly to Minnesota. There was a stop in Chicago, I remember, and they gave us coats there because we had shorts, t-shirt, and sandals right? And it was the middle of winter, there was a big snow storm, so we came directly to Minnesota. First time we saw snow and didn't know what it was. And that first morning I took a spoonful of dirty snow and ate it to test it out. And I knew what ice was, so I told everybody it was just ice. So that was our introduction to Minnesota; eating dirty snow. Our sponsor was this catholic family, and they were in Brooklyn Center. And we stayed with them for about, I think a good month, and then they found us a house in Minneapolis. And then I lived in Minneapolis until, almost until '89. ; 80-'89. In '89 my parents bought a house in Brooklyn Center and we went up there and I graduated from Park Center and then went off to college and came back. And by the time I came back in 1995, I graduated by then my dad has bought his second house in Blaine and then around in '96 I moved to Saint Paul. And then I have been in Saint Paul, I lived in Saint Paul from '96 all the way into 2010. And now I live, eh, you can say back and forth, majority of the time is in Florida, and average of about 3-4 months up here in Minnesota.

You know, it was a lot, yeah it was very difficult. Because you know we were brand new to the state and it was just right after the Vietnam War, and I assumed at time, a lot of kids hated Asians, right? Because they assumed we were all Vietnamese, and so yeah it was tough, even in elementary school, we get spit on, we get pushed and at recessed you didn't have a word, or the language to defend yourself or whatever. But I remember fighting a lot, not because I wanted to but because I wanted to defend myself, you know.

I'm not that kind of guy to just take something. I fight back, and yeah I remember fighting a lot...Elementary, junior high, high school, not only me, I talked to a lot of friends and they also. Maybe it was different in Saint Paul, 'cause you know there was more Hmong kids. Maybe if you were a bigger group, they'd mess with you less, but when you were in Minneapolis, you were lucky there was 1 or 2 other Hmong kids in your classroom. And you know when you get picked on, you have to defend yourself, and so that, and learning my ABCs, that's pretty much it.

I started (school) when I was 11, so I was still in elementary school, technically you had to be 12. So I followed my brother, and you know, tagged along and joined the (scout) troop. And I stayed well after my 20's. Technically I'm not a scout anymore, but I stayed and helped the other kids. But on the flip side, in school you fight, you end up fighting a lot to defend yourself. But then the scouts was one of the best experience in learning how to be an American too. And that was our exposure to America, we learn all these values; loyal, trustworthy, help out a friend, being courteous, kind, and obedient. These are all the Boy Scout values. And so you are taught not to swear. We can't cuss, and do good deeds. Lately and the neat thing about that scout troop is, we have a brother troop, troop 100. We have another troop that the same church sponsored, troop 33. And troop 33 was filled with fluent white kids from the suburbs. So you have these poor Hmong kids and these fluent white kids from the suburbs. And couple times a year we go camping together. And I made a lot of friends outside the Hmong community from that experience. And those guys are still really good friends of mine, even today, you know. And so scouting was something that you know was really helpful. And it was one of those things where we could escape and maybe learn about America in a safer setting. And it was just all Hmong kids learning scouting through that troop together. And so almost all of the scouts, well in the beginning all the leaders, the troop were these Caucasian white guys right? And they got really good hearts, and they put a lot of values into us, and as the troop got older, some of us go back and volunteer and we drive. And the troop is still thriving today, you know. And just those kids outside of those group, a lot of them are, today are movers and shakers within our community. And a lot of them would say, you know they learned their leadership skills and dedication from being in the scouts. And so I still run into a lot of those guys who are doing great stuff in the Hmong community who came out of that troop. Each year, we have anywhere between, I say the average would be about between 60 and 70 kids every year. And then there were some years where we would have over 100 kids, you know and we didn't really have a budget. When I look at other youth programs with the non-profits and stuff, and I compare to our troops and our budget is so small, and we served so many kids. That was also another lessons that we learned was to be self-sufficient, you know, and so we were so efficient with the little money that we made, that we had.

Each person has a different impact you know, and so, in scouting, the scout leader Dave Moore, he instilled a lot of good values in us. Being a parent, a good parent, probably my mom, my dad, he was always at the meeting you know, at the Hmong meeting, rallies, he's never there. But he still instilled some good values. But my mom, my mom made sure, and painting wise, artistic, probably a couple of my professors at college that really helped shaped me artistically to what I am today, political wise, some of the old, like Kevin Foley, one of those guys whose been, god he's been campaigning forever. He's part of the Jimmy Carter campaign. That's how old he is, and so these guys did know a

lot about politics, they're the ones that I was on the phone constantly every day, running through scenarios, how to campaign and all that stuff. It all depends on what I'm doing that each person has a certain level of influence so I can't really say a particular person.

So I'm married to, my wife's name is Lee Vang. She's an artist, she's a singer. So the reason why she married me was, I told her I didn't know she was a singer. I'm like, who? I don't know who you are lady, 'cause every guy she meets wants to date her. Because she's a singer, because she's a Hmong singer. I'm like, I don't know who you are so I got her interested. So that's my secret, right... So I married, I got 2 kids, 2 girls; they're 10 and 13 now. But I don't know, I've been married since 2000, so what, 14 years... 15... 14 years now. I've been with my wife (for) 17 years, We were together for 4 years before we got married. So we've been together for about 17 years, quite a while. It's still going strong, not only that, she is my business partner, so not only my wife. But my business partner and we do a lot of stuff together. Yeah, I met her after college, we were doing theatre together, and I was in the theatre company long enough where I wasn't the best actor, but I knew how to do every job in the theater company. So I kind of ran the theatre company in a way, and we met through the theatre company. So the classic story is, we're stuck in the hotel for three months right? What are you going to do you know, so we were on tour in Milwaukee. And they put us in the hotel for three months, and we got to know each other. And became good friends, and then we ended up getting married, and so you know, it was pretty cool. But you know, I guess you can say at the time, I was a little unusual than most Hmong guys cause I was 28 and my wife was 30. Right? So she is two years younger... older, now that my new age, she is only a year older, but at the same time I was 28 before I got married. And by then, most of my friends already had kids, and they were almost teens already you know. So I just started, so I am one of those guys who married pretty late, and compared to my buddies, I grew up with.

There were probably no more than 10 at any time. And we, kind of, become like a close family, because there was nothing there, you know. We had to come down to the Twin Cities to get the Asian food or spices that we could make food with, so we kind of became family there. And there wasn't that many Hmong, and not that many Asians either, so we weren't just family with the Hmong kids, but we were family with the other Asian kids you know. Even the adopted Asian kids, we were really close with them, and so, I would say, it was a good experience for me. Umm, fresh out of High School, now you're in college, you had no one to watch over you, right? You're on your own. You got all the time, no curfew. It was an adjusting period, you know, you had to learn how to adjust yourself, cause boy, I did really do good my freshmen year, by the time I got to my sophomore year, I was on the probation list. So then I figured, I got to do something or I am going to get kicked out. So I worked really, really hard, and got my grade point average up to a B-. So, before I graduate, a low B now. Yeah I got a double major in political science and studio art.

Oh man, he didn't mind that, but at the same time I remember our conversation. When I was getting close to graduating, he came to my graduation and he said 'Now you're done, what are you going to do?' And I don't know what I said to him, and he wanted me to go into law school and I had to give him the bad news, and be like, "no, I'm not going to law school, I didn't go to school for you man, I went to school for myself." I got to figure

something out, so yeah, I didn't go to law school, it didn't work out, then I went into the teaching profession. There was a program where they trained you to become a teacher within a year. And so I went to that program, and got my teaching license as well. I taught for one year and I hated it. It was called "CUE" program. It was through St. Thomas. University of St. Thomas and it was a Master's program, so I did my first year and if I went back my second year I would've gotten my Master's Degree. But that wasn't important. What was important was getting the teaching credentials, so I got my teaching licenses and I taught as a substitute and student. But they basically gave you a full load anyways, so I really wasn't a student-teacher. I was teaching an old class, and then I taught one year, two years, no, outside of that, no I think it was just one. After I got my license and it wasn't me man, I, you know, I love teachers and they're great, but I wasn't a teacher. I didn't have the patience for little kids, you know. I need some interactions, where I need to be stimulated intellectually, maybe I could handle college, but I just can't handle Junior High and elementary kids. It just, you know, you just got to know, right? Know who you are.

A couple of my friends, who I met through doing theatre, including my wife said, hey, let's start an arts organization. 'Cause the theatre's gone, we could just incorporate the theatre into the arts organization and include other artist. Because by training, I'm a visual artist, and my wife's in theatre and another friend Nouqou Thao, she's a writer. Right, and so, ok let's do this, where we encompass all the arts discipline into the theatre. So then, we launched the Center for Hmong Arts and Talents. We are called, "CHAT" and every year we do a theatre production. We put some organized gallery shows, print out...print out poetry, journals and stuff. And did an arts festivals, one in the summer. So, it was interesting how it got started. We didn't have any money. I think we had \$5,000 left from the theatre, so before the theatre closed, they were just like, how about we just give you the \$5,000. So no money, this arts organization, no money. So I went to the Board and I said, well I created the board, so a group of friends, they became the board members. So you know, you got to have board members, so I said to them, I said, "look, there's no money, if you guys hire me as the director, the executive director I'll work for free. Until there's money, and when there is money, you can pay me." You can't lose with that, right? So I had no grant writing skills, I don't know nobody in the foundation world, but we had sample proposals from the theater, and some relationship when it was the theatre. And so, I was probably 26, 25...26, I took on this task. And to my surprise, I raised \$175,000. And the second year, I raised \$300,000. I'm like, wow, you know, and so then after the second year I left and my wife took over and so we ran. She ran the arts organization for a couple more years. She probably did a better job than I did, you know. I know how to build, but boy, I can't run anything. I left, because by then I got a Bush Fellowship. Through my proposal to Bush was, 'Hey, when I got out of college, I start painting the Hmong migration series, cause, right now it is at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, they bought all of it and I probably had 10 pieces by then. It took me about 4 years and I had about 10 pieces. And, I wrote my proposal to the Bush foundation and said, 'Hey, if you give me this 40 grand, I'll do nothing at home but just sit and paint, you know. And so to my surprise, they gave me 40 grand, right? I'm like wow! that's pretty cool. So I took the money. I traveled to Laos, Thailand, and China, and learned about the History. Met a lot of people, and learned about the Hmong history. And then from that, I spent a good whole year just painting the whole Hmong migrations series. And it ended up being 50 pieces, and about the whole story of the Hmong people. And I still

remember our first show; the Arts center, CHAT. You know, I think it was the foundation money, I forgot, but we rented these big tents, and we pitched it at the Sunrise (Market) parking lot, and I did a show in the community. When the series was done, we created, we put it in a maze where they walk through it. And for them to see and walk through these pieces, and see them in chronological order. We didn't do any advertisement, but because people were shopping, they saw the big tents and went in there. And from word of mouth, there was 500 people who came to see the show, just in the weekend and it was pretty cool. You see mom and dad's coming in with their kids, and they're explaining to their kids what the story was. And their own personal story was running through the wars and all that stuff. So the whole time while I was getting my teaching degree, building the Arts center, I was painting. So I quit CHAT to continue to paint. And so when I finished painting, I didn't know what to do, right? Did a couple shows.

So anyways, and so a buddy of mine, in '98, there was KQRS, a radio station, made these disparaging remarks about the Hmong community. A couple friends, the artist friends were like, "oh no, you can't do that, you need to apologize," and then they even made more comments. And so then, we organized and protested, and got people to withdraw their advertisement money. And to our surprises, he (disc jockey) apologized. The management of KQRS came and apologized to the Hmong community. I think to me at that point, I understood the power of organizing, and being involved politically, and it was the same year when Jessie Ventura won governor. And two years later, he was like, if any Hmong person runs, I'm going to help them out. I remember calling you, Lee Pao (Xiong), and said hey let's do it. And next day I went and registered my name and ran as an independent with no political experiences. And I remember talking with my friends, and our decision to run was, One: it was important that the community got involved politically, Two: it was important that we learned the skills, how to campaign, and we weren't going to go back to school to learn so we were like hey, let's just learn it on the fly, and Three: I knew in my heart that chance of me winning was slim, and so hopefully we gained enough skills and so in 10 years later, someone can put this together and eventually win the race. So the first time, first year I ran, boom, I got crushed pretty bad. Got beat up pretty bad. In (House District) 65 it was the most diverse district in the whole state of Minnesota. And it has a large Hmong population. You're looking at about 30%, about a third in the whole population of that district. And so we ran and registered a lot of new voters. But it wasn't enough to win. And whether it was through the lining of the stars, or sheer luck, 2 years later the guy that I ran against with and lost too, retires, right? And now it's an open seat, and now with all the skills that we learned and gained through campaigning, and through the connections and through the voters, the Hmong voters, who are now engaged, they are active now.

I decided to run again, and it was the year right after Senator Moua had won, and the community was energized. So I put a campaign together and won on my second try. And to be cleared, I was more aligned with the democrats. When I interned at the Capitol, I was more with the Democrats, and I actually tried to apply for a job with (Senator) Paul Wellstone. I didn't get hired, but my good friend got hired. And I mean, she did a great job. I would hire her before I hire myself. I have always been a democrat. just not formalized, and when Jessie Ventura asked to see if anyone in the Hmong community would run, I mean, to me it was how can you turn down a sitting Governor,

that is willing to help and I won't regret it at all. That I went into an independent party and ran against the democrats. If I had not done that, I don't think I would've gotten the skills. And even though I lost, I proved to a lot of people that I was capable of getting votes. That year that I lost, I got the most percentage points of independent candidates, most of them were like 5-6% points, right? I had 25 you know. I had the most percentage points, almost as much as Jessie Ventura. So I was able to generate a lot of votes and I think that some people were impressed. Even though I lost, people were impressed by it and I gained a lot of skills through it. And so when Andy Dawkins decided to retire, with the skills we already had, we had a legitimate chance. And I was smart enough and needed to come back and be a democrat again to have a shot. And we went to the caucus and jammed pack the caucuses. And went to the convention. And remind you, we had to do this on the fly. We have never been to a convention and we had to do this on the fly. But I was able to get the endorsement on the first ballot. You know, it was a lot of reservation, because I wasn't in the democratic party and I went against a democratic party. So there was some hesitation, but I brought in my own democrats. And they helped put me over the 60%.

Even though all we do is make decisions, all you do is, you go there and you decide this or that, that's all we do. It was still really stressful. Stress was real. I know the stress was real because of this. The minute I got elected to the day I quit, if I woke up at 2 in the morning, I know I would not be able to sleep, 'cause I'm always thinking about certain issues or what's going on in the community. 'Cause your mind was always working. The day I quit, I woke up at two in the morning and went back to bed like that. So I went back to sleep just like that, so the stress wasn't there, blood pressure, I mean I had high blood pressure, cholesterol, cause we sit a lot you know.

There are days where we sit for 24 hours, basically, and listening to testimonies, and deciding what's right and what's wrong for the state. And so that part of it was pretty intense. And there were days when I would wake up before my family does. And when I get home, all of them are asleep already. So you don't see them, even though you were in the same house. The scheduling, and there was a lot of commitment on your time, either at the legislature, or if not you are a constituent, also being Hmong and the Hmong community needing your help. And so there is a lot of stuff to juggle with, and then half way through my legislature, I started my own business too, so I had all this stuff going on too. And so the lack of time is really a big challenge. So you know I loved serving there and you learn a lot, and I served for 8 years.

My wife and I started an assisted living business where we have the housing and they come in and they rent from us and we take care of them. And so the first business, the first idea or beginning was because grandma needed one and we couldn't find one that cooked Hmong food for her. So we approached the county, and so then, yeah, there is a need, and so ok, let's do it. We did it, so we got a single family home. The first one we filled it up. The second one, we filled it up. And the third one, there wasn't any more Hmong people anymore. The fourth one, there was no Asian and then I did the fifth one. I did a 35 unit, like an apartment building. And by then, there wasn't any more Hmong clients. And so in the beginning, it was just to serve the Hmong clients. And so we maxed out. But the business was good, we liked the business. And even though I'm not in the legislature, I'm still helping people, especially the elderly, low income, individuals

with no place to go so we're there as a service, I mean it's a private business. But we are still taking care of a lot of charity work, so it's going well. And it was a time where the business grew to where we had almost 50 employees. So it was significant enough to where it required my full time too. And when you have 50 employees, 50 families that depend on that paycheck to get them through the day, and so you kind of feel obligated to those employees. That you need to make sure the business is viable so the employees have a job. And so it was to a point where the business can support my wife and I finally. Where I don't have to do any other work. And so I decided to quit, to really just focus on the business, and expanding, and building. And right now, we are expanding, we are looking at adding 33 more units to the existing 35 units. We got enough land to do on the side and do 40 units down in Florida. So not only are we expanding in Florida, but we are expanding in other states as well.

New perspectives, I keep telling people, I've lived three life times already. One was the arts, the poor guy, the poor artist starving, trying to get by with a couple thousand dollars a year. Became a politician, and now I am the business man. I feel like I'm living three life times. It's going well. I enjoy it. New challenges. When we started the business, all of them were in Saint Paul, and most of them but one is in Maplewood. But all is in the metro area here.

Well, I have a long term goal. My long term goal is, and I'm still pursuing it, even though someday I feel like it may be tough. Since I'm in the business world, entrepreneurship, and being in politics, I see how important money is. Without money, you can't do anything. You need money. If you have some passion about some cause, you probably can get somewhere, but boy, if you don't have money, you can't do anything. You don't have money at home, who is going to pay your mortgage. You can't be out there doing your cause, right? You can't find enough funds or whatever, but money is very important. And I saw that at the legislature, and being an entrepreneur, you are, your job is to make money, your service is to help people, you're making money. But really your job is to generate money. And so my goal is to get to a point where I have enough and I could set aside a large chunk of it and not miss. You see, the key is when you don't miss your money, that's when you got enough. So my goal is to set aside a large chunk of it as an endowment. To pursue some of the cause, causes or issues that I have passion about or become a foundation where I could funnel money or help support issues, organizations that are doing good work. I mean I don't have to do it myself, but I would like to get to a point where I can support them. And so, that's one of my goal, and that's what keeps me going is to get to that point, where I have enough to help others. My other goal is to make more than I made last year. That is always the overdriving goal of an entrepreneur. This years is the spreadsheet, let's see if we can double that in a year or two.

I'm just concentrating on business, and I don't do any other work but building my business. When I'm waiting for certain projects to come online, there's a lot of down time. When I'm busy, I'm really, really, busy, but there are times when I had nothing to do. So I picked up Deep Sea fishing. Like I told my brother, right now where I live, I know exactly the season and which fish bite and what bait to use. I can't exactly put on the right date, but I know the timeline when they bite, and so right now we target on certain fish when they are biting the hardest and so I got that done. So I might be bored

and so then I moved into not just fishing with a line, I am doing scuba diving. I dive down, it's beautiful, it's beautiful world down there. A beautiful world. And I dive done, and I shoot, and they say what do you do with all the fish that you kill and catch? I usually give them away to old people. There are some older Hmong individuals that has never seen an ocean fish in their life until I give them to them. And there is a couple of them that they enjoy my fish.

You know, I keep thinking about that and I don't think there has been one moment that I could say, yes that moment, but I feel like I have always been very lucky. I mean, don't get me wrong, I worked really hard, for everything I got. Like when I was running for the legislator, I lost and I ran really hard. And I wore out three pairs of shoes that summer. And the business, I worked really hard. But at the end of the day, I've been really lucky to the point where almost everything I pursue, I got some success at it. Like my paintings, right? Who knew? I didn't know. My plan wasn't to get to where it is, but after I painted it, and I finished it, the Minneapolis Institute of Arts bought it. I mean it's a big collection with 50 pieces. And it's a significant moment in an artist when a huge major institution is willing to buy your stuff at that level, so it's a big deal. So I have found success with the arts. Politics, even though I stumbled some, in the end I found success. And in the business, there was a point where I almost died. Man, try using 30-40 grand a month. You know where the next worry is. You don't know where the next money is to fill. I was losing a lot of money. I must've lost like \$200 thousand in six months, and that's \$200 thousand I don't have. But at the end of the day, we're able to pay all those off and the business became successful. And so, I just, I don't think there was ever one moment. But I think my whole life, when I put all those together, I am pretty lucky. But then it reminds me of what my professors said, "When a guy plays golf, he does the first shot, they call hole in one with one shot, and some guy said it is luck." Yeah it is luck, but at the same time if you keep practicing it, eventually you'll get a better chance of getting luck with a hole in one than a guy who never hit a ball in his whole life. So there's a part of me that says its luck. That I'm living comfortably right now. I can provide for my family. I don't have to work too hard if I don't want too. I can use some of my time leisurely, if I need it. A part of me says all that is luck. But to say another part of me says, you worked really hard at it, so I think both of them coming together is working hard and making good decisions. And having good luck that kind of helped make my life easier than most people I think. I don't know,. I feel very fortunate with what I got.

It all depends where you are in your life, you know. Like the, the arts, my stuff being at the museum and they are holding and collecting that forever is a significant contribution to the community. And its one of those things where most, lot of people they die they want to leave a legacy or whatever. Like write a book, or whatever. That's kind of like my piece. I can't write a book man, but I left 50 pieces telling the story of the Hmong people, in the museum where people can see for a long time. So that in itself is significant. Being one of the first few Hmong to ever get elected, and right now you have create this moment and meeting young guys who are volunteer for other campaign and say, "hey man, I saw you run, I was in elementary school and I saw you won and you came to speak at my school, man it made me so proud. That's why I'm doing this campaign right now." I'm just hoping one day. And so the political stuff, being a trail

blazer and in getting the community to care about the political process, then getting the elective officials who are now Hmong to care about the community. And now we become this power broker in the city, really, you know. And so that part is important. And then the financial stability with the business for my wife and kids and myself. And employment that I created for the 50 employees and their family. All of those are important at different levels. But at the same, having the same value, depending on how you evaluate it, and whatever the situation is, it's tough to pick one over the other, you know.

I think about that all the time. And that's something that because someone like my daughters, man, they don't know any hardship, you know what I'm saying? They need something, they come and they say a couple of words and I go buy it for them. I told them I said, look, "when we came to the US, I was lucky I had a pair of underwear and three pairs of dirty socks ok? That's all I had, I had to wash them constantly just so I could have clean underwear and sock." So I think about working in the refugee camps, we had to kill rats; we didn't kill rats so that we could keep them away, we killed rats so that we could eat them because we were hungry. Coming from a place where we had to kill rats to supplement our food to a place where we have world-class education. All paid for free, and all you needed to do was show up, and put in an effort. What I want to say to the younger generations is that, if you don't take advantage of what America is giving you, it's a shame man. It's a shame if you don't take advantage of what's out there. The free public institutions. I mean it's not free, and the state pays for it, but it doesn't cost you a penny out of your pocket other than the taxes that you pay. All those institutions, if you're smart and do well, there's a lot of these scholarships. They make it so easy to do business. You just have to have a good idea and work hard at it. You can't be stupid with your money. If anybody, any individual, any Hmong kid is thinking about this stuff and doesn't take advantage of the institution, the banking, the business atmosphere here, the openness; like who would think that a little guy from the refugee camp could be state representative. No one would have ever thought of it. If you don't take advantage of what this country offers us, it's an embarrassment to yourself and to your family. You know we didn't just get on a plane and showed up. A lot of people died on the way here. So many generations died from china along the path to get us to America. I would say this to myself, I know that none of these people got the chance to live the life that I'm living right now. All of them are my ancestors and it's a shame if I don't take advantage of it and live the best life that I can for them. They never got a chance to do it. So it's really my obligation to live the best life; a worthwhile life while we're here on earth. For all the many generations of Hmong that never ever got the chance. If you really think about this, in the first time in the history of our people that the whole population has access to first-class education. If you really think about it, that just blows your mind. If you go back to Laos, some kid will never fathom that. My message is, you have to make your life count; take advantage of all the opportunity that this country gives; and don't waste your life because so many people died to get you here. Even though I left the legislature, part of me still makes me regret that I left too soon. Because while I was there, I could do that kind of stuff. If I see a need in the community, all I needed to do was convince one of my friends who is a chairman of some finance committee and say hey, "the community needs money for this," and they say, "ok how much?" When you're in a seat of power you have access to that, and that's the piece that still eats at me when I'm not there anymore. When I was there I had the ability to send guys like you (Lee Pao) and the

senator and get them going. When you're not there, you're not there and you can't do anything about it. That's the piece that makes me, still eats at me. I feel like I'm not doing enough because I gave up this very important, very powerful position to concentrate on myself. I feel guilty, I feel very guilty, but at the same time I need to go in this new direction as well, so there's this guilt in me. Down the road I'll get to the same path again, while in the meantime, I gave up an avenue that the community had and that's why I still feel guilty, because when I was there I could still do some stuff for the community. You can't do anything if you're not there.

Transcription completed by:

This project is made possible through the generous funding of the Digital Public Library of America Digital Hubs Pilot, which is supported by the Digital Public Library of America with funding provided by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

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