

My name is Htee Sia Paw. I was born in the Mae Kai Key refugee camp. It is located between the Thai border and the Burmese border. My parents came from Burma and they resettled in the Ban Sala refugee camp in 1998. I was born then. At that time many people were going around singing carol songs and doing many activities. I lived there until I was four years old. In September 2002 the camp experienced a devastating "flash flood". It was raining and thundering. I heard many people screaming and shouting for help. Because of the flash flood in the camp, many people lost their lives and we had to move to another camp. The new camp was called Mae La Oon camp. When I was young, I didn't know the reason why my parents had to come to a refugee camp and I didn't question why I was born in a refugee camp either. I always thought that I was free living in a refugee camp and I could also do a lot of things as well. As I was getting older, life was getting harder for me and I learned why refugee camps existed and I started to question my life. I learned that my parents didn't have any choice but to live in a refugee camp and that I couldn't do anything with my life. It was my luck that I was born and raised in a place that way.

In 2013, my parents decided to come to the United States because we heard that many other Karen people had started move to the States and they were living a better life. My parents also wanted the same thing and they wanted to be free again, to get a job, to live in a house that we didn't have to fix it every year or rebuild every time it rained. The most important reason why my parents wanted to come to the United States was because they wanted me and my siblings to have a chance to get a better education. Before we came to the United States, there was a long process we had to complete we had to do multiple interviews, tests, and screenings. It took one year or more before we came to United States and right before we were about to leave, my sister felt ill so we had to wait extra time for her to recover. After my sister recovered, my family had to do some learning about the United States and then we came here in November 2014.

I came to St. Paul, Minnesota with my whole family. We had some other relatives here that came before us, but there are still a lot of other relatives and friends who we had to leave behind. The reason why not all of my relatives came to the US is because some of them still live in Burma and others are afraid of new life in a new place. Some of them stay behind with their parents because their parents are old and they think that even if they come to the United States, they can no longer work. And, if they don't speak the language, they will only bother their kids. There are many other families like that who don't want to leave the refugee camp. When my family and I came to the US, we only brought our clothing and that was it. We didn't have money or other valuable things to bring.

When I left the camp, I was very sad because I had to leave behind my friends and relatives and I didn't know when I would see them again. My family and I were also nervous because we didn't know what our future would be like and resettling in a new country where you don't speak the language is very scary. Now my life is much better than when

I was in the camp and when I first came to St. Paul. I speak English now and I have a dream and goals in life which I know I can achieve if I work hard.