

## **Yan Naung Immigrant Story**

### **Produced by Kevin Yi**

Hi my name is Yan Naung and this is my immigrant story. I'm originally from Bangkok, Thailand and both of my parents are Karen. If you don't know what that is, it's an ethnic group from Burma (also known as Myanmar). They are refugees that fled from Burma because of the turmoils of the world's longest ongoing civil war. I lived in Thailand for the first six years of my life and I still have some memories from that period of time.

Although I was born in Bangkok, I mostly remember my mom and me going back and forth between the refugee camp and another city where my mom would see family and make some money to send me to school. Coming from a life where education was not an opportunity that was given to her, my mom wanted to provide that opportunity for me. She wanted to give me all the opportunities she never had and to live a life she never had the chance to live. So one day, we went to get documented, along with a lot of other refugees. The World Relief Organization had found a sponsor family in the United States for us and so for my sixth birthday, my mom's gift to me was a life here in the United States. That also meant that she would be leaving her family in Thailand and everything that she had found there. She would be going to a foreign country where everything would be new to her and a place where she would need to find new ways to survive. So that's briefly how I got here to the United States.

As I grew up here, she took pictures and saved them in a photo album and in that very same photo album were also pictures back from Thailand. There are some pictures from the refugee camp. One is a picture of me in the living area inside the camp which was a small room, smaller than the room I share with Kevin now. Another is a picture of an advertisement of a big celebration that was held inside the refugee camp. It celebrated the diversity of ethnicities inside the refugee camp. My mom also kept some pictures of me at a mall that she took me to one day. I had the best time of my life- well, I would say, of my toddler career. There are also some pictures of me at the airport in Thailand that represents my last moments there.

Looking at these pictures I sometimes wonder what my life would have been like in Thailand. Would I have known my siblings? Would I have the same opportunities as I do now? How hard would my life have been?

These pictures also make me appreciate the sacrifices that my mom has made for me. All that I have now is because of her. Her strength, courage, and drive is why I am here today. My name is Yan Naung and my immigrant story is just one of many.