

## English Translation of Khem Srey

**1. Interviewer:** Kong Seiha

**2. Interviewee:** Khem Srey

1. Hi, my name is Kong Seiha, and I will be the interviewer today. We are doing this at your place of employment, The Cambodian Job Foundation. I want to ask you a few questions.

What is your full name?

2. My name is Khem Srey.

1. We're doing this interview through a University in America. They want to interview Cambodian people and their families and put these interviews on a website to benefit many different people, including future generations. These interviews will help our children and grandchildren know about the lives of their parents. What were they like? What did they overcome? And when children and grandchildren have these questions, they can go look on the website and listen to the interviews to hear the answers. When I'm finished interviewing you, would it be okay if your answers and your picture are put up on the website?

2. Yes.

1. I want to ask you a question: Did you have a nickname that people called you from when you were little?

2. When I was young, my mom gave me the name Sokhuan. Later she changed my name to Khem Srey instead, but she would call me Srey Srey all the time.

1. Did you have any other names?

2. No.

1. How old are you now?

2. I'm 46 years old.

1. When were you born?

2. I was born in 1970.

1. Do you remember the day or the month?

2. I don't remember.

1. Do you remember where you were born?

2. I was born in Kampongthom Province, in the city of Baray in the village of Seyong.

1. Lots of times in Cambodia, we use the Zodiac year instead. What year are you?

2. The year of the pig.

1. Did you ever learn a language other than Khmer?

2. I have never learned another language. I have always wanted to, but I've never had time.

1. Did you study Khmer?

2. Yes.

1. What is the highest level of education you received?

2. I learned until the 5th grade. That was about 25 years ago.

1. I want to ask you a little bit about marriage. Have you ever been married?

2. Yes.

1. How many times have you been married?

2. Just once.

1. Do you remember when you got married?

2. 2004.

1. Where were you married?

2. In Kampong Thom. In the city of Baray.

1. Did your parents arrange the marriage or did you find your husband on your own?

2. We (my husband and I) worked together and we had seen each other before, but his mom and dad arranged the marriage.

1. But you also loved each other, right?

2. Yes.

1. When you got married, was there a dowry?

2. He took the rent money; it was \$600.

1. When you got this money, what did you do?
2. I took it and used it to pay for the marriage—the tables, chairs, dishes, and the priest.

1. I want to know about to know a little more about your marriage. How did you first meet? Why did you love each other? Can you explain it from the beginning?
2. Back then, we worked with each other. When we were working together, we saw how each other felt. We understood each other and at that point his parents arranged the wedding.

1. What happened that made him know that he wanted to marry you?
2. Just that we worked together.

1. Sometimes people say that there was something specific that made them take extra notice of their future spouse. Do you have anything like that?
2. There is one thing. My husband--he's younger than me. I said that I didn't want to marry him--I didn't want a young husband. He said that he wanted an older wife--he didn't want a young wife. I fought though--I said that I didn't want a husband who is younger than me. I also told him that I was poor, but he told me that he didn't want somebody that was rich--he wanted somebody like him--somebody who was poor.

1. When you were married you were in Kampong Thom, but then you came down to Phnom Penh?
2. Once I was married, I came to Phnom Penh---from back then all the way until now.

1. How many siblings do you have?
2. Nine.

1. Can you tell me a little bit about them?
2. My oldest sibling is named Khem Peng Ang. My second oldest sibling is named Khem Lum Ang—a girl. My third sibling is named Khem Peng Chiang. The fourth--Khem Peng Chon. The fifth--Khem Num Yeng. The sixth---Khem Sok Hiang. The seventh--Khem Peng Hua. The eighth--I can't remember. The ninth--that's me--Kum Srey.

1. So which child are you?
2. The ninth. The youngest.

1. Where are your siblings now?

2. Two of my siblings are in Battambang--both brothers. I have a brother and a sister who already died. In Kampong Thom, there are three people. I have an older sibling in Phnom Penh--he sells for a living.

1. So you came to Phnom Penh to work—is that the only reason?

2. Yes, that's why I came. But my house was so happy in Kampong Thom.

1. How long have you been in Phnom Penh?

2. I came here in 2001.

1. Wow--that's more than ten years. When you came here at the beginning, where were you?

2. When I came here at the beginning, I couldn't walk. My husband made me a fake leg that I could wear. That leg cost \$450. They had me wear it, but when I wore it, it was hard to walk and to do everything else. When I was walking it was hard; when I was sitting it was hard; so I stopped wearing it. When I stopped wearing it, I started walking and I could walk without it. The organization NCDP (an organization for people who can't walk)--they helped me find work. I used to work in a factory. In one year, I worked in two different factories. When I left from there, I made incense. I did that at the market Mun Ang. Then I went and worked sewing bags at the Tuol Tom Pong Market with a teacher. I did that since 2001. I did that for nine or ten years before I stopped. When I stopped working there, I worked at a different place in Beoung Kheng Khong. I sewed there for a while and when I stopped there, I went and worked by the Independence Memorial. I worked there for about 9 or 10 years. When I stopped there, I started working at CJF. That's my last one.

1. How old were you when you split from your family?

2. Since I was 39 years old.

1. Do you remember the names of your parents and how old they were?

2. My Dad--he had passed away before I was born. I was only 2 months old when the Khmer Rouge started. They took and killed him. I never knew him. His name was Den Ung Hi. When he died, he was 48. Right now he would be 89.

1. And your mom?

2. My mom died 2 years ago. When she died, she was 87. Her name was Khem Lum Ang.

1. Where were your parents born?

2. My Dad was born in Kampong Thom, in the city Baray. My mom was born in Kampong Cham--they called it Am Pel Tvear village.
1. Do you remember anything about your grandparents? What were their names?
2. My grandfather was born in China. He came and met my grandma in Cambodia and they decided to get married. They died a long time ago though. I never knew them.
1. Do you remember their names?
2. I don't remember their full names. I remember that we called them Kong Chao and Ma Niang--on my Dad's side. On my mom's side we called them Kong Kum and Ma Lon.
1. So your grandparents are Chinese?
2. Yes, they came from China. But on my mom's side, those grandparents are Khmer. On my Dad's side, they're Chinese. They don't speak Khmer very clearly.
1. Did your parents ever go to other countries?
2. They never did.
1. So your grandparents were in China before. Why did they come to Cambodia?
2. Lots of people were coming over at that time. I'm not sure why. Lots of Chinese people were coming over to Cambodia to work, and once they came here and got married and had kids, they stayed.
1. You said you were born 1970, right? That's about the time when the Khmer Rouge started.
2. Yes, the Khmer Rouge started in 1975.
1. Can you tell me a little bit about that time?
2. I remember just a little bit. I was crippled, so they wouldn't let me do anything. They made me stay at the house. When it was time to eat, they let me go eat, but then I had to go back home. When night would come, I would go eat, and when it was time for breakfast I would go eat. Back then, I was only 7 or 8 years old. They wouldn't let me do very much. I stayed at home alone. My parents and siblings were all gone. I slept alone in that house. I was always alone. My parents and siblings were gone. That time was very hard. When I was sick, my mom wanted to come and take care of me. The organization wouldn't let her because they kept saying that there were hospitals for that kind of thing. My mom wouldn't let them take me to the hospital though. She said that if they took me, they would just kill me. I was sad--I always had the opinion that if they took me, there were two options. They would heal me or they would kill me. I thought that I would be lucky with either result. If I was healed, I would be better off. If they killed me, I could be reincarnated and my life would be better. It's

hard being crippled. They would feed us though. In a big pot, they would give us two spoonfuls of food. The rice soup only had water and corn in it though. It only had a few grains of rice.

1. Did you have any other struggles that you wanted to talk about?
2. My mom usually had me stay at home alone, but when I was sick, she would take me with her. When they would feed us, I wouldn't eat because I was sick.
1. At that time, did they beat you?
2. No, at that time, I was small. They didn't beat my parents either; they just forced us to work. They split the children and the families--we couldn't meet together.
1. You said that your dad died during the Khmer Rouge. Why did they kill him?
2. In 1973, the Khmer Rouge was just starting. They saw that he could work. At that time, our neighbors were jealous of us. They saw that we had success selling. They took him—one day he came home from the market and hadn't even eaten yet. They took him and told him that they were taking him to learn. My mom told them that if they were taking him to learn, she wanted to go instead because he hadn't even eaten yet. She asked them to at least let him eat first, but they wouldn't agree. They said that the person they came for is the person they would take. They took my dad and tied his hands behind his back and took him outside. I heard that maybe one or two days later, they killed him. We couldn't investigate about it like we can now though.
1. Back then what did he do?
2. He was a trader.
1. So they killed traders as well?
2. Basically anybody who was a merchant or educated they didn't keep around.
1. What work did you father do before the Khmer rouge?
2. He didn't really do anything. He butchered pigs and other things. In 1973, we hadn't quite entered the Khmer rouge, but in 1975 we fully entered. In 1973, he just worked, and they captured him in 1973.
1. What did you mom do back then?
2. Back then she watched the kids at home.
1. During the Khmer Rouge, what did your mom do?

2. She was split from her children and she went and lived in one of the Khmer Rouge camps. She moved dirt, planted, harvested. Nothing outside of that.

1. And were you guys together with your parents then?

2. No, we were all split up. When the Khmer Rouge started, I stayed at home, and my mom was somewhere else. My siblings were also in different places--we were all split up.

1. Do you know why they split you up like that?

2. I don't know, but for the most part, all families were like that. They were all split up like we were. There was no family that stayed together. The children did different things far away from each other. They couldn't see each other or hear from each other.

1. When the Khmer Rouge ended, were you able to meet up with them again?

2. On the day Khmer Rouge ended, they were planning on taking and killing my mom around 5:00 or 6:00. When 5:00 came around, the Vietnamese soldiers came into the country. People were running all over the place in the streets—and that's when the Khmer Rouge was officially over. After that happened, we all tried to find our moms—to find our families. Some people in a car called to my brothers saying they would take them to their country, but my brothers said that they hadn't seen their mom since they were young and so they refused the offer and instead came and found my mom.

1. And then you all met together?

2. Yes.

1. When you all met each other, where were you?

2. I was in the village of Reaksmei in Kampong Thom.

1. When the Khmer Rouge started, where were you?

2. The same place. And the house that I lived in--Pol Pot built it for us. In some of the villages, Pol Pot build houses. They were 5 meters x 7 meters. There were only 5 stairs. Any more than 5 stairs they wouldn't do, even if it was just a tenth of a meter more, they wouldn't allow it. They put a limit on the height of our houses, so they could come at night to spy on us. If we made houses higher, they wouldn't be able to hear us. Only short houses.

1. When the Khmer Rouge ended, did you miss Kampong Thom?

2. I stayed there--I didn't leave.

1. And when you were there, was your whole family there?

2. Yes.

1. While you were there, what work did you do?

2. I just sold. We farmed, we sold.

1. Let's talk about your education a little bit. Before the Khmer Rouge, what did you study?

2. I didn't study before then.

1. And when the Khmer Rouge ended?

2. When the Khmer Rouge ended, the Vietnamese had schools. I learned from 1st grade to 5th grade, but after that I didn't have the opportunity to go anymore. My family was poor, and I didn't know how to ride a bike. The school was far away, and so I didn't have the opportunity to learn anymore. I stopped after 5th grade.

1. Do you remember the name of your school?

2. Tang Ko school.

1. Where was it?

2. It was near my home.

1. In Kampong Thom?

2. Yes.

1. Did you do anything besides farming?

2. I just sold.

1. What did you sell?

2. I sold vegetables and other food—pretty much anything that I could.

1. How is your life right now?

2. My life now is different from before because I don't sell now. I work. I work Monday-Friday and I have free time on the weekends to do what I want.

1. Do you think your life is different than before?

2. Yes, it's definitely different—it's a lot better.

1. Why is it better?

2. I can't exactly think of why---I think our country is a lot better. We have lots of occupations, and lots of people who are smart and professional.

1. Thanks so much for this interview. I just want to ask one more question. What do you think your biggest problem has been in your life?

2. The hardest thing about my life is that I've never been able to leave my home. I've been with my mom always. I have sold from my house my whole life. I have one son and he's sick too. I've have to take responsibility for my family. From 2001 to now, I've been split from my family.

1. What has been the best thing about your life?

2. I don't have anything that's the best or the happiest yet. Ever since I was little, I've always had problems. Even when I've have a family and kids, I still have had problems.

1. Thank you so much for this interview. Your life has definitely been difficult. There isn't anybody who doesn't have problems--there isn't anybody who only has good things in their life. I know this will be a big blessing for your posterity--for them to learn about your life. Before we stop, can I take a picture of you? We will give you a copy of this interview so you can listen to it later. Do you have anything else?

2. Just that when my children and grandchildren listen to this interview, they will now know that my life has been hard.

1. Thank you.