HMONG WOMEN’S
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTRODUCTION

Minnesota is home to one of the largest Hmong communities in the United States. More Hmong live in the Twin Cities than in any other urban area in the United States. Originally from Laos, the Hmong supported American troops during the Vietnam War. Beginning in 1976 and continuing in four waves until 1996, many came to the United States as political refugees. The Hmong have strong kinship and clan ties. Many who originally were resettled in other areas, chose to move to Minnesota to be close to family members and other relatives.

The elder women’s experiences included maintaining home and family while their husbands fought alongside American soldiers in the Vietnam War. They fled their farms and villages and crossed the Mekong River into Thailand where they lived in refugee camps before resettling in the United States.

The experiences of the oldest members of the community are vastly different from those who came here as children and those who were born in this country. Today, Hmong women work as teachers, lawyers, and decision makers in their respective positions—opportunities not available to them in their homeland. The youngest never experienced war or resettlement and are unfamiliar with the privations of their elders.

This oral history project chronicles the contributions and experiences of Hmong women with ties to Minnesota. Members of the Hmong Women’s Action Team, a group of Hmong women community leaders and activists, interviewed each other and their mothers and grandmothers, and in one case her daughter. They share their stories of life in the Minnesota, Thailand, and Laos. Three generations from six different families are represented in this series of eighteen interviews.

The interviews help provide a greater understanding of Hmong women’s roles in the home and community, challenges and successes in public and private realms, and across time and space.
MAY YANG HANG
An Interview with

May Yang Hang
Narrator

Bo Thao
Interviewer

On
January 17, 2000

For the
Hmong Women’s Action Team Oral History Project
Hmoob Thaj Yeeb Oral History Project

The transcript is presented in both English and Hmong.
May Yang Hang

BT: Okay, today is January 17th on a Monday. We are at MayKao [Hang]’s house and I am interviewing May Hang. What is your clan name?

MH: I am from the Yang clan.

BT: Okay, to what clan were you married to?

MH: I was married to the Hang clan.

BT: Okay, how old are you now?

MH: Right now, I am 26 years old.

BT: Okay, how many children do you have?

MH: I have two children.

BT: Okay, what is the highest level of education you have achieved?

MH: I finished a four year registered nurse program.

BT: Okay, now what kind of job are you doing?

MH: Right now I am working for UCare Minnesota. UCare Minnesota is an organization that provides health insurance to individuals who request insurance through state and government programs especially for the elderly people. I am a care coordinator or a care manager handling their cases.

BT: Any time if you feel like speaking English, you can. [Laughs]

MH: Okay.

BT: How much do you think you make per year? In the range from $20,000 to $50,000, or $50,000 to $75,000?

MH: Between $20,000 to $50,000.

BT: Okay, right now, whom are you living with?

MH: Right now my husband and I have a house and live by ourselves.

BT: Okay, so your marital status is?

MH: Married.
BT: Okay.

MH: Married with children.

BT: Okay, when did you come to this country?

MH: I came to this country when I was four years old, so I think it was about 1977.

BT: Okay, so where did you first arrive?

MH: We first came to Rhode Island.

BT: Whom did you follow?

MH: My older sister and her husband and a church in Providence, Rhode Island were our sponsors, so we came over there.

BT: Was it your whole family?

MH: No, just our immediate family members, only my parents and the children. My grandparents and my uncles landed in Iowa. So we lived in Providence for only six months.

And then we moved to Iowa…

BT: So the reason you moved to Iowa was to join family members?

MH: Yes, the reason we moved there was to join with family members, and it was because our grandmother landed there, and she was not feeling well, so we joined her there.

BT: Okay, where were you born?

MH: I think my parents told me that I was born in Pha Khe in Laos.

BT: Okay… what category of Hmong do you belong to?

MH: We are Hmong…

BT: White Hmong, Blue Hmong?

MH: We are both White and Blue Hmong.

BT: Oh, yes.

MH: My dad is Blue Hmong and my mom is White Hmong, so we speak both languages.
BT: Oh, so your mom speaks White Hmong and your dad speaks Blue Hmong, that is why they use…

MH: We use both languages, so but if you look at it from my father’s side, then we are Blue Hmong.

BT: What about you and your husband, what is your religious belief?

MH: Right now we believe in Christ and we go to—we just came to St. Paul here, so we are in the process of going from one church to another. We probably will go with Hmong Methodist Church, but we still have another to look at. After looking at that one, then we can make a decision.

BT: Okay, right now, I want to ask you about your childhood, can you tell me what you can remember? You said you were born in Laos right?

MH: Yes.

BT: And then when you came to this country, you were four. When you were in Laos, do you know how long…?

MH: I think we lived…

BT: How old were you, when you…?

MH: We stayed in Vinai for just six months….

BT: Okay.

MH: Yes, we fled Laos to Nong Khay, then they sent us to Vinai, so we stayed there, I think, six months to nine months, then we came to America, so…

BT: So you stayed in Thailand for a very short time?

MH: Yes, it is not too long.

BT: Do you remember if you had had any schooling at all?

MH: Not in Laos and Thailand, but I remember starting kindergarten when we arrived in the United States.

BT: Okay, about chores in the household, do you remember anything that you had to do when you were still a child.

MH: Most of the times when I was young, because I am a girl, so…the biggest job was to help with the younger siblings. I helped my mom take care of the younger siblings, I helped her…As I
grew older, some of my siblings could take care of the younger ones, so I was able to free myself to help my mom and my older sisters cook, help them clean the house and other things.

BT: Yes, were there any things as a child that you did to help relatives or the community?

MH: Mostly when I was young, the biggest thing was to help people babysitting.

BT: I see.

MH: There was not much to do.

BT: Okay, were there things or special skills that they taught you and wanted you to know because you are a girl?

MH: When I was young, even though you did not want to learn—at that time the community loved girls with traditional dance talent, so…

Everybody got forced to do that—so both my older sisters were the one who led and taught us. In addition to that, my mom also encouraged me to learn…even if I did not like it, she still want me to know how to sew, how to start a *paj ntaub*, [needlework and embroidery] she would start a *paj ntaub* for you to do…to see if you can finish and…

So talking about learning any skills, the real Hmong culture and tradition are Hmong tapestry and maybe learning the traditional dance something like that…

BT: At that time, how old do you think you were?

MH: When we danced, I think, I was maybe just seven or eight years old, when we learned the traditional dance. But I started doing *paj ntaub* when I was about nine or ten years old.

BT: How about when you became a teenager, what were the things that you did for fun?

MH: What I did for fun, in the beginning when I turned into a teenager, was bicycling.

The bicycle, riding my bicycle back and forth around town and playing volleyball as well as rope jumping with friends at their house, and going shopping.

BT: How about courtships or dating?

MH: Oh!

BT: At what age?

MH: I think for me, I was a, like what American people say, I was a late bloomer because I was kind of biased. I used to see older men come and visit my two older sisters, and I hated the fact that they were much older, and they still came and visit much younger girls.
So I had a very good friend who was really just pretty mature beyond her age and I used to always tease her because she, you know, hung out with older people, with older men. Maybe because she was too nice to say bad things to them, so I just left. So I think for me I have always had this bias that I would not date older men—men who are more than three to four years older than me. Because that’s just too much—that’s just wrong in my opinion for them to come and visit young girls. So, I think for me, about having a boyfriend or starting to have a boyfriend was not until when I was in high school around 9th or 10th grade. But in 7th or 8th grade, I had friends who had boyfriends whom I have gone shopping with or went to the parks with or, you know, whatever. Because for Hmong people, being a girl, it is not appropriate to go with someone alone. So I have been going to places with them, but talking about having a real boyfriend, then it was not the case…

I did not have a boyfriend until I was 15 or 16.

**BT:** So right now, your husband, how much older is he?

**MH:** My husband is three years older than me.

**BT:** Okay so.

**MH:** Yes so.

**BT:** Within that range. [Laughter]

**MH:** Yes. [Laughter]

**BT:** Do you remember if there was something that you wished for or wanted for yourself when you grew up, what was it?

**MH:** Yes, when I was little…

**BT:** Your aspirations.

**MH:** When I was turning into a young girl, I thought I was different from other young Hmong girls my age because I was not worried about how pretty I should look and how well I should know how to communicate with them. You know, I thought about and wished for something different. People generally believe that girls cannot accomplish much, a girl will just become someone else’s wife. So it is wise to find a husband who makes a lot of money, even though he might be old, as long as he has money, then it is okay. So for me, I did not believe that I would depend entirely on my husband. I believed that my parents came here without any education, so I would try to do my best to see if I could do it. I always wanted to pursue higher education after high school so that my life would not be miserable like my parents, and also so that my children would not see poverty like I did. So I always thought about accomplishing higher degrees of education.

**BT:** So that was your thoughts, did a member of your family support you at all?
MH: My family…

BT: Or what were their thoughts about your aspirations, did you share them with your parents at all, and did they support you in any way?

MH: My parents—about my dad, because I am a girl, so mostly I did not talk about it as much with my dad as with my mom.

BT: Yes.

MH: My mom knew, and I have older sisters who got married at a young age, and they keep telling me not to hurry on getting married because life would be too hard. They had to use government help such as WIC [women, infants and children] and welfare. It was so hard for them because it took them about ten good years to be self sufficient, so they recommended that I should not be in a hurry to get married. I think my father knew how hard my sisters had to work to make it through, so he was more relaxed.

BT: I see.

MH: For me, he was more lenient to me, he allowed me to go and play volleyball and do activities at school. For my older sisters, he was very strict; they could not get out from the house. My parents, I think that, my dad saw that here things are different than back in our country. Even though he did not tell us “I support you,” but his actions showed that he supported us. Also when I went to school people kept telling my parents that if they let their daughter go to school like that, their daughter would come back pregnant.

So they defended me and said that if she does good things it would end up good. If she does bad things, the problem can be looked at at that time. So my parents were very supportive. I was the first one, the first person in our family, the first girl to go to school away from home. My parents wanted me to go to school close to home, but all the school close to home did not have the major I wanted, that was why I was away from home. It was about a two-hour drive.

BT: Did you live at school?

MH: Yes, I went to one school that was two, three hours drive from our home. I lived on campus for three years then moved to live outside in the apartment. But while living there, I live with some of my cousins; so I lived with a bunch of guys.

BT: Oh, right now, as a housewife, what do you see as the household duties?

MH: For us, it’s very confusing because we live by ourselves, we don’t have a differentiation of roles. Because my husband has his own regular job, and I have my own job, even though he is a man, he helps me with household chores, he helps me take care of the children. You know, if I am late from work, he would start cooking diner. As I see him preparing diner, I would start doing dishes or giving the children a bath, and he would do the dishes. Something specific like mowing the lawn and shoveling snow, he would say that that would be his job, so he rarely lets
me do it, as it relates to strength or whatever, I don’t know. But everything inside, you know, we never said this is your job, but like, the kitchen and the bathroom, he would never touch it.

He just does not touch those. But about taking care of children and cooking and things like that, we don’t have specific roles. It’s just kind of, whoever has the time to, whoever sees the jobs to be done, but it is kind of hard because my mom lives with us and she would say, “Oh! Son-in-law, you should not do the dishes, we will do that later” so I think...

I was telling my mother, you should not prevent him doing it because if you would move out, then there will be no one to help me. So I think that it’s very confusing for him because sometimes he would help me, but my mom told him not to, so sometimes I told him that he should do even though my mom say you shouldn’t do it.

I think with him and our roles, it’s not as distinct as with me growing up and my brothers’ roles because, I think, a lot of it has to do with, maybe, how his mother raised them, and how my mother raised us because, my mom and dad were very strong into female roles and male roles, and my brothers now, I think that makes them unable to assist their wives to the degree that they should because of that, because we, as the girls, we did everything.

**BT:** Yes. So now that they are married, they still expect things to be that way…..

**MH:** They expect their wives to go to work and come back and do the kids and, you know, so and then my mom says “Why don’t you do like Fu? Why don’t you help your wives?” things like that.

Now she is telling them two things, you know, so for us we have very meshed roles and you know, which is fine because I like it that way, and my son helps me bake and his dad mows the lawn…so.

**BT:** Yes, and within your family, do you think that between you and your husband, you know, how do you make decisions?

**MH:** For us, it depends on the situations or problems, or what the topic of discussion is, what the topic is all about. If it involves spending a lot of money, then we both make the decision together. Things that we want to have in the future, we also decide together. Even though he meets with relatives about something, he would never make a decision by himself. He would come back and discuss the issue with me first, and whatever decision we make he would go back and tell his relatives. So I think that I would do the same. If there is something that, you know, little things, then we would do it by ourselves. But when it come to our family and helping our relatives, something like that, then we usually do it together or even when both of us are there, we both have to talk about it and agree about it first before we do anything.

**BT:** And usually what about within your close family members, when it comes to making decisions, are you involved and if so, how?
MH: I think that within the relatives who are not close family members, immediate family only, just me and my brothers, my sisters or my uncles, I think, everyone in our family can participate in the decision-making, no matter if they are men or women. Everyone can say whatever they have to say. But when it come to decision-making outside the immediate family, then you might participate in the meeting, because most of the men are the ones to speak out, and their wives who come along with them would not say anything. So you kind of, if you see that they, you listen, and if I find that you are way off, things like that, then I would interject, but to go and fully participate in the meeting, then usually I don’t do that. But if I listen to them, and see that they go off on a point, or if there were a point that they agree on that I think is not fair for everybody, then I would tell them. So about extended family wise, I am usually not very active. I’m not as active as if it’s within my close family members.

BT: How about just in the community?

MH: In the community, I think that I am not too involved, but something that I see and that is important to me, mostly things about women, children, and things related to my job, health-care, then I would do whatever it takes to get involved. But any outside activities, if it is big then I—if it does not involve me, then I am usually not involved. But I am a person who wants to stay very alert, or make sure I know what is happening out there. If problems arise, and I need to be out there, then I would be out there finding ways to resolve the problems.

BT: So, do you see that this has changed because of your position as a nurse who has specific skills in a specific area.

MH: Yes.

BT: So when talking about the community, it is different because I know a little bit in that area. So it’s not like you have problem in the family, but when it comes to the community, it’s more—the role is different because I am not Mrs. Something that they come and ask you, but because I am the nurse, so you can help make the decision “Oh! Maybe the best thing is—” it just separates the roles. So that’s more, I don’t know, personal, I mean how do you see that and has that changed Hmong women’s roles.

MH: I see that having professional skills, a specific skill does allow you to have a certain degree of voice where we’d not had it before. I think that, if I am in a meeting with people outside the family, and I say that I am May Hang from the hospital, I am here for the meeting about… do we need an interpreter at the hospital, I am here for the meeting about… do we need an interpreter at the hospital, then even though there are men around, they would listen to you more and would ask you to see if you have anything to say. But when you out there meeting with relatives or some place else, then you are just another woman.

BT: Yes.

MH: Unless, of course, if somebody who has some kind of disease or by their diagnoses something else and then, you know, it is a different situation too then you are called to make a lot of the decisions. But I think that’s probably the most advanced step for women is our ability to
have those kinds of skills and that is a plus for us when it comes to—people must accept that we
do have the skills, then what we say may be valuable and important to be listened to…

**BT:** When you were growing up, did you know of any woman leader that you respected?

**MH:** Yes, when I was little, and we just moved to Wausau, there was a Hmong lady, she and her
husband were the first couple to settle in that town, so her husband—later on her husband passed
away—but she would make friend with the leaders or public officials of the town, so Caucasian
people respected her a lot. I saw that she was an intelligent woman who know how to talk to
people, just like people say, she was beautiful and she know how to talk to people, but I am
very—I see that she is a nice person who supports our young Hmong girls. When you meet her,
she would talk with you with a smiling face. She takes young Hmong girls to places to show
their talents, she is a role model for me. She is someone that I want to be when I grow up, but at
that time some people in our community may say something nice about her, but others also say
bad things about her, you know…

**BT:** What were the things they were talking about?

**MH:** What they were talking about was mostly, for instance, for Hmong people, when someone
becomes unmarried, then they would say “Oh! She dates someone’s husband, she just pretended
to open a store,” you know, she had her own grocery store; she had her own business. “Oh she
just opened the store, so men have a place to come and meet her,” you know and, to me it was
like, every day that I walk from my school to our house, I have to pass her store. I would go in
and talk with her; she would give, you know, soda just at her free will.

**BT:** I see.

**MH:** She just said things like how are you doing and here is a soda, and stay here for a little bit,
rest here for a while first, then you can go home, you only half way home, you know. So to me
those are like little things that meant a lot to me. But then, when you go somewhere, you would
hear people say something else. You’re like thinking no, you know, I know this person, I go
there like every day after school and spend like 15-20 minutes with her, and I did not see any
men in there.

**BT:** Yes.

**MH:** You know, I mean I used to say that when people would say that, and I would talk to my
mom, and I said, “No, everyday I go and talk with her, and there is no one in there with her, there
is nobody, I don’t see anybody,” you know. So as a child, as a young girl, 12-13, you had this
mentor, but then you are torn because your community thinks that she is so rebellious and all this
too, but…

Now that I look back, she is actually a pioneer because, you know, as a widow, she was able to
raise all her children well by herself. Now they all have good life, you know, she has her own
business. She made friends with Caucasian people. She is very active. Back in Laos, she was one
of the young women who attended nursing school, so she asked me what major I wanted to
pursue. She is one of the Hmong women that I can see… but like I said for the young generation who achieve a higher level of education and who become leader, then I can’t see any.

BT: So talking about when you got married, what made you decide to get married?

MH: What made me decide to get married, what made me to get married…just like I said, I planned to take couple years, you know, to travel, so I can see the world after I graduated, but I think maybe I was not strong enough, and I fell into my family’s pressure, more so because I got married a little earlier then I wanted to.

BT: How old were you?

MH: I was 21, I was done with high school and college but I always wanted, you know, to be a travel nurse, so I can travel from country to country. But before that happened, I met my husband, and then, you know, when parents see that you have met a good person, and his family is a good family, and my family is a good family. They also know each other well. So they said, “Okay, when is the wedding? Let’s get the wedding going,” you know, so it’s a little difficult because before that my mom and dad would never allow me to date, to go to party, or anywhere. They would yell at me if I would go out too often. Somehow in the fourth year, it was like. “Okay, oh…my god maybe our,” maybe they think, “Oh, my gosh, our girl is getting old” or whatever.

BT: Yes.

MH: It was like, “Sweetheart, why don’t you go to the 4th of July festival…?”

BT: Ah ha…

MH: Oh, I got to work. “No, no, no, here take our car,” you know “go.” It is like, you know, so I think I felt that, they thought that I was going to be with them forever, that I would never get a husband, and then whatever, and then they wouldn’t know what to tell their neighbors. They sent this daughter to college, and here she is, you know, old and living with them. So I think that my family, my mom and dad changed a lot in that fourth year, the last year of my college because I have never had a boyfriend that I really liked and considered marrying, so they thought that I would stay with them forever, so that fourth year they…

BT: The fourth year of your…

MH: …college…then they said “Oh, go party,” you know, “go to St Paul, go to the new year, go,” you know, “and watch them play soccer, volleyball,” so when, they see that…Also my husband, I think he was ready to get married, so when we met he was kind of a little more aggressive then my other boyfriends. He would come, even if I was away from home. He would come and visit my parents. He would come and do, you know, traditional Hmong male courting.

BT: Yes.
MH: …courting the parents first, he would come and visit them, he would come and talk with them. When he called, he would talk with my mom for 10-15 minutes first, and my mom then passed the phone to me. I’m like “who’ve you been talking to for 15 minutes?”

“Your boyfriend.” “Why you are talking to my boyfriend,” so my parents know that he was a good person, and his parents were people they knew back in Laos. So, my husband’s parents were also ready to allow him to get married if they find some girl that they knew the parents well. I think that, you know, if I look at what happened, then I don’t regret of not being able to travel as I planned because I am happy with my life now and I also have children. But like I say, if I think back, if it can be delayed then I want to delay like one to one and a half year, so I know what the world would be like when I graduate. Just like what I used to joke with my husband, “if I knew maybe I wouldn’t get married and then, we… you know…”

BT: So they came and asked you to marry or?

MH: No, then it was a very long debate.

Then, as a girl I preferred them coming and asking my parents. We have talked about it back and forth. What my mom was disappointed the most about was—like she said, he lied to my mom because when he came and visited my mom, he told her that, you know, he would come and ask them. So when it come down to the time, his parents looked at the situation and thought that it would be hard because they did not have any relatives living in that town. If they came and asked my parents, it would take a longer time. They know that if my parents made it easy, then it would be okay, but if my parents make it hard, then it could delay things a couple weeks. And because they didn’t have any relatives there, then it would be hard. In addition to that, his parents also have to have their restaurant open, and nobody in their family ever asked for a woman, and he is not man enough if he can bring me home…so.

BT: So, how did you fall then?

MH: At first I was disappointed, you know, because I thought that as a good person I was—why they did not respect me enough to come and ask my parents because I was not quote and quote a bad girl. I considered myself a good girl and I would not depend on them to support me, you know. I would instead be able to help them, support them, so I was kind of disappointed that they did not do it right. Why there was such a culture that would prevent them from doing it the way I wanted. So that made the relationship kind of strange. And I also thought that, if they are not even willing to do it my way, are they going to respect me once I become their daughter in law? All this stuff so, I had that feeling, but, you know, I talked with my mom and dad, and they said “No.” You know, “Don’t go” and you know, “if you go, we’ll never forgive you” and all that and I think that after back and forth, back and forth, I told myself that night or the wedding night, it’s such a small piece of our life. I think back to my sisters, I had one that eloped and two that they came to my parents’ house.

So, I’m thinking now they all have the same kind of life, nobody remembers, they don’t remember how it went.
**MH:** So, I thought, “Okay it does not matter how it is going to be, it is my life. I’ll go and even if my parents cannot forgive me.” If I have a good life and I can help them, then they are going to have to forgive me.

They are going to have to love me again. So, I think that for my husband—I think for him. I wanted us to start out in his clan with a good footing. I wanted him to be respected, and I wanted him to have as much acceptance as—you know, we are still in the male world. I didn’t want him to go along forever with them saying, “Yeah, yeah... you’re the only guy that has to go beg for your wife ha.....ha” You know, so, I figured, as a woman, I think women, all women tend to do that, kind of sacrifice a little bit of themselves for other people, so I said “Okay, fine, I will love, I will follow you, but I have a job here already, it’s a very good job.” At the time I graduated, nursing job were very hard to come by, and especially one in the hospital where you are going to get to learn technical experience, so I said “Okay, fine, I will follow you, but you have to come live here because I am not about to, you know, leave this job, the people I know, and try to start all over again” Because he also lived in a small town where I would have to drive thirty minutes to actually get to a real huge hospital with all the latest technology.

**MH:** So, he said, “Okay let me talk it over with my family.” Anyway so that was our trade off was that I followed him and he gets all their recognition and whatever. But then that he would make the move, at least, for a couple years, so that I can get some experience, and I can be more of a value, and it would be easier for me to get a job. It’s very difficult as a new grad to try to get a job, a nursing job in a larger hospital without having any connections, without having prior internship so, the hospital where I was working at, I had an internship there for the last two summers or so.

That was our trade off. I follow you and you come live with me for a couple years, and then we go back and live with your parents, so his family was liberal enough to allow us to do that.

I think he had more; he took more slack from the relatives for living with me then actually...you know asking for me, so I figured “Well, it could have been worse.”

**BT:** Yes, after you got married, how did you plan for your family?

**MH:** I think that we planned kind of based on the resources that we have. We knew that childcare was very expensive. When he moved in with me there, my parents lived in the same town, and they were retired. So we figured that my parents were still there to help us, so it was better for us to have children because it would be hard for us when we have to be away from them. So even though we just were married for a couple of months, we would try to have children due to the availability of help. Without my parents’ help, we would have to pay a lot of money for daycare. We evaluated all the circumstances, and then we decided that even though we just got married, we wanted to have kids.
BT: Okay.

MH: Yes.

BT: Okay, good, how about a time when you were most respected, when was that?

MH: I think that I felt most respected when my family and his family or other people ask me to be involved in their decision-making, when it has to do with health problems.

I get called in most for situations like that, and it’s a big responsibility, but yet you feel like you could actually assist the family because you know a little bit of both worlds, and you know if the doctor is saying the correct thing or you know how to help the family ask the right questions to get all their needs met. So I think, you know, I feel most respected in that sense. I also feel respected when, when my siblings would ask me to intervene with children or whatever especially their daughters. So I think that to able to—you can’t accept that you’re a role model, I mean you can’t say I going to be a role model, but you have to be accepted as one, no matter what. You are a role model, you need to live up to what is expected then. So I think that it’s nice to be able to have, be able to do for these younger girls what I never had, you know, to ask them. Okay I have to write this paper on this, and be able to say okay, well you want to figure out all the different theories of the psychology, and which one you agree with, and then that’s what you are supposed to do with that paper. So I mean that is really simple, but growing up and not having anybody to bounce ideas off like that. All of us, we need to take it for granted and can do that for them. But when you think about those activities, then you feel good about yourself and good about the fact that, you know, you had a harder time, but at least you can help them, make things a little easier for the younger generations.

BT: How about the times when you feel most disrespected?

MH: I think, my wedding... [Laughter]

I think wedding are very difficult culturally. Time and tradition are important because it’s your wedding, but you have no idea what they are negotiating. You can’t even sit there and listen to what they are negotiating. I had a very traumatic wedding because my husband’s side ended up bringing a person who like ten years ago supposedly said something really bad about my family. So when you bring the guy who said something bad to be the mej koob, in my family’s eyes, it was like a slap in the face.

So, you know, I mean I think that I felt not very respected because they didn’t ask either of us. I mean, neither of us said it, and here we have to pay the price for a sin that somebody, you know, did ten years ago. It was dropped in our wedding, and it had people bickering. I mean for—and his side refused to say they did it and I’m like; you know, we have money, just give them $500 dollars of our money, and get it over with. I think that for me, because of those types of discussions, it made me feel like I wasn’t a person, and it made me feel like I was a thing, like my happiness was irrelevant, and they just had to get over it. They were like, you know, you did this to me, so I am going to get back at you. That kind of the thing. They were forgetting that it’s us and how we going to start our life, and to have both sides of the family be so hostile...
You know, I just thought, what am I? I could be... you know, a piece of furniture and so I think... my wedding, I think made me feel, because of some of the different traditions that goes on... made me feel like I wasn’t who I am, and everything I accomplished meant nothing because when it came down to it, it was about what was said ten years ago....

**BT:** Yes.

**MH:** And if they didn’t get that resolved, then our negotiation wouldn’t proceed, and it was like gosh!... you know, we didn’t even do it. I didn’t even do anything, why do I have to be the one to, you know—little selfish there—but why do I have to be the one to suffer because somebody said something, because somebody got their eagle knocked off or whatever. But anyway, I think weddings are like that.

**BT:** Well, do you remember anything about the war, when we lost the war, did you remember anything at all? Or were you still too little?

**MH:** No, I was too young. I don’t remember. I don’t have any memories. I just know about things from listening to my parents...

**BT:** Well, how about coming to America, what was that like?

**MH:** I don’t remember coming either. My first memory is trick or treating in the United States, so I remember carrying an orange pumpkin going from door to door thinking, ‘Wow, I can just go knock on anybody’s door and get candy!’

So, that was one of my first memories. I think that as you get older, you remember more things. I remember, you know, not liking, once I got to have American friends and visited their houses and stuff, not liking that I have ten people living in my two bedroom house but, you know, we all went through that.

**BT:** Yes, so, let’s see, you were four years old when your family came?

**MH:** Yes.

**BT:** I think that’s pretty much it. Was there anything that I didn’t ask you that you want to tell us... about yourself?

**MH:** No I think that’s it.

**BT:** When you first came and then you went to school, was that difficult, I mean, you spoke Hmong right. And you went to school and had to learn English, what was that like?

**MH:** I think it was difficult. I think that as a person who went to school and did not know any English, I never felt confident in myself until I was probably in 7th grade.
Because, you know, I did not know enough, so I thought I would not be able to do things like American children did.

**BT:** Yes.

**MH:** And I never felt like I could compete with them or that I just as good as they were until like 7th grade, then I started to realize that “Man… I’m getting A’s too or just like they are, so I think that, you know…”

**BT:** What was that like for you going to school and that whole experience because, did your parents have any education background?

**MH:** No my mom and dad did not read or write English. They could not speak any English. I think that more than anything; I had to mature fast because my parents did not know much, so I did everything for them. Even when I was 7, 8, 9, or 10 year old, I went to the hospital and interpreted for them. I had to balance their checkbook, write checks for them, and take care of their paperwork from the bank. You know, so I think that, even though I was still little, I handled tasks that adult people would do already. I did not think that I did big things at that time, but if I think back to that time, I realize how mature I was, and I knew things that my younger brothers and sisters would not know. It was hard for me because my parents did not know much, and I had to do it, so I learned from what I did. My older sisters, they got married long time ago, so everything would fall back to my older brother and me. You know, we either help each other or help my parents. I never thought I could do it because everything was hard and time consuming. It would take nights to just write an essay, I mean compared to the one now, like before doing it together. So about schooling, it was hard because when I wanted my parents to write a note telling the teacher that I had my homework done, I still had to explain to them why I need their signatures, so that makes it difficult, so you feel like, again you’re all alone and there was no one that could help me, or I always have to explain everything to everybody so…

**BT:** So, overall do you think that life in this country is better for Hmong women?

**MH:** For Hmong women in general, I think that it is better for elderly women, younger women, even those who are born in this country, it is better for them. First, they have the opportunity to do everything they like as men do. For instance, my mom’s generation, back in our country they would not have the chance to be able to drive a car. They would not have any way to find ways to make any money. Here, women can drive a car and can do so many things. When I look at my mom and dad, I don’t think that my dad would have respected my mom this much if they were back in our country. Even here, my mom is the one that can read Hmong. My dad cannot read Hmong, so my mom can help my dad with that as well. My mom can drive and go to work like my dad.

So I think that coming to this country, there are many things that have changed that were why my dad respected my mom more. And that is how I can see more respect from one to another. I did not know how it was before, but I don’t know how much men respect and love their wives, but for my mom and dad, they would never say “Oh I love you baba….baba….” but one thing that they do, for example, when he would go and eat at a relative’s house, and my mom said she
did not want to go, my dad would say, “If you don’t go, then I won’t go either because it doesn’t look good,” you know, what’s the point, and you know, they both go and then, you know. And when my mom was to go somewhere, she would take him with her also. So I think that here many things have changed in favor of women. Young women like us, whoever has the ability; she can pursue her education as far as she can. There are still many things that need to be improved, but if we look at all the changes, then we can say there are many good things. Compared to over there, we don’t have to use physical force as much as before.

**BT:** Are you a U.S. citizen?

**MH:** Me, yes.

**BT:** Do you vote?

**MH:** We did vote when we were in Wausau because it was a smaller community. We were more active and we knew the candidates. Here we just moved into our house this May, and they just have some elections going on, and we were just qualified to vote in November for the school board candidates. So that was what we did, but about the governor’s election, we have not done that yet.

**BT:** Okay, what are your feelings about Hmong people competing with American people for public offices?

**MH:** I think that is something that is very good because they are the ones who know what our community really needs. For an outsider, it does not matter how much they respect us, how much they know about us, if they are not a person from the community, then that person would not know everything, and would not anticipate what we need. I see one of the problems we still have now is that we cannot be united which prevents us from sending out a good candidate. We have so many things that pull us apart. In addition, now everybody lives in different parts of the metro area, there are some parts of the town that have many Hmong people, and there are some parts that there are less Hmong people. But for those who want to compete for public office, I am proud that they have the courage and the time to accomplish what they want to do.

**BT:** How about women’s roles outside the home, are there any Hmong women with public figures that you admire?

**MH:** I think that there is no specific person that I admire, but I can see that the younger generation of women have achieved a higher education level, they hold good job positions and already accomplished things that I just happen to think about doing. I am proud of them because, as a woman, if you can only dream of something and never could accomplish it, it is sad, but if someone can actually do what you are dreaming and thinking of doing, then it is great. And you say, “Wow!…you know we have a woman news anchor out there.” Or a woman doctor, or whatever. So I can see that it is a good thing even though I personally cannot do it. Your children would later realize “Okay, you know, I want to go talk to Doctor Phuab Xyooj to see how she did it with four kids and still become a medical doctor.” There was no role model for us then, but now we are glad that there is more and more role models, which give us hope.
BT: What public contributions do you want people to remember about Hmong women?

MH: I think that… ho!… that’s a really broad question.

BT: How about just for yourself?

MH: I think for me, a personal goal is that I want—I’m not as vocal and as passion about everything, but I think when it comes to battering Hmong families and the situation with the healthcare system and understanding how the systems fall together and making sure that they are truly informed before they make their decisions. I think that’s always been a passion of mine, and it doesn’t matter, you know, if I need to be at every visit or whatever. If that is what it takes to get them to make sure that they are getting all the answers to all their questions, I will do that.

I think that, I do my work not to be rewarded or not for people to say “Oh! You know, she is just a great nurse,” but just to know that okay… he got the treatment he wanted, he understood the treatment is going to follow through, and his health is going to be better, he going to stay longer with his children.

So I think that, I want people to know when they say, “Oh do you know so and so.” I want them to say yes, she is very helpful, and she is really passionate about helping us, and just helping to help us, and not getting any payback or whatever. I think that has a lot to do with, you know, why I am a nurse and what my philosophy is.

I think that I—it’s really bad to say this—but I want the world to see what women’s contributions are, but I think, for me personally I want people to, you know, be able to say this person truly did this just for the benefit the women and children and the Hmong community. Not to have a six figures in the bank or whatever. But I think yes, I think that just changing lives and bettering their situations, I think that’s more important to me than having a big paying job. I mean that would be nice if you can do both, but I mean, you know, like I said to my husband, “I’m not going to…” He’s like “you don’t even know these people, why do you get up at six in the morning to make sure they did the surgery fine?”

BT: Yes.

MH: It’s like well, if they don’t get fine, and I going to have to deal with it, so let’s just start them out on a good foot… ha….. ha…. so I mean, you know, like I said, it doesn’t matter, they don’t have the privilege. It’s my job and, and if it means that, you know, I do it this way, I do it this way, that’s what makes me a better coordinator because I know that they are Hmong people, they are going to need these extra things, and the American coordinators, they don’t care, they’re going in and out, and they just do the paperwork.

BT: Yes.

MH: So, you know.

BT: Good, was there anything else that you wanted to add?
MH: No I think that if anything probably, we’re still not to the point where I would like to see our community as far as accepting women and, you know, men and women being treated equally. We’re not there yet, but I think that if I compare myself to my sisters who are four or five years older than me, my life and their lives, and my relationship with my husband and their relationships with their husbands, and I think that if you look at the very micro issues that I gained a lot through, by being born in the time that I was born in, and being here and getting an education.

If you look at the larger picture, there are still a lot of work yet, but I think that if you take individuals’ stories and see how much women had progressed, you will see that women have a lot to say, and their families have a lot to say, and their clan has a lot to say in the community. I think that if you look at the larger picture any time you have a large movement in large numbers, it’s scary so you end up getting a lot of backlash.

But I think that if you investigate the different situations, you will see that there’s a lot of strong women out there, in various ways, and not everybody is going to be as vocal, not everybody’s going to be politically involved. But there are certain people who are very involved in their church, there are certain people who are very involved in their family; there are certain individuals who are just, the one brings all the members together, you know, it kind of depends on what you, what is important to you.

I think for me it’s important, my family is my first priority, and, if it means that my person, me as a public figure gets a little shadow, that’s fine because I think that I value my family and, that more than what is out there. I think that if you can’t be a leader within your own family, then when you try to be a leader in the community. It’s just a spot because you really have to be a leader in the family first.

BT: Ok, thank you.

MH: Thank you.
May Hang

Interviewer (I) : Okay, today is January um… 17th on a Monday um we are at May Kao’s house and I am interviewing May Hang, okay. Um koj yog nkauj hmoob dab tsi?

May Hang (M): Kuv yog nkauj hmoob Yaj.

I : Okay, hos koj los yuv tsev neeg hmoob xeem dab tsi?

M: Kuv los yuav tsev neeg hmoob Haam.

I : Okay, tam sim no koj muaj tsawg xyoo lawm?

M: Tam sim no kuv muaj 26 xyoo.

I : Okay, es koj muaj tsawg tus me nyuam?

M: Kuv muaj 2 tug me nyuam.

I : Okay, hos koj um… qib siab tshaj plaws koj kawm ntawv ne… tiav yog dab tsi?

M: Um kuv kawm ntawv tiav um 4 registered nurse.

I : Okay, es tam sim no koj ua hauj lwm dab tsi?

M: Tam sim no kuv ua hauj lwm rau Ucare Minnesota um… Ucare Minnesota yog ib lub um koom haum uas muab cov health insurance los yog cov ntaub ntawv kuaj mob pub pab rau cov pej xeem uas um tau mus thov tom um tsoom fww loj txog cov State thiab Federal programs, feem ntap yog nrog cov laus, ua ib tug um care coordinator los yog ib tug case manager tuav lawv cov cases.

I: Um…any time if you feel like speaking Englis, you can, ha, ha, ha.

M: Okay.

I: Um ib xyoo twg koj xav hais tias koj tau nyiaj npaum li cas xwb, qhov range from $20,000 to $50,000, $50,000 to $75,000?

M: Um qhov range yog $20,000 rau $50,000.

I: Okay, um tam sim no ne koj nrog leej twg nyob?
M: Tam sim no wb ob niamb txiv wb nyob wb tus kheej ntawm wb lub tsev.

I: Okay, so your marrital status?

M: Yog…um…married.

I: Hm hm.

M: Married with children.

I: Uh ha…ha…. Okay um hos koj tuaj teb chaws no thaum twg nab?

M: Kuv tuaj teb chaws no, kuv muaj 4 xyoos, so I think like um 1977.

I: Okay, es nej tuaj poob rau qhov twg?

M: Peb tuaj poob rau Rode Island.

I: Es nej, nej, nej raws leej twg los…

M: Peb um, kuv tus niamb laus thiab kuv tus txiv laus nkawv ua co-sponsors nrog ib lub church nyob Providence, Rode Island ces nkawv tos peb ces peb tuaj poob rau tid.

I: Hm hm, was it your whole family, tag nrho nej tsev neeg tuaj lov?

M: Um no, hais peb immediate family xwb, kuv txiv thiab cov me nyuam caum nkawv xwb hos niamb pog, pog thiab yawg thiab cov txiv ntxawm lawv ces lawv ho tuaj poob rau Iowa, so um peb nyob Providence for only six months.

I: Uh hm hm ha…

M: And then um we moved to Iowa so….hi…hi…

I: Um ces qhov nej tsiv mus rau Iowa ntawd yog raws kwv tij lov?

M: Yeah, qhov peb tsiv Iowa yog raws kwv tij thiab raws peb, peb pog tuaj nrad ces nws ho tsis tshua zoo xis nyob ces peb ho mus rau nrad.

I: Okay, um where were you born?

M: Um… I think um kuv niamb nkawv hais tias kuv yug um Phav Kheb sub, Phav Kheb nyob Nplog teb.

I: Okay… um koj yog hom hmoob dab tsi, nej tsev neeg?
M: Peb tsev neeg yog hmoob…
I: Hmoob dawb, Hmoob ntsuab
M: Peb tsev neeg yog hmoob dawb hmoob ntsuab tib si.
I: Uh ha…..ha…..oh yeah.
M: Kuv txiv yog hmoob lees hos kuv niam yog hmnoob dawb ces um, peb hais ob yam, hais yam twg los tau.
I: Oh, ces koj niam hais lus hmoob dawb, hos koj txiv hais lus hmoob lees, es lawv thiaj siv…. 
M: Peb siv ob yam, so tab sis yog saib ntawm txiv los ces yeej yog hmoob lees.
I: Uh hm hm, hos tam sim no um…um ntawm koj thiab koj tus txiv ne, neb kev ntseeg yog dab tsi xwb?
M: Um tam sim no wb yeej coj kev cai tshiab lawm thiab, wb mus, wb tseem tab tom los rau hauv Saint Paul no, tseem mus xyuas ib lub church dhau mus rau ib lub um feem ntau wb yuav mus rau nrog cov hmoob United Methodist tab sis wb tseem tshuav ib lub um wb tsi tau mus xyuas txog ces wb mus xyuas lub ntawd tas wb mam li ho decide thiab.
I: Um hm hm okay, um tam sim no kuv xav noog koj txog thaum uas koj tseem yog me nyuam yaus nav, es koj piav saib koj nco dab tsi xwb, um koj, thaum koj um, koj tias koj yug Nplog teb laiv puas yog?
M: Um hm hm.
I: And then thaum nej tuaj teb chaws no ces koj twb 4 xyoox, nej nyob Nplog teb, do you know all along or…?
M: I think peb nyob um…
I: How old were you, when you, when…
M: Peb nyob Vib Nais tau 6 hli xwb os….
I: Okay.
M: Yeah, peb khiav Nplog teb mus rau Noom Qhais ces peb mam li, lawv mam li ho muab xa mus rau um Vib Nais ces peb nyob tau li, I think 6 hli mus rau 9 hlis ces peb tuaj teb chaws Meskas no lawm ces…
I: Ces nej nyob teb chaws, um nej nyob Thaib teb luv luv xwb?

M: Yeah tsis tshua ntev thiab os.

I: Um... koj puas nco qab thaeu koj tseem yog me nyuam yaus ntawd koj puas tau kawm ntawv nev?

M: Nplog teb thiab Thaib teb kuv tsi tau kawm, tiam sis kuv nco thauam tuaj txog teb chaws Meskas no es mus pib kindergarten xwb.

I: Okay, um... hos uas hais txog uas hauj lwm hauv um, dej num nyob rau hauv tsev ne, koj nco qab thauam, thauam koj tseem yog me nyuam yaus ntawd, koj tau ua dab tsi xwb?

M: Um feem ntau thauam yog me nyuam yaus ces yus yog ntxhais thiab ces yeej um... qhov hauj lwm loj tshaj yog tu cov yau, tu cov yau, tu cov... pab kuv niam zov cov me nyuam yau, pab nws um... thauam yus loj me ntsis tuaj, as nyub kej me ntsis ces yus ho um cia cov es yau mus zov cov me nyuam hos yus ho mus rau pab yus niam, yus cov niam laus lawv ua zaub ua mov noj, nrog lawv ua ub ua no, tu vaj tu tsev.

I: Uh hwv, hos puas muaj tej yam uas ib yam yus yog me nyuam yaus xwb los yus tias yus ua los pab kwv tij neej tsa los um zej zog tej maj?

M: Um feem ntau thauam yus yau ntawd yeej um qhov loj tshaj yog mus pab lawv zov lawv tej me tub me nyuam thiab xwb.

I: Uh hwv...

M: Tsi muaj ab tsi loj thiab.

I: Okay, hos koj xav hais tias even thauam ntawd koj tseem me me los koj yog ib tug ntxhais nav um puas muaj tej yam hauj lwm los tej yam uas um txuj ci dab tsi es lawv qhia rau koj kom koj paub rau qhov koj yog tus ntxhais?

M: Thauam yau ces yus yeej tsi xav kawm los lawv yeej, um cov kwv tij neej tsa sawv daws lub caij ntawd los yeej pom tau hais tias lawv nyiam nyiam cov ntxhais kawm fuab laas voos li ub li no hiab ces...

I: Uh hwv.

M: Every body got forced to do that ha...ha... so kuv ob tug niam laus los, nkawv yog ob tug es coj thiab ob tug qhia thiab ces yeej qhia qhia tej ntawd thiab, tsis tas li ntawd xwb um, kuv niam los kuv niam yeej qhia kom yus um kawm... yus tsis nyiam ua los kom yus paub hais tias saib kev ua paj ntaub yog ua li cas, yuav pib
li ces nws yeej pip paj ntaub rau yus kom yus ua um… kom yus ua saib yus ua puas tas thiab…

I: Uh hwv.

M: So um hais txog kawm txuj ci xwb ces, um nco zoo hais tias tseem tseem um hmoob kev cai ub no ces yog paj ntaub thiab maybe kawm fuab me ntsis tej ntawd xwb.

I: Uh hum es thaum ntawd koj, kab tias koj muaj tsawg xyoo?

M: Uh, thaum peb fuab ntawd… I think… um huh 7 los 8 xyoo xwb pob, thaum peb kawm fuab naj, hos thaum ua paj ntaub lawm ces may be a little older… 10 xyoo 9 xyoo, 10 xyoo tej ntawd ov.

I: Uh hum uh hum, hos uas thaum uas… thaum koj tiav hluas nkauj tej ntawd lawm ne, koj nco qab tias tej kev ua si… lom zem yog dab tsi xwb?

M: Uh kev ua si lom zem thaum um ib nyuag… thaum pip kiag tiav hluas nkauj lawm ces yeej ua li hais, xub pip ces yog lub luv thij xwb.

I: Uh ha…ha…

M: Lub luv thij ces, caij lub thij baax and forth around town um thib yeej nrog yus tej muj mus ua si, mus um ntaus npaas, mus dhia yas ua si tom lawv tsev, mus taj laj tej.

I: Uh hum, um how about like um courthip los tham hluas nraug tej ntawd?

M: Oh!…ho…

I: Ha…ha…at what age and …ha…..

M: Um… I think for me kuv um kuv, I think for me kuv yog ib tug neeg es yog ib tug late ua li meskas hais late bloomer rau qhov kuv um kind of bias, kuv pheej pom cov nraug laug tuaj saib kuv ob tug sisters nav ces kuv pheej ntxub ntxub hais tias cas yuav laus ua luaj es tuaj saib cov hluas ua luaj nav.

I: Uh hum…hum…

M: So um I had a very good friend who was really just pretty mature beyong her age and um I used always teach her because nws pheej, you know, nrog cov laus uh….txiv nej laus laus tham, los yog nws tsis zoo hais lus phem phem rau lawv ces I just left, so I think for me um I always have this bias that, kuv yua tsis tham cov neeg uas, cov txiv neej uas nws laus tshaj kuv los yog hlob kuv, tshaj kuv li peb plaub xyoos lawm rau qhov that’s just too much um that just wrong in my opinion
for them to um tuaj xyuas cov hluas nkauj yau yau so, I think um for me qhov es hais tias muaj hluas nraug kiąg xwb los yog txawj nyiam kiąg hluas nraug, los xav tham hluas nraug yeej tis, yeej tsi tau yog until um nyob high school hoob 9 hoob 10 tej ntawd, tab sis tham nyob hoob 7, hoob 8 tej xwb los yus yeej pom um yus yeej muaj cov phooj ywg es muaj hluas nraug es yus yeej pom yus nrog nws mus, yus yeej tau nrog nws mus shopping, los yog yeej tau nrog nws mus tom park los yog, you know, whatever because peb hmoob no ces yog ib tug ntxhais mus ces yog ib leeg xwb ces tsi zoo saib ces yus yeej tau nrog yus cov phooj ywg pais ub pais no tab sis hais kom have a real boyfriend ces yeej tis yog…

I: Hum…hum…hum…

M: Yeej tsi muaj until 15, 16 thiab os.

I: Uh hum hum.

M: So um….

I: Ces tam sim no koj tus txiv, how much older is he?

M: Kuv tus txiv hlob kuv 3 xyoos.

I: Okay so.

M: Yes so.

I: Within thatrange.

M: Ha…ha…ha…

I: Ha…ha…ha… hos koj puas neo qab thaum koj tseem yau ntawd nav, puas muaj tej yam uas koj xav tau thiab ntshaw rau koj tus kheej thaum uas koj loj hlob naj, es nws yog dab tsi xwb?

M: Yeah thaum kuv yau…

I: …Your aspirations.

M: Thaum kuv tseem tab tom pib plhis ua tug me nyuam hluas nkauj, kuv yeej xav tias kuv txawv dua li cov uas ntxhais hmoob uas nrog kuv ib loj ntawd rau qhov kuv tsis tshua txhawj txog hais tias saib kuv yuav zoo nkauj li cas es kuv yuav um txawj hais lus li cas, you know, kuv ho xav txog, ho xav ntshaw txog tej yam txawv lawm. Kuv ho xav ntshaw txog tias luag tej hais tias yus yog ib tug ntxhais yus yuav ua tsi tau ab tsi, yus yuav mus um ua ib tug, luag ib tug poj niam xwb, kom mus nhiaiv ib tug txiv es ua tau hauj lwm tau nyiaj ntau ntau xwb, txawm nws laus laus los tsuav nws ua hauj lwm tau nyiaj ntau ntau ces yeej Okay xwb.
Kuv ho tsis xav hais tias kuv lub neej yuav kawg rau kuv tus txiv, kuv ho xav hais tias yus tuaj yus niam yus txiv twb tsis txawj ntaub txawj ntawv ces cia yus twb kawm qhov ntawv ntawd saib puas tau, thiab kuv yeej xav hais tias yog kawm tiav High School ces xav mus kawm ntawv kom kuv lub neej tsi txhob txom txom nyem li kuv niam kuv txiv lawv, thiab kom yus tej, kuv tej me tub me nyuam los tsi txhob uas pom kev txom nyem li kuv pom thiab, ces yeej xav hais tias ua ib tug neeg mas yuav tsum mus kawm kom, kawm ntawv kom tau qhov qib siab ntawd.

I: Um, es koj xav li ntawd, koj tsev neeg lawv uas lawv puas pab txhawb koj li cas thiab?

M: Kuv tsis neeg…

I: Los lawv hais li cas txog, txog tej yam koj um koj ntshaw ntawd, koj puas hais rau koj niam koj txiv paub, es lawv puas txhawb koj li cas nab?

M: Kuv um, kuv niam thiab kuv txiv nkawv, ntawm kuv txiv ces nws, yus tus ntxhais ces, yus thiab leej txiv ces yus yeej tsis tshua sib tham npaum li yus thiab yus niam.

I: Uh hwv.

M: Kuv niam yeej paub, thiab kuv yeej muaj cov niam laus es lawv mus yuav txiv thaum lawv yau yau ces lawv yeej tau rov qab los hais tias kom txhob rawm yuav txiv rau qhov ua neej nuuab nyuab um… lawv yeej tau thov tsheej mis, tau thov welfare li ub li no, nuuab nuuab rau lawv thib yeej yog tsheej 10 tawm xyoo lawv mam li tiav ua tau lub neej tsheej thib ces lawv yeej, cov hlob los lawv yeej rov qab los hais tias kom yus nyob thiab, I, kuv xav tias tej zaum kuv txiv yeej pom tias lawv cov neej txom txom nyem thiab ces kuv txiv yeej tsis um, kuv txiv more, more relax…

I: Um hwv.

M: …Rau kuv nav, nws, ib yam li ib nyuag tso kuv mus ub mus no zog nws, ib nyuag tso kuv mus ntaus npaas, ib nyuag tso kuv mus ua ub ua no nrog hoo hia li ub li no ces, thaum nkawv mas nws very strict, twb tawm tsi tau tsev, ua tau kuv niam thiab kuv txiv nkawv ces, I think that, kuv txiv yeej pom tau hais tias teb chaws no txawv teb chaws tid lawm, thib nws tsi tau tso qhov kev li ntawd me ntsis rau peb cov yau thiab ces um kuv txiv yeej tsis tau hais kiag qhov ncauj hais tias kuv support koj li naj, tab sis nws cov actions yeej qhia tau hais tias nws yeej support thiab um kuv mus kawm ntawv kiag lawm los luag tej hais rau kuv niam kuv txiv nkawv tias neb tso neb tus ntxhais mus kawm ntawv ces ib ntsis nws yuav rov qab los ib plab me nyuam xwb.

I: Uh hwv…
M: ...Ces nkawv yeej... um... defend thiab nkawv yeej hais tias um nws mus los nws mus los mus nws mus zoo los yuav zoo, nws mus phem los thaufm ntawd mam li hais, ces kuv niam thiab kuv txiv nkawv yeej very supportive thiab los mas, kuv yeej yog tus thawj, tus thib ib uas ntawm peb tsev neeg, tus ntxhais thib ib es tau tawm sab nraumd mus kawm ntawv...

I: Uh hwv...

M: ...Um nkawv yeej xav tias kom kawm kom ze ze tsev no tab sis cov kawm hoo hia ib neig no lawv yeej tsi muaj yam kuv xav kawm thiab ces ho tau mus ob xuab mooos...

I: Uh hwv...did you live at school?

M: Um yeah, kuv mus ces, I went to um... ib lub tsev kawm ntawm peb zos ntawd mus khaiv lub fais li ob xuab mooos tawm, peb xuab mooos ces yeej mus nyob tom school, tom cov tsev hoo hia es dormitories ces yeej nyob... Kuv nyob peb xyooes ces xyoo, xyoo kawg kuv mam li mus nyob tsev appartment, tab sis thauum mus nyob tsev appartment ces twb nrog kuv ib co, cov nus kuv tij nyob thiaw xwb so, I lived with a banch of guys.

I: Uh ha... ha...so tam sim no, xam hais tias koi yog ib tug niam tsev koi pom hais tias um tus, tus niam tsev thiab txiv tsev no nav, koi xam hais tias nws, nws txoj hauj lwm hauv tsev, los nws qhov role nyob hauv tsev naj, yog dab tsi, koi, koi pom hais tias yog li cas?

M: Um... ntawm wb xwb it's very confusing because wb nyob wb nav ces wb, wb tsi muaj differentiation of role! nav, rau qhov kuv tus txiv naj nws yeej muaj txoj hauj lwm sab nraum, kuv yeej muaj txoj hauj lwm sab nraum, ces nws ua ib tug txiv neej tab sis nws yeej pab kuv hauv vaj hauv tsev, nws yeej pab kuv tu me tub me nyuam thiab um... you know, yog kuv ua... yog kuv los lig los nws yeej pib ua hmo noj, ces kuv pom tias nws pib hmo lawm ces kuv yeej ntxuav tais diav los yog kuv ntxuav me nyuam, muab me nyuam da dej ces nws yeej tu tais diav um tej yam es specific ib yam hais tias txiv nyom thob snow tej ces nws yeej hais tias yog nws cov hauj lwm, ces nws yeej tsi tshua pub kuv ua thiab um as it relates to strenght and whatever I don’t know....

I: Uh ha...ha...ha....

M: ...like move the lawn, but um... but um, and everything inside, you know, we never said this is your job, but like, lub kitchen thiab lub bathroom ces nws yeej tsis kov li.

I: Uh hum...hum...hum....
M: He just does not touch those. But hais txog tu me tub me nyuam thiab ua zaub noj thiab um....

I: Uh hwv....

M: ...tej ntawd ces wb, wb tsi muaj specific roles, it’s just kind of, whoever has the time into, leej twg los tom thawj ntawd, tab sis yeej nyuab tsawv rov qhov tam sim no wb niam tais nrog wb nyob ces niam tais yeej tias “Oh! Vauv koj txhob ntxuav tais diav os, ntawm ko yog, ib ntsis wb mam ua os” so I think um...

I: Uh hum...hum...hum....

M: ...I was telling my mother, koj, koj tsi txhob txwv kom nws txhob ua nav ib ntsis koj tawm tsev lawm ces nws ho tsis ua lawm ces tsi muaj leej twg pab kuv lawm. So I think that it’s very confusing for him because tej lub sj hawm ces nws pab pab kuv ces niam tais ho hais tias kom nws txhob ua, ces tej lub sj hawm kuv tias koj yuav tsum ua even though niam tais says you shouldn't do it.

I: Uh hwv.

M: ...And it's, I think with him and our roles, it's not as distinct as with me growing up and my brothers' roles because, I think, a lot of it has to do with, maybe, how his mother raised them, and how my mother raised us because, kuv niam thiab kuv txiv nkawv yeej very strong into female roles and male roles, and kuv cov brothers tam sim no, I think that makes them um...unable to assist lawv cov poj niam to the degree that they should because of that, because we as the girls we did everything and um....

I: Uh hwv, uh hwv...

M: ...So for her...

I: So now that lawv yuav poj niam los lawv expect li ntawd.....

M: ...they expect lawv cov poj niam to go to work and come back and do the kids and, you know, so and then kuv niam ho tias “cas nej tsi ua li vauv Fwv, tsis pab nej tus poj niam” li no nav ha...ha......

I: Ha...ha...ha......

M: Now she is telling them two things, you know, so...For us it is very a mesh, mesh role and um...you know, which is fine cause um, I like it that way, and my son helps me bake and his dad move the lawn...so.

I: Uh hum, hos um hauv koj tsev neeg ne koj uas xam hais tias um ntawm koj thiab koj tus txiv nav, neb txiav txim, you know, how do you make decisions?
M: Um ntawm wb ces nyob ntawm saib cov situations los yog qhov uas, qhov teeb meem, los yog qhov yuav los tham, cov lus los tham ntawd yog muaj txuam nrog li cas, yog um… yog nws… tej yam es loj es hais txog siv nyiaj txiag ub no ces wb yeej txiav txim ua ke um, tej yam es yuav tshwm sim muaj dab tsì los wb yeej txiav txim ua ke, txawm yog nws mus sab laj tom kqw tij los nws yeej tsis teb hais tias kuv teh li no….nws yeej rov qab los nrog kuv tham ua ntej tso ces wb mam li txiav txim li cas los nws mam li ho coj qhov lus ntawd mus hais rau tom kqw tij, ces kuv xav hais tias um ntawm kuv los yeej ib yam thiab yog tej qho es, you know, me me tej xwb es tsi muaj ab tsi loj ces nws ua nws kuv ua kuv los tau, tab sis ho yog yuav hais txog wb tsev neeg thiab wb yuav pab kqw tij neej TSA, los yog li cas ces wb yeej, usually ua together los yog wb ob leeg txawm nyob ntawd los ib tug yeej yuav tsum rov qab los nrog tus hauv tsev tham tas es zoo siab, ob leeg zoo siab li cas ces mam li ua li ntawd.

I: Hos usually ntawm nej pawg kwv tij ne, thauam, thauam muaj sìb hais es yuav txiav txim tej yam dab tsi ntawd koj, koj, are you involved and if so, how?

M: Um I think that um… hais txog kwv tij…es ib nyuag kem zog lawm nav…

I: Uh hwv…

M: …Um immediate famliy xwb, es kuv thiab kuv cov nus, thiab cov niam laus niam hluas los yog cov um niam ntxawm txiv ntxawm es ib pab, es ib tug niam txiv yug kiąg nav, I think, li ntawd xwb no ces peb tsev neeg qhov decision making ces yeej tsi muaj hais tias poj niam txiv neej ab tsi li, tsuav yog family members ces sawv daws muaj lus, muaj xuaj ces um tham li cas ces tus uas muaj ab tsi hais los nws cia li hais li nws lub siab xav xwb, tab sis yog tawm kiag sab ib npoog sab nraum me ntsis lawm es kom sab laj nrog kqw tij no ces, tej, feem ntau yus yeej mus thiab, tab sis… rau qhov coj es hais lus tawm suab ces yog txiv neej ntau xwb, lawv cov poj niam es muaj ntawd los tsi muaj ib tug hais li ces, yus yeej, yog yus pom tau hais tias lawv, yus yeej noog lawv tham, yog yus pom tau hais tias lawv yeej hari way off los yog li cas ces yus yeej interject thiab, tab sis yuav kom, …um yuav kom um….hais mus hais los li ntawm, ces kuv yeej tsi tsha hais thiab, tab sis kuv noog noog es yog lawv, kuv pom tau hais tias lawv go off to a point los yog muaj tej qhov point es lawv agree on es kuv tham, kuv pom hais tias tis ncaj los yof tis haum sawv daws ces kuv yeej, kuv yeej hais thiab. Um ces hais txog ntawm sab, ib nyuag sab kwv tij ib nyuag sab nraum lawm ces kuv tsi tsha, kuv tsi tsha…active as, as if it’s yog kuv tsev neeg es niam txiv ib plab kiag so um …

I: How about just in the community?

M: Um in the community, I think that I, kom get involve kiag xwb ces kuv yeej tis tshua get involve thiab, tab tis yog tej yam es kuv pom txog thiab kuv… hais es kuv pom tias tseem ceeb rau kuv tus kheej feem ntau tej yam, ib yam txog um… cov poj niam cov me nyuam, thiab tej yam ho txog ib yam li kuv qhov kev hauj
Iwm health-care tej ntawd ces yog need get involve li cas los kuv yeej xav get involve thiaj, hos yog sab nraud, qhov loj no ces kuv, yog tsi txuam los yog tsis raug kuv loj ces kuv tsi tshua get involve thiaj, tab sis kuv yeej yog ib tug neeg es xav stay very alert, los yog yeej noog txog hais tias saib tam sim no muaj li cas li cas, teeb meem los yog kev zoo kev tsi zoo yog li cas li cas ces yog noog txog thiaj xyuas txog tias saib puas yog tej qhov zoo, tej qhov tsi zoo; tsi zoo li cas los yuav raug nrog lwm… cov sab laj li cas los yeej mus sab laj thiaj noog txog tias saib yuav ua li cas kho thiaj.

I: So, kj puas pom hais tias qhov nov nws, nws hloov rau qhov tias ib yam li kj hais txog tias koj txog hauj lwm mas, kj qhov um hauj lwm koj yog ib tug nurse ib yam li koj txawj ib qho specific area nav...

M: Uh hwv…

I: …Ces thaum hais txog community ces nws hloov, nws hloov hais tias ib yam li yus ke txiax txim li cas rau qhov tias tej yam ntawd yus ho paub me ntsis, so it’s not like um yog yus muaj teeb meem hauv family, tab sis yog hais txog community ces, it’s more um, qhov role ntawd nws txawv rau qhov tsi yog tias kj yog niam dab tsi es lawv thiaj li tuaj hais rau koj, tab sis mas rau qhov tias koj yog tus nurse ces koj pab txiax txim tias "Oh! maybe qhov zoo", ib yam li nws separate cov roles ntawd nav, so that’s more of. I don’t know, personal, I mean how, how, how do you see that and has that changed hmong women’s roles.

M: I see that um having a professional skill, a specific skill does um allow you to have a certain degree of voice where, where we’d not had it before. Um I think that, yog kuv mus sab laj sab nraum es yog kuv mus hais tias kuv yog Maiv Haam kuv tuaj ua tom lub tsev hoos maum li no tuaj, tuaj sab laj txog… do we need an interpreter at the hospital ces zoo li tseem yog muaj txiv neej nyob ib ncig ntawd los zoo li lawv ib nyuas noog yus dua thiab yuav noog tias saib yus muaj ab tsi hais, hos yog thauam es mus sab laj nrog kkv tij neej tsa los yog mus sab laj lwm qhov txawv ces um you are just an other woman.

I: Uh hwv.

M: …Unless, of course, if somebody who has some kind of disease or by their diagnosis something else and then, then, you know, it is a different situation too then you are called to make a lot of the decisions. But I think that, that’s the, probably the most advanced step for women is the, our ability to have those kinds of skills and that is a plus for us when it comes to um… cov sab nraum yuav tsum tau accept hais tias peb yeej txawj txuj ci li no ces tej zaum cov lus peb hais los nws yeej muaj xoos thiab nws yeej muaj, yeej yog ib qho tseem ceeb es yuav tau noog txog thiaj ...

Í: Hos koj puas nco qab thauj koj loj hlob ntawd puas muaj tej poj niam uas nws yog thawj coj es koj um… koj ab tsi, ib yam li nav thwm txog naj?
M: Yeah, thaum kuv tseem me me peb nyuam qhuav khiav los nyob Wasau um, muaj ib tug niam, ib tug poj niam hmoob ntawd nws, nws thiab nus tus txiv nkawv yog ob tug thawj thawj tuaj rau hauv lub los ntawd nav, ces nws tus txiv, tom qab no nws tus txiv ho xiam lawm, tab sis nws yeej ntaus phooj ywg zoo nrog cov nom tswv los yog cov coj noj coj ua ntawm lub los ntawd, ces lawv cov neeg taww dawb lawy yeej nav nav thwm nws heev. Kuv yeej pom tau hais tias nws yog ib tug poj niam uas nws um muaj fwj chim, thiab nws txawj ntse thiab nws txawj hais lus thiab, ua li lawv hais, qhov zoo nkauj los nws zoo nkauj, qhov txawj hais lus los nws zoo nkauj, tab sis kuv very um, kuv ho pom tau hais tias ua cas nws twb yog ib tug neeg siab zoo, twb yog ib tug uas pab peb cov ntxhais hmoob, koj pom nws mas nws yeej nrog yus tham luag ntxhi, nws yeej coj cov ntxhais hmoob mus um…show txuj ci rau lawv cov taww dawb ub no ces, tab sis ib nyuag nyuab rau qhov yus pom tau tias nws yog ib neeg es yus…ws xav kom ob peb hnub yus laus tuaj los yus tiav niam, yus ua tau li nws tab sis tam sim lub caij ntawd kiag xwb los yus cov community hmoob los ho tus hais zoo los hais zoo, tus hais phem los hais phem thiab ces, you know…

I: Tej yam es lawv hais txog nws yog dab tsi?

M: Tej yam lawv hais txog nws, mostly, ib yam li yog hmoob no ces yog thaum tsis muaj tus txiv lawm ces lawv hais txog ib yam tias "Oh! tham luag tej txiv, lam qheb taj laj", you know, nws yeej muaj ib lub taj laj, nws yeej muaj nws business thiab. "Oh lam qheb taj laj kom muaj ib qho chaw rau hluaas nraug tuaj xwb", you know and, to me it was like, txhua txhua hnub es kuv taug kev tom school mus rau peb tsev nav, kuv yuav tsam mus dhau nws lub taj laj, kuv nkag mus hauv mus nrog nws tham nws yeej…muab, you know, soda, muab just at her free will.

I: Uh hum.

M: Just said how are you doing and here is a soda, and nyob nov ib ntsis, su ib ntsis koj mam mus tsev, you only half way home, you know. So to me those are like little things that meant a lot to me, but and then, yus mus sab nraum ces yus ho hnow luag hais no ces, you're like thinking “No you know, kuv twb paub tus no, I go there like txhua txhua hnub after school kuv twb mus spend like 15-20 minutes nrog nws es kuv twb tsis pom txiv neej nyob hauv nev.

I: Uh hwv.

M: …You know, I mean I used to say that when people would say that, and I would talk to kuv niam, es kuv tias “ No, kuv twb, every day kuv twb mus, kuv twb mus nrog nws tham twb tsis muaj neeg nyob hauv nev, twb tsis, there is nobody, I don’t see any body”, you know, so as a child, you know, as a young girl, 12- 13, you had this mentor, but then you are torent because your community thinks that she is so rebeles and all this too, but…
I: Uh hwv…

M: …Now that I look back, she is actually a pioneer because, you know, as a widow, nws yeej tu tau nws cov me nyuam loj hlob zoo. Tam sim no lawv neej zoo tas, you know, nws yeej muaj business, nws yeej ntsais phooj ywg nrog cov meskas, nws yeej very active, nws yeej, yav tim ub nws yeej yog lawv cov mus, ntxhais es mus kawm ua nurse ub no thiab, ces nws yeej nrog kuv tham me ntsis tias saib kawm ntawv xav mus kawm txog qhov li cas li cas thiab so. Hmoob ces yeej muaj tus ntawd, tab sis ua li kuv hais um, hos lwm… lwm tus es… cov ntxhais yus pom tau hais tias kawm tau ntawv siab es yus yuav muaj no ces yeej tsi muaj, yeej tsi muaj qhov ntawd, tsuas yog cov, cov es tab tom pib mus lawm xwb ces tsis tshua muaj ntau thiab.

I: Ces um, hais txog thaum uas koj los yuav txiv ntawd ne, koj txiav txim li cas koj thiaj li yuav txiv?

M: Hum……ha…ha…ha…

I: Ha…ha…ha…

M: Um… qhov txiav txim siab yuav txiv ntawd, qhov txiav txim siab yuav txiv ntawd ces um… ua li kuv hais um, yus yeej xav tias yus kawm ntawd tas lawm es yus yuav siv ob peb xyoos, you know, xyuas teb chaws… ncig ub ncig no kom yus pom tau hais tias teb chaws zoo li cas, yus lub neej yav pem suab zoo li cas, tab sis ntawm kuv tug kheej kiaj xwb ces kuv yeej hais tias, qhov loj tshaj yog kuv yeej um… tej zaum kuv tsis strong enough es kuv yeej fall into kuv qhov family pressure more so, because kuv yeej ib nyuag yuav txiv a little earlier then I wanted to.

I: How old were you?

M: Um I was 21, I was done with High, college but, kuv yeej xav tias kuv yuav, you know ua hauj lwm as a travel nurse es mus ib lub teb chaws rau ib lub teb chaws, tab sis ua ntej ntawd ces kuv ho ntsib kuv tus txiv ces, you know when um niam txiv nav lawm pom hais tias yus ntsib ib tus neej zoo, ces nws tsev neeg los zoo, yus tsev neeg zoo, ces lawm sib paub ces lawv tias "Okay, when is the wedding, let’s get the wedding going", you know, so it’s a little difficult because um, ua ntej ntawd kuv niam thiab kuv txiv nkawv yeej tsis tso ncauj hais tias kom yus tham hluaa raug, kom yus mus party, mus ab tsi nav, yus mus, ib nyuag mus zog lawv twb cem nav. Somehow xyoo 4, it was like. "Okay, oh…my god maybe peb tus", maybe they think. "Oh, my gosh peb tus ntxhais laus laus lawm" or whatever.

I: Yog ha…ha…

M: It was like, "Me naib cas koj tsis mus os 4th July naj…"
I: Ah ha…

M: Oh, kuv yuav ua hauj lwm os. “No, no, no, here take our car”, you know "go”, it is like, you know, so I think I felt that, they thought that I was gonna be with them forever…

I: Ha..ha….

M: …I would never get a husband, and then whatever and then they wouldn't know what to tell their neighbors. They sent this daughter to college, and here she is, you know, um old and living with them and whatever, so I think that my family, kuv niam thiab kuv txiv nkawv yeej pauv ntau xyoo plaub ntawd, xyoo kawg ntawd nav rau qhov kuv um… yeej tsis tau hais tias yuav muaib tib tug, ib tug hluas nraug es kuv yeej nyiam nyiam es xav yuav li thiab ces nkawv yeej xav tias ntshai kuv yuav… nrog nkawv nyob forever, ces xyoo plaub ntawd nkawv yeej …. 

I: The 4th years of your…

M: …college…ces nkawv yeej hais tias "Oh, mus party", you know, "go to St Paul, mus noj peb caug, mus", you know, "saiab lawv ncaws npaas, ntaus npaas", so um when, thaum nkawv pom tau hais tias, hos kuv tus txiv ntawd los, I think nws yeej txog lub caj nws pom tau hais tias nws xav yuav poj niam lawm thiab nav ces nws, wb sib ntsib los nws yeej um ib nyuag more aggressive then cov hluas nraug qub thiab nav, nws yeej tuaj, nws tsi tuaj xyuas kuv los nws yeej tuaj xyuas kuv niam nkawv, nws yeej tuaj ua tej yam es, you know, traditional hmong male courting, you know.

I: Yeah.

M: …courting the parents first, nws yeej tuaj saiab nkawv, yeej tuaj nrog nkawv tham, nws hu xov tooj tuaj los nws yeej xub xub nrog nkawv tham for like 10-15 minutes, kuv niam mam muab rau kuv. I’m like "who you’re talking to for 15 minutes?"

I: Uh ha……ha…….ha…….

M: "Your boyfriend". Why you are talking to my boyfriend", so nkawv yeej pom tau hais tias nws yob ib tug neeg zoo, thiab nws niam nws txiv los lawv yeej yog cov uas qub hmoob es tim ub es lawv sib sib paub thiab nav, so, nws, kuv tus husband niam thiab txiv los yeej xav hais tias yog nrhiaiv tau ib tug ntxhais es lawv twb paub niam txiv zoo ces um kom yuav thiab ces, I think that um, you know, yag yus muab xyuas txog tej ntawd tib si ces um kuv tsis tus siab hais tias kuv tsis tau mus xyuas teb chaws li kuv xav mus xyuas rau qhov tam sim no kuv yeej ua neej los yeej txaus siab thiab haum siab thiab yeej um tau me tub me nyuam ces yus yeej ua, tab sis ua li kuv hais yog yus um yog kuv think back, yog delay tau no
ces kuv yeej xav, yus yeej xav kom delay li ib xyooos los ib xyooos tawm tej ntawd es kom yus paub hais tias yus kawm txuj ci tas ces, yus tawm sab nraud yog li cas, ua li kuv tso dag rau kuv tus txiv uas, if I knew maybe I wouldn’t get married and then, we… you know…….

I: Ces thauam, thauam, thauam ntawd um ab tsi lawv tuaj hais koj lov los?

M: Um, no thauam ntawd ces it was a very long debate…ha….ha….

I: Ha….ha….

M: …thauam ntawd, yus ua ib tug nttxhais ces yus yeej xav tias kom lawv tuaj hais yus, um wb yeej hais mus hais los nws yeej, qhov uas, qhov kuv niam tu siab tshaj nws yeej um… like she said nws yeej dag kuv niam rau qhov nws tuaj xyuas kuv los nws yeej hais rau kuv niam tias, you know, yeej yuav ua li ntawd thiab, so um txog, txog kiag thauam lub sij hawm ntawd ces nws hos, nws… hos… nws niam nws txiv lawv ho tias yaav nyuab rau qhov lawv tsi muaj kvw tij nyob lub zos ntawd thiab ces yog tuaj hais ces yuav muaj, yuav tsum muaj ib qho chaw nyob ntev yog kuv niam nkawv ua yooj yim ces yooj yim (ngaib ces ngaib) hos yug ua nyuab ces yuav muab ncua ob peb as thiv thiab ub no thiab ces tsi muaj kvw tij neej tsa nyob ntawd thiab, thiab lawv um… you know, qhib laab….ba, ba, ba… and nobody in their family ever asked for a woman, and he is not man enough if he can bring me home……es ha…..ha……so.

I: So, how did you fell then?

M: At first yus yeej tu siab mav, yus yeej tu siab tias um, you know, ua cas es yus twb yog ib tug neeg tsvm txiaj thiab yus yeej tsi yog ib tug neeg es ua dog ua dig thiab es ua cas es tsev neeg ntawd tsi xyuas txog yus es tsis nav thwm yus, es tuaj hais hauv tsev thiab rau qhov yus, tsi yog tias yus yog ib tug quote and quote neeg tsi tsvm txiaj los yog ib tug mus ua ua si tej xwb, yus yej yog ib tug neeg zoo thiab, koj mus txog los koj tsi yog mus um tos lawv noj lawv haus, yus tseem mus pab tau lawv, yus tseem mus, you know, tsu lawv tus tub lub neej ub no xwb ces yus yeej tu siab thiab yus yeej disponted tias ua cas tsi ua li ntawd, tsis ho, ho muaj qhov kev cai li ntawd es ho, nws lawv ho tsi kam ua li ntawd no ces, yeej, you know, yeej make qhov relationship ib nyuag strange zog me ntsis thaib yus yeej xav ntau qhov tias, yog tsev neeg no tsi kam tuaj hais yus es mus ua lawv tus nyab lawv puas yuav hlub yus thiab all these stuff so, yus yeej xav li ntawd thiab mav, tab sis, you know, kuv nrog kuv niam kuv txiv nkawv tham los nkawv yeej tias no, you know, "Don’t go" and you know, "… if you go, we'll never forgive you and ba,ba,ba,ba… and I think that after back and forth, back and for um, kuv muab xav los hais tias, hmo ntawd or qhov wedding night, it’s such a small piece of wb lub neej nav, I think back to kuv cov sisters lawv es,I had one that caum and two that lawv tuaj hais hauv tsev nav.

I: Uh hwv…
M: So, I’m thinking tam sim no lawv sawv daws neej zoo ib yam, nobody remembers, lawv tsis nco txog hais tias how it went.

I: Yeah. Uh ha…

M: So, kuv thiaj xav hais tias, Okay zoo phem los yog kuv lub neej es kuv tseem mus es yog kuv niam lawv tsis forgive kuv los yog kuv ua neej kom zoo zoo ces kuv hlub hlub lawv ces, they gonna have, you know, they gonna have to forgive me, ha…ha…

I: Ha…ha…

M: They gonna have to love me again uh ha…ha…So, I think that um, for my husband…it’s…I think, for him, I wanted us to start out in his clan with a good footing. I wanted him to be respected, and I wanted him to have a… whatever as acceptance as, you know, we are still in the male world, and I didn’t want him to go for ever been seeing, "Yeah, yeah….. you’re the only guy that has to go beg for your wife ha…..ha…you know, so, I figured, you know as a woman, I think women, all women tend to do that, kind of sacrify a little bit their, themselves for other people, so I said "Okay fine, I will love, I will follow you, but I have a job here already, it’s a very good job", um the time I graduated, nursing job was very hard to come by, and um especially one in the hospital where you are going to get a letter there um, um technical experience, so I said "Okay, fine, I will follow you, but you to come live here cause I am not about to, you know, leave this job, the people I know, um and try to start all over again" cause, you know, um he also lived in a small town where I would have to drive 30 minutes to actually get to a real huge hospital with all the technologies.

I: Yeah.

M: So, he said "Okay let me talk it over with my family baba". Anyway so that was our trade off was that I followed him and he get all their recognitions and whatever uh hi…hi….but then that he would make the move, at least, for a couple years, so that I can get some experience, and I can be more of a value, and it would be easier for me to get a job. It’s, it's very difficult as a new grat to try to get a job, a nursing job in a larger hospital without having any connections, without having prior intership so, the hospital where I was working at, I was, I had intern there for the last two summer so.

I: Uh hww.

M: That was our trade off was: I follow you and you come live with me for a couple years, and then we go back and live with your parents, so, um his family was um, um liberal enough to allow us to do that…
I: Uh hwv.

M: …I think he had more, he took more slack from the relatives on living with me then actually…

I: Uh hum….

M: …you know asking for me, so I figured "Well, it could have been worse".

I: Yeah, so after you got married, how, how did you plan for your family?

M: Um, I think that um, we planed kind of based on the resources that we have, um we knew that childcare was um…um… very expensive, and thaum wb nyob, thaum nws los nrog kuv nyob ntawd ces kuv niam thiab kuv txiv nkawv nyob tib lub zos thiab nav, ces nkawv twb retire lawm, thiab nkawv ho tau nyiaj laus xwb ces kuv, wb tias wb tseem, thaum es wb tseem muaj niam tais yawm txiv nyob ntawd ces cia wb muaj me tub me nyuam rau qhov ib ntsis, tej lub sij hawm es wb ho khaiv mus lwm qhov ces wb tsi muaj leej twg pab wb lawm ces um txawm nyog wb nyuam qhuav sib yuav tau ob peb hlis xwb los cia wb try saib wb puas muaj me tub me nyuam rau qhov wb tseem muaj nkawv pab wb thiab um… yog wb tsi ua li ntawd ces wb ho tsi muaj neeg pab ces qhov es them rau neeg zov me nyuam ntawd ces kim kim no ces, so I think wb yeej npaj tau tias wb xav yuav me tub me nyuam, tab sis wb yeej xaav tias cia wb, cia ob peb xyoos wb mam muaj no, tab sis hos hais saib, muab saib txog cov resources thiab cov support wb muaj ces ho tom, tom thawj nws lub sij hawm nws ho lub zoo ces um we just got married have the kids…

I: Okay.

M: Yeap,… so.

I: Okay, good, um how about time when you were most respected, what , um when, when was that?

M: Um… I think that I felt most respected when my family and his family or other people um…ask me to be involved in their decision making um… when it has to do with health problem.

I: Uh huh.

M: I think that um… I get call most from situations like that um, and it’s… it’s a big responsibility, but yet you feel like you could actually assist the family because you know a little bit of both worlds, and you know what if the doctor is saying the correct thing or you know how to help the family um ask the right questions to get all their needs met, so I think, you know, I feel most respected in that sense. I
also feel respected when, when um my sibblings would ask me to intervene with children or whatever um especially their daughters, so I think that um to able to, to, you know, you can't accept that you're a role model, but, I mean you, you can’t say I gonna be a role model, but you have to accepted that, no matter what, you are a role model, you need to live up to what is espected then. So I think that it’s nice to um… be able to have, be able to do for these younger girls what, what I never had, you know, to ask them. Okay I have to write this paper on this, and be able to say okay, well you wanna figure out all the different theories of the psychology, and which one you agree with, and then that's what you are supposed to do with that paper, so I mean that is really simple, but growing up and not having anybody to bounce ideas off like that. All of us, we need to take it for granted and can do that for them, but when you think about those activityes, then you feel good about yourself and good about the fact that, you know, you had a harder time, but at least you make, help them making a little easier for the younger generations.

I: How about the times when you feel most disrespected?

M: Hum…. I think, my wedding ha…ha…ha……

I: Uh ha….ha….

M: I think wedding are very difficult cultural, times and tradition because it’s your wedding, but you have no idea what they are negotiating, you have no, you can't even sit there and listen to what they are negotiating um, um I had a very traumatic wedding because um my husband's side ended up bringing a person who like, 10 years ago supposedely said something really bad about my family, so when you bring the guy who said something bad to be the (mej koob), in my family's eyes, It was like a slap in the face…

I: Uh hum.

M: …so, you know, I mean I think that I felt not really, I felt not very respected because they didn’t ask either of us, I mean it was, neither of us said it, and here we have to pay the price for a sin that some body, you know, did 10 years ago, and it, it dropped in our wedding, and it had people bickering, you know, I mean for, and his side refuse to say they did it and I’m like; you know, we have money, just give them $500 dollars of our money, and get it over with hum…hum…ha…ha, you know, and I think that, um for me, um because of those types of discussions, um it made me feel like I wasn't a person, and it made me feel like I was a thing, um like my happiness wasn’t irrelevant, and they just had to get over, they were like, you know, you did this to me, so I am going to get back at you, kind of the thing um they were forgetting that, it would, it’s us and how we gonna start our life and tab both side of the family be so like hostile.

I: Hum hmm.
M: ....You know, I just thought, you know, what am I? I could be...you know, a piece of furniture and, you know, so I think... um, you know, my wedding, I think may me felt, feel because of some of the different tradition that goes on... make me feel like I wasn’t who I am, and everything I accomplished meant not thing because when it came down to it, it was what's said 10 years ago....

I: Uh hmm.

M: ...And if they didn’t get that resolved, then our negociation wouldn't perceive, and it was like gosh!...you know, we didn't even do it. I didn't even do anything, why do I have to be the one to, you know, you know, little selfish there, why do I have to be the one to be suffer because somebody said some, cause some body got their eagle knocked offer or whatever, but anyway, um... I think weddings are, are like that um.....

I: Well, do you remember anything about the war, thau mit chaw tawg ntawd naj koj puas nco qab dab tsi? Or were you still so little?

M: No, I was too young. I don’t remember. I only... I don’t have any memory. I just know about things from listening to my parents...

I: Well, how about coming to America, what was that like?

M: Um, I don’t remember coming either....

I: Yeah!...ha...ha.....

M: My first memory is trick or treating...

I: Oh.

M: ...in the United States, so I remember carrying a orange pumpkin going from door to door thinking “wow, I can just go knock on anybody’s door and get candy” he..he..he.

I: Uh um...

M: So, that was one of my first memories um... I think that as you got older, you remember more things. I remember, you know, not liking, once, once I got to have American friends and go to their houses stuff, not liking that I have ten people living in my two bedroom house...

I: Yeah...

M: ...but, you know, we all went through that.
I: Yeah, so um, let’s see, you were four years old when your family came?

M: Um hm.

I: I think that’s pretty much it. Was there anything that I didn’t ask you that you want to tell us… about yourself?

M: Um… no I think that’s.

I: What, when you first came um and then you went to school, was that difficult, I mean, you spoke hmong right. And you went to school and had to learn english, what was that like?

M: I think it was difficult. I think that as um a person tsi paub lus Meskas es mus kawm ntawv nav, I never felt confident in myself until I was probably in 7th grade.

I: Uh um.

M: …cause, you know, yus pheej tsi paub txaus ces yus pheej xav tias yus ua tsi tau, yus yuav ua tsi tau li lawv cov me nuyam Meskas nav….

I: Uh um..

M: …And I never felt like I can compete with them or that I just as good as they were until like 7th grade, es yus mas pom tau tias "man… I’m getting A’s too or just like they are, so I think that, you know um…

I: What was that like for you I mean going to school and that whole experience cause koj niam nkawv puas tau kawm ntawv nab?

M: Uh, no kuv thiab kuv txiv nkaws yeej tsi paub, yeej twm tsi tau lus.. ntaub ntawv Meskas, yeej um hais tsi tau Meskas. I think that more than anything, yus loj hlob sai nav rau qhov yus niam yus txiv tsi paub lus aaskiv, tsi paub ub paub no ces yus yeej ua everything rau nkawv. Um, tseem yog 7, 8 xyoo, 9 xyoo, 10 xyoo xwb los yus yeej mus hoos maus, yeej mus txhais lus rau nkawv, nkawv tej ntaub ntawv tuaj tom bank tuaj los yus yeej balance nkawv checkbook, yus tseem sau cov check tib si. You know, so I think that yus tseem yau yau los zoo li yus twb ua tej yam es.. cov loj loj lawm nav yus yeej tias xav hais tias yus ua ab tsi loj tab sis, tam sim no yus muab xav rov qab mus txog lub caij ntawm ces yus yeej xav hais tias yus so much more mature, and you paub txog um kev qhov loj qhov yau es tam si no yus tej…niam hluas tej kwy tej los lawv tsi paub txog tej ntawd rau qhov yus ua tej ntawd ces yus pom tau tej ntawd ces yus yeej um, yeej yog ib lub caij es nuyab thiab rau qhov yus niam yus txiv los yeej pab tsi tau yus, ua ub ua no los yeej yog yus tus kheej xwb, yus cov niam laus niam hluas los… kuv cov
I: Yeah...

M: ...yeej um qhov hais txog qhov kawm ntaub kawm ntawv ntawd xwb ces yeej myuab rau qhov yus twb kom yus niam thiab yus txiv lawv um sau hais tias yus ua yus cov homeworks tas los yus tseem tau qhia rau lawv hais tias yog vim li cas yus need lawv cov signatures thiab ces um makes it difficult, so you feel like, again you're all alone and tsi muaj leej twg pob tam yus, los yog always have to explain everything to every body so...

I: So, um overall koj xav hais tias cov poj niam um hmoob tuaj txog teb chaws no lawm naj, um lub neej nws puas zoo shaj rau cov poj niam?

M: Kuv xav tias, hais txog poj niam hmoob xwb ces lub neej yeej zoo shaj lawm, cov laus, cov hlues, cov... es nyuam qhav tuaj yug teb chaws no los lub neej yeej zoo shaj lawm. Qhov ib yog nws um... muaj qhov peev xwm ua tau txhua yam; ib yam li tus txiv neej lawm. Ib yam li kuv niam lawv phaum xwb los, tim ub mas yeej tsi muaj qhov es tias lawv yuav tsav tau lub fais, tai muaj qhov tias lawv yuav, you know, mus khvv tau nyiaj ub no. Txog tim no poj niam los yeej tsav tau lub fai ib yam txiv neej, los yeej ua tau ub tau no um kuv saib kuv niam thiab kuv txiv nkawv xwb kuv xav tias yog nyob tid tej zaum kuv txiv yuav tsis um fwm kuv niam nphaum li tim no, tab sis tim no los kuv niam tseeem yog tus es twm tau ntawv hmoob, kuv txiv twm tsis tau ces kuv niam tseeem lub tau kuv txiv rau qhov ntawd, kuv niam ms tseeem tsav tau lub fais ib yam nws, pab nws tsav lub fais, nws tseeem mus khvv tau ib yam li nws thiab ces kuv xav tias tuaj txog teb chaws no yeej yog um pauv ntau yam li no es nws ho thiaj li fwm kuv niam zog thiab nws thiaj li um, yus thiaj li pom tau hais tias um niam txiv sib hlub yog li cas nav, rau qhov I think that kuv tsi paub sov yav thauub ub li cas, tab sis um... tej tus, tej tus neeg ces yus, yus tsi paub hais tias cov lawv kev hlub lawv cov poj niam lis cas, tab sis yog kuv saib ntawm kuv niam thiab kuv txiv nkawv xwb ces nkawv yeej tis, you know, hais ntawm qhov ncauj tias "Oh kuv hlub koj os baba....baba....", but, tej yam li nws ua, ib yam li tias mus noj haus ab tsi los nws, kuv niam tias kuv niam tis mus no los nws tias koj tsi mus ces kuv tsi mus thiab because doesn't look good, um you know, what's the point, and you know, they both go and then, you know. Hos yog nws ho, kuv niam ho yuav mus qhov twg los kuv niam yeej coj nws ub nos thiab ces I think that um, tuaj tim no yeej pauv ntau rau qhov zoo rau poj niam um cov ntxhais li peb los yeej, yeej yog tus es muaj um... muaj... tus es muaj peev xwm mus los nws yeej mus kawm tu ntawv txog qib twg los yeej mus tau, um yuav um ua yam ab tsi los yog nws muaj siab
ua ces yeej ua tau um tseej muaj ntau qhov es, you know, tsi zoo tab sis yog muab xyuas cov es pauv qhov zoo xwb ces yeej ntau tshaj li tim ub lawm thiab, thiab ua, ua dej num ub no khwv los tsi khwv npaum, thiab tsi siv yus lub zog, tsi siv yus lub cev npaum li tim thiab.

I: Koj um, koj puas tau ua xam xaj Meskas?

M: Kuv...ua lawm.

I: Um...Do you vote?

M: Um...wb yeej vote thiab mas thaum wb nyob tom Wausaw ces wb yeej vote thiab rau qhov lub community me dua ces yeej yeej, get more active and yus yeej paub cov candidates thiab. Wb los txog hauv no, wb nyuam qhuay los nyob wb lub tsev thaum lub 5 hlis ntuj ntawd ces, lawv nyuam qhuay vote, wb nyuam qhuav qualify to vote zaug thib ib thaum lub 11 hlis ntuj ntawd txog cov school board candidates xwb ces wb nyuam qhuav ua li ntawd xwb, tab sis hais txog um...um... pov ntawv rau governor thiab ub no rau Minnesota ces wb tsi tau ua.

I: Uh hwv, hos koj xav txog li cas txog cov um cov hmoob uas tau mus nrog meskas...sib tw ua nom tswv?

M: Kuv xav hais tias qhov ntawd yog ib qho uas haj yam zoo rau qhov nws thiaj li paub txog hais tias peb lub community no yuav toob kaas yam ab tsi nav, rau qhov ib tug neeg sab nraum nws tseej um... fwm txog peb, nws teem pom txog peb npau li cas los yog nwg tsi yog ib tug neeg es nyob kiag ntawm peb no sawv cev mus nav, ces yus yeej yuav tsi um paub txhua txhua yam nav thiab yeej tsi paub anticipate hais tias yuav need ab tsi. Um... kuv xav tias ib qho es tam sim no tseej yog teeb meem mas, peb cov hmong naj peb koom tsi tau ua ke nav, ces peb twb xa tsi tau peb ib tug neeg mus li rau qhov peb muaj ntau yam es um faib peb dhau hwv lawm, peb twb koom tsi tau ua ke, es hais tias peb sawv daws yuav koom tes xa kom tsi tau ib tug mus no nav. Thiab qhov ntawd yog qhov nyuab, thiab tam sim no nyias ho nyob nyias, ces tej thaj tsam ho muaj hmoob coob coob, tej thaj tsam ho tsu muaj hmoob coob thiab, tab sis yog cov uas muaj siab mus los tseej haj yam zoo siab hais tias lawv muaj qhov tswv yim, muaj qhov um qhov, lub caij nyoog, es qhov es xav mus ua kom tau li qhov ntawd thiab.

I: Hos hais txog ua women’s role outside the home ne, koj um, tam sim no puas muaj cov poj niam hmoob los puas muaj tus hmoob es maybe nws um that’s public figure es koj um admire naj?

M: Um... I think that um tsis muaj ib tug es kuv admire tab sis kuv yeej pom tau hais tias cov ntxhais ob peb xyoos no lawv mus kawm tau ntawv siab, lawv los khiav hauj lwv, lawv yeej ua tau tej yam es um kuv nyuam qhuav xav hauv siab hais tias kuv xav ua xwb lawv tub mus ua tas lawm, kuv yeej zoo siab rau qhov ntawd rau qhov ua ib tug poj niam no yog yus xav txog, yus npau suav txog xwb es yus
I: What um public contributions do you want people to remember about hmong women?

M: Um... I think that... ho!...that’s a really broad question.

I: Hum hum... how about just for yourself?

M: Um I think for me... you know... my, a personal goal is that, um... you know, I want um I, I’m not as vocal and as passion about everything, but I think when I comes to battering hmong families and the situation with the healthcare system and understanding all of those um how the system fall to together and making sure that they are truly inform before they make their decisions, I think that's always been a passion of mine, and it doesn’t matter, you know, if it’s, if I need to be at every visits or whatever, if that is what it takes to get them to make sure that they are um getting all the answers um to all their questions, I will do that. And I think that, you know, I, I, I do my work not, not to be rewarded or not for people to say "Oh!... you know, she is just a great nurse", but just to know that okay... he got the treatment he wanted, he understood the treatment is going to follow thru, and his health is going to be better, he going to stay longer with his children. So I think that, you know, I want people to... know when they say "Oh do you know so and so" I want them to yeah she is very helpful, and she is really passionate about helping us, and just helping to help us, and not getting any payback or whatever, and I think that, that has a lot to do with, you know, why I am a nurse and what my philosophy is. And I think that I, it’s really bad to say what I want the world to see what women's contribution is, but I think, for me personally I want people to, you know, be able to say this person truly did this just the benefit... women and children and hmong community, you know, not to have a six figures in the banker or what ha... ha... but I think yeah, I think that um, just changing lives, changing bettering their situations, and I think that’s more important to me than um, you know, having a, you know, big paying job or, I mean that would be nice if you can do both, but I mean, you know, like I said to my husband, "I'm not gonna..." He's like "you don't even know these people, why do you get up at 6 in the morning to make sure they did the surgery fine?"
I: Yeah.

M: It’s like well, if they don’t get fine, and I gonna have to deal with it, so let's just start them out on a good foot... ha.....ha....so I mean, you know, like I said, it doesn’t matter, they don’t have the previleged. My, it’s my job and, and if it means that, you know, I do it this way, I do it this way, that’s what makes me a better coordinator because I know that lawv vog hmoob nav, they are going to need these extra things, and tus, tus coordinator Meskas they don’t care, they're going in and out, and they just do the paperwork.

I: Uh hmm.

M: So, you know.

I: Good, um was there anything else that you wan to add?

M: Um… no I think that um….if anything probably that… you know, we're, we're still not to the point where I like to see our community as far as accepting um women and, you know, men and women be treated equally, and we're not here yet, but I think that if I compare myself to my sisters who are four five years older than me, my life and their lives, and my relationship with my husband and their relationships with their husbands, and I think that um, if you look at the very um micro issues that um I gain a lot um through, by being born in the time that I was born in, and being here and getting an education um, you know, if you look at the larger picture, there are still a lot of work yet, but I think that, you know, if you take individuals' stories and see how much women had progressed, you will see that um women have a lot to say, and their families have a lot to say, and their clan has a lot to say in the community, um I think that um if you look at the larger picture um, when, any time you have a large movement in large number it’s, it’s scary, it’s scary so you end up getting a lot of back latch, but I think that um if you investigate the different situations, you will see that there’s, there is a lot of strong women out there, in various ways, and not everybody is going to be as vocal, not everybody's going to be politically involved, but there are certain people who are very involved in their church, there are certain people who are very involved in their family; there are certain individuals who are just, the one brings all the members together, you know, it kind of depends on what you, what is imporatnt to you and...I think for me it's important, my family is my first priority, and, if it means that, you know, my, my person, me as a public figure gets a little shadow, that's fine because I think that I value my family and, that more than um...what is out there. Um...I think that if you can't be a leader within your own family, then when you try to be a leader in the community, it's just spot cause you really have to be a leader in the family first.

I: Ok, thank you.
M: Thank you.