

# YANG CHA YING

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The following interview took place in Yang Cha's home, at 3027 3rd Street, Minneapolis, Minnesota, on November 20, 1991.

*1. When did you come to the United States?*

I came to the United States October 7, 1980.

*2. How old were you when you came?*

When I came, in the papers it says I'm 46, but then I move to California and then I change my age, because I'm older than what the papers say, so right now I'm, 56.

*3. Where did you come from?*

In 1950 I was in a city called por far, and then I came to Thailand in 1975. This is when they were fighting. General Pau was the leader at that time and the communists came and I went to Thailand where I stayed for four years before coming here. I was born in Laos.

*4. Who sponsored your immigration?*

My son-in-law, Ge Vang.

*5. Do you still have contact with your sponsors?*

Yes, I have contact with my sponsor every day because they live not too far from each other. My daughter married my sponsor, my son-in-law, so we see one another often.

*6. How many of your family members came with you?*

Seven all together.

*7. How many of your family members have joined you since then?*

A lot. I have also sponsored two cousins and three of my son-in-laws.

*8. Have you studied English? Where? For how long?*

I studied English for two years and then I have a lot of things in my mind. In my country I was a leader, and when I come here I am like a child going to school. I have a lot of things in my mind so I cannot learn, so I just quit going to school.

*9. Who in your family speaks English best?*

I have two older sons. They're now living, and they have their own homes and they speak English really well.

*10. What was your occupation before you came here?*

I was a governor before, in a city in Laos. More like an assistant for the mayor. By the time I was fifteen, I was a soldier. Before this I was a farmer. As an assistant for the mayor, I was doing two jobs at the same time. I live as a soldier. In 1953-55, I was a soldier. The war began in 1957. At first the French come and invade our country, and we fight, and until there was a traitor and then I went to the Vietnamese. This is how it started, and then General Pau became the leader. He helped our country and then the Americans came and invade our country and help our country at that time. They tell us to keep fighting and to fight the French. At that time, the French and the Vietnamese were fighting together. We fight and fight and fight until we lose the war and we move to Thailand.

There were like three wars. The first war I don't know what year it begins, but it lasts for four years. The second one, the French came and invaded our country. I don't know how many years or how old I am. I just know, that I know how to shoot a gun. After the four years that the French invade our country, we start over with General Pau and this lasts for another six years.

(When asked if he had been injured, Yang Cha showed me his war scars). I was shot and it's the same as on the movies, they use the knives on their guns and you hit each other. I lost my jaw and both of my legs were injured in the French war. When General Pau became the leader and we fight the Vietnamese I lost my jaw. I don't have any teeth. I have a really big scar. When I come to the United States I have plastic surgery to fix it, so I look a little better.

There were 380 men in my group when we were fighting and I was the only one who survived. I was injured and when they were fighting and using the knives everyone died. I die too. I was unconscious and then the soldiers came and rescued me and took me to the hospital. I recover there. A lot of people who were taken still alive, all died in the hospital. At that time I draw up like a row. I am fearful for my life and I think that I will die when they rescue me and put me in the hospital. My wife came and she see me, and she crying a lot. I tell her to go on with her life. I tell her how much money to leave for the children. I raise a lot of animals, so if I die just give me two buffalo. (This was the chosen animal for his funeral). With the rest just give to the children and go on with your life. I draw up a will. It was really hard. I didn't know if I would make it. I was in the hospital for three months. My wife came to see me in the hospital and she stay with me for two months. Because she have to do a lot of farming, we have a really big farm, she has to go home and I spend the last month alone in the hospital.

I have two sons and one daughter at that time. Now I have five sons and six daughters.

**11. What is your occupation now?**

Now I am retired. So I stay home. I drive my wife to work and pick her up because she cannot drive.

**12. What did you think life would be like here before you arrived?**

When I came here I think if we still have our country and I see this country I will not come here. If we hadn't lost our country I would want to be there rather than here.

**13. How does your life compare now to what you anticipated?**

As in this country, I like it really much, but everything is money. Compared to my country, I have my own money and my own animals. I don't have a car, but I ride horses that pull wagons, so it is good. In this country everything is money. You have to pay for everything. I would rather be in my country than here. Yes, I miss it very much, even the rock that I step on and it hurts my feet. I still miss my farming. It's really hard because in this country the laws say we cannot punish our children. I don't like it, so I don't punish my children and when they go to school they become like punks. They don't listen to us anymore and it makes me really afraid.

**14. What has been the most difficult part of your adjustment here?**

In this country it is nice. You can raise your children to grow up healthy. But it's really hard to talk with them, and communicate with them, to tell them what to do in this country. This is the hardest thing for me, to ask my children not to do this or that. The way I would think in my mind, it says that, the children in this country do not want to be good, because they do not take the mother's milk, they take the cow's milk. The second idea is when they go to school they listen to the teacher and talk to their American friends, and they have house chores they need to do at home. Their American friends say, "I don't have to do that, my parents pay someone to do that. I do not do house chores, I do not mop the floor, or wash the dishes because we have a dishwasher. I do not." A lot of things, when they get home I tell them to do those things, and they refuse to do the chores. This is a really big issue. You have to learn to do it, to be perfect in your life, so when you grow up and get married you know how to do it. But, this doesn't work for us, because our children go to school and learn how to refuse to do things inside the house. They ask, "If our American friends don't have to do it, why do I have to do it?"

**15. *What are the ages of your children? Do they spend a great deal of time with American students?***

Right now I have two young sons, thirteen and ten. they spend alot of time playing with American children rather than Hmong children because the American friends stay home and don't have to do anything, just watch tv so when they ask them. Why are you so strict you make us do chores all the time, you never buy us anything. Our friends if they do something, they get something.

**16. *What has been the easiest part of your adjustment here?***

In this country there are many things which are easy for me, such as; good clothing, good house to live in, good friends, and food is easy to find. But, I have a lot of stress. I keep thinking, if I lay down and close my eyes I see Laos, my country. Everytime I lay down I see my country and this makes it hard. As for my children I don't think that they want to go back, but as for me I don't think that I want to stay here until my last days on earth. If we have our country back, I would like to go back. I talk to some of my relatives and they say that the country is still the same, but we're still occupied by the Vietnamese and we're still farming. If there isn't so much fighting I would like to go back.

**17. *What do you wish most for your future here?***

The thing that I really wish for is to have a big farm so I can raise my own animals and do gardening. To just come home and have a lot of friends come over and make a lot of food for them. I have my own home, but I would really like to have a farm. It would be really hard for me to move, because all my children live in the cities. I do not want to isolate myself from my children, so it would be a little hard for me to move out, like to a farm in Rochester. I've been living in the United States for ten years, now. I do a little bit of farming, not a lot. Like one acre or two acres and plant vegetables. Allmy children come and gather from there and then bring home and eat. A lot of Americans also come and gather vegetables. I like to do this, every year. I rent some land, it's a little far from here.

**18. *How does this compare to your previous wishes for the future?***

When I was young, what I wish for is wealth, and I wish for to be intelligent. These are the two things I wish for most when I was young.

**19. *What grades in school have your children reached?***

Most of my children have not accomplished anything yet. They felt like American children do. They feel if they're too tired, then they don't want to go. They get married when they are still teenagers so they don't even have the diploma. They married when they are like sixteen or seventeen. They have their own children so they just don't go to school. It's really hard because it's only today that my grandchildren are not here, otherwise they come every day to stay with me, so my daughter can go and find a job. She cannot find a job because she doesn't have a degree. She job hunt every day. I would rather we were still in our own country because then we would just do farming. Even here she cannot find a job because here, you have to have a diploma to work, so it's really hard. I am worried day and night. And then there's the religion thing. My children want to be "Christianity", but I still want to believe the spirit. There is a lot of controversy about this. I am worried day and night. For me, I want my children to do the same thing as I do, but they never do. They adapt the American culture, but they really can't, because they don't understand the American culture.

**20. Who do you talk to when you need advice or help?**

There are a lot of elderly people that I know. I like to talk to them. We all have a different perspective on this country, so I have a lot of problem especially in my family. When I go out and talk to the elders they think that this country is really good for them, they have a nice home a nice place to live. We live in the cities, there is the A.F.D.C. funding. A lot of the elders like me think this is really good. You don't have to work you will get some help from the government. The people that live in the suburbs they are rich they are working. But if you stay in the city, you can get this money. They think this is good for them, but it is not for me. There are many different perspectives on this thinking. It hasn't caused a lot of split between us, but as long as there are younger children they can get the A.F.D.C., so they feel it is good here. But for me, back in my country, I have everything and here I don't have any control over my life.

**21. Have you had any problems with the laws in this country? Specifically, marriage, welfare regulations, divorce.**

It's really hard. In my family, I don't have any problem. But my relatives have problems with marriage. The police will come if the wife call and handcuff the husband. I am an advisory, so they call on me to come and explain the cultural differences. When you go in the wife call the police come and get the husband and if the husband call they come and get the wife and then take you down to jail. You have to go and bail them, like \$1,000. By that time the husband and wife realize what they have done. They don't have the money to bail the other out. Then they have to borrow.

**22. What kinds of changes have you made in the food you eat?**

With the food there's not so much difference. We have learned to eat American food sometime, but eat the same as in our country. We don't go into a restaurant and have dinner or breakfast. Also a lot of pain within our family, because when we cook our own food, our children will not eat it, because they eat every day in school. There's a difference in the food. At supper they want to go to the restaurant. We don't do that so most of the time they don't like to eat the food that we have. I have learned to eat American school and I like it. I go to the store and will buy it.

**23. How do you respond to our religious holidays?**

We have learned to celebrate Christmas, because our children like it. So we have adapted to it. We have a tree and presents for our children.