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**Norasith, Champeng Interview**

Carole Hensley

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NORASITH, CHAMPENG
(Loatian)

September 13, 1980
Interviewed by Carole Hensley

Transcribed by Tien Ho

Start of Tape One

Start of Side A

Hensley: Your name, your place of birth, how long you lived there, your birthdate, and just as much as you can.

Champeng: I was born in a Christian home, and I was born in the north part of Laos. [It is] The place is Luang Prabang, [the king live] where the King Live. [I was yes] Usually I am a countryside people, but I was born in the city, and so my life you know [like] whatever I [learn] in the city. After that I went to elementary school for six years and after that I went to school training teachers for four years.

Hensley: How old were you when you went to elementary school?

Champeng: I was five years in elementary I am in [first ] grade and after I graduate I was 12 year old and I went one year to private school and then after that I had to take examination to go to school training teacher and after that after I graduate I became a teacher [for five].

Hensley: How old were you? [Sorry for interrupting]
Champeng: How old? Seventeen years old when I start being a teacher I was seventeen years old, and after that I teach in school for five years and after five years I felt like I would like to continue my study and I went to continue my study [like] to be a professor for two years and then the communist took over our country. When the communists took over our country the system in school like the system education changed to communist education. And they make us work hard and like work in the garden and go to the forest [you know forest] to [collect] wood for cafeteria and we only have a little [little] time to study. And I don’t want to stay on that conditions so I try to escape at that time my parents still in Laos and I asked them if I can leave them and they said they don’t want me to leave, but I said I can’t stay in those conditions. I had to leave because I was thinking about my future. If I stayed there, I wouldn’t be able to study [or you know]. They just told you work hard and go to [seminar] or something like that, and I said I don’t want to stay. And my husband [allowed me you know] give me permission to leave, to escape, and I escaped. I escaped [nineteen] in June 29th, 1976. Then I escaped to Thailand, and live in a refugee camp in about three months and my brother who live here before, you know, he [ ] this before I did. He live in Kentucky and he filed paper to get me here. Usually in the refugee camp, there’s no job available, no school available. Just stay there and lay down and sleep all day. Just do nothing. And the only one thing you could do if you’re a Christian and you wanted to [witness] people, you just go around and you know like [ ], and we did that too in the refugee camp. [and] Usually people stay there almost two years, almost three years or almost one year, but I am the lucky one. I only stayed three months and my brother filed paper for me and then I came to United States on September 2nd, 1976. As soon as I got there my sponsor sent me to college only one semester. I went to summer school at the University of Bowling Green in Kentucky. I was attending summer school only one month and my friend from Laos, my very close friend, in there working right now with [ ] broadcasting company. This is a [gospel radio radio gospel whatever they call it] gospel radio, and they made a tape in our language. Not in English. Broadcast in our language and make a tape, and then we send to Philippines. They have a translator over there. My friend said they want someone to come and work with them in the [ ] broadcasting company, and I said well, I feel pretty lonely because my brother moved up here to [Stockton well to] Ripon first, and then only me stay with my sponsor’s daughter and then I said well, okay I’m gonna come and work with you. By the time my husband came from France to visit our friends, and our friend call me from Kentucky and then I just rode a bus and meet him at Texas at the missionaries. At the missionaries’ house, one of the missionaries went to our country, and then he came home probably for his vacation or something like that. Then I came to work with my friend to work at the [ ] broadcasting company for two years.

Hensley: And this is where? In Texas?

Champeng: No, in [ ] down Los Angeles. They have a main office there. And they have many, many nationalities work together like Chinese, Japanese, and Vietnamese, Cambodian, Russian, [who else] Burmese, and with the American people. At the time I [was pregnant], and then when the time coming and my husband still in France and I thought that well, nobody take care of me and I barely live with my brother. At the time my sister came from refugee camp, and I thought I
better live with my brother or sister. I feel more comfortable. Then I quit a job and I move up here, and live with my brother. After baby born one month, and my husband came. After that he started working at the Stockton Milling Company and I [then] start working at Stockton Unified at Kennedy School. That’s my background.

Hensley: What is your birthday? When were you born?

Champeng: When is my birthday? May 18, 1951.

Hensley: When you came to the United States, who did you come with? [When you escaped from] Well, first of all, when you escaped from Laos into Thailand, were you alone or were you with anyone else?

Champeng: I was escaped with [one of my friends] one of my really best friends, and we escaped together. When we escaped, we escaped by boat. At the time we had to have people with us otherwise the companies, if they know you escape they will shoot you. And we tried to go silently. Nobody knows that we gonna escape. And I escaped with my very best friend, but when we escaped and we stayed at the refugee camp, [you know] the people who work for the immigrant they came to interview [with] you, and they ask if you have someone in the United States or relatives in the United States. Then I told them that my friend is a really close friend and also like a cousin. An then there’s no way that she can come with me, but because they only need a really close relative like my brother can file to get me here, but my friend she’s no chance to come with me so right now she got married with my friend, and then she went to [English I mean] England right now. She has foster sister. She’s English. She was a teacher at my school before. And then she made a paper for her to go to England. And right now my friend is in England right now, but she really likes to come to United States [] it is possible for her to come here.

Hensley: How many brothers and sisters do you have?

Champeng: I have one brother and five sisters.

Hensley: Where are they all?

Champeng: They’re all in Stockton right now.

Hensley: Oh really?

Champeng: Yes, they’re all in Stockton right now and with my parents too.

Hensley: Your parents are here?

Champeng: Yes, they just live here. Just the corner. Just close to my brother and my sister and all the family. The family all get married. Only one sister is still single, but she is going to marry maybe next year sometime next year.
Hensley: Does she have a fiancé?

Champeng: Yes, her fiancé just came from Hawaii last month I think [last month].

Hensley: When did all of your family get here in the United States?

Champeng: They get here at different times. All of them get here at different times. My [oldest sister no my] youngest sister came here first. She came here last year in March, I think. Next is my older sister with her family came I think on... I forgot when she came here, but she came at different time. My parents just came here on February. One of my sister came here last... I think May or something like that [May right]. And my youngest sister just got married the last couple months.

Hensley: How about your parents? When did they come?


Hensley: What is your parents’ educational background?

Champeng: My father was [he was only] only in the third grade. He doesn’t have chance to go to school because he live in the countryside and I think at the time they only have third grade, not up to sixth grade. So he just graduate on... Well, in our country we have third-grade certificate. When you are first, second and third grade, they gave you a certificate in third grade. He only finish his education at third grade. And at the time he learned French too, but not very much. He only start from alphabet. But in our country we started learning French from third grade. We only start learning alphabet. After that, I think he stopped. He quit school, and then he worked in the farm. I think years ago a missionary go to our country and then he start learning in bible school, and then he became a pastor. And he just went around and around the countryside and village to village to village. And he’d just leave us in the city with a friend of his, and a friend of his took care of us. At the time we just stayed in the city [with a friend of his a friend of his would take care of us] and he just go around to go to ministries or something like that, and we stayed in the city with one of my brother, and my older sister and me stay in the city and go to school.

Hensley: How about your mother?

Champeng: My mother didn’t go to school at all. [But she] She learned when my father go to bible school, and at the time they have a lesson for the lady. And then my mother just pick up, at the time, only my language. She know how to read, but she know how to write a little bit. She never been in school like elementary school or you know. She never been in school before.

Hensley: Did your mother ever work outside of the home?

Champeng: No, she only work in the house like a housewife, and raise the kids.

Hensley: [How did you feel leaving Laos?] How did feel when you escaped from Laos? How did you feel when the communists came into Laos?
Champeng: Oh, I feel uncomfortable to stay there. I feel so sad when they take over our country because we thought that we gonna lose our country, and then the other people come to take our country and I feel that I don’t want to stay with those people because [ ] that they were in the forest many, many years ago and then they want to come in the city and live in people’s house [you know and like]. They want to stay in a very good house, in rich people’s house and they take good people to seminary, almost like a [prison], and put them there in seminar and let them work hard and stay in the city and do whatever they want to do. At first when they came they said “Oh we’re gonna do very good things” or “do very good work” you know, something like that. But it’s not true. They just put you to work hard, and everything belonged to the government. Like if you raised pigs, if you raised chicken or if you raised something, every property belonged to the government, and I don’t like that way because everything you had to share with the government or to share with your neighbor or whatever. If you want to kill your chicken or you want to kill pig to support your family, but you cannot do that. You had to share with your neighbor or you had to report to the chief of the village first before you kill something or before you do something, and I hate that. I don’t like that. And they really put you work hard in [you know] a farm [you know in a farm] and whatever they want you to do. In the garden, [plants], vegetable or, but that not belong to us. Belong to the government. But they just make you work hard and everything that belong to you belong to the government.

Hensley: How did your family feel? What did they tell you when you told them you wanted to escape?

Champeng: They just feel that everybody is going to leave them alone. At first in my family we only have one brother. He is the oldest. And my father and my parents really love him [you know]. And at the time he was military and he teach English, too. He taught English, my brother. He came to United States I think twice, and this is I think his third time. He escaped and then I think this is his third time coming to the states. Right now he is working with Catholic charities. I think Alice Anderson working at the Catholic charities. Anyway [he's working there right now] and my parents said my brother already left them behind, and I’m the second one that’s going to leave them and they feel sad when I leave them. I said “well, if I stay here my future is not good. If I escape maybe I have chance to go to school in the United States or I have a chance to…” Wherever they accept the refugee like Canada and Australia and French. Wherever they need. [I keep asking them] And I keep asking them to escape and they said “well if you feel that you want to go, go ahead. And if you can’t stay here, then we’re gonna write to you and you have to write to us if they allow to.” Before a couple months, they did not allow [people] to write to relative in Laos. After I left, a couple months, they didn’t let you. If you write, they have to open what you said in there. But we were lucky. We had a friend who went back and forth between Thailand and Laos. My parent just write a letter and let her take it to Thailand and send from Thailand from Laos. So we can communicate each other anytime and then my parents say we can’t stay anymore and we have to escape.

Hensley: What were you expecting when you came to the United States after leaving Thailand?
Champeng: When I first came, I didn’t expect that I can do something [in this states] because my English is not good. When I first came, I didn’t even know how to speak, but I know how to say “Good morning” and “How are you” and “What do you do? What are you doing?” because we took a special course in our school before. Twice a week only reading, writing, pronunciation and a little bit of conversation or something like that. I said “well what I’m gonna do?” My brother said “the only thing you have to do. You have to go to school first.” My sponsor said she wants me to go to school, too, and then I said “well I decide to go to school.” And when I decide to go to school and my sponsor knows that I was a teacher in Laos before because my brother told her. She told me to take a elementary school education as a major and I said “well after I learn more English, I’m gonna take elementary education as my major.” Then as I tell you, I only went to school one semester and I just learned English in school and I have many friends in school and they taught me English and they taught me slang words and whatever. [And then] I feel better when I went along with my friend in school. [And] Also, my sponsor’s daughter was my roommate at that time so I feel more and more and more comfortable when I met many friend and I feel better and better. I said after I graduate school, I plan to graduate in college, but I don’t know what happened. I just decide to work with my friend and decide to marry and I didn’t get chance to graduate. At first I plan to graduate from college first.[But] I don’t know how many years in college. Four years? I plan to graduate college, but I don’t know what happened to my life. I just married first and [and my hobbies and you know].

Hensley: When did you get married?


Hensley: ’79. So you were already here in Stockton?

Champeng: Four years. No, not in Stockton. I think six or seven months in Kentucky and two and a half years in [down Los Angeles] when I was working and a year and a half [I think year and a half] in Stockton. Because I was here since [since May yes] May fifth last year.

Hensley: ’79?

Champeng: Mhmm, ’79.

Hensley: How did you meet your husband? Didn’t you say he was in your same school?

Champeng: Yes, in Laos. We were classmates when we were in the school training teacher in the first year, and after that we separate class, and when we go to second year, [like what] they call sophomore. We were classmates [in the] freshman, and sophomore we separate and junior we separate too, and senior we separate too. Not the same class. And after we graduate from school training teacher and then I became a teacher and he became a teacher in his... [I mean] different city. After that I don’t know he applied to [ ] to the capital city of Laos. He transfer to my school where I’m teaching, to the same school. And then we teach the same school and we became [very] very good, very close friends. Wherever we go, we just go together. At the time
he was not a Christian and my family is a Christian and [then] he interested in going to church and being a Christian. I just gave him a [ ] to read. We have in Lao language too. I gave him the Bible to read and he said I am interested to go to your church and I said well go ahead, I’m glad to. On Sunday he go to church with me. Every Sunday he go to church with me. And he seems to a very good friend of mine. Before we were friends, but not very close. But he’s very close now. I mean, he’s very close when he go to church with me. [And then] After he go to church, a couple months and he said I would like to baptize and then he just baptize and he became a Christian, but his family is not a Christian. His family is a Buddhist. But his relative was asking his father why your son became a Christian, and he said well, he’s mature enough and he can do whatever he wants to do because he’s mature enough. That’s his choice. I think his father passed away since 1973, and he became a Christian in 1973.

Hensley: Do you think his father’s death had a lot to do with it? With him becoming a Christian?

Champeng: No. He doesn’t care. He just let his whatever he wants to do. Doesn’t hurt him that my husband became a Christian. It doesn’t hurt him at all. He was sick a long time ago before my husband became a Christian so he passed away because his sickness.

Hensley: Oh, no no. I thought I was asking if you thought maybe his father’s death had anything to do with turning him to a Christian. Do you think he became a Christian [after] because he saw his father die and go through a bad sickness?

Champeng: No, he became a Christian before his father passed away. Before a couple months, I think.

Hensley: So anyway, you and your husband. You came to the United States before getting married?

Champeng: Yes. As I told you, he came in 1977 to visit us. Two of my friends in Los Angeles right now, they were very good friends of us too in Laos. He plan to visit them and visit me too. We just met each other in Texas, but my friend live in [ ] down in Los Angeles, but they went to visit one of the missionaries down in Texas, and we meet each other at the missionaries’ house and then he came to visit and he just brought a silver bracelet [you know a silver bracelet] from France and he gave it to me. Then he said “I have nothing from France, I only have this” and then he gave it to me. We just feel like friends at the time. After that, my friend said you’re gonna work with us, and I decided to work. And then we just rode a [cart] to Kentucky. Then we rode back to California. Then we just spent time together to Disneyland and to Hollywood. At that time I think we fell in love. After that, we engaged. Then he went back to France and tell his foster father that he’s getting married with me. We married in 1978, I think. I forgot. Then he come back in 1978. He came back to marry, and after married he went back to France again, and come back and we has a baby. Whenever people at church ask me to speak at church. I told him when he first came, he came to visit. The second time he came to marry. And the third time he had a baby. Three times he came.

Hensley: [ ] each time.
Champeng: Everything [is new] for him in [this] time.

Hensley: When did you guys come to Stockton?

Champeng: I came to Stockton [when I had the baby] before I had the baby. As I told you, before I had the baby I feel that I have nobody to take care of me. I have to come here to stay with my brother so at least I have a relative to take care of me. My brother and my youngest sister.

Hensley: What was your brother doing as far as working and where was he living?

Champeng: Before he lived here, he lived in Rippon. Then he move here to Stockton. And at the time he’s working at the Catholic charities with the refugees. And then I just moved up here and lived with him. And I have my little [baby ] at French Camp hospital. She was born May 26, and I was born May 18. The same...

Hensley: Close.

Champeng: Yes, close. My husband was born April 10 in 1951 so he is one month older than I am. He’s only one month older than I.

Hensley: When you were growing up at home did you have an extended family like were there other people besides your mother, your father, your brothers and sisters living with you or was it just your immediate family?

Champeng: Let me think about it. Yes, as I remember, only our family. But ever since I got a job and we have our cousin living with us. Two of my cousin living with us. After the communists took over our country and everything change and many people escape, I have a friend living with us.

Hensley: Would you mind if suppose your parents got old and couldn’t take care of themselves having them live with you or would you, like many other Americans, send them to a convalescent home of some kind? How would you handle that? Would you want them to live with you or the convalescent home?

Champeng: Yes.

Hensley: Which one?

Champeng: [Do you mean] Cousin or?

Hensley: No, no, no. Your parents. Suppose when your parents get old and maybe are unable to care for themselves, would you want them to live with you?

Champeng: [Oh oh I see] Usually our country, our customs, have to take care of our parents when they’re getting older. [So] We have to take care of them. And let them choose whose they’re gonna live with. At first my father said he only have one son and he wants to live with his son, you know. I assume if they getting older and if my brother bought a house, I think they are going to live with my brother. I [wouldn’t] mind if they gonna come and live with me, and my husband
[wouldn’t] mind either, but let them choose whose they want to live with so they will feel more comfortable. But yes.

End of Side A

Start of Side B

Hensley: Can you tell me about your home when you were growing up? Where did you live? Was it [the] city or the country? Did the kids have to work? Did you have chores with your brothers and sisters? When you were very young in Laos growing up, were you living in the city or the country?

Champeng: When I grow up I was living in the city because, as I told you, my parents leave us in the city to go to school to have an education. I just live in the city. At that time, some time I had to help myself like earn money to help myself. In our country we don’t have like in United States. In United States kids have to go house to house to distribute the newspaper or something like that, but in our country we don’t have that. Sometimes we have to go out to the forest [ ] sometimes we have vegetables that we could eat and then mushrooms, [collect wood]. In our country we don’t use electricity like a stove. We have to use wood to cook something like that so we have to go out to [and] collect wood or vegetable or mushroom. Whatever, you know. And then go to the market and sell then I can earn some money and help myself. When my parents were in the countryside to do [Gospel job] something like that. Sometimes my parents came to the city to visit us and give use some money to live or to bring some rice to [his friends to] their friends who take care of us. They brought rice, they brought meat or whatever to their friends to take care of us. With my sister or my brother too, sometimes they have to help themself [to do things like that]. But usually in our country, even if you’re mature enough like you’re eighteen years old, twenty years old, your parents had to take care of you not like here. You have to go out and work by yourself and earn money by yourself. But our parents have to take care of the kids until they get a job.

Hensley: [Why] Why do you think they don’t let young people, maybe eighteen and twenty, don’t go out and find their own job and move away from home? Is it love of the family? What is it?

Champeng: That’s not really [law]. That’s our custom. Also in our country, they don’t have job available like here. Like teacher you have to finish. You’re eighteen years old and you don’t know how to teach and how can you find a job. And there’s no job available in our country. It’s really hard to find a job. Like us, after school finish at the end of the year, elementary school here, we have two month vacation and we don’t have a job available for these kids. We only go out and collect wood and go out and fishing. If you want to earn money, you have to go out fishing. You could do that and you can help parents at home on vacation. [ ] go out and find a job. That’s why we, you know. So parents had to take care. Sometimes you can help parents if your parents is a merchant or you have to help your parents. Like me, my mother used to sell vegetables or peppers, things like that. On vacation, I just go to the market and sell things [you know]. Help my mother. Something like this.
Hensley: So your mother did take things to the market, so she did work outside of home in some respect [or did she].

Champeng: Yeah, sometime she work at home, but usually she go out to the market to sell things like that.

Hensley: Who made most of the family decisions in your home? Your mother or your father?

Champeng: Well, usually my father. In our country, the woman have to respect man in our country. Whatever man said, “we got to do this” and “we got to do that” and women have to do it. Not everything I mean. He said “you got to [do something like that]” but he never say that, but I supposed to. Like if he said you got to go out and do something. Something that he said “you got to do that” we agreed to do it. Most of the time we got to do whatever we want to. We have to respect or listen to your husband. [Not argue] No argument with husband. Many, many years again, you have to respect. But since out country have more education and women have education so we learn more and more so sometime we have to have argument. If not everything that they want to say “you have to do that.” Point “you have to do that”, you have to do. But before, many, many years ago the women that had no education at all, they had to listen to their husband because husband is the head of the household. So men have to work hard in our country to go out and get the money. When they get the money, the bring it home and give it to their wife to take care of the money. In our country many, many years ago we don’t have bank so whenever you get money you just keep it home. If you have a trunk or chest, just hide it. Men had to work hard and earn money, and when they get money, they have to offer all of the money to give to their wife to take care of money. That’s why they have to respect their husband because their husband have to work hard and earn money and give every money to their wife. I think that’s why wife feel that way and they have to respect their husband and do whatever the husband want to do and do whatever husband said.

Hensley: Do you and your brother and sisters get together now with your mother and father?

Champeng: Yes, sometimes. We all have family now. Only one still single. Every Thursday we meet. Sometimes in my house, sometimes my sister or my brother’s house. We change every Thursday and we have a Bible study too. And my father is the leader, the one who teach us the Bible.

Hensley: Do the husband and wives come along to these?

Champeng: Yes, husband and wives come along. [Every] My brother, my sister, my brother-in-law, my sister-in-law. Every husband and wife has to come and be together. Sometimes after Bible study we have coffee or cake. Sometimes before we have Bible study, sometimes we eat together, sometimes we have potluck. Sometime each brother and sister has to invite us like you don’t have to bring something. Like me, I have to cook for a whole family to come for Bible study, and sometimes next Thursday is my sister’s turn or next month is my brother’s turn. We do that. But every Thursday we have to come to each one. We have a turn. This Thursday they come to my house. Next Thursday we go to my sister’s house, and next Thursday we go to my parents’
house. If we have any problem, we just share our problem. We can solve each our problem. We just give advice. Like my sister [they] just came to United States and they don’t know what to do and where to go and how to read the sign [like a sign] like a stop sign or something like that. We just teach each other or just tell them we have to do this and we have to do that and you have to learn English. Usually, [my sister] all my sister have basic English before they came here because we learn French and English is not different from French. Only the many, many big words in French are the same. Like to give you an example: important is important. [ ] It’s the same, just pronounce different. English, we say important. I don’t know some state or different city they pronounce different like important. Some state they say important, but sometime they say important. “T” is silent. Like Sacramento. Some people say Sacramento, some people say Sacramento. Different accent, too, right?

Hensley: Oh yeah, southern states.

Champeng: From out country too, we speak Lao, but different accent. Like I from north part of Lao. I’m from [ ], where the king live, and we speak different. North [ ], [ ] is capitol city, and south we speak different. And we also speak different dialects. We have different dialects, too. [ ], and then I had to take care of the baby or I had to tell them when to let them go out and be careful. [ ] so every Thursday we meet [with all of them].

Hensley: Good. So your family is helping each other adjust to everything, but when your brother first got here who helped him to adjust?

Champeng: It’s easy for him because he came to the United States before. Three times. And he speak English. Not fluently like American people speak, but he speak English very well so he know how to adjust himself, he knows how to work, he knows how to visit his family so no problem. My niece is going to school right now and she speak English fluently like American people right now. She speak English with her father, right now, and she can speak Lao, but a little bit. Not a little bit. She can speak, but sometimes when you say Tuesday and she doesn’t know Tuesday in my language. In my language, Tuesday we say [vnoangkhan], and if we say vnoangkhan she say “what does that mean? Vnoangkhan?” [see you know] They almost forgot our language right now.

Hensley: How do you feel about that? Do you want your nieces and nephews and your own children to retain the Laotian culture?

Champeng: Of course. I really want them to. Even my kids at school, I want to teach them Lao. How to write, how to read, how to speak, but most of the kids who came to the United States and as soon as they go to school they start to forget Lao. They didn’t speak Lao together right now. Even Laotian kid and Laotian kid and Laotian kid, they speak English together right now. They don’t speak Lao. Like our neighbor here, they speak English at home. They don’t speak Lao, but our neighbor is another dialect. They speak Hmong. They spoke another language.

Hensley: How many dialects of Laotian are there? Many?
Champeng: Yes, I think sixty-eight [I think sixty-eight].

Hensley: Wow, that’s a lot.

Champeng: Yes, that’s a lot. Sixty-eight [ ] right now, and we speak different dialects.

Hensley: How do you think you might keep Laotian culture in your family?

Champeng: I think I should. Like my daughter, here, we teach her Lao right now. Some words we teach her English like “no”. If she try to touch that and this and we said “no”, and she learn. She pick up “no” and she know how to say “no, no”. But the rest we teach her Lao, and [and we should keep] I won’t let my kid forget how to speak Lao.

Hensley: With all of your family here, it might be easier because if your brothers and sisters feel the same way because you can have your nieces and nephews and your own children be able speak Laotian together. That would be good.

Champeng: Yes, sure. We are going to keep. We should. But I’m not sure. I might teach my daughter how to read Lao, how to write Lao at home. And some people said... I told them don’t worry about speaking English when your kid go into school. If they go to kindergarten, kids pick up very fast than an adult. I’m not gonna worry about my kids to not speak English. She will learn as soon as she attends school. She will pick up very fast because if she go to school she always speak English and when she got home she didn’t speak English. She speak Lao. She doesn’t have chance to speak Lao [you know I mean] at school so that’s why I have to teach her when she go to school she will speak English all day in school. When she get home I have to speak Lao with her.

Hensley: Good. How do you feel about some American’s here that many believe that if immigrants come to this country that they should adapt totally to the American way of life. And many believe that they shouldn’t even speak their own language. Does that ever make you angry or does that hurt you in any way. What do you think about that?

Champeng: Like Mexican people or Spanish? They should keep their own language too. And some people came here and they don’t know how to speak their own language. That make me feel hurt too. That make me sad. Like my niece too, I try to tell her that not to forget your old language. Your native language. Like so many, many people that came here and they forget their language and don’t know how to speak their language. I feel bad for them too. They should keep their own language, but I think [ ] people here [thought] they have in their mind “well Mexican people came here and they don’t know how to speak English.” I think that is only for old person. Sometimes it’s not their fault that they don’t interested to learn English because they don’t get chance to go out or to go to school or... so they just can’t speak English.

Hensley: What customs or rituals or any religious practices... Well, you’re Christians so that doesn’t really apply, but do you still practice here from the old country? Like what old Laotian customs do you still practice here in the United States?
Champeng: We still practice respect old person. In our country we respect old person and like higher person like who works in the highest positions and things like that. Like here, Jimmy Carter or people who work in school, police department. We respect them. Especially old person we keep respect them, and we have to speak nicely or politely to old person. Since we came here, we still respect them too. But for the kids, I don’t know maybe their parents didn’t tell them or didn’t teach them, I don’t know, but sometimes they speak with the old people [they speak] not very nice words. In our country we talk specific word to the old person. Like to the old person we have to say [ ] “yes, sir” or “yes, mom” “yes, grandmom.” Things like that. But I don’t know like here, kids or parents or teacher and they’re all friendly. Like at school they talk with teacher. Some kids I saw them talk back to teacher. If teacher said something, they talk back. But in our country, never. Kids had to respect the teacher. They had to talk nicely. They have to do what teacher tell them to do like assignment or homework or exercise. They have to do it immediately. Not talk back. But here, I so far... I work with kids and I started talk back. And our kids right now start learning with the American kids sometime they try to give you the reason like my niece right now. If you say something to her and she just... If she doesn’t want to, she try to give you the reason. [ ] explain it to you. This, that. They don’t know so. But for us, we still keep respect the old people over here, and our custom too. We still keep our custom in our country like dating. The young people, we don’t let them go out. [Like here] Eighteen years old, they date each other. But in our country before you date that man or that boy or that [guy], you have to ask permission from your parents first. If the parents said okay, you may go. If your parents said no, you cannot date that guy. Especially rich person. They just want their daughter date with a rich person, but love doesn’t have limit, doesn’t have religion, doesn’t have that quality or whatever. Sometimes rich girl can marry with poor guy or poor guy can marry with rich girl, something like that because, as I tell you, love doesn’t have limit. And their parents cannot against them. If you’re against them, some people commit suicide. In our country, there are some girls commit suicide because their parents doesn’t want them date this guy, and that guy [you know]. Some parents arrange wedding. Arrange marriage for them. Some are not [but some].

Hensley: How are the arranged marriages arranged? Is it just between the parents between the two kids, of the man and a woman or does the children have any input whatsoever? What happens in an arranged marriage?

Champeng: Sometimes parents say... Like I have a neighbor and I have a daughter and they have a son. If I said “Their son is very nice guy. He has a very good education. He’s very polite and he talks very good. He talks very nice. Then if I want my daughter marry him, even though their not fell in love, I just arrange marriage for them.

Hensley: With the parents or with the [boy]?

Champeng: Yes, with the parents. And sometimes with the boys, with the guys. [ ] Something like that.

Hensley: Did your parents set any rules for you about dating?
Champeng: Yes, sometimes. We go out at night. In our country sometimes we want to see the movie. If we go out and when I come back I get spanked. Sometimes they have movie like here, a drive-in movie, but in our country just free. Not pay. And sometimes they have movie about United States, [you know] about other countries, and we would love to see it. And he would allow us to see it. But [in the what is it the] movie where their pay money like a theater. And if we have to pay money or not, and the movie is not good. Sometimes the movie is about love, about bad things he doesn’t want us to see. He doesn’t want us to spend money because we are not rich person to spend money without... So he doesn’t want us to spend money, something like that. He just doesn’t want us to go. And he [make rules] for us not to date. Like during [studying during] school my father said not to date with the guys. Sometimes love make you lose your education. You get what I’m trying to say. Sometimes love destroy your education, and my father said during your school, your study, your education, no date. If you want to date with another guy, after graduate from school or after to get a job you can date. And if you wanna marry, then after you graduate. Well that’s happened to every nationalities. During school, you [pregnant]. During school you do something not satisfy your parents. Like United State and many people during school, pregnant during school like high school. [You know something like that] Some people like Mexican people. I have a friend that told me that, I think the Mexican people, and they said the sister pregnant when she was twelve years old. That’s too young. And right now she’s crazy. She has mental [what do you call it]...

Hensley: Mental illness?

Champeng: Yes, she has mental illness right now. She’s crazy and she’s [ ]. She wants to, you know... Because she’s at a point [and she ]. I don’t know how to explain, but do you understand what I’m saying? When you pregnant when you so young like that, and you lose your body, you lose your mind, you lose your... If you broken heart and you will be mental illness person. And you lost everything and you became a people. What they call? Not [valid] people or something like that. [Invalid] people. [Or you know] Something like that.

Hensley: How did your parents feel about you marrying your husband? Did they know him before you got married?

Champeng: Oh sure. They met him. When I was in Laos he came to my house often. He came to see me often. And my parents had met him before. Also, first of all my parents wants me to marry with a Christian people, and when they heard that I married him my parents said they are so glad that I marry him [and] so there’s no problem.

Hensley: Can you tell me about your job here as a teacher and what you do, and if it was hard to get it? What you had to go through to get it?

Champeng: First of all, I want to tell you that in teaching is not very hard for me because I have experience in teaching before. But the very hard thing is what... The kids I have right now, they have different dialects.
Hensley: What grade are you teaching right now?

Champeng: They’re from kindergarten to 6th.

Hensley: These are all refugee children?

Champeng: Mhmm. They’re all refugee children. Like kindergarten, the kids never went to school before in our country. Their parents have no education at all and they don’t know how to teach the kids before they go into school. When they go to school and they don’t speak English at all, and don’t know how to write and don’t know how to read ABCD. Don’t know how to say ABCD. It’s kinda hard. And if I want to translate to them and I want to talk with them, it’s hard for me to communicate with them because they speak different dialects. Speak, Lao, [Latin] and speak Hmong. Three dialects, but I can speak little bit Latin and a little bit Hmong because I learn with the kids. And sometimes I can communicate with them. Maybe not as much as I want to, but it helps because I can ask them “What’s your name” and “How are you” and “Don’t do that. Don’t do this.[Don’t be afraid] Don’t cry” and “Who’s your parents? What’s your father’s name? What’s your sisters name?” I can communicate with them about this, but Lao speak Lao. No problem with me. No problem with the Laotian kids too who speak pure Lao, but for the kids who speak different dialects I have to learn from them. But I can communicate with them a little bit.

Hensley: How many children are you teaching?

Champeng: Right now? [Well you know before] Last year I have sixteen kids, but they are Vietnamese, Chinese, Laotian, speak different dialects and [makes it hard], and they are different level.

Hensley: Oh different levels, yeah.

Champeng: Yeah, [they are] different levels. Kids never went to school and they just start. Here the education according to the age. But in our country, if you never been in school before we have to put you in first grade. At the bottom. Even if you’re sixty years old, if you never went to school before we have to put you in first grade. Start from beginning. But here, the education according to the age. And the kids that they put them to the 4th grade. They are ten years old or twelve years old. They don’t know how to write ABCD, and they don’t know how to read. They don’t know how to do math. I have to help them. I have to start very beginning. One, two, three, four, five. Help them to count. Count in my language or in English. At first I had to ask them if they know how to count in [your language in] their language first. And then count in Lao and count in English. Many people escape from Lao. If they escape from Lao like people live in mountains, and they have no school available for them, and when they escape they’re thirteen years old and they stay in the refugee camp let’s say about two year and it makes fifteen years. And then when they came to the United States they fifteen years old and they never went to school. And if they want to go to school, they put them in the high school. Fifteen years to the high school, and how can they work with that? [Those kids] How can they go along with those kids? They cannot follow them so school need help. If they need help, they need Lao-English
speaking. So they need help. Right now, this year they have sixty-three non-speaking English at all at Kennedy school where I am working. I haven’t met them yet because I am on pregnancy leave. I don’t know I’m gonna to work with them when I go back.

Hensley: When are you gonna be going back to work?

Champeng: October 30th. Yes, October.

Hensley: How long have you been teaching here?

Champeng: Here? September last year. From September 18th.

Hensley: Was it hard to get the job?

Champeng: You mean where to get a job?

Hensley: No, was it hard to get the job or to get hired. Did you have to get any other credentials or anything like that?

Champeng: Oh sure.

Hensley: You did?

Champeng: Yes, it's very hard. That's why I said I tried to [ ] the school. I told them that I got credential from my country, but I can't bring any paper with me because [you know] I told them I couldn’t bring any paper with me.

Hensley: You couldn’t?

Champeng: No.

Hensley: Why?

Champeng: Because I just came by only dress. I can’t bring any suitcase, any dress, any paper with me because if you bring any paper, any dress, any suitcase with you, the [company] will [say to you] “Where are you going?” They know where you going. So I can’t take anything with me

End of Side B

End of Tape One

Start of Tape Two

Champeng: [ ] credential, but here they need credential. I told them as long as I have experience in teaching... They saw already and how I teach. I said as long as I have experience in teaching, you have to increase the salary for me and then there’s no way they can increase money without [seeing my] [ ], without seeing my [units], without seeing my credentials or without these things. I only had thirteen units of fourteen units. They only hire you at [$3.98]. At [$3.98] I only
pay for my rent. [$2.60] and that’s all. I took at home, $3.60 only, but [aid], American [aid] of course they have [aid] over here from United States. They hire them $6 per hour.

Hensley: For teacher’s aids?

Champeng: Uh huh, teacher’s aid.

Hensley: Then why are you making only $3.98?

Champeng: I don’t know because they want to see my credential. And I said I don’t have with me. I already explained to them that I couldn’t. Even though my husband have a credential with him from our country, but they need [they need] state to... And they told my husband to take his credential to Sacramento and let’s see if Sacramento will say his credential compared to United States, how many units. It depends on Sacramento. And we have to take his credential to Sacramento by himself.

Hensley: Shoot doesn’t seem [right]...

Champeng: Doesn’t seem right.

Hensley: What is your husband doing now [ ] before he starts teaching?

Champeng: He’s working at the Stockton Milling Company. And they’re hiring him very high like at $7.25 per hour.

Hensley: What does he do there, now?

Champeng: [ ] handbag or clean up or something like that. At first, his job is [pre-mixer ], and if they don’t have people clean and him to clean. It’s kinda hard work too because there’s many dusty and many dirt. Very hard work for him. He has to use his muscle. It’s very hard work for him and he never work hard. When he was in France, he work in academic office [academic office] and he would work electronic. He has electronic certificate from France too. He works in academic electronic. Electronic is [not hard too]. They only connect small yes...

Hensley: Wires and stuff. You mention you wanna go back to school and that your husband does also. When do you think this might happen that you might be able to go back?

Champeng: We can next semester if it’s possible. We plan to apply for the basic grant, but we don’t know if we are eligible to [eligible to] get basic grant or not, but we will apply. We will try. Mr. Chris at the education center for multilingual, [in the educational center the] multicultural center, he hire him and he said he going to send him to U.O.P. to study English. He said well, maybe he will try to go to Delta first. My husband said he try to go to Delta first. Maybe if Mr. Chris put him in U.O.P. maybe he will try at the U.O.P. And he try to teach French too. If U.O.P. need people to help in teaching French like speaking French or grammar. He can teach grammar too. Grammar or speaking or French customs. Whatever they wanted.
Champeng: If you know somebody or yourself want to study French. If your friends want to study French, they can come here to study.

Hensley: Yeah, that would be good.

Champeng: We will tell you later on how much per hour, but not very much. Don’t be [hesitant] about charging. I don’t think he would charge very much, but we will see.

Hensley: Okay, good. When you went to school here for that one semester, how did you like it? What did you think of it?

Champeng: I like it very much.

Hensley: Did you?

Champeng: Yes. I like it very much. I have friends and they teach me, and I have chance to speak English all the time. [ ] Stay home I don’t have chance to speak English. And my English is not improve.

Hensley: It’s good. I think it’s good.

Champeng: Thank you. If I stay at home it’s not improve. If I go to school, I think my English will improve [will be improve] more, I mean, and my husband too. He just learned his school and he just pick up here, but I think if he go to school, he’ll pick up very fast because he’s good at language, [at language you know he learn] at foreign language. He’s very good. He’s real smart than I am. He’s very smart so, I think [he] in going to school I really interested. It’s very good for me, and I love to go to school. We will try. Both of us will try. And the reason we want to go back to school is because they hire us and they just keep us at lower rate. And they as for units. How many units do you have? Do you have credentials? Do you have license? Do you have credential to teach school? No, I don’t, but I have experience in teaching five years already.

Hensley: Yeah, and it didn’t make any difference.

Champeng: No. Didn’t make difference. So I really interested in going to school.

Hensley: Have you ever felt discriminated since you’ve been here in the United States at all for being a Laotian immigrant? Did you feel any prejudice at all? People being prejudice against you?

Champeng: For Lao?

Hensley: Because of your background, yes.

Champeng: Sometime I feel depressed because our people stay here and some American people, I don’t know, hate or look down on them. Like if they don’t know how to speak English. Like we go shopping. I have an experience. I went to [ ], and one day I told them that I want to apply for [ ]
card for my father, and one lady over there she just, I don’t know like say bad person or I don’t know how to say, but she just act very bad to me. She said “[May I] [help you]?” She just talk...

Hensley: [cursed].

Champeng: Yes, [cursed] like that. And she says “[May I help you]? I said yes ma’am. I want to apply [ ] card for my father. Does he have identification? [Does he have] I need a [dollar]. I said “yes, he does. You have to talk nicely to me.” And [she said] “I don’t understand what you’re saying.” Maybe she might have an experience with the Laotian people who doesn’t speak English at all and might be make her English, but I told her “you have to talk nicely to me. I understand what you’re saying.” Something like that I feel depressed because some people they talk not nicely. And sometimes when you go to the market and of course when they came here they don’t have work to do, they don’t know how to speak English. Of course they have to go to [the] welfare. Everybody came here they have to be on welfare [on welfare], of course. But when they go to the market and they pay [first], they just push your cart, they just do something [strange] to you and they get angry. They just do, but I saw many people, they are so friendly, so nice. But many, many I have an experience with already and they just curse people or not being nice at all, you know. Well, I have an experience. I got mad at one lady at unemployment too. She just talk not very nice, and of course English is not my native language. [Sometimes I have] Even though you are educated people too, English is not your native language, sometimes confuse you too. [And] Also English there [are so many] one word there are so many meaning, and if you don’t understand you have to ask them, and if you ask them make them angry. Like last time I thought “I’m not able to work and maybe I will apply for unemployment.” I just try. And I went to see the lady and she just, gosh. She is Mexican, and I almost cursed her back, but I said well being nice to her because I almost said “You’re Mexican people too. You live this country, you have to talk nicely to me.” I thought I have to say. I thought no I better not say that to her. She said “you go ahead fill this. You know how to read?” I said “I know how to read, but this is not my native language and I don’t understand” and I asked her. And she said “you see people wait for me in the line and I couldn’t help you. You come back and see me next time.” I [I just try] said well can you talk nicely to me. I just try. I told her just forget it. I’m not gonna come here and apply for it again. I just try [you know]. If you could help me, help me. If you cannot help me just forget it. I’m not gonna come back. She said “You should come back because you already apply.” I said “No, I won’t.” I’m not gonna come back. I told her I’m not gonna come back in. She still gave me an application. I just accept her application, I said “You forget it. I’m not gonna come back and apply. You will see it” And I just walk out [you know I just walk out]. This way I feel depressed because some people are very friendly, but some are not. Like our kids here, one day one of my teachers [aid] at Kennedy School, she took me home because I don’t have transportation. One people at that side, he throw a balloon.

Hensley: Water balloon.

Champeng: Yes, water balloon. Throw water balloon to me and one of the teacher who took me home, she went there and she asked who throw balloon? One day he throw water balloon to my car.
When I drove out there and he throw to my car, and one day when I came back home from school with my friend and he throw water balloon to me too. Almost hit me, and I was pregnant too. I was [eight no] seven months pregnant. I thought, oh I’m gonna call police and watch them \[and you know\] take care of these people. Sometimes they ride their bike and throw water balloon to our people, to Laotian people. Not to American people. They just do it to our people. Only our people around here.

Hensley: Have you ever called the police?

Champeng: No, [but] I never call the police. But I said next time I should. Some of the Black kids they climb my fence here, and they said they just want a shortcut. I said no. They just get off the bus from school and they want shortcuts and they climb over my fence and I said “you shouldn’t do that.” I told him one time and he still keep doing it. I said “this is my second time.” I told him twice and I told him this is your third time. If you still keep doing this I’m gonna call the police. I just tell him “okay, honey, I talk with you [nice I talk with you] nicely okay. I love you and I don’t want you... and I told him some people will think that you are steal something. Some people will think you stole something, that you will steal something. “I didn’t steal anything.” “I know you are not. If you’re still doing this, people will think you will steal something, and then I told you nicely and not to do it anymore, and I love you like my kids.” I talk nicely with him. The kids, they like people talk nice to them. [And] I told him not to do it anymore and he didn’t do it. That is his third time. He not climb yet, but I catch him first because I heard the noise and came and look out and I saw him and explain it to him. I said “this is your friend?” He said yes. “And tell him too.” He said “he do it too” and I said well tell him okay? I just talk nicely to him and he didn’t do it anymore.

Hensley: Has your family, your brothers and sisters or mother and father ever had any of those kinds of experiences happen to them also?

Champeng: Yes, and they told me [they told me]. My sister-in-law too. They just talk badly because they said well these people don’t understand anything. They might think “oh they don’t understand. I can curse them, I can do whatever I want to do, I wanna say whatever I want to say.” They might say that. My sister have an experience like me in [ ] too. Maybe the same girl, I don’t know. At first I thought I’m gonna ask her supervisor [or something like that at first]. No forget, I just tell myself don’t create a problem because [you know] I stay here. I stay the country.

Hensley: But they’re creating problems for you when they do that, so they’re creating problems.

Champeng: [Right] Right, and sometimes I thought that I didn’t create problem because they do it first. And this is not something against the law. I didn’t do something against the law. The only thing I’m afraid. I respect the law. Not people who say something to me and I’m scared or something like that. Sometime I remind myself. Sometime I talk back to them too. If you don’t talk to them, if you don’t say anything, they keep doing that. They still keep saying that. Sometimes I just try and I just take my sister go to the market and I just let her go. And I just see if they’re going to say something, but they did. They charge you and then when you pay food stamp to them, they
look you like they unhappy and they just put do it like this. One day I told the girl [ ] right here, they just push. First of all, they will see you how you dress. They will look you how you dress and if you speak English. If you dress like a poor person or refugee, they look down, and also if you pay with food stamps or something like that. I tried many time, sometimes I dress like a refugee and they just do something bad to you, and sometimes I dress like a person [ ] who work in an office and they said “hi”. [You know they] Just hi and they talk nicely to you. “How are you today?” If you dress like a refugee and go out, they didn’t even say hi to you. Even you say hi, they just have a face like…I don’t know how to explain it to you. Not all of them, but I think one store have one or two person that act like that to you. [ ] I say two or three person who act like that to you. Sometime [they don’t understand sometimes] people they came and don’t understand. Like food stamp, they [charge] for food. But sometime they need soap, [Kleenex].

Hensley: Toothpaste.

Champeng: Yes [yes], toothpaste and they don’t accept food stamps. And then they pay food stamp and “oh this we don’t pay for food stamp”. Sometimes they get angry to separate [charge]. “Why didn’t you tell me first? You should tell me first.” They talk stronger like a curse.

Hensley: Abrupt.

Champeng: Yes, they talk like that. “You should tell me first.” I don’t know how to tell them. That’s why I told my sister you have to go to school and you have to learn English very well. Even me, I’ve been here four years and I still want to go to school. Want to improve my English and you have to learn. If they say something to you, you know how to say something back to them. You know how to explain it to them and next time they won’t say bad thing or they won’t curse you. And some people like our friend that just came here, a manager brought them to me and let me translate it to them because they don’t speak English. [And they said like they live in apartment] They live in apartment and when our people when we cook, we have to pound and make some noise a little bit, and some people don’t like our noise and they get angry and don’t even know how to say “excuse me. Apologize. I’m sorry.” Our people just came and they don’t know. How they know because some people they just came from let’s say [from from] the mountain in our country. How do they know the life in the city? And how do they know how to say sorry to people. They didn’t even know how to say I’m sorry in the language or they didn’t know how to say something polite. If they don’t come here and how do they live because they don’t like the communists. And when they came to the refugee and the refugee doesn’t fit them either. And the refugee camp is terrible too. They’re hungry and people die in the refugee camp because of they’re hungry. And they should come. Some people there don’t want to come here. When they come here they cry, cry, cry everyday.

Hensley: Yeah [well]

End of Tape Two