

# My Dad Khamfong PHAXSY History

## MY HISTORY

My father was a mayor or headman elected from among the wealthier farmers. The headman, offers hospitality to visitors and contributes to the temple. The headman held his position for as long as he lives. He acts as a link between the villagers and the central government. He keeps track of births and deaths and passes on these statistics to district offices run by the government. Traditionally, he is responsible for law and order, but more and more this function has been taken over by the government. He also passes on government orders and instruction to the villagers. Even under the Communists this position of mayor has not changed all that much. My brother and I studied in France where I became a teacher; my brother became a lawyer. During this stay in France, I met another Laotian student, the woman who became my wife and who is Sonexay's mother.

After I completed studies at France, I came back home. I worked for the Education Department Office and directed financial aid positions, helping students to study in France or the U.S. through various government programs.

Hostilities broke out in about 1960 between the neutralist, pro-western troops, and the Pathet Lao forces. Laos divided into two countries between North and South and it became impossible to get together with my family because of the war. I was separated from my six children and my wife.

8075  
17 10 3 99

My wife was lost during the hostilities but my six children all survived.

After my first wife's death, I married Sonexay's mother. This was about the time that her brother went to study in America with the U.S. army. When he returned he became a leader of Laos army. Altogether, with both families, I had ten children one of whom was killed by soldiers in a labor camp.

During 1968 and before 1975 all my family worked for the Laos government with high positions. Sonexay was born in 1969 and my brother worked for the high court in Laos during that time. He eventually campaigned for President of Laos in 1972-73. The election never took place because the fighting started between the communists and former King of Laos.

Nonetheless, my brother gained a great deal of political power from the exposure during the Presidential campaign and that power made the new Communist government fear him. It was the Communists' fear of that power that kept him incarcerated in prisons and labor camps until 1997 when the government officials finally killed him. The officials made up some excuse of how he died but the rumor which I believe is true is that he was killed in the camp by the officials.

During the war in Vietnam and my brother and I worked for The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) taking helicopters of rice and food to the refugees fleeing the fighting. We worked to get schools and medical care to them too through USAID and through Christian organization sponsored in Canada called World Vision Canada. We went to all of the small countries surrounding Laos -wherever people were fleeing from the battles. During this time we

prison and most others ended up for many years in labor camps where thousands died of overwork, mistreatment or starvation. I survived two years in prison and then \_\_\_ years in a labor camp outside the capital city.

Eventually, my wife and our three children came to live with me in a labor camp on an island. During the labor camp time they let my family and one other family take care of about 300 buffalo which they said belonged to the Communist government.

It was here that some soldiers killed one of my children. They did it for sport. They drowned him in the water which surrounded the island. When I complained about this terrible thing, I just got arrested and sent to prison again.

Now my wife was again left to take care of our remaining children in a labor camp under very hostile conditions. During this time one of our daughters escaped being raped by running away from some soldiers. After this my wife was afraid to let the children go to the school set up for the children in the area because she feared for their safety. She couldn't protect them because she was forced each day to go to work herding water buffalo. She dared not try and escape. She knew that they would all be killed if she did. Anyway there was no way for her to get the children and herself off the island.

Finally she saw a way out. There was a terrible shortage of teachers since so many people had fled the country that the government. She volunteered to become a teacher. The government let her go to the village outside the labor camp and become a teacher. Now our children could go to *School*.

school with her each day. Once she had this job - working for the government as a teacher, I was released from prison and could rejoin my family. I was not free. I still worked as a laborer assigned to work with water- buffalo, but I was with my family.

Eventually 70 families including my own were assigned by the government to make a new village. We were given a communal spot and ordered to make our living growing rice and vegetables for ourselves with most of the produce going to the government as a sort of tax. Unfortunately, the land we were given was horrible. Nothing grew on that bad soil.

After awhile, we were all starving and so I took all 70 families including my own and we went to my old land and formed a new village there. With our hands we cut wood and built our own houses. We called it Phomsomboun. It is the little village my wife and daughter and her family still live in..

I was very happy helping the people work for food and take care of themselves on this land. The people voted me Mayor. We grew rice but the Communists came over and took almost all of the villagers rice. They called it a tax but they took more than is left for all 70 families. We didn't have enough rice to take care of one family certainly not enough for 70 families.

We worked hard to develop the land to become good land for growing rice. When the people didn't have enough rice they sent me to complain to the communist government. The government says that whoever complains will be arrested or killed or sent to prison. The villagers let me be responsible to tell the communists that we need more food or medicine or whatever it was that

everyone needed.

Many from our villager ran away during that hard time. They became refugees in Thailand.

When the government people come back and counted the people in the village they discovered that many were missing they arrested me again, saying that I let the villagers run away.

This arresting and releasing me happened over and over. When I was back to my little village, the government refused to let me have any contact with the Americans or Canadiens that I had worked with before the communist takeover. We desperately needed a school, electricity and other necessities. After seeking help for these improvements and not getting any, I eventually contacted some of the Americans and Canadiens I knew from years ago. We did get a school built and electricity brought to our village.

This success just made the government persons furious with me. In 1992 The government removed me as village mayor. The government sent someone from outside the region to take over as the new mayor. This man made things very bad for me. The new mayor tried to strip me from power but the villagers remained loyal to me. Then in 1993 he ordered me out of the village. Today I am still banished from my own village. I cannot live with my wife and daughter. I can only come into the village once a week to visit with them and am forbidden to talk to any other person in the village. I cannot attend temple. I am not allowed to work anywhere in Laos or to hold any job, either public or private. I live by what my wife gives me on my weekly visits to the village and what I can grow in the little tiny house that I built on my land about 20 kilometers outside of the village. I have a chicken and a few other things, but it is a meager existence. And it

## **MAJOR NEW PROBLEMS**

### **My 1999 ARREST**

On March 17, 1999 I went to the village and bought some limber to build a better house for my wife, daughter and grandchildren. Soldiers came to our home and arrested me and took me away. I was taken to the major's office with my hand tied up and soldiers with guns surrounding me. The villagers are afraid. They dare not say anything. But I know many people of power around the country and the Mayor got so many protests from these powerful people that he did not dare to sent me to prison- but sent me again out of the village. My sin? Trying to make my family's house better.

After I was forced out of the house all tied up, my wife says that the soldiers inventoried everything in her house and the soldiers told her that everything in the house belong to the government.

We are only waiting for the Major to make more trouble for me to finish my life off. It is only a matter of time.

### **MY BROTHER'S SUSPICIOUS DEATH**

My brother, the lawyer, who was arrested in 1975 spent 10 years in prison in Northern Laos in the XiengKhone Province. After that he was sent to a labor camp for older people who had high positions in the former government which is near Vientiane. He lived there for the rest of his life. He was never allowed out of the labor camp. In 1997 he died in a chair. He had a black bruise all around his neck and his tongue was out of his mouth with a blanket over his head. We think he was killed but we don't know for sure who killed him. The government statement was that he had a heart attack. No one expects the government to sign a paper saying that they arranged for him to be killed. The rumor is that my brother was killed by the government because he knew too much of the old corruption. I don't know why they waited so long. The government people often said he tried change the people's ideas about the government because he ran for President before 1975 and people still respected him too much.

Our current government tells the world that the labor camps are closed. This is not true. There are several fairly close to my village, including the one my brother died in 1997. Since the government controls where foreigners can go in the country, the rest of the world cannot know the extent of the imprisonment of Laotian people that still goes on for political reasons.

Because I had many foreign contacts before the days of the Communists, my life has been watched over much more than others. Shortly after the creation of my little village, the government sent two soldiers to live in our home. Their duty was to report anything suspicious that we might say to one another in the house and to make sure that I did not hold meetings with the villagers.