

Narrator: Jennifer Vue  
Interviewer: Sallie Anna Steiner  
Date: August 3, 2018  
Place: Eau Claire Area Hmong Mutual Assistance Association  
Duration: 57:25

STEINER: Today is August 3rd, and we are at the Hmong Mutual Association and I am here with Jennifer Vue. Is that an Americanized name? Do you have a Hmong name?

VUE: Yes I do.

STEINER: What is your Hmong name?

VUE: My original name is Joua Vue, and then my original name is Joua Yang and then I married my husband and so I became Joua Vue.

STEINER: OK.

VUE: And then in 1991 I became a United States citizen so I decided to change my name. The reason I decided to change my name is the story behind. I just made the long story to be short because the pronunciation of my name is "Choua" and then people cannot pronounce my name, it's not right. They only pronounce "Chow" or "Chouee" or whatever.

STEINER: You just wanted to forgo that.

VUE: Yes, so I changed my name to be Jennifer and later I wanted to change back but it cost me a lot of money.

STEINER: Yeah. It is like \$300.00 to get the name changed isn't it?

VUE: Yeah, so I decided to go by Jennifer for now.

STEINER: What made you to choose Jennifer?

VUE: You know, at the time that I changed my name that is the only popular name that I know. Because my name spelled correctly is J-O-U-A. I don't know why I didn't go by Joua, but then I could just go with Jennifer. It started with a "J," so that is what I decided to do.

STEINER: Oh, interesting. Where were you born?

VUE: I was born in Laos, in [city] Laos, in northern Laos. I was born in 1965. My real birthday is 1961, but when we came to this country my parents don't know my real date of birth. My uncle knew but my parents doesn't know, and they just made me younger, four years younger.

STEINER: Interesting! So your real birthday was in 1961. Then according to the U.S. government you are born in 1965.

VUE: That is why I am older than I am supposed to be.

STEINER: Well, you can keep the 1965. That's probably fine.

VUE: Yes.

STEINER: How old were you when you came to the US?

VUE: When I came here I was about sixteen.

STEINER: What was the most shocking for you, or was different or surprising or interesting about coming to the US?

VUE: You know, it was really exciting to come to the United States because my father was a soldier and then they always talking about that if my family go back to Laos, that it was not safe for my family, so when we had an interview and everything passed and we had the authorization to come to the United States. Then everybody was so exciting. Then we came in December, so we came to Oklahoma--Lawton, Oklahoma--and Father Renee was our sponsor. Then we came in through the Catholic Church.

When we came to Oklahoma—Lawton, Oklahoma—and the big thing that was shocking me was, you know, during Christmas time. And then I had the mind that United States was a beautiful state, and we will be safe and we would start a new life. We had opportunity because I, as a girl, I had the opportunity to go to school and do things like working or writing, or go to school and learn how to write and read, and things like that. Then when we came to the United States and we got to Lawton, Oklahoma, and that is in December at Christmas time and everything was so beautiful. Like Christmas lights everywhere and our sponsors, when we came to his home, he had a big house and lights everywhere, Christmas tree there, it's so pretty. I was so shocked and I say why is the United States so beautiful? So that is a big shock for me.

And then the other thing is everybody is speaking English, and I don't know what they talk about, and then when I go to school on the first day I was really shy and I don't know what to say, and I don't even know what they are talking about. We had no ESL at that time, we had no interpreter at that time. No translation.

I have a story. I go to the Catholic school and I started with the sixth grade. They placed me in the sixth grade to just learn English. It had been a week that I went to school, and then my teacher asked me what do you have for breakfast? And I always said cookies and milk. Then they ask me every single day and the only two words that I know was cookies and milk. They were thinking what is our sponsor Father Renee doing, feed this family? They kind of investigated our sponsor. And I was so shocked and I was so scared. The police came and talked to me and I don't know nothing and no interpreter and everything. So I finally I said that is the only two words I know, and then everybody was laughing. That's my story.

STEINER: A little missed on translation there.

VUE: I know. He gave us a variety of things to eat, but I did not know, and my teachers would say, "What do you have for breakfast this morning?" "Cookies and milk." Every single morning. [Laughter].

STEINER: I guess it was good that they were looking out for you, but maybe not in the way that was most productive for you.

VUE: I know, yes.

STEINER: I am assuming back in, you were born in Laos or Thailand you said?

VUE: Laos.

STEINER: I'm assuming back in Laos your family was on the move a lot because of the war and stuff?

VUE: Right, yes.

STEINER: I wonder, how did you practice Hmong culture when you were moving around a lot? Was it hard to keep up a lot of the traditions then?

VUE: It was really hard to keep the tradition. Basically the traditions, the big event that we were keeping is the Hmong New Years. So back in Laos I was a little girl and then my mom always prepared a costume for us for the New Years. Every year we would escape, if the communist would plan to come to our village, we would have to hide for a while and then for a while we would have to go to another village, so we were moving village to village. My father was a soldier in the city and then we would live in the village far away at the mountain.

Then my father came home, and we always have New Year's in December, and then my father came home in October or November to bring a little black material, and some blue material, and pink and green material just for the Hmong costume. So my mom had to make the costumes. Sometimes she would just ask the children to sleep, she put us to sleep and she would light a little lamp and then she was just sitting all night to sew the costumes to get ready for the New Year's in December. So when I grow up and I ask my mom and she said that because traditionally everybody had to have a new costume during the New Year's. So that is to bring a new ritual like good luck or bring the new luck to the New Year's. So at the beginning of the year, everyone and every individual had to have new clothes on. That is why she was preparing for that.

Then traditionally we were practicing shaman, and then at that time if I get sick and my parents had to go find some shaman to come and do a practice to oversee my spirit side to make sure everything is OK. They have to do a soul caller every year.

STEINER: They do what?

VUE: The soul caller.

STEINER: What is that?

VUE: It is just like calling your soul.

STEINER: Oh, OK. I see.

VUE: We call it soul caller person. Every year we have call our soul because we believe that individuals have twelve different souls. Then we had to make sure that everyone will be attaching to your body so you don't get sick.

STEINER: What did those different souls – do you know what each one of them is?

VUE: Yes. They say that you have a soul to monitor your head, monitor your eyes and your mouth and your body.

STEINER: So it has to do with different parts of your body?

VUE: Yes. And the different parts of your body. Then some soul had to make sure that everybody was listening or attaching to your body and they make sure you have energy or you eat well and things like that. When I grow older like about ten or thirteen years I ask my mom why are you doing that every year and why do we have to have this and that? My mom would explain to me that traditionally you have to have the culture going on. You have to make sure an individual in the family to be safe for the years. And to be healthy, to have some kind of good luck. And then when we got sick they had to go see a shaman and make sure that our soul is attaching to our body. If not, if one of our souls is gone so they have to do some performing to call him back.

STEINER: So when you came to the US how was it transitioning into a society where you go to a Western doctor verses like having a shaman? Was that kind of weird to not have the shamanic practice be so much of the society that you are living in?

VUE: Yes. The other part of the tradition is the herbal medication. So when we came to this country and then my parents were still using so kind of herbal medication. My father developed high blood pressure and my grandma developed some diabetes. So my parents tried to use some herbal medication, but it won't help. So we get into the Western medication and that helped. Also my mom had a kidney infection, and then they tried to use all kinds of herbal medication but it won't help. Then my mom went to see a doctor and they gave her some medication so that helped her a lot. So that is why my family became really Westernized and we don't use any herbal medications. We go to see the doctor and if we don't have a diagnosis, then we will go to see a shaman after that. We're still practicing now but we don't practice it as much as before. Just to be honest with you, my husband and I will still practice shaman, but we will go to the doctor and if the doctor doesn't diagnose anything, and if we don't have anything, then we can go to see the shaman just to be sure.

STEINER: So you use both.

VUE: Yes, we use both and we are balancing everything. All my children go to church but just me and my husband not yet!

STEINER: So your children have become Christian, or ...

VUE: I have two children. They go to the Alliance Church and the other goes to the Christian Church. Because they were graduated from college and they learn so much and they know so much about Western medication and so they don't know how to practice like shamans or things like that. They have decided to go their way.

STEINER: Maybe they will come back.

VUE: Maybe they will come back. You never know.

STEINER: Is that important for you to continue practicing shaman rituals?

VUE: Yes. It is really important because I want to teach my grandchildren Hmong and English and the traditions a little bit, so that is why I keep going. I say that traditional culture is really important and I teach my children Hmong and reading and writing Hmong. When my mother-in-law is babysitting them and I also teach them we only speak Hmong at home, and people keep telling me that how come I not speak in English in our home? I say they well English they learn eight hours at school and they come home just for a couple hours before dinner, and they go to bed and tomorrow they go back school and learn English. So I think I will teach them Hmong as much as we can. Then I have the rule that in my house my children will have to speak Hmong. So my mother-in-law would know, my mother would know and everybody would know. So I keep that and now my children speak Hmong really well and all my children work at the school district. My daughter Sandy who graduated from guidance and counseling and she works at the university and she knows how to read and write Hmong really well. She knows more than I do, I think, so I am really impressed. That is why I try to teach tradition as much as I could.

STEINER: What have you seen change the most in Hmong culture since you have been here in the U.S.?

VUE: I see a lot of changing. I see a lot of changing because most of the families, they were adapting really quickly. Now when you go to a Hmong house and you ask their children if you talk in Hmong and they make some sign, but they don't know what you're talking about. And they don't know anything about culture or tradition. They don't know anything about Hmong *paj ntaub*. What does *paj ntaub* mean? They don't know what. They look at that story cloth and they don't know what that means. So it is a lot of changing. So we still have a Hmong language class here every year and that is why we try to keep it a little bit.

STEINER: What is it, *paj ntaub*?

VUE: *Paj ntaub*, that is the Hmong story cloth.

STEINER: Yes. Do you do this kind of stuff yourself or...?

VUE: We did it in the camp. But since I came to the United States I did not do anything. But when we lived in the camp, we had to do it for a living.

STEINER: So you did this kind of embroidery.

VUE: We do those embroidery.

STEINER: Is that by someone you know?

VUE: No, I bought this from someone. But we did the little ones, those cute maybe 20 x 20. We did those.

STEINER: At home I have a big tapestry. A lady earlier was telling me what it was called.

VUE: The elephant footprint?

STEINER: Oh, you call that elephant footprint? She was saying it was called snail.

VUE: Oh, snail. *Paj ntaub qwj*. Yes, I have some of them here. This is the star.

STEINER: Can I take a picture?

VUE: Yeah. This is the star with the snail.

STEINER: What does that mean? Do you know?

VUE: That means [in Hmong]. This is the star and then this is the snail, and then those represent – I don't remember what the story behind that is. There is a story behind it. So I have this one.

STEINER: Are those by people you know?

VUE: Yes. This is by my mom. My mom made this one. And this one, my cousin made this. This is one I bought, this is a bigger one. This one I have several of these. At my home I keep every individual different design.

STEINER: Have you taught any of your kids to do anything like that?

VUE: Yes, I taught my daughter to do those, and my daughter knows how to do the cross stitch, but she doesn't know how to do the applique.

STEINER: The applique?

VUE: It is hard for them to do this because we cut a little bit, we cut all these around and we sew along with the patterns. So they don't know how to do it.

STEINER: In the camps, who would you sell those to?

VUE: We sell it to the missionary and we also sell to somebody coming from the United States.

STEINER: OK, so people who were taking them on to...

VUE: They would take them to Bangkok and sell and the. Now in Bangkok, when we went to Thailand, the Thai people they are collecting all these designs, and they make them into purses, and bags, and

they even using the Hmong clothing, the old embroidery to make pants and shirts and jackets and they have all those treasures.

STEINER: I have seen some of those on Ebay, you can buy that stuff. I always felt kind of weird about it because it probably came from somebody who didn't have a lot of money for that.

VUE: No, it's not.

STEINER: And then I don't know if I want to buy something.

VUE: Yes, they sell very expensive. When we go to Thailand, and we went to Bangkok, and they call it culture cloths or something, and they were just selling all different like Indian things or Hmong old cloth. They use it in little pieces and they make a t-shirt and jackets. They make different things like pants, all different things and it's very expensive. They are also using some Hmong designs to make capris and shorts....

STEINER: How do you feel about that kind of stuff?

VUE: You know, I think that I feel really sad. I feel so sad to the Hmong, to our family because we don't know how to keep our culture. We don't know how to save our designs, our traditional designs. It's not something like machine printed, it's not something like that. It is a real handmade thing. But they went to the Hmong village and they were collecting from the Hmong village. It is really old pieces like embroidery that our parents or grandparents used to do. But they were collecting from the Hmong village and they would wash them and cleaned and pressed down, and they added some like hand material on it, and they just made it really pretty and they sew it onto pants or shirt and things like that.

STEINER: It is sort of complicated, because it's beautiful but also an heirloom that maybe should be with the people.

VUE: Yes, it should be with our people.

STEINER: Yes.

VUE: It should be with our shop. It should be with someone from our heritage or culture. We have no country, and a lot of people live in Thailand. They don't know what to keep. Thai people can go into the village and they buy any old things and the Hmong people bring a lot of things and just give it to them, or just for a couple of bucks, a lot just for like five bucks, and things like that.

STEINER: And they probably turn around and sell it for a lot more.

VUE: Yes, and they took it to the city like Bangkok and then they try to sew things matching, and then they sell really, really expensive. So they matched. And then, you know, they got a really good business out of those.

STEINER: Yeah, from the Hmong people.

VUE: Yes, from the village and from our grandparents and our great-great grandparents.

STEINER: Did you bring anything with you when you came to the U.S., any artifacts with you? Were you able to at all?

VUE: I brought something but it is not very old like the one I said. It is something from the refugee camp. I have a couple old, old things from the refugee camp and my mom gave me a couple so I have some really old things at home, too.

STEINER: Did you grow up during the war like moving a lot? Or did you ever live in one village for a while before you had to start moving?

VUE: I don't remember the time, I remember a little bit of the time that we moved around a lot in 1972. And then we moved to the south of Laos and we crossed the Mekong River to the other side. Because my father was a soldier and my father knew exactly one of these days we would have to escape and cross the Mekong River so we would have to go there first, so we don't have to struggle when the time comes. So, my father said that we will be moving to Sayaboury. So Sayaboury is a Laos city that is across Mekong River. It is closer to the border of Laos and Thailand. So we moved and we lived there for three years, and then in 1975 we lost the war and that is why everybody tried to escape and would just walk from Laos to Thailand. So we don't have to struggle crossing the Mekong River. That is what my father planned to do that, and that's why we did that.

STEINER: You father was a soldier in the Lao Army?

VUE: Yes.

STEINER: OK.

VUE: So he was a soldier there for all his life and he knew exactly what they were going to do. Because General Pao had been talking about it and had been saying that one of these days we might lose the wars and then all the people would have to go to the third country or something. So they called the first country Laos, and second is Thailand, and third country we had to come to the United States or to America. My father knew little bit about those things and that is why my father prepared himself, and he said he better take his family to live closer to the border of Thailand. Then when the time comes and we would just walk across the border, so we don't have to struggle crossing the Mekong River.

STEINER: Did you have a lot of family in the places that you were moving to, or were you strangers when you came to a new place?

VUE: We were strangers. It was a stranger when we came to Sayaboury and we stayed there, and we didn't know anybody there. We were just on our own. It was the same country so we know the language really well, so we can settle better. But when we came into Thailand and then it was different, and then when we came to the United States it was more different.

STEINER: I know from some other conversations that I have had that big extended family is important in Hmong culture for like weddings and funerals and stuff. Was it hard to be separated from your extended family?

VUE: Yes. It was really difficult. We were really sad and my parents were really sad because we had to move from our village which is all our relatives. My father's cousins and our uncles there and they don't want to move with us. They think that have agriculture and they had all kind of animals and they don't want to lose their animals, like cows, pig, and chicken and all these things. They had a big farm and they don't want to move because they don't know exactly that the country would be losing the war and everybody would have to escape. So they think that my father is crazy. They thought my father was crazy. Why did we move and leave everything behind? My father tried to encourage them but they don't want to. So then we left everybody behind. Then when we came to Sayaboury it was really, really difficult for us. Then my father and my mom, they just tried to do their best to get us settled there. There are Hmong people, and we are Yang, and there is the Yang family there. It is not related to us but their last name is just the same last name Yang. They just come into engage with them and associate with them and consider that they are our relatives.

STEINER: What happened to the relatives that stayed home with the farm? Did they make it out?

VUE: Those are my father's uncle, or my father's brothers, and we have some brother that came by 1975. Then people tried to escape and come to Thailand and a lot of them got killed on the way. My father lost a sister-in-law, a brother and then the older brother. They got killed and all their family. And then they came to the camp, the refugee camp in Thailand, so just one or two survived. Some don't want to come so they are still in Laos. My father's cousin is still in Laos. If we don't come my father doesn't think ahead, we would probably die or be left behind still in Laos now. So that is one thing that is a really big shock for my father and really sad for my father.

STEINER: Have you been able to travel to Laos at all?

VUE: Yes, we went a couple of times.

STEINER: Has it changed a lot from what you remember when you were younger?

VUE: Yes. It has changed a lot. I went to the same airport that we came from up north, and we come to [City]. Then we landed in [City], and then we were taken by boat from [City] to Sayaboury. So when we went back to Laos and I tried to stop and see all the station where we were landing on, and I just feel so sad. I feel so sad because a lot of people died and a lot of people got killed. And then my cousin had talked about, and also my husband were talking about when they escaped from Laos to Thailand and they come at a time that it was really a struggle. They were just walking at night only, and they crossed the Mekong River. They had to use the plastic bags, like garbage bags, to swim and cross the Mekong River. Or they can use the bamboo to tie together and then swim across the Mekong River. My husband took us to the Mekong River, the part that they walk or were swimming, and that was really sad. It was a tragedy for everybody.

STEINER: Do you try to teach your children about these stories about your experiences or is it important to you to tell them about you experienced when you were younger?

VUE: Yes.

VUE: It was a sad story that I taught when I was first teaching classes, like Hmong classes, to my children. I established a Hmong class in my basement and teach my children how to write and read Hmong. Then I try to tell them my story because when we were in Laos and I was about two years old or three years old

my mom tells me she doesn't remember exactly how old I was. Then she said in the middle of the night there was shooting everywhere. They were shooting in our village, and they had to escape, and my mom had to carry a baby and holding me, and my brother is older, and she was carrying a blankets and she also carried some food. Then when she went a little bit from the village she saw a cave that is really dark, and a she threw me into that cave and she said she was hiding me with all the weeds. Then she would hold my brother's hand and run. So she was thinking in her mind that in the morning she could come back to get me. She told me "You stay here and mom will come back." Then she put a blanket over me and then she said rocked me with the blanket and just let me breathe and she put me in there. She said you stay here, mom will come back because it was sprinkling and raining. Then my mom just held on to my brother and she ran. She came back in the morning and I was still sleeping there. She would just say that it looked like something was protecting me, because In Laos there is a lot of bear and tigers and other things, you know. She said it was lucky that none of them were eating me, and that I stayed in that cave and breathe and still sleep in there.

I told my daughter the story and then I told her that I never got to go to school. I really wanted to go to school and I never had a chance to go to school. Then my daughter was like teary and cry and all these things. Finally she said "Mom I was just so proud of you that you can survive and you are really lucky to be alive." So things like that.

STEINER: Yes, so this heritage of survival, are there traditions you want to practice here in the U.S. in order to show strength of Hmong culture, that Hmong culture has come through so much struggle and then come here to the U.S., and then trying to keep it going here in the U.S.?

VUE: You mean something I would like to continue?

STEINER: Yeah.

VUE: Things that I want to teach them? You know when I lived in Menomonie, I used to work for the school district in Menomonie, and I went to schools over there and then I did a presentation all alone with the school, like grade school. I would say that I would like to continue to show my children to show them the Hmong clothing and the Hmong ritual and cultures, because the Hmong family has to respect each other and respect the elders, and we would have to continue to keep our culture as long as we can. And try to teach our children how to speak Hmong as much as we can. We can't just let them go. We have to keep them, so that is what I want to do now, and I want to continue teaching the language and the religion and some of the traditions.

STEINER: Do you like to make Hmong food?

VUE: Yes.

STEINER: What kinds of, or do you have to change any recipes in order to be able to make them here with different ingredients being available?

VUE: You know it is a lot of new things added on to the Hmong recipe or Hmong traditional food. But now my husband and I are eating the traditional food and really simple thing like chicken and vegetable. Traditionally the chicken boiled with ginger, oh no, with lemongrass and the herbs, plants that we have been using for hundreds of years ago. We still carry on and I think those are really important so I still taught my daughter and my daughter-in-law to continue to carry on those things. I think that is really

healthy for when we are getting older like me and then we cannot eat things like fat or if it has all kinds of ingredients. We just eat really simple things, really light tradition things, light things. I still am cooking them. You can come to my house and you will see every time we eat we have to have the plain vegetable broth, we have to have some chicken with herbs plants, and then we have to have rice. But we change to either really simple rice from Walmart because I will try to stay away from the carbohydrates.

STEINER: I had Hmong sausage and sticky rice over at the Rice Palace the other day. It was pretty good.

VUE: Those Hmong sausage is really good but, we used to do the traditional thing and we use a real intestine to put the meats in. Those sausages now we changed to the artificial and then we will put some meats in so that is the difference. And then also, when you go to the Hmong village in St. Paul, the Hmong village shopping mall, and they have all the sticky rice they will put in the artificial intestine like the one we put sausage in. We make a sausage and make rice sausage.

STEINER: Interesting.

VUE: Those are really good, too.

STEINER: Do you make sausage?

VUE: Yes, sometimes I make some traditional ones.

STEINER: Are there any traditions that you, since being here, decided not to practice? Or are there things that you decided to change because you wanted to?

VUE: Because I want to?

STEINER: Like things about the culture that you like and you have changed because you wanted to.

VUE: Yes. The things that I try to change is like treating the girls different than the boys, and respecting boy more than girl. I only have four children, but I treat them equally. Basically back in Laos we would say OK you are just a woman or you are just a girl. They would always say that, OK, you are a boy, you are tougher, you are more valued, you have more strength, that is true. But now I try to say that everybody, I treat my kids at the same level. I respect them the same. Also respecting the elderly as they carry on. And be a Hmong wife and not to do everything and let your husband just lay there and not do anything. I try to change that a little bit. I taught my daughter, I taught my son, I taught my daughter-in-law, and I told them that you need to do equally. Not just like me. Because we used to do that, so I still practice a little bit of the culture thing, but you need to do the best for you. I encourage my daughter and daughter-in-law that they just do equally, because they are both working and they have a job so they have to do the housework, and when they go work outside they do their thing equally and help taking care of the children. They are all helping each other. That is one thing I tried to teach them.

STEINER: So some of those gender roles are changing a little bit?

VUE: Yes the gender roles changing a little bit, and then the culture thing, I try not to do so intensely. In the past every little thing that everybody, if somebody is sick, then we will do the shaman, and we

would do all these practices. I try not to do those things. I think that is too much. So I would have to take that person to see the doctor first to see what they can, if they diagnose and then they would have some medicine and get that over with. So the other way, because some of the Hmong family they would do all the performing, do all the herbs medication, and then they would go to the doctor. So that would take so much time and it is more expensive and it takes everybody's time, and we wait so long so sometime you just cannot hear.

STEINER: So you are a little quicker to go to the western way than some other people might be?

VUE: Yeah.

STEINER: I won't take too much more of your time, but earlier I was talking to Sia and she was telling me, she had a bunch of interesting proverbs she was telling me. She was talking about how Hmong people are often very indirect, they are not very direct and they tend to speak in proverbs and stuff in order to say things without saying it directly. Do you know a lot of proverbs? I was just interested to hear if you had any proverbs that....

VUE: Yeah, you know Hmong people is just like what I mentioned earlier, we are speaking and we don't see eye contact very much. You don't have eye contact, and then when you say like for sexual things, that is very sensitive and they don't want to talk about it. And abuse, like domestic violence, they don't want to talk about it. They kind of go around, and say for example if I have a client here--I work with the domestic violence population for a long time, for more than twenty years--and when we have a woman who came in to talk about that issue and they were just kind of like go around and say that we are arguing, we have a conflict. Things like that. They never tell you that they were threatened, that they were abused. You need to know how to talk to them so you would find out what is their problem. Domestic violence is a really sensitive issue, and sexual assault and sexual abuse is a really sensitive issue for the Hmong population. When you talk to them and hand shake, you never shake hands with a man. Hmong women would never shake hands with a man, traditionally. When we talk to someone we never look at their eyes, and we would never look at them in their face.

STEINER: I probably freaked out some of the people I have talked to today because I didn't know!

VUE: We just look at a different direction but they are listening to you. That is what it is.

STEINER: Is working with Hmong people in your social services capacity, like you were saying, are there any certain cultural things you have to be aware of in order to work with women and domestic violence situations? Is there a way that people talk about these things?

VUE: Yeah, they kind of like, for an example, if you go to talk about your interpreter--I do a lot of interpreter-- "Have you heard about the yellow ear?" Because if Hmong people don't have energy, their face looks like yellow and they don't have enough blood or anything like that, they call it *daj ntsaj*, and they would just say I feel tired, I feel yellow and things like that. So they just say [in Hmong] I can't eat and that is why I turn yellow, I turn pale, and then they don't say exactly what they do, so that is why the interpreter has a problem to interpret. They say she said she cannot eat and she has a yellow ear. *Daj ntsaj* means that your ear is yellow.

STEINER: So you have to kind of figure out how to turn that into English.

VUE: Yes, and then talking about traditionally, that anything that I work in my field and I see, there is a lot of things we need to be aware of their culture differences. So if you go to a Hmong house and you see a little green branches, like tree branch on the door, we don't go into the door, because they have a ritual, they do a shaman ritual to protect them. They would let anybody to come in. So they have to stay there for three days before they can let people come in. And the other thing if you and a social worker, if you and I would go to a Hmong house, and if they offer you a drink, just go ahead and take it. If you don't take it they feel bad. They think that you don't respect them. You don't accept their things like drink. Because every Hmong house, when you go in mother and father would have to bring you waters or they would bring you a can of pop. They would offer you cookies or they would give you something, just a little thing because that is their respecting. If you don't take it, they think you don't respect them.

STEINER: Just one more question. Do you think that the fact that Hmong people have a different way of interacting, like interpersonally they are not as direct, do you think that is something? I feel American culture is often direct. Do you think that is something like culture shock for some people?

VUE: Yes.

STEINER: Do you hear that for your own cases? Is it surprising to you coming to America?

VUE: Yes. You know when we were coming to the United States, and then in Laos for my brother and my cousin and everything, when you see them they will say "Hi." That is it. We would never hug each other, we never hold hands. We never touch each other and things like that. When we came to this country, then we were more direct. The indirect is a big thing, too, because they never say "I love you," my husband never say "I love you," and you never show love. You never touch your wife or your husband, and you don't touch in public. Don't do direct touching, or hugging, or say love or anything in public. So now when we hear somebody say "I love you," it is kind of like really weird. For example, if I would say to my friend "OK, I love you, bye, I will see you tomorrow," they would say "What do you mean you love her or love him?" or something like that. If I hugged them, them that would be really unusual. That is a culture shock.

STEINER: Interesting.

VUE: If you do that to somebody, and then the husband and wife, you never hugging in public. We never touch or say love or things in public. So if you say that and then people would think why your wife doesn't respect our people. They just feel like I am so weird and I'm not .... What's wrong with you? What happened to you? Things like that.

STEINER: Interesting. Thank you for giving me some insight. Is there anything I didn't ask you that you think I should have asked you?

VUE: I think that is pretty much.... I got your card so if I think of something that you didn't ask me, then I will call you. But if you are thinking of something specific that nobody talk about or you need to know, you can call me and we can get together again, and if you write down the specific question of what you need to know I will try to go onto it.

STEINER: OK.

VUE: And then Vincent told me the other day, and I told Vincent, you know the Hmong *paj ntaub* like the sash or the front that you are sewing on traditional *paj ntaub* means something. It is a story behind but it is a long, long story. It would take a long time to talk about it.

STEINER: Yes.

VUE: So if you need to know some more of these, you can call me.

STEINER: Thank you so much.