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Cheung, Steve Oral History Interview: Class Projects

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Mark Dolbee
First year seminar
Cambodian interview with Steven Cheung

MD: Can you please state your full name for the record?

SC: My name [is] Steve Chung.

MD: Where were you born in Cambodia, and how long did you live there? Can you tell me a little bit about your family life?

SC: I was born [date removed] 1956 at Batenbong City. I don't know exactly how far it is from capital Penampeing, it's a big city. I was in a high school in 1974 and I study first year university medicine at Penampeing in 1975. My dad was president of Pepsi Cola company in Cambodia and my mom just house work. I have 6 brothers and 1 sister. I am second one and my older brother is two years older than me.

MD: What was life like in your home town?

SC: Cambodian [is] a small country and was very good to live to raise family.

MD: What do you remember about life in Cambodia during the war and during the Khaum Rouge period?

SC: Oh, it's terrible, and that time planed, I mean before the Khaum Rouge, my dad planed took all our family out country. He make a passport for each of us but later he changed his mind because he say nothing happen to the student or anybody just change the government, so and we decided stay. After Khaum Rouge took over, they force all the people who live in big city to live at country side. So the city became the ghost town; nobody lived there except the Khaum Rouge soldier. So, we live in the field in the call country side over there far away from big city. We work seven day per week like 15-16 hour per day. They don't pay you money, they don't want you to use car, you can not drive a car—you just walk.

MD: Where did you work? Did you enjoy it? And how did you spend your free time?

SC: I do not enjoy it. I work because I don't have another choice. I don't work they kill me. You have no other choice. You had to work, everybody had to work, no other choice. No complain, no talking, nothing—all you can do you just go to work. They give you just little bit food to eat, not enough.

MD: Did your family practice any religious observances in Cambodia, and what do you remember best about them, if they did?

SC: As you know, I say 95% of Cambodian people the Buddhist. that a long time generation to another generation. So at that time, I was a little teenager, I know not choice, just go

by the parents.

MD: What led to your decision to leave Cambodia, and how did you leave the country? Did you have to spend any time in like any refugee camps or anything?

SC: Yes, and almost five year and the companies time. I have terrible life; I almost die. I cannot use my education because Khaum Rouge, they don't like talent people. They kill a lot of professional—engineers, business man, teacher, student—everybody that they think of as talent people. They only keep the people who don't know how to read, don't know how to write, look like people live in jungle, they keep those people a little bit not all of them. So they had to kill, too, because they think one each day those people come back and fight them back, so they always destroy all those people. Every day people die by disease, starvation, by killing, by a Khaum Rouge Solider. They kill every day, so it think that's a terrible life for me, you know. I waiting for one each day I got a chance I had to get out. I said hey I still remember my home land but it's not the right government for me. I cannot kill a people like you, dog, cow anymore, like that, you know. People have a right to live, you know, no judgment, just kill you like crazy. People even care people die on there own everywhere. You can see find the dead people everywhere and people live like fear and scared. They don't which day is your turn because they kill people everyday. They just pick name. But I'm so lucky and still alive, you know, maybe cause God beside me or decide when a Vietnamese solider come in, you know, get out right away.