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Pradith, Khamphan Oral History Interview: Sesquicentennial of Holland, "150 Stories for 150 Years"

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Interview with Khamphan Pradith
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Interviewer: Larry Wagenaar

LW: Master, could you pronounce your full name and your date of birth for me please?
KP: My name is "Khamphan." My last name is "Pradith," and I was born the [date removed] in 1936.

LW: Where were you born?
KP: In the northern part of Laos. Laos is the former state of Indochina, the fringes/friends of China. I came to the states as a refugee because I was kept in a camp by the communist government. I escaped in 1992. I then fled to Thailand in 1993. I stopped over in Germany for seven months, from April to October. I flew to Chicago, and after three months I was ordained as a monk, a Buddhist Monk, in Elgin, Illinois. I have been traveling around to cities with most of the monks in the U.S., to learn how to practice, meditate, and preach. It is a self-taught, self-educated program that I have been doing since 1993/94. I was ordained on the 26th of October, 1994 in Elgin, Illinois. We belong to the Buddhist congregation, we call, Lao Buddhist Monk Organization, Incorporated. It has its main office in San Diego, California.

LW: You didn't come in to the United States until 1994?

LW: Tell me a lit bit about your experience.... Let's go back to your childhood. What was it like to grow up in Laos during the time when you were a child?
KP: In Laos, I was born in 1936 in a very remote village, or township, where my late
father served as a deputy clerk of the township over there. It is about 100 or so miles from the main town, Luang-Prabang. Luang-Prabang is a former royal city of Laos. This city was named by the royal palladium. The royal palladium is the buddhist statue. The king and the royal family reside in there. I went to the elementary school in the small township. I came to the town with my parents, who move around quite a bit. I when to elementary school and primary school. After I finished primary school I started secondary school in Luang-Prabang. For the last part of secondary school I went to Saigon in South Vietnam. After I finished my high school I went to France to study law and taxation. After that I went back and I got married. We had six children. When the third child was on her way, I was very fortunate to get a scholarship from the state department during the Kennedy administration. The secretary was Dean Rusk at that time. I came to the states in 1962. I was touring the states quite a bit, about 20 or so states. Just to visit about taxation and other points of interest too. After that I went to school because my brother, who used to be the Ambassador to the United Nations. In 1972 to 1975 he was ambassador to Australia and New Zeeland because at that time he was in the royal government. The royal Laos government is not communist yet. For myself, I came to the states and the I.I.E., the Institute of International Education. They gave me a choice of what city I wanted to go. I had been in Utah, I'd been in Portland, I'd been in San Francisco..., so I made up my mind to go to Houston, Knoxville as well. I was in D.C., New York, and the eastern part of the states. So, I decided finally that I should go to school at Georgetown. It would be where my brother was educated also. I had a
political science degree, so I went to the business administration school which they call economics, but quite special in there. So, I was a transfer student because my degree was not accepted from France as a B.S. It did not matter because I could come and stay in the states and live with the American people. Also I would have the higher academic standard. I came here in 1962 and I finished in 1964. At that time I was the serial seven in the royal government, so I got a scholarship and I got my contract with the government. They needed me to go back, so I couldn't wait for my graduation. I went back first, so they sent me the paper afterwards. I missed a good opportunity to wear a gown and cap and have pictures to show around what I looked like.

LW: What was the country like when you returned in 1964?

KP: It was very peaceful. It was the second time of the coalition government. The communists joined the royal government and we called it a three party government at that time in 1962. After the second formation of the government the communists had the front again. That kept us as the pro-imperialists. After 1964, I worked as a administrator of finance and did taxes for the department. I was at that time an inspector of the whole department. I was traveling quite a bit from north to south repeatedly. I thought that being a tax man, like every where else in the world, is a very notorious profession. I would say even when you do that legally, and according to the rules and regulations and the law, still....

LW: People don't like you when you collect taxes.

KP: Yes. Still, I'm sure the duty is worth it, but you are like a blood sucker. Is that
right? So, people don't like me, but my ambition was to be a representative. We call it a deputy over there. A deputy has nothing to do with a deputy of the sheriff or the police.

LW: A political office.

KP: Yes. It is like a congressman in the lower house. In the House of Representatives. Or, in England they call it the lower house. In Laos, we have only one, monarch, a monocratic system. Otherwise, we have a national assembly which represents the cities who are eligible for one, from 18 to 65. Now, back to my career. I liked my job as a tax collector because I can use my power. (Laughs) Still, I had an ambition to be somebody in the future, not just a tax collector sitting around, ordering people around, and crushing people. I used a sort of bureaucratic discipline or rules or power, so I quit from the administration of finance. I went to the administration of the interior. The administration of interior in Laos is nothing compared to the administration of interior in the states. Here it is about the land, the parks, the wildlife reserve

_______.

The administration of interior is equivalent to the administration of internal affairs, like in England they use the home affairs department. Based upon my degree from the states.... In Laos they are pro-French. Because I have been educated in the states, my boss did not really appreciate my background as an american educated man. I should have been a governor in any province at all because at that time there were sixteen provinces. The first appointment of the administration of interior, I was not assigned to the office of the administrator. I was appointed because, here there is a democratic way, people did not get elected in any public office at all. Whether you
are a chair, a city councilman, the mayor, the governor, or someone else present at a higher level. In Laos, we are appointed because we have the King of _________. A moral person.... Well, you know the monarch is someone who represents the country and that is all. The people who are working straight with us is the government, the Prime Minister and the internal departments. The head of each department is the minister, not the secretary. Please do not confuse it with the minister in here. The minister in here deals with the chosen instinct. From 1967 to 1975, I was appointed repeatedly and successively as a vice-governor. The vice-governor title seems to be a really big shot to you, but in our language it is only the deputy administrator who is in charge of a province. A province is not really comparable to Canada. Canada is a really big state. The provinces we base upon the population of the country. In a small portion of the country we just call it a province, but they have demographic _________. I was eventually appointed as the deputy governor in _________, the province. Let me compare _________ and Chicago. Chicago is located within Cook County. So, Chicago is the main city which engulfs most of the whole area of Cook County, except a few cities around, like Hanover Park, or Elgin, or Rockford, or different counties. So, _________ is at the same time the capital city of the country and also the seat of the government. In Illinois, the biggest city is Chicago, but Springfield is the capital of the state. Vientiane is a big city, the largest I would say. I served there for almost two years and then I moved up to Luang-Prabang, my hometown, because the deputy of the office passed away and they needed somebody who is originally from the place. So, the Governor himself asked the minister to
appoint me, and it was automatic. I liked going to my hometown to serve my folks. I used to be a country kid, so they know. I served there... My job in Luang-Prabang was tougher than in Vientiane because there were not any departments there, so people dealt directly with the department. We only are mail boxes, that's all. People will or will not drop their requests or editing by mail, so they go straight to the departments. Things would be much easier. Each small case, like IRS or INS, or anything at all like conflict with justice, we had to deal with that. We handle some 42 officers which were in charge of each department matters--like justice, public works, world affairs, social security, or police. All in all, we had 42 officers in there. So we had the yearly meeting in November and we had three days to discuss on the general matters. I served in the Luang-Prabang office for one year and a few months because at that time the communists attacked the city and we were powerless. The job belonged to the military so they just blame each other. Also, there is a little court in there, the royal family, and they have to deal with that really strictly. You know England, and you know in the Netherlands too, they are not a kingdom, but a queendom. But in Laos, we used to have a king. So I was the protocol officer at the same time. The ambassadors from the other countries who would come to visit the king to present their letters of credentials to the king. So I had to be an interpreter in there. It's not a little job in my office, this was something beyond that. I had to be the master of ceremony too, because the customs...I was young at the time--I was only thirty-three, thirty-four.

LW: Sounds like you had a lot of important posts for being the age that you were.
KP: Not very important, ________. After that, I come down to Vientiane to be a veteran administration. This again, I had a very hard time with the military because they are not active military, they are retired military. Those people do what they want. As a civilian like me, I don't know how to deal with that--so I quit. I went to Australia for a Colombo program, a ________ plan for six months. I came back from Australia, and I had another appointment to go to the upper Mekong province, which is actually a northernest province. They had war, so I encouraged the people to explore the sapphire minds. It's exactly like in Belarat, where they screen the gold in there--Belarat in Victoria. But instead of gold, they've got sapphire. They export to Thailand where they get a very good price. After that, in 1973, when my plan was booming, I would say, because I was a strong anti-communist man, not in weapons, but in ideology. I formed a militia to fight, and who is the secret or underground agents, things like that. The government has signed the agreement between Royal Government and Pathet Lao between the two parties now--the communist party and the royal army. So I was then the persona non grata by the communists and they moved me down for one year--jobless. I got my job, got my pay, but I haven't got any position as important as I used to have. So I've been wandering around for one year. Finally, they appointed me as the first deputy again in Vientiane province because the governor is sick, he has a heart problem and has a long list of disease. So it was like me who was acting as a governor. In 1975 everything is falling down after Cambodia, after Vietnam, and finally Laos, Laos need five months to collapse. I was sent to the concentration camps for seventeen years, four months, and sixteen days--
still I didn’t mind that.

LW: Tell me about what that was like--to live in the concentration camp.

KP: It’s a long story. Can you define "hell?" Exactly.

LW: What kinds of things did you have to endure?

KP: They make people die. For no purpose at all, they tell us to cut the woods, carry down from the mountains on our shoulders, barefooted in very cold weather, not enough food. They cut down to 15 kilos per person, and that included the guards and everybody. That’s why we were looking for the fruits, bamboo shoots and insects. Everybody ate the rats and snakes. Everything was eatable. There was no choice; it was a matter of survival. So I went through that for seventeen years, four months and sixteen days. In 1983, I had heard from Amnesty International.

LW: Did things improve after they...you had some contact with amnesty international, did things improve?

KP: I don’t know who gave my name, but it might be my brother’s name that they aimed to. But my brother was arrested and put in jail in the Sop-Hao cell.

LW: Solitary?

KP: Yes, underground. It is not like in San Quentin, not like any jail here. In the jail here, you can ask for a complete meal, three meals a day; if you need a doctor, the doctor comes to see you; you have a nice haircut; warm clothes. You have your rights to have your lawyer defend you in the court legally and properly.

LW: Not at all like that...

KP: No, you’re done. If you’re in there, you’re done. No rights, no liberty, nothing.
We call ourselves the "moving skeletons." Everybody is skinny because we are hungry.

LW: Was torture a regular practice?

KP: It's not torture directly. In jail, yes, they do. But in the concentration camp they have limits, it's like the reserve, they put another fence around and say this is the point where you are living and you cannot go around beyond one kilometer. You had to be in there. They could grab anyone and kill you in front of everybody. It didn't happen in our camp. My camp was number 05—it was just the worst. Number 2 was the uncommunicado jail where they kept the king, the royal family members. Number 3 was the officers of the army, not the majors but the captains and lieutenants. Number 4 is the public servants and directors, all the people who obey them. Number 5, those were the big shots—used to be big shots. Even I don't have anything against them, so they suspected me as an important person. They put the army generals in there, police generals, governors, ministers, congressmen. It's about 1,000 people in there.

LW: In a small space, right?

KP: Yes, one hut, one house. They would call it a hut because it is covered with a grass roof. The walls were bamboo, so the wind just went through. In each house they have thirty people. The houses are all military formation. They have the section, the team. The team depends on the head of the section. The section depends on the chief of the camp. The camp is semi-military, organized. The work is meaningless. I say meaningless because they don't have any purpose. It's like the prisoner, they build
their own jail. They say we are nearly liberated. "Comrades, you should help yourself." Like a good Christian would say, help yourself and God will help you. So they would say, "help yourself and the party will help you." Who is the party anyway?

LW: So how did you escape?

KP: Let me add a few words about the hard works there. They told us to build a house--they don't have any nails, they don't have any materials, they don't have any wood. We have everything in the mountains--the machete, the cutting knives. We went there and built a house after 15 months or maybe one year and then they say, "Okay, we have to move to someplace else because the enemy will know where we are." So we move and have to reconstruct again. On and on. And that for seventeen years! So I'm glad that I survived. How did I escape? I escaped--it's not the proper word for escape. Escape in a way that I didn't go through the bush, I didn't go through the jungle; I paid myself out. The guy who was craving for money and answered the communists is collapsing--big shot so they didn't have to collapse. So they allow the communist party depends entirely on the communists. They told the people, "We are still communists, but we changed our initiative." I don't know why they called that "new perspective." Either you call it new or old, you're still communists. I escaped because I paid my relatives in town and they paid one officer who is a high school drop out and joined the communists. He was named as a lieutenant in the army. He is the guardian or warden of the jail.

LW: How were you able to pay him. Did you still have money hidden away?
KP: My relative took care of that. We have a certain secret message. My family had fled to France all alone.

LW: I see, your family was in France.

KP: Nobody at home. I know some people at my house, so I guaranteed that I owe my house, provided they will let me go to town to cure myself because the...there was a hospital given by the North Vietnamese government, but the level of education; they cannot take good care of the hospital. So they sent me down to Vientiane for the check-up for one month. I said, "Yes, I promise I'll come back." Because I was not through with my education first because I was not very bright with the communist philosophy. When I came to Vientiane, I saw the Mekong River. This was my first and last chance. I would not cross this, it would be the verdict of my death. So I just wandered around in the city for two months. I was looking for the embassies. The first embassy I went into the U.S. Embassy, Charley Salmon. He asked me about the MIA and the POW. I said, "How do you expect me to know that because I was myself kept in the camp for years?" I couldn't get out beyond the five meters. So we talked about bad weather, good weather, everything. Maybe he didn't want to jeopardize the relations between the communists, the Lao government and the U.S. I was not accepted as a refugee because they said the relationship between the two countries is getting better, so we don't want to mess up our minds with this. They said, "It's early." I know that. That's fine. I went to Australia. Those Aussies were the same. "Well you see, sir, I know what you have in mind, but the bridges across the Mekong are financed by Australia and we don't want to jeopardize."
LW: So nobody would help you?

KP: So finally I had a friend in there, so, "Hey pal, will you take me around town a little bit for today?" He said, "Yeah, gladly." So he takes me around the town past the Japanese and the communist Chinese embassy, and I saw the German embassy. But I just wondered at the time, if there is still two or one embassy. So my friend took me to the eastern embassy, eastern German embassy. Fortunately, the German was unifying, so there was only one. It was at the Federal German embassy. So I went into there and rang the bell. Someone said, "What do you want?" "I come for the visa." "Push the gate." So I pushed the gate and didn't see anybody in there. I saw one woman who was cleaning the lawn. "You know where they are working in the office--over there." So I pushed the button. "Is it you that comes for the visa?" I said, "Yes." "So, you want to go to Germany?" "Yes," I said. "Do you know German? Do you speak German?" "No." "Then how do you go there?" "Because I want to go to Germany." "Have any paper?" "No." "Well, we need you to fill out these forms." "Okay, gladly." They give me the forms and I pretend to read the papers. Because of the friends and myself, it was helped several years through the amnesty in Germany. My sponsor in Germany was Krista Bremer. She is about 65-70. So I have my amnesty card with only my name and also the year of membership, in there. The guy delivered it, "Your ID?" "Well, I suppose so." No other things, just my name. "How do I trust you have the name on the paper?" "I don't know, maybe the ambassador has it." So he rushes to the second floor. Claus Soenson rushed down, "Are you Patrick?" because my legal name is Patrick. "Yes, I am."
He rushed me in the office, closed the door and put a sign, "don't disturb." We were discussing for hours until we passed lunchtime. Lunch is ready. "Hey Patrick, my wife prepared something for you." So we went on talking until 4:00 in the afternoon. Then he went to the Japanese embassy to see the former ambassador off—to say goodbye.

LW: So that's how you got out of the country—through the German embassy?

KP: Yes. I've been in town for a couple weeks, and finally...somebody put a gun in my house. This is the source of the trouble. I know that people want to catch me and maybe force me to sign a paper to give the property to somebody else. I know, because lots of cases happen that way. Another time they have a meeting of the monastery in my community. The time is about 9:00-9:30 p.m. They discovered the gun in my house at 5:00. I went to see the head of the village. He blamed me on so many things. He told me, "Tomorrow we go to see the mayor." "I'll be ready at 8:00 a.m.," I said, "I'll follow you." At 7:00 p.m. sharp, I went through the monastery which was empty, nobody was there. Some folks said, "Hey Khamphan, where are you going?" "I'm going to the meeting." "Are you silly, the meeting will be at 9:00-9:30 p.m.. Why should you be so early?" "I don't know, I've got to see people." I'm new here, so I wanted to know people. So I go through the monastery compound, I went out the other side, I stopped the taxi, I drop in there so I reach the Ambassador residence. Nobody was looking for me for five days. After the fifth day, I crossed the Mekong River.

LW: How did you get across?
KP: Greenbacks.

LW: You paid your way across.

KP: Yes, Claus gave me 300 marks. He took a very big risk to take me. I went to Nougkhai. I stayed there for one day. I was scared to show off, because I was scared of a policeman asking me because of the Laotian people wore a different style. That's the way we tell we're different too. They might know me, so I just keep myself in for one day and one night. The next day as predicted, as planned, the first of April—I always told Claus of April Fool (laughter)—he's in a car by a German driver. He's got the papers and everything. This car has to be fixed in Thailand, because we don't have any spare parts in Laos. So I went there. I appointed myself as a helper of the driver. I wore the clothes, like the blue collar. We went straight into Bangkok. The Ambassador went to the party and came back at 10:00 p.m. So I had a hard time with the chauffeur and the guards in the compound because their security is very strict. Nevertheless, I was a free man. I slept in the garage where they had a small room, one mattress. I took a shower, I didn't bother to go on because I'm full, I'm too happy. So I slept nicely. The next morning, knock, knock, knock on the door at 8:00 a.m. One voice said, "The Ambassador wants to see you, sir." So he knew. Mr. Von Pfahen knows that. So I went to see him. We had a cup of coffee together, and he asked me for diplomacy. "My wife and I are delighted to invite you over to our house for lunch." "Gladly, your excellency," I said. Claus didn't accept the title "excellency," Von Pratten. Baron, he's still excellency or Madame the Baron or Baroness. Not only lunch, but he asked me to stay until my
papers were done. For three weeks! Could you imagine that? Somebody who even worse than you cannot accept their own penance for one week. They took me in for three weeks. I go to the hospital, and go to interview at the JVA, Joint Voluntary Agency. I don't have any papers with me. So the man in charge, by the name of Jack Price, asked me, "You don't have any papers?" "No, I don't." "How could I interview you then?" "I have my records in my school." "Oh yeah, where?" "In Georgetown University--School of Business Administration." Two days later, they faxed back. Everything in there, complete.

LW: And that got you out?

[voices in background make it very hard to transcribe]

KP: Yeah. So, the 22nd of April I went to the airport so I took off, arriving in Frankfurt the next day at 8:00 a.m., and two hours later I was in Bremen. At 1:00 p.m. in the afternoon, Mr. Yammen went to the social services, and I stayed there for seven months. Meanwhile, during the seven months I went around to lecture. I joined the PEN, a private, non-profit association for writers. I'm still a member of that. Finally I came here.

LW: Let's fast forward to your coming to Holland. How long have you been in the Holland area?

KP: I've been here three times, but each time was only a couple days. Last year, in 1996, and this year I came for the first time. I have my daughter here, who is married to an American citizen. Her husband is also an American citizen of Laos ancestry, of course.
What were your first impressions of Holland when you came to live here--which was last year?

My first impression was--is that Holland? I would call it "holy land." Holy land because it is a sacred place for people to worship. Quiet town, nice people, really profound ancestry or heritage, and in a word, I like it. There's no guns, there's no drugs. It reminds me of Amsterdam because you have a windmill. This is the external impression. But the inside impression of the people, well, they're not purely of Dutch ancestry, are they? In a sense, I like the place because the fall is nice, winter is nice. The four seasons are nice. Compared to California, I like it, but California...

I like to be in contact with other organizations besides our Buddhist religious organization to learn from other people, and also if they are interested to tell background about the Buddhist philosophy. It doesn't matter to be converted or something like that, but it's a matter of finding the peace within yourself. Do not rely upon God to save you, but you save yourself first. You've got to know yourself, you've got to help yourself.

Has the temple had a lot of contact with the community?

Not yet. I think I'm the first pioneer. I wish it could. Probably with your help, though, we could make more progress. I like to have the children who are the Asian-Americans, who are like the small boy here. He shouldn't come higher than that, he should stay in there. We have different rules. That does not mean that that should
apply to other people. Visitors who come are more liberal, so we can sit downstairs and talk. It's like the chat and so on. I get some talking and they may ask, "What is Buddhism? What do you have like the Ten Commandments?" Things like that.

LW: Have quite a number of people that are of Laotian background come to the temple? Most of them who came to Holland were sponsored by Christian organizations...

KP: This is the point. The people they set up a place for worship, that's what we call it. We do not call it temple yet--by the law that I draft. And we have the police department from the state of Michigan. I draft the by law in English and I translate it into Lao, so they can't dispute it. This place is a place of worship for the Buddhist believers, it is also the place of the cultural promotion. The religious activities. There's no exception for any other religious believers. Either you are Christian, Jewish, Muslim, or buddhist-- you just come. Everyone is welcome in here. We don't have any restriction on that. We're not trying to convert anybody. So you can come and see for yourself. You have any questions, or people happen to have any question, especially the young people who are between the two sides, you are not a bird because you have ears, and you are not a mouse because you have wings. The generation I speak especially for are my kids. They don't know, "Why should I go to the temple? What for?" "You shouldn't talk back to your father." "Why?" "Because it is wrong." So we have morals to make these people understand why, what point they are at. As I say, this is a little religious matter. Your parents, they have five precepts. First, they are big creator. You owe them so much, right? You owe them your life, the habitat--you are inside nine months, no rent--free food,
everything's free. Also the owner of the belly, the house where you are living since you are a fetus, takes good care of you because she didn't want to kill you. She might, why not? When you are born, you are living in her lap--how you eat, to be fat, change your diaper. This is the second step. After that, you still stay in there, even you go to school and you speak English with no accent. That doesn't matter at all. You are still here, you don't pay your rent, you don't pay for food. The room is free. Clothes, and even ask for money for party, and you join the gang, and you join the Halloween Club and you come back to your parents. Your parents look after you, and you have to look after them back again. That's not right, I say. "Well, I don't know, because we grow up here." "You watch that." Life in the U.S. has so many things which are so good, my time, my time, my job, that's why I came to study in here. One hundred generations after that, so you see all the easy things. Easy need, behavior, everything. So we have to purify these people. Purify them in what way? Purify to bring them to common sense, to good reasoning, and to bring them to think to be their own selves. Myself, too, as a Buddhist monk, I like to go to church sometimes. Not to this church, I want to go there. It's not a matter to be converted or not, to be criticized or anything, I don't know. In Tennessee that worked out perfectly because the Asian gangs, the Cambodian they have enemies, the Lao, they joined together making trouble everywhere. They rush, they don't respect through the street at night, they shoot around, break in the windows, everything. People complain. Our monastery is located close to the church. They invite us over. "How could you remedy this?" I said, "That's not difficult." I would tell them either you
go to your church, or you go to our temple. They have their choice.

LW: When did you come to Holland? How long ago was it?

KP: Last Saturday, the 8th.

LW: So you've only been here a week. You said that you've been here twice before?

KP: Yes, twice before.

LW: How long were those stays?

KP: About a couple days.

LW: Well, Holland's a unique place. I hope you enjoy being here...

KP: Yes, I think this is my favorite place. Without any excessive propaganda. Frankly, in my heart, I appreciate Holland very much.

LW: Are you assigned here for a period of time--can you stay here as long as you like?

KP: Yes, as long as I could.

LW: That's your decision, not part of the greater congregation?

KP: I have to report to the congregation, the central office to say that I want to stay here. Today I'm going to Detroit because of the big Master come for the ordination of the Buddhist statues. We have ordination of the monks, we have ordination of this statue, and we haven't seen one in here. So you'll be invited maybe some time this spring.

LW: I would enjoy doing that.

KP: I would like to ask you if you have time to have lunch with us.

LW: I would be honored.

KP: So, I think this official interview is over now. We might discuss it... Okay, I'll ask my people to bring you some refreshment.
KP: We need to make the distinction between the words supporters and believers or practitioners. Believers can either practice or not, but you believe in Buddhism. We do not request the membership to pay an amount of money per year. You just come in... you are already an honorary member of this temple. We welcome you to be here. On behalf of the community, I thank you so much for coming. We welcome you anytime at all. You like to bring your students, family members, friends, anybody at all, anytime.

LW: Well, thank you.

KP: The supporters, those who are willing to donate, not only cash or money, but anything at all, even advice, counsels, anything interesting in building up this community to be an outstanding community like the whole U.S., or like the whole state of Michigan. The supporters are welcome, regardless of sex, age, origin, race, creed, or background. They are welcome because it is good. We want to make the difference between good and bad, and know how to distinguish between God and evil. This philosophy is very pacific, peaceful, and this philosophy requires so much thinking, in matter of reasoning, to counter-balance your mind. I know very little about Christianism, I understand a little bit of the sins committed by man are forgiven because God purifies all the sins of man. But in Buddhism, it is a different way. We have the Creator, but we do not call that God. We call it just the Creator. We have the universe, world, earth, solar system, and nature. Buddha is a man; he was a rich man; he was a crown prince of the kingdom of India. He gave away all his wealth,
his property, and what he called desire. Desire has two meanings. Either you want
to do too much good, or too much bad—that's called desire. Suppose you want to
build a big church. You put my name on that—that's desire. The building goes
slowly, "I don't like this temple, I want to set fire on that." That is desire too. That
is bad desire. So desire has two meanings. Desire is something over the boundary or
the limits of what a man should do. Like a donation is good, because we are
supported by the people. We are not paid, we do not own a house, we do not cook
food for ourselves, we do not have anything at all. We came here because we leave
away everything—wife, family, good clothes, good dinner, good meals, parties and
everything which belong to the worthy.

LW: What are the special rules that apply to you as a monk as a leader? You don't cook
food...Do you drive?

KP: According to the Buddhist teaching, we cannot be transported by man, by animals.
Because you overuse the strength and energy of the animals and the man if you are
carried by those. But actually, that's why you have your license. As long as you
have money for your gas, as long as you are allowed to drive, you may. If I want to
be a little specific about the Buddhist teaching, I might say that. But, Buddha didn't
predict that because at that time there was no car (laughing). That seems a little
ridiculous.

LW: Only the last hundred years.

KP: To convince people to be reasonable. Like, one part, Monks shouldn't be touched by
women. Oh, sounds great. Monks shouldn't travel with women, sounds great, but
how? When I am sick I go to the hospital and all the nurses in there are females. So, we should compromise. If we had done that against our will, for our survival, we have to bow before the other monks. We have to criticize ourselves, oh, I have done that. It is like a confession. It is like this that I have done that. So, I am forgiven. But, still the sin and the mistake and they are not the same. (Pause. KP is speaking to a women in Laotian). Mistake and the sins are not the same. Mistake is like you jump into the muddy pond, you can't see anything, but mud, so you hurt yourself with a piece of glass. So, you wash away the mud and you become clean again, but the cut that was caused by the bit of glass is a sin. You have to cure it, you have to suffer, you have to undergo that. I cut myself, so can't you take my cut, no it is yours. See what I mean.

LW: Yes, I see what you mean.

KP: Now, turn over there. No, I mean your feet.

LW: Oh, I am sorry, my feet are falling asleep.

KP: That is okay, you can turn around. I am sorry to say that. Now, aborting a topic about meditation. Meditation is to calm down, to calm ones self down. Suppose you have somebody who cuts in front of you when you are driving. They didn't put any sign of this, they just cut through. So you have to be alert. You are alert, you are ready to stop or to change lanes. Meditation is not just sitting around, crossed-legged, or position, or motionless, no. Meditation is inside. You have to concentrate. You have to be reasonable, you have to be your own all the time. So, people confuse meditation as a posture. They sit around at it for hours without moving. That is
suffering. So, you mistreat yourself physically to obtain a moral self-destruction, or a moral preservation. My point is quite different. (Noise). They are making the monk feast.

LW: That's fine.

KP: And you will try to eat with them. I am sure the Laotian foods are not very pleasant to you. But you will try.

LW: I am willing to try anything.

KP: Yes. Spicy, greasy (laughing).

(End of interview)