

I AM "RED HAT"



My family lineage can be traced back to China as far as four generations. Za Chong Xiong, my great-great-great-grandfather, originally hailed from China but fled to Laos during the war in his homeland. He settled in Laos with his two sons, Chong Mai Xiong and Xa Hua Xiong. Chong Mai Xiong had my grandfather, Pa Ying Xiong, who, in turn, had my father, Saw Chong Xiong.

Saw Chong Xiong married my mother, Blia Her, and together they had ten children. Among them were nine sons (Vang, Nhia Lue, Vang Seng, Vang Sou, Youa Pao, Doua, myself, Kia Chue, Ger, and Choua) and one daughter, Pa. Sadly, my oldest brother, Vang, passed away at the tender age of two due to malnutrition. Tragedy struck again when my mother passed away during childbirth, bringing my youngest sister, Pa, into the world.

As for myself, Kia Chue Xiong, I was born on April 10th, 1943, in a small village called Ban Thua, located in the District of Tassang Phou Hua, under the County of Muang Koon, in the Province of Xieng Khuang, Laos. By the age of eight, an unknown disease afflicted my father, rendering him unable to care for the family. Our circumstances became dire as we struggled with poverty, lacking both financial resources and proper clothing. At this challenging time, my oldest brother, Nhia Lue, and his wife selflessly took on the role of caregivers and providers for the entire family. Despite the hardships, they nourished and clothed us, displaying incredible compassion and dedication. I am forever grateful to them.

The burden of providing and caring for all of us was exceedingly heavy for Nhia Lue and his wife. In response, he made a courageous decision to relocate us into the jungle, where we embarked on a journey of learning farming and survival skills. Despite the challenges, we toiled tirelessly and managed to establish our farm. Before long, we witnessed the fruits of our labor as we became self-sufficient, sustaining and supporting the family through the cultivation of diverse vegetables and the raising of animals. During those days, I was young and unable to contribute much to the efforts of my older brothers, but the memories



of their struggles to ensure our family's well-being are etched deeply in my mind. My eyes swell with tears thinking about those younger days.

After a few years, Nhia Lue came to the realization that education was the key to breaking free from poverty for his younger brothers.

However, the family's financial constraints made it challenging to send all of them to school simultaneously. As a solution, Nhia Lue made the difficult decision to send them to school one at a time, starting from the eldest to the youngest brother. The first to embark on this educational journey was my brother, Vang Seng. However, after attending school for about a year, Vang Seng dropped out, leaving Nhia Lue deeply disappointed.

Undeterred by setbacks, Nhia Lue remained determined to provide opportunities for his brothers to receive an education. He then allowed the fourth brother, Vang Sou, to attend school, but unfortunately, he too faced challenges and eventually dropped out. Nhia Lue's unwavering dedication led him to give it another try with my sixth brother, Doua. Nhia Lue arranged for Doua to live with friends and cousins, hoping for a better outcome. However, Doua's strong attachment to his elder brother became apparent as he repeatedly sneaked behind Nhia Lue's back to follow him home. This pattern continued several times until Nhia Lue grew weary, ultimately deciding to let Doua remain at home permanently. Despite the trials, Nhia Lue's love and determination for his brothers' education remained steadfast.

In 1955, Nhia Lue made the crucial decision to send me to school. At that time, I was a skinny and short twelve-year-old, often adorned in a traditional Green Hmong shirt. My educational journey began at San Khoun Elementary School, located in the quaint village of Ban Xieng Khouang. However, attending school required me to move to another small village predominantly inhabited by the Kamu people.

The distance between school and home made it impractical for me to live at home while attending school, as it entailed a half-day's walk to and from the school. As a result, I had no choice but to seek shelter elsewhere. Fortunately, I found refuge with some Kamu families and friends who kindly allowed me to stay with them. While staying there, I gratefully ate what they had to offer and slept wherever they accommodated me.

Despite the generosity of my hosts, the conditions were far from comfortable. Many nights, I found myself in tears, either due to hunger or fear. I had no bed, pillow, or blanket to provide warmth during cold nights. On those chilly nights, I would curl up my legs and wrap my arms around myself to ward off the cold. The separation from my family left me feeling lonely, but my unwavering commitment to my purpose—pursuing an education—kept me driven and focused. Though the journey was arduous and filled with challenges, the pursuit of knowledge remained my guiding light, spurring me forward through the trials of my young life.

In the village, though surrounded by Kamu people, the schoolteacher was Hmong, and his name was Vang Chia. The fact that I had someone from my own community to communicate with brought me comfort and encouragement. While I continued my education in the village, my family back home efficiently managed the farm, rearing animals (pigs, cows, chickens, ducks, and goats) and cultivating various vegetables. Sometimes, I would bring livestock and produce back to the village to sell or exchange for school tuition and living expenses. Amidst the poverty and challenges, I held on to my determination to pursue education and complete my studies. The hardships and sacrifices were worth the pursuit of knowledge and a better future for myself and my family.

Following a year in Ban Xieng Khouang, a new teacher arrived in the village. However, the presence of this Laotian teacher made me feel uneasy, as the Hmong people were generally disliked by many Laotians during that period. The reluctance to educate Hmong children from nearby areas prompted me to make a difficult decision—to move to a village further away from my home and family. Settling in Ban Nan Lake within the Province of Xieng Khouang, I found shelter with a family from the Thao clan.

Each morning, I arose early, preparing myself for the hour-long walk to school. Unlike many of my peers, I lacked financial support and the luxury of indulging in fun activities during my school days. Attending school barefoot, without a uniform, I continued to wear my traditional Green Hmong clothing. My school supplies were scarce, so I had to be extremely frugal with them. I used my pencil and notebook sparingly, ensuring they would last throughout the entire school year. Every line on my notebook, both front and back, was utilized, and I only sharpened my pencil when absolutely necessary. The fear of wasting materials was ever-present since I could not afford to buy more supplies.

Ban Nan Lake village experienced bitter cold during November, December, and January, owing to its high elevation. While there was no snow, the mornings were frosty and chilly. Despite being alone and justifiably almost orphaned, living far away from my brothers, my determination to complete my education burned fiercely in my heart. I resided there for approximately a year until I achieved a significant milestone—I passed an exam that opened the door to upper-level classes.

Passing the exam brought excitement, but it also presented new challenges and financial burdens. To pursue higher education, I needed to move to a big city, and so I set my sights on Xieng Khouang, one of the largest cities in Laos. As I arrived, I was amazed by the plethora of interesting new things—cars, roads, bicycles, and electricity—which were all novel to me, as they were not

commonly seen where I came from. The presence of numerous doctors in the city brought happiness, as in my hometown, access to medical professionals was scarce.

Xieng Khouang was a well-established city, a result of the French invasion of Laos between 1920 and 1954, during which they erected buildings and introduced many Western elements. Over the years, I studied the Laotian language extensively, becoming proficient in conversations and writing. My interactions with the city's French vocabulary contributed to my linguistic growth, though I didn't learn English due to the scarcity of English speakers in Laos at that time.

Enduring various obstacles, I persisted in making my dream a reality. At age fifteen, I successfully completed and graduated from the sixth grade (P-6 level) at Muang Koon Primary School, an accomplishment equivalent to obtaining a high school diploma.

In 1960, the looming Vietnam War cast its shadow over the city, marking one of the most significant events in the Province of Xieng Khouang. The region faced an imminent threat from a group of Vietnamese marauders known as Kong Lay, who wreaked havoc on villages, leaving destruction and death in their wake. To ensure our safety, many of us, including myself, had no choice but to flee our homes in Xieng Khouang and seek refuge in the nearby forest.

Upon reuniting with my brothers at the farm, I recounted the harrowing events I had witnessed in the big city. Considering the dangerous circumstances, we collectively made the decision to abandon our farm and embark on a journey along the course of the Nang Nhia River, heading south. We sought safety in the southern direction, as the Kong Lay possessed formidable war equipment, including cars and trucks, enabling them to scour the roads in search of travelers like us to attack and kill.

Surviving on meager resources, we constructed modest tents along the riverbank, where we lived for several months. The constant threat of danger and the uncertainty of the future weighed heavily on us, but we remained resolute in our determination to endure and safeguard our lives. After spending numerous months on the riverbank and jungle, my brothers and I made the decision to seek shelter in a small village named Pha Pheung. However, our stay there was brief as the country was engulfed in war.

During this tumultuous period, General Vang Pao arrived in Pha Pheung with a mission to recruit young and educated men to join a secret army for the Vietnam War and learn about the map of Laos. I felt compelled to join this endeavor and

study the map, as the relationships between the United States, Thailand, and Laos were strong and stable at that time. Our collective efforts were aimed at combating the communist party of Vietnam. Throughout my year of service in this capacity, I demonstrated dedication and commitment, and as a result, I received a promotion to the rank of Sergeant. The experience was both challenging and rewarding, and it solidified my resolve to contribute to the cause and protect our nation during the trying times of war.



Five hundred men and I were flown to Thailand with a vital mission—to become proficient map readers and skilled soldiers, supporting the United States' endeavors in the Vietnam War. During our time in Thailand, I dedicated myself to learning the intricacies of the army's regulations, mastering the use of various war tools, and understanding the proper handling of military supplies and weapons. The expertise I gained was not only valuable for my own development but also for training the new batch of five hundred men, as I could effectively communicate in both Laotian and Thai.

The Thai instructor recognized my capabilities and sought my assistance in training and translating for the new recruits. My commitment to excellence led to an extension of my stay in Thailand for an additional six months to fulfill this crucial role. With no room for mistakes, I imparted the same essential skills and knowledge that I had acquired, ensuring that the new soldiers were well-prepared for their duties.

The transportation of weapons between cities carried significant risks, and the fear of mishandling leading to disastrous consequences always loomed in my mind. I approached this responsibility with utmost caution and vigilance, understanding the critical nature of our mission.

Amidst the intensity of the training, I seized the opportunity to learn English. Armed with a dictionary and driven by my talkative and inquisitive nature, I engaged in conversation with American soldiers, using their guidance to improve my pronunciation and enhance my language skills. My willingness to learn and adapt earned me the confidence to communicate effectively in English.

Upon my return from Thailand, my dedication did not go unnoticed. In recognition of my hard work and growth, I was honored with a promotion to the rank of Lieutenant. My journey from a remote village in Laos to becoming a skilled

soldier and a self-taught linguist was a testament to my unwavering determination and passion for learning and self-improvement.

At the age of twenty-two, I returned to Laos and was stationed at Zone 6-B for my duties. At that time, I was in my prime, youthful, and handsome, which caught the attention of many Hmong ladies. My stable job in the army and ability to support myself were appealing qualities that attracted them. My linguistic skills in Thai, Laotian, and some English further added to my charm.

In 1963, my assignments took me to Mt. Poo Kay, where I spent nine months. The challenges and experiences during this period further shaped my journey and deepened my commitment to my responsibilities.

One fateful night, the Vietcong launched a heavy bombing on Xieng Khouang, and Mt. Poo Kay was not spared from the attack. In the chaos of combat, I suffered a severe injury from an eighty-one-millimeter caliber mortar (M1). My legs bore the brunt of the blast, rendering me immobile and causing me excruciating pain. The courageous efforts of fellow soldiers carried me to safety, escaping the flames of the camp and seeking refuge in the jungle.

With determination and quick thinking, my friend managed to call for a helicopter, which airlifted me to Samtong Hospital for immediate treatment. I spent thirty-three days under the care of skilled doctors, who did their best to address my injuries and remove bomb fragments. Although I bore the scars of that traumatic event, my recovery was not complete when I was discharged to make space for other wounded soldiers.



In the healing embrace of Long Tieng (Looj Ceeb) city, where my brothers resided, my journey towards recovery commenced. The severity of my injuries meant I could no longer partake in field assignments in the jungle. However, between 1963 and 1967, General Vang Pao recognized my capabilities and

assigned me to important roles that were still meaningful to the cause. I became responsible for managing transportation and the warehouse at the Long Tieng airbase, where I handled crucial tasks like ordering military supplies, medical provisions, and food for Region 2, while also overseeing airport control. This significant responsibility allowed me to work closely with General Vang Pao himself, a man people greatly admired and respected.

In 1967, my dedication and hard work paid off, and I received a well-deserved promotion to Captain. During this time, I continued to reside in Long Tieng, where I not only served the military but also built a family of my own. I married a woman named Ka Moua, and in accordance with our customs, I paid a dowry of ten silver bars for her hand in marriage. Together, we welcomed the joy of parenthood with the arrival of our daughter, Ah, and our son, Kou. It was common for men at the time to marry multiple wives to show status. I found myself marrying once again. My second wife was Mai Houa Lor, although we did not have any children together. Between 1968 and 1969, duty called, and I was assigned to serve at an airport in Nan Khang. This time, I was given the important role of being the head air controller, with authority over all aspects, including the loading and receiving of essential supplies. It was a position of great responsibility, but one that I embraced wholeheartedly to contribute to the greater cause.

While on duty, there was a surprise attack on the Nan Khang base that was very traumatic and changed the course of my life. During that fateful day, my two wives and children were visiting me, and in the chaos of the attack, soldiers had to flee into the jungle. I had to leave my family behind, hoping they would be safe and released once the situation settled. Little did we know, the Vietcong had been hiding in the woods, and instead of leaving women and children alone, families were captured. The thought of their capture left me heartbroken and filled with uncertainty about their well-being. I didn't know where my family was taken nor if they were still alive. I desperately wanted to search for them, but I was overwhelmed and did not know where to begin my search.

My brothers and parents-in-law, who also felt the anguish of the situation, advised me to try to forget about my wives and children, as we had no information about their whereabouts. It was an incredibly difficult decision, but I listened to their counsel and attempted to continue with my life, even though the pain and longing were unbearable. To cope with my emotions and stay focused, I kept myself busy by taking on multiple jobs, including my work at the airport. Working there not only provided some stability but also gave me a sense of purpose, knowing that I was contributing to the Hmong community in Laos. In my quest to rebuild my life, I embraced various job opportunities that brought in much-needed income. My determination to survive and move forward was fueled by the hope that someday, somehow, I might find a way to reunite with my beloved wives and children, or at least find solace in knowing their fate.

Four years after the devastating event at Nan Khang base, I found myself embarking on a new and daring mission. Along with eleven other men, I was assigned to south Vietnam, specifically Saigon, to be trained as part of a secret



team. Our mission was to go undercover into North Vietnam, particularly the border region with Laos, to gather crucial information about the civilians' lives and communication in that area. We believed that this valuable intelligence could aid us in our fight against the ongoing war.

The training was intense and comprehensive, led by both Vietnamese and American instructors. We learned how to blend in with the local communities and understand their ways of life. We honed our language and communication skills to interact seamlessly with the Hmong and Vietnamese people in the region. Our hope was that by gathering intelligence from the people on the ground, we could make a significant impact in our efforts to combat the enemy.

However, despite our best efforts, the undercover assignment was short-lived. After only six months, our cover was compromised, and we found ourselves facing imminent danger. We had to act swiftly to ensure our safety, and escaping into the dense jungle was our best chance at evading capture. We trekked westward, navigating through the challenging terrain to make our way back to Laos, where we could regroup and strategize for future operations.

The experience was harrowing and put us on edge, but we were determined to continue our fight against the forces threatening our homeland. Our dedication to the cause and our commitment to protecting our communities fueled our spirits, despite the setbacks and dangers we encountered along the way.



Upon my return to Laos, I received a new assignment that proved to be of great importance in the ongoing conflict. I became part of the Forward Air Guard (FAG) unit, where my role was to coordinate alongside the troops on foot and communicate vital information to the fighter pilots, known as Ravens, regarding specific locations that required bombing. This critical communication allowed the air fighters to carry out precision strikes, providing crucial support to our forces on the ground.

In the field, I operated under the code name “Red Hat” when interacting with the air fighters. Our coordination and seamless communication were instrumental in ensuring the safety and effectiveness of the airstrikes. As a member of the air

guard unit, I dedicated three years to this duty, working tirelessly to assist our forces and protect our homeland during the challenging period of the Vietnam War.

Throughout my service in the military, I have experienced hardships, loss, and danger. Yet, my determination and commitment to my people and my homeland remained unwavering. The sacrifices and challenges were significant, but the unity and resilience of our forces helped us navigate through the difficult times.

In 1969, fate led me to meet Mee Lee, my third wife, in an unexpected way. She worked diligently at a noodle shop, helping her aunt prepare delicious noodles for customers. It was during one of my visits that I found a unique way to capture her heart. I surprised her with a truckload of watermelons and sodas, and our connection blossomed from there. In a matter of two weeks, we realized that we were meant to be together and decided to marry.

Our union brought us to live with my brother Nhia Lue and my other brothers. It was a time of unity and support within our family. Additionally, a significant transformation took place during this period as we embraced Christianity and accepted Christ as our Savior. The newfound faith brought profound meaning to our lives and strengthened our bond as a couple.

In 1970, my dedication and commitment to my military service were recognized, and I received a promotion to the rank of Major. It was an achievement that filled me with pride and a sense of responsibility. As we continued our journey together, two years later, we were overjoyed to welcome our firstborn daughter, Phonetala, into this world. Her birth in 1972 became a cherished milestone, marking the growth of our family and deepening our sense of love and devotion.

Five months later, another chance encounter led me to cross paths with Oneta Xayavong, a young lady with a unique background, being half Laotian and half Chinese. Although it was not common to get involved with individuals from different races, I found myself drawn to her in a way that I couldn't resist. Our meetings and getting to know each other sparked a strong connection, and I knew that she was meant to be in my life. With genuine affection, I welcomed her as my fourth wife.

In 1973, we celebrated the arrival of our first daughter, May Dee (Mindy), who brought immense joy and love into our expanding family. However, during this time, we also faced heartache as my third wife, Mee, and I had a son named Kal, who, tragically, lived only nine months due to malnutrition. The loss of our young son was a painful experience, and we mourned the precious life that

had been cut short. Despite the challenges, I remained committed to supporting my two wives and daughters. My dedication and hard work at the airport paid off, and I earned a promotion to the rank of Colonel. The airport became a place where I not only served my country but also ensured the well-being of my family.

The year 1973 brought significant changes as the United States began its retreat from the Vietnam War. For the next two and a half years, I collaborated with Colonel Chong Kua Vue in Nam Heo. However, as the situation evolved, my fellow high-ranking officers and I were compelled to retreat to Thailand, seeking safety and protection for our families and ourselves.



During these tumultuous times, the love and support of my wives and children became a source of strength, helping me navigate the challenges of war and upheaval. We faced uncertainties and hardships together, yet our family bond remained resilient, providing solace and hope during the darkest days.

As we embarked on a new chapter in our lives, we held onto the memories of our loved ones lost and embraced the future with determination, courage, and the knowledge that we were united as one family, bound by love and resilience.

In 1975, as the United States withdrew from the war, a sense of urgency and fear gripped my heart when I learned that both of my wives were expecting again, each with a second child. The uncertainty of the times weighed heavily on me, and I knew that I had to take immediate action to secure the safety of my family. In fear of prosecution, those who supported the US Army panicked and fled Laos by tens of thousands.

On May 13, 1975, I rushed back home to my wives and quickly packed some of our belongings. With a sense of urgency, I returned to the airport with my family, where I saw many other Hmong families anxiously waiting, attempting to board the airplane. Though some officials tried to reassure the crowd that more planes would come, having worked at the airport, I knew that this was the last flight out of Laos, bound for Thailand.

In that moment, I made a decisive decision and approached Choua Xiong, a

fellow soldier at the airport and my extended cousin's brother. I confided in him, instructing him that regardless of what happened, if I managed to get on that C-130 airplane, he was to ensure that my wives and children were lifted up to safety as well. The plan was for me to be pulled up first, and then I would help lift him onto the plane. Determined and resolute, I assured him that we would board the plane no matter what the officials said.

Fortunately, we were able to secure a place on the last flight out of Laos, and within a few hours, we arrived safely in Thailand. The relief and gratitude I felt were immeasurable as I held my wives and children close, knowing that we had escaped the perils that lay behind us.

In the months that followed our arrival in Thailand, a group of Hmong men, including myself, came together and discovered an empty piece of land. In a collaborative effort, we established a new refugee camp, which we named Ban Vinai. I was honored to be one of the original founders, under the leadership of Colonel Xay Dang Xiong. Our mission was to provide a safe haven for Hmong families fleeing from the ravages of the Vietnam War.

At Ban Vinai, I served as an advisor, offering guidance and support to the community. The camp quickly became a refuge for many Hmong families, and its memory remains alive in the hearts of countless people to this day. Our daily sustenance came from the United Nations, which graciously provided us with one meal per day. On occasion, Thai patrols allowed us to venture outside the camp to seek work opportunities.

To ensure the well-being of my wives and children, I would seize these opportunities to work, laboring diligently outside the camp, and skillfully managing to bring food back for my family. My determination to provide for them fueled my actions, and the strength of our unity as a family kept us resilient in the face of adversity.

Ban Vinai became a testament to the resilience of the Hmong community, and it stands as a testament to our unwavering spirit and determination to rebuild our lives amidst the challenges of displacement and uncertainty. Our time in the camp was filled with hardship, but the camaraderie and mutual support amongst the Hmong families helped us find solace and hope in a world far from the one we once knew.

During our time in the Ban Vinai refugee camp, my family continued to grow. I was blessed with two more daughters, Nou and Kham Xao, and four sons, Luexa, Kham Phur, Kham Cha, and Kham Phad. With eight children now, life

in the camp became a delicate balance of patience, resilience, and hope.

Patiently for five years in Ban Vinai, my heart yearned to reunite with my siblings. I made it my mission to find them and ensure their safe passage across the perilous Mekong River into Thailand. I worked tirelessly, even smuggling money back to Laos, to support them and their families during their escape. I assisted them in acquiring water tubes and carefully planned their journey to freedom.



The joy of reuniting with my siblings and their families was indescribable. Yet, my responsibility did not end there. With their presence in Thailand secured, I embarked on a new mission: to sponsor them for resettlement in the United States. The well-being and safety of my family came first, and I was determined to see them settled in a place where they could find peace and opportunities for a better future.

I set aside thoughts of my own journey to the United States, focusing instead on navigating the complex process of sponsorship. Witnessing my siblings' families being granted the chance to start anew in America filled me with happiness and a sense of fulfillment.

Life in the Thai refugee camp was filled with challenges, but it also provided me with moments of triumph and love. As we waited patiently, enduring the uncertainties of displacement, our family bond grew stronger. Our shared experiences in Ban Vinai became a testament to the power of unity and perseverance in the face of adversity. After all my brothers resettled in the United State, I finally took the journey across the Pacific Ocean to America.

In 1979, faced with the constraints of U.S. immigration law, I had to make a heart-wrenching decision concerning my family. As U.S. law only permitted sponsorship for one wife, I knew I had to find a solution to ensure the safety and future of both my families.

After much contemplation, I made the difficult choice to split my family. My third wife, Mee, and our four children were the first to be sponsored to the United States. On December 20, 1979, they arrived in San Francisco, California,

and settled in Merced County. It was a bittersweet moment as they embarked on their new journey in a foreign land, leaving behind cherished memories of our life in Laos and the Thai refugee camp. Though separated geographically, the bond between my two families remained strong. Despite the distance, we held on to the hope of one day being reunited on American soil.

Before the end of that year, I was fortunate to find support from a church and my friend, Ka Long Xiong, who had already established himself in the U.S. before the end of the war. Thanks to their assistance, my fourth wife, Oneta, and our four children were sponsored to the United States. Like Mee's family, they were given a chance to start afresh, leaving behind the hardships and uncertainties of the past.

Boarding that airplane to America was one of the most nerve-wracking experiences of my life. We lined up in a single-file, escorted onto the large metal bird, as I called it, not fully grasping what a passenger airplane was at that time. But what mattered was that this metal bird could take my family and me away from the only lands we had known and into a world completely unfamiliar to us.

With uncertainty in our hearts, we boarded the airplane, not knowing where America was or who lived there. We had no belongings except the clothes on our backs and one blanket for my kids. My children were barefoot and dirty, a stark contrast to the world we were about to enter.

Deep inside, fear and anxiety consumed me, but I had to stay strong for my wife and children. I didn't want to add to their worries, so I kept my fears to myself during the entire flight to America. It was like venturing into the unknown, a place we called the Big Monster Land. However, amidst the fear and uncertainty, I prayed to God, seeking guidance and strength for this new chapter in our lives.

As the metal bird carried us across the vast ocean, I couldn't help but wonder what awaited us in this strange new land. My heart was filled with hope, trepidation, and a sense of adventure, all intertwined into a mix of emotions that only time would unravel.

On February 22, 1980, we finally arrived in Santa Barbara, California. As we stepped out of the airplane, we were greeted by many people with yellow (blonde) hair, all strangers to us. But among them was my closest friend, Ka Long Xiong, whom I hadn't seen in years. It was a heartwarming reunion, and I felt a sense of comfort knowing he was there to welcome us to this new land.

For the first two months, we stayed with Long's family, and then we moved to

Merced County, where my third wife, Mee, and our four children had settled. It was a joyous moment to have my entire family together once again after the difficult decision to separate them for the sake of complying with U.S. laws on polygamy.



Even though we were now in America, adjusting to this new life and culture was challenging. Everything seemed so different, and at times, it felt like we were in a world completely alien to us. However, with the support of friends like Ka Long and the strength we gained from each other as a family, we faced these new challenges with determination and hope.

During our time in Merced County, I faced the challenges of learning English while working hard to support my family. I attended ESL (English Second Language) classes to improve my language skills, and I took on the role of a custodian at Merced College. It was a tough balancing act, juggling work and education while taking care of my family's needs.

Eventually, I managed to become proficient enough in English to communicate effectively. I found an opportunity to work at the Lao Family Community in Merced, a center set up by the State of California to aid refugees like me in various aspects of their new lives. I assisted in helping refugees find employment, complete paperwork, and acted as an interpreter for Hmong citizens who had difficulty with the English language, particularly the elderly.

While in Merced, my family grew. My wife, Oneta, and I had welcomed four more children into the world, and our family had expanded to include eight children from both of us. Additionally, my third wife, Mee, had two more children, including the four children who had come with us from Thailand. In total, I am now the proud father of fourteen children.

As my family continued to grow, I realized that we needed a bigger city with more opportunities and resources. After visiting Sacramento, I was convinced that it would be a better place for my family's future. So, in 1988, we made the move to Sacramento, California. The decision to relocate turned out to be a wise one.

In Sacramento, I was determined to provide my family with stability and a place they could call home. I made the significant step of purchasing a house, fulfilling

my dream of giving my children a stable and secure environment to grow up in. Having a place to call our own was a symbol of our progress and a source of pride for our family.

Being in a larger city also provided me with more opportunities for personal growth. I decided to return to school and complete my high school education at Las Forest High School. To my delight, I graduated from high school in the same year as my oldest child, Phonetala. Witnessing her start college and seeing my other children follow her example filled me with immense pride and joy.

While in America, the uncertainty and concern about my first two wives and children remained at the back of my mind. However, in early 2005, I finally received some closure and answers. I was relieved to learn that they were alive and had moved on with their lives. My first son, Kou, had unfortunately passed away due to a suspected allergic reaction to a shot. This news brought sadness and grief to my heart, as losing a child is a pain no parent should ever endure.

On the brighter side, my daughter, Ah, had married and started her own family. Knowing that she was doing well and had her own family was a comfort to me. The years of wondering and worrying were finally eased, although the loss of my son was a profound sorrow that stayed with me.



In 2005, I had the opportunity to return to Laos and reunite with my first wife, Ka Moua, my daughter, and my grandchildren. The reunion was bittersweet, but it brought a sense of closure and peace to know that they were doing well.

As for my second wife, I learned that she had remarried and moved on with her life also. Although we went our separate ways, I hoped that she found happiness and fulfillment in her new life.

Throughout my journey, I've experienced moments of joy, challenges, and heartache, but I always strived to provide a better life for my family and myself. My life has been a story of resilience, determination, and love for my family, both near and far.



Throughout my lifetime, I have achieved so much, and I hold deep pride in the legacy I've created. The Hmong settlements, clan establishments, businesses, individual careers, and community organizations I've played a part in starting, supporting, or founding are a testament to the impact I've had on my community. I humbly won't say I am a hero to the Hmong community; however, I will say I was an enabler. Seeing and hearing Hmong community success stories throughout the United States confirms anything is possible. When there is a will, there is a way.

But above all, my heart swells with pride for my children. Watching them grow, start their own families, and forge their paths in life has been a source of immense joy. Their accomplishments have surpassed any expectations I once held, and I can't fully grasp the extent of their professional achievements and ranks. Yet, I do know one thing with certainty: they have collectively reached great heights, succeeded, and turned their dreams into reality. Their success is a source of pride and fulfillment that words cannot fully express.

Three core life principles that I instilled in my children are deeply ingrained in our family values:

1. Family first: I taught my children that nothing is more important than family. They understand the significance of cherishing and supporting one another through thick and thin. Our bond as a family is the foundation that sustains us through life's challenges.
2. Educate and develop yourself: I emphasized the importance of education and personal growth. I encouraged my children to continuously seek knowledge, acquire new skills, and strive to be the best version of themselves. By doing so, they can contribute meaningfully to society and provide value to those around them.
3. Be a part of and serve your community: From a young age, my children learned the value of giving back and being active members of their community. They understand the impact of service and have embraced the spirit of helping others. Contributing to their community not only enriches the lives of others but also brings a sense of fulfillment and purpose to their own lives.

By embracing these core principles, my children have grown into compassionate, responsible, and successful individuals, making me immensely proud of the legacy we are building together.

The most significant aspect of our family's journey is our shared faith and acceptance of Christ as our Savior, which has bound us together in love and hope. Despite facing trials, tribulations, moments of sadness, and even separation, our faith provides us with the assurance that we will be reunited one day.

Through the highs and lows of life, our Christian beliefs have been a source of strength and comfort. It has taught us to trust in God's plan, even when we don't fully understand it. Our faith has helped us navigate challenges with courage and resilience, knowing that we are not alone in our struggles.

As a Christian family, we hold fast to the promise of an eternal reunion, where we will all be together again. This hope sustains us in times of separation, as we look forward to the day when we will be united in God's presence.

No matter where life may lead us, our shared faith remains the unifying thread that connects us all. As we continue to walk this journey together, we find solace in the knowledge that our faith in Christ binds us in an unbreakable bond of love and eternal hope.

Throughout my life, family separation seemed to loom like a persistent shadow, a recurring theme that I could not escape. Yet, I have come to believe that life's events often unfold for reasons unknown, much like the way I patiently waited for all my brothers to find safety and new lives in America before embarking on my own journey to the United States.

As the years passed, fate took a similar course in our earthly journey. One by one, all my brothers bid their farewells, leaving me as the sole surviving son of Saw Chong Xiong. While their absence brings a profound sense of loss, I carry their memories in my heart, cherishing the moments we shared together.

In the face of these circumstances, I find peace in the precious bonds we forged as brothers and the legacy we created as a united family. I take comfort in knowing that their spirits live on, guiding me through life's uncertainties and reminding me of the strength and resilience we experienced together as a family.

As I continue on this journey, I honor the memories of my beloved brothers, drawing strength from the lessons they imparted, and embracing the precious gift of life that we all shared as one united family. It's always been about family. Through the grace of God, we will be together again.

When the time comes when I must leave this life to join my brothers and lost loved ones, please sing to me my favorite hymn "Nplajteb Vaajtswv Tsim Tseg".

On Friday, June 23, 2023, in the early morning hours, Kia Chue Xiong peacefully passed away, leaving behind a legacy of love and resilience. He is survived by both wives (Mee Lee and Oneta Xayavong), 19 children (Ah, Phonetala, May Dee, Nou, Lue Xa, Kham Xao, Kham Phur, Kham Phad, Love, King, Pa, Manola, Jer, Tou, Wilson, Tang, Don, Billy, and Thomas), 36 grandchildren (12 granddaughters and 24 grandsons), 39 great-grandchildren, and 4 great-great-grandchildren. His only sister, Pa Xiong, also cherishes the memories they shared.



*“As I reflect on my life, my heart overflows with gratitude for God’s boundless love, His abundant blessings, and the precious gift of my wives and children. Family has been the cornerstone of my existence, the center of my world. Their unwavering love and support have carried me through all the seasons of life.*”

*As I approach the end of my journey, my fondest hope is that my children will carry on the legacy of valuing education and embracing the significance of family. I pray that they continue to cherish and nurture the unbreakable bond that unites them as siblings, bound by the very essence of my bloodline.*

*Even in my absence, I trust that my family will remain strong and united, holding each other close through life’s trials and joys. May they remember that family is a precious gift, a source of unconditional love and support.*

*Above all, I thank God for the privilege of experiencing a life filled with love and family. As my time on this earth draws to a close, I leave behind a heart full of gratitude and a legacy of love that will forever live on in the hearts of those I leave behind.”*

*Kia Chue Xiong*

