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## Ty, O Oral History Interview: Class Projects

Jeremiah Saier

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Oral History Interview  
Interviewee: O Ty  
Interviewer: Jeremiah Saier  
November 10, 1999

JS: Will you please state your name and spell it?

OT: My name is O, and its spelled just O, my last name is T-Y.

JS: Where are you from O?

OT: From Cambodia, but I lived in Thailand most of my life.

JS: How long ago did you come here to the United States?

OT: I came here in June 26th, 1992.

JS: Where did you live when you came here, did you come right to Holland?

OT: Yeah I came here to Holland and lived with my uncle.

JS: Where are your mom and dad, are they still back in Thailand?

OT: No, they're here, all my family's here. Except my uncles, my aunts... it's just my parents, me, my brother, my sisters.

JS: So it's just your immediate family?

OT: Yeah.

JS: Do they live in Holland too?

OT: Yeah, they live here.

JS: So your house is actually over on... what street do you live on?

OT: I live on 18th street, it's near the high school.

JS: Oh really, you live over by the high school. So you go home often?

OT: I go home like every weekend, but I don't talk to my parents that much. I have to work.

JS: Where do you work at?

OT: At the mall, it's a Chinese restaurant.

JS: Nice. How is it different from Cambodia here, or from Thailand to here, is there a lot of differences?

OT: Depends on what you're talking about differences, according to what category... like school or politics, or kids, there is a lot of stuff.

JS: Let's start with school?

OT: Okay, school in Thailand is like pretty simple, your day is go to school in the morning and then you're off school in the afternoon, which is about 12 o'clock and then you're off for the rest of the day.

JS: Really!

OT: But, it's different, one main difference is that... over there they whip you!

JS: Like capitol punishment?

OT: Yeah, they have punishment if you don't do your homework, or you get bad grades in your tests.

JS: It's allowed by the government?

OT: Yeah, and the way you behave is punishable too. Like here... if you just talk in class, you don't get in trouble right? But over there just being disrespectful you would get like whipped and your arm just like blistered, full of blisters.

JS: Did you ever get whipped?

OT: I got whipped all the time.

JS: It was probably nice coming here then huh?

OT: Yes.

JS: Do you like it here then, I mean from Cambodia or do you miss it?

OT: Over here in a way I like it but, there's certain ways that I don't like it, but there's advantages and disadvantages for each country.

JS: So, how did you get here, did you take a plane, did you take a boat, what?

OT: I took a plane.

JS: You flew right into Holland?

OT: No, we went to uhmm... first we went to San Francisco changed our flight and then we came here. It was like two days and two nights in a plane.

JS: That's a long time. What was your first impression when you stepped off the plane in San Francisco? Was that the first time you'd ever seen the United States? What did you think?

OT: As I wrote in my essay dude, my paper that I just got done. America, I thought it was like a "Heaven." It's different because over there it is like more poor, here it's more rich, it's like a rich country. Before I left over there my neighbor just told me; America is like... the road is made out of gold. That's metaphorically meaning that America is rich. So when I stepped off the plane I saw all these lights, which surprised me because over there we don't have lights, we use just like... candles.

JS: Was it nighttime when you came here?

OT: Yes, the lights were so bright and I just looked around. I just kept my eyes open dude. The cars, and the buildings, tall buildings, and just people, it was just so different.

JS: You didn't have cars in Cambodia?

OT: Only like the Government, they just drive around sometimes.

JS: So how was your family, were you guys just average?

OT: Yeah, we were just average. We didn't own a car or anything.

JS: How was your house, just an average house?

OT: The house was made out of Bamboo leaves, you know the Bamboo leaves, they dry it up, it's old and then they make it like a roof. Then the walls is made up of like logs, like Bamboo logs. You just like build all that stuff up.

JS: It was a pretty small house probably huh, it wasn't very big?

OT: Yeah, it's not big but...

JS: And how many kids were living there with your parents?

OT: It was my uncle's family and my family.

JS: Really, two families in one house. It was probably pretty crowded huh?

OT: Not really, it's more space... I don't know, you don't have like sofa's and stuff.

JS: You just kind of sit on the floor?

OT: Or you can just sit on a stool.

JS: What did you guys do over there for entertainment, I mean here we watch TV, but what did you guys do?

OT: Over there they have a movie theater too, but it's not as technology, here it's better technology, but it's just a screen and they just show on the little screen and the theater's aren't as big. It's like a play, and they just like carve off... like cardboards, and they make it into like pictures and they show it like... what's that called?

JS: Puppets.

OT: Yeah, it's like puppets, they show that on the screen and stuff. That's in the temple, there is like certain evenings that everyone goes there and just sit down and watch that.

JS: How did your parents react to it, did they always want to come here; I mean how did you get over here initially, did you like one day decide you know, we're leaving?

OT: No, there was a war going on in 1979 in Cambodia, and the American troops, they sent American troops over to Cambodia to bring all the people back here to America, to be away from the war. But, some people came and some people didn't. My uncle came, and at that time my uncle asked my dad if he wanted to come, so my dad made his choice... no. Then we stayed there until 19... well, about that time we moved to Thailand and we lived there until 1992 then we moved here.

JS: So you guys stayed right through the war?

OT: Yeah, my parents did, but I was like little at that time.

JS: So you didn't really know what was going on?

OT: I didn't know much, but a little bit though.

JS: Did you know who was fighting, who were fighting in Cambodia?

OT: Yeah, it was the Khmer Rouge, and Khmer Rouge is a term for Red Cambodian, it's the... uhhm. How the war started is like the communist China, they got all these people, all these Cambodian people convinced, and they made them like soldiers, gave them guns to go out to Cambodia and then take the

whole city, try to control the whole Cambodia. That's why the whole war happened. It was the communists from China.

JS: So that was probably a big change coming here, you could actually do what you wanted and not have to worry about saying anything?

OT: Yeah.

JS: Was it different there, I mean did you have to watch what you did around Cambodia?

OT: No, most of the time I don't live in Cambodia, I don't remember that much in Cambodia. But mostly it's just Thailand, but Thailand and Cambodia are similar to each other.

JS: So in Thailand, you couldn't do certain things there that you can do here?

OT: When my family moved to Thailand, I was about eight or nine, and we weren't citizens of Thailand, but we lived with our grandma, cause my grandma, she lived there for awhile- because she was a citizen. There was like certain times that soldier came, they armed with guns and stuff, and they would just search around the house and then me and my family would have to hide, like under the bed.

JS: Do you think they'd shot you if they found you?

OT: Yeah, cause they were just searching around to see if the non-citizens living in the houses and stuff.

JS: So in Thailand, did a lot of your friends come over and you stay, or did a lot of your friends stay or what?

OT: Throughout my life, I've moved a lot. I've moved from Cambodia to Bangkok, Thailand, and then I moved to two, three refugee camps, and then I moved here. So I'm just moving around.

JS: So you've lost a lot of friends probably, you'd make them and then you leave?

OT: Yes, you make and then you leave. That sucks.

JS: Do you want to go back someday?

OT: I want to go visit, but I'm not sure if I'm going to live there.

JS: Do you still know a lot of people that are living over there?

OT: I don't know. I know just my uncle's family that lived there, and like there's some friends I want to go find. I have to get their real names in order to go find them.

JS: How are your mom and dad, how do they take all this? Coming over here, are they happy? Cause you said your dad didn't want to come initially, what made him change his mind?

OT: You know how in Thailand, I told about that non-citizen stuff, so we struggle with that. And then, all the sudden, they sent us to refugee camps, and that's when my dad made contacts with my uncle, and then my uncle sponsored us.

JS: How did you get here, from San Francisco to here, why Holland? Is this where your uncle was, how did he get here, just chance?

OT: Remember I told you about that war. He went to Colorado, his cousin lived there in Colorado, so then he moved here later on in the year.

JS: What kind of work does your mom and dad do here?

OT: Right now. Just working at factories.



JS: What kind of factory, where do they work?

OT: They work in Prince, Johnson Control, that's what I mean.

JS: What did they do when they first moved here, was it like immigrant work?

OT: No, they treat us with, like, food stamps, and my uncle and my dad and my mom just went through process of finding jobs and getting stuff registered and stuff, all this crap.

JS: Have you ever felt like you were being discriminated against? Have you ever felt like just cause you're a different race people look at you differently? A lot of it right now in the United States is white people against the black people, but you're neither, do you feel like you're kind of in-between. Like it's white people against the Asians now or what?

OT: Now it's not, no. Now it's like you're building a relationship and communication. I get to know more about different people and it's not like discrimination against me. There is like certain events that people say some stuff or do some stuff to me and it's like 'I felt like it was racist'.

JS: You felt discriminated against though, before, here?

OT: Yeah.

JS: Was it more in high school or now that you're in college?

OT: It was when I was little, when I moved there.

JS: How was high school for you, did you like it?

OT: Yeah, I had friends.

JS: Did you like the new kind of schooling rather than what you had in Thailand?

OT: In a way I do, in another way I don't.

JS: Was it better schooling, did you learn more, do you think?

OT: I can't say anything about that, because over here you have to learn English, over there I have to learn my own language. Plus, over there, like the grading they don't go by A, B's, or C, but they go by... let's say 20 people in the class, then they rank them, who got number 1, who got 2, who got 3... and like throughout the school I was like #1 the whole time. I was smart over there in my country, but here I'm like okay. Because I have to like change the language.

JS: When you came here you knew no English right?

OT: No.

JS: When did you learn English? You must have picked it up pretty quickly, how long have you been here, seven years?

OT: Yeah.

JS: You speak pretty fluently for only being here seven years. When did you learn English, like as soon as you got here did you have to get on it?

OT: Yeah, I got here in the summer and when it's September, I start sixth grade.

JS: So you had to know what you were doing right away. Was it hard in school the first couple years cause you didn't know much English?

OT: Yes.

JS: There aren't many Asians here at Hope at all, does it feel kind of weird being a minority over here? I mean, you've probably been a minority your whole life, most of it anyway? Does it feel kind of weird to walk around and not see anyone who looks like you or talks like you?

OT: Talking about minority and majority, I don't take that seriously, I don't take that word for seriously. I don't keep that in mind that I'm always a minority, or like when I go around and see like oh... this dude is white, I'm not going to talk to him. I don't have anything in mind. I just have that everywhere I go, everyone is people. That anyone if they're someone I can talk to them. Anyone. It's like everyone's treating each other equally. I don't care much if I see, this is a white boy right here and this is a Cambodian boy here, I wouldn't just go to the Cambodian boy first, you know. I would just talk to anyone that I approached, whatever.

JS: Do you feel sometimes like we Americans are kind of snobby and kind of spoiled, because we have so much money and so many things?

OT: Sure.

JS: Just by looking around and seeing all of us American kids running around with a car and stuff, kind of makes you feel like we're spoiled rotten and not have to work for it.

OT: Over there we work hard on things like our foot or hands, we work mostly our physical body, but over here since there's technology to use, you can use more on technology to help- you guys use it, you know what I mean.

JS: Instead of us doing it on our own, we have computers do it for us.

OT: Yeah, they do it for you. Like these machines that you guys created to make your lives easier. But over there, there's no technology.

JS: Did you have to work when you were young, like physical labor when you were young kid?

OT: You would have to work around the house yeah. You'd have to carry like water in a bucket and you'd have to like wash your clothe and, you know, do chores around the house, like cut the trees or plants.

JS: What did your mother and father do while they were there in Thailand?

OT: My dad was a teacher.

JS: What did he teach?

OT: He teach, like I don't know what he teach, I think it's French.

JS: You don't talk to your parents much right now?

OT: I talk to them only on the weekends.

JS: How many brothers and sisters do you have?

OT: I have one and two sister.

JS: How old are they?

OT: My brother is younger than me, he's like a year younger. One of my sisters is 15 and another sister is like 10.

JS: So your younger brother's in high school right now?

OT: Yeah, he's a senior.

JS: And your older sister is probably like a freshman?

OT: Yeah, she's a freshman in high school.

JS: And your other sister is in what grade?

OT: She's in fifth.

JS: They all go to Holland high school, Holland public schools?

OT: Yeah.

JS: So what do want to do, what are you here for, what's your major?

OT: I don't know, I'm moving toward like business, business administration.

JS: Do you think you're gonna stay here at Hope? Do you like it here?

OT: I'm not sure yet.

JS: A lot of people have already made up their minds they're gonna transfer and stuff, a lot of freshman.

OT: It depends.

JS: Have you so far, since you've been here at Hope have you liked it?

OT: It's okay, it's all right. I mean I don't know if there's colleges that's better than this, cause I never experience it yet. But so far Hope is good.

JS: Do you like your professors?

OT: Not that much.

JS: Really?

OT: Some professors are real nice, but some- it's okay.

JS: Have you found that we Americans don't know much about Cambodia and don't know much about you guys at all? I know that you could tell me anything and I'd believe it. I don't know what goes on over there, does it kind of upset you sometimes how we're not informed about what your life's like, I mean everyone around the world knows what America is like.

OT: I don't care too much, I don't care that you guys don't know about what's happening in my country, but I'd be glad if you guys wanted to know.

JS: A lot of people just don't care to, I guess.

OT: But the Khamer Rouge war was is considered one of the events in the United States, the government considered the most ruthless, and cruel war that

happened in the history. Because it was like 2 million people got killed. 2 million people in Cambodia got killed.

JS: Cambodian people?

OT: Yeah, and that's a lot. It's like Cambodian's killing Cambodian's.

JS: So the U.S. came in to help you guys?

OT: Yeah, but the Cambodian government tried to keep you guys out.

JS: So we ended up killing some of you guys to get in probably huh?

OT: Some... maybe. The Khmer Rouge killed some Americans too.

JS: They didn't want us in there to help you guys at all, the Cambodians?

OT: I don't know how the Government works out, but it seems like they didn't want the government from the United States to help us.

JS: They just wanted to let you guys stay in there and die?

OT: Or something, I don't know.

JS: That's kind of weird. From what you remember about Thailand and what you know about the U.S. now, how do you compare the two, do you like this place more or not? Obviously each have their up and down sides, but overall?

OT: Okay... all those memories when I was little in Thailand, I always recall it and I miss it a lot, because you went through that stuff, and you want to experience it again. But one thing that is bad about over there is that it's not a free country, it's still going through the little wars and stuff, that the government doesn't work out. But the life is pretty simple, you know, over there it's really simple, it's not as complicated as in the United States. Over there your life was just go to school, come back, hang out with your friend. I just remember times run

around with your friends and go jump in the lake naked. Everytime when it rained, over there the seasons is like rain, wind, and summer. There's no snow, but everytime when it rain hard, it's like monsoon rain. All the kids just run out and like run everywhere in the neighborhood naked and everyone just taken showers. It's pretty fun for the kids, just running around and playing. Over here it's complicated because you go to school, you live in a world that has laws, all these laws that it's so many types of laws just within the United States. There's so many.

JS: You can't run around naked here!

OT: Yeah, there's tax laws, there's property laws, house, bills, there's all this stuff that you got to take care. But over here it is easier due to technology, you know, it helps- makes your life a lot easier. But over there you work harder with your body because you don't have those technologies.

JS: More physically demanding?

OT: Yeah. But over there, it's not much laws, it's just pretty simple.

JS: Well O, I think we're done, I appreciate it and thank you for spending your time with me.

OT: Thanks a lot.