

Voices from Laos

Three Hmong stories



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A digital version of this book is available to download from www.tcal.org.au

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Three Hmong stories

The 340 members of the Tasmanian Hmong community lived mainly in the Hobart area. All came from refugee camps in Thailand from 1978 to 1992, following the war in 1975. They originally had lived in the mountain area of Laos.

All their lives the Hmong people had been involved in the war in Laos, which had claimed many of their family members. Because of the war, they had no opportunity to gain an education. So they had come to Australia without literacy skills.

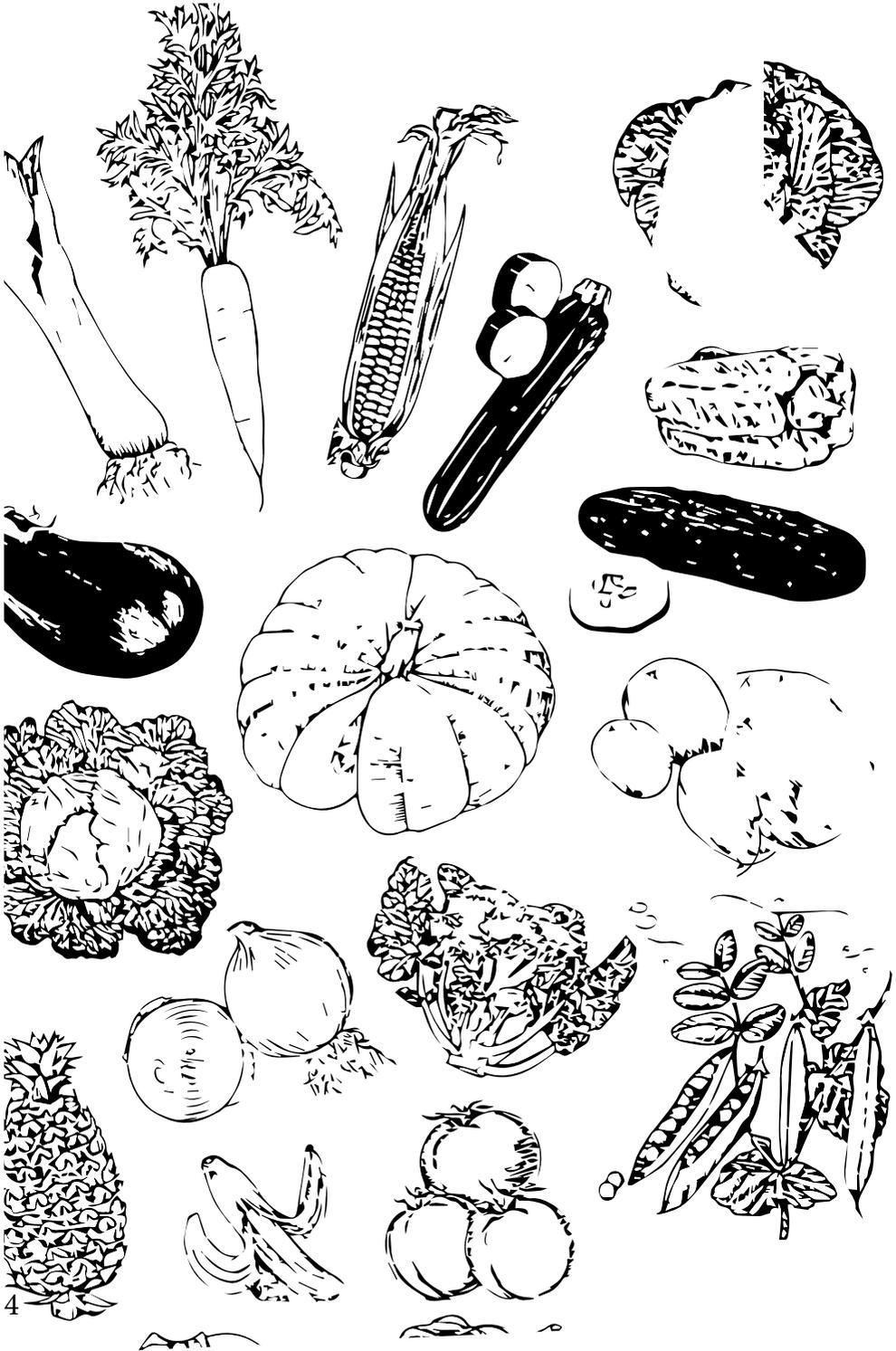
‘Life in Laos’ is a story from a literacy group of Hmong people in Hobart. They met weekly at the West Moonah Community Centre during 1992. Their tutor, Lou-anne Barker, transcribed their story and prepared most of the illustrations for it.

‘The Pair of Glasses’ and ‘Escape to Thailand’ were given to the group tutor by Cher Xiong to publish so that children of the Hmong community could have some stories and history of their people. Cher Xiong has a large family and likes going fishing.

Life in Laos

Written by Xia Xiong, Boufoue Xiong, Mai Yang,
Xai Xue Yang, Xia Mai Yang, Chang Vang Yang,
Cher Xiong Yang, Mai Yang, Yee Yang

Transcribed by Lou-Anne Barker



We Hmong people lived in the mountains in Laos. The weather was never cold. We had a big farm in a clearing in the jungle.

We grew pumpkin, cucumbers, corn, rice, lettuce, bananas, chillies, potatoes, capsicum, eggplant, pineapple, oranges, apricots, beans, leeks, garlic, spring onions, ginger, coriander, tomatoes, broccoli, cabbages, zucchini, lemons, lemongrass and lots of other vegetables and fruit.

We also had cows, chickens, pigs,
ducks and geese for meat to eat.

Men and women started work in the garden at
7 a.m. and looked after the animals at 8 a.m.





The older children, from eight years old to twelve, worked on the farm.

The seven-year-old children looked after the younger children. People looked after their old parents.

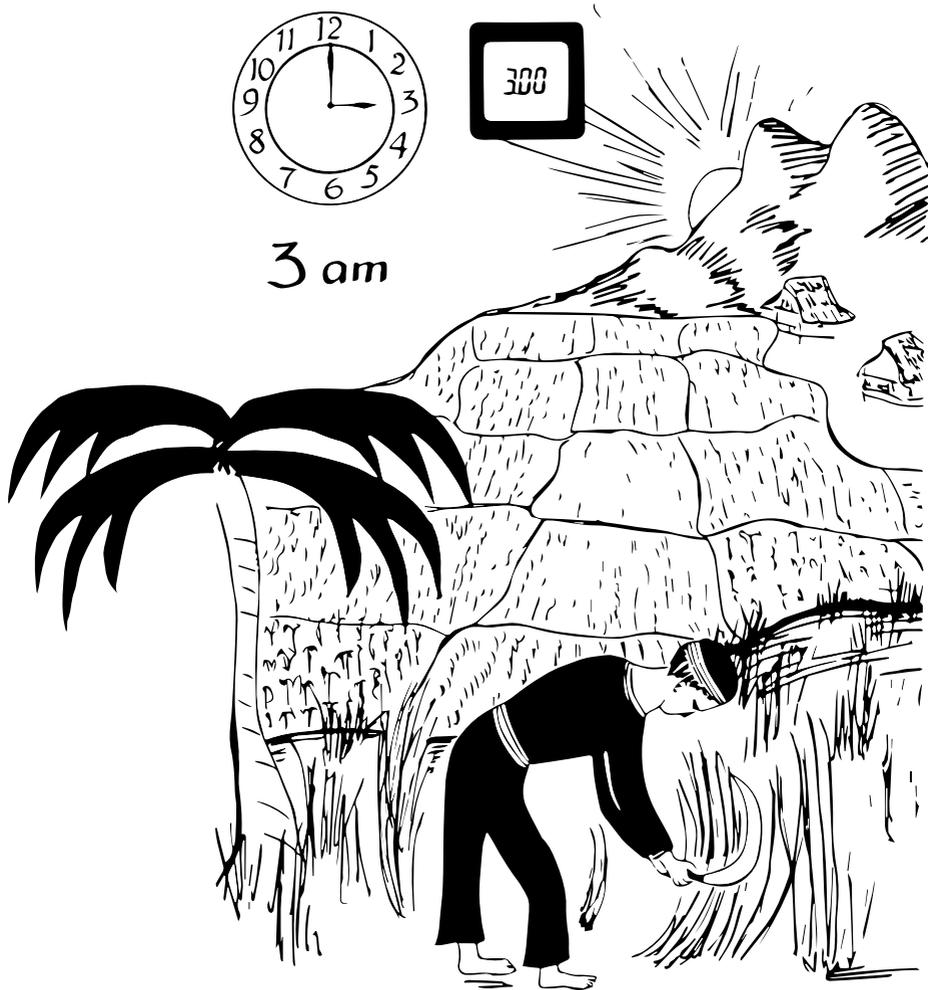


The houses were very big and
the whole family lived in them.

There were no cars. We walked everywhere and
carried food on horses, cows and our backs.

Some people got up at 3 a.m. in morning to cut

wood for cooking and to cut grass for the horses.



1993

New Year activities

January

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31						

February

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28						

March

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April

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May

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June

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July

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August

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September

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October

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November

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December

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26	27	28	29	30	31	

New Years Eve

At New Year there were special activities. Everyone stayed at home for ten days. All of the family came: the brothers and sisters-in-law, cousins and grandparents.

The pigs and cows were killed and everybody spent



time eating, drinking and talking.

The young children played ball in the park with material balls.

The older teenage children, from seventeen to



nineteen, chose a marriage partner from a different clan by playing a ball game. If they liked a person they would throw the ball to them and sing.

Then they got married and lived with the boy's family. In a small family they



had seven children and in a big family they had ten children.

The Hmong have their own medicine people. They can help people with

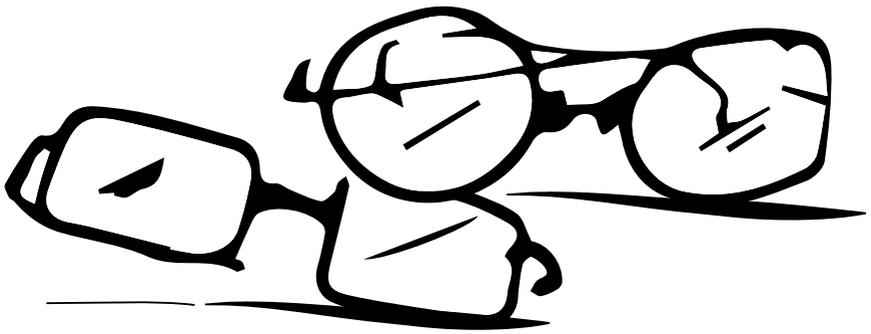


headaches and stomach aches.

Life in Laos was very
different to Australia.







The Pair of Glasses

A true story

Written by Cher Xiong Yang

I would like to write this story to show you about our past. The Hmong people have never had an education before. Most Hmong people lived in the country with no education and no jobs. This is what happened to one man.



Twenty years ago there was a young man who didn't like going to school. He lived in the hills far away from the city. One day he got some money. He wanted to go to the city to buy some new clothes.

When he arrived at the shopping centre, he saw many old men who were wearing glasses, reading newspapers and writing letters. The young man watched them for a while and thought:

I will get some glasses, then I will be able to read and write, just like those old men.

The young man was very happy. He went inside the shop to buy some glasses, which would teach him to read and write.

The salesman showed him all the glasses in the shop. But the young man said, “All your glasses are very bad! They are no good! You should put them all in the rubbish!”

The salesman said, “Why?”

“Because I’ve tried on all the glasses in your shop and I can’t read and write with any of them,” the young man replied.

The salesman said, “Did you ever go to school?”

The young man said, “I have never been to school in my life.”

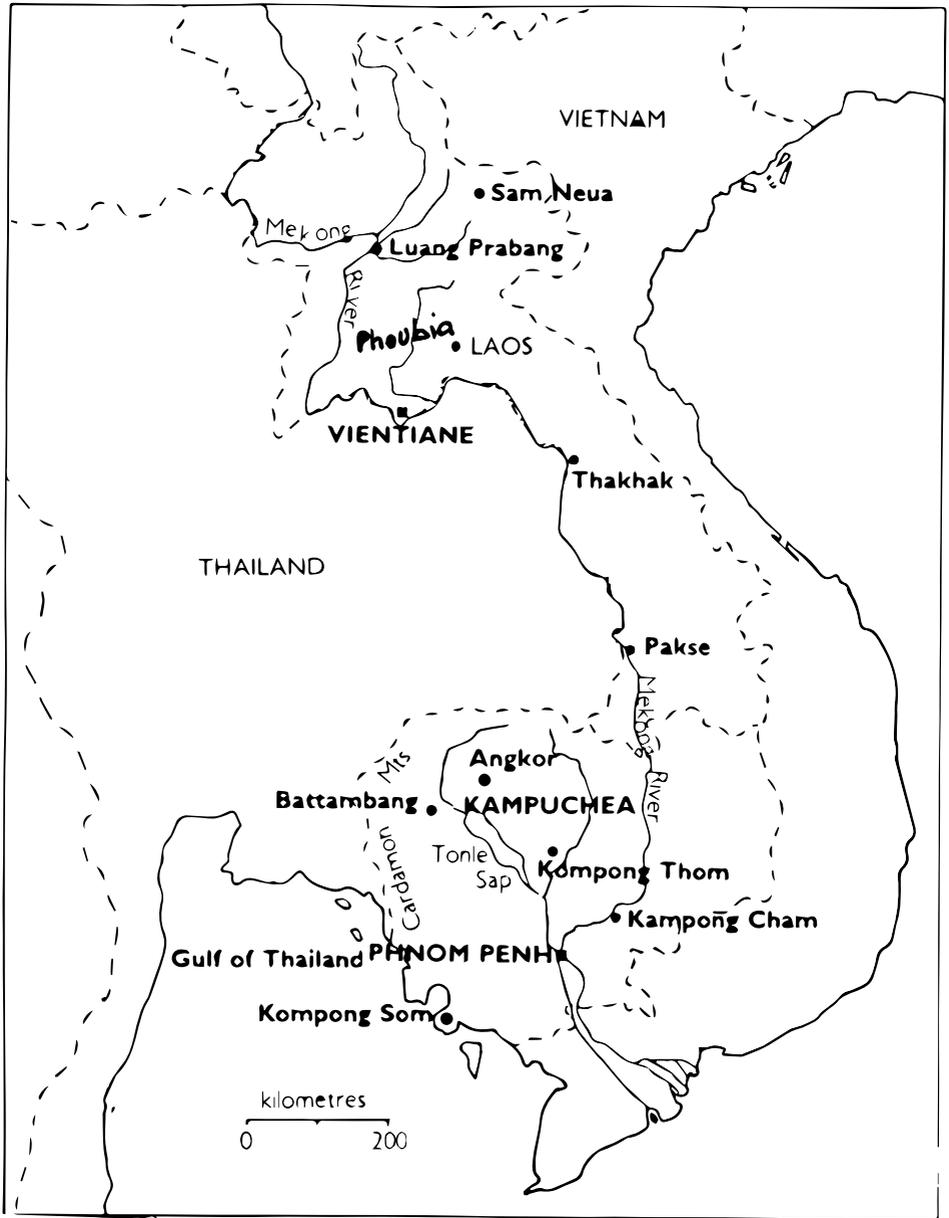


The salesman laughed, “You are very funny! You should return to your home. After you’ve been to school for three or four years, come back here and I will help you find some glasses to help you read and write. Then you’ll understand why glasses are important!”

Escape to Thailand



Written by Cher Xiong Yang



In 1978 the North Vietnamese and Laotian soldiers came to fight us in Phoubia. Phoubia is a small village in Laos. After the soldiers came, my family went to live in the jungle. For one year we had nothing to eat and no clothes.

In 1979 I decided to escape from Laos to Thailand. At the time I was 36 years old. I went with my family and cousin who was about 26 or 36 years old. There were about 213 people who escaped together from Phoubia to Mekong River on the border of Thailand. It took about 10 days and 10 nights. We didn't sleep for one minute. We walked all day and all night.

On the second day we came to Phouhold which is a big high mountain near Vientiane city. The Vietnamese and Laotian soldiers were watching us.

When we got to the top of mountain the soldiers fought us for about 30 minutes. After we stopped fighting we ran away. We lost a lot of people who got shot and died on the top of the mountain.

At night we went to find some bamboo and we used a knife to cut it quietly.

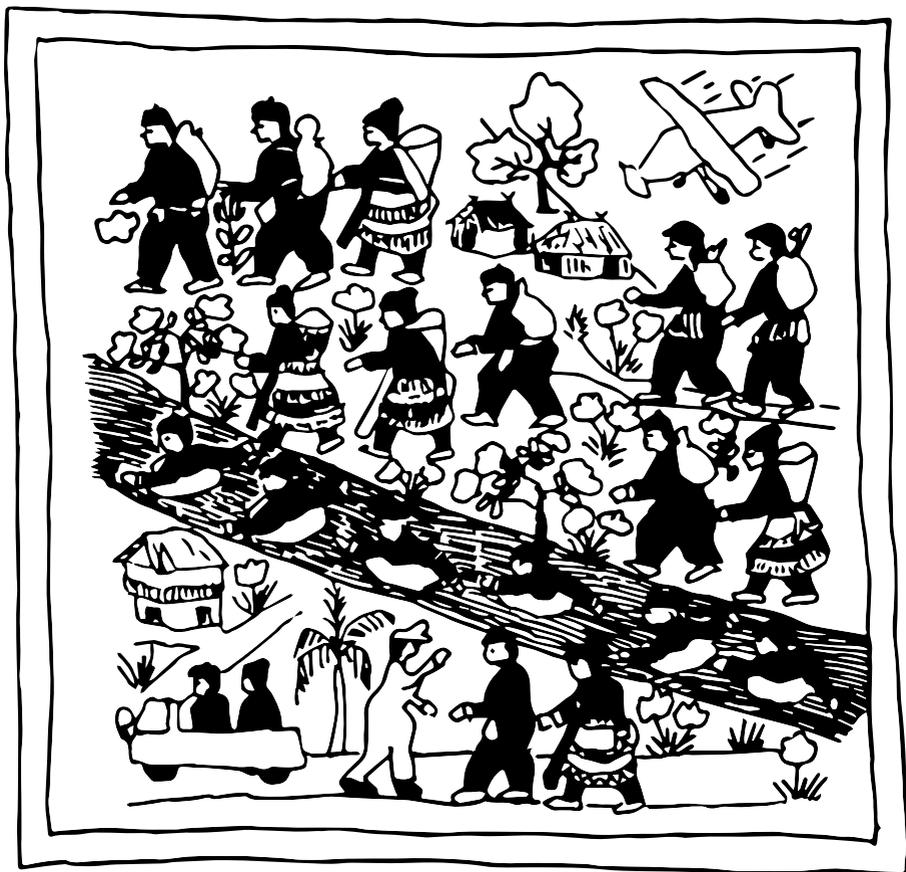
The bamboo carried us across the Mekong River.

Twenty people couldn't swim and died in the river. It took 2 hours to cross the Mekong River.

We had now crossed into Thailand. Thai policemen came and took us to the police station for one week in order to fill in forms and do interviews.

After that the UNHCR* found buses to take us to Banvinaï camp in Thailand. They had food aid for us – 7 gm of meat, 5 gm vegetables and 3.5 kg of rice





for one person for one fortnight. All of the people who were refugees felt the same as me, very hungry because the food aid was not enough.

*UNCHR: United Nations High Commission for Refugees.



25 Stories

Written by learners and published
as a resource for others to share
on their learning journeys

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Adult Literacy and Basic Education (ALBE) Resources Unit in Devonport, Tasmania, published over 50 stories that had been written by learners as part of their literacy learning program. The writers were closely involved in the production of their stories, with the understanding that the resources would be made available for other learners, teachers and tutors. Since their initial publication there has been continuing interest in the stories, that contain relevant content and appropriate reading levels for adult learners. They are widely used by individuals and organisations across Australia as reading resources and as models for writing.

25 Stories is a selection of those works that have been republished and made available to download, free of charge from the Tasmanian Council for Adult Literacy (TCAL) website, www.tcal.org.au. Each story has been assigned an Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF) level for reading and writing.

TasTAFE and TCAL wish to thank the original writers, illustrators, learners, teachers and publishers who have generously made these stories available for others to share.

