

Houston Asian American Archive
Chao Center for Asian Studies, Rice University

Interviewee: Tha Aung
Interviewers: Xingyi Li, Anna Ta, Tian-Tian He
Date/Time of Interview: June 21, 2017, 12:00 PM
Transcribed by: Tian-Tian He
Edited by: Daniel Ngo
Audio Track Time: 1:01:07

Background: Tha Aung was born in Thailand to a Burmese father and Karen mother, and grew up in a small village in Burma. At around age 14, his mother took him, his brother, and his sister to the Mae La refugee camp in Thailand to escape from the Burmese civil war and oppression of the Karen people. Tha spent 4 years there, and finished high school (equivalent to 10th grade in the US). At age 18, he and his family came to Houston with the help of the UNHCR. In Houston, Tha earned his GED, studied to become a phlebotomist, and worked at a Foxconn factory, where he met his wife. At the age of 23 he began working at the HOPE Clinic's eligibility department, especially helping translate for Burmese and Karen immigrants who do not speak English. Tha is now 28 and continues to work at the HOPE Clinic, and lives in Sharpstown with his wife, 5-year-old daughter, mother, and siblings.

Setting: This interview took place on June 21, 2017, in a conference room at the HOPE Clinic. It was conducted both for HAAA and a documentary project led by Kinder Scholar Yehuda Sharim. Partway through the interview one of Tha's co-workers comes into the room. At the end, Yehuda comes in to tell us the next interviewee is ready. After the main interview was finished, we followed Tha to his workspace and filmed a short clip of him working (not included in the transcript).

Interview Transcript:

Key:

TA: Tha Aung
XL: Xingyi Li
AT: Anna Ta
TH: Tian-Tian He
—: speech cuts off; abrupt stop
...: speech trails off; pause
Italics: emphasis
(?): preceding word may not be accurate
[Brackets]: actions (laughs, sighs, etc.)

XL: Okay, so, today is June the 21st, 2017. We are here today to interview Tha, in HOPE Clinic. Uh, I'm Xingyi Li.

AT: I'm Anna Ta.

TH: And I'm Tian-Tian He.

TA: Okay, very nice meeting you all, thank you for doing this. Yeah. [all laugh]

XL: You too. So, yeah, uh, can you say your name?

TA: Oh, yeah, my name is Tha Aung.

XL: Uh, can you write it down for me?

TA: Oh, yes, of course. [writes name on paper] ...Tha Aung. This is my first name and last name.

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XL: Oh, can you hold this—

TA: Oh—oh, it's too small?

TH: It's a bit small.

TA: I'll make it bigger for you, okay. [rewrites name on paper]

XL: [laughs]

TH: We can take a picture of it afterwards, but could you--

XL: You can, like, zoom in.

TA: Yeah. What about this one? Tha Aung, T-H-A Tha.

XL: Tha Aung. Yeah. Uh, how do you write it in Burmese?

TA: In Burmese? Oh okay, yeah. Gonna be... Tha Aung is like this. [writing] Like soccer (?) thing.

XL: Oh, so, do--does your name have any meaning?

TA: Uh, actually, you know, Tha Aung, my real name is [spelling?] Aung, you know. Yeah. My--Tha Aung is like, from immigration through. But uh, there's, there's a meaning. Aung is mean, like, victory. Tha is mean like, peace. That's how, in our, in our language...Tha. Even Chin--but I'm Karen so, this is Burmese name. Tha Aung. Yeah.

XL: So how old are you?

TA: Um like, I'm 28.

XL: 28?

TA: Yeah, mhm.

XL: That's really young!

TA: Yeah.

XL: So how long have you been working here?

TA: Uh, this--HOPE Clinic? Almost, almost, uh, five years. I enjoy working here. Great. Yeah.

XL: Oh, so, what do you do here?

TA: Oh, I do, I--eligibility de--department, helping, you know, patients get the discount, through the, you know, income screening. So, they can see the doctor, with the lowest, you know, amount. And also help apply for Medicaid, filled out paperworks, if they have question about their bills, or anything, because they don't speak English, right? So, they need help with the languages. So, we read it for them, help them, sometimes we need to call, we help them call the, you know, department... yeah, any department, maybe car insurance or something. I just help out like, you know, just quick, you know, you usually helping them, you know, thanks to the clinic, HOPE clinic, they open. I helping--helping, like, Burmese community and other, you know, nationality, Arabic and others. Yeah. Yeah, many languages here.

XL: Is, uh, is there a lot--lot of Burmese patient here in HOPE clinic?

TA: Yeah, I think so, yeah. It's like, they have a, like a scale, you know, like fifty percent, but I'm not, I'm not sure about this year, but before, was like a lot. Yeah, a lot of--usually a lot. But someone move out--wanna stay, you know. They come here, they say "Oh hi, sir, we are moving out, I wanna say goodbye." Say, "Okay," change the address, and yeah. Yeah. And they move out for employment, stuff like that. They have better opportunity... actually, yeah, go ahead! [laughs] Yeah, actually like Burmese, you--they need help like with employment, you know, like here, it's hard to look for a job, right? So, they move to other states. Like in Houston it's hard, they're not really educated pers--people, you know, they, they just hard laborer, you know. They need to pay the rent, the rent is going up all the time, this area. They always--like, up you know, like went up, the rent is always went up. So, they always complain about that. They come in, "Oh, sir, I think we gotta move out... Like out of state." Uh, out of state, mean like Indiana, Kentucky, they have like job opportunity there. They pay more. More than like, eleven, twelve, like fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, they said like, you know? It's for them, like you know they really want a better life, American Dream, you know. [laughs] Houses, being house owner, they, they--yeah, they talk about that, like about their life here. They... yeah. They really appreciate the HOPE Clinic, like, helping them. Yeah.

XL: So, um, is your work always busy?

TA: Uh, me?

XL: Mhm.

TA: Yeah, busy, all the time. Yeah. We always have things to do, you know, like eligibility, checking insurance, uh, if a patient's coming in, yeah, they have question about their paper... sometimes they get the--the letter from mailbox, whatever, like you know? It's not--what is it called, uh, it's—it's not for the clinic case, you know, just for other cases. Just came, brought it, sometimes the letter from school, sometimes from--yeah, all those--they come. Uh, busy, yeah. [laughs] Got busy, you know, you gotta make yourself busy so the day ran. You gotta run the--I don't know the saying... you gotta run the day, right? You gotta run the, if you don't run the--the day will run you, you gonna be like bored, you know, you're not contributing anything. Usually I always help, like, you know my best, like, you know? Um, yeah. Help them my heart, you know, like helping them. Like, come in, smile at them, customer service, you know? [all laugh] Yeah. They really, yeah, appreciate that.

XL: Yeah.

TA: All of us, right here. [laughs] Yeah.

AT: So how did you get involved with the HOPE Clinic?

TA: Uh... yeah. I came here, you know, do the intern for the--uh, phlebotomist. And then the, the front desk managers need my languages, so I just say okay--I didn't even know HOPE Clinic exist, you know, before. Yeah. Actually, like you know--but right now I'm married though, you know, I have a kid. While she's pregnant, I didn't even know about HOPE Clinic. Man, if I knew about HOPE Clinic, I--I'll probably came here and I ask questions. 'Cause HOPE Clinic there's a Burmese staff there. Like they--they really, like, [unknown name], she's very helpful, I learn from her, how she talk to patients, how she give information. Like, you know, it's great. If I knew that, like, I already come here and I... and I get help. But now I know, so--I know through the, the, the [unknown name]. [name], the staff from here. She, she work here before me. Yeah. She told me... there's a, they need help, the Burmese--I, I speak Burmese, and English, and Karen... Karen--not a hundred percent, but I can communicate with them. They need help, they don't speak Burmese, they from Burma but they don't speak Burmese because they are from like, what it's called... like, Bur--usually they live in uh, like, villages, like you know. They don't really communicate with us... township or town folks, and like. Some, they don't speak Burmese, and, yeah. They need help. [laughs] I don't know, I'm talking like-- [all laugh]

XL: So, yeah--

TA: Sorry, but, yeah!

XL: It's okay! Uh, how do you feel about your work so far?

TA: How do I feel about the work? Yeah, HOPE Clinic, where I'm working right now, I feel like, it's kind of like great! Because I can help, I can contribute my... you know--yeah, I can, I can help, I can help people, like, you know, they need help, they come, they say, "Oh, I need help to--for you to fill out." Uh, I feel helpful, like, you know? And, yeah, my position right now, I'm, I'm grateful for it, pay--pay my food, uh, what is it, put my food on the table? [laughs] It's great, uh, I, I'm learning, I'm learning, um, I feel I'm growing, yeah. Yeah, it's great. Uh, the people there is great, like, you know, they are always helpful, positive, that's what you wanna be, right?

XL: Yeah.

TA: The people, the coworkers gotta be like positive, helpful each other, yeah, that's why I'm here for, for five years--wow, yeah. [laughs] Great! Also, it's, it's--like even patients tell me, "Okay, uh, sir, don't even go, uh, go change another job!" You know? Uh, "Stay here, help us." I say, "Yeah, okay, great! Thank you!" Um, I--yeah. Uh, right, you know all about contribution, right? Y--you can contribute, and you've--if you help, if you help people, you feel happy, right? If you can help people, you can, you feel better... helping is great for you to be happy, and positive, and [laughs] yeah.

XL: So, how long have you been here in Houston?

TA: Almost ten years.

XL: Twenty years?

TA: No, ten years, yeah.

XL: Oh, ten years. [laughs]

TA: Yeah, um, yeah. Great. Long time, but, yeah. I--

AT: So, what did you--sorry--uh, what did you do before your job at the HOPE Clinic?

TA: Before, uh, HOPE Clinic? Uh, work in a computer, like, Foxconn... yeah, Foxconn. Foxconn, like they do electronic, electronic parts, you know, do that. Like kind of--

TH: In Houston?

TA: Kind of like a testing board, like you know, uh, yeah. Testing, like, tester, like, the computer boards are running good or not. [laughs] Yeah. It's kind of boring. It's not, it's not for me, you know, so, yeah.

AT: How long did you work there?

TA: I worked there like almost one year, yeah.

AT: In Houston?

TA: Yeah, Houston, yeah. Mhm.

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XL: So, uh, how did you came to Houston?

TA: How I came? As a refugee. Yeah. I came as a refugee, from, by pl--by, by plane...? Oh, you wanna know like how I came, like as a refugee, uh, by UNHCR, the... yeah. Because I was refugee in Thailand for three years. My mother, my brother, my sister, we came here together, we family. Yeah, and... for American dream, you know? [laughs] It's like sometimes disappear, like, where's American dream, not there! [all laugh]

AT: Was it difficult to secure, um, your travel over to the US?

TA: Question like, is what, sorry? Secure?

AT: Oh--uh, travel over to the US, was it difficult to get here?

TA: Uh, for us, I didn't expect to come here. Sorry, uh, yeah. I didn't expect to come here, like, my mother, she don't want, like, you know, searching, you know, to go a better place, you know. And... and she, yeah. It's not--when she decided, uh, we go and apply, you know, to come here through the, they call, U--UNHCR, as a refugee.

XL: How do you spell it?

TA: UNHCR.

XL: UNHCR.

TA: Yeah, UNHCR. That's a long, yeah. Ab-abbreviation, I don't--Union, something.

XL: Is that part of the United Nation?

TA: Yes, United Nation, yeah. Uh, huh. Sorry, excuse me. [drinks water] Yeah. It's--it's not difficult for me, but for others, they have to wait ten years. For other refugees, left in, you know, Thailand refugee camp. I came from refugee, uh, Thai, Thai, um, um, Burma border, you know. Yeah. Some was like, they have to wait long time, they gotta, they fail many times. We did only one time, interview, because we tell the truth, you know? 'Bout how difficult it was be--before we were in Burma, uh, you cannot go farther, you know, with your Karen. If you're Karen tribe, you cannot go farther. They, they rank you down, like rank--uh, yeah, ranking? Like discrimination, yeah. It's, it's happening that time, but now it's democracy, a bit better, yeah.

TH: Wait, uh, did you say Korean?

TA: Not Korean, the Karen.

TH: Okay, okay. [laughs]

TA: Yeah, Karen, yeah.

TH: How do you spell that? We--we know nothing about--

TA: Karen? It's like last name of the lady, like you know, usually lady Karen, "Miss Karen"? K-A-R-E-N.

XL: Karen. Oh.

TA: Yeah--yeah, Karen. Yeah, yeah.

TH: Karen. Okay.

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XL: So, is your family here?

TA: My family? Yeah, my father's, he passed away, due to cancer. Uh, my mom here, we--yeah, my, my, my brother, my sister, other city, yeah. She's married, um, all together, USA, yeah. My family is mean like, like relatives, they're on my mother's side, they're, uh, a lot of them, like, you know, in Amarillo. Usually they live there because they have a job, you know, there's a place, like, Karen community there. There's a lot more Karen people, yeah, a big--bigger than Houston. Karen. Like, you know, like, like, for some tribes, they have their own state, like, you know? Like, like, Chin tribe, they are in Indiana, like, usually a big crowd, and Amarillo, uh, Karen--yeah, they live there, like, mostly more--in more number. Yeah. And Minnesota, yeah. Big--mhm.

XL: So, do you live in a Burmese neighborhood?

TA: Yeah, no, I live over there [points outside the window], I just live in that apartment right now, in that building, see. You see a lot of Chinese over there. Yeah, uh huh. There's a Burmese neighborhood over in Ranchester, Yehuda--Yehuda, he been there a lot of times. He even go to there and, like, you know, house and interview them too. Uh, yeah. There's a Burmese society, yeah. It's hard, apartments. [laughs]

AT: Were there a lot of Burmese in, um, the refugee camp in Thailand?

TA: Yeah, I think seven. They have Karen, they have Karenni, and other tribes. Seven refugee camps. I was in Mae La camp. Like, Mae La, camp. It's the biggest one. It's huge, like, if I go to school--there's a school there too. I learn English from over there! There's a teacher from England and, uh, she's very nice, she--she teach English, uh, we learn.

XL: Wow.

TA: Yeah, you--you had to walk, like, how many miles, like, I think... three--oh wait. Five, six, seven? Well, like, it's far though. You gotta walk, you know? My hou--my, my, my house there, the school over there... I mean, like, for that school. So, they have many schools, you know, open by the, the missionary, you know, they come, brought by the UNHCR. Have to pick which one you, you wanna go. Yeah, so, I choose that school, like, they call FSP, yeah. They learn Eng--they, they teach English, um, yeah. History, yeah.

XL: Uh, can you tell me about your refugee experience, just overall?

TA: Refugee experience? I was, I was fifteen, fifteen, yeah. Fifteen, six--like fourteen years old. That time I don't really--I, I just think about "Okay, my mom told me," okay, she said, "We going to your grandfather," my mother's father, you know. He lives there. He lives there for like almost twenty--twenty, thirty years there. So... yeah, I say, "Okay, let's go," you know. I wanna see different world, so, yeah, we went over there, I saw the mountain... Yeah, actually I was born in Thailand, you know. Thailand, my father doesn't want me to be a Thai citizen, so he moved me back to Burma. And then when I was in Thailand, I was in that refugee camp like for a few months, where my grandfather was living. I have picture, I don't remember any of that, but, uh, and then when I turned fourteen I came back to the refugee, uh, camp. I saw the mountain... Beautiful, because, like, it's Thai, you know? Thai--there the food is great, Thai f--like usually, I don't know, Thai food is great, you know. So, I love the food over there. I see refugee camp--the one I was there, it's like, that's a, it's great place! Not like the other refugee camp, they're, uh... when I was there it was great, like, you know, I have school, you can go to school, you can... They give you food though, they give you food, like ra--ration? They called ration? Rice, fish paste, and beans, they have, like, for one person, how, how much they give you every month. And they give you house, shelter, supplies, uh, and the bamboo leaves, and all that stuff, bamboo. I used to carry those down too, from the place. I had to carry them. Like, it's fun. For me, I was fourteen, I don't really know much, I just, you know. I like reading books. So, there's a marketplace--there's a market, they sell books, and that's many shops, you know, too. Um, the experience, like, uh, they have a temple, they have a church, yeah, all the--all of them over there. Because they been there, like, for thirty years, thirty--yeah, long time. Yeah, it was great, like, for me, like, I feel like... yeah, but then many people say, "You are living like a pig," like, you know? Like a pig, you just,

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like, you know? There, you just stay there, you don't go anywhere. But there's a security, like, police there. they don't want you to go outside. If you go outside, some people they go out p--uh, they work for the Thai, you know, Thai people, they can pay. And some, like, they have to, uh, buy fish and stuff, they don't have money to, to buy them. So, they have to go out, like, secretly, and sometimes the police might shoot, you know, they shoot. They got--some, some refugee camp, but not ours though. I don't, I never heard of--they got shot. Uh, for me, yeah. For, like, experience, it's like... I want to get better, like, I want to have a better life. Uh, you know, like, you go to school right? And other students, they have a like sponsorship from other, from Norway, British, or... USA. They said if you're smart or if you study hard, you know, they, uh, they would pick you. Uh, you can, if you, if you pass the test, they--so they will pick you, you know. Like, out of hundred, out of ten, uh, you can go and study abroad, and come back help, help your, you know, people. That's how--it's like a dream over there. Like a dream, its own dream. I didn't know about American, to go--come here. My mom said, "Oh you can go to America," so we like "Okay, let's do it! Okay." We made it. Come here, yeah, we were happy. Uh, yeah. Awesome. [laughs]

XL: So, uh, just to make it clear, uh, so you came to the refugee camp when you were ten? And spent one year there, and then you came back?

TA: I think like six, four years, something. Yeah.

XL: Ah six--oh okay.

TA: Like, five, six years. But I don't remember, yeah.

XL: And then--and then, like, you came back to home?

TA: I went back to Burma. Yeah, but Burma. Yeah.

XL: Yeah, and then when you were nineteen...

TA: When I--oh, eighteen, I came here eight--as eighteen. And I, here, I came here, and you cannot go to school. They said--the YMCA--they said "You--you're eighteen now. You turn eighteen, you cannot go to school anymore." Uh, high school. Only in, it happens only in Houston, you know, other states different. You can go to school, finish high school. Actually, when I come here I have a--"Okay, I'm gonna go to school. I'm gonna go to high school. Finish school." Come here, they say "You gotta go to--to work, pay the rent." You know? And then that's, like, okay, and then study GED... You know, if you're, like, I don't know for me--it depends on your environment too. The, the people around you. Good people or, like, you know, the people... they give you ideas, someone they don't... But here usually you come in, if you don't search, you, you find nothing, you know. You have to look for it, you know. You have to keep looking to be better, to appl--better opportunities. Probably at that time I didn't know. I just, you know, wait. You know, sit down, study for English more, and mathematics, for GED. I passed the test, yeah, I passed it, passed it, and then I go study for, uh, phlebotomist. Yeah.

XL: That's G-E-T?

TA: Uh, GED. For high school diplomacy, like, equiv--equivalency, yeah. I got married. I don't know, like, you know, so. [laughs] Mind's... not like, probably, not disciplined, that time. Yeah, great, you know, I'm happy, I have a daughter. She's beautiful. Yeah. I'm grateful for that. Uh huh. [laughs] Sorry, yeah, go ahead.

XL: Uh, so just focusing on your uh, your time during the refugee camp, like when you're at the refugee camp, uh, can you describe the environment here? Like--

TA: Environment, uh... We had to build--like for, for me, uh, for my mother, for--for--for environment, like, they have water, they put--uh, they dig, uh, there's a water, you know, a water well. Like a... uh--

XL: Yeah, a well.

TA: Um, my--yeah, a well. My environment's like a mountain, like, you know? But we live in the mountain, in the refugee camp. Has, like, many mountains, that they, they build the houses aside, you know. Like this--the mountain's like that, right [gestures a slope]? But you have to cut the--you cut down and you build a house. Oh, you have to, uh, put the, uh, what's it called, earth, make it flat, and you build a house there. There's many houses like that. That was incredible, like, to see those, like, beautiful view too. Uh, especially in the rainy season, it's beautiful. Like, people... uh, yeah. Like, like, uh, the environment is, I mean it's great. Like, mountain, houses, there's a sho--there's a market, a market, they usually some Thai people, they come to--they come and sell, you know, stuff. Vegetables, fishes, it's awesome--but yeah. And they have um... shop? Not shop but like, coffeeshop, yeah.

XL: And this--

TA: I just, like, I just know, like, I see in my mind, but how to express is different, it's a different world, you know? [laughter] Yeah. But, um, there's many houses, like, close to each other. It's very close. You have to, yeah. I experience that the--when they build a house, you have to dig the hole and all that, you know, it's great. It's kinda easy. But, uh--I also learned how to, uh, cut the bamboo. To build a house, you know, like you have to build a house, for the floor--yeah, you use the bamboo. You know? Cut, cut, cut it, like w--use the bamboo. All the houses made of bamboo. But, uh, some, some people, they have money, they buy custom and they build house, better. Yeah.

XL: Are they all Burmese?

TA: No, not Burmese, they're Karen.

XL: Oh, they're Karen.

TA: Karen, Muslim... yeah, Muslim. Karen, Muslim. I call Muslim because they, like, you know, many people. Karen people, uh, Arakan, Mon, I don't see Chin. Yeah. Mixed though. But more Karen people. Karen, like our tribe. That--that camp. In that camp. Uh huh.

TH: Do they, do they each have their own language?

TA: Huh?

TH: Do they each have their own language?

TA: Yeah, they use their own language. I don't speak Karen before! I'm Karen, right? I don't even learn--my mom is Karen, but in, in Burma, I mean, that area, like, we call like Karen people, like, "rebellion". Like, you know, we say if you're Karen you're rebellion. Because you fight against the government. So, you, you can't even say you're Karen. So, we don't--I never use Karen language in my life. Uh, before... I went to the camp, I start learning Karen. Like, my mom teach me, you know? Writing and, yeah, great, awesome! So, I can help these--uh, pa--the Karen people here, they, they, so I can talk to them. That's great for me, yeah.

AT: You mentioned earlier the Karen pe--uh, people experienced discrimination in Burma?

TA: In Burma, yes, uh huh.

AT: Um, what do you mean by discrimination exactly?

TA: Discrimination's like, for education. If you're Karen you cannot... easily be, uh, like, a doctor. You need to have that--they s--they call suppress you. What's it called? Suppress, they suppress you. Like, uh, yeah. Like, you--like, like, I need an ID, you say they has a, like, race, Karen, Mon. If you're Karen, you know, they usually--how

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to describe, like, discriminate, like, they don't really treat you right, like equally, like, you know? You feel like... my mom have that exp--but my mom is tough. She's like very tough. Determined. Because, yeah... they were--not together, she was not together with my b--my father for long time.

XL: So, were you considered, uh, by the people, Korean?

TA: Karen.

XL: At that, by that time? 'Cause your mom is Korean?

TA: Uh, my mom is Karen, yeah. Mhm.

XL: So, like, what is--is write on your ID?

TA: Karen. She's Karen... yeah.

XL: So, w--your dad is, um--

TA: My dad is Burmese, though. Yeah, he's Burmese. So, he has--yeah, yeah. He--he met my... sorry, yeah. He met--yeah. [laughs][drinks water]

TH: Is it hard for like Burmese and Karen people to get married?

TA: It's about love, I think, right? [laughs] When you're in love, you, you, yeah. My mom, like, told me about that story, like how they met, it's great, like. My father, uh, was arrested for, for detector... from Burmese regime, you know. So, my mother, like, you know, because, like, Karen--so they have their own army, right? My mom was... yeah, living in that Karen army base. My father, he's doing business, stuff, he came visit, they, they accuse him of, like, you know, he's a spy. Spy, spy, yeah. Spy from--yeah. So, they gonna kill him, like, they already dig the (?), you know, everything. They almost kill him. My mother talked to the general, you know? Like, she talked, like, very, like, rashly, like harshly. So, she sav--she saved my father and, that's how they met. Yeah. Yeah, great. [laughs] And then they divorce, oh my god, yeah. [laughs]

AT: Um, so, when you were young, were you growing up in a, um, Karen area, or in an area with mostly Burmese or was it mixed?

TA: Yeah, Burmese area. Because my father took me back to his mother. Yeah. And my, my mother was with him too, everybody, like, my brother, my sister, in Burmese zone. Like, like, most days my father... in Burma they have, like, states, you know, like, Karen state, Mon state, Chin, Kachin, uh, yeah, Arakan, all those states. I was in Mon state that--where they speak Bur--Burmese and Mon. It's peaceful, that, you know, there. But uh, yeah. If you Karen, it's different story, yeah. [laughs]

AT: Could you describe your childhood growing up in the, um, Burmese state?

TA: Burmese--Burma? Child... uh, it was fun! [laughs] Great! You can play, there's a lot of mountain, you can go to the... oh, you can go fishing, you can swim, there's a lot of things that, you know, to do, right. Beautiful. Was... My childhood, I was, I remember only six, seven, eight, nine, ten. It's Buddhist country, you know, Buddhist. Mo--wherever you look you see the pagoda, you see the temple, you see the monks. Very peaceful, you learn about Buddhist practice, you become peaceful person. Yeah, you know, if you can--but you don't--what's that... for me though, like, you know, I, I usually like to go temple. And, uh, they... yeah, my grandmother, she's a Buddhist. So, she teach me about, you know, be good, [laughs] don't lie, don't kill, stuff like that, um, you know. And, like to go to, like, usually like we have to cut the woods, you know. It's called--for fire, you know, for cooking. Yeah, usually I was like seven, and I, and I go to the forest, to the mountain, there's a mountain, there's a lot of trees, you cut them, you shed them, you know. You make a, a bundle, you carry them. I, I carry them too, at that time. Wow,

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it was great. Fun. And we catch fishes, it's like natural, you know. Burma is, is beautiful for that time, but now it's, I don't see many forests. They cut down all the trees, for fires, no good, right? Yeah, we gotta do better. Because it's rich country too. It's naturally, so they have resources. Uh, I had a great childhood... for me, yeah. [laughs] Play together, with the village. There's a lot of pe--like, children, in the village they, usually they gather together, you know, they play together. Like, was fun. You--you have the memory. But not like here, here you--you go to school and then you have to make, you have to go to p--like, particular place, you know, right? School, so you can get the right group. Yeah.

XL: So--

TH: Was it a--sorry--was it a small town?

TA: Uh, the, the village?

TH: Yeah.

TA: ...But now it's town, before, it's village.

TH: Okay.

TA: Yeah. It's, it's small. But for me, at that time, I was like, oh, huge. I can, I can run, I can go around, like, you know? Yeah. It's, it's kind of big, you know, they have the water, and also the paddy field, the river... huge. Sometimes you have to travel with a car, cow car, you know, cow--we travel like, we travel nighttime, sleep... it's big, yeah. [laughs] For me, yeah.

XL: So. what were your parents' occupations back--back then?

TA: Yeah, occupations... my father, he, he's a what's it called, he made knives? I don't know the name, how to say that in, in English, he made knives. Like with fire. Fo--forger? Forger? Yeah...

TH: Oh, oh, like a blacksmith?

TA: Blacksmith, yeah! [unintelligible] Awesome, yeah. My mother, my mother... you know, yeah at that time, yeah, my father he just goes wherever he wants. [laughs] Different, you know. My mother, she the one that really took--take care of us. She, she do all kinds of stuff, she go fishing, got fish and sell it, and she got dried fish from other city, and sell it in a local, you know, place. We call it [Burmese word] in Burmese, but you know, but, you know, great. She--occupation? A big word, but over there I don't know, like, it's kind of like you do whatever. Uh, sometimes you go to the forest, and pick the vegetables, and sell it in the morning. Yeah. Man, gotta do better here, so I can retire my mother. [all laugh] That's gotta be a goal, right? Man, she work hard all our life, for us. Gotta be grateful for--yeah. [laughs]

XL: So how many siblings do you have?

TA: Oh, I have three. My, my brother--my big brother, my younger sister. And me, in the middle. I'm grateful for that too.

XL: Oh, so who is, who was taking care of the kids, like, when you are in Bur--Burma?

TA: Oh yeah, my mother pu--uh, we were with a, a grandmother. My mother worked too, before, she worked in Thailand too, like, you know, as a dentist assistant, but with a, you know, [unintelligible] so, we were with uh, my, my, my, my father older sister. Yeah, she trained nurse (?), she's very disciplined, you know. If you go out late, they gonna give you punishment, like... really great time. [laughs] You gotta study, yeah.

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XL: Have you ever think about going to America?

TA: No.

XL: Like when you were a kid?

TA: No, never.

XL: You never think about living here? Like leaving--

TA: Live in the USA? No.

XL: Or like, leaving Burma?

TA: Yeah, I was thinking about, okay, you know, when you in Burma, you study, like, to be a doctor, something like that, like, it's like a stereotype, like, if you're a doctor, if you're a nurse, if you're engineer, you can be, you can be rich. You know? That's kind of like the mindset over there. Yeah, over there. You gotta--so that's why I studied hard, you know? ...Not really. [laughs] Different...yeah. But over there it's so important.

AT: Um, what were your expectations when you were coming here? What did you expect the US to be like?

TA: When I come here, I just, I say I'm gonna study! Study, I'll become somebody! You know? [sighs] That was my... you know, my dream. The dream's--not really dream, you just expecting, right? Expecting. Uh, to, to get a better life. Uh, I didn't really expect anything, like, you know, I just came, "Okay, this a new place, USA, exciting," you know? Like, you know if you've seen the movie, you know, it's beautiful, like Las Vegas, California, it's beautiful places. You come Houston, you see... it's alright, you know. I saw the downtown, great, you know. [all laugh] When I start coming I saw, uh, the Rice University. I went over there, I see, I see the classroom, they have like the, all the... and then they give food, so good. Like a wrap--like a wrapper, something. I remember that. That was a, the, the first two months, you know, YMCA, they took me to Rice University. And I was thinking, "Okay, man, I wish I could, could be here!" [laughs] One day. And I--I showed the price, oh my god. Too expensive, too, you gotta be very smart, to get those, you know, scholarships now, right? No hope for me. No. Well, you guys are very smart! [all laugh] You guys are rich, I mean, your parents are great, like, you know? They work hard, you know. I see that.

AT: Um, so the YMCA, is that, did you spend a lot of time there whenever you were first here? Um, in the US?

TA: Uh, I'm sorry?

AT: Uh, did you spend a lot of time at the YMCA whenever you were first coming here, to the US?

TA: The first time, YMCA. Question, your question--oh. Yeah, yeah, Y--but YMCA the agency that help us, resettle everything. Yeah, they resettle everything. And the, I also worked there too, before I, yeah. I worked there... and I quit. [laughs] Yeah. YMCA is a great place. Right? What time is it--ah, already! [all laugh]

TH: We have time!

TA: How many minutes already, there?

TH: Uh, only thirty-six... We have like, twenty, thirty minutes?

TA: Thirty minutes, okay! [all laugh] Am I, am I doing okay or what? [laughs]

XL: Yeah!

TH: You're good!

TA: My English alright, you got clear or yeah?

All: Yeah! [laughter]

TA: Oh wow, okay.

XL: So, uh, what's your childhood dream? What do you want to be?

TA: Childhood dream?

XL: Yeah.

TA: Before--my childhood dream, 'cause I was in Burma, right, I see Buddhists, right?

XL: Mhm.

TA: I wanna be a monk. [laughs] Like a monk, like, you know, there's no--you don't have to be wo--uh, be worrying about anything, like, no possessions, nothing. Like, you know, at that time, yeah. That's my dream, like I was--just become peaceful person, you know. Study about Buddhist practice. There's a lot of things to do, you know. I wanna do too, but uh you have family now, you gotta make sure they are... you gotta leave some legacy or something. You gotta do something. [laughs] I was--yeah.

XL: So, do you have any religion?

TA: Mm? I'm Buddhist.

XL: Are you Buddhist?

TA: Yeah, I'm Buddhist, yeah. But now when you're here--you change, you know. But I--I believe in Buddhism, you... you change mean like, not *very* religious anymore. Because, you came here, right, from Burma, Burma is, like, there's people around you, they are very religious, they always pray, you can hear the praying in the morning. But here you don't hear anything. But if you a, a Christian, maybe great, like, you go to church and you just, you study, you know. [someone accidentally comes in] But not really religious person though. But, uh, I teach my daughter how to pray, tell her about Buddhist... I don't want to, you know, I--you know, I just don't want her not to know about Buddhism, like, you know. So, yeah. Uh huh, I'm Buddhist.

XL: So, do you go to a temple here?

TA: Temple? Yeah. There's a--a monk just came in, he invite me, yeah. It's, like, one-hour drive. Far though, yeah. Temple, Thai temple, there are two Thai temples. We go to Thai temple sometimes, like thirty minutes. Go around, you know. I, I like reading, right, so I read, and yeah. You can... feel yourself calm. Like really Buddhism. [laughs] Stress, sometimes stress, you know, so yeah. It helps a lot. You believe in something, that's great. Yeah, right. You believe it too? You believe in God?

XL: No, I don't have any religions.

TA: Okay, great, yeah. You don't have religion, but--

XL: My grandpa is Buddhist.

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TA: Ah, Buddhist. But you—

XL: So is my dad.

TA:--you believe in like doing good for others, right?

XL: Yeah.

TA: Yeah, you do good to the others, so the good things will come back to you, you know. Oh, uh--it's like karma. Like karma, right? Something like that, yeah. [pause] Oh, no religion! Wow, interesting. [laughs]

AT: Um, are most, uh, Burmese people, uh, Buddhist? Or Karen people?

TA: Karen, they have like, but we have Karen and Pwo Karen. Pwo Karen are Buddhist. Karen, mostly Chr--Christian. Because they most--Karen--like, I say Karen but I'm Pwo Karen. Pwo Karen is, we usually live in the, the flat, you know, uh, place, like. The Karen, they usually live in the mountains. Like, Karens, so the, the British, you know, before, a hundred years ago, they came down, they do missionary. So, they be--they believe in Christian. So, Karen--uh, Burmese, the, uh, Chin, they believe in, like, the Jesus, you know. Many, whoever live in mountain, moun--moun, uh, mountain? Yeah, it's different. The Muslim, they have, uh, Muslim, they have Jew, they have, um, Buddhism, yeah. Christian, yeah, other. All mixed up.

XL: So, can you--can you tell me about your education?

TA: Yeah, my education is, is that, um... I studied--oh, over there, back in my country?

XL: Mhm.

TA: Yeah. From one grade to nine grade, and then my mom taught me nine grade--because in Burma only ten grades, you know? Ten grade--after ten grade your go to college. You go to university. Yeah, you gotta read all the books, and--by five books, all of them. By heart and--so hard, like yeah. And there, yeah only nine grade over there, and then, uh, in Thailand I finished high school, and here didn't finish high school, just finished GED. And, uh, I'm phlebotomist. I like to read, I'm learning, you never stop learning, you know right? If you stop learning, say you dead. Right? You never learn. I like to learn. Yeah.

XL: So, what was school like in Burma?

TA: School? Same, like, same like this, right? Like, high school, they have a building... yeah, school usually, the school outside of the, like, you know, the, uh, outside of the city, you know? Like, not outside of, like, it's far from your house. You gotta walk over there. What's your, your question, like, just to, what is school like--what, what do you mean like? The, the system?

XL: Just--no, it's like describing like how your school is like. So how long does it take to walk?

TA: For me to walk there, like thirty minutes. Yeah.

XL: So, you have to wake up really early?

TA: Uh, yeah, yeah, it's great, fun, you know in the morning, yeah, we got up early, and then there's a b--like a... a noodle shopper, she's making something, we go there, we get something. Like, you know? Yeah, get up early, there. Yeah. Here [laughs]. Burma, mhm.

XL: So how was your high--high school like in Thailand? Back in the refugee camp?

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TA: Refugee camp?

XL: Mhm.

TA: They speak Karen, you know, I don't speak Karen that time. Yeah so, I had to learn Karen, so didn't know that. But usually, they speak Burmese too. It's great, you know, because you learn English. Because over there they really, uh, focus on, like, learning English--English, you know. If you not good with English, no future over there. So, you have to, like, focus on English, and grammar, have people from Japan, they come and teach you, like, different class. Yeah, you keep learning, I don't--like you just do it, like, learning, learn, learn, learn.

XL: So--

TA: Yeah, yeah?

XL: So what language did they use to teach?

TA: They use Karen. And they use Bu--Burmese too, but usually there's a Karen student, you know? So how much--a few, only a few, like, students speak Burmese. So, they, they usually use Karen language most of the time. But they use Burmese too. Yeah.

AT: Did a lot of foreigners come to the camps to help teach?

TA: Yeah, they came volunteers. Some of the, yeah. They came volunteer, a lot, yeah. Like--they, they have schedule, like month, two month, three month, six months. They live in my--like, in the city, at Mae Sot and then they came into the camp and help teaching. It's great, you know, yeah. Someone, like, from India, Indian student, they speak different dialect, but we don't understand what--yeah, you know? [imitates fast speech]--fast, like, you know? Great, that was great experience, with a different nationality teachers. Yeah.

TH: Wait so, uh, what were you escaping from to go to the refugee camp?

TA: [drinks water] For me?

TH: Yeah.

TA: My mother escaped--[laughs] Escaping? Not really escaping for me though, for--for my family, it's different. Like, some other families, they escape from war because their, their people getting killed. Like, in a village, you live in a village but--where I live is not really like, what is it called... uh, it's a village but different, like, most states. Yeah. Yeah, usually--I, I should say, like, escaping from the war, you know? War is going on because they, they killing, you know, genocide.

TH: Ohh.

TA: It's kinda like overrule, like Karen tribe, like, you know, they try--it's, I think it's a grudge that they hold before, like. Before, the Karen people, they helped British to fight against the Japanese and government. You know, Burmese army was with Japanese, you know. And then the Karen people, they support the British army. Those--and then they say, "Karen, if you see Karen people, kill them, like a bamboo, you gotta kill them from the root." That kind of like, like a... yeah. Probably [unintelligible]... that was the worst toll in the history, yeah.

TH: So, it was--so is the Burmese, like, trying to kill the, uh, Karen people?

TA: They ki--they kill, they rape, they kill, they, yeah--lot of stuff. Before, yeah. The, the, there's a news, yeah, they have a like journal like... Before, I didn't know anything about it in Burma. It's... you just shut down, you don't know anything about what's going on, you know, to your people, you know. When I came out of the, uh, my

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country, and I stayed in Bur--in the camp, you get exposed to all the news, like, you know? Wow. There's, uh, ladies, killed, uh, a lot of things, yeah. Burning villages, houses, they--I took a picture, you see, wow. This is what, what's happening inside Burma. That was ten years ago though, you know? Ten years ago, but it's still, I think still happening, war. I don't really r--read news anymore. It's impacted you, there's no, no use for me right now, like, you know? Just exhausting, like your mind. [laughs] Yeah. Uh huh?

AT: So, while you were still living there, was it sort of hidden from you in a way, so that you didn't really know what was happening? Or was it just happening in a different part of a country--of the country?

TA: It's happening in the Karen state. Because I didn't live in Karen state. Yeah. That time, but now it's all settled down, you know, because it became democracy. They picked the democracy, now it's better. Now we can go back there. We can, like, okay, "come and kill me now," nobody gonna kill you! [laughs] Yeah, it's, like, great, you know.

XL: So, you came to the camp because of the war?

TA: The war, yeah, mainly war, war. Civil war, they call. They been fighting for sixty years. Over sixty years, yeah. [drinks water] It's no win. I think it's the new generation gotta do something, like, we gotta do something. [laughs] Yeah. Uh huh?

AT: So--sorry--

TA: Go ahead.

AT: Have you gone back since you left? [HOPE employee (Rodolfo – R) knocks on door]

TA: [whispers] How much time?

R: Sorry! Are you filming?

TH: Oh, yeah.

R: [whispers] I just wanted to have my lunch.

TA: Oh yeah, go ahead! [laughs] So Rodolfo, how are you?

R: Pretty good. [unintelligible chatter]

TA: Oh, this is a nice spot here. I usually didn't come here.

TH: It's so empty, just the refrigerator. [door closes]

TA: Yeah. So, your, your question, sorry?

AT: So, have you gone back to Burma since you left?

TA: Yeah. I ca--I went back last year.

AT: Oh really?

TA: Yeah. I g--yeah.

AT: Has a lot changed?

TA: Ah?

AT: Has a lot changed that you remember?

TA: Yeah, changes, the road change. But it's still like--yeah. Change... I don't really see a lot of change though, but mostly big change, same thing, like they just cut down more trees and, yeah. Changes--

XL: Did you go to--go back to home?

TA: Uh huh?

XL: Sorry, uh, just keep going--

TA: Oh, changes I mean like, about changes, there's many changes, like, you know? Like transportation is b--get better, um, before, there's not--no more stopping, like, you know, if you travel the, the police stopping you, you know, all the time. They check your ID, you know, who are you, they check all the time. Those--but now it's better. You can go travel easily. For me when I go back there--I went there... I don't want to tell you if it's all right, yeah! [laughs] There's many changes. But I probably--I didn't know a lot. But I see that there are changes about, political changes, yeah. Keep going, keep going, yeah! [laughs] Uh huh.

XL: So, did you go back to your, your c--like, your home?

TA: Mhm.

XL: Like, when you visited last year.

TA: Yeah, I, I... I went there, yeah, to the place where--yeah, I went back to the place, yeah.

XL: Where you lived?

TA: But I didn't go to that specific place, that where I *love*, you know, I didn't go there. 'Cause I got only one day. But the other place, I'd like be there for a few more days. I stay there for a month, yeah.

XL: Is there still, like, are there still relatives living in Burma?

TA: Yeah. Still living there. Yeah. Like, my, my father's sides, they are living there. Struggling, you know? Because they have to go work in the foreign--in a foreign country, because in Burma is not lot of opportunity you can earn to feed your family. So, they have to travel to other--like Thailand, Malaysia, gotta work, you know. This morning when it was raining I was thinking about that, like, "oh my god, I can do--" [laughs] If you, if you can change your... I don't know, I was thinking, like, you can make a difference, you know? Maybe like money issue, right, like here--the, the, we got to war over there because of the money issue. Yeah. Because you--you mentioned that about that side, so I was thinking. [laughs] Uh huh... So, good? You guys get, like, the right question?

XL: Wait, wait, we haven't finished yet.

TA: Okay, yeah, go ahead.

TH: I just have one more. Like, um, how did you meet your wife?

XL: Yeah.

TA: How I meet my wife, from the, from the Foxconn company.

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TH: Oh.

TA: She worked there, yeah, so I met her.

XL: Is she also Burmese?

TA: Yeah, she's Karen.

XL: She's Karen?

TH: Wow!

TA: She's purely Karen. She's like—

XL: Oh.

TA: --she can speak Thai, Pwo Karen, Thai--uh, yeah, Thai already--Burmese, yeah. Uh, and English.

XL: Where is she from?

TA: She from Burma. Yeah, same country. Yeah. We married young, not really good, you know? You, you marry at the right age. [laughs] Like, it's great though, yeah. It's, uh, it's, uh, fun. It's--not fun, it's great, like, you know. That you settle down, you have a responsibility, you get more mature, you know. Having--yeah. Yeah.

XL: So how did you, how did you meet? Uh, like, how did you meet each other?

TA: Huh? Yeah, the one--

XL: You just ran into each other?

TA: Actually, I took her to, to work, you know. You know, I took her to work together, like. So, we talked, got to know, she's--she's innocent, uh, she talked pure, like from your heart, okay she's a good person, and yeah. She's not, like, faking or whatever, like, you know? So great, yeah... yeah. So, it's like, maybe, this is for me, yeah. Married. [laughs]

XL: So--

TA: It's just once, that's it. I met her for six months and I get married with her.

XL: Wow. How old were you?

TA: Ah?

XL: How old were you when you guys--

TA: Oh, twenty. She was nineteen.

XL: Oh!

TA: Yeah.

XL: So, [Tha laughs] when did you have your daughter? [laughs]

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TA: Ah?

XL: When did you have your daughter?

TA: I think the middle of--like right now it's five years, right--think like, after a few years, later. Five years, now I'm 28... would be two, three years later. [sighs] [all laugh]

XL: So what language do you speak back home?

TA: Back home, Burmese.

XL: Burmese?

TA: I speak only one Bur--one language, Burmese. Yeah. I don't speak English, I don't--English, I don't, I'm not good at English, either. But writing, and I'm not good at writing. I got a book though. So, I just practice. Help pronunciation, just learn. Just, you know, learn, learn, and then... I'm not good at it yet, that's it, yeah. Still learning. English is a lot.

XL: Did you teach your daughter Burmese?

TA: Yeah, I teach my daughter, yeah, Burmese. Trying to! It's hard. Like this--like, you know, environment, only English, right? She like to speak English all the time, ah. Try to speak to her in Burmese, right? So important, you speak Chinese?

XL: Mhm.

TA: You speak Chinese too? Ah, Vietnamese.

AT: Mhm.

TA: Oh, you? Are you?

TH: I--I can understand Chinese.

XL: I speak Chinese.

TA: You speak Chinese, oh okay, great. Yeah, don't forget. Great. [laughs] Your language, yeah.

TH: Um, so, does she go to school?

TA: Who?

TH: Your daughter?

TA: My daughter?

TH: Yeah.

TA: Yeah, she's five years so she go to school. Now in summer school, at Salvation Army. The church, yeah. [laughs] I'm Buddhist, but she go to church.

TH: Ohh. [all laugh]

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TA: Yeah. Uh huh?

XL: So, um, do you, um... so, so is there any, um, language school for Burmese?

TA: Burmese school?

XL: Yeah, Burmese school in--in Houston?

TA: Burmese school, no, there's no Burmese school. I don't think so. Not in Houston, though. But other states, they usually have the... s--yeah, Burmese teachers, here too! Like even Burmese school, like by--by how like, like Burmese school--

XL: By language, like a language school?

TA: Oh, not yet. We trying to build one. Yeah like, like, like you know, I'm Society, for, like, uh, Buddhist Karen? So, we trying to, uh, have a class, you know, to teach our language. Yeah, you need volunteering... it's hard, like, you know? We need it, so we trying to. We, we doing it, but not happening yet. Yeah. But other, other tribes, they doing it, for Kachin tribe, they doing it already. Kachin. I'm not Kachin, I'm Karen, right? Kachin, they say, oh, they have their own, uh, church, there's a class for Burmese.Kachin language. Doing it--not for Burmese, K-Kachin language only, not, not Burmese. They don't like--yeah. Mhm?

XL: So, how's the relation between, like, different tribes, like Kachin and Burmese and, like, Karen?

TA: Yeah, Karen, Kachin--Kachin is more--I don't know, like, it's interesting! Like, Kachin is, they can--they live in a group, like, they always together, like. Karen is, like, different. Like, Karen--like, each other? Each other? Usually, like, not, not really close to, you know. But we talk, we say hi, you know, friends, you know we--we help when they need help, we, you know. But not, it's a different, but, uh, but their religion, they believe in Christian, so they have their own group, they go to the church, you know. So yeah. So, we--but we got along in the country. They okay. Only with the Burmese regime, because they are main power, you know. The, the main people who, who hold the power. You know, who, for the richer, richer, like, who got richer all the time, because they are Burmese. So, we fight to get the state. Like, Kachin, they, they are all fighting too. Right now still fighting. Uh, we all got along each other, you know, yeah. No problem.

TH: Okay, uh, I don't know how much time we have, but--

TA: Yeah, I know, time. Me too! [laughs]

TH: [laughs] just, like, squeeze in one more thing, like, uh, is it easy to keep, you know, like, Burmese traditions in America? Or, like, how much do you think you wanna take on American culture versus keeping Burmese culture?

TA: Culture, culture, culture is so important, you know, you gotta keep your culture. Yeah, we try to--but we always do the tradition, like Karen new year, like, as Buddhism we have--as a Karen they have their own, like, wrist-tying tradition too. We keep it. We trying to do it every year. It's easier--yeah, it's, it's not that easy though. You gotta collect the money, like, you know, from whoever Karen people who are... want to keep the traditional. Usually we have to, like, you know, pers--tell them, "Yeah, okay, this is for this," and, "We just need money, we just need a--association, we trying to build, not happening yet." But, uh, we only have organization though, you know? Yeah. We need organization, like Vietnamese community center, Chinese community center, you know? We trying to, we--we working on it. Yeah. It's hard though, you know? Yeah. Hard. Because they--is, is get exposed by, you know, the, the, the, the, the, the foreign, the Western st--style. You know? The way they dress, everything. You know, the way--it change. Over there we use the sarong, you know? It's like, if you sarong you can--if you go to Burma you will see all the people, they use sarong. Not, not, not this. But usually they use this only in the city. Yeah. But here, different. Change, lot of change. She change too, yeah.

XL: So what food do you cook, like, back to your home, with your wife?

TA: Over there?

XL: Yeah.

TA: Like, cooking?

XL: Like, cooking, what food do you cook?

TA: Rice, mainly. Main--mainly rice all the time. You know, every day, every mor--morning, evening, you know. But we use vegetables all the time, fish... yeah.

XL: So, like, Burmese style`?

TA: Expensive--pork, expensive. Beef, expensive. Very expensive, yeah, right now.

TH: Here, in Houston?

TA: Uh--here's okay, right? Here, you, you make one, you pay that--if you want to eat it.

TH: Yeah.

TA: Yeah. [laughs] But not ev--Burma... but the food is great though, like, generally tasty, I don't know, like re--really great, you know? You eat, everything tasty, great! [all laugh] Different from here. You always remember the, the food over there, you know? You can ask some people from Vietnam, you know, if they go back--if they came from Vietnam or China, different right? China, if you go, over there food is very fresh. Here, frozen food... yeah. It's different, everything is change--di--different, yeah.

XL: So, do you cook Burmese food now?

TA: Me? I'm learning. I, I don't wanna cook, I'm learning now. Because I have to take care of my daughter, learning. Yeah, I--I need patience. When you cook, you need patience. You know? Yeah, starting, like--you cook? You guys cook? You can cook?

TH: I have to now, 'cause I'm living alone.

TA: Oh, yeah?

TH: For the first time.

XL: I'm cooking--yeah, 'cause I'm living alone, so I'm cooking Chinese food for myself.

TA: Oh, you live alone?

XL: Yeah.

TA: Oh yes, how about for--okay great. Like, alone mean, like, you know, like, not with the parents, mother.

XL: Yeah, like, my, my, my family is back in China.

TA: Oh, back in China. Oh, okay great! Wow. I mean it's great--it's goo--it's good for you, you know. You can go

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on your own, you can be on your own. Wow.

XL: So, you said that you're--you, you are building the organization?

TA: I mean like I'm part of it, I'm not, I'm not the main person, I'm not--I'm part of it, I do the finance, like, stuff of it. [laughs] Like with the money, like checking... [laughs] Doing like sales, stuff like that, yeah.

XL: So how, how many people are, are there in that organization?

TA: Few, like twenty?

XL: Like--

TA: It's, it's hard to keep them, you know, you gotta call them, connect. them. It's so hard, yeah. Yeah, but great, yeah. Twenty, around twenty, yeah.

XL: Do you have, like, events, and just different stuff?

TA: Mhm. We have events, yeah. Yehuda--he's always there. Happy new year--he's, he's always over there. [laughter] He's like, Yehuda. Yeah. You get lot, like a lot of, like, you think you get the, like, answer, the, the right answer from me, or?

TH: Yeah!

TA: I'm not sure if I'm answering right, you know?

TH: No, all I need is, like, your, your life story.

XL: Yeah.

TA: Oh yeah? My lifestyle. Lifestyle, like, you know, here, in America, for me, I believe the health, your, you gotta take care of your health, I--I take care of my health. I just found out, like, this year--I just started, like, you know, taking care of my health because I see that there's a person, gotta do heart surgery, you know, problem. Eating foods, like, sugar, all the stuff, like, your health, uh, money. [laughs] Pay the right--pay bill on time, have a drink, try to find what you wanna do with your life, you know? It's so hard. [Yehuda (Y) opens the door] Yeah--I think we gotta go, huh? [unintelligible] It's time, right? [laughs]

Y: Yeah, because he needs to eat... he is starving.

TA: Yeah, no, actually over there... [unintelligible] [laughs] This is true, right? You gotta find out what you wanna do with your life. Have to looking for it.

1:01:07

[discussion about logistics and next interview]