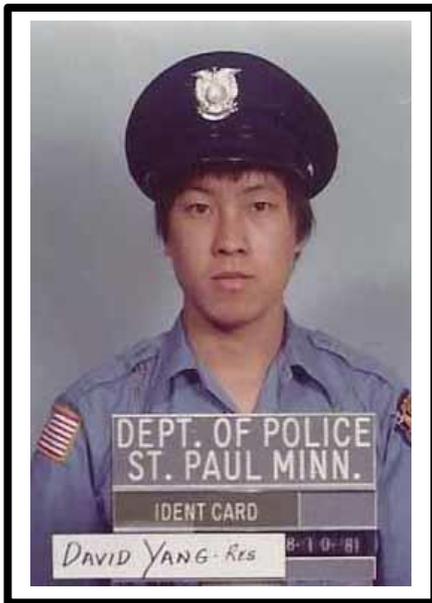


Transcript of Saint Paul Police Department Oral History interview with

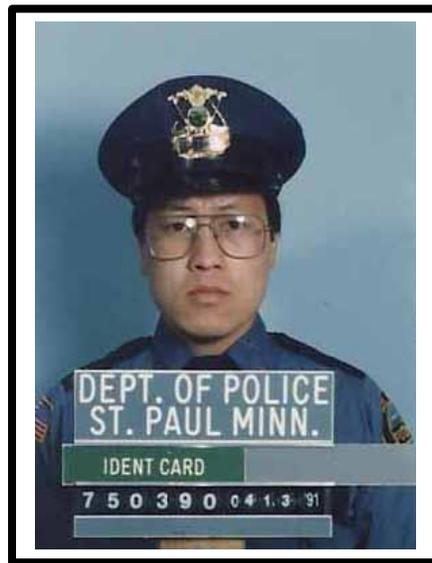
# Officer David Yang

Saint Paul Police Officer

1981 – 2014



1981  
Community Service Officer



1988  
Officer



2014  
Retired Officer

Interviewed on

April 30, 2014

by

Kate Cavett of HAND in HAND Productions

HAND in HAND's Office in Saint Paul, Minnesota

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2014

*This project has been made possible by the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund through the vote of Minnesotans on November 4, 2008. Administered by the Minnesota Historical Society.*

All pictures are from the Saint Paul Police Department collections.

## ORAL HISTORY

Oral History is the spoken word in print.

Oral histories are personal memories shared from the perspective of the narrator. By means of recorded interviews oral history documents collect spoken memories and personal commentaries of historical significance. These interviews are transcribed verbatim and minimally edited for accessibility. Greatest appreciation is gained when one can listen to an oral history aloud.

Oral histories do not follow the standard language usage of the written word. Transcribed interviews are not edited to meet traditional writing standards; they are edited only for clarity and understanding. The hope of oral history is to capture the flavor of the narrator's speech and convey the narrator's feelings through the timbre and tempo of speech patterns.

An oral history is more than a family tree with names of ancestors and their birth and death dates. Oral history is recorded personal memory, and that is its value. What it offers complements other forms of historical text, and does not always require historical corroboration. Oral history recognizes that memories often become polished as they sift through time, taking on new meanings and potentially reshaping the events they relate.

Memories shared in an oral history create a picture of the narrator's life — the culture, food, eccentricities, opinions, thoughts, idiosyncrasies, joys, sorrows, passions - the rich substance that gives color and texture to this individual life

Oral Historian Kate Cavett

HAND in HAND Productions  
Saint Paul, Minnesota  
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[www.oralhistorian.org](http://www.oralhistorian.org)

David Yang  
was appointed police community officer July 27, 1981;  
appointed police officer December 1, 1988;  
and retired May 30, 2014

DY: David Yang

KC: Kate Cavett

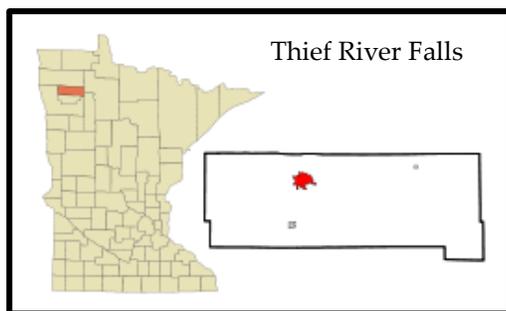
DY: David. My middle name is pronounced *Chiple*. The last name is Yang. I'm a Saint Paul Police Officer.

KC: How do you spell your middle name?

DY: T S W J J F W M.

KC: Tell me a little bit about your family's history. And you're a Hmong officer in Saint Paul, but I'm wondering if you were born in Minnesota.

DY: Well, I grew up in Laos. I was born in Laos. When I came to the United States, I was fifteen going on sixteen. And I came to the United States with my parents, three brothers, one sister. And once we got to the United States, couple of months after we arrived, my mom gave birth to twin sisters.



When we came, we were sponsored by Zion Lutheran Church<sup>1</sup> in Thief River Falls. We didn't know where that little city was in a refugee camp, but we were told that it was in Minnesota and it was very cold. And so we just didn't know how

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<sup>1</sup> **Zion Lutheran Church** is located at 505 Main Ave N, Thief River Falls, MN 56701. It was originally formed with sons and daughters of Norwegian immigrants along with a few Danes and Swedes. In 1988, it became part of the ELCA-- Evangelical Lutheran Church of America.

cold it was. And they also explain about snow and we had no concept of what snow was. And so they showed us James Bond movie with people skiing downhill. You see all the white stuff and they said, "That's snow." Still we have no idea what snow looks like or how cold it was, but they said, "It's very, very, very, very, very cold." That's how they described.

And so my family came to Thief River Falls, and we were sponsored by the church. They didn't have a place for us, so we stayed in the church library for about a month.



Zion Lutheran Church

I don't know if the pastor or the congregation ever asked for my parents approval before baptizing us as a Lutheran, but I was a Buddhist monk from time to time before coming to America, and my parents, they practiced the ancestral belief, and so it was quite different coming to the United States, and a couple of weeks after our arrival, we were baptized as Lutherans.

And so we continued to go to church, and we were in Thief River Falls for three, three-and-a-half years. For us kids it was okay, but for my parents, they were very lonely because there were no other Hmong families they could talk to. And so it was quite difficult for my parents, and we had some contact with people from the Twin Cities. A couple of Hmong caseworkers came up to see us up there, and they told us that there were Hmong people here in Saint Paul. And

so my dad and I, we came down. At that time the majority of Hmong people live right here at Liberty Plaza,<sup>2</sup> on Marshall there. And so we came down.

We met a handful of people and because we didn't have – at that time everybody was open, friendly. It doesn't matter where you came from. We didn't know each other, but people were very happy to see us, and we were happy to see them. And we were welcomed into the homes. I was the one that decided that Thief River Falls wasn't going to be my home. Okay? We were very concerned about what would happen if we continued to stay in Thief River Falls. Would my parent being old, be lonely?

And don't get me wrong, okay? We were very well received, and we were accepted as a family to the church. And my family even adopted a couple that we called Grandma and Grandpa. And we also adopted some uncles and aunts and some cousins up there. And we still even today maintain some contact with people we have met in 1976. That's when we came. But they're no longer with us. And so a lot of young people that I met in high school, they have moved away because of lack of job.

So about three-and-a-half years after we were up there, we were joined by two of my uncles from the refugee camps. So they came up to Thief River Falls and they also felt lonely up there, and knowing that there were Hmong people down here in the Twin Cities, I brought my uncles down here. They agree that we should move down here. We did move down here in probably late 1980. We

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<sup>2</sup> **Liberty Plaza** is located between Concordia, Western, Marshall, and Arundel in the Summit University neighborhood of Saint Paul. The property consists of 173 affordable rental housing units in fifteen buildings, including a 6,100 square foot community center building on a nine-acre site. The property was originally developed in 1968 by Liberty Plaza, Inc., a nonprofit controlled by the Dayton Avenue Presbyterian Church. A two-year multi-million dollar major renovation of the property was completed in 2003.

all came down. My dad thought that I was crazy coming down here. He wasn't sure how things were going to be like in a big city.

KC: You had graduated from high school?

DY: No. I graduated from Como.<sup>3</sup> I went down here for my senior year, but I did go to Lincoln High School up there. I went high school. I was placed in high school [in Thief River Falls] not because of my knowledge of the English language. I was placed there because of my age, so when you're sixteen, you're old enough to go to high school. So I started in freshman. So I did go to high school up there.

KC: When you came to America at fifteen years of age, had you been in school before?

DY: I went to school there [Laos] and I was fluent in French. I was in Laos where I was born. Then I was in a camp for less than a year in Thailand. So we are across the Mekong River. We could get to Thailand. Once we get to Thailand, then we were placed in the camp.

KC: When you went to school in Laos were you exposed to English at all?

DY: No. In order for somebody to take English, you have to pay a private lesson, because French was in that country for so long. Everything was based on a French system, so when you start going to school, you start learning French. You don't learn English until you get to college.

You know, Kate, I think the fascinating thing for me was I had a Webster Dictionary that was quite thick and my teacher said, "Anytime you don't know a word, you look it up." And I said, "Teacher, I don't know, every word that I see I don't know!" So what I did, I started studying the dictionary. I started memorizing the dictionary. Because of that, I became a very good speller in

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<sup>3</sup> **Como High School** is located at 740 Rose Ave W, St Paul, MN 55117.

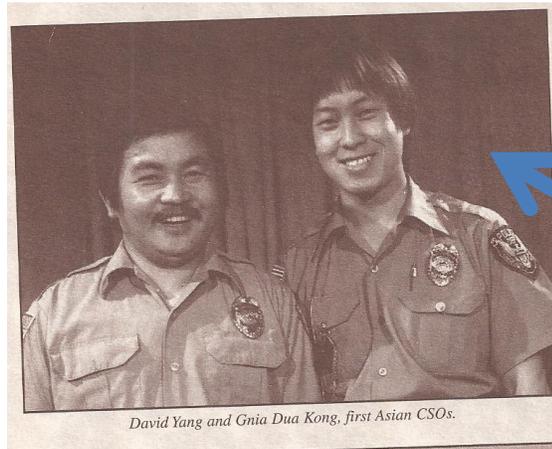
English because I study. Not that I study every word in the dictionary, but I chose those that I would commonly use. And so I began studying the dictionary.

In 1980, my family came down and I graduated from high school. After high school, I wasn't sure what I wanted to do. So I went to printing graphic training and I was going to be like a typesetter. At that same time, I took the test for the police department as a Community Service Officer. So as I graduated from my training in photo typesetting and word processing, I was offered a job with Minnesota Mutual Insurance as a typesetter. At that same time, I was offered the opportunity with the police department. I felt that, "What's a better way to learn the English language? What's a better way to get to know the American people? What's a better way to help my people?"

But in my quest to become a police officer, my parents were against it, because being a police officer back in my homeland wasn't a very respectable profession. Okay. They didn't make a good living. And of course there were corruptions. My parents, my relatives said, "You know, David, you are bright. You're intelligent. You could do other things besides being a police officer. We encourage you to go do something else. Being a police officer is not an honorable profession and people are going to hate you. You're not going to make friends. We have a lot of faith in you that you can lead our family here in the United States, so we don't want you to be a police officer."

I had a real tough decision to make and I felt that, you know, I was still struggling with the English language at that time. I was still struggling with the culture. And I was struggling with educating my people about how to survive in the United States, especially here in Saint Paul. So I told my wife—we were newlywed—I got married in 1981 after I graduate from high school. So I told her, "You know? I'm going to go join the police department." So I declined the job offer with Minnesota Mutual.

I joined the police department as a Community Service Officer. I was the first Hmong person ever to join the Saint Paul Police Department. So about a week later, I had a Hmong colleague that also joined me. He was much older. He had served in the service and he had studied English.



*David Yang and Gnia Dua Kong, first Asian CSOs.*

We decided to join the police department and we decided to go to school. And as I continued to go to school to become a police officer, usually it would take like four years. It took us six-and-a-half years, okay. Because we were going back and forth and working full time and going to school part time and then doing all the things with our community life. I'm thankful to the police department and the city that they were willing to give us the extra time for us to complete our education. Otherwise, there as a Community Service Officer, you're only given four years. And I think that because we didn't finish our education in time or because there wasn't a test at that time, supposedly after four years you're supposed to finish your education. Then you're supposed to take the civil service exam to be a police officer.

So when he and I took the test, there were other people that took the test too. And there were people that served in the service [with veterans'

preference<sup>4</sup>]. There were people that were probably more educated than us. Kate, I'm not sure if we were chosen because of our look or if we did better on the test. I have no idea. But when the job was offered, many people were disappointed I was so young, that some people more mature should have gotten the position. I didn't listen to the rumors. I said, "You know, I may be young, but I have a lot of energy, and I'm going to go out there and really make a difference."

And so I continued to go to college and got my law enforcement [Bachelor of Arts] degree, and I also took my U.S. citizen test and passed that test. In order to be a police officer, I need to be a U.S. Citizen. So I became a U.S. citizen. I also passed my P.O.S.T.<sup>5</sup> exam to be police officer. So I took the civil service exam to become a police officer and I passed.

So I must say that when I joined the police department there were so many veterans, seasoned officers. I mean, from time to time, because I was brand new to the country, I couldn't take some of the jokes. I took some of the jokes serious. It wasn't until a few months later that – yeah, if they didn't like you, they wouldn't joke about you. And so they would play jokes that I felt very offended.

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<sup>4</sup> **Veterans' Preference.** Since the time of the Civil War, veterans of the Armed Forces have been given some degree of preference in appointments to government jobs, in recognition of their sacrifice. Veterans' preference recognizes the economic loss suffered by citizens who have served their country in uniform, and restores veterans to a favorable competitive position for government employment. Veterans' preference laws have changed over the years. After World War II, Minnesota had the strongest veterans' preference law in the USA, with absolute preference; no non-veteran could be appointed to a first class city—Duluth, Minneapolis or Saint Paul. In the early 1970s veteran's preference laws changed relating to promotions, no longer discriminating against females, who could not join the military at the time.

<sup>5</sup> The Minnesota legislature created the Minnesota Peace Officer Training Board (MPOTB) in 1967 to regulate the practice of law enforcement. In 1977, several legislative amendments were added to create Minnesota Board of **Peace Officer Standards and Training (P.O.S.T. Board)** and the first law enforcement occupational licensing system in the USA. This system established law enforcement licensing and training requirements and set standards for law enforcement agencies and officers. Minnesota officers are required to have a two year degree and 48 continuing education credits every three years.

A few months after I joined the P.D., I realized that, hey, this is the culture of the police department. They took me under their wings. Officer Dick Martin,<sup>6</sup> Officer Leo Hurley,<sup>7</sup> Officer Fred Haff,<sup>8</sup> Officer Sid Hansen.<sup>9</sup> These are seasoned officers. I think they were probably in their late fifties, sixties. They took me under their wings and they taught me about the police culture. They helped me along. They encouraged me.

So when I passed the police test and started going to the police academy, I didn't have as many problem.



But once I got into the FTO, the Field Training part – I was brought up in a culture that we were taught to be somewhat passively polite to people, to show

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<sup>6</sup> **Richard J. Martin** was appointed police officer March 4, 1957 and retired September 6, 1991.

<sup>7</sup> **Leo T. Hurley** was appointed police officer March 4, 1957 and retired September 26, 1984.

<sup>8</sup> **Fred Lowell Haff** was appointed police officer November 2, 1964 and retired August 16, 1985.

<sup>9</sup> **Sidney Hansen** was appointed police officer July 25, 1949; deceased February 20, 1986.

respect. And I would say the toughest thing for me once I hit the street was to understand the English slang, to start being assertive, to start being aggressive. And I had a really hard time being very assertive, being very aggressive when I have to. And I was just being too nice. So one of my call going to – at that time we called this area The Hill.<sup>10</sup>

KC: It still is called The Hill.

DY: [laughs] I went to a call – not to be prejudiced or anything, but I went to a call involving a family of African-American. I'd never heard – I'd never been in a situation where so many people yelling, screaming, and profanity. Every word is F this and F that. After five minutes I turn around and I told my FTO—[Field Training Officer], I said, "I don't know if I have enough to write my report. I don't know what's being said. I can't comprehend everything here. All I hear is almost every word is F this and F that." He said, "You know, get used to it, because you are working up here on The Hill." [laughs]

So I learned real quick. The first time that I swear as a police officer, I felt very uncomfortable. Of course, during the academy, they taught us to be polite and escalate as a situation goes on. There was a call that I went to and I was being nice, being polite. I didn't get my message across. Nobody was listening to me. And I had heard other officers use some terminologies that I thought I would never use. I thought I joined the police department to learn proper English. [laughs] And so it was the first time, excuse the language, but it was the first time

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<sup>10</sup> **Cathedral Hill neighborhood** extends roughly from the John Ireland west to Lexington, between I-94 [Old Rondo] to Summit Avenue. It encompasses what remains of the "Rondo Neighborhood" (Rice/John Ireland to Marshall, to Lexington, to University) - a diverse, but predominately Black neighborhood after World War II.

that I said, "Hey, asshole, get off the F couch and listen to me. I'm in charge." Oh! Got a lot of stuff off my chest. [both laugh] I got the attention.

KC: He got off the couch and listened?

DY: He got off the couch and listen and I said, "Wow, it worked, but it's something I better not use every time." [laughs]

It was after that I continued to work on my language and being assertive and being aggressive with people when I need to. Because I was the Lone Ranger<sup>11</sup> at that time, working up in this area, I've made some arrests involving Hmong people that are traffic warrants, didn't pay for a citation, or miss a court date and stuff like that. And I started arresting a couple of people here and there for that and people didn't understand that, "Hey, I didn't do anything wrong. Why would you arrest me?" And I would explain that, "There's a warrant – a traffic warrant – for your arrest. I have to arrest you."

As soon as I brought those people downtown, the clan leaders would call me – would call 911 into the Comm Center [Communication Center] and they would call me up and say, "We just got a 911 call from so-and-so. They need to talk to you about the arrest that you just made." And I called them back and they say, "Are you a Hmong? Then you should look the other way. You shouldn't arrest your own people." And I got, I'd say, a lot of shit from the community. So I was getting a lot of pressure from the community, a lot of pressure from my parents. Plus, I was facing a lot of stress under FTO, because every day I'd come to work and I was expected to perform.

KC: Who were your FTOs?

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<sup>11</sup> The **Lone Ranger** is a fictional masked former Texas Ranger who fights injustice in the American Old West with his Native American friend, Tonto. The character has become an enduring icon of American culture.

DY: Well, I had time Tim McCarty.<sup>12</sup> I had Steve Johnson.<sup>13</sup> I had Timm Gilkson<sup>14</sup>— [we called him] “Joe Blaze”, Butch Swintek.<sup>15</sup> Those great guys, okay? And they did their job. They did what they need to do teach me to be an effective police officer, but I was facing so much stress at work, from the community, from my family that I decided I was going to quit. And I did.

I submitted my resignation to Chief McCutcheon<sup>16</sup> at that time and I was ready to leave. I was ready to join the water department as a meter reader. Quit my job as a police officer to go be a meter reader. I said, “There’s so much stress about this job. I don’t want to deal with this anymore.” So I got to give a lot of credit to Chief Finney.<sup>17</sup> At this time, I think he was a captain in charge of a training unit. When he heard that I was quitting, he talked to me and said, “You know, David, I know that you submitted your paper to the chief’s office. I understand that you may be



Wm Corky Finney  
1984

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<sup>12</sup> **Timothy McCarty** was appointed police officer December 27, 1986; promoted to sergeant August 17, 1996.

<sup>13</sup> **Stephen Joseph Johnson** was appointed police officer March 13, 1978; promoted to sergeant February 3, 2001; and retired April 25, 2008.

<sup>14</sup> **Timm Ray Gilkson** was appointed police officer July 11, 1977 and retired October 12, 2001.

<sup>15</sup> **Howard “Butch” Joseph Swintek** was appointed police officer September 8, 1975 and retired November 30, 2002.

<sup>16</sup> **William Wallace McCutcheon** served the Saint Paul Park Police 1948 to 1954; appointed patrolman January 4, 1954; promoted to sergeant August 22, 1960; lieutenant December 12, 1965; captain June 20, 1969; deputy chief February 4, 1972; chief April 1, 1980; and retired July 15, 1992.

<sup>17</sup> **William “Corky” Kelso Finney** was appointed patrolman January 4, 1971; promoted to sergeant April 1 1978; the first Black male promoted to lieutenant March 8, 1982; captain February 23, 1987; and Saint Paul’s first Black chief July 17, 1992. He retired June 30, 2004.

under a lot of pressure." But he must have saw something in me that he decided to intervene.

He said, "I'm willing to go to Chief McCutcheon and withdraw your paper and I want you to continue. I don't want you to quit. You're so close to finishing your FTO. I want you to continue." He talked to me and he said, "You know, you can do great things for your people and you can be the role model for your people. You can be a role model for the community. Don't quit. We invested time in you. We have faith in you." So, I decided to take his advice. If I didn't take Chief Finney's advice, I wouldn't be here today. I'd be crawling under somebody's basement trying to read meters. [laughs] I don't know how that would turn out.

KC: You're not going to heal people that way. Police officers have the opportunity to heal people.

DY: So once I made the decision that, okay, it doesn't matter how tough it is, I don't have to justify my actions to anybody, I just have to justify the action to myself, that I'm doing good for the community, it doesn't matter what people are saying or telling me as long as I know I'm doing something morally, ethically correct. I'm doing something that will benefit people in the community. I am doing my job.

And, I think, once I made the decision, I became a mature person, because so many time when I made arrests, people that I arrested and put in my backseat, they would tell me to go back to Vietnam. They didn't know where I came from. They didn't know I was Hmong. But I looked Asian so they assumed I was Vietnamese. So they told me, "Hey, go back to Vietnam. You don't pay no taxes here. You're working as a cop, but you don't pay no taxes. You get preferential treatment. We don't want you here. We don't want your kind here." These are the things that I get back from people, okay?

And then finally I got fed up, and one day I told one of my suspects in my backseat, I said, "You don't even know where I came from. If you're better than me, you'd be up here driving and I'll be sitting back there, but you are back there handcuffed, so shut up. I'm doing my job." You know, sometimes I got to get things off my chest because you can only take it from so many people, so many times. And I say, "You know, my water's boiling. I'm not going to punch you, but I'm going to tell you what I feel." [chuckles]

Every job that I went to, that I got assigned, I felt that I didn't want my fellow officers to think that I got that job, I got that assignment, because of preferential treatment, because I was put in there because they needed a minority. So I tried to prove to people that, "Hey, I do belong in this unit. I do belong in this assignment. I can excel as well as any officers, and I don't need to prove it to anybody, but I need to prove it to myself." And yes, every unit that I went to, I excel. I did well and I was proud of the things that I've done.

Looking back, when I was a rookie, I made the right decision to join the police department. I made a right decision to listen to Chief Finney's advice. And I made the right decision by listening to myself. And I did well over the years. I know that I made a lot of sacrifices as a police officer. There are times that I would put the police department first, put my family last. I felt good about doing it, and I have been with the city for thirty-four years. I'm retiring. I'm happy that I made the decision to become a police officer, and if I have to do it all over again, I'd be a police officer again. But I'm not young. I can't do it anymore. Okay? All right, go ahead. Ask questions.

KC: Do you remember the time that you really felt comfortable in your skin as a police officer? You felt the assertiveness and you felt you had –

DY: It took me five years, okay? Four to five years before I felt comfortable working on the street. Before I felt comfortable going into any situation. I used to look at

my size and say, "How am I going to handle someone who is 6' 5", 300 pounds? I'm a soaking wet 5' 5", 120 pounds. How am I going to handle those people?" And that was my initial impression when I first joined the police department. But as I worked in the job, I realized I wasn't alone. I had fellow officers out there. I had stuff around my belt that I could use. I had to use my mouth talking to people.

I have to communicate to people more than other people who are physically able because of my size. I have to talk to people. I cannot just go and physically manhandle somebody unless I really have to. And so I learned to talk to people. I learned to listen to people. And so probably one of the examples, I went to a call – a suicidal call – one time. And I took the time to talk to this person as I transported that person to Region Hospital for evaluation. I spent the time talking to him trying to convince him that life was worth living, okay? And killing oneself is not worth it and that I would continue to talk to him. I would visit him when I had the time.

Well, you know, a couple of months later I went to a call. I went to a loud party call and there was some altercation and the next thing I knew, he was the one that was peeling people off my back. That gentleman that was going to commit suicide and I spent time talking to him, I said, "Wow! I didn't realize he was here. I didn't see him here, but he was the one that was pulling people off my back."

KC: What nationality was he?

DY: Caucasian.

I felt very comfortable working with gang members, because I know they are dangerous, but I said, "I'm not picking on these people. I'm out there talking to them. And I'm out there arresting them because they did something wrong." And each time that I arrest these people, not that I justify my action, but I would

tell them, "Hey, what you did is not right. What you did was wrong. You have the opportunity to change yourself." And when I talked to many of the gang members who were Hmong at that time I said, "You know, you are wasting an opportunity that our parents would do anything to get to America. And you have a free ticket to get to America, so you should go get the best education you can. You should go get the best job that you can. Many of you came here when you're much younger. Many of you were born here. If I could come here at age sixteen and start in high school when I was sixteen, and join the police department and working as a cop, then you should be better than me." And so I tried to talk to people so I don't worry about people jumping on my back. I say, "You know, if you're going to jump on my back it's not because of something I did to you." And so I learned a lot. I matured a lot with the job as a police officer. I think I grew up to be a better person as I go on with the job.

KC: When you're at a call with the suicidal man or you're at some kind of medical emergency and you're also trained as a shaman,<sup>18</sup> do you bring in that part of yourself as well?

DY: I don't let people know that I'm a shaman. I just apply whatever's appropriate to the situation to help resolve the situation, but it does come in handy as a shaman that I understand how people feel. As a shaman, I understand sometime what's a cause of a situation. The cause of a situation may be spiritually, but I never go out of my way and tell somebody, "Something's wrong with you spiritually," because I understand that this culture is hard for people to accept. But if I could

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<sup>18</sup> A shaman is a person regarded as having access to, and influence in, the world of benevolent and malevolent spirits, who may enter into a trance state during a ritual, and practices divination ("to foresee, to be inspired by a god) and healing.-Wikipedia

talk to somebody and offer some support, I'm not telling that I'm giving you some spiritual advice, but I just go ahead and apply in a common sense way.

It does help me a great deal having that extra knowledge, that gift, and also having the opportunity to grow up in a different environment. I came from an environment that many people here would never have the opportunity to grow up in. I was able to share with many of them my life experience growing up overseas. When I talk to people here, it doesn't matter if they're Native American, they African-American, Caucasian, or Asian, I try to give them a pretty good perspective of life – what kind of suffering other people have to go through in Third World countries and how good they have it here. And not to waste the opportunity.

When I was on the street, I enjoy talking to people. I enjoy meeting people, so I don't spend as much time harassing people. That's part of my job, but I spend time stop, talk to people. Probably the main difference is once we went into public housing I was working with the ACOP [A Community Outreach Program]. We went into public housing at that time. Public housing in Saint Paul were heavily populated by Southeast Asian people, mostly Hmong. And when they see police officers, they see this parked car, they would turn and go the other way. It took about a year for us to really initiate a contact with them and say, "You know, we are here. We're your friends. We're here to serve. We're here to protect. We're not here to harass you. We're not here to hurt you. We are here. You must understand that you pay our salary and we're here to help you."



**Mt. Airy Family Development**

includes 298 townhouses and 153 units in a 10 floor hi-rise that was built in 1959 and remodeled in 1985.

Located north of the Capitol, east of I-35E with streets that includes Arch, Mt. Airy, L'Orient, Jackson, Linden and Wales.



**McDonough Housing Project,** with 580 units, was built in 1950 – 1952 between Wheelock Parkway, Arlington Avenue, Jackson Street and L'Orient Street.

These public low-income family housing projects are run by the Public Housing Agency of the City of Saint Paul.

We started educating people, and pretty soon, the Hmong people preferred to talk to an officer riding a squad car with an acronym ACOP rather than a regular squad. They'd say, "I want to see an ACOP officer." I think over the years, even today, ACOPs still exist doing a great deal, and they provide a great service to the citizens that live in public housing.

I think we have come a long way since the 1980s. We have seen a lot. We have seen growth. We have seen negative and positive stuff in the community. I'd say I'm proud to be a liaison between Asian community and the police department, able to help educate the Southeast Asian people and also able to help educate the law enforcement community, bridge the two together. And probably for ten years after I joined the police department, that was one of my responsibilities, to help bridge the gap. So I would conduct workshops. I would do trainings. I'd talk to every police academy so that the recruits understand how

to work with the Southeast Asian population. I try to do it as best I could as a police officer with a special knowledge.

KC: Did you ever get resistance push-back from some officers that they didn't want to learn about the Hmong community?

DY: No. Even if that was the case, I never felt it. I was never confronted. I was never told of any such a resistance.

KC: You've been in the Background Unit for five years now? You do background research for potential new officers.

DY: Yes. Yes.

KC: And you've been there before. Do you use these [shaman] gifts as you do looking at who are going to be—

DY: I don't use the spiritual gift to choose people, because we have a set criteria that people must meet. And these criterias are standard. So there's no way I could use a spiritual gift to influence anything.

KC: You don't have the ability to recognize that someone would be good or someone would be bad?

DY: Yes, but I cannot reject somebody based on that, because standard is set.

KC: Have you ever had to let somebody in when you knew that it wasn't a good thing?

DY: No, but the Chief has overridden my decision. [laughs] Go against my recommendation. But as background researchers, I have a pretty good feel about a certain candidate and once the – because I know the candidate better than anybody at the police department. I spent four months, five months doing research, doing follow-ups, talking to people just to learn about this person. So who knows this person better than I do, other than his own family? The police department have to rely on us as background researchers. Sometime the chief will do things according to his gut feeling. "I think this gentleman, this young

lady, deserves a chance." So the chief will override. Does the chief always make the right decision? Always make the smartest move to choose somebody? No. Is he always wrong? No. [Kate laughs] So there's a risk there. But when you try to tell the chief that, "Okay, you can override my recommendation, but I think these are some of the things that you will see starting in the academy, that you will see starting in the FTO, that you will see, once this person hit the street." And then, what is recommended to the chief will also be confirmed by the psychologist, Dr. Champion<sup>19</sup> from Illinois.

KC: Does he come in and then meet with the people?

DY: Yep, they come in. They spend three or four days in town, meet with the people. And so when Dr. Champion's crew confirms my recommendation, the chief will sometime then say, "Well, okay. I will then listen to Dr. Champion." Because if he doesn't and there's a lawsuit down the road, guess what? The attorney is going to come back and say, "You went against your background researcher's recommendation. You went against Dr. Champion's recommendation."



Dr. Michael  
Champion

KC: How long do you spend researching somebody? Looking at their background?

DY: We have four months to do it, but we're not just doing one person. Each background researcher during that four months' time will have an average of twenty to thirty candidates that we are looking at. So some we have to spend more time. It depends on what we are able to uncover. And there are some that are pretty clean and we don't have to spend as much time. The time that is spent on each individual candidate is not the same. It's all different. I may spend more

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<sup>19</sup> **Michael Champion** of Champion, Barrow, and Associates of Champaign, IL, provides psychological services to police and fire departments

time with a certain individual than the next one, I may not have to spend as much time because there's not much I can find.

KC: You're talking to other people?

DY: Oh yeah, we look at everything. Yeah, we talk to all the previous employers, teachers, friends, anyone who has any knowledge. We go back and we dig and dig and dig and dig and dig until we can't turn rocks anymore.

KC: What do you like about working backgrounds?

DY: I think that we are really making a difference there. I'm able to help the police department hire quality people. Maybe not the best people in the State of Minnesota, or the best people in the country, but from the list that is given to me – the number of candidates that are given to me to do background – I'm able to give the best one to the chief to make a final decision on. Let's say I have thirty people. I would give the chief my top fifteen people that the chief will make decision on. And so of the top fifteen, are they all perfect? No. But these are the top fifteen. They're better than all the rest. They meet the standards. They meet criteria. Many of the people that don't make that list are either rejected or there is something in the background that we don't want to hire them. Or other departments have looked at those people and don't want to hire them.

KC: Tell me a story about something that surprised you in doing a background check.

DY: Many people tell the truth. And many people will lie like hell. [laughs]

KC: Really?

DY: Because a lot of people, I don't want to give a specific one, but I just want to give you a general. Many people think that we may not be able to find stuff when they're kids, or we may not be able to find secret stuff that they don't think exists, but between the computer technology and between people that we meet, it's amazing how we find stuff. Some individual may give you only a certain address and don't want to give you others. And computers – we can track every

addresses that person ever lived or had a driver's license registered to or used as an employment, and we find out and we're going to talk to people. We find stuff.

When I get through, there are some things that sometimes we don't find every needle in a stack either, but we do our very best. I think that all of our background investigators are great people. They're doing the best they can to help the police department.

As a background investigator, that's my last assignment with the police department. I helped make the unit better than I found it. Once I got there, I help revise the forms. I looked at the statutes, made sure the statutes are up to date. So we did a lot to help the unit and we helped the unit – another background researcher who works on the manual for police officers and I worked on a manual for officer new hires. I helped update all the forms. I did all the research to make sure that all the statutes are up to date. And so right now, we are finally getting a final version of the manual that we're going to use to select the police officers. So I'm leaving that place happy that I made a difference and I left my mark there.

KC: If you came here at fifteen, you had to teach yourself English. You had help, but you've learned English and you've gotten to the point of being able to write technical government manuals.

DY: Yes. [laughs]

KC: I acknowledge that huge amount of work and the intelligence that you would have to bring to be able to do that. Not everyone would be able to do that. Not everyone can do that.

DY: Well, I think as slowly as I progressed through my job at the police department working as a patrol officer, eventually to the chief's office as inspectors up there, I've seen a lot. And working up in the chief's office, I was able to see a lot of writing, to see a lot of things of how the chief's office functions—administered

throughout the police department. So I've seen a lot working my way up there. Not being a chief, but working up in the chief's office.

KC: Before you were in Backgrounds, you were in Inspections, which is administration to the chief's office?

DY: Yep, yeah. Inspection is just part of the chief's office.

KC: What do you do in Inspections?

DY: Well, we are responsible to make sure that people [employees] follow department rules and policies. We are responsible for evidence destructions. We are responsible for providing transportation to the mayor. We are responsible for advising the mayor and the city council about activities that happen at the police department. We were responsible for helping the chief in his daily activities up there. So we were really the chief's front line people.

As inspectors, we would inspect every unit to make sure the unit functions like the way it's supposed to, make sure that the unit followed department rules and policies, and where they find deficiencies, we'll make recommendation to the chief. And the chief will meet with the unit commander and talk about the recommendation, talk about findings. Inspectors are not very popular. [Kate laughs] We're not. We're not popular because wherever we go, we check off thirty sites. We will check and stuff and make sure people do what they're supposed to and make sure they wear the hat and wear the proper uniform, and so people look at us as we are the enforcer for the chief. And so whenever the inspector comes into the room, everybody is quiet down. Shhhh. No joking.

KC: How many inspectors were there at that time?

DY: We usually have three inspectors working up in the chief's office. [John Harrington<sup>20</sup> was chief] Kathy [Wuorinen]<sup>21</sup> was John's XO [Executive Officer].

KC: Is the XO over the inspectors?

DY: Yes.

KC: Okay. Who was your XO that you worked with?

DY: Kathy, David Korus.<sup>22</sup> Those two. Kathy was there for a short time. And then David was there. And then when I was moved down to Background Unit, I was supposed to do recruitment for the police department, which I've done for many years. But once I got down there, I was assigned as a background researcher. I helped out with the background and also, from time to time, would go out and do recruitment for the police department.

KC: Who's the commander over at Backgrounds?

DY: It's the commander of the Training Unit, so we had Mary Nash.<sup>23</sup> Now we have Julie Maidment.<sup>24</sup> I don't know if you know Mary. Mary's –

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<sup>20</sup> **John Mark Harrington** was appointed police officer July 11, 1977; promoted to sergeant September 7, 1983; acting lieutenant January 4, 1997; lieutenant November 1, 1997; title changed to commander January 1, 2000; senior commander July 1, 2000; assistant chief May 8, 2004; chief July 1, 2004; and retired June 14, 2010. Elected to the Minnesota State Senate from Saint Paul 2010-2012. Appointed Chief of the Metro Transit Police September 4, 2012.

<sup>21</sup> **Kathleen Ann Wuorinen** was appointed police officer September 19, 1988; promoted to sergeant October 7, 1995; commander November 18, 2006; assistant chief July 3, 2010.

<sup>22</sup> **David James Korus** was appointed police officer April 2, 1990; promoted to sergeant April 27, 1996; commander; and retired May 31, 2014.

<sup>23</sup> **Mary Nash** was appointed police officer September 18, 1989; promoted to sergeant September 9, 2000; commander August 22, 2010.

<sup>24</sup> **Julie Marie Maidment** was appointed police officer October 6, 1997; promoted to sergeant November 10, 2007; laid off November 30, 2007; voluntary demotion December 1, 2007; reinstated sergeant April 19, 2008; promoted commander November 16, 2013.



Officer Yang  
1999

KC: I know Mary. Of all of the assignments you've had, which one have you enjoyed the most and which one have you felt you made the biggest difference?

DY: I would say that I enjoy being hostage negotiator and also a canine handler. Probably more as a canine handler, because there's so many challenges. I went into the Canine Unit and never had a dog, ever, in my family. The first time that I brought my dog home, my family and the kids all ran. [Kate laughs] I had a big dog, so they used to call me that little cop with the big dog.

KC: What was your dog's name?

DY: Hercules.

KC: That's a big name for a big dog. [laughs]

DY: So I brought the dog home and the family all ran. They were scared. And I as went through the basic training for all the canine handlers, I wasn't sure how I was going to be successful in the unit, but I worked hard with the help of the training staff here. And every year, we would have a regional certification, and if you achieve certain scores, you would qualify to go to the national trial. So for every year that I was in the Canine Unit, I had the opportunity to go to the national trials.

KC: Wow!

DY: For a couple of years in a row, my dog and I, we won the award called The Best Criminal Apprehension Team in the country.

KC: Oh! That's incredible, David.

DY: Yeah. We were given the Best of Criminal Apprehension Obedience award. And our name will travel around the country forever. So whoever gets that plaque, that trophy, every year we added a name to it, whoever wins that type dog

trophy. So Hercules name and my name will be on that trophy forever, as long as Canine Units still exist in the United States.

KC: Oh, they'll always exist.

DY: Yeah, so I'm very proud. I had a smart dog. I couldn't ask for more from my dog.

KC: Did you find that your special gifts helped you be a good partner with your dog?

DY: Yeah. I think I was able to connect with him. I mean, he's not a human, but we had a pretty good connection. I had a real good understanding and he does what he does and I do what I do. We work together. He became a real good friend of my family, from the family running away from him to the time that the whole family would embrace him. The whole family would feel very comfortable with him in the house when I'm not home, because I turn off the alarm system when he's home, because there's no need for an alarm system when he's in the house. When somebody knock on the door or rings the doorbell, he's at the door greeting with his teeth. [laughs] He got along real well with my family, and when he died, it was real tough for the family. The family went through a grieving period.

KC: What did he die of?

DY: He had a stomach turn<sup>25</sup> very common for a German Shephard. One day when I wasn't home, he was in a kennel outside and my wife went out and was going to take him for a walk and found him dead. So we took him to the vet and the vet said he had a stomach tumor, had a very bloated abdomen, and so he was

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<sup>25</sup> Gastric dilatation volvulus (also known as **twisted stomach**, gastric torsion and GDV) is a medical condition in which the stomach becomes overstretched and rotated by excessive gas content. The condition occurs commonly in domesticated animals, especially certain dog breeds. Deep-chested breeds are especially at risk. Gastric dilatation volvulus always involves the twisting of the stomach and is a life-threatening condition that requires prompt treatment.

cremated and was buried at the Canine Cemetery at our training facility.<sup>26</sup> He had left the Canine Unit. For some reason, many of our canines died shortly after they were separated from service. And I think that it's very stressful. He would be home. I would put on my uniform. I would leave for work. He wasn't able to leave with me.

Usually, I put on my uniform, he's right at the door, ready for me to open the door and go. When he couldn't go with me, he became quite destructive. He started chewing on stuff. And I knew that he was under a lot of stress. He wasn't able to go to work with me. So many of our canines, they don't live very long after they left our service.

KC: They're no longer working dog. They're not doing what they're trained –

DY: So I felt very secure having Hercules as my partner. We went to many calls, many distress calls. We went to many chases. Got into many chases because I was with the Canine Unit because I had a dog.

KC: Tell me about one.

DY: Oh, there's so many incidents, but we had a situation. We went into a house and this person escaped custody and we went into the house and we couldn't find the person. The officer went inside. He couldn't find it, couldn't find it, but we knew that he didn't get out of the house either. And so Hercules went in and he was able to smell the person in the attic. He start barking and putting his nose up and that's when we know, "Okay, something's up there." And so, we have to trust.

As a handler, I will trust Hercules in any situation. He would put his life before me, because so many dangerous calls he would be out there first. I'll be walking behind, so he doesn't know he's in the line of fire. What he's thinking is,

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<sup>26</sup> Timothy J. Jones K-9 Training Center at 1900 Rice Street. Maplewood, MN.

“I need to go find somebody,” and he’ll go find somebody. And he’s very, very friendly. It’s like a light switch. You can turn him on and off. Without a command, he is mellow as any dog that you’ll find. Any kids can take him for a walk. But once you give him a command, the light goes on. He is a different dog. He is a working dog, working partner. I totally enjoy my time with the Canine Unit and I would say that of all of my assignments, I loved being a street officer, but all of my assignments, I found it very rewarding working with Hercules, working with an animal that I can’t really communicate with them as a human, but he would take commands. He would go out. He would do what he’s supposed to do. He doesn’t ask for reward. How can you ask more from a partner?

KC: Why did you leave Canine?

DY: At that time we could only stay in a Canine Unit for so long. There were a five year limit. When your time is up, you have to leave. I think shortly after that, they went back and were able to extend the time so officers are able to have two dogs, three dogs, before they leave. When I join there, we had a five year window. During that five year window, when your time’s up, you leave.

KC: And then, of course, the dog just becomes your family dog.

DY: Yep, mm-hmm.

KC: That’s a lot of expense and training for a dog that is only going to be in the unit five years.

DY: Yeah. Well, at that time when it was there, we were still taking donated dogs. We would take a donation from the public. After that, they start buying dogs from overseas, and they would spend as much as \$5,000 to \$7,000 per dog. If you look at what is my dog worth, a well-trained dog like that is worth more than \$10,000. You cannot put a value to it. I mean, I can walk that dog without a leash. I can go downtown, go anywhere without a leash and that dog would be walking right

next to my leg. And when I stop, he stops. And when I move, he moves. And when you got a dog that's well-behaved like that, you cannot put a value.

KC: Would he behave like that with commands with your family.

DY: Mm-hmm.

KC: Who is in your family? How many in your family?

DY: Well, at that time I had seven children, and my youngest one grew up with Hercules. And they would roll around on the ground together. As a baby, she would ride on Hercules. And so she really missed him the most, because they were really together when she was a baby.

KC: He'd have to be incredibly gentle to be with a baby.

DY: Yeah, well, he was very protective of the young one. One time my wife was chasing that young one around and Hercules went and knocked her over with his paws. He didn't bite her, okay? [Kate laughs] But he knocked her over and say, "Hey, that's my friend. Don't chase her." [Both laugh] She learned that, "Okay, when Hercules around, I don't chase that little one. I'd be gentle with that little one."

KC: What's the age range of your children now, David?

DY: The oldest one is thirty-three years. And I still have one that's three years. So this one will probably wheel me around when I'm in a wheelchair. [laughs]

KC: That's not the youngest one that was close to Hercules at the time?

DY: No. The one that's close to Hercules, she is graduating from high school next month.

KC: Wow! So, she's graduating and dad's retiring, all in the same month.

DY: That's right.

KC: When you were in ACOP, was there a lot more translating that you were needing to do or working with Hmong culture than some of the other assignments?

DY: Yes. When ACOP first went into public housing, we still had many people that had language barrier, and so many calls I was called to. Not only that, I was called to calls in public housing, but outside of public housing, because of the language assistance that I could provide to the officers.

I think knowing the culture and knowing the language there was a big benefit to the program. The intention of the program was to help ease the misunderstanding between the Southeast Asians and the police department. We weren't getting cooperation with certain crimes. People were not reporting criminal activities. People were very reluctant to call the police, and so we went in with the intention to educate the Southeast Asian community by providing workshops and trainings and answering questions, giving them ride-a-longs, talk to them, participate with the different activities in the community. That really helped open the door, because our officers started learning the culture, started taking more time.

With your usual street officers, you don't have as much time. You'll go in and out and you're usually out in five minutes. We tell ACOP officers, "You go into a situation, you take the time. You help provide an education to these people. Take as much time as you want." Officers are able to spend quality time with people, sit down with people. When they go in, the officer may get offered a drink. And I tell them, "If they offer you a drink, you sit down and you drink with them. That's how you develop rapport with people." Officers started doing that and people started talking to the officers, started making reports, started cooperating in testifying in court, cooperating with the investigators downtown. We made progress over time, but initially it was not easy.

KC: Was administration willing to let you design programs, let you do a lot of the guiding? Were they willing to accept that you needed to tell officers to have a drink?

DY: Yep. Yep. Because in order for us to get into the community to have the rapport that's needed, we need to do that. I would tell the officers, I would tell the administrators that if we are going to answer calls in the traditional ways that we do as police officers, we're not going to be very effective in this community. If we want to get into the community and we want to spend time with them, we want to listen to the problems, then we will go there, we will help resolve problems. Our officers don't get too many calls outside of public housing and so they spend time getting out. They spend time on the bikes, walking foot patrol, going into community centers, play ball with the kids. We started community policing<sup>27</sup> in public housing. I think that, if I remember correctly, I think we implemented community policing in public housing.

KC: Who were your commanders? Who were some of the leaders who were willing to do that?

DY: Oh, I can't –

KC: First in ACOP in 1992.

DY: We had a sergeant. We didn't have a commander. We had Sergeant Joe Mollner<sup>28</sup> that later became a commander. He was there. Very instrumental. And then after Joe Mollner, there were several other sergeant.

KC: You've been on the department when Hmong gangs were a significant concern in Saint Paul.

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<sup>27</sup> **Community Policing** is a philosophy that promotes organizational strategies that support the systematic use of partnerships and problem-solving techniques, to proactively address the immediate conditions that give rise to public safety issues such as crime, social disorder, and fear of crime. [United States Department of Justice, Community Oriented Policing Services]

<sup>28</sup> **Joseph Clarence Mollner** was appointed police officer September 8, 1975; promoted to sergeant March 1, 1990; lieutenant April 4, 1998; title changed to commander January 1, 2000; and retired January 18, 2002.

DY: Yes.

KC: Did you have to do a lot of educating with families that their kids were gangsters? I'm sure the kids were not wanting to pay a lot of attention to you or maybe saw you as a traitor.

DY: I developed a training program for the parents, so that they recognized the early signs that the kids are getting involved or thinking about joining gangs. I go in and I help the parents understand what they need to look for in the room, what kind of writing they need to look for, what kind of tattoos they need to look for, what hand signs they need to look for. And this is really to educate the parents, because if the parents are not paying attention, it may be too late to help someone. When somebody start running away, somebody start skipping school, somebody start spending a lot of time on the phone and not coming home from school on time, skipping school, all these things are signs that maybe the son or daughter is in a gang or will be joining a gang.

And what the parents can do. The parents were very frustrated, because when nothing else works, they would resort to physical discipline. And so some parents would chain the kids to the basement and got into trouble with the law for child abuse. But the intention is not to abuse. The intention is to prevent. Or some parents would shave someone's hair [completely off so they were bald]. Even a girl's. And they hoped that by doing this, the girl would be discouraged from going out. So they started doing a lot of thing that didn't work. Here the law said you cannot do that. I had to go in and tell the parents there are other ways, other disciplinary action you could take, other positive things you could do. You don't have to do this. You don't have to chain your kid. You don't have to hit your kid with the coat hanger. You don't have to shave their hair. You don't have to deprive them of this and that. There are other things.

Then pretty soon parents would give up and the parents would say, "Then let the system take our kids, educate our kids," without expectation. I said, "The law doesn't do that either. It doesn't allow us to do that either." So many parents would call and they'd say, "You know, I have no control of my son or daughter. You come and take him or take her away." And I will go in and say, "This doesn't meet certain criteria. We cannot place your child. We are the police department. We are not the parents. We're not the big brother or sister either. We will help with whatever we can, but we cannot solve your family problem. This has to come back to your family."

KC: Would you get a lot of calls at home?

DY: I got a lot of call from parents whose kids ran away from home, from parents having kids that don't listen or kids in a gang, so they just call asking for advice. As an ACOP Unit, I could only provide what I could to the parents. I couldn't help at all their situations. But I could give them resources and say, "You need to go here and there, and you need to help participate."

And one of the example would be, we have programs [at the public housing community centers] and parents are afraid to bring the kids. They think that when they bring the kids to the community center, the kids will now be involved with some of the kids that they don't want to. So I would tell the parents that if that's the case, if that's your concern, then you'll come. You'll spend time with your kids. Don't just drop them off. And make sure your kids are associated with people that you think are good kids. If you're just going to drop them off and leave them and we supervise the kids, if you don't trust us, then you need to be here physically. Many parents will do that and many parents will just drop off the kids and say, "You know, we have other young kids at home. We cannot do that. We have other responsibilities that we need to go do."

But the gang situation continues to escalate, and no matter what we did, they continue and continue and continue and the problem continue to proliferate even nowadays. The situation is not as bad as back in the 1980s and 1990s, but there are still Asian gang members out there.

KC: John Harrington and I did a gang research project<sup>29</sup> where I interviewed a 103 gang members around the state. We received a \$50,000 grant from the state legislature and wrote a report for them. Then after that, we got funding and ran an after-school program for Hmong gang girls. So I know it's a hard problem because of cultures clash.

DY: When dealing with the gangs, there were two situations that were very, very intense. The first one we had two auto thieves that were shot in I think Cottage Grove or Inver Grove Heights. I can't remember which city. The officer shot these kids, killed them both. And this was their very first incident that police officers shot Hmong kids, killed them. And everyone was afraid to even go and give notice to their parents. So I volunteered to go. Spoke to the parents and we had officers stand by just in case the parents decided to take an action against the police department. I told them, I said, "I know the parents. I know the family. Let me go in and talk to them." And I did. I went in and talked to them. And I talked to the chief. I told the chief, I said, "You know, I think you should go visit the funeral." I accompanied the chief –

KC: Who was it?

DY: It might have been McCutcheon.

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<sup>29</sup> HAND in HAND Productions was incorporated as a Minnesota nonprofit in May 1996 by Kate Cavett and John Harrington to address the epidemic problem of girls and boys lives being lost in the street gang culture. Their collaboration was unique in that they brought law enforcement and human services professionals together to address the street gang issue. A multiyear **gang research project** was completed, and then a Hmong gang-girls after school program was conducted.

KC: It would have be harder for McCutcheon. Finney it would be easy for.

DY: Yeah. This was in the mid-1980s, so it would have been McCutcheon.

KC: It would have been McCutcheon.

DY: Yeah, I went to the funeral home with the chief and I had told the chief, "In our culture, when you visit as a representative of the police department, you give a cash donation to the family." I don't remember exactly how much the chief gave to each family when he made the visit, but I told the chief anywhere from \$20 to a \$200.



Chief McCutcheon  
1983

So the second incident, we had an Asian gang, a group that executed a kid and I ended up negotiating with the primary suspect. He wasn't going to come out unless he sees me out there. And my decision was if he comes out with a gun, he either shoots me or I would shoot him. I went up against some good advice. I said, "I know this kid and I don't think he's going to shoot me. So, I will let him come out and he will see me." So I exposed myself so he would see me through a window inside and he came out and he was proned<sup>30</sup> [placed flat on the ground by the officers] and arrested.

So a couple of these incidents, they were scary because I was still young. I wasn't a mature, seasoned officer yet. I was young, probably I think at that time I was doing things that I thought was appropriate. Sometime, police officer, we put our lives on the line.

KC: That's part of the job.

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<sup>30</sup> **Prone position** is a body position in which one lies flat with the chest down and back up.

DY: Yep. So I did what I had to do. Otherwise, what happened if we would have stormed the house? We don't know if there are guns in the house. This is a kid that just executed somebody. If we storm the house, is there a chance he's going to start shooting, killing one of the police officers? Hurting one? Sometime we take a risk. I don't tell a lot of war stories and my family says, "How come we don't hear you tell war stories like the other police officers?" My friends would tell the same thing. I'd say, "You know, war stories are war stories. This is stuff that happens on the job and I want to leave it on the job." [laughs]

KC: Did you find that most of your friends were on the department or were still in the Hmong community?

DY: Well, it was hard for me to get out and socialize with the Hmong community. Not because they hate me, but because they have so many questions.

KC: So you were on the job all the time even if you weren't on the job.

DY: Yeah, I was on the job all the time. So even when I go to party people will come up to me and ask me a question about a traffic ticket, ask me a question about this and that. And they bombarded me with questions probably for fifteen something years until we had more Hmong police officers.

When I left the street to go work inside, I don't have as much contact with the Hmong community anymore. So they would call me if they really need me, but they don't see me out there in patrol. They don't see me out there. They don't get a chance to talk to me. So working inside, I lost touch with people.

KC: Do you ever get a call to help somebody turn themselves in when they were afraid to?

DY: Yep. I did have several occasions in which people have warrants and they wanted to come down to the police department and turn themselves over to me. And I would in turn call their probation agency and turn them over to the agency. That's because they know that when they come to me, then they're not

going to get thrown down or get the guns point at them. I give them very specific instructions that, "You know, when you come down, I don't want you carrying any weapon. When you come down, just come to the front desk, ask for me, I'll come out." So, I think you need to develop those rapport with people in the community for people to feel comfortable.

Like I said, probably the last ten years I've lost touch with people in the community because I don't work the street anymore.

KC: Is that okay giving you a chance to not be on duty all the time?

DY: It gave me my life back that I go to work, I go home, but I spend quality time with the family. Go do stuff. I don't have to worry about getting a call at three o'clock in the morning that says, "You have to come down. We got a situation." Because we now have a lot of Hmong officers working in all three shifts, so whenever something happen, if it's a gang related, they'll call people who are in the Gang Unit. So I don't get many calls unless there's something very sensitive that the chief will call me and say, "Hey, what do you think about this situation?" I don't get too many calls anymore. So I was on a downhill mode.  
[both laugh]

KC: Were you called out? I mean, it sounds like you were called out a lot and you were on call all the time those first years.

DY: For fifteen years I got called out a lot.

KC: Fifteen from 1981 when you were a Community Service Officer?

DY: Yep. Yep. I got called out a lot. I got called at home early in the morning to do phone translation. Other times when I have to come in in person. So I did get called out.

Like I said earlier, I was pulled to work Hmong New Year,<sup>31</sup> Hmong Soccer Tournament,<sup>32</sup> every year for fourteen years that I couldn't spend time with my family. I felt that the department needed me more at those functions and I would spend a little time with my family in uniform while working with my wife and the kids, but I just didn't have time to spend quality time with them. But the community come first.

KC: Serving the larger community and the Hmong community by being an officer.

DY: Yep. Right.



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<sup>31</sup> **Hmong New Year** has a deep cultural significance to the Hmong community. It is a celebration of accomplishments during the past year and a time to welcome a new beginning. Traditionally it has been hosted in Minnesota during Thanksgiving weekend since 1975 by Lao Family Foundation of Minnesota at the Saint Paul River Center.

<sup>32</sup> Since 1980 Lao Family Foundation has sponsored the **Hmong Soccer Tournament** over the Fourth of July weekend at Como Park Murphy Field in Saint Paul, Minnesota. Besides soccer games, there are numerous food, merchandise, and display booths. It is attended by thousands from around the USA.

## Hmong New Year draws 40,000 to St. Paul

Posted: Nov 30, 2013 12:20 PM CST

by Iris Perez -

ST. PAUL, Minn. (KMSP) –

Hmong Community members demonstrate a strong presence in Minnesota politically and socially. On Saturday alone 20,000 people are expected to be at the St. Paul River Centre, and by the end of the weekend 20,000 more people will have come through the doors just to celebrate their new year. "It's celebrating all the hardships throughout the year and we just come together as a community to just let it go and start new again." Nou Qou Jayang, Hmong dancer, said.

Taking the Roy Wilkins Auditorium stage to display their talents are just a few Hmong community members. This is just one way they celebrate a new beginning, through dance. Three days are dedicated to the holiday, plenty of entertainment, food, shopping, friends, family, and of course ball tossing. "You can ball toss with friends or if you can do it traditionally" Jayang said. The ball toss is a custom that serves as an icebreaker of sorts. It helps initiate courtship or dating, much gentler than say an American style blind date. "It's a lot different because you meet random people right there and you just start ball tossing with them." Said Jayang. Important to the Hmong every New Year is reunion.

"During the new year celebration they wear the best costume, and it's a time to meet others and rejoice in family." Said Mickie Vang. "it's just great to see family and see everyone because this only happens once a year." "It's a place and time to celebrate." Amee Xiong, Lao Family Foundation Spokeswoman said. This year our Hmong community has at least two things to celebrate. Politically two new faces to both St. Paul City Council and Minneapolis City Council respectively. Dai Thao, the first Hmong American Council Member elected in St. Paul, and Blong Yang, the first Hmong American Council Member elected in Minneapolis. "We have these two Hmong individuals who are elected as the first Hmong City Council in St. Paul and Minneapolis I think we're really happy about that and it's a great time to celebrate in many of those victories." Xiong said.

And the Hmong welcome all creeds and backgrounds, not just their own. "We welcome everyone." Xiong said. "It's really nice to see how the whole community comes together to celebrate the Hmong New Year." Said Jayang, "It feels great knowing that other people wants to join our culture too to celebrate our Hmong New Year it's not just the Hmong New Year, but the whole community's." Vang said. The festivities will continue through December 1st at the River Center in St. Paul.



# HMONG FREEDOM CELEBRATION 34th ANNUAL SPORT FESTIVAL

FRIDAY, JULY 4<sup>th</sup> & SATURDAY, JULY 5<sup>th</sup> 2014

COMO PARK,

McMurray Field, Saint Paul, MN



Men-Soccer	Sr-Soccer 40+ ID require	Women-Soccer	Men-Volley ball	Women-Volley ball	Men-Foot ball	Women-Foot ball	Hmoob Tuijub	Ka tao
Fee: \$350 (30 teams min)	Fee: \$200 (15 teams min)	Fee: \$100 (10 teams min)	Fee: \$200 (10 team min)	Fee: \$150 (10 teams min)	Fee: \$300 (30 teams min)	Fee: \$200 (15 teams min)	Fee: \$200 (20 teams min)	Fee: \$200 (10 teams min)
1 <sup>st</sup> Place \$ 6,000	1 <sup>st</sup> Place \$ 2,000	1 <sup>st</sup> Place \$ 1,000	1 <sup>st</sup> Place \$ 3,000	1 <sup>st</sup> Place \$ 2,000	1 <sup>st</sup> Place \$ 4,000	1 <sup>st</sup> Place \$ 3,000	1 <sup>st</sup> Place \$ 3,000	1 <sup>st</sup> Place \$ 1,000
2 <sup>nd</sup> Place \$ 3,000	2 <sup>nd</sup> Place \$ 1,000	2 <sup>nd</sup> Place \$ 600	2 <sup>nd</sup> Place \$ 1,500	2 <sup>nd</sup> Place \$ 1,000	2 <sup>nd</sup> Place \$ 2,000	2 <sup>nd</sup> Place \$ 1,500	2 <sup>nd</sup> Place \$ 1,500	2 <sup>nd</sup> Place \$ 600
3 <sup>rd</sup> Place \$ 1,500	3 <sup>rd</sup> Place \$ 600	3 <sup>rd</sup> Place \$ 400	3 <sup>rd</sup> Place \$ 800	3 <sup>rd</sup> Place \$ 500	3 <sup>rd</sup> Place \$ 1,000	3 <sup>rd</sup> Place \$ 800	3 <sup>rd</sup> Place \$ 800	3 <sup>rd</sup> Place \$ 300

- ★ Sports Registration Deadline is on June 27<sup>th</sup>, 2014 by 4:30PM
- ★ Booth Sale on April 5, 2014 at Lao Family Foundation 9:00am to 1:00pm
- ★ Free admission for senior over 65 years (ID required) and Children under 3 years old

**Admission Fee:**  
**\$5.00**



**Merchandise Booths** includes items such as movies, clothings, antique and household items.  
**Food Booths** includes sticky rice, pork, chicken, papaya salads, and refreshments.  
 Located on the main stage there will be performances by performers on both days of the event.

<b>Event Chair:</b> Giatou Yang	651-592-6667	<b>Display Booth:</b> Neng Wa Vang	651-447-0840
<b>Sports:</b> Neng Lee	651-734-3414	<b>Food Booth:</b> Soua Ger Yang	651-497-8109
<b>Security:</b> Tou Fong Lor	612-998-6538	Tzianeng Vang	651-235-9328
<b>Programs:</b> Amee Xiong	651-332-6799	<b>Merchandise Booth:</b> King George Lee	651-262-3774
<b>Admission:</b> Janelle Vang	952-201-0383	Yee Steve Yang	612-655-4266

Hosted by Lao Family Foundation 320 University Ave suite 16, Saint Paul, MN 55103

[c4board@laofamily.org](mailto:c4board@laofamily.org)

KC: At what point did your family embrace the fact that your being a police officer was making a difference?

DY: I think my wife never got comfortable, because whenever I leave, she worries about me until I get home. But for my parents, my relatives, once they realized that I was in there for good [laughs] there was no turning back. They saw a lot of stuff that I do that really benefit the community. They saw the good things that I did with the police department with the community and they appreciate it that I stuck to my dream. My family now have changed a lot since I first joined the police department, and recently I have a nephew that just graduated with the last academy, and I gave him my badge.

KC: You have a legacy.

DY: Yep. So now we'll have somebody continue in my badge.

KC: Wow! That's fabulous. What's his name?

DY: Bobby Yang.<sup>33</sup> He was a police officer in Sacramento. So when he asked me if I could help him, I said, "Well, apply for it. Come up!" And so he did. He went through the academy. He's in FTO right now.

KC: What contribution do you think is the most important that you've made over these thirty-three years?

DY: I think it's my asset to the community and to the police department. To the community I was able to help and explain the legal process. I helped them understand how the police department operates. I helped them how important it is for the community and for the police department to work together.

To the law enforcement community, to the legal system, I was able to help educate people how to work effectively with the Southeast Asian community, what type of resources are out there and just being a liaison between both. I

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<sup>33</sup> Bobby Yang was appointed police officer March 29, 2014.

would say that's my major accomplishment. Like being in the Canine Unit, that's a personal accomplishment. But to accomplish something for the community is to help provide an education to both sides.

The community now understands the law enforcement side and the law enforcement now understands the needs of the community. Of course they're not always going to come to terms. There are going to be differences, but they can work together. That's what I would say is my major accomplishment.

KC: Being the only officer available for many years to do that education –

DY: Yeah, so I was able to pass on that to the younger Hmong officers, and I hope that the younger Hmong officers will continue to carry on the tradition, or continue to represent both the community and the police department.

I think that we are very fortunate to live in a city that really embraces diversity. The mayor, city council, the police department really have been working hard to bring diversity to the police department. Not just Hmong officers, but diversity. I'm happy to see that the police department and the city continue to work together to make sure that our police officers reflect the people that we serve, and to make sure that we have representative from every community with the police department. And I've seen that working the Background Unit. I've seen that working as a Recruitment Officer. So we've come a long way since the early 1980s.

KC: [laughs] A long, long way.

DY: Yep.

KC: David, thank you so much. It has been an honor being able to sit down with you.

DY: Thank you very much.

KC: Thank you.



6/25/2014 1:07:00 PM

## Amy Doeun

In May, David Yang, one of the first Hmong Police Officers in Minnesota and the nation retired after over 30 years on the force. Over those years much changed in Minnesota and his work continues to bless the community. Hmong Times talked with David about his experience. When asked what made him want to be a police officer he said, "It started in high school. A buddy of mine became a police officer in Minneapolis. We talked about being a state trooper, but were just kind of joking around. Once I graduated I was more serious about it. I wanted to learn about the American laws and help educate my people so I figured the best way to learn about the laws of the land was to become a police officer."

It wasn't an easy decision for him and his family, as many of the other elders didn't support his plan. "They had a negative experience of seeing police overseas and they were negative about it here. They thought there were other more honorable professions. I thought things were different then in Laos." So Yang took the tests to become a community service officer. "It is not a sworn position, but a step towards that. I took the exam, passed and was offered a job."

He then started the necessary schooling; two years of college were required. "Once I completed my schooling, I took the test to become a police officer. I had some veteran officers that were really good mentors." He said at first it was really difficult, "One of the toughest things was that I was brought up in a culture where we were taught to be kind to people so I wasn't use to being aggressive. During training it was hard for me to learn to be assertive. It took almost two years for me to become comfortable using slang and the terminology of the street."

Another difficulty was that he was really working as a "liaison officer". Many of the early calls people wanted me to put blinders on or look the other way because I was Hmong." When he did make arrests often the community would be angry. "I got many 911 calls from clan leaders wanting to know why someone had been arrested or demanding release. I explained that my job was to enforce the law and it wasn't my job to release someone after they had been arrested. There were many internal issues dealing with my own community. I thought about leaving because I felt so much pressure. I turned in my resignation, but Captain Finney [he later became chief] heard about it and approached me and encouraged me to stay. I am glad he took the time to talk to me. I was doing the right thing for my community and the police department. I had a successful career because of him." So through the help of Captain Finney and his other mentors, "I decided it didn't matter how tough it was I would do my best to achieve my dream."

It wasn't only his own community that made things difficult for Yang. "Because of my stature I didn't get a lot of respect. I was told to go back to Vietnam and things like that. But that paved the way for other officers." Currently there are about 20 Hmong officers in the St. Paul Police Department.

Yang decided to take his experience and help others. "I can remember that we had many recruits that came to the academy that struggled overall due to language barrier or cultural issues. Several didn't pass. I decided that I would try to educate the community about how to be successful as a police officer and worked with the academy to help educate the Hmong officers. I wanted to make sure we both understand each other."

He said that the first 10 years of his work in the community he had, "Little cooperation because there was misunderstanding. People didn't understand when we needed to call and report crimes or how to help the police department with investigations. We need the community to help us solve crimes and we need police officers."

One way he helped change this is through a joint program with St. Paul Public Housing and the Police Department. "People would run away from us when we tried to talk to them. So we trained special officers, ACOP officers to spend time to listen to the problems and come up with solutions. After two or three years they would love to see ACOP officers. Still today it is a very successful."

When asked what was the next step for him he said, "Even though I am retired I will continue to help the police force and community when they need me and continue to be a resource. "

His advice for young people interested in going into the police department Yang says, "That they should work hard, but not be afraid to go to whatever community they work in and to be open and fair to people. Represent both the police department and Asian community. We feel strongly that we have to prove that we belong and can do the job. It is a good job. You have the opportunity to really make a difference. It is an honorable profession and a career."

