

RICHMOND IS HOME:

*Preventing a second
displacement of
Laotian Americans*

Brandy Khansouvang, Sary Tatpaporn
Sasha Graham and Evan Bissell

Building Power Fellowship
Richmond LAND



LAO JALEUNE SUPERMARKET

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Interviews by

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Published by Richmond LAND
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RichmondLAND
LOCAL ACTION IN NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT



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Introduction

Everybody comes from somewhere. Many people come from more than one place. We are from Laos and we are from Richmond. Even in Laos we are from different places; from the lowlands and midlands and highlands. Like here, we are from the Manor and North and the Iron Triangle. Laotians have been in Richmond for almost 45 years.

How did we get here? The American War in Vietnam spilled into Laos and Cambodia, forcing many of our families to leave their homes. This was the first displacement. We fled for many reasons, as Mrs. Kham shared in her story of leaving Laos, "If you take us back we'll die, they'll kill us. We don't want to come here, we don't mean to come here. We are refugees, we have to come."

Today, many in our community are facing a second displacement from our homes in Richmond and West Contra Costa County. This book seeks to tell a story that isn't told enough in Richmond - how we came here, why we came, and how and why we love this place. It also shows how we are facing a housing crisis. Most importantly, it shows that we are going to fight to stay and to create new solutions to keep our community together and intact.

We hope you read, share and are compelled to act on behalf of housing security for all. Being uprooted from one's home and family is one of the most difficult things one can experience. It's time to put an end to this and ensure safe, stable and healthy housing for all. This is the foundation of the beautiful, healthy and diverse community of Richmond and West Contra Costa County.

About this Project

This book came out of the Building Power Fellowship, a program of Richmond LAND that supports Richmond area residents to design community development and housing projects that serve low-income residents of color. The fellows also develop arts and cultural projects that reflect low-income communities of color's right to live stably and affordably in west Contra Costa. To learn more about Richmond LAND, please visit www.richmondland.org

This storytelling project was developed by fellows Brandy Khansouong and Sary Tatpaporn who represented the organization Asian Pacific Environmental Network (APEN) in the fellowship. Brandy and Sary also designed a housing development concept to stabilize housing for low-income members of the Laotian community as well the broader Richmond community. This project is outlined in Section 4, at the end of the book.

ຄໍານໍາ

ທຸກໆຄົນຮຸ່ນມາຈາກແຫ່ງໃດແຫ່ງນຶ່ງ. ຫລາຍໆຄົນມາຈາກຫລາຍໆບ່ອນບໍ່ແມ່ນມາຈາກບ່ອນ ດຽວກັນ. ພວກເຮົາມາຈາກປະເທດລາວແລະພວກເຮົາກໍມາຈາກເມືອງ Richmond. ແມ່ນແຕ່ຢູ່ ປະເທດລາວ, ພວກເຮົາກໍມາຈາກບ່ອນຕ່າງກັນ; ມາຈາກເຂດທົ່ງພຽງ, ມາຈາກເຂດ ລະຫວ່າງກາງ ຂອງທົ່ງພຽງແລະພູສູງແລະມາຈາກເຂດພູສູງ. ຄືຢູ່ທີ່ນີ້, ພວກເຮົາມາຈາກບາງເຮືອນໃຫຍ່ໂຕ, ຈາກ ພາກເໜືອແລະຈາກສາມຫລຽມເຫລັກ. ຊາວລາວໄດ້ມາອາໄສຢູ່ເມືອງ Richmond ເກືອບ 45 ປີ ແລ້ວ.

ພວກເຮົາມາຮອດນີ້ໄດ້ແນວໃດ? ສິ່ງຄາມອາເມຣິກັນຢູ່ວຽດນາມໄດ້ແຕ່ລາມເຂົ້າມາໃນປະເທດລາວແລະ ກໍ່ປູ່ເຈ້ຍ, ບັງຄັບໃຫ້ຄອບຄົວຂອງພວກເຮົາຈຳນວນຫລວງ-ຫລາຍຕອງໂຕໜຶ່ງຈາກບາງເຮືອນຂອງຕົນ. ນີ້ ແມ່ນການຍາຍຖິ່ນຖານຄົງທຳອິດ. ພວກເຮົາໜຶ່ງອອກຈາກບານມາດຈຸຍເຫດຜົນຫລາຍຢ່າງ, ດັ່ງທີ່ ນາງ ຄໍາໂດເລົາເຮືອງຂອງຕົນກຽວກັບການໜີຈາກປະເທດລາວ. “ ຖ້າທ່ານສິ່ງພວກເຮົາກັບຄືນໄປ ພວກເຮົາກໍຈະຕາຍ, ພວກເຮົາຈະຂາພວກເຮົາ, ພວກເຮົາບໍ່ຢາກມາທີ່ນີ້- ດອກ, ພວກເຮົາບໍ່ໄດ້ຕັ້ງໃຈມາທີ່ນີ້. ພວກເຮົາເປັນຊາວອົບພະຍົບ, ພວກເຮົາຈຳເປັນຕອງໂຕມາ.”

ໃນປະຈຸບັນນີ້, ມີຫລາຍໆຄົນໃນຊຸມຊົນຂອງພວກເຮົາກຳລັງປະເຊີນກັບການຍ້າຍຖິ່ນຖານຄົງທີ່ສອງຈາກ ບານເຮືອນຂອງພວກເຮົາໃນ ເມືອງ Richmond ແລະ ຢູ່ເຂດຕາເວັນຕົກ (West) ຂອງ Contra Costa County. ປຶ້ມຫົວນີ້, ຊອກຫາເອົາເຮືອງຮາວທີ່ບໍ່ຄອບຄົວມີຄົນເລົາພຽງພໍ, ມາເລົາ –ພວກເຮົາມາທີ່ນີ້ແບບໃດ, ເປັນຫຍັງພວກເຮົາຈຳເປັນໂຕມາ, ແລະດ້ວຍເຫດໃດ, ເປັນຫຍັງພວກເຮົາຈຳເປັນຮຸກຮ້າຍຢູ່ແຫ່ງນີ້. ມັນຍິ່ງສະ ແດງໃຫ້ເຫັນວ່າພວກເຮົາກຳລັງປະເຊີນກັບບັນຫາວິກິດດາມທີ່ພັກອາໄສ. ສິ່ງທີ່ສິ່ງຄົນທີ່ສຸດ, ມັນສະແດງ ໃຫ້ເຫັນວ່າພວກເຮົາກຳລັງຈະຕໍ່ສູ້ ເພື່ອຢູ່ (ບໍ່ຍົກຍາຍ) ແລະສາວິທີ່ແກ່ໂຂ່ແບບໃໝ່ເພື່ອເຮັດໃຫ້ຊຸມຊົນ ຂອງພວກເຮົາໄດ້ຢູ່ຮວມກັນແລະບໍ່ມີ ຄວາມກະທົບກະເທືອນ.

ພວກເຮົາຫວັງວ່າທ່ານຈະອ່ານ, ແບ່ງປັນ, ເຂົ້ອໜັ້ນ, ເຫຼີດຄວາມສົນໃຈໃນການປະກອບສ່ວນປະຕິບັດເພື່ອ ຄວາມໝັ້ນຄົງປອດໄພທາງດານທີ່ພັກອາໄສສຳລັບທຸກຄົນ. ການຖືກຫວາດລາງໃຫຍ່ກຍາຍຈາກເຮືອນແລະ ຄອບຄົວແມ່ນສິ່ງນຶ່ງທີ່ລຳບາກຫລາຍທີ່ສຸດທີ່ຜູ້ໃດຜູ້ນຶ່ງຈະປະສົບໄດ. ມັນເຖິງເວລາແລ້ວທີ່ຈະເຮັດໃຫ້ສິ່ງນີ້ ຢູ່ດີລົງແລະຮຸບ-ປະກັນໃຫ້ມີທີ່ພັກອາໄສທີ່ປອດໄພ, ໝັ້ນຄົງແລະມີສຸກຂະພາບດີສຳລັບທຸກຄົນ. ນີ້ແມ່ນພື້ນຖານຂອງຊຸມຊົນທີ່ສວຍງາມ, ມີສຸກຂະພາບດີແລະຫລາກຫລາຍຂອງເມືອງ Richmond ແລະເຂດຕາ ເວັນຕົກ (West) ຂອງ Contra Costa County.

ເຮືອງຮາວກຽວກັບໂຄງການນີ້.

ປຶ້ມຫົວນີ້ເກີດຈາກ ການສ້າງພະລັງມິດຕະພາບ, ຊຶ່ງຜູ້ປົກຄອງໂຄງການຂອງ Richmond LAND ທີ່ ສະໜັບ ສະໜູນໃຫ້ຊາວຜູ້ມີອາໄສ ຮຸກຮານບໍ່ມີທາງອອກແບບໂຄງການພັດທະນາຊຸມຊົນຜູ້ຮອບຮອບຢູ່ອາໄສ ທີ່ຮັບໃຊ້ ຜູ້ພັກພາອາໄສທີ່ທຸກຍາກ, ມີລາຍໄດ້ຕໍ່າ. ເພື່ອນຮວມງານຂອງພວກເຮົາຍັງພັດທະນາໂຄງການ ສິລະປະແລະວັດ ທະນະທຳທີ່ສະຫຼຸບໃຫ້ຊຸມຊົນທີ່ທຸກຍາກມີລາຍໄດ້ຕໍ່າ, ໃນດານສິດທິໃນການດຳຮົງຊີວິດ, ທີ່ໝັ້ນຄົງແລະເໝາະສົມຢູ່ໃນເຂດຕາເວັນຕົກ (West) ຂອງ Contra Costa County ຖານຢາກຮູ້ລາຍລະອຽດກຽວກັບ Richmond LAND, ກະຮຸນາເຂົ້າເອົາຂໍ້ມູນທີ່ ພພພ.ຮຮຊຊຫມທນດ.ທຣກ.

ໂຄງການເລົ່າເຮືອງນີ້ໄດ້ຖືກຈັດຂຶ້ນໂດຍເພື່ອນຮວມງານຄື ນາງ Brandy Khansouvanh ແລະທານ Sary Tatpaporn ຊຶ່ງເປັນຕົວແທນຂອງອົງການຮວມມິດຕະພາບສິ່ງເວດລອມອາຊີປາຊີຟິກ (APEN), ນາງ ຮອນດຖ ແລະທານ ອຣຖ ຍັງໄດ້ອອກຮູບບຸຣຸດເພື່ອພັດທະນາກຽວກັບທີ່ຢູ່ອາໄສເພື່ອສ້າງຄວາມໝັ້ນຄົງ ດານທີ່ຢູ່ອາໄສໃຫ້ແກ່ສະມາຊິກຂອງຊຸມຊົນຊາວລາວທີ່ມີລາຍໄດ້ຕໍ່າທີ່ຢູ່ອາໄສໃນເມັດຕາເວັນຕົກຂອງ Richmond ທີ່ ໄປ. ໂຄງການນີ້ໄດ້ລະບຸໄວ້ໃນພາກທີ 4 , ຢູ່ຕອນທາຍຂອງປຶ້ມ.

Introducción

Todos vienen de alguna parte. Mucha gente viene de más de un lugar. Somos de Laos y somos de Richmond. Incluso en Laos somos de diferentes lugares; de las tierras bajas, medias y altas. Como aquí, somos del Manor, de North Richmond y del triángulo. Los laosianos han estado en Richmond durante casi 45 años.

¿Cómo llegamos aquí? La Guerra de los Estados Unidos en Vietnam se extendió a Laos y Camboya, obligando a muchas de nuestras familias a abandonar sus hogares. Este fue el primer desplazamiento. Huimos por muchas razones, la Sra. Kham compartió su historia de dejar Laos: “Si nos llevan de regreso, moriremos, nos matarán”. “No queríamos venir aquí, no queremos venir aquí. Somos refugiados, tenemos que venir”

Hoy, muchos en nuestra comunidad se enfrentan a un segundo desplazamiento de nuestros hogares en Richmond y el condado Oeste de Contra Costa. Este libro busca contar una historia que no se cuenta lo suficiente en Richmond: cómo llegamos aquí, por qué vinimos y cómo y por qué amamos este lugar. También muestra cómo nos enfrentamos a una crisis de vivienda. Lo más importante, muestra que vamos a luchar para quedarnos y crear nuevas soluciones para mantener a nuestra comunidad unida e intacta.

Esperamos que lea, comparta y se vea obligado a actuar en nombre de la seguridad de la vivienda para todos. Ser desarraigado del hogar y la familia es una de las cosas más difíciles que uno puede experimentar. Es hora de poner fin a esto y garantizar una vivienda segura, estable y saludable para todos. Esta es la base hermosa, saludable y diversa de la comunidad de Richmond y el Condado Oeste de Contra Costa.

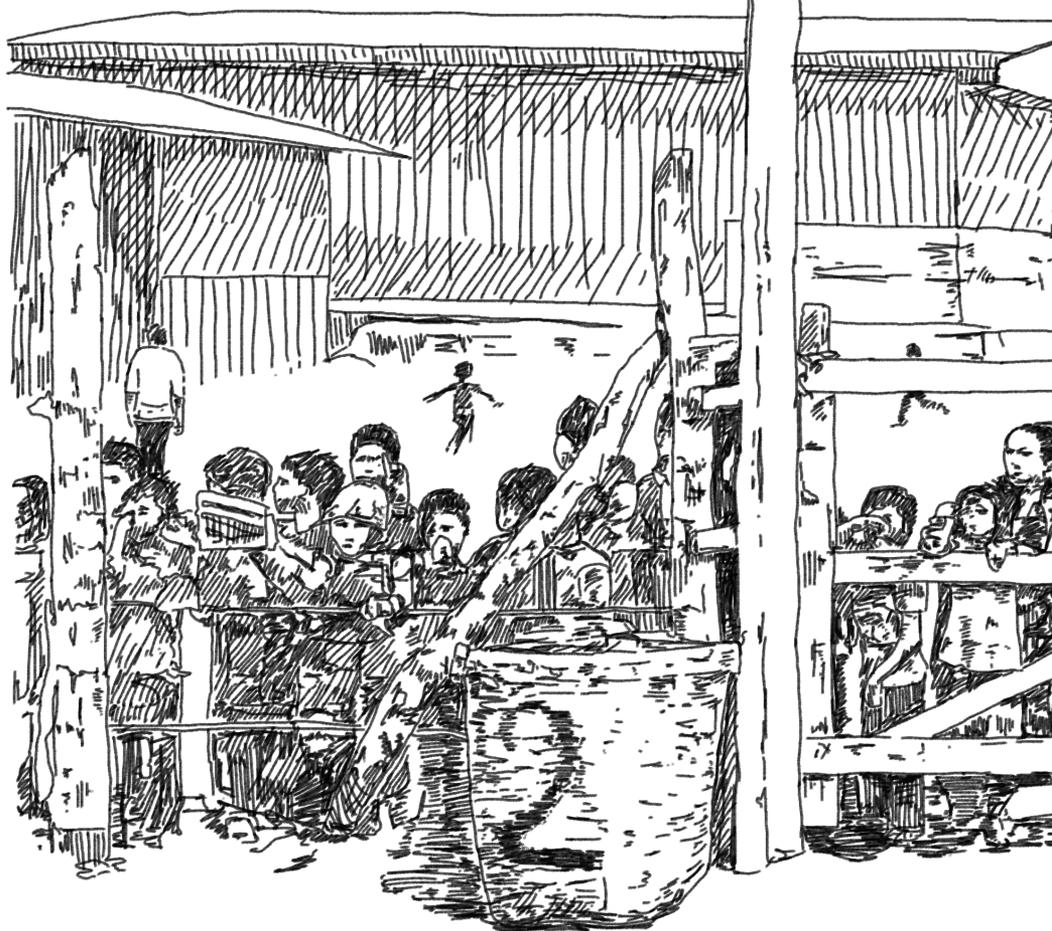
Sobre este proyecto

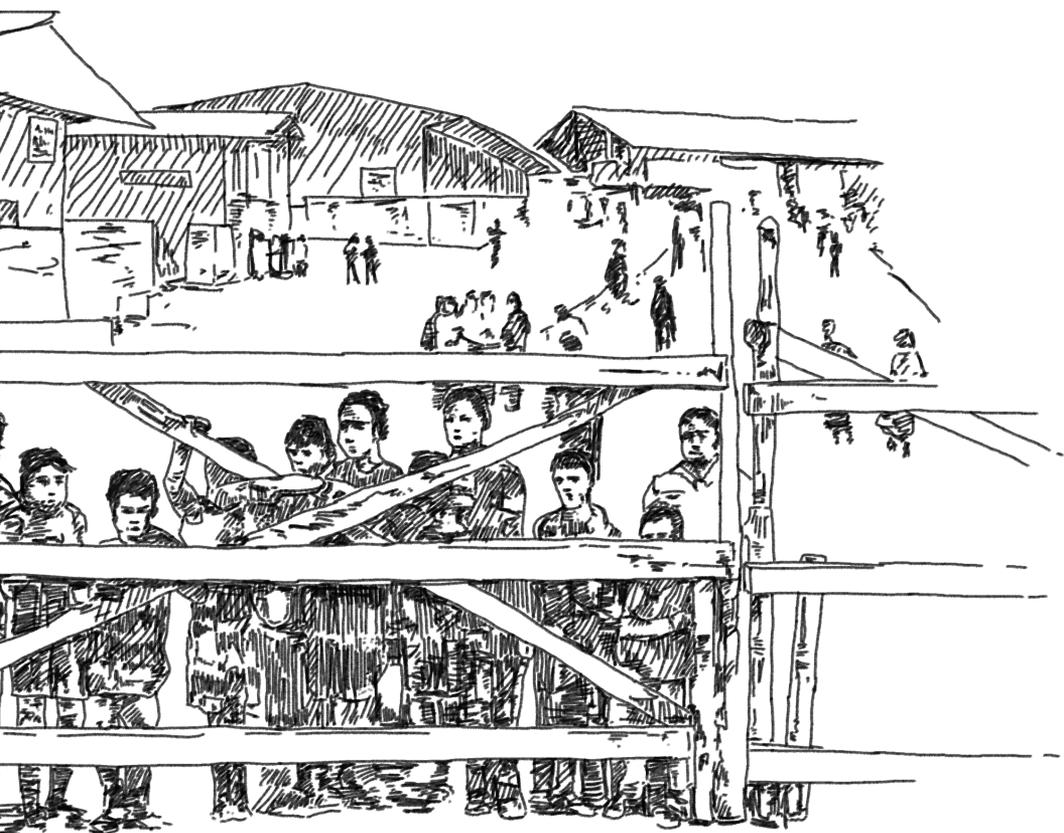
Este libro salió del programa de Richmond LAND, Becas de Construcción de Poder que apoya a los residentes del área de Richmond para diseñar proyectos de desarrollo comunitario y de vivienda que sirvan a los residentes de color y bajos ingresos. Los becarios también desarrollan proyectos artísticos y culturales que reflejan el derecho de las comunidades de color de bajos ingresos a vivir de manera estable y económica en el oeste de Contra Costa. Para obtener más información sobre Richmond LAND, visite www.richmondland.org

Este proyecto de narración fue desarrollado por los becarios Brandy Khansouvong y Sary Tatpaporn, quienes representaron a la organización Asian Pacific Environmental Network (APEN) en la beca. Brandy y Sary también diseñaron un concepto de desarrollo de vivienda para estabilizar la vivienda para los miembros de bajos ingresos de la comunidad laosiana, así como para la comunidad más amplia de Richmond. Este proyecto se describe en la Sección 4, al final del libro.

Section 1

Coming to Richmond:
The first displacement





Drawing of the Thai Refugee Camp where Sary Tatpaporn lived from 1979-1981 after fleeing the war in Laos

War

Mrs. Kham

I was a farmer in Laos. When there was a war and political change, a lot of people decided to leave and we were one of those.

Torm

At that time it was called the Secret War so nobody knows the United States is in war in Laos until later on. Even though they call it the Vietnam war, the US dropped more bombs in Laos than all the bombs in World War II combined. Today, Laos is still the most bombed country in the world. 200 million tons of bombs come from the sky, dropped in that land in Laos. Laos in square miles is about the size of Oregon or Utah.

Laos is also divided into two political factions. One group is the Communist side and fought the government, and on the other side, the Americans supported the government. The US government paid for all the military costs, and the Laos government during that time didn't even pay one penny.

Sary

It was the interest of two superpowers to create the war in that part of the world. The ordinary people had no idea what's going on. It's only the political class that were used by two sides of larger political ideologies. One side is democracy and freedom, the other is socialism and communism. The cold war used Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia as a place to fight, it was a proxy for superpowers fighting each other.

Leaving Laos

Torm

When the communists took over, I was living with an American family so I had to leave right away. I was in the most danger of my life. They were looking for anyone associated with the Americans as the first ones they can go after. So I have to run across the Mekong River to Thailand right away, like within 24 hours after they take power. I left Laos May 24, like a week before the Vientiane (the government capitol) collapsed.



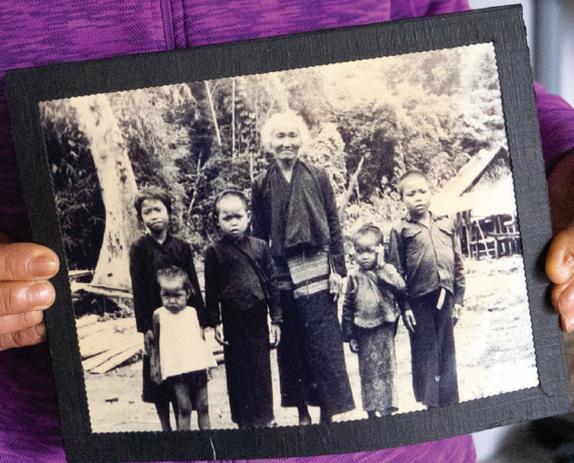
The first Laotian refugees came to Richmond in 1975. 50,000 Laotian people came to California in 1980.

“ຢູ່ປະເທດລາວ ພວກເຮົາບໍ່ໄດ້ຊື້ຳເຮືອນ. ທຸກ-
ສິ່ງທຸກຢ່າງທີ່ເຈົ້າຕ້ອງການ, ເຈົ້າເຮັດເອົາເອງ, ສິ່ງ
ດຽວທີ່ ເຈົ້າຕ້ອງໄດ້ຊື້ກໍຄືເຄື່ອງນຸ່ງແລະແມ່ນແຕ່ຄົນເຜົ່າ-
ກຶມມຸແລະເຜົ່າມົ້ງກໍເຮັດເຄື່ອງນຸ່ງດວຍຕົນເອງ. ຄວາມ
ແຕກຕ່າງຢູ່ທີ່ນີ້ກໍຄືທຸກສິ່ງທຸກຢ່າງແມ່ນເງິນ, ເງິນ, ເງິນ.
ບໍ່ມີເງິນ, ບໍ່ມີເຂົ້າກິນ, ບໍ່ມີເຮືອນຢູ່.”

“In Laos we don’t have to rent the house. Everything you need you do yourself, the only thing you have to buy is clothing and even the Khmu and the Hmong people make the clothes themselves. The difference here is that everything here is money, money, money. No money, no food, no home.”

“En Laos no tenemos que alquilar casa. Todo lo que necesitas lo haces tú mismo, lo único que tienes que comprar es ropa e incluso los Khmu y los Hmong hacen la ropa ellos mismos. La diferencia aquí es que todo es dinero, dinero, dinero. Sin dinero, sin comida, sin hogar”.

Mrs. Kham in her
North Richmond living room
2020



The day I left from Laos to Thailand we crossed the Mekong river [the river forms the border of Laos and Thailand]. One guy has a very small boat, and he said he can cross the river to Thailand. We pay him. In the middle of the river, he drop us there on an island. It was a veryyyy small boat, 5-6 people to sit in there at one time. The same night he came back with other people. Altogether we had 94 people. After that he went back to Laos and tell us to cross the other half of the river to Thailand.

Oh my god. My older daughter was close to two and my younger daughter was only 17 days. I carry my older daughter on my back and the young one in the front. I carry one bag over here and another bag over here and on this side I grab my husband. Because I believe in God, I tell everybody to hold hands and pray. And after that we hold hands and cross. We almost die in the water. Up, up, up, up to here [points to chest]. All my kids get wet, the babies cry cry cry in the night.

We can't go through the city at night so we go hide in a banana garden. My older daughter cry sooo bad. One guy, my own friend, he says, 'what the fuck's wrong with your kid? Cry never stops. You don't know what to do? Bring her over here I have a knife' and then he poke me. I zipped my mouth, I don't say nothing, I don't answer at that time.

And then later on she get warm and falls asleep on my chest. And his son start to wake and cry cry cry nonstop. I say, "Well I have a knife too if you want me to poke him. Then bring him over here." He zipped his mouth and didn't answer.

We couldn't make a fire to get warm because we're scared. In the morning we go to a bigger street and there's a camp there. They scream at us, "Where you come from? What are you doing?" "We come from Laos, we're scared to die over there so we cross the Mekong at night and now we're here."

At first they're so sweet and so nice. They cook for us and make us food. After they've done everything they say, "you guys ready to go?" We say yes. They say, "You guys cannot walk to the camp. It's too far."

Now everybody get in line." On their shoulders they carry guns. Oh, they take all our money. They see money they get money. They see gold they get gold. Diamond they get diamond. Whatever you have, they take all you have. My cousin's sister in law and niece, they go beg and ask, "Please give us a little money back. When we get to the camp what are we going to eat?" The soldiers get the gun like this [point at them] and say, "we don't take nothing from your guy. We're going to take you back to Laos."

One lady, she had a little bit of opium - opium is medicine too, and she hid it in her hair. They found it and took it. They get the rope and tie her in the tree and kick her and get the gun and hit her. Everyone says, "Please, please, please don't take us back to our country. If you take us back we'll die, they'll kill us. We don't want to come here, we don't mean to come here. We are refugees, we have to come."

“ເມື່ອຂ້ອຍເວົ້າເຖິງບູຮານ, ມັນໝາຍເຖິງຊຸມຊົນ, ຄົນທຸກ-
ປະເພດບໍ່ວ່າຈະເປັນຜູ້ເຖົ້າຜູ້ເຮືາແລະຊາວໜຸ່ມ
ມາຮວມກັນ. ສິ່ງນັ້ນເຮັດໃຫ້ຂ້ອຍຄິດເຖິງຊີວິດຄົນຫລັງ-
ຍູບຸກຸນເກົ່າ, ເພາະຄຳຂວາບາມມັນມີຄວາມໝາຍເໝືອ
ກວ່າສິ່ງໃດໆ. ທຸກຄົນຮູ້ຈັກກັນແລະມີກຳລັງອຸມອູຊຸດ
ເຫຼືອຊຶ່ງກັນແລະກັນ. ນັ້ນແມ່ນວິທີທີ່ຂ້ອຍມັກ.”

**“When I say home, it’s about
community, all kinds of people,
elders and young people
coming together. That reminds
me of life back home, because
home is more of the village.
Everybody knows everybody
and supports everybody. And
that’s how I like it.”**

“Cuando digo hogar, se trata de comunidad,
todo tipo de personas, ancianos y jóvenes
que conviven juntos. Eso me recuerda a la
vida de mi país, porque un hogar es como un
pueblo. Todos conocen a todos y apoyan a
todos. Y así es como me gusta”.

Torm with rice and Lao rice baskets
2020



Sary

In 1979 I went to a refugee processing camp in Thailand. I lived there for three years, from 19-22 years old. Across the street were Thai businesses where we would get needed supplies. The gate was open only from 9-5pm every day. You had to be back inside by 5pm or else there would be penalties.

Mrs. Kham

We stayed in the refugee camp and we got assistance from the UN and the Thai government. When we lived in the refugee camp we had a very small amount of food, just enough to barely survive. Each day a water truck would come and people would take a small bucket to the truck for each family. Same thing with the food, in the morning we'd have to get in line to get the food. There was no money.

We applied with US immigration to come to the US. When we arrived in the US we were really happy because we believed we had gotten out of a really difficult situation in the camp and that there was lots of opportunity in this country. That's what we believed.

**69,303 Laotians live in California.
The state is home to the largest
Southeast Asian American
population in the U.S.**

Coming to Richmond

Torm

When I came to Thailand, the US Government didn't have the refugee program for Laotians, they only had it for Cambodians and Vietnamese. I was in the first 3,000 Laotian refugees approved by President Ford to request to come to the United States as a refugee. The first 3,000 Laotians were accepted as refugees and I was in that first group.

I came to Richmond in 1975 on December 1st. Of course, I came to America by airplane [laughing]. I am the first Laotian family settled in this County and then first in Richmond, of course. I was here 44 years now.

Mrs. Kham

At first we lived in Georgia for 8 months. We didn't know anything, even "yes" or "no" we didn't understand. We started working. I had to work like three jobs because my husband was sick and two other children had mental problems. I was responsible for everything for them so I tried to work three jobs at the same time.

Finally we decided to move from Georgia to California because there was a Khmu community in California. So it took us three nights and four days nonstop driving. Only stopped for gas.

When we got to California we applied for welfare and public assistance and started working. Same thing, I was the only one who was working. But I got laid off from my company in a warehouse. They closed down and moved to a different state. After that I worked part time just taking care of old people at their homes, 3-4 hours a day.

Torm

I came to Richmond because I had a friend who I met while I was in Laos, his name is Leonel Diaz and his wife is Jacqueline Butler-Diaz. He went to Laos to visit my sponsor Mr. William Sage, who was working in Thailand at that time and his parents Mr. & Mrs. Lloyd and Twyla Sage, who lived in Union City. William Sage was my personal sponsor but he was in Thailand at that time so he contacted Jacqueline and Leonel and asked if they could support me and my wife. So of course they accept and that's how I came to Richmond. Leonel was working at Chevron, at that time we called it "Standard Oil," as an engineer. We stayed with them a week and then the apartment downstairs was empty so we applied to rent that place. They were upstairs and we're downstairs and it was kind of like one family. Jacqueline used to work as a nurse in Thailand so she speaks some Thai. My English is not great but I'm a survivor. That's how we settled here.

Mouang

My parents came here in the first place to shape my life, to help me have a better life. Our country was good in a lot of ways. But when we got the opportunity to come, it was for the children's safe future. For my parents it is more of a challenge to move here. The whole world is different, they don't know the language, they experienced war. But they really looked forward to their children's success and well being.

Some Laotian and Laotian serving entities in the Richmond Area

- Wat Lao Rattaranam Buddhist Temple
- Grace Lao Lutheran Church
- Lao Senior Center at the Grace Lao Lutheran Church
- Lao Jaleune Supermarket
- That Luang Market and Restaurant
- Lao Family Services
- Lu Mien Friendship Baptist Church
- Asian Pacific Environmental Network
- Bay Area Lao Association

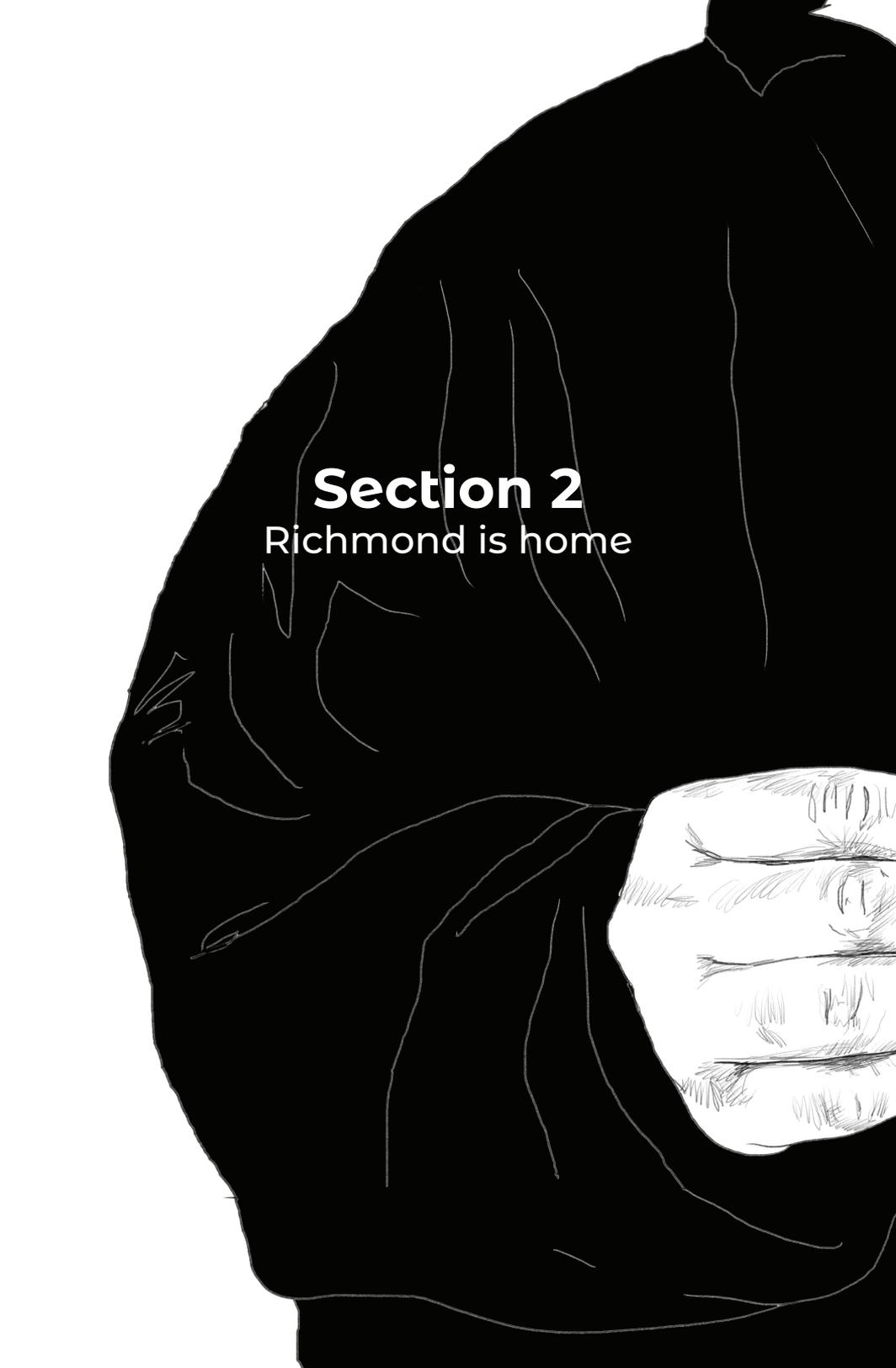
“ ຂ້ອຍຍັງຖືປະເທດລາວເປັນບ້ານເກີດເມືອງນອນ-
ຂອງຂ້ອຍ, ແຕ່ຂ້ອຍເອີ້ນ Richmond ເປັນບ້ານຂ້ອຍ.
ຂ້ອຍຢາກຢູ່ Richmond.”

**“I still consider Laos
my homeland, but I call
Richmond my home. I want
to stay in Richmond.”**

“Todavía considero a Laos mi tierra
natal, pero llamo a Richmond mi hogar.
Quiero quedarme en Richmond”.



Somphone in his
San Pablo living room
2020



Section 2
Richmond is home



“Richmond, Richmond ເຂດໃຕ້ແມ່ນບ້ານຂອງ
ນັ້ນແມ່ນບ້ານທີ່ຂ້ອຍເຕີບໃຫຍ່ພອມກັບອາຍເອ້ອຍ
ຂອງຂ້ອຍແລະແມ່ນບ້ານທີ່ຂ້ອຍຢູ່ມາຕະຫລອດຊີວິດ.
ນັ້ນແມ່ນບ້ານທີ່ໜູ່ເພື່ອນຂອງຂ້ອຍຢູ່ແລະພວກເຮົາ
ໄດ້ເຕີບໃຫຍ່ຢູ່ບ້ານໃກຄຽງກັນ.”

**“Richmond, South Richmond
is my home. That’s where
I grew up with my siblings
and that’s where I’ve been
living my whole life. That’s
where all my friends are and
we grew up in the same little
neighborhood.”**

“Richmond, el Sur de Richmond es
mi hogar. Ahí es donde crecí con mis
hermanos y ahí es donde he estado
viviendo toda mi vida. Ahí es donde
están todos mis amigos y crecimos en
el mismo vecindario”.



Brandy with traditional clothing from Laos
2020

Denny

My parents were displaced from Laos of course. So, my mom would always tell me stories about the war and leaving, how her father passed away from the war, and how they started to introduce people into re-education camps. It always kind of gave me an identity crisis growing up because I'm always like, okay I'm Lao. I'm also American, I guess. How does that really go together? So I think there was a big search from my own identity when I was in high school. A mentorship program helped me better understand that.

Mrs. Kham

When we first moved to the US we lived in Georgia and we were alone. I was the only one in my family who was able to work to support my two daughters and husband who was sick. My brother lived in Richmond and he really really wanted me to move because of all the programs - medical, food stamps, welfare. He wrote me every day to tell me to move here. When we got here to Richmond there were more family relatives so they wanted us to come live among each other. I'm happy because I have family and extended Khmu community here in Richmond. I feel more stable with that. If I have problems I can ask for help from other Khmu families.

Mouang

The older generation, like my parents, are really comfortable and surrounded by the Lao people here. I don't know about others, but in the Asian culture we just like to stay together and we can rely on each other and look after each other's health, so we really want to stay together. We do a lot of ceremonies with family and a lot of people come together. And that's your family. Even as far as moving over the bridge to Vallejo, it's too far.

I never really thought about moving out of Richmond. I like Richmond, that's why I still live here. It's bad in a way with pollution and all, but it's what we call home. It's what I grew up in. I can't imagine living somewhere else and adjusting to a new place.



Grace Lao Lutheran Church, Richmond

Tom

I have planned maybe a hundred times to leave Richmond but it never happened. One time, I visited my cousin in Oklahoma. He bought a duplex for \$29,000. I said, "Oh my God, I'm gonna move here." I told everybody I'm gonna move. So I go to my father-in-law's house on a Saturday night and I said, "Dad, we're gonna move to Oklahoma." He said, "We, who we?" I said, "My family and me, my kids and my wife. We're gonna move."

And he was crying so hard and I said, "Dad, we are not dying, we just move. We're gonna come back and visit you." And he said like, "No, if you want to move to Oklahoma or anywhere, you wait 'til I die then you can move."

And that hit me hard in my chest, like, "Oh." This is it. Here is my home. I have been here. I'm the first person from the Laotian community. I know everybody, I work in the community and I must be crazy to move to some other place. I can go to any government office and I know someone who work there and I can ask their help to support our community. So I go tell my father-in-law, "Don't think about moving anymore, Richmond is my home. I'm gonna die here, and live here."

“Richmond ແມ່ນຮາກຖານຂອງຂ້ອຍແຮ່ງ. ມັນ-
ແມ່ນບ່ອນທີ່ຂ້ອຍເຕີບໃຫຍ່, ມັນໄດ້ຝຶກຝົນຫຼືຫຼອມ
ຂ້ອຍ. ຂ້ອຍເປັນຕົວຂອງຂ້ອຍເອງກໍຍອມ Richmond
ແລະທັງປະສົບການທີ່ຂ້ອຍໄດ້ມາ”

**“Richmond is definitely my
roots. It’s where I grew up,
it’s what shaped me. I’m who
I am because of Richmond
and the experiences that I
had.”**

“Richmond es definitivamente mis
raíces. Es donde crecí, es lo que
me formó. Soy quien soy debido a
Richmond y las experiencias que tuve”.



Bousa with a Tai Lue scarf from
Sayaboury province, Laos
2020

Somphone

"I still consider Laos my homeland, but I call Richmond my home. I moved here from Oakland in 1980 and so I've been living in this area a long time. It feels like home because there are lots of Laotian people here. There is the temple on Barrett, there's the Bay Area Lao Association that I belong to. So that's why I stay.

Peter

I moved here in 1986 from Hayward because I heard there were a lot of Lao people in Richmond and San Pablo. One day I came to the market on 23rd, and I talked to one of the elders. There were a lot of Lao people in Richmond but they didn't know each other. So in 1988 we started the Bay Area Lao Association.

We help each other. Elder people don't know how to drive? We drive them to the hospital or grocery store. They can't speak English? We help them with translation. People pass away, we help them to do the funeral in the Buddhist way. I drive them to their housing to apply and sometimes I help them to apply for housing. In the Association we have all kinds of experiences to help people. They trust us and so we help them.

We also have the Lao Temple on Barrett Avenue [in Richmond]. All Lao people from all over the Bay Area come to this place and worship in the temple.

Denny

Where do I see home? Richmond. As simple as that. Love lost city. I made a home for me just because I grew up in North Richmond. There are a lot of different refugees and immigrants from Central and South America, Mexico and all these little places. Even though people are from a lot of different places, we all shared one common language. English wasn't our first language. We all grew up poor, but we always had fun hanging around the block.

Brandy

Richmond, South Richmond is my home. That's where I grew up with my siblings and that's where I've been living my whole life. That's where all my friends are and we grew up in the same little neighborhood. The diversity makes it feel like home.

Asia

I moved here with my mom and a lot of my family lives out here already. I've been out here and I know where everything is at. We are able to walk around and talk to our neighbors in the morning when we see them. Talk to others when we are walking around. Our culture is getting into the community and we feel included in a way.

Torm

We're here and we cannot go back home. I have to be in my community here. That's why I go talk to and meet all the different community leaders, African American, Latino. And I've known them a long time so we are friends. I feel really connected here.

Bousa

Richmond is definitely my roots. Its where I grew up, its what shaped me. I'm who I am because of Richmond and the experiences that I had. I went to Richmond high and now I work in Richmond. I have a connection to that place, the community, the people there. I'm grateful to come back and work in that community again even though I don't live there.



Detail of a monk's carving at Wat Lao Rattaranam Temple, Richmond

Section 3

Facing a second
displacement





In a 2019 survey we conducted of Laotian residents of the Richmond area:

70% spend over half of their monthly income on rent, with some spending as high as **83%** of income on rent.

70% of respondents like where they live now but **57%** of respondents shared that the cost of housing made them want to leave Richmond.

The most common reported impacts of high rent are **overcrowding, moving frequently and not having money left over for other basic needs.**

“ບຸກຄົນໃດກໍຕາມທີ່ເຈົ້າຖືວ່າເປັນບ້ານຂອງເຈົ້າ, ກໍແປວ່າ
ບ່ອນນັ້ນເປັນບ້ານ. ມັນອາດຈະເປັນອາພາດເຕັມ, ມັນ
ອາດຈະເປັນຫຼອງ, ມັນອາດຈະເປັນຮູ້ອຸ່ນ, ແຕ່ວາມັນເປັນ-
ບ່ອນຢູ່ຂອງເຈົ້າ, ເປັນພື້ນທີ່ ຂອງເຈົ້າຢູ່ດີ”

**“Wherever you consider
yourself home, then that’s
where it will be. It could be
an apartment, it could be a
room, it could be a house,
but its your dwelling, your
space.”**

“Donde sea que tu consideres tu
hogar, ahí es donde estará. Puede
ser un apartamento, puede ser una
habitación, puede ser una casa,
pero es tu vivienda, tu espacio”.



Denny with the blanket his mother
carried him in as a child
2020

Brandy

My mom is happy to be here. It's just the struggles that she's gone through, going through. It's just like not enough to pay her rent. I have tried to help my mom also but it's still not enough. So, that's the only struggle we have in my household, paying rent. And then she has other stuff to pay like bills that I tried to help her with but sometimes it's just hard because we don't have enough money.

I also don't really feel safe here because of what happened to my sister. I've been traumatized ever since that. The community where I live is not a safe place for neither me or my family. So yes, I do want to move out of Richmond. Somewhere I could raise my son where there is no shooting. I don't want him to be exposed to it. The only thing is that I look everywhere but there is no house that we could rent because we are on Section 8.

Kham

The only thing, the burning issue is the cost of living that undermines my quality of life. The cost of living is getting higher and higher.

It is different here and comparing the life back home in Laos. In Laos there is more land, more space to grow food, to support yourself or your family. In Laos we don't have to rent the house. Everything you need you have to do yourself, the only thing you have to buy is clothing and even the Khmu and the Hmong people make the clothes themselves. The difference here is that everything here is money, money, money. No money, no food, no home. In my country no one is in the street. Everybody has their home. You don't have to pay anything. You want meat, you want vegetable, you want fruit? Everything we have, no buy. I haven't been able to do any of that here, where am I going to do that here?

I don't know other communities but I know the Laotian community suffered because they would cut everything to find money to pay the rent. They would go fishing to get their food to subsidize their rent. Or they might wash their clothes at home because they have to cut down on going down to the laundry. Our folks have suffered the most, except nobody sees it unless you are Laotian. Let's say people go to Kentucky Fried Chicken, you'll find almost the whole chicken eaten by the child, right? In Laotian community, we don't do that. That one whole chicken, we eat at least 3 or 4 meals for the whole family. We cook with the rest of it with a different way, too. That's a part of survival.

When not included with the larger category of "Asian American," Cambodian (\$16,429), Laotian (\$15,363) and Hmong (\$11,440) have the lowest per capita income in California compared to all the racial groups.

When I was younger we used to live in a house in Richmond. We were there for a couple of years, maybe first grade to fourth grade. I used to go to Riverside for those years. All of sudden we couldn't afford the place anymore. We had to move to El Sobrante. Everybody thought I was Samoan. I'm like no, I'm not but that's fine. We were there a couple of years until my eight grade year when the management of the apartment building decided to sell it. They raised rent a thousand dollars. We thought the place wasn't worth it. A lot of things were wrong with the place. We moved out here with my grandma since my eight grade year and now I'm a senior. It hasn't been that bad but you have to pay for certain things before you can do what you want to do. Priorities like paying rent, paying car insurance, things that need to be paid off before you're able to go out with your friends. I knew I was maturing at the time, it was just me and

“ຂ້ອຍຢາກໄປຮຽນຕໍ່ວິທະຍາໄລຢູ່ບ່ອນໄກແຕ່ບໍ່ໄກ ຫລາຍປານໃດເພື່ອເບິ່ງວາມີຫຍັງແດ່ໃນໂລກນີ້. ແຕ່ຂ້ອຍຄິດຮອດ Richmond. ຄອບຄົວຂອງຂ້ອຍມາຈາກທີ່ນີ້ແລະຢູ່ທີ່ນີ້. ຂ້ອຍມີຄວາມຮູ້ສຶກວ່າ ຂ້ອຍຈະກັບຄືນ ມາ.”

“I do wanna go to college kinda far but not too far to see what else is out there in the world. But I’m going to miss Richmond. My family is from here and lives out here. I have a feeling I would come back.”

“Quiero ir a la universidad un poco lejos pero no demasiado lejos para ver qué más hay en el mundo. Pero voy a extrañar Richmond. Mi familia es de aquí y vive aquí. Tengo la sensación de que volvería”.



Asia with a childhood Christmas picture
in traditional Mien clothing
2020

my mom all the time. I learned how to be responsible with money and sometimes as the oldest grandkid I had to take care of younger grandkids. It feels like I matured from that.

Denny

Why would you want to move all the way up to Antioch and Pittsburgh and then have to commute so far to try to get to work? And I know a lot of my friends, some of them have already moved to Pittsburgh and did that. They commute all the way to San Francisco to work. You could afford to live in Pittsburgh comfortably with a nice house but in order to maintain it you got to go to work in San Francisco or something else, maybe a tech related job or just any work where you can make at least 150 grand a year.

Somphone

Moving would be difficult for me because I am getting old and it's gonna affect my wife, who has a problem with kidney and she has dialysis three times a week. If I moved, I'm not sure what the situation would be in a new location, a new place. I cannot be separated from my friends and people that I live with. I've lived here a long time. So there's uncertainty if I have to move. I would prefer not to move. But I worry about the future constantly if the rent goes up in the next couple of years.

Torm

I'm always thinking about displacement. I was thinking about what caused it and I think it comes out of imperialism, capitalism. If you look at the apartment, it's the same apartment, same structure, same two bedrooms. Twenty years ago, you can rent for just \$300. Now, it's \$1,500 or \$2,000, right? For those people who invest in a property, they say, "Why, isn't that fair?" But I say, it's the same box that I rented 20 years ago at \$300 and they don't fix nothing. And so the government doesn't invest in affordable housing because there is no interest for the government. If they open a shopping mall, they get sales tax. But to invest in affordable housing, it's not

there for the government to get a return, right? I'm not a critic of the government but the budget of the United States each year, they only spend 25% or 30% at the most in domestic programs. The rest is spent around the world. What is that? That's capitalism, that's imperialism.

Peter

One family that I was helping tried to get housing. I went 2-3 times but they said it's not available, there's a line for the application. Now the family moved to Fresno. It's cheaper over there so we lose one family. They are still connected with us through the Association, but they move far away now. If they are far away, we can be in touch but we cannot help them like people nearby us. People nearby, we can help them, we can run to help them. But faraway we can only help by phone.

Bousa

I want to give SF as an example, where you have all of these new people, these tech people moving in, where the people who are the heart and the soul of the city and built the culture of the city are pushed out. A lot of natives from SF are like, 'The culture isn't the same, the events and community just aren't the same anymore.' That's the same thing with Richmond. It's going to change the culture of the city. What was once the heart and soul isn't there anymore. Richmond is very multicultural, if that changes, if you have all the Laotian people moving out, that's going to change the fabric of the community. That culture is no longer going to exist, it's been shipped away and forgotten or replaced.

Laotians have some of the lowest homeownership rates in California compared to all other ethnic and racial groups.

A photograph of a person with long dark hair, seen from behind, reading a white document. They are sitting on a black leather sofa in a living room. In the background, a man with glasses is sitting on the same sofa, looking towards the right. The room features a white wall with a framed picture, a red tassel, and a lamp. The text "Section 4 Keeping the community together" is overlaid on the image.

Section 4
Keeping the community
together



Denny

I don't plan on leaving. [laughs] Once I realized that we grew up in a very like, you know, high crime rate-neighborhood with a lot of poverty and things like that, it made me angry at the fact that you meet a bunch of great people who are stuck in bad cycles and things like that. But then you also meet a lot of people that do a lot of great work and they actually do wanna try to improve the city. And then other folks they just want to get out. When I was growing up I always had that dream of moving out of Richmond. But now I'm like I got to try and invest more into it and make it better.

Torm

We don't have any money but we have the people. If we, all of us in Richmond – African-American and Latino and Asian whatever - if we come together and understand what we want here together, we can change Richmond, we can make Richmond better. Every time I go to the city council or make a speech, I always say, "I love Richmond." I think a lot of people in the Southeast Asian community did not know or did not see how much African Americans fought for rights and all that. Without them we wouldn't get a lot of what we have in terms of rights and services. A lot of refugees coming here, they did not know this.

Sary

Even though we work hard to support each other, we still need help and outside assistance, especially with housing. What we do is not enough, we need outside assistance to make our community better and to keep our community together.

Brandy

We had a note on our door about our housing. I don't remember what it said but I remember fighting it because they were trying to kick us out of our house. They said we didn't pay but we proved that we paid it. I went to the housing authority and said, "We paid this, this, this and we don't know why you guys gave us a note saying

you're going to kick us out." I also help my auntie because she has a hard time reading English. I tell her what the papers are about so she can decide what she wants to sign. And last year I worked with APEN to pass the policy called The Healthy Home Act or AB1232. So that's how I fight for our housing.

Mouang

I've been doing this my whole life, providing my knowledge and language capacity to interpret for the community. I started working with APEN and a lot of things they do are helping the community over the long term. I feel like I contribute because I'm translating some of the language to help them know what is available for them.

Torm

My family always served the village. And when I first came here, I looked into all different things about how we can support each other in the Laotian community. I don't know how many times, a hundred times or a thousand times, I have to kneel on my knees at the landlord to get them to rent a place to a family that just arrived. I sponsored 24 families [to come to the US] myself. And for each of those 24 families, I asked them to sponsor at least one family. I trained them how to help other people to find a place and support other community members.

Asia

I have to work harder in life for the things I want because most of my family didn't graduate from high school. I'll be the first one to graduate high school and go to a four year college and hopefully I'll be the first one to graduate. I want to show my younger cousins that we are able to put our mind to it and that I'm here for them. Seeing my family struggle most of my life, it makes me responsible. I have to put my mind to things when it needs to get done.

You have to take it to the people who are in charge, the ones who split up the money and decide what the money will go to. Like Chev-

“ໂອ ບໍ່, ຂ້ອຍບໍ່ມີແຜນທີ່ຈະຍ້າຍອອກຈາກ Richmond. ຂ້ອຍຢູ່ທີ່ນີ້ໄດ້ຫລາຍປີແລ້ວ. ຂ້ອຍຮັກມັນ. ພວກເຮົາມີຊຸມຊົນທີ່ດີລະມີເພື່ອນບານຸ, ພວກເຮົາຮູ້ສຶກປອດໄພ, ພວກເຮົາຮູ້ສຶກພາກພູມໃຈທີ່ຢູ່ Richmond.”

“Oh no, I don’t have any plans to leave Richmond. I’ve lived here for many many years. I love it. We have the community and neighbors. We feel safe, we feel happy to live in Richmond.”

“Oh no, no tengo planes de irme de Richmond. He vivido aquí por muchos años. Me encanta, tenemos la comunidad y vecinos. Nos sentimos seguros, nos sentimos felices de vivir en Richmond “.

Peter (Phengkio) in front of the Wat Lao Rattanaram temple, Barrett Avenue, Richmond
2020



ron doesn't pay their fair taxes and there are big corporations that have all this money but don't really want to help the place that they are in. It's harming the community instead of helping. It should be the opposite. We need to let them see what our struggles are, get to know us and connect with us on an emotional level about the distress we've been in. This can help the community and also other people who are in the same struggle.

Torm

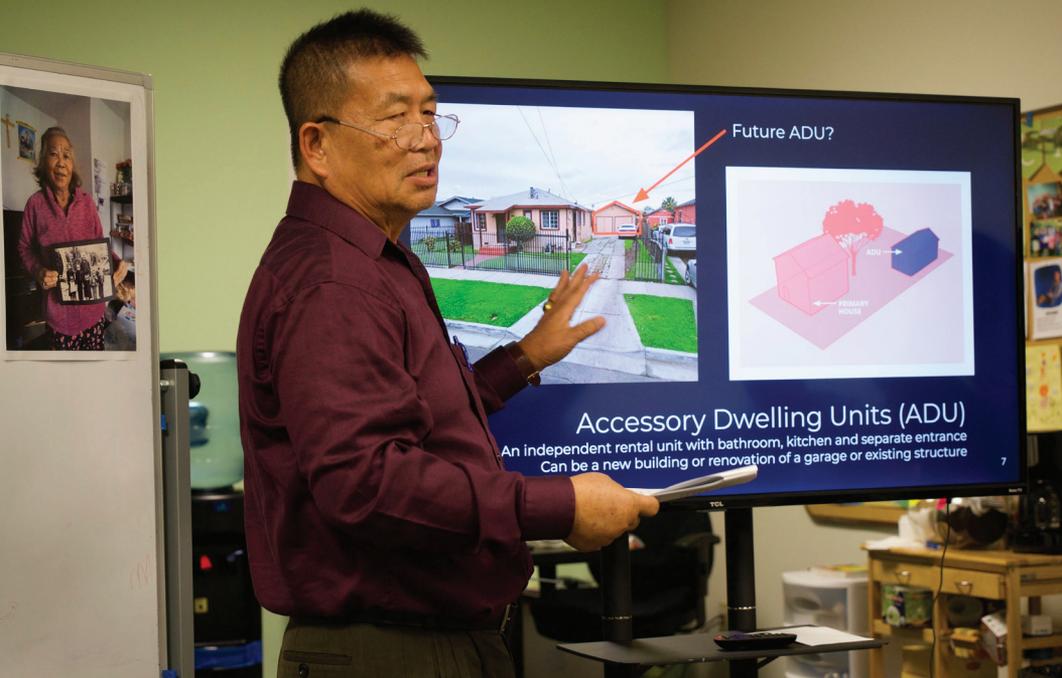
In Laos, we don't buy a home. Each family has a plot in the village and the whole village builds a house for each family. All you need to pay is cooking the food for lunch and dinner. After you're done, you're done. You don't pay mortgage. You don't pay insurance over there. So people don't see money as a value. It's the love and caring for each other and the neighbors supporting each other. Like I have a tomato but somebody have green onion, so we exchange. You feel more like a human being and connected to each other.

We never close the door and we never have the key to lock the door, only so the goat doesn't go in and eat your food or something like that. Say a neighbor needs something in your house, like they ran out of salt or something. They just go into your house and get the salt to cook their meal. Later on when you come home, they say, "Oh, we got some of your salt today." That's it, so it's hard for me to adjust to homes here.

This project [the Building Power fellowship] has given me a lot of thoughts about housing and a housing cooperative. I'm not qualified to buy a home because I don't have a lot of money. What happens if I talk to the Laotian community who are right now renting? Why can't we buy the house or apartment building that we rent together? In my apartment right now we have 6 or 7 units, all with some friends there. It would be much cheaper than each of us purchasing a single home.

Bousa

There is a culture of fear, no one wants to speak up, that's the legacy of the secret war. I feel like that's changing, our generation is more like, our stories need to be heard. People from my father's generation didn't want to speak up and talk about their displacement. They don't want to cause any trouble or say anything. Its part of the mentality that was instilled to not speak up or they don't know the language or how to navigate the system so they don't even bother with it. But its the responsibility of the newer generation to speak up and navigate that systemic oppression.



Preventing a Second Displacement through Low Cost Accessory Dwelling Units

Over the course of a year, through Richmond LAND's Building Power Fellowship, we explored different needs and issues facing the Lao community. We started by reflecting on our own stories in Richmond using photography, writing and storytelling. We then connected the mission and work of our host organization, the Asian Pacific Environmental Network (APEN) to the history of development and housing in Richmond. We learned about the community efforts to make Richmond a better place for all, its deep culture, the histories of migration, and the fights against segregation and injustice. We also learned about different economic models such as cooperatives and community land trusts that are being used around the Bay Area and country to build community wealth, power, and keep communities together. Next, we conducted first interviews with Lao residents to identify their most important challenges and issues in the Richmond area. The cost of housing was the issue that kept showing up, so we decided to focus our project on providing housing for our community. We

then created a survey for an additional 25 residents to better understand housing needs. We also conducted longer interviews with ten residents.

At first, our project was focused on reclaiming a vacant property and creating business and housing opportunities there. After our surveys, we realized that in addition to renters, there are Lao homeowners in the community who also need support. We also wanted to design a project that could help support the diverse community of Richmond. Because of this, we shifted our focus to a project concept that is more flexible and can help more people across Richmond.

The project is to work with low-income homeowners in Richmond who are interested in creating an additional, low-income rental unit on their property. These units are known as Accessory Dwelling Units or ADUs. We started by focusing on the Laotian community, but this is a project that can support all of our communities in Richmond. Our goal is to start with one block in Richmond to develop 6-10 units at the same time. This helps anchor the existing community in place and connect neighbors to each other and to the services that they need. For example, in our interviews, elder Laotians identified the importance of being close to family and friends due to language barriers, access to medical providers and other social services.

The units would be low-cost rentals for community members in danger of displacement and struggling with housing costs. The project would benefit homeowners by creating a monthly income from the lease of their land. This helps keep the community intact and people close to each other and their resources. This project is in line with the city goals in the General Plan, Housing Element, and Health in All Policies to increase housing density, prevent future displacement and increase the health of the residents of the city overall.

Creator Bios

Brandy Khansouvang is a mother who grew up on Richmond's Southside. She is a member of the Asian Pacific Environmental Network and has worked on campaigns to support affordable housing and the banning of coal in Richmond.

Sary Tatpaporn has been a community advocate in Richmond for nearly three decades, working on numerous projects for community health and resident empowerment. His impact has ranged from founding the first senior daycare for Laotian residents in Richmond in 2019 to getting the first mailbox installed in North Richmond in the 1980s. Sary is a father and husband.

Sasha "Sunny" Graham is a Black student parent and community activist. She serves as the President of the state board for the Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment and is an advocate for housing and healthcare as a human right for all. Sunny has received numerous distinguished awards as a student and advocate. She graduated from UC Berkeley in May 2020 with a Bachelors in Ethnic Studies. She is in the Berkeley Law class of 2023.

Evan Bissell facilitates participatory art and research projects that support equitable systems and liberatory processes. Projects take varied forms: an interactive online history of freedom and confinement in the United States told through 50 miniature paintings (knottedline.com), poster installations and community surveys about broken windows policing in the Bronx, and collaborative, life-size portrait paintings created with incarcerated fathers and children of incarcerated parents. Evan is the Arts and Cultural Strategy Coordinator at the Othering & Belonging Institute and co-coordinator of the Building Power program at Richmond LAND.

Thanks

Special thanks to the interviewees for their time, feedback and willingness to share their stories.

Thanks to Marie Choi of APEN for feedback and design guidance

Lao translation by Manh Phongboupha

Spanish translation by Yenny Garcia

Additional Resources

Statistics on pages 10, 17, 38, 42 are from the 2020 report *Southeast Asian American Journeys*, created by the Southeast Asia Resource Center and Asian Americans Advancing Justice.

https://www.searac.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/SEARAC_NationalSnapshot_PrinterFriendly.pdf

Other efforts to advance affordable ADU projects:

Community Land Trust of West Marin: <https://www.realcommunity-rentals.org/>

LA-Mas: <https://www.mas.la/affordable-adus>

blink!LAB Architecture: <http://www.blink-lab.com/adu-design-and-development.html>

Casita Coalition: <https://www.casitacoalition.org/>

“...no one wants to speak up, that’s the legacy of the secret war. I feel like that’s changing, our generation is more like, our stories need to be heard. People from my father’s generation didn’t want to speak up and talk about their displacement. They don’t want to cause any trouble or say anything. Its part of the mentality that was instilled to not speak up or they don’t know the language or how to navigate the system so they don’t even bother with it. But it’s the responsibility of the newer generation to speak up and navigate that systemic oppression.”

-Bousa



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