

WEST meets EAST

Interview with the women of Western Hmong Mennonite Church

Sunday, July 21, 2013 at their meeting place – 5:00pm

Hammond United Church

11391 Dartford Street,

Maple Ridge, V2X 1V6

Present: Cheryl Dyck, Rita Siebert and Waltrude Gortzen for MCBC Women's Ministry
And joining us from the Western Hmong Mennonite Church are:



Left to right:

Back row: *Kay Moua* (Assistant Women's group leader and our translator), *Seng Yang* (Pastor's wife), *Song Thao*, *Lee Yang* (Leader of Women's group) *Chia Cha*

Front row: *Song Thao* (Elder's wife) *Mee Lee* (Pastor's mom) *Paj ...* (Mee Lee's good friend from Portland, Oregon) *See Her* (Visiting friend from Alaska) *Yer Vang*

Rita & Cheryl & I had been eagerly anticipating our upcoming visit with our dear Hmong Sisters and in preparation for our visit we sent them some questions to consider and talk about.

During our drive out to Maple Ridge, BC, the 3 of us were wondering how this visit would proceed. How many women could we expect? Would we intimidate them? Would we be able to communicate?

Well... once we arrived it only took a few minutes and we wondered no longer! We were greeted with hugs, laughter, chatter and smiles! Introductions were made all around and we were invited to come in and help ourselves to some refreshments and then **Seng** opened our time together with a prayer in her native Hmong language.

They were eager to talk and we were eager to listen and learn.

They had obviously talked about the questions we had sent them and were open and willing to share.

Below are their answers to our questions, with 'minimal' editing!



1. When did your people come to Canada and why?

In 1980, the Hmong people came to Canada because of the Vietnam War. In Canada we live mostly in Ontario and BC.

2. Our home country and our native language:

We came from Laos and our native language is Hmong.

3. How did you learn about Mennonite faith?

We learned about the Mennonite faith from the Mennonite church that had sponsored the First Hmong Mennonite Church community that lives in Ontario.

4. Are there Mennonite Christians in your home country?

In our country there are no Mennonite Christians.

5. Were you allowed to worship freely?

Before the Vietnam War we were free to worship, but after we were not.

6. What is the size, age range and makeup of your group of women and what are some of your activities as a group?

In the Western Hmong Mennonite Church, we have **14** women. We have meetings or gatherings **4** times a year, and women's group is any ages.

Our Church meets every Tuesday night @ 7:00pm for Bible Studies and every Saturday evening we have song and band practice to prepare for Sunday service.

7. What encourages you to keep participating in MCBC's Women's Ministry?

To encourage our women's group to participate within MCBC grows our faith; gives us more experience of praying to God. Also get to know MCBC women better through fellowship.

8. What advice do you have for us as a committee to better connect with our Ethnic sisters?

Make more connections and keep in touch through events and non-events.

Obviously, we talked about much more than just the questions we had sent them and I've since learned that these wonderful Christian Sisters are so committed to attending the annual Fall Women's Retreat that they go and pick blueberries during the summer in order to raise funds to help pay for their retreat participation.

In the hot summer sun, a group of 19, including husbands, picked over 1600 pounds of blueberries – about 64 buckets full and they raised \$800.00.



In the blueberry fields: *Seng Yang & Kay Moua*

Other topics we talked about... now that they live in Canada.... do they still adhere to their ethnic traditions when it comes to weddings and other life events? They told us that the more 'Canadian' young people prefer to be more modern. Frequently, the traditional Hmong Celebration is followed by a Western style celebration.

Clothing – nowadays, mostly Western style but on special occasions like our 2012 Fall Women's Retreat – the finery was out on display.

Left to right: Kay Moua, Kia Xiong and Seng Yang



Food – a combination of East and West

These ladies are looking to get involved! Their hope is to participate at this year's BC MCC Festival **September 6&7** by providing the masses with their delectable spring-rolls that they treated us with at the 2013 Spring Inspirational Day. When the women were done, no spring-rolls were left!



One last group picture before going home!
It was a most enjoyable visit!
Thank you, ladies, for spending your time with us!

Written by Waltrude Gortzen
MCBC Women's Ministry Rep.