



Yia Lee was in her twenties with two children when the war began in Laos in the 1960s.

She had a job in a hospital as a doctors' assistant, cleaning and organizing tools, but when the Vietnamese soldiers came, she, her children and the other villagers ran from their home in the village to hide in the jungle.

For years, she said, they were in constant, mortal danger, hiding in the jungle and returning to their homes when the soldiers left. She followed the other villagers, moving from place to place, finding things to sell so she could feed her children. "We were always afraid," she said, and remembers crying every day.

Finally, she was able to pay her way to Thailand where she and her children lived in a refugee camp for a year. (In the latter part of the war, many people could not leave Laos and were killed. Desperate, some tried swimming across the Mekong River and died.)

Around 1976, the family received help from sponsors to travel to the U.S. as refugees. They moved from state to state. She eventually found work as a seamstress and in a factory assembly line. But after years of labor, she fell, hurt her back, and was unable to work.

The move to Minnesota came in 1999. After a lifetime of hardship and trauma, Yia Lee had a simple wish. She wanted to find a small apartment she could afford. From a friend, she heard about Arlington Gardens, ASI's first senior housing building in Minnesota. Offering accessible, affordable housing with service coordination to seniors 62 and older, it seemed like the perfect opportunity. She put her name on the waiting list, and "didn't have to wait too long." She was "very, very happy because the building was subsidized and I was able to live on my own and pay for it myself."

With many Hmong people already living in the building, she immediately made friends. "Here at Arlington, we all look after each other. We sit and talk about our lives. We feel so happy to be able to enjoy our lives without stress." She is grateful to not have to worry about food.

Yia Lee's children visit, help with her needs, bring her meals, and take her shopping.

"I am so thankful to be living all by myself," she said. "It makes me feel so happy and free to have my own place."

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