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Pressroom for more information and/or downloadable images:

www.itvs.org/pressroom/photos

Program companion website: www.pbs.org/deathofashaman



INDEPENDENT LENS'S "DEATH OF A SHAMAN" FOLLOWS DAUGHTER'S JOURNEY TO UNDERSTAND HER FATHER'S LIFE

*Film by Richard Hall and Fahm Fong Saeyang
Premieres Nationally on "Independent Lens,"
ITVS's Acclaimed Series on PBS*

*Presented in Association with KVIE / Sacramento and NAATA
Tuesday, May 27, 2004 at 10 P.M.
(check local listings)*

"Shattering." —LA WEEKLY

"My name is Fahm Fong Saeyang and I'm standing on the spot where I was born. It took me 23 years to get here and this is the story of my journey."

—FAHM FONG SAEYANG, FROM DEATH OF A SHAMAN

(San Francisco, CA) — As her father lay dying in a hospital bed, Fahm Saeyang and her siblings gathered around to watch over him. The family's tradition on many occasions, both big and small, was to record everything on video, and this was no exception. Her father's final words were about walking through the mountains in his home country of Thailand. After his death, Fahm grieved for the unfulfilled promise of her father's life. A shaman in Thailand, he had been respected and treasured by the Mien villagers for his knowledge and wisdom. But like many of the Mien people who found themselves in the path of the Vietnam War, he and his wife and young children had been driven out of their mountain village, then picked up and transplanted to the plains of Kansas to live with an Amish family. From the time of his arrival in America, Yoon Fong Saeyang lost his way, falling victim to poverty, violence and a drug addiction that destroyed his family. What kind of man was he really? And how could his daughter come to understand him?

Fahm Saeyang responded to her father's unsettled life and death by taking a reverse journey on film to examine the heartbreaking path he took from respectability to hopelessness—and from Southeast Asia to America—in a heartfelt personal mission to understand his tragic story. **DEATH OF A SHAMAN** will air nationally on the PBS series *Independent Lens*, hosted by Don Cheadle, on Tuesday, May 27th at 10 P.M. (check local listings).



This dual journey helps **DEATH OF A SHAMAN** examine with painful honesty how Fahm's Mien immigrant family suffered through a 20-year ordeal of poverty, racism, religions, drugs, jail and the murder of a family member. It is a chronicle of a darker side of the pursuit of the American dream that affected

many of the 40,000 Mien who came from a primitive life in the mountains of Southeast Asia to America.

DEATH OF A SHAMAN is also a moving account of Fahm's need to understand her father's pain, and a desire to figure out what will placate his troubled spirit and her own.

Additional information and/or downloadable photographs from **DEATH OF A SHAMAN** are available at www.itvs.org/pressroom/photos.

DEATH OF A SHAMAN is a film by Richard Hall and Fahm Fong Saeyang in association with KVIE, the Independent Television Service (ITVS) and NAATA.



The program's interactive companion website www.pbs.org/deathofashaman features detailed information about the film, including an interview with the filmmaker, cast and crew bios, as well as links and resources pertaining to the film's subject matter. The site also features a "talkback" section for viewers to share their ideas and opinions, preview clips of the film, and more.

The ITVS Community Connections Project (ITVS-CCP) is partnering with NAATA in undertaking a community engagement campaign **Worlds Apart—Common Voices**, which looks at Asian Pacific American stories that highlight differences and commonalities in cultures and communities. Through compelling personal stories and a broad-based community engagement campaign, **Worlds Apart—Common Voices** is designed to stimulate cross-cultural dialogue and encourage long-term partnerships for lasting social and educational impact. More information about the campaign is available at www.itvs.org/outreach/worldsapartcommonvoices.

ABOUT THE MIEN

The Lu Mien have had a history of displacement by conflict for hundreds of years. After being pushed out of their original homeland in China into remote areas of Southeast Asia a century earlier, their peaceful farming existence was disrupted as French colonial powers in Vietnam began to wage war. When Americans became involved in Vietnam, the Mien participated on the U.S. side in the “secret war” in Laos, the largest covert operation during the war.

Although safe from soldiers in the border camps, the Mien were forced to live in awful conditions: poor housing, sanitation and little food or water. The camps were surrounded by barbed wire and patrolled by Thai soldiers. Adults and children were confined with little or no physical activity.

It was at this point that the Mien began to apply for refugee status to the U.S., and the first Mien began to arrive in 1980. Unlike many other Asian refugees during this period, however, the Mien had no exposure to formal education, no written language, and little to no experience at paid labor.

Today, the Mien in America face the challenge of many other immigrant groups: how to live and work in a new country while maintaining cultural identity. There are Mien communities in several cities in the U.S., where cultural rituals offer a chance to gather together and celebrate their lives as Mien in America. It is estimated that there are about 40,000 Mien who resettled in the U.S., with the largest group of about 3,000 being located in Oakland, California.

DEATH OF A SHAMAN Credits

DIRECTOR / WRITER:

PRODUCER / WRITER:

PRINCIPAL PHOTOGRAPHY:

EDITED BY:

Richard Hall

Fahm Fong Saeyang

Pat Srisawangwat

Dave Corona

Rico Corona

Eric Fox

Sovonto Green

Richard Hall

Fahm Fong Saeyang

Nai Fong Saeyang

Jim Callahan

Karen Jewell

AWARDS

Best Feature Documentary Award, Oakland International Film Festival

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

RICHARD HALL (Director/Writer) has produced over 50 national primetime shows for networks A&E, TLC, and Discovery, and for PBS stations KQED and KCET. Hall has won Emmy Awards in San Francisco and Los Angeles, a Golden Mike, an Iris Award, and the LA Press Club award for best documentary. He is currently a producer for CBS's *The Amazing Race*.



FAHM FONG SAEYANG (pronounced fom fong sigh-yong, Producer/Writer) was born in a Mien refugee camp along the Thai-Lao border near the city of Nan in Northeastern Thailand. She grew up mostly in Sacramento, California, but also spent a year on an Amish-Mennonite farm in Kansas when her family first immigrated to the United States.

Fahm Saeyang has worked as an associate producer for five prime time episodes of the TLC series *I Witness*, and two A&E episodes of the primetime series *Biography*. She has also worked as a weekend reporter and daily news writer at the Financial News network *On 24*. She has a BA in Broadcast Journalism from San Francisco State.

ABOUT INDEPENDENT LENS

Independent Lens is a weekly series airing Tuesday nights at 10 P.M. on PBS. The acclaimed anthology series features documentaries and a limited number of fiction films united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement and unflinching visions of their independent producers. *Independent Lens* features unforgettable stories about a unique individual, community or moment in history, which prompted Nancy Franklin in *The New Yorker* to write “Watching Independent Lens ... is like going into an independent bookstore—you don’t always find what you were looking for but you often find something you didn’t even know you wanted.” Presented by ITVS, the series is supported by interactive companion websites, and national publicity and community outreach campaigns. Further information about the series is available at www.pbs.org/independent-lens. *Independent Lens* is jointly curated by ITVS and PBS, and is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding provided by PBS and the National Endowment for the Arts.

ABOUT ITVS

Independent Television Service (ITVS) funds and presents award-winning documentaries and dramas on public television, innovative new media projects on the Web and the weekly series *Independent Lens* on Tuesday nights at 10 P.M. on PBS. ITVS is a miracle of public policy created by media activists, citizens and politicians seeking to foster plurality and diversity in public television. ITVS was established by a historic mandate of Congress to champion independently produced programs that take creative risks, spark public dialogue and serve underserved audiences. Since its inception in 1991, ITVS programs have revitalized the relationship between the public and public television, bringing TV audiences face-to-face with the lives and concerns of their fellow Americans. More information about ITVS can be obtained by visiting www.itvs.org. ITVS is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American People.

ABOUT KVIE

KVIE, Inc., located in the heart of California’s Central Valley, inspires audiences and enriches their lives through engaging programs and educational services. Established in 1959 by a group of educators, KVIE serves more than 1.2 million households in the nation’s 19th largest television market. With one of the largest geographic signals in the country, KVIE can be viewed in 28 counties through its analog signal, more than 60 cable systems and satellite providers, and in high-definition on KVIE-DT. KVIE actively creates original local programming and is one of the top most active producers of public television programming in the country. For more information, visit KVIE’s Web site at www.kvie.org.

ABOUT NAATA

Since 1980, the National Asian American Telecommunications Association (NAATA) has been at the forefront of bringing Asian Pacific American media to the American public. The organization was formed to challenge the historical exclusion of Asian Pacific Americans from the media field and to counteract the distorted portrayals of Asians by mainstream press. NAATA's mission is to present stories that convey the richness and diversity of the Asian Pacific American experience. In addition to national public television broadcasts, NAATA fulfills its mission through educational distribution, presenting the annual San Francisco International Asian American Film Festival, and assistance and funding for media artists.

ABOUT PBS

PBS, headquartered in Alexandria, Virginia, is a private, nonprofit media enterprise owned and operated by the nation's 349 public television stations. Serving nearly 90 million people each week, PBS enriches the lives of all Americans through quality programs and education services on noncommercial television, the Internet and other media. More information about PBS is available at <http://www.pbs.org>, the leading dot-org Web site on the Internet.



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