

Outstanding New Reader Award, 1996

Nyia Sengkhammee

I have had the privilege of serving Literacy Green Bay for 23 years, as a tutor (1992 to 1996) and as a classroom instructor (1996 to the present). Over the years I have worked with so many wonderful learners!

I would like to pay tribute to an extraordinary woman, Nyia Sengkhammee, whom I tutored from 1992 to 1996. A very special memory I have of Nyia is the day she received the "Outstanding New Reader, ESL" award at the Governor's Residence in Madison on October 25, 1996, given by WI Volunteers in Literacy. The event was hosted by First Lady Sue Ann Thompson. Miss America, Tara Holland, whose platform was literacy, was also present for the celebration. Nyia was thrilled to receive this prestigious honor along with a commendation from Governor Thompson. I was extremely proud of her and all that she had accomplished. Those of us who accompanied her to the ceremony (Evie Jensen and Anita King) were elated to witness her well-deserved recognition. It was such a happy and exciting day for all of us!



Nyia overcame many hardships and obstacles to reach this point. She and her family fled their homeland of Laos as refugees in 1976 and came to the U.S. to build a new life. She worked hard to learn English and math. She passed her citizenship test and became a U.S. citizen in 1996. All the while she cared for her husband and four children and was employed full time.

Her greatest achievement while we worked together was her "book." She was especially gifted as a writer. We compiled a collection of her works which included folktales from Laos. She recalled these tales and other stories that had been passed down for generations by storytellers in the "oral tradition." She put these cherished stories into writing to preserve them.

Also, she wrote about life and family members in Laos (many of whom did not survive), as well as her new life and challenges in America. These heartfelt pieces reflect her love of family and her strength of character and spirit.

Nyia wrote: "Some people measure success by things. But you can be truly happy if you are proud of what you have like your family and friends."

Also, "Love and care are so precious in this world. I think my sons and daughter are the most important people in my life. The most important thing in life that we want to live for is love."

Nyia passed away September 26, 2010. She will always be remembered for her kindness, creativity, and friendship.

Submitted by Cindy Volz