

# **IMMIGRANT 'PIONEER' DIES UNEXPECTEDLY;**

## **HMONG BUSINESSWOMAN CALLED 'MOM' BY MANY**

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### **Body**

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To customers who shopped at her St. Paul store, Khou Xiong Yang was known as a leading **Hmong**-American importer of ceremonial costumes. **Many** who visited her store **called** her "**Mom**." She was also the real mother to 18 children, including 13 she adopted during the war in Laos.

Yang, a **pioneering immigrant businesswoman**, **died** Sunday, apparently from a heart-valve rupture. She was 55.

Yang ran **Hmong** Toj Sab, a clothing and general store at 629 University Ave. The store sold imports from China, Thailand and Laos. Opening the store two years ago fulfilled a dream, according to her daughter, May Chou Her. She ran it in partnership with her husband, Xeng Xue Yang. Before the store opened, Yang sold her costumes and embroidery - known as pan'dau in **Hmong** - from booths at **Hmong** festivals.

"She's been a **businesswoman** all her life," said Her. "Even in Laos, she started going into business (as a shopkeeper during the Vietnam War). She was from Long Cheng, where she had a store similar to what she's doing right now - selling food, drink, clothing."

Yang was among the first wave of refugees to leave Laos after the communist regime took over in 1975. After spending four years in Thailand's Ban Vinai refugee camp, Yang settled in Minnesota.

Yang **died** on the way back to her Twin Cities home from a weekend international crafts festival in Bemidji. "She was never sick," said Her. "This is really unexpected for us."

The store on the northwest corner of University and Dale streets will be closed until next week. Normally, it is open seven days a week. Yang's funeral will run from Thursday through Sunday at the Sundseth-Anderson Funeral Home, 2024 Lyndale Ave. N., Minneapolis.

The daughter said the family wants to re-open the store after the funeral, as a way to honor their mother's dream.

Besides her business ventures, Yang took in **many** children whose parents could no longer care for them, as well as Vietnam War orphans. Her first husband **died** in 1959. She had two biological children and three stepchildren, but also adopted 13 children, including Her, before leaving Laos.

"Everybody **called** her '**Mom**,'" said Her. "She loved all the children she adopted. Even people who just came to her store, they **called** her '**Mom**.'"

Burial for Yang, who lived in North Minneapolis, will be Monday in the city's Lakewood Cemetery.

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## Graphic

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Photo:

Yang

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