

# HONORING OUR OWN:



*“My parents worked hard to ensure we had our basic needs met. I did not know that I was poor until I was a freshman in high school.”*

The Souriya family including parents, Kapkeo & Sisana, along with their seven children – sons Vannareth and Vannaseum, and five daughters Vannapha (Vanna), Vanphasong (Vanessa), Phourasami (Samanta), Panomesone (Kao) and Manivone (Mani) immigrated to the United States in August of 1979. They left their home in Laos due to the Vietnam War and landed in Marble Hills, Missouri. Life was difficult for the Souriya family because they came as refugees and empty-handed. Their American sponsors provided housing for the family in an old abandoned hospital building located next door to their house. The family lived in one large room, however, it had kitchen appliances, sofas and beds. There, they learned to speak English and became familiar with the American culture. After a year, the Souriya family moved to Kansas City then later in 1982 moved to their permanent home in Wichita. All became U.S. citizens during this time.



Kapkeo and Sisana were working but still struggling to make ends meet. They were poor but the children never felt that they were poor. Vanna recalls, “My parents worked hard to ensure we had our basic needs met. I did not know that I was poor until I was a freshman in high school. I had to work after school to help my parents with expenses.” Vanessa adds, “All of us kids had to help out once we were of working age. If we brought home \$150, we would contribute \$100 for family expenses and keep the left-over monies to pay for our personal expenses like gas or clothes.”

