

Tears of Separation and Reunion

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During the Pol Pot Regime, many of the men in my family died. My grandfather died because he was sick from working too hard for Pol Pot. He only had porridge and water to eat and drink. He left my grandmother with ten children.

My first and oldest uncle was a high school teacher. He was very kind and he never killed even a chicken. So when he was under the Pol Pot Regime, they forced him to dig the channel and kill chickens for them to eat. His glasses dropped in the channel and he couldn't see the chickens. So he could not dig in the correct spot for them. As a result, he was killed because they thought that he pretended not to do what they asked him to do. The Regime also thought that my uncle was a literate man because he wore glasses.

My second uncle was a doctor. He died because they observed that he was a doctor. They considered him a wealthy and knowledgeable man, so they killed him because they didn't want any literate people to be alive.

My third uncle was an honor student. At that time, he was in high school. In just one more month, he would have graduated and would have been supported to go on studying in Japan. Yet, he was killed because he didn't know how to work in the rice fields. He was the best student, so my grandmother never taught him to do anything besides let him spend time studying. So when Pol Pot arrived, my uncle didn't know how to do any of those duties. Therefore, they thought that he was lazy and didn't work hard for

them. For example, if other people worked on the rice field for 10 yards, my uncle would only get 3 yards of rice fields done. That's why he was killed.

My fourth uncle used to be a soldier in the Cambodian military before the Pol Pot Regime came. He used to work very hard for the country. He was disabled because of the war. He was killed just because they thought that a disabled man was useless because they only eat and don't do any work.

To end that war, my father became a soldier and he fought against the Pol Pot soldiers. He was only 16. He didn't know how to use a gun and he never trained to be a soldier at all. His family was so worried about him. They realized that being a soldier was so dangerous. In Cambodia, a soldier had to know how to survive by themselves in a jungle, and soldiers didn't have enough weapons or any modern weapons. They didn't have doc-

tors or nurses to take care of their health. They didn't have enough medicine or food.

When the Civil War ended, my father came back home with torn clothing and skinny bones. My mom didn't recognize him. All the family ran to hug him and he lay on the land after meeting them because he was so exhausted. My father was so weak. My mother asked the leader of the armed forces to get medical help for her husband. But they had nothing to support him. When my mother went to ask for some medicine from her neighbor, the neighbor also couldn't help her.

At that time, my mother and her family members were so sad since my father had devoted his



life to work for his people. Even though he didn't get trained to be an army soldier, he supported them and survived. So, he is lucky to be alive. I now call my father every second I get.

That experience taught my family to be fair to everyone. My father told me that he didn't even kill any one during the fighting and maybe that is why he is still alive. He only helped the people who were punished by Pol Pot to free them from jail and get them out. He stated that he didn't kill those Pol Pot people because they are innocent. Those Pol Pot armed forces are ignorant and illiterate people. So they didn't understand anything, especially they were so young to be in a war at that time and the leader, Pol Pot, taught them to be cruel.

He taught me to be a kind girl toward every disabled person because those people have become handicapped because they had fought for us to be alive today. I feel appreciation for all handicapped veterans in my country too because they were not being loved or supported by any one and they were invaluable to most of the people too.

My father always advised my nephew that if you want to be a soldier, you must train to be a soldier. Don't follow his way. It is a high risk toward yourself and your family, and please be kind toward human beings. Then you might be fortunate enough to come back home like he did. Even though my father never got any support or medal from the armed forces, he still doesn't hate the people who forced him to be in the army at that time at all.

This story is all about the tears of a broken heart. The tears come from everyone in the family when they all have a chance to be united and also when they realize the painful loss of family members. It could be said that there are tears of happiness for those who lived and tears of sadness for those who died.

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Background on Cambodia

From 1975 to 1979, an extremist group called the Khmer Rouge ruled Cambodia. They came to power after years of civil war and U.S. bombings related to the war in Vietnam. The Khmer Rouge distrusted foreign influences. They wanted to create a new agricultural society that did not depend on any foreign support.

Pol Pot was the Khmer Rouge leader. Under Pol Pot's command, Khmer Rouge soldiers committed brutal acts. They forced ordinary citizens living in cities to leave their homes immediately and go to work on communal farms in the countryside. The soldiers also carried out bloody raids, executing anyone suspected of having an educated background. Teachers, doctors, and other professionals, especially those with foreign training, were killed. Bodies were thrown into mass graves all over the country. Families were separated, cities and villages were destroyed.

Under Khmer Rouge, Cambodia suffered from genocide. It is estimated that millions of Cambodians were killed by the Khmer Rouge. The country also suffered from famine and illness. The Khmer Rouge was overthrown by their enemies, the Vietnamese, in 1979.

Many Cambodians fled the war-torn country and spent time in refugee camps in the Philippines and other places. The U.S. offered refugee status to Cambodians. Many Cambodians came to the U.S. from the camps. When they arrived in the U.S. they did not know much about North American culture, and North Americans did not know much about Cambodia.

Sources: <www.mekong.net/cambodia/uniq_rev.htm>, <www.edwebproject.org/sideshow/khmeryears/index.html>.