

## Sokphal / 53

Sokphal Din was born in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. After the city fell to the Khmer Rouge, he and his family were among those driven into the killing fields...

*[Sokphal is sitting in his garden, talking direct to camera]*

1975, just after new year, April, my family was having breakfast in the morning. Somebody knocked the door, the front door. It was the Pol Pot soldier, with the black uniform and the gun. And point the gun at us, saying, 'You got to get out of your house right now or we shoot you.'

So myself, I was about 14 or 13, 14, they forced me to work hard labour in the field, the corn field. They told us, if anyone soldier or teacher, anyone well educated, tell them that you are what you are and then they send you back to Phnom Penh. They send you to study. After three month you come back, or you join your family. So my father talking with my mum, thinking, what shall we do?

I remember the night before he left the family to join training; my father gave me his necklace. He gave it to me and said, 'Please look after this, and look after your brother and sister. Look after your mum, and I don't know when I come back. Now you, it's your duty now to look after the family.' And at the time I didn't have any emotion, we just feel, OK, you go now, and three month you come back and take me with you, kind of thing, and I will see you again.

We waited and waited. There's no news back at all. Then one day, they told us, 'Oh, you're going to join your family now.' I was so excited, my mum excited, and suddenly somebody, the farmer, told us, say, 'It's not true. They not taking you back to Phnom Penh. They take you to fill the jungle.' And we knew that we'd never go back. We knew this is a lie. They just want to kill us. And we knew that we'd never see our father again. We kept hoping, but we knew that it's impossible.

They took us through the jungle, until we got to the place. Completely jungle. Completely... nothing there at all. They just left you there. To die, basically.

So my grandmother really hungry, so I fed her this egg to eat, boiled egg, and she couldn't swallow it, she couldn't swallow, she couldn't chew, because she is too ill to eat anything. And I hold her head in my arms like that. So that night we slept in the same mosquito net. Nearly morning, when I touch her, she felt, she – I felt cold. So we all wake up, woke up, and look at her, she already pass away. I felt so sad to see her burn, burning, cremated, underneath the pile of wood in the jungle.

After my grandmother died, they separate me, took my away to work in hard labour. I came to see them, but I can't stay there more than one day, I had to go back next day. And I found out my brother really ill who was, must have been six years old. His name is Gosawa.

And I remember that morning, that day when I left, I heard my brother, not shouting, but crying. He swore to the Communist Khmer Rouge, said, 'You took my brother away. I never see him again. You took my brother away. You are terrible. You burn to hell. I condemn you. Please stay brother, I want you to stay with me, don't go, please don't go.' He begging me, and I can hear, I could hear his voice now, cry and begging me not to go back. I walked out in tears. I could not stop. And then two days later, I got the news from my mother, said my brother died.

Some people got the radio, we heard about Vietnamese invaded Cambodia. So they forced me to join the army. And I thought to myself, I'll never ever kill anybody. I can't refuse it, but I had to take the order. One day, we heard the sound of the tanks, the ground shaking everything. And we knew the Khmer Rouge soldiers disappeared.

Vietnamese was in the village already. That day, they put me in the brick oven. **So we had to sit against the wall in circle in the oven. And I thought to myself that day, I thought, 'that's it. That's it. They're gonna burn us alive in here.' I didn't say nothing. I thought, 'I'm gonna die'.** They moved me to Siem Reap prison. After many months in the prison I was released.

So we spent time in the refugee camp until I found my cousin in England. She sponsored me, and through the Red Cross, I came to England in August 1987.

All the memories in the killing field still with me every day. I had nightmares all the time, even the night before, yesterday, I had nightmare. I dreamt that I was there and I tried to escape from the water, and at some point – I seen so many things, I seen dead bodies next to me, I seen a lot of things, so I can't describe it, but it still upset me, it's really a nightmare.