

The Tonle Sap Lake Massacre – Ranachith (Ronnie) Yimsut

Ronnie Yimsut was 13 years old when the Khmer Rouge swept into Phnom Penh in 1975. He and his extended family were removed from their homes in Siem Reap, near the famed ruins of Angkor, and forced to work in collective camps. During the last week of 1977, Ronnie's family was horded up for the last time before being killed by the Khmer Rouge. Of the dozens killed on that December day, only Ronnie survived. Today Ronnie is a landscape architect for the National Forest Service. He lives in Bend, Oregon, with his wife and two children.

It was a chilly evening of 22 December 1977, when a group of armed Khmer Rouge cadres herded what was left of my family and neighbors to an unknown destination. At the time we were at a forced labor camp in Siem Reap, Angkor Province, in what was then known as Democratic Kampuchea – Cambodia as we call it today. Our group was counted one by one by the armed men, some who were more like boys my age at the time. There were 87 of us all together and 7 of them. None of us knew for sure where we were going. However, after we had experienced similar move many times previously, we didn't really care where we were heading next. We all got used to such relocations. It was almost routine for us.

This time it felt a little different. They seemed to try to accommodate us, to go out of their way to try to please us. It was an act that we were not used to. It made us feel uneasy about the whole plan. Why were they so nice to us this time? The last 24 relocations were miserable and the soldiers were very rough. In fact, they were so rough that some of my family died in the process of relocation. The soldiers' acts were very suspicious, but we didn't really care. It was a nice change, yet a change that we were having a problem swallowing whole. Perhaps their policy had changed? It was yet to be seen.

One exhausting day of walking later we stopped at a former Buddhist pagoda on the way to some place - they refused to tell where. Our escorts ordered us to stop and wait. We were more or less pleased to have a chance for a breather stop, no matter how short it was. However, the place was not an ideal resting area. We had always known that it was a 'processing centre'. It was also a place where people got punished or even executed for a minor infraction. They called it a 'Work Camp', but we all knew it simply as 'The Death Camp'. We waited and prayed that they won't keep us here permanently.

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Approximately 20 minutes later, they herded us out again. Twenty minutes may not be long, but it is an eternity when one life or future is at stake. It was a nerve-wracking experience. We knew that we had passed through 'gate one' at last.

Two days later, we all arrived at a place called Tasource Hill. I had been here several times during my time in the Mobile Brigade – it was another labour camp. There were thousands and thousands of people working, digging for a huge canal project. It was a sad sight to see. I thought I was just skin and bones, but the people I saw there were in worse shape than I was. It was not long after we arrived at Tasource Hill before they put everyone, including small children, to work among other people. It was then that I finally realised our faith had paid off – or so I thought. We were forced to work all day and almost all night for five agonising days by a new batch of soldiers. Those who brought us over had long since departed. The new guards were cruel and had no mercy. Many died in front of me from heat stroke, sickness, exhaustion and starvation. But most people died from beating they received from the soldiers. And many were quietly taken away in the cover of the night to almost a certain destination: death. All that time I wondered when our turn would come. I wished it would arrive sooner so that we didn't have to suffer like those before us.

People from my group began to drop like flies in the muddy bottom of the canal. Very few even bother to take them to get a proper burial. The dead and near dead were scattered all over as far as my eyes could see. We were all too exhausted and too weak to move. Every now and then a group of people came by to collect the dead bodies. Very few mourned for the dead. Even the relatives showed very little emotion because they knew that the dead would suffer no more. We were all like a bunch of living dead. I thought that it would be much easier if they just came and took us away. When were they going to end our misery? I waited and waited. It never came.

A pointed object poked at me very hard and woke me up from the muddy bottom of the canal. I slowly opened my eyes to look at the teenage soldier who continued to poke me with his seemingly over-sized AK-47 rifle. He was no older than 12, just a few years younger than I was, but much, much fatter. He was yelling angrily for me to get up from the mud. 'Go ahead and shoot me!' I said to myself. I was ready to die. It was hopeless. I finally pushed my weak, skinny body up from the mud and wearily walked into a direction where my group was being congregated. It was our time to go, at last.

I began to have mixed feelings about the sudden relocation plan. Normally, we would stay in one place for weeks or even months at a time before they shipped us out again. I had wished for them to take us away and now that the time had come, I was having second thought. Nonetheless, after five long days and nights without substantial food or rest, I was more than ready to go - where I was going was irrelevant. I just wanted to

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get out of this place even if it meant sudden death. By the look of others, including my family, they were all ready to go as well. After all that they had put us through, especially the last five days, nothing could be worse. Nothing would matter anymore.

They ordered us to file in a row of four. A small group of soldiers who were to escort us were made up of all ages, some as young as 10. There were only five of them to escort what was left of my original group of family. By then there were only 79 of us altogether. During those five awful days at Tasource Hill, eight had died, including six children and two elderly men. I wondered why there were so few of them if they were going to kill all 79 of us? The oldest soldier came over in front of us and spoke loudly so that everyone could hear him. He told us that we were being moved to the Tonle Sap – the Great Lake – to catch fish for the government. He also said that there will be food to eat. Suddenly, people began talking among each other about the news. We were all very skeptical about the seemingly miraculous news. However, it made sense as most of us in this group were at one time commercial fishermen on the Tonle Sap. They told us just what we wanted to hear: the food, the chance to catch and eat fresh fish from the lake, the chance to get away from the misery of Tasource Hill. It all sounded too good to be true. I was completely fooled by the news. Well, perhaps I had a little doubt, but so did the rest of the people in my group. We would have to wait and see what the future would hold for us.

They took us south through a familiar muddy road toward the lake, which was about six or seven miles away. The last time I walked on this very same road was just last the year before, when I was on another Mobile Brigade project. The longer we were on that road, the more relaxed we were. Perhaps they were telling us the truth? We seemed to be heading in the right direction. There were only five of them. They couldn't possibly kill all 79 of us - Could they?

After about three miles of walking, they asked us to stop and wait for the rest of the group to catch up. People were very weak and the three-mile hike took its toll. Another child died on the way. After some hesitation the soldiers allowed the mother to bury her child. It was another 20 or 30 minutes before they caught up.

They wanted us to move on quickly before the setting of the sun. They asked all the able men, both young and old, to come and gather in front of the group. The men were then told to bring their tools, especially any knives and axes they had with them. They said that the men needed to go ahead of the group to build a camp for the rest of us. The men were soon lined up in a single file with their tools in hand. I watched my brother Sarey as he walked reluctantly to join the line after saying goodbye to his pregnant wife, Oum. I told him that I would take good care of my sister-in-law. The

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group disappeared shortly in the darkening sky. That was the last time I ever saw Sarey and the rest of the men again.

The sky was getting darker and a chillier. The notorious Tonle Sap mosquitoes began to rule the night sky. After about 30 minutes or so, the two soldiers that led the men away returned. They quickly conferred with their fellow comrades. One or two of the people from my group overheard something quite unbelievable – the shocking news quickly spread among the people within the group. I learned later that they said something like, ‘a few got away’. It only meant one thing: the men were all dead except a few who managed to escape.

It was about seven or eight in the evening when we were ordered to move on again. By this time the children who still had enough energy to cry were crying and screaming as loud as they could. It was mainly from hunger and exhaustion, but also from the attack by the swarming mosquitoes. Amidst the crying of the children I could hear the sobbing and weeping of the people who lost their loved ones. I still had my doubts about the whole situation, although the odds were stacked against us. If we didn't die of starvation, exhaustion, or mosquito bites, there was a good chance that we might be killed by the hands of the soldiers.

The thought of me actually coming face to face with death now terrified me for the first time. I had thought of escaping right then, but could not do it after a long consideration. I didn't have the heart to leave my family, especially my pregnant sister-in-law who was already a week overdue. Besides, where would I go from here? I would eventually be recaptured and killed later on. If I were to die, I preferred to die among my loved ones. There were plenty of opportunities for me to escape, but I just couldn't do it. So I reluctantly trekked with the rest of the group, with my sister-in-law Oum over my right shoulder and a small bag of belongings on my left. Somehow it seemed ironic: we were knowingly walking toward our deaths just like cattle being herded towards a slaughterhouse. We all knew where we were heading; even the children seemed to know it as well. I still had a little doubt despite everything I had seen and heard thus far. Perhaps it was a faint hope – a hope that these Khmer Rouge soldiers were not the cold heart killers we thought they were. Perhaps.

A few miles before we were to reach the Great Lake, they ordered us to turn off to the west instead of continuing down south as planned. It was a very muddy, sticky road. My feet seemed to stick in the mud every single time I put them down to go forward. The progress was slow and cumbersome. A few people got stuck there just like in a quicksand bog and the soldiers would go back to them to kick and beat them up. I still don't know if they ever made it. I was busy helping Oum and myself move forward and didn't really care anymore. All that time I was trying to calm myself down and keeping a

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clear mind. Oum was beyond help. Her quiet weeping had now become a full-blown scream. She was in bad shape, physically and emotionally. Oum said that she had stomach cramps or was in labour; she wasn't sure. It was to be her first child. She didn't know much about child birth or contractions, and neither did I. All that I could do was drag her across the muddy flats so the soldiers won't come and beat us to death right there and then. It was pathetic.

We were no more than 300 yards off the main road when they asked us to sit down on the edge of a small shallow canal that ran east to west. Both of our legs stretched forward; we had to shut up or they would beat us up. In a matter of minutes a large group of at least 50 people suddenly emerged from a hidden place in the nearby forest. It was really dark by that time, but I could tell from their silhouettes that they were soldiers with AK-47 rifles, carbines and large clubs in their hands. One of them began to shout loudly at us as the rest surrounded the group with their rifles, aiming directly at us. People began to plea for their lives. The soldiers screamed for all of us to shut up. They said that they only wished to ask a few questions – that was all they wanted. They also said that this was an interrogation and that they suspected there were enemies among us. They claimed there were Vietnamese agents in our group, which I knew was a bogus claim since we all had known each other for many years. It was all a tactic, a dirty trick to keep us calm, weak and under their control. But the tactic had been very effective because all the strong men who could have risen against them were the first ones to go. Those people left in my group were women and children, the sick and the weak. They had us right where they wanted. It was all a premeditated plan.

A soldier walked towards me, yanking away a cotton towel and shredding it into small strips. I was the first one to be tied up tightly by the soldiers with one of the strips. I was stunned and quite terrified. I began to resist a little. After a few blows to the head with rifle butts, I could only let them do as they pleased with me. My head began to bleed from a wound. I was still semi-conscious – I could feel the pain and blood flowing down on my face. They were using me as example of what one would get if they got any kind of resistance. They quickly tied the rest of the group without any problems. By this time it was totally chaotic as people continued to plea for their lives. I was getting dizzy as blood continued to drip across my face and into my right eye. It was the first time that I had tears in my eyes – not from the blood or the pain, but from the reality that was now setting in. I was numb with fear.

I was beyond horrified when I heard the clobbering begin. Somehow, I knew that this was it. Oum's elderly father was next to me and his upper torso contracted several times before he fell on me. At that moment, I noticed a small boy whom I knew well get up and start to call for his mother. Suddenly there was a warm splash on my face and body. I knew it was definitely not mud – it was the little boy's blood, perhaps his brain

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tissue scattering from the impact. The others only let out short but terrifying sputtered sounds. I could hear their breathing stop cold in its tracks. Everything seemed to happen in slow motion; it was so unreal. It happened in a matter of seconds but I can still vividly remember every trifling detail. I closed my eyes, but the terrifying sounds continued to penetrate my ear canals, piercing my ear drums. The first blow came when I was laying face down to the ground with a corpse partially covering my lower body. It hit me just below my right shoulder blade – I remember that one very well. The next one hit me just above my neck on the right side of my head. I believe it was the one that knocked me out that night. The rest of the clubbing, which included at least 15 blows, landed everywhere on my skinny little body. Fortunately, I did not feel them until much later. I do not remember anything after that, except that I slept very well that night, unconscious from the beating.

I woke up to the familiar sound of mosquitoes buzzing like bees over my body. Only this time there were tons and tons of them feasting on mine and other peoples' blood. I was unable to move a muscle, not a one. My eyes were opened, but they were blurry. I thought I had been blinded. I was disoriented. I could not remember where I was. I thought I was sleeping at home, in my own bed. I wondered why there were so many mosquitoes. They didn't bother me at that time because I could not feel a thing. Where was I? Why can't I move? I was still tied up with the cloth rope. After a few minutes I was able to see a little, but everything else was still blurry. I saw a bare foot but I didn't know whose it was. Suddenly, reality set in at full blast and I broke into heavy sweat. The memories of the events that happened earlier came rushing back and smacked me right in the head. I realised the sharp dull pain all over my body and head. I was very cold. I had never been so cold in my entire life. Fear ran rampant in my mind. I suddenly realised where I was and what had happened. 'Am I already dead? If I am, why do I still suffer like this?' I kept on asking myself that same questions over and over again, but always came to the same conclusion. I was still alive. I am alive! But why? I could not understand why I was still alive and suffering. I should have been dead. I wished then and there that I was dead like the rest of people lying around me.

The faint light of a new dawn broke through the sky, revealing my shriveled, blood soaked body in the mud. It must have been about four or five in the morning, 1 January 1978. 'Not a Happy New Year today,' I thought. It was still dark and cold. My motor skills came back little by little until I was able to move with great difficulty. I pushed myself to sit up by supporting myself on the pile of dead bodies. I began to work to untie myself from the cloth rope. I broke the rope after a few painful tries. My eyesight was also back, but I wished then that I was blind after seeing the scattered bodies laying at every direction. Some of them were beyond recognition. Some were completely stripped naked. Blood stains which had already turned to a dark color gave the area a new dimension. It definitely was not a sight for sore eyes.

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I wanted to look around for my relatives, but was unable to turn around. My neck was stiff with pain. My head hurt – oh how it hurt so badly. I could only feel around me with my two hands. Everywhere I touched was cold flesh. My hands were both trembling and I could not control them from shaking. I cried my heart out when I recognised a few dead bodies next to me, one of which was Oum and her unborn child. I suddenly remembered the bare foot I saw when I woke up – it was hers. Her elderly father and her two sisters were all piled on top of each other and side by side as though they were embracing just before they lost their lives. I could not go on. My cries turned to a sobs; it was the only sound around besides the mosquitoes which continued to torment my almost bloodless body. I began to fade and feel as though my life was slipping away. I passed out again on top of the dead bodies. I was totally out cold.

I woke up to the sound of people coming toward the killing field. I sat up and listened closely. I began to panic: 'They are back to finish me off,' I told myself, 'They are going to bury me alive!' They might as well. I had nothing to live for. Technically, as far as the Khmer Rouge were concerned, I was already dead. I was ready to give up as the voices got closer and louder, but my survival instinct finally took control. I pushed myself, inching my way towards nearby bushes. I was no more than 20 feet away from where I was earlier but I now commanded a good view of the area. The people soon arrived at the site. I was right – the soldiers were back with a new batch of victims with them. Most of the people were men, but there were a few women. Their hands were all bounded together around the back, but with real rope instead of cloth. 'There's no way they can get out of that rope,' I said to myself. One of the soldiers gave a command. In the broad morning light, I again witnessed the slaughter of human lives. In a matter of seconds they were all clobbered to death, just like the rest of my family and friends whose bodies were still scattered on the muddy ground. My heart just stopped. My entire body shook convulsively and I wanted to throw up. My left hand squeezed tightly over my mouth so I wouldn't accidentally cry out and give myself away. I felt as though I was going through the same ordeal all over again. My mind just couldn't take it anymore. My mind went blank and I passed out again.

It wasn't until the next night before I was really awake. A whole day had gone by just like I wasn't there. I remembered waking up several times during the day, but everything was kind of foggy. Soon after I woke up, more people were coming toward me again. I assumed they were more victims to be killed. I did not wait to find out. I decided then that I wanted to live. I began to slip away from the area by crawling on all my elbows and knees. I couldn't walk at all, even if I had wanted to. I was no longer bleeding, but I knew that I was in a bad shape. I was hungry and very thirsty. My lips cracked like mud in the hot sun. My entire body cracked from the layers of mud and blood that had baked in the hot sun. I had to find water soon or I would die of thirst. I worked my way west along the shallow-dried up canal and then turned north. By this

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time it was really dark and chilly. I found myself in the middle of a forested area. Impenetrable bush. I went back and forth trying to find a way to get through the thick forest and ended up back where I had started, near the killing area. After the fourth or fifth time trying, I found myself in the middle of the forest, lost and frustrated. I knew that I was getting very weak and needed to find my way out of this tangled web of thick thorn brush soon if I was to stay alive. I spent the night right where I was, crying myself to sleep. That night I slept like a log.

For the next 17 days I found myself hiding out in the forest. I slept only in the daytime and spent my nights raiding one village after another for whatever I can find to eat. My injuries healed quickly and I began to put on some weight thanks to the food that I had stolen from the surrounding villages. I never stayed in one place for long. I kept on the move and always watched out for any sign of danger. I knew that they were searching for me but I was able to keep a step or two ahead of them. They always counted bodies and if one was missing, they always searched and usually recaptured the escapee. It was very difficult for me at first, but I soon became expert in the arts of raiding food and eluding capture. I am sure I must have frustrated a few Khmer Rouge soldiers who searched for me during my 17-day reign as king of the jungle.

Life during those 17 days was never easy. Every single day I waited for the moment when I would get the chance to avenge the death of my family and friends. One day that opportunity arrived. I stumbled accidentally on a group of escapees who were also hiding in the forest. I almost got killed because they thought I was a Khmer Rouge spy. The only thing that saved me from certain death was my recent injuries; they believed my story. The next night all of us – over 200 men and women – broke up into three groups and went out to attack a Khmer Rouge garrison for food and weapons. Despite our lack of organisation and weapons, we were willing to go against an army with only sticks, stones, a few knives and two recently dug up grenades. The element of surprise was gone when the old-rusty grenades failed to explode. Most of us got mowed down like weeds. There were heavy casualties. Many died or were wounded during the attack and counterattack – it was a total failure on our side. Although we obtained a few pistols and rifles we didn't reach our objective, which was to get food and weapons and take over the garrison. However, many of us were able to hurt or kill quite a few soldiers during the attack. I may have killed at least one and hurt a few others with my homemade 'cave man's club'. At 15-years-old I was the youngest in the group, but I fought just as bravely or even braver than any of the men or women there. I was burning and boiling inside with hate. I was fearless. Life meant nothing to me. I decided to live only to kill the Khmer Rouge, and that one night I was a savage animal with nothing but rage.

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Most of us were killed or captured during the army's full-scale counterattack. Our hideout in the wood was shelled day and night for three days until hardly anything was left standing. I decided to stick with the three leaders wherever they would go. The four of us managed to get away and head to Thailand. After 15 days of hiking the 150 miles to the border we found ourselves in a Thai prison. The Thai authorities considered us as 'political prisoners' simply because we arrived when they closed the border. And the four of us were not alone, as there were over 600 others like us who were kept in a 75x75 meter cell. Living conditions were bad and the treatment we got from the Thai guards was even worse, but I must admit that I would rather be in a Thai prison than in the hands of the Khmer Rouge anytime. At least we were fed and clothed like a human beings – much better than the Khmer Rouge would have done. And because I was the youngest of the prisoners I got better treatment than the others; I even got to know some of the guards really well. I used that privilege to my best advantage. I weighed a little less than 80 pounds when I first arrived in Thailand. Within 4 weeks, I managed to gain over 20 pounds.

We spent five months in the Thai prison before we were eventually moved to a refugee camp near the Thai-Cambodian border. While I was in the refugee camp I waited for a recruitment drive to join the freedom fighters against the Khmer Rouge, but they did not accept me because I was 'too young and too skinny'. I even tried telling them that I was almost 18, but it was no use. I was stuck in one place and got very frustrated. I could not go back to fight, and staying in the camp would only lead me to commit suicide. My life had no meaning at that time. There was nothing to live for. I thought that I should live so that I may one day avenge the death of my loved ones. My purpose in life was gone when they refused to let me fight the Khmer Rouge. I thought I should end my life just like my fellow refugees who had already killed themselves. But then I thought some more. 'That is too easy!' I told myself. 'I am a survivor. I will not die so cowardly.'

My life began to turn around when a CBS News producer named Brian Ellis showed up at the camp one day. I was interviewed for a documentary called 'What Happened to Cambodia?' which was later broadcast in the United States. Mr. Ellis took me outside of the camp for the very first time in months. I tasted freedom and I liked it a lot. That day with Mr. Ellis was special and I have never forgotten it. My life began to change for the better after Mr. Ellis left. That one encounter with Mr. Ellis change my perspective about life – I got a reason to go on living. It was also a chance for a new life and an education. After the broadcast I was contacted by a cousin named Khen Chen who worked for Voice of America in Washington DC. I was eventually sponsored by Khen and her husband Chun to come to America. I arrived in Washington DC in late October, 1978 after a long, miserable eight months in Thailand. The other three men who escaped with me would eventually settle in a third country as well. Two of them are

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now residing in the United States and another is currently in France. They all remarried and are doing well.

I went on and made a new life for myself. I graduated from high school and eventually got a degree from the University of Oregon in 1988. I am now married to Thavy, a Cambodian woman, and have a young daughter. I am currently working for the U.S. Forest Service in Bend, Oregon as a District Landscape Architect, which I have done since my graduation. Life could not be better for me now. I still have nightmares about the massacre on that dark December night. It has never completely gone away from my mind and I am still horrified just thinking about it. Time does not heal such an emotional trauma – at least not for me. However, I have long since learned to live with it. Although it hasn't gone away from my mind, my life must and will go on.

Brian Ellis (the CBS News producer), whom I had not heard from for 10 years, decided to show up at my graduation with his crew for a follow-up story. It was great to see the man, and he continues to influence my life. We are now good friends and keep in touch with each other, though he is no longer with CBS News.

During the winter of 1984, I received a shocking letter from a refugee camp in Thailand via my cousin Khen in Washington, DC. The letter was from my oldest brother Larony, who was supposedly dead since the fall of Cambodia in April 1975. My family received news that he was killed by the Khmer Rouge while he was in a hospital, where he was recovering from wounds he sustained from a landmine. That was the last time anyone heard from him until his letter arrived in 1984. At the same time, I also learned that my only sister, Malennie, was also alive and well. On top of that, they were both married and had three children each. Both Larony and Malennie were not with the family so they were able to survive the Khmer Rouge madness. They and their families, ten people all together, worked their way to Thailand following the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia in January 1979. In January 1989, after five years of struggle, they were finally granted permission to enter the United States from the refugee camp in Thailand. This was after a long battle with the Immigration and Naturalization Service. By the time they arrived in Oregon, the family had grown from ten people to twelve people. Each family had a new baby who was born in the camp just weeks before their resettlement to the United States. They are now doing well, residing in Oregon. It was a heartwarming and emotional reunion after so many years of loneliness and separation. The last time I saw my brother Larony was in 1973. For my sister Malennie it was April 1975, following the Khmer Rouge takeover of the country. I had not seen their families until they all arrived at Portland International Airport in 1989. I am fortunate that I did not lose my life or the rest of my family.

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On February of 1992, I returned to Cambodia for the very first time for four weeks. I arrived in Phnom Penh and then went on to Siem Reap, my home city. It was more than just another trip. It had been more than 17 years since I last stepped on the ground of my home city. It was also more than 14 years since I had last seen, heard, smelled, and tasted my Cambodia. It was highly emotional, to a point that it almost unbearable. The pain and the anger returned to my once traumatized memory. However, I felt that the Cambodia I now saw was more traumatised than I was. Peoples' lives are much better now than during the Khmer Rouge years, as I can still vividly remember, but their lives are still on hold and waiting. We all agreed that a healing process is a must in order for all parties concerned to have a lasting peace. I learned a long time ago that one may forgive, but one must never forget the past. We must go on. Life goes on and forgiveness is the key to it all. I have also realised that revenge is not the answer to my pain and anger. Instead the answer was forgiveness of the people who had hurt me, both physically and emotionally. I never achieved inner peace until after I had forgiven the murderous Khmer Rouge. In a strange way I have to thank them, for they made me who I am today: a stronger person.

I waited a long time for a chance to return to my native land. What I saw there was a country in a very sad situation. Cambodia is still devastated from the many years of war and foreign intervention. From the economic embargo by the United States to the destructive military machines of China, the former Soviet Union and Vietnam. People are still 'camping out' rather living their lives the way it should be, settled permanently. It was a sad sight to see. Nonetheless, the people are doing what they can in trying to put their lives back together. It is an uphill battle for a people who are at least 20 years behind the rest of the world.

My return trip to Cambodia gave me a new insight and a new goal in life for me to reach for: to help rebuild my homeland. I feel just like the salmon, whose urge to regenerate is very strong despite the hardship and the danger; it becomes their primary goal in life. I am alive today for such a purpose – to help regenerate and rebuild Cambodia to her best potential.

The door is opening little by little now, yet the waiting game continues. I feel that the longer I wait the more uneasy I become. I feel that I am a person caught between two cultures: I am not quite Cambodian and not quite American. Sure, I am fairly successful here in the United States and I have adapted to American life and culture well. But the longing to return home has always been utmost in my mind. I have seen Cambodia and I am not even sure if I could make it with that culture or lifestyle. Nonetheless, I am willing to try because Cambodia will always be home to me despite the fact that I have nothing left there anymore.

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This is how I feel about Cambodia and why it is so important to me to help with the healing process. It is not just for Cambodia, but for me as well. After all, I am still one of the walking emotionally wounded that needs to be healed.

A poem of mine:
Life is living.
Suffering was faith.
Struggling because there's
hope.
Life is everything all
together.

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