Spring 5-1-1993

My Misery Years of Childhood

Rohman Ly
College of DuPage

Follow this and additional works at: https://dc.cod.edu/plr

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://dc.cod.edu/plr/vol12/iss2/39

This Selection is brought to you for free and open access by the College Publications at DigitalCommons@COD. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Prairie Light Review by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@COD. For more information, please contact orenick@cod.edu.
I cannot remember a teddy bear, a great moment with my parents, my grandparents, an unforgettable present that I received at my birthday, or an exciting moment of my first day of school like the other children; but the misery years of my childhood I will never forget.

While I was growing up, the Civil War in Cambodia gripped the country. Like other Cambodians, I was aware of how poor and miserable we were. For several years, I used to live in that way. Having no television, no radio, no newspapers, no magazines, I was living in total obscurity of my life. Slavery, poverty, starvation and ignorance were the cage in which I was trapped. I knew nothing about the world outside. I was illiterate; I did not know what a school looked like, how fun it was to be a student of a kindergarten, or to see my mom come to pick me up after school.

When I was nine years old, a communist leader sent me to live with a group of young children, far away from my parents. Every night my tears wet my eyes. I missed them so much; they never allowed me to see them. I knew nothing besides working six days a week from sunrise until sunset, receiving only a slight portion of food daily.

I remember hearing the bell ringing at five o'clock in the morning. I had to wake up even if I was sick. Stupor in the darkness: I carried a heavy pickaxe on my shoulder, walked along with the other children forward to the fields. Every day, I dug a shallow trench, built a barring, cut the trees under the burning sun or a tormenting rain. I remember hearing the unpleasant voice of the group leader pushing me to work like an animal. I remember listening to the long and boring tirades of the idiomatic communists every Sunday. They tried to convert my spirit into an ignorance world.

I remember seeing unmerciful punishments to the innocent youngsters who made the slightest mistake. One of my friends stole a small piece of potato because he was very hungry. The guards arrested him. They hung him upon a tree, balanced him through the fire and beat him with a bar of metal until he died. Another young boy was pulled by a horse like in the Western movies; all his skin
was grazed off his body. We were all tortured. We all were treated as the slaves. If someone tried to revolt, he was killed the morning after because he was accused of being an anti-communist. I remember learning not to show any form of expression to keep me alive. I remember seeing hundreds and the hundreds of people crying at the loss of their children, their husbands, their wives or their relatives because of the severe sickness, and all kinds of torture. I remember smelling of disagreeable food like garbage at the end of the hard working day when I entered the cafeteria. I remember wearing the same aged and perforated clothes for weeks and only one garment for four years because I had no more change. I remember feeling my skin dry and ugly because I had no lotion.

I was emaciated, lean because of malnutrition, of working over capacity, of inadequate health care. I looked like a ragamuffin child. Living without liberty, without knowledge, without food, without health care, without family relationship; mine was a body without soul.

The years have taken me worlds away from that time and that place, from dust and poverty, from slavery and inhumanity, from the Killing Fields and the Open-Jail. Now I live in a new world, a world of liberty, of justice, of prosperity. What happened twelve years ago was a nightmare, was an inferno for me. It makes me understand more deeply about human society. It also helps me face any problem in the future.