

## **The Killing in My Village**

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The Khmer Rouge occupied my village in 1973 when I was about 13 years old. During that first year, they divided the people of my village into many work groups. In 1974, the Khmer Rouge policy was to eliminate all of the people that they viewed as imperialist or capitalist. They believed that imperialists and capitalists exploited the poor, the working, and the farmer classes. They destroyed the pagoda and used it as a prison. They ordered the villagers and even the Achar (a religious layman) to destroy the Buddha statues. If we resisted their orders, we would be killed. An Achar from my village, a man named Khun, was ordered to destroy a Buddha statue. Later, he became a killer. It is hard for me to understand how a person who the people used to respect can become so cruel. It is hard to believe such a change!

The killing started right away. Many people in my village were arrested and accused of being capitalists. They called the people into a meeting and said, "Today our meeting cannot happen. Instead, we will arrest all of the traitors." I did not know who was considered a traitor. They immediately began tying people up and putting them in a line on the road. I saw the Khmer Rouge spies tie back people's hands and march them to the Phnom Chhmar pagoda, which they used to detain and then kill people.

The people were living with fear every day. They might live today, but what about tomorrow? They didn't know. About 200 people in my village were detained and killed in the pagoda.

The campaign of "clearing out all the capitalists" was stopped when Ta Mok (another Khmer Rouge leader) came to intervene. He took over the region and ordered his soldiers to arrest all of the Khmer Rouge leaders there.

In 1975, I was assigned to be the chief of a children's group responsible for collecting cow dung and growing vegetables. About ten children were under my control. During this time, the Khmer Rouge stopped killing people in my village. Instead, they focused on killing "New People," people who had just been relocated from Phnom Penh or other villages.

Once I remember seeing a woman carrying a suckling baby at her breast. She was being escorted by two Khmer Rouge soldiers. When they arrived in the forest, about two kilometers from the village, the woman with her baby still suckling asked the soldiers, *"How far is the place where my husband is? Are we getting close?"* A soldier replied, *"We are here."* When the woman turned back to see, the soldier shot her. As the mother lay dying on the ground, covered in blood, her baby kept crawling towards her. Suddenly, the soldier grabbed the baby by her legs and slammed her against the trunk of the tree. I was so shocked. I could never imagine such cruelty. How could those people be so inhuman? Today, the person who killed that woman and her baby still lives in my village. He became an Achar, a religious layman, but most of the villagers in this commune do not like him.

In 1978, when I was 18 years old, a Khmer Rouge cadre who was responsible for recruiting soldiers to fight against the Vietnamese came to me and asked, *"Your parents weren't arrested or accused of being capitalists, were they?"* I replied, *"No they weren't. They are still alive now."* The man then replied, *"Ok, that's good. Then you should be a soldier."*

I agreed to be a soldier because I thought that I would have a better chance of having more food to eat than I did working in the children's group. Soon, they sent me to the Svay Rieng province for six months of military training. I was sent to fight against the Vietnamese for one month before the Vietnamese defeated the Khmer Rouge soldiers. After the loss, I escaped with other soldiers to the west side of the country. Although many Khmer Rouge soldiers ran away during this time, a large number still died because the Vietnamese soldiers ran after them. It took one month for me to reach my village by walking, and then I continued on to the Khmer-Thai border with a weapon on my back.

I decided to continue fighting with the Khmer Rouge because I heard Pol Pot say during a meeting after our defeat, *"Brothers and sisters please join together to expel the Vietnamese from our country. Once this happens, I will be responsible for my previous deeds."*

In 1987, I lost my leg when I stepped on a landmine in the forest. After that, I went back to live with my family. I feel very sorry for what happened in my country and I am happy to have the Khmer Rouge tribunal. I believe that trying the top leaders of the Khmer Rouge is important in order to find justice for the victims. I want to tell the young generations that if society has uneducated people lead, it will cause destruction.

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