



## **Dream sparks events that reunite Cambodian family**

**Anthony Kuhn**

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On a recent day, Peou Phyrun steers his motorcycle down the rutted dirt road to his father's home in southern Cambodia's Kampot province. His father, 85-year-old Peou Nam, lives in a traditional Khmer farmhouse on stilts, where sugar palms tower over verdant rice paddies like giant dandelions on a lawn.

Like so many other families in Cambodia, theirs was torn apart by the Khmer Rouge. But unlike so many others, they were able to find each other, 36 years later, through a most unusual sequence of events.

Many young Cambodians born after the Khmer Rouge are either unaware of its horrors or want to move on. But the Peou family's story is a reminder that the older generation's psychic wounds have yet to heal, and that many families still hold out hope of finding their loved ones. The Khmer Rouge is believed to have killed as many as 2 million of its own citizens between 1975 and 1979.

### **The Search Begins**

Peou Nam had served as an official in the Lon Nol government, which the Khmer Rouge toppled in 1975. The family was told that their father had been executed. In the early 1980s, Phyrun and his six siblings immigrated to Canada. One night last year, he recalls having a vivid dream.

"In the dream, I saw my father walking," he says. "And I was walking, and then I met him unexpectedly. And he said, 'Hey, dear son, I'm still alive, come to me.' "

Phyrun's elation at seeing his father alive quickly melted into tears, as he woke up and realized it was just a dream. Yet something convinced Phyrun to head to Cambodia. He spent months searching for his father along the Thai-Cambodian border. He distributed fliers with his father's picture and story, traveling to Poi Pet, the last place his father had lived.

At the same time, Phyrun's father remembers being at home when an inexplicable impulse came over him.

"I felt unsettled, restless," he recounts. "I had this urge to go to the town of Poi Pet, where I had worked before. I didn't realize my children were looking for me. Then I saw posters

looking for a missing person. The person in the picture looked familiar, and the story matched my own."

Townsfolk in the border town of Poi Pet insisted that Phyrun speak to a local spirit medium. Phyrun didn't believe in the supernatural, but he went anyway. It would be the second of three clairvoyants that the family would encounter in their difficult search (the first was a psychic in Canada who told the family their father was indeed alive). This medium told Phyrun exactly when and where to meet his father.

Then the medium predicted: " 'You will see him, but I warn you, you will not recognize your father, and your father will deny you,' " Phyrun explains. " 'But you are his son and he is your father.' "

### **Amnesia Lifts**

Indeed, both father and son thought they had the wrong person. Time had changed them both physically. And some things just didn't match. The old man had a mole on his face, which Phyrun's father didn't have. And while the son remembered his father had a blackened fingernail, the man before him had a normal, pink one.

Hoping to confirm the man's identity, Phyrun's sister in Canada turned to Connie Adams, a psychic in Merrickville, Ontario. Adams recalls the family asking her about their father.

"I could see him very clearly in my mind as an older man, not a young man, so that tells me that he was alive," she says. "But I also talked in detail during the reading about things or markings he would have on his body, or things that would identify him as their father."

The clincher came when the old man spoke to his former wife in Canada by phone.

"I began to communicate with my son's mother by phone," the elder Peou recalls. "She wasn't sure about me either, so we started to test each other, asking questions about our private life that no other family member could possibly know about."

Peou's amnesia gradually lifted and he remembered his lost family. He also remembered how the Khmer Rouge bludgeoned him and left him for dead in a mass grave, and how he climbed out from under the corpses. He recalls wandering the land in a traumatized daze, only to be recaptured by the Khmer Rouge. In a horrific sort of *deja vu*, he was again bludgeoned and left for dead. But he survived a second time. He later changed his name, remarried and had six more children.

"My memory is incomplete," Peou says. "I just remember that I was forced to do labor and cut trees. If I didn't please my captors, they tortured me however they liked. I just endured it to survive, but I don't know how I survived."

### **Hope For Others**

The elder Peou says he always believed that he would reunite with his lost family in a future life. But fate brought them back together in this life, he says, which he now feels is complete.

As for the mole, it had appeared in just the past couple of years. And Phyrun explains the blackened fingernail.

"Finally he told my mother that, 'The reason why my nails are now nice and white [is] because when I was in prison, they pulled out my nails,' " Phyrun says.

While the Peou family's reunion was extraordinary, their separation was not.

Since the local media aired the family's story, other Cambodians whose families were torn apart by the Khmer Rouge have contacted the Peous and told them that their story has given them hope.