

The Spirit of Hope That We Had... Still Lives.



Best Wishes for 2013!

In front of an audience of nuns and other young children, a little angel struggles to curl her tiny fingers to signify a fruit. It is late December 1974 and, unknown to everyone in the room, the child is performing one of the last Apsara dances before the Khmer Rouge came to power.

The photograph may seem like only a snapshot in time, but behind the smiling faces and intense stare of a young Apsara pupil lies a story that touches upon a theme that all of us should consider around this holiday season.

In the 1970s, well-intentioned parents did anything they could to send their young children overseas in hopes of a better life, but, in the end, they unknowingly assigned them to a life that none of them could predict. The children were mostly from elite families, even though the program was meant for the rural poor, and they were some of the last children to leave Phnom Penh before its fall in 1975. The children were loved and cared for by Western families, and they were given opportunities, freedoms, and luxuries many children today could only dream of. But they also grew up feeling different and their life seemed artificial; they did not seem to fit as their parents had imagined.

They were too young to remember their Cambodian roots, yet they did not feel right in their new home. Rather than fulfilling their parents' wishes to prosper and change the world, they were haunted by the burning desire to find the world that they left behind. Many years later,

some of them returned only to sadly find that their parents were killed and their identities were lost. Even today, there are children who do not even know if their parents are still alive.

The good intentions of parents to give their young child a chance at a better life are often fraught with uncertainty and risk. Indeed, nearly forty-two years later, in a small town in Connecticut, U.S.A., parents sent their young first-graders off to school, unknowing that their good-morning hug and daily good-bye would be the last opportunity to see them alive.

This message comes not as a sober note to think of the world's dangers, nor should one lose faith in mankind's nature. We should look instead to the hearts of young children. Without worry or sadness, a child's outlook on the world reminds us that while the world is still colored by evil and danger, there is still a hope that mankind can be better.

In 2013, the Documentation Center of Cambodia wants to remind all to reflect on the innocent wonder behind these young eyes. Indeed, in the eyes of our children hope is not dead. As we bid farewell to one year and wonder on the unpredictable future, be mindful that the spirit of hope continues to live.

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