



SURVIVOR

THE TRIUMPH OF AN ORDINARY MAN IN THE KHMER ROUGE GENOCIDE

CHUM MEY with Documentation Center of Cambodia

Translation by Sim Sorya and Kimsroy Sokvisal

Chum Mey's confession (with introduction by David Chandler and Youk Chhang)

Documentation Series No. 18 - Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2012. (126 pages in English)

CHUM MEY personifies the tormented history of his country, surviving gunfights and rocket attacks during a civil war, losing his wife and four children during the brutal Khmer Rouge regime, and dragged blindfolded into Tuol Sleng prison, where more than 12,000 people were chained and tortured and sent to a killing field. Only a handful survived, and Chum Mey's story provides a rare glimpse inside the workings of a brutal and highly organized assembly line of death. At least 1.7 million people died between 1975 and 1979 when the Khmer Rouge ruled Cambodia.

It was his skill as a mechanic that saved him, when after 12 days and nights of beatings and repeated electrocution, he was plucked from among the other prisoners and put to work repairing the typewriters his torturers used to record their forced confessions.

Chum Mey himself confessed to a wild fantasy of counter-revolutionary work for the CIA, an organization whose name he had never heard before his torture began. He was ready to say anything in order to stop the pain. His confession is one of the few that have been translated into English and it is reproduced in this book, the first of thousands of Tuol Sleng confessions to be published.

Over the years Chum Mey has come to understand and even identify with his torturers, rather than to condemn them. "I consider them victims like me, because they had to follow other people's orders," he says in an introduction to the book. "How can I say I would have behaved differently? Would I have had the strength to refuse to kill, if the penalty was my own death?"

He escaped death, but his survival itself continues to bewilder him. "It was such a rare chance that I survived when so many people were killed there," he says. "I think about it every night, how lucky I was to survive. Why did I survive?"



My life was spared when Seng, my interrogator, had a prisoner carry this typewriter to me and asked me whether I could fix it. I said, "Brother! Wait, let me have a look." After I fixed it, Seng put me to work as mechanic and gave me food. This typewriter kept me alive until the Vietnamese and liberation troops came. Because of this typewriter, I have been able to tell millions of people of the bitter and most brutal operation of Tuol Sleng prison. Photo by Kimsroy Sokvisal, 2012.

Funding for this project was generously provided by Friends of the Documentation Center Cambodia with core support from United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

"...a society cannot know itself if it does not have an accurate memory of its own history."

Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam) for Memory & Justice

www.dccam.org www.cambodiatribunal.org www.cambodiasri.org

SURVIVOR

THE TRIUMPH OF AN ORDINARY MAN IN
THE KHMER ROUGE GENOCIDE

CHUM MEY with Documentation Center of Cambodia

Translation by Sim Sorya and Kimsroy Sokvisal

Chum Mey's confession (with introduction by David Chandler and Youk Chhang)

Documentation Series No. 18 – Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2012.
(126 pages in English)



Top: My life was spared when Seng, my interrogator, had a prisoner carry this typewriter to me and asked me whether I could fix it. I said, "Brother! Wait, let me have a look." After I fixed it, Seng put me to work as mechanic and gave me food. This typewriter kept me alive until the Vietnamese and liberation troops came. Because of this typewriter, I have been able to tell millions of people of the bitter and most brutal operation of Tuol Sleng prison. Photo by Kimsroy Sokvisal, 2012.

Bottom: Chum Mey at Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum. Photo by Mariko Takayasu

CHUM MEY personifies the tormented history of his country, surviving gunfights and rocket attacks during a civil war, losing his wife and four children during the brutal Khmer Rouge regime, and dragged blindfolded into Tuol Sleng prison, where more than 12,000 people were chained and tortured and sent to a killing field. Only a handful survived, and Chum Mey's story provides a rare glimpse inside the workings of a brutal and highly organized assembly line of death. At least 1.7 million people died between 1975 and 1979 when the Khmer Rouge ruled Cambodia.

It was his skill as a mechanic that saved him, when after 12 days and nights of beatings and repeated electrocution, he was plucked from among the other prisoners and put to work repairing the typewriters his torturers used to record their forced confessions.

Chum Mey himself confessed to a wild fantasy of counter-revolutionary work for the CIA, an organization whose name he had never heard

before his torture began. He was ready to say anything in order to stop the pain. His confession is one of the few that have been translated into English and it is reproduced in this book, the first of thousands of Tuol Sleng confessions to be published.

Over the years Chum Mey has come to understand and even identify with his torturers, rather than to condemn them. "I consider them victims like me, because they had to follow other people's orders," he says in an introduction to the book. "How can I say I would have behaved differently? Would I have had the strength to refuse to kill, if the penalty was my own death?"

He escaped death, but his survival itself continues to bewilder him. "It was such a rare chance that I survived when so many people were killed there," he says. "I think about it every night, how lucky I was to survive. Why did I survive?"

Funding for this project was generously provided by Friends of the Documentation Center Cambodia with core support from United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

"...a society cannot know itself if it does not have an accurate memory of its own history."
Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam) for Memory & Justice
www.dccam.org www.cambodiatribunal.org www.cambodiasri.org