

JUSTICE SERVED

Sin Sinet

I have very deep affection for my grandfather, Pheach Kim, and my grandmother Nop Seng, whom I have lived with ever since I was a young girl at Kampong Som Province. My parents were very busy with their careers as teachers in Phnom Penh, so sometimes I also lived with my Uncle Vanny and Auntie Phat.

My grandfather was an honest man. In the village, everybody knew him as a friendly and respectable man. He worked as a mechanic at the SKD beer factory. Even at age 55, he was very strong physically. He was the breadwinner and conscientiously looked after the entire family. My affection for my grandfather developed from day to day, as he drove me every morning to Klaing Leu Primary School. After school, I would take food which my grandmother had prepared to my grandfather at his workplace. Sometimes, I would have lunch with my grandfather and some of his colleagues in the garden in front of the factory. My grandfather loved me very much. I remember that he protected me every time my aunt or uncle made me cry, telling them that my crying saddened him. In return for his protection, I would massage him when he felt tired after work. My grandmother also loved me very much. I remember hugging her every night when I slept. In my mind, they were like my parents and I called them "mother" and "father."

Uncle Vanny was a hardworking man. He worked and studied at the same time to earn money to support his study. He taught me how to read and how to calculate numbers. He was a high school student at that time. In his free time, he would carry me over his neck as we walked to the orchard near our house. Uncle Vanny once participated in a singing contest at his school, singing a song called "Unfortunate Military Officer," and won some money and school supplies. He also learned Taekwondo, a Korean martial art, to develop himself physically.

On April 17, 1975, the Khmer Rouge took over Cambodia, and I lost contact with my parents and my younger brother, Lin, who lived in Phnom Penh. Together with my grandparents, my uncle, and my aunt, I was forcibly evacuated from our house in the provincial town of Kampong Som. We were not informed where we were being taken. Instead, we were ordered to work along the way, and it took months before we reached our destination in Veal Reanh.

In 1976, we were assigned to work in a garment factory at Orussei in Phnom Penh. The factory was called Office K-9. My grandmother was assigned to work as a cook, while my grandfather was assigned to work as a blacksmith and sometimes as a mechanic. My aunt was assigned to sew clothes, and I was assigned to repair sewing machines in the Children's Unit at Office K-9. We were not allowed to stay together as a family. Since I was living near my grandmother, every three nights I would ask my unit chief if I could spend the night with her. One night, my grandmother showed me a photo of my parents and my younger brother and told me, "These are your parents and younger brother. Please stop calling me 'mother' and

your grandfather 'father.' Your parents stayed in Phnom Penh." However, I paid no attention to her words.

One day, my grandparents, uncle and aunt, as well as some other people, were sent for re-education at Chamka Doung, Phnom Penh, and they never returned. I was told by my aunt's friend, Pheap, that they had been accused of being CIA or KGB agents, and were taken away in a white truck. She stated further, "You should not reveal the relationship between you and your grandparents. If you miss them, do not cry out. If you do cry, you have to lie that you are crying because of a toothache, otherwise you will also be in danger." After their arrest, I discovered that my grandparents tried to hide our relationship from Angkar so that I would survive. With the care of Auntie Pheap, I did work hard in order to survive. I was 12 years old when my grandparents, my aunt, and my uncle were arrested. At that age, I hardly understood anything and could do nothing but follow Auntie Pheap's advice. In my mind, I was waiting for my grandparents, my aunt, and my uncle to return.

In mid-1978, I was assigned to help build a dike near Phsar Deum Kor and Beong Salang. In order to complete the project, we were forced to work day and night, with little rest. At the same time, it was evident that people were disappearing one by one, and we all worked as hard as we could to avoid being called for re-education.

In January 1979, when the Vietnamese soldiers came to Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge cadres started to evacuate people from the city. The situation was chaotic and I saw Khmer Rouge cadres brutally shoot those who refused to leave. I crossed Aural Mountain, headed for Bor Vil District, along with Khmer Rouge cadres and other evacuees. Along the way, there was a big stream called Chaol Chab Stream, and very few people were able to swim across. The women and small children who were unable to cross the stream decided to move to other villages in Battambang Province. When we arrived at our destination, I was walking aimlessly, without direction, and stopped to ask the villagers for some rice. I followed other women back to Kampong Thom Province and worked for a family there in exchange for food to satisfy my hunger. Unfortunately, I was not allowed to go to school, so I decided to leave that village and I wandered, terribly lost, without any relatives. Later, the chief of military medical staff helped me to arrange my marriage.

In 1980, I was told by a friend of my parents that she saw a photograph of my grandfather at Tuol Sleng. I immediately went to the prison to search for his photo, which I eventually found. I asked the prison guard if I could take my grandfather's photograph with me so that I could pay respect to him at home. The guard refused, and I returned home, feeling hopeless.

Twenty-eight years later, in March 2008, I met staff members from the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam) by chance and discovered my grandfather's prisoner biography at Tuol Sleng. DC-Cam staff told me that I could file a complaint with the Khmer Rouge Tribunal if I wished to do so. Without hesitation and with the hope of seeking justice for my grandfather and my lost relatives, I filed a Civil Party application with the Khmer Rouge Tribunal.

I have never missed a chance to participate in the Tribunal. I am gratified to have the chance to sit in the Court Room and observe the proceedings. Though I have little knowledge about legal issues, I still appreciate this opportunity to seek justice for my lost loved ones. Every time I am invited by DC-Cam to join the hearings at the Khmer Rouge Tribunal, I gladly accept and am always excited for the journey.

During the trial of Case 001 against Duch, the head of Tuol Sleng, where my grandfather was imprisoned, I was afraid the Court might reject my application as the granddaughter of Pheach Kim, since there was no documentation to prove my relationship with my grandfather. If the Court would not have acknowledged my case, I would have been devastated. During the announcement of Duch's verdict in Case 001 on July 26, 2010, my Civil Party application was accepted. I was thrilled, relieved, and grateful to see justice served. At the same time, I felt sorry for those whose applications were not acknowledged by the Court.