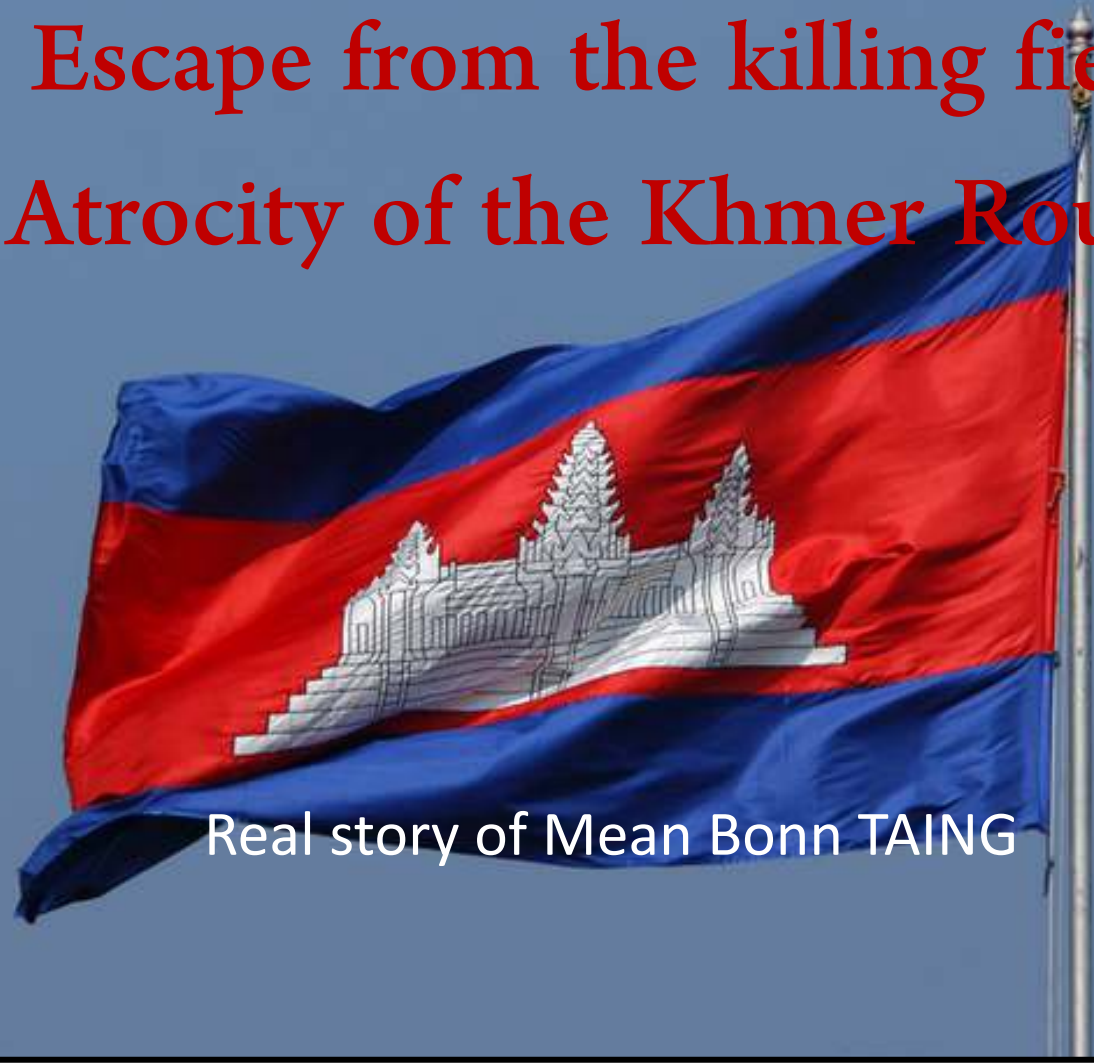
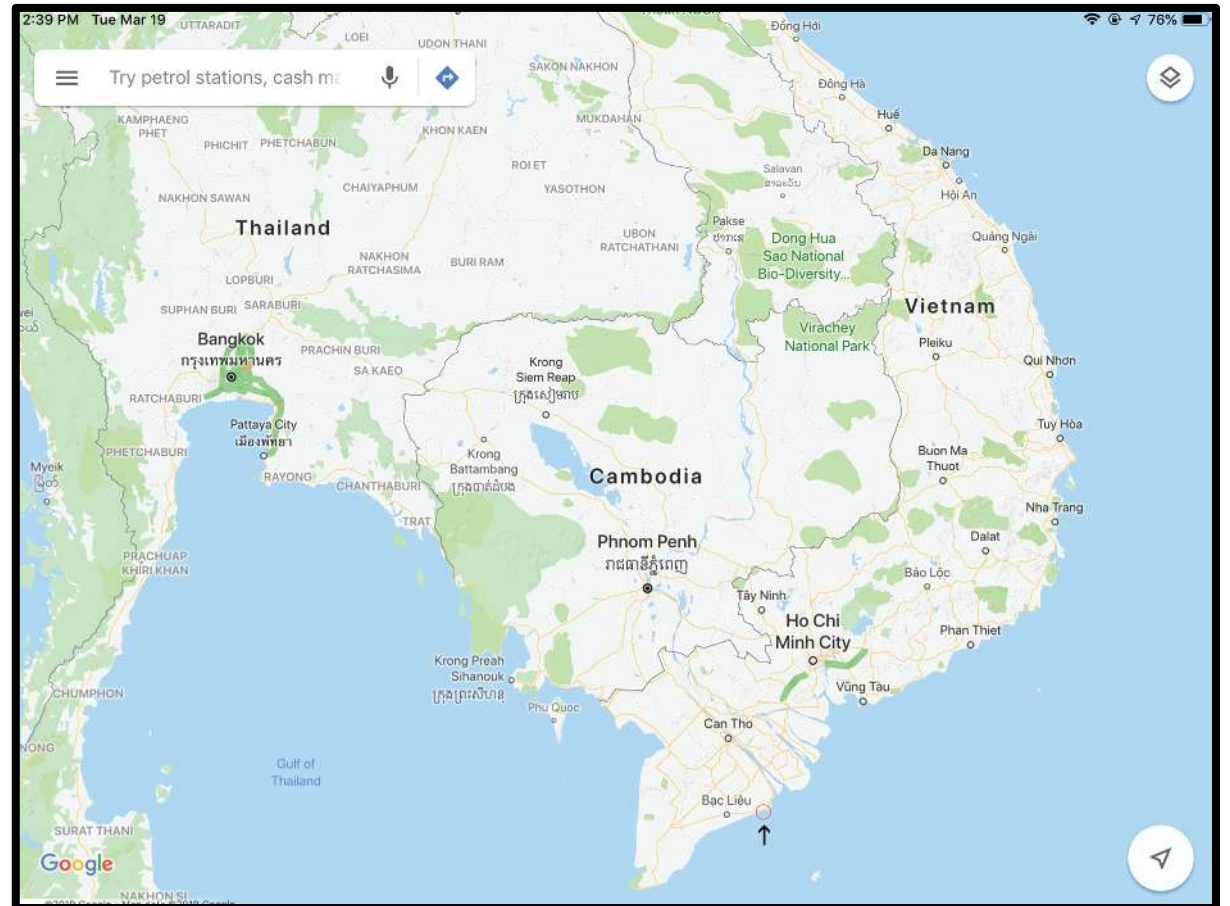


*Escape from the killing field
Atrocity of the Khmer Rouge*



Real story of Mean Bonn TAING

My name is Mean Bonn TAING, I was born in the South of Vietnam of the Khmer Krom minority (Khmer Kampuchea Krom ខ្មែរកម្ពុជាក្រោម) a few year before the Vietnam war stated. I'm second of 7 children, 5 girls and 2 boys. In a commune's called " What Serei Kandal វត្តសិរីកណ្តាល", Province of Soc Trang (Name in cambodian ស្រុកស្រាំង) near by the south China Sea.



At the age of 6 the Vietnam War broke out, at 7 year old my parents decided to let me go live with my uncle (my mother's brother) in Phnom Penh Cambodia, fearing that my life is in danger for the simple reason the conflict army between the South Vietnam government backed by the US with the communist movement of South Vietnam (Viet Cong) supported by the North, China and the USSR. Cambodia at that time is led by Prince Sihanouk just got the independence from France (1953) is fully at peace what benefits me from this environment so that I can go to school and increase my knowledge, my life going smoothly until the Khmer Rouge took power in Cambodia (April 17th 1975). Since 1971 I was trained as an electronic engineer at I.T.S.A.K.S. (Institut Technique Supérieur de l'Amitié Khmère-Sovietique) until April 17th 1975, my life turned upside down, all my dreams are melted, I do not recognize the Cambodian society anymore.

Once in the capital, the Khmer Rouge began to drive the citizens out of the capital Phnom Penh under the pretext of the American bombing the capital city but there remained a large number of the population who doesn't want to leave their homes, the Khmer Rouge army began to shoot the people who doesn't want to leave home to intimidate the rest of the population so they have no choice but to leave the capital, It's a complete K.O., imagine 2 millions peoples leaving the city in the same time and there is no infrastructure to support this evacuation.



To avoid the problem the family of my uncles, aunts and my sister decided to leave our houses and give themselves a meeting point to leave together, our direction the national road N° 1, we were 56 peoples in all, we were able to bring with us foods, clothings and personal belongings. We used our car to transport the goods only because it does not have enough space to transport people so we have to walk. There were too many people leaving the capital at the same time which makes the displacement very slow, we talk about the speed of half a kilometer an hour, it's so slow to a point where we do not want to run the engine anymore in order to save gaz. After 10pm, we advanced about 5 Km and it was the night fall and with the fatigue most of the evacuate take the rest everywhere on the road, the street became a real campground.

After 2 weeks, we run out of food we have no where to turn because no stores was open beside the money is useless, the khmer Rouge reject the idea of using the money, they know that they cannot have the full control if they allow people to use money. At the same time the authorities of the villages (Angka) all along the road

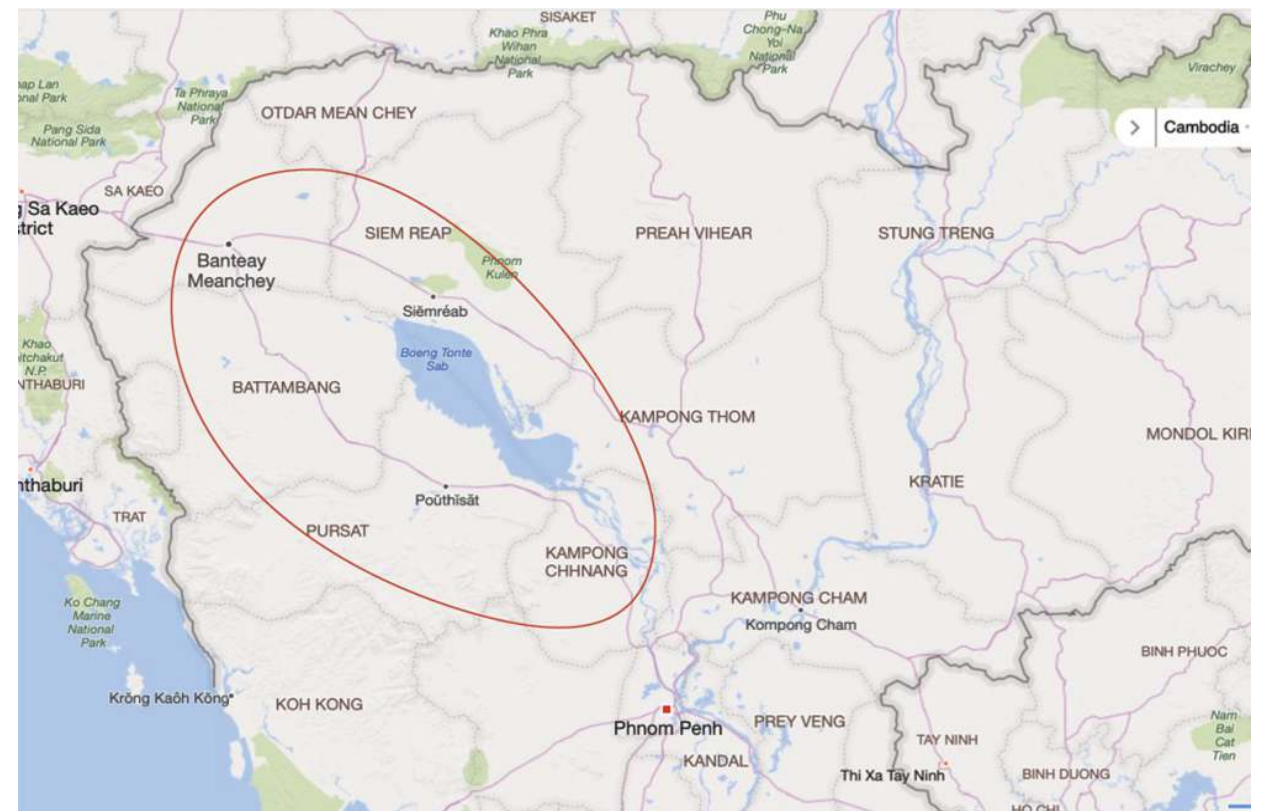
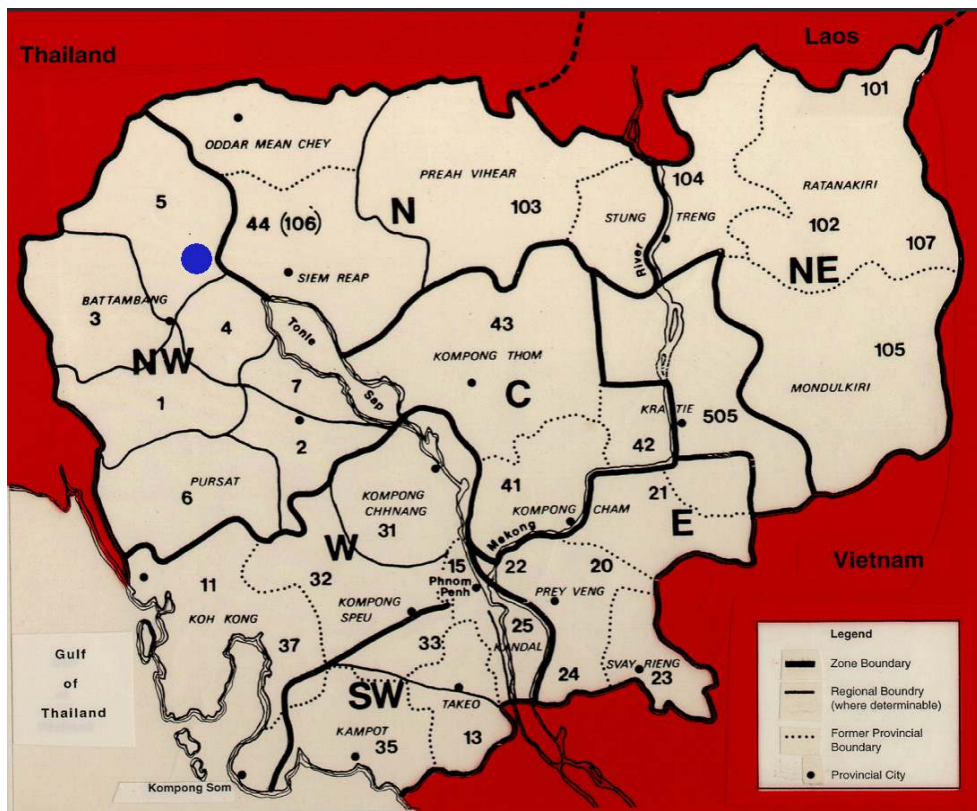
began to force the evacuees to stay in their village to help the people of the villages for the work in the field as well as others works of the village in exchange the food and places to stay in a form of slavery. The majority of people have no choice but to accept this practice because of the food. The Khmer Rouge divided the Cambodians into 2 categories,

We were forced to stop in a village called Koh Ksach Tonnlea (កោះខ្សាច់ទន្លេ) is about 35Km south of Phnom Penh (the Capital). For 6 months in this village, the Angkar forced us to work as slaves so if they are not satisfied for one reason or another they simply stop giving us foods. The foods that have been distributed to us are: rice, corn, tapioca and the vegetables that grow in the village. The portion given is very small that it is not enough for the daily consumption of the most which forced everyone to fetch extra food during their rest, in other cases where people drag the jewels with, they exchanged them against everything that is eatable.

The Khmer Rouge divided the Cambodian population into 2 categories, the BASE (the one who stayed in the village during the war until now) and the EVACUEES (the newcomers). They (KR) promoted the hene between the 2 groups of population

After 6 months, the Khmer Rouge started to transport the evacuees mostly from the south and south west of the country the so call south-west region (they take only the new comers but not the villagers) to the provinces northwest of Cambodia or north-west region where they want these peoples to produce more rice, we're talking about the provinces of : Kampong Chhnang (កំពង់ឆ្នាំង), Pursat (ព្រៃវែង), and Battambang (បាត់ដំបង), especially every where in

Battambang. The Khmer Rouge divided the Cambodian population into 2 categories, the BASE (the one who stayed in the village during the war until now) and the evacuees (the newcomers). They (KR) promoted the hene between the 2 groups of population. They (KR) encouraged the BASE not to socialize with the evacuees, to spy on them for Angkar, in some cases they (BASE) used intimidation to silence the newcomers. There was a consensus in the ranks of the KR to eliminate the intellectuals and officials of the old regime, to do this they asked us to declare our antecedents and our past life, as soon as they have these statements they started to to kill people one by one under the pretext that Angkar needs these people to help Angkar in another level, we have no news of these people afterwards. We are no longer reassuring of our safety in this regime, in my case I declared that I was a taxi driver and I never went to school. I have warned my family members to keep low profile and never show our knowledge because the KR's do not accept someone superior to them.



The Khmer Rouge map divided the country into 7 regions and 32 districts , these region are : North, North-West, West, South-West, East, North-East, and Central, the 32 districts call by the number : #44, 103 (in the North region) the #1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7 (in North-West region), the # 11, 15, 31, 32, 37 (in the West region), the # 13, 25, 33, 35 (in the South-West region), the # 20, 21, 22, 23, 24 (in the East region), the # 101, 102, 104, 105, 107(in the North-East region)and the # 41, 42, 43 (in the Central region).

They transport the people from their villages by the truck (Old Chinese made) to Pursat



then by train directly to Battambang, in my case the first and last stop was the town called Serei Saophoan សិរីសោភ័ណ (where the National road#3 merge with National road#6).

I had to wait with my family for 3 days before they took us by truck to the village Preah Netr Preah ព្រះនេត្រព្រះ about 30Km east of Serei Saophoan, from there we had to walk 4 km to another village south of Preah Netr Preah name Eastern Srès ស្រះខាងកើត, this village is located to the east of the mountain Srès ភ្នំស្រះ, all around this mountain is home to 3 villages, the Eastern Srès, the Northern Srès ស្រះខាងជើង and the Western Srès ស្រះ



we get into the village the Angka (Khmer Rouge authority in gave us a hut (4X5m) per family. The next day they y people and send them to the construction site far was shock because I never stay away from my family since I live with my uncle, this is the first time it's happen.

*After 5 months away from the village on the forced labor construction site, my cousin (my uncle's eldest son) became ill while infecting malaria. He was so weak that I did not have the hope that he would be cured ... later, me too, I had malaria, I asked permission from the head of my division to bring my cousin to the village, hope we can find medicine to heal, the chief has allowed us to return to the village. Three weeks after our arrival in the village, my cousin died in the shock from the family because he was very young, we are not ready to accept his death. The death of my cousin gave me a very deep thought about my health condition, I think if I stay in the village my chance to survive is very slim, If I flee to Thailand, I will have the chance to get healed or I will die on the way too, so this idea of running away to Thailand is already in my head. I formulated this idea to my sister, she agrees that I must flee to Thailand because it's a good idea. By chance, I found a man older than me (a Chinese Cambodian) live in the same village his name **Ma Khanh Than**, he went to get the wood on the mountain with me to provide to the village shared kitchen, he has the same idea as me to flee the village to Thailand by dragging his two boys (a 17yo. his name **Ma Bun Sieng** and the 20 yo.name **Ma Bun Hok**) with him. Every time we met, we discussed the plan to flee, from foods, water and time to leave. On the mountain Srès we could see the Dângrêk (ភ្នំដងរែក) mountain range*



This is the Dângrêk mountain range, the border Khmer- Thai. The highest point is about 2,497 feet (760m) and the length east–west-trending range extends from the [Mekong River](#) westward for approximately 200 miles (320 km)

which is in the north at a distance about 100 to 120 km from the village where we live, it is the border between Cambodia and Thailand. Finally we set the date of departure on October 10, 1977 (2 and a half years after the Khmer Rouge captured the country) and why on October 10, the Khmer Rouge grouped the 3 villages of Srès to form a cooperative and every 10 days, they called a meeting of the cooperative (all the villagers of the 3 villages) it's a form of brainwashing, we think it's an opportunity to hide with the mass when they returned to their villages and we will not be caught up. October 10 arrived, around 6 PM the meeting was over, we knew that the departure time had arrived, I returned to my hut to say goodbye to my half-sister, we were very moved because it is an uncertain journey we did not know what was waiting for me.



Long-handle knife, we're carrying this to protect us in case where we get caught by the Khmer Rouge we will fight until our last breath, if they shot us to death it's better then to let them capture us.

Dries cooked rice



I went to the meeting point about 1 Km north of the village, as a precaution we had to hide in order not to be spot. At the same place we had hidden our packets of dried cooked rice, 4 long-handled knives and 4 bottles of water. Around 7PM, it was dark, the sky was overcast, it is the ideal situation to escape. This part of the road I know very well because since my return from the construction site the Angkar of the village asked me to transport food several times to people who worked in a plantations called Arak Bakkâr អារក្សបាក់ក្រ this site is about 7Km at northwest of the village. After an hour of walking we reached the National Road # 6 which connects the city of Siem Reap to the town of Serei Saophoan.

When we almost crossed the road, I asked everyone to stop and check left to the right to be certain that there are no hidden guards or patrolled in this area, suddenly we saw the car light approaching us on the road moves from east to west, I told my mates to close their eyes once the car arrive near us and when it's moving away we must run at full speed to cross the road if there is guard not far, their eyes got blind for a few seconds because of the blinding light of the car. For one second and a half we all been on the other side of the road, nothing happens we're all fine, that night we was far from Srès between 15 to 20Km, we were on the west side of mountain "Chup ជួប ". We kept moving suddenly we heard the rooster singing reminds us that the daytime will begin shortly, we have to find a place to hide during the daytime to avoid getting noticed because we're still in the living area.

*The second night arrived, It was dark It is a moonless period but we can see the stars, these stars helped us to find our direction of the "North" because Thailand is to the north of our village. Before sunset I asked one of two young people especially **Bun Hok** to climb on the tree to position the sun, from this spotting I know exactly the direction to north. We were waiting for the stars to shine in the sky and we determined which star is at the far north so our 4 pairs of eyes will remember that star.*

From midnight I know a group of star that Cambodian known as star chicks ផ្កាយកូនមាន់ and from 4 am another group of stars known as the star of crocodile ផ្កាយក្រពើ it continues to be the same way from one day to the next. The third night around 9pm we were crossing plains, it was black, I noticed there was a light directed towards us I asked my mates to sleep on their back, two minutes later We saw two Khmer Rouge carrying light on a bicycle with rifles on their shoulder, they were about 5 to 7 meters from us but they cannot see us because of their light, we were very lucky.

From the 4th day we were very far in the forest, we decided to walk during the daytime to accelerate our trip. The dried cooked rice is finished, we started to eat the leaves, the roots and the fruits that we knew or some fruits that the birds ate and fell on the ground, the hunger caught us, our energy begins to run out we moved slowly, suddenly we were in front of a big bamboo forest, we were desperate to continue our way what we can do in the circumstance was to walk parallel to the forest, pretty much a few hundred meters we found a stream run below the forest that gives us hope, we walked in the creek to cross the bamboo forest, a few hundreds meter from the start I saw something dips into the water in front of us (the water in the creek is not deep), we started circling this place, a few minutes later Bun Sieng caught a big frog but we did not know how we're going to eat this treat. After a few minutes, we killed the frog, removed the skin and cut the animal in 4 parts and we ate it raw.

About half an hour later we were on the other side of the bamboo forest, from there we could not find any more water there were still bamboos growing everywhere in this place which explains the lack of water because bamboo absorbs water, we continue the path slowly because of dehydration. At a certain moment my foot was hanging with the vegetation, I fell and my head banged hard against a tree I lost consciousness. I did not know how many time I fainted but suddenly I felt something in my mouth, I opened my eyes and saw that Bun Sieng was putting a second bird egg in my mouth, I felt better. We stayed in the same place and the night was coming, Mr. Ma the father decided to sleep in that spot to give me the chance to recover. The next day at about 4 am, I woke up alone and I noticed, a little further, so many fireflies which gave me a hope of finding water. I was walking towards that place, I saw a large pond in front of me, I felt that the Buddha did not let us down, I came back to alert my mate, everyone was very happy we ran to the pool and jump in the water to get out all the heat that caught in our body. We filled up our bottles of water and soaked our cotton scarf to keep the moisture on our body as long as possible.

We continued our journey, about 4 o'clock in the afternoon we were not far from the mountain Dângrek. Back to in the village we heard a lot about antipersonnel land mines and ditches with daggers all over the border with Thailand We do not know if these rumors are true or false but it is better to prevent than to cure. We took a lot of precaution by walking in line, we designated Bun Sieng to walk in the lead using a tree branch to detect the ditches. We advanced very slowly looking left and right to detect something suspected, about half an hour we arrived at the foot of the mountain we found a very smooth track (there is no grass over it) it tells us clearly there was the coming and going on this track. We hid, observed to see if there were activities on the track, after about ten minutes I asked Bun Sieng to run and hide behind a big rock a little higher and look down if he thought there was no activity he would sign us so that we could join him. Once behind the big rock, we were discussing the summit of the mountain that we are going to climb (do not forget that it is a mountain range), the 3 Ma chose the summit lower but I chose the one the most higher, the 3 wondered why, I explained that as human we have a bad habit "laziness" so the same applies also to the Khmer Rouge soldiers. The summit we chose has a height of about 600m, we climbed almost reached the top of the mountain at sunset, I sat on a rock looking at Cambodia territory,

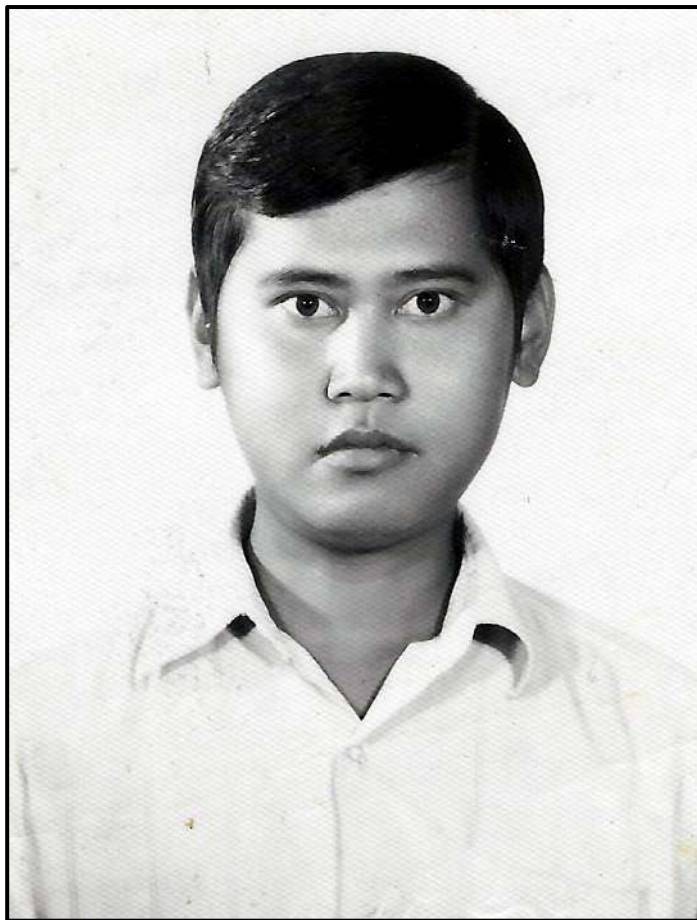
the scenery is beautiful I can't describe the beauty of my native country, I cried a lot thinking that maybe this is the last time I can see this beautiful country of my ancestor. Night was falling, we must sleep on the top of the mountain, that night it was raining heavily we cut the big tree leaves to cover our heads, it was cold. In the morning of day # 6, we continued our journey up to the summit, from there the descent is not steeply than that of the Cambodian side, the descent slope little by little we walked without making any effort , further on we found a serpentine track in the forest, we used this track to move forward hoping to find a Thai village down below but suddenly I talked with my friends about the possibility of walking on the antipersonnel land mine I proposed to walk in the creek near by to avoid the mines, normally if someone wants to plant the mine always thought to put in a place where there is the passage but is not in the water, so we decided to walk in the water but it's a bit difficult to walk, we continued our trip all day but have not yet seen a Thai village in front of us, the night was falling again, we slept under a big tree putting our backs against the tree trunk to protect our backs. The next day we kept moving, at one point we noticed something in the middle of the path covered by a piece of plastic, I lifted the plastic to see the under, I saw a pot of rice,

some fishing lines and a newspaper written in Thai, turned my head towards my friends to announce that we arrived on the Thai soil, all of my friends are very happy they were almost shouting for joy but I made them sign to remain silent. A few minutes later, a man in his fifties was walking towards us while addressing in Cambodian (he is the minority Cambodian in Thailand ខ្មែរស្នាក់នៅ), he asked us "where are you guys come from" we all responded "Cambodia" in the same time he opened the lid of the pan to give us his rice by saying that he does not have time yet to prepare the dishes, for about 3 minutes we finished the rice in the pan then the old man told us that we have to go directly to the village because it is not safe here there are the Thai Communist in this area, he rushed us to his village named Bak Ronus (បាក់រន្ទាស), it tooks us about half an hour to get there. Arrived at his home, he spoke with his wife in Thai that we do not understand but later his wife invited us to eat rice with delicious foods this the second time we ate his foods, 3 days without eating anything we finished all in less than 10 minutes. At the same time we told them our adventure to escape from Cambodia, the couple cried they have a lot of sympathy and pity for all of us. After eating, the guy asked us to go with him to the border police station in the village, he told us that it is much safer in the police station than at his home, before leaving we thanks the couple for their generocity and we left all our knives for them because we're no longer need them in Thailand.

Later we met the border police, he made us fill the official papers recognizes that we are the refugees from Cambodia, that night we slept in the police station, they distributed us the used clothes and they fed us a lot of food. That night, we slept in the police station, we were allowed to take the shower, a first after a week in the mud, in the rain, it help relieves us from the enormously stress, I slept like a dead man because of accumulated fatigue.

The next day the border police transported us to the district police station "Barn Krourt បារនគ្រួត" which was about 20km from the border. At the police station, they put us in the cell during the night to ease our protection, we stayed in the station for 2 nights before being sent to the immigration court at the city of Buriram in the same province. At the end of 1976, Thailand closed the borders with Cambodia, all people were crossing the border to Thailand considered illegal, we exactly match the status of illegal immigrants but in fact we were refugees. In the immigration court, the judge asked us to pay a fee of 500 bahts/each, we told him that we are refugees we did not have money on us to pay this fine. The judge sentenced us to 45 days in prison to cross the border illegally in Thailand, at the end of the session I thanked the judge for not expelling us back to Cambodia. When we finished in the court, the police took us to the prison, the next day the prison authorities sent us to the central police station where we spent 44 days before being exported to the LUMPUK refugee camp in Surin province where I stayed until December 14, 1978.

While I was in the camp, UNHCR sent me to Surin hospital to be treated the malaria, after 3 days the doctor told me that I was cured of this disease. With my knowledge of French I helped the other Cambodian refugees in the interview with the immigration officers of the different countries such as: France, Belgium, Canada etc ...



*From left to right : Sok, Bonn, Meng,
Bun Sieng.*



*From the left : Meng, Bun Sieng, ..., **Khanh Than**,
Bonn,... (... forgotten)*

I also gave the French course to people who prepared to go to French-speaking countries until I left for Canada.

I arrived in Montreal on January 12, 1979 at Mirabel's airport via Sabena Airline from Bangkok with a stopover in Brussels. After completing the immigration process, the immigration officer asked me a question : Do you have any questions? I said to him: officer is it possible to go back to Thailand, he looked at me and asked: why, I answered him: from the top through the plane porthole I saw only snow everywhere and I do not know how I can live here. The office laughed at my innocent and he told me that you could come back to see me in 6 months to tell me that if it's possible for you to stay here (laughing).

When I arrived in downtown Montreal with other Cambodians from the same camp in Thailand, Immigration Canada temporarily placed us in a hotel on Drummond Street, we stayed for 3 days while the immigration of Canada has provided us with clothing, bed accessories and basic kitchen items so we can get by and start our new life here.

Normally newcomers must learn French for 6 months in a COFI (centre d'orientation et de formation des immigrants), given my knowledge of the French language, I do not benefit from this program, I must go on the job market after 2 weeks of my arrival.

The Canadian Employment Center found me a job in a fabric manufacturing plant in Lachine, I was working in the evening shift (from 11pm to 5am) earning \$ 3.75 / h, I was very pleased with this work until the month of July 1979 that I found another job with Canada's immigration as interpreter because of the massive arrival of refugees from Southeast Asia.

On October 4, 1980, I married to Miss Sinang Yith whom I met during my employment with Immigration Canada, with whom I live with until today.

In 1982, I studied the computer programming course at the College Informatique du Canada and it lasted for a year and a half. After graduating in programming, I found a job in the field at the Federation des Cooperatives du Nouveau-Québec, I started on January 13th, 1983. In April, 2007 I was appointed as the IT manager until my retirement at the end of September 2016.



The final word:

I would really like to thank the Government of Canada and Quebec also the people of Canada and Quebec for their generosity and their good heart to open the door and accepted me so that I can live in peace and prosper in this great country.

But a question remained unanswered, this question is very important to me and millions of victims of the Cambodian genocide, the question I always ask in my head: why the Khmer Rouge reacted this way? killing millions of their fellow citizens, WHY. Some theory mentioned that there is the conspiracy on the part of the Vietnamese to facilitate their conquest of Cambodia but according to what I saw during my time with the Khmer Rouge I do not see it this way, if the Khmer Rouge were killing the Cambodians to help the Vietnamese to take control of Cambodia why they were fighting in the end against each other.

After spending \$ 100 million, the international court mounted by the United Nations has not yet charged the ruling heads of the Khmer Rouge who are still alive in Cambodia, it is a shame for the government in place who seeks to cover the crime committed by the Khmer Rouge because the head of the current government was one of the leaders of the KR.

I lost hope of finding the right answer for the Cambodian genocide.

Vaudreuil-Dorion, Québec March 31st 2019