



Leaving Year Zero: Stories of Surviving Pol Pot's Cambodia

By Richard Lunn

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"When I came to Australia as a refugee I worked hard, very hard, especially at science and math's, because I wanted to become a nuclear physicist and build an atom bomb to kill the Khmer Rouge." These are the opening words of Soour Gov's story, summing up the anger and determination of his early adolescence in Australia after surviving the genocidal policies of Cambodia's Khmer Rouge. He had lost all his close family - his father, mother, sisters and brothers - yet he slowly found the means to recover from his experiences. "In September 1978, I heard that I was on a death list." The opening to Tek Heang Ya's story expresses the fear and desperation that were ever-present under Pol Pot. Tek Heang lost both of her young sons, who starved to death at five and six years old. Seak Choung and Seak Ay made a horrific two-day passage through a minefield littered with dead bodies; Sophy was forced to feed the victims of the killing fields before they were butchered; Chong-Hean carried the bones of his own murdered father in his arms. Yet all these people now live highly constructive lives in Australia, bringing up their families and contributing their skills and understanding to the community. The stories in this book are compelling, powerful accounts which vividly involve the reader in the experiences of six Khmer individuals reacting to the dramatic upheavals of a society gone terribly wrong. They explore the remarkable resilience and strength of character shown by each of these Khmers as they attempt to reconstruct their post-trauma lives in Australia.

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