

Sokphal Din

Easy to read life story



HOLOCAUST
MEMORIAL
DAY TRUST

Key terms:



Cambodia: A country in Southeast Asia.

Rebel: A person who refuses to accept the government's power and tries to change things.

Government: A group of people who run a country making the laws and rules.

Labour camp: A prison where people are forced to work as slaves.

Refugee: A person who has to leave their home because they are in danger.

Sokphal (*pronounced sock-pal*) was born in **Cambodia** in 1958. He lived with his parents and three younger siblings in the capital city Phnom Penh. His dad worked for the Cambodian army. Sokphal wanted to be a doctor.

In April 1975, when Sokphal was 17 years old, his dad had gone to work and the rest of the family were eating breakfast. There was a knock on the door. Sokphal opened the door to two soldiers. They were not from the Cambodian army. They pointed a gun at Sokphal and said the family had to leave their home right away.

Everyone in the city was being forced out and crowds of people were already walking to the countryside. The soldiers were from a **rebel** army who had attacked the **government** and taken over control of the country. They were called the Khmer Rouge.

Sokphal's dad was already at work, wearing his Cambodian army uniform. The Khmer Rouge soldiers were killing anyone they found from the old army, so Sokphal's family had to find him and give him different clothes before the soldiers did. Luckily a friend found him and he got changed and left with the family.

Sokphal's family was taken to a **labour camp**. Sokphal had to work on farms every day under the hot sun. He was only allowed to eat three spoonfuls of rice a day.

The Khmer Rouge wanted everyone to work on farms and not live in cities. They didn't like people who were educated. Sokphal lied and said that he could not read or write. This lie saved his life.

Sokphal's dad was taken away and told he could come back in three months. The night before he left, he told Sokphal to look after the family. Sokphal and his mother were very close. Sokphal says she was his best friend.

The family finally heard they were leaving the camp to see their father again. They were excited. But it was a lie. The family was taken into the jungle and left without any food or water. Sokphal realised that he would never see his father again.

People became sick in the jungle and there was no medicine to help them. Sokphal's grandmother and his six-year-old brother both got ill and died. The family were very sad and unhappy.

On 25 December 1978, the country next to Cambodia, Vietnam, invaded and started fighting the Khmer Rouge. Sokphal was forced to join the Khmer Rouge, but promised himself he would never kill anyone. He was captured and put in prison.

When his mother found out which prison he was in, she took his siblings and walked all the way there. She stood outside the fence and, when the guards were not looking, threw a small packet of rice over the fence for Sokphal.

Finally Sokphal got out of prison and saw his family again. But they were still not safe. They decided to escape from Cambodia to Thailand. The journey was very dangerous, but they made it to a **refugee** camp.

They lived there for many years, waiting to be allowed to move to a new country. Finally, the family were allowed to come to England. They arrived in August 1987. It had been 12 years since they last had a safe home.

Sokphal has made his home in Basingstoke in the UK and is writing a book about his experiences.

Find out more... Genocide in Cambodia: hmd.org.uk/cambodia
Other resources for educators: hmd.org.uk/education