

CHANRITHY HIM



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Chanrithy Him is a child survivor of the Genocide in Cambodia. She experienced unimaginable trauma when she lost both her parents and five siblings during Pol Pot's regime. Today, she finds strength in telling her story and sharing a part of her culture through the medium of dance.



'The sight of someone dressed entirely in black would also trigger a memory – the uniforms of the Khmer Rouge. And for a moment it could paralyse me as if I was under a spell... Memories seep back to me in ways I hadn't imagined.'

Chanrithy was born in Takeo Province, Cambodia in 1965. She was four when the Viet Cong invaded Cambodia in 1969. Chanrithy and her family were forced to leave their home and became displaced around Cambodia. Due to a lack of medical care during the displacement, she lost her brothers Bosaba and Tha.

Chanrithy was ten when the Khmer Rouge came to power in 1975. She and her family were forced to move to a labour camp in Year Piar village. Upon their arrival, Chanrithy's father was taken away and executed because he was an educated man. Despite their grief Chanrithy, her mother and seven siblings were forced to work in labour camps. The conditions were appalling and they were forced to do hard agricultural work, with only a small amount of food to live on each day. There were many times when they received no food and would have to risk their lives to find something to eat. They were often punished if they were found looking for food or trying to grow their own food in the labour camps.

Due to the lack of food and gruelling work, many people became severely ill but did not have access to medical care, including Chanrithy's siblings Avy and Vin who fell ill and died. Chanrithy's mother also died during this time when she became too ill to work and was moved to a hospital which had inhumane conditions; she was later murdered by the Khmer Rouge. Chanrithy was distraught at the death of her siblings and later, her mother. When her older sister, Chea, whom Chanrithy idolised also died, she felt utterly helpless and alone. She says, 'Part of me was angry and I wondered why didn't the world care? Why didn't the world do something to help us?'

When the Vietnamese army invaded Cambodia in 1979 and ousted the Khmer Rouge, Chanrithy and her surviving siblings fled Cambodia and were moved around a number of refugee camps. Although some of them were able to study and work, times were difficult as there was little food and it was often a dangerous place. Eventually, their Uncle Seng, who had fled the country before the genocide, learned of their presence in the camps. He was determined to move his family to a safer place and started the process of applying for their citizenship to the United States.

In 1981, their uncle's request for citizenship was accepted and at 16, Chanrithy began her journey to the United States. Upon arrival, she reflects 'I couldn't believe that I had arrived in America. It was like a dream and I felt guilty that my parents and siblings didn't survive'. Chanrithy recalls that moving to America was very distressing for her, due to the language barrier and the difficult transition into a new culture.

Despite the challenges, Chanrithy was determined to continue her studies and attend summer school. However, Chanrithy's memories of the genocide would haunt her daily and she often found it difficult to see her peers with their parents. This sadness and grief made her determined to succeed and she excelled in her education.

During her time at Brigham Young University in Hawaii, Chanrithy suffered from severe post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). She recalls watching a documentary about Ethiopia where people were shown starving. They looked skinny and frail which triggered memories of the Khmer Rouge using starvation as a tool to weaken their prisoners. Realising that she was not getting the right support in Hawaii, Chanrithy transferred to the University of Oregon where she later completed her degree in biochemistry. Around this time, Chanrithy started to tell her story to her friends and peers and decided to write about her experiences in a book.

During her studies, Chanrithy was recruited by Dr William H Sack to assist with the Khmer Adolescence Project. The project explored war trauma that many young people had experienced under the Khmer Rouge. Dr Sack found it difficult to recruit Cambodians for the study because there were sensitivities around understanding the culture and trauma of the individuals. Chanrithy was able to empathise with them and helped increase participation in the study. However, it became increasingly hard for her to listen to her fellow survivors' traumas whilst dealing with her own.

In 2000, her award-winning memoir *When Broken Glass Floats* was published and she was inundated with requests to speak at events. Chanrithy decided to dedicate her life to raising awareness about the Genocide in Cambodia and has since spoken at schools and conferences around the world, including Cambodia. Often, Chanrithy has the opportunity to incorporate a Cambodian classical dance called the *Blessing Dance* into her talks to teach people about Cambodian culture.

'Telling my story gives me a sense of personal justice because I have exposed what the Khmer Rouge and other world leaders have done to Cambodia'. Although Chanrithy has found some solace in telling her story, reliving the horrors of the genocide is hard for her and she plans to stop.



Chanrithy continues her passion for writing and has since written her first novel for young adults called *Rise of the Golden Aura*. It will be released on 7 January 2017, the 38th anniversary of the end of the Khmer Rouge regime.

Find out more...

Genocide in Cambodia: hmd.org.uk/cambodia

More information about Chanrithy: hmd.org.uk/chanrithy

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Learning lessons from the past to create a safer, better future

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Roedd Chanrithy Him yn blentyn pan oroesodd hil-laddiad yn Cambodia. Aeth trwy brofiad erchyll pan gollodd ei rhieni a'i phum brawd a chwaer yn ystod teyrnasiad Pol Pot. Heddiw, mae'n cael rhyw nerth o adrodd ei hanes a rhannu elfen o'i diwylliant trwy gyfrwng dawn.



'Byddai gweld unrhyw un mewn gwisg ddu hefyd yn procio'r cof - dyna litrai'r Khmer Rouge. Ac am ennyd, mae'n gallu fy mharlysu i fel pe tawn ni dan gyfaredd... Mae'r atgofion yn llifo'n ôl mewn ffyrdd na allwn ni fyth ddychmygu.'

Cafodd Chanrithy ei geni yn rhanbarth Takeo, Cambodia ym 1965. Pedair oed oedd hi pan oresgynnwyd Cambodia gan y Viet Cong ym 1969. Cafodd Chanrithy a'i theulu eu gorfodi i adael eu cartref a chael eu symud o le i le yn Cambodia. Bu farw ei brodyr Bosaba a Tha oherwydd diffyg gofal meddygol ar y pryd.

Roedd Chanrithy yn ddeg oed pan ddaeth y Khmer Rouge i rym ym 1975. Cafodd hi a'i theulu eu gorfodi i symud i wersyll llafur ym mhentref Year Piar. Ar ôl cyrraedd yno, cafodd tad Chanrithy ei gipio a'i ddienyddio gan ei fod yn ddyn addysgedig. Er gwaethaf eu galar, gorfodwyd Chanrithy, ei mam a'r saith brawd a chwaer i lafurio yn y gwerylloedd. Roedd yr amodau'n erchyll, a phawb yn cael eu gorfodi i wneud gwaith amaethyddol caled, gan dderbyn dim ond ychydig iawn o fwyd bob dydd. Doedd dim bwyd o gwbl ar gael yn aml iawn, felly bydden nhw'n gorfod mentro'u bywydau yn chwilio am rywbeth i'w fwyta. Cawsant eu cosbi'n aml am chwilio am fwyd neu hyd yn oed wrth geisio tyfu bwyd yn y gwerylloedd llafur.

Oherwydd prinder bwyd a'r gwaith beichus, aeth llawer o bobl yn ddifrifol wael. Er hynny, doedd dim sôn am ofal meddygol, a bu farw llawer o'u salwch gan gynnwys Avy a Vin, brawd a chwaer Chanrithy. Bu farw mam Chanrithy yn ystod y cyfnod hwn hefyd pan aeth hi'n rhy wael i weithio, a chafodd ei symud i ysbyty lle'r oedd yr amodau'n frwnt; cyn cael ei lladd gan y Khmer Rouge yn ddiweddarach. Torrodd Chanrithy ei chalon dros golli'i brodyr a'i chwiorydd, a'i mam yn ddiweddarach. Pan fu farw Chea, ei chwaer hŷn yr oedd Chanrithy yn ei haddoli, teimlai'n gwbl unig a diymadferth. Meddai, 'Roedd rhan ohona i'n flin ac yn meddwl, pam dyw'r byd ddim yn malio? Pam na wnaeth gweddill y byd rywbeth i'n helpu ni?'

Pan gafodd Cambodia ei goresgyn gan luoedd Fietnam ym 1979, dihangodd Chanrithy a gweddill ei brodyr a'i chwiorydd o'r wlad a chael eu symud o un gweryllo ffoaduriaid i'r llall. Er bod rhai ohonynt yn gallu astudio a gweithio, roedd bywyd dal yn anodd oherwydd prinder bwyd, a'r sefyllfa'r beryglus oedd ohoni. Yn y diwedd, clywodd Ewythr Seng - a lwyddodd i ffoi o'r wlad cyn yr hil-laddiad - am eu hanes yn y gwerylloedd. Roedd yn benderfynol o symud ei deulu i le mwy diogel, a dechreuodd y broses o wneud cais am ddinasyddiaeth yr Unol Daleithiau iddynt.

Ym 1981, cafodd cais eu hewythr am ddinasyddiaeth ei dderbyn, a dechreuodd Chanrithy 16 oed ar daith i America. 'Allwn i ddim credu 'mod i wedi cyrraedd yr Unol Daleithiau. Roedd e fel breuddwyd, ac roeddwn i'n teimlo'n euog nad oedd fy rhieni na 'mrodyr a'm chwirydd wedi goroesi.' Mae'n cofio'r profiad brawychus braidd o setlo yn America, oherwydd y rhwystr ieithyddol, a'r trafferthion o bontio i ddiwylliant newydd. Er gwaetha'r heriau, roedd Chanrithy yn benderfynol o barhau i astudio a mynychu ysgol haf. Fodd bynnag, byddai atgofion Chanrithy o'r hil-laddiad yn dal i'w phlagio, ac roedd hi'n anodd iddi weld ei chyfoedion gyda'i rhieni. Ond roedd y tristwch a'r galar hwn yn ei gwneud yn fwy penderfynol fyth o lwyddo a rhagori yn ei haddysg, gan ddod ymhlith 25 disgybl gorau'r ysgol.

Yn ystod ei chyfnod ym Mhrifysgol Brigham Young, Hawaii, dioddefodd Chanrithy achos o Anhwylder Straen wedi Trawma (PTSD). Mae'n cofio gwylio rhaglen ddogfen am Ethiopia, lle'r oedd pobl yn llwgu. Roedden nhw'n wan ac esgyrnog, golygfa a sbardunodd ei hatgofion o'r Khmer Rouge yn defnyddio newyn fel arf i wanhau eu carcharorion. Wrth sylweddoli nad oedd y cymorth cywir ar gael yn Hawaii, trosglwyddodd Chanrithy i Brifysgol Oregon lle chwblhaodd ei gradd mewn biocemeg. Dyma pryd y dechreuodd Chanrithy ddweud ei hanes wrth ei ffrindiau a'i chyfoedion, a phenderfynu ysgrifennu llyfr am ei phrofiadau.

Yn ystod ei hastudiaethau, cafodd Chanrithy ei recriwtio gan Dr William H Sack i'w gynorthwyo gyda'r *Khmer Adolescence Project*. Roedd y prosiect hwn yn archwilio'r trawma rhyfel a brofodd cymaint o bobl ifanc o dan y Khmer Rouge. Cafodd Dr Sack drafferth recriwtio Cambodiaid ar gyfer yr astudiaeth, gan fod cryn sensitifrwydd ynghylch deall diwylliant a thrawma'r unigolion. Gallai Chanrithy gydymdeimlo â nhw, ac felly llwyddodd i gynyddu cyfranwyr y prosiect. Er hynny, roedd hi'n fwyfwy anodd iddi wrando ar straeon dirdynol ei chyd-oroeswyr wrth geisio ymdopi â'i rhai hi ei hun.

Yn y flwyddyn 2000, cafodd ei hunangofiant o fri, *When Broken Glass Floats*, ei gyhoeddi a daeth ceisiadau lu i siarad mewn digwyddiadau. Penderfynodd Chanrithy roi ei bywyd i godi ymwybyddiaeth am yr hil-laddiad yn Cambodia, ac ers hynny, mae wedi siarad mewn ysgolion a chynadleddau ym mhedwar ban byd – gan gynnwys Cambodia. Yn aml, mae'n cael cyfle i blethu dawnsglasurol ei mamwlad, *Blessing Dance*, i'w sgysiau er mwyn addysgu pobl am ddiwylliant Cambodia.

'Mae adrodd fy hanes yn rhoi ymdeimlad o gyfiawnder personol i mi, achos 'mod i'n tynnu sylw at yr hyn mae'r Khmer Rouge ac arweinwyr byd eraill wedi'i wneud i Cambodia'. Er bod Chanrithy wedi canfod rhyw gysur yn ei straeon, mae ail-fyw erchylltra'r hil-laddiad yn anodd iddi, ac mae'n bwriadu rhoi'r gorau iddi.




Parhau mae brwdfrydedd Chanrithy fel awdur, ac ers hynny, mae wedi ysgrifennu'i nofel gyntaf i bobl ifanc o'r enw *Rise of the Golden Aura*. Bydd yn cael ei chyhoeddi ar 7 Ionawr 2017, 38 mlynedd ers diwedd cyfundrefn y Khmer Rouge.

Rhagor o wybodaeth:

Hil-laddiad yn Cambodia: hmd.org.uk/cambodia

Mwy o wybodaeth am Chanrithy: hmd.org.uk/chanrithy

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