

# CHANRITHY HIM

## - EASY TO READ LIFE STORY



HOLOCAUST  
MEMORIAL  
DAY TRUST



### Key terms:

**Cambodia:** A country in south-east Asia

**Khmer Rouge:** The group who ran Cambodia from 1975-1979, they made all the laws and rules in the country. Their leader was a man called Pol Pot.

**Vietnamese:** People who live in a country called Vietnam, which is next to Cambodia.

**Genocide:** Genocide is a word used to describe killing people just because they belong to a particular group. This has happened in many countries around the world.

Chanrithy Him was born in **Cambodia** 1965.

In 1975, the **Khmer Rouge** took over power in Cambodia and forced everybody living in cities to leave their homes and move to the countryside. The Khmer Rouge wanted everyone to be the same, so they banned money, owning homes and religion. They killed people for things that made them different such as being educated, knowing a foreign language and even wearing glasses. Everybody had to work on large farms.

Chanrithy was just 10 years old when her father was taken away and killed just because he had had a good education.

Chanrithy, her mother and her seven brothers and sisters were forced to do very tough farm work, with very little food to live on. Sometimes they were given no food at all and had to risk punishment when they tried to find or grow their own.

Many people became very ill including some of Chanrithy's brothers and sisters, who died. Her mother became too ill to work and so was killed by the Khmer Rouge.

After four years, the **Vietnamese** army invaded Cambodia and defeated the Khmer Rouge. Chanrithy and her other living family members escaped. Their uncle was able to arrange for them to live in the United States of America.

Chanrithy arrived in America aged 16. She had lost her mother and father and some of her brothers and sisters, and could not speak English. She often suffered from sadness and struggled with her memories of the terrible life she had escaped. However, she was determined to try to re-build her life. She worked hard at school and later got a degree in biochemistry.

She wrote a book about her experiences, called *When Broken Glass Floats* and has spoken about the **genocide** in Cambodia at schools and conferences around the world. Telling her story has helped Chanrithy to make sure people know about what happened in Cambodia and the terrible things that the Khmer Rouge did.

### Chanrithy says:

**'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.'**




Find out more...

Genocide in Cambodia: [hmd.org.uk/cambodia](https://hmd.org.uk/cambodia)

More information about Chanrithy: [hmd.org.uk/chanrithy](https://hmd.org.uk/chanrithy)

Other resources for educators: [hmd.org.uk/educators](https://hmd.org.uk/educators)

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