



*The Khmer Rouge issued guns to their boy soldiers that were almost as big as the children themselves. The first few times Arn Chorn shot his, the impact knocked him backward into the dust.*

"I just tried to keep going, following streams, walking in the evening away from the sound of guns. I would tell myself, 'You will see your mother in another mile. You will see your brother, Arn Chorn. Keep going.' And then one day I came to a river. I sat on the bank and thought for a while before I decided to cross. But once I was there, I didn't feel safe under an open sky. For two days I crouched in the field, stuffing myself on corn and sleeping between the rows. On the third day I stood up. A soldier came upon me, and I dropped my gun. He picked me up and carried me in to a refugee camp. I didn't know it, but I was in Thailand.

"Two years later an American man named Peter Pond who was working in the camp got permission to take me and two other Cambodian boys to the United States. I went to live in a big house in a small town in New Hampshire with Peter and his wife. They adopted me.

"I had terrible nightmares almost every night. I didn't know where my family was, or if they were even alive. I slept on my bedroom floor because I couldn't get used to a bed. I still didn't feel safe. It was very hard for me to believe that I no longer had to hunt for food. At night I would steal down to the refrigerator almost every hour and take food back to my room. I would put bananas under my pillow so I could eat in the safety of the night. I wanted to eat them by myself, like I used to. I would finish the banana and put the peel on the floor. When my new mother would come in in the morning she would see the peels and get angry. I didn't know to throw things in a trash container.

"School was terrible. Even though I couldn't speak English, they put me in ninth grade. I had never been to school before, except for a little time at a Buddhist monastery when I was very young. It was so hard to speak English, which was very frustrating, because there were so many things I wanted to say and ask. My English teacher kept wanting me to say 'TH.' Well, there is no 'TH' in Cambodian. She kept going, 'TH, TH, *pronounce it!*' Finally she asked one time too many and I spat in her face. She sent me to the principal. I was so angry I was shaking.

"For two years I failed every course in high school, but they let me and the two other Cambodian boys stay in school because we were so good at soccer. We took our anger out on the field. We got to the state championship twice, and we were the stars of the team.

"I was worried about my Cambodian family. I couldn't keep from thinking about the others who were suffering in Cambodia. I wanted to help them. I kept thinking, 'What am I doing in New Hampshire playing soccer?' Then one day my adopted dad said to me, 'If you really want to help more Cambodians come to this country, you have got to speak out.' So he helped me write a speech, one word at a time on a piece of paper. I memorized it,