



St. Sometimes

I Still Cannot Believe I am Here!

The October issue is forever lost in time. It was a busy month of school, with little time for editing. The biggest drawback of the month was the lack of any Halloween celebration—at least as far as I could tell. Mark my words, next year will be a rather large costume party around Hallow’s Eve. Going without the year’s most important party just seems wrong.

This November issue should catch your imagination, perhaps “move” your emotions, and enlighten you to a few other major events that make up the Cambodia experience. From the Killing Fields to the Waterfestival, this month was an emotional rollercoaster ride for yours truly. No matter where you find yourself right now, you can rest assured that I am saying to myself: “man, I cannot believe I am

Another Visit from David Woolls

David Woolls is my financial advisor/investor and friend. I have known him ever since I lived in Cairo, where he and his wife still live. This is the third country David has visited me in. He is like a surrogate brother that makes sure I put away some money every month. It’s also a good excuse to see the “touristy” places in each country I live in!

When David got off the plane, I asked him if there was anything he wanted to do in Phnom Penh. His automatic response was a need to see the infamous Killing Fields. It turned out to be one of the most somber days in his almost 60 years of life - according to him the next day. The day started with a call to my Tuk Tuk driver (and friend) Po. The first part was the trip to the actual killing fields. The second part was the genocide museum in Phnom Penh. The final part of the day was spent watching the movie “The Killing Fields”.

Hopefully you know something of the genocidal times in Cambodia following the Vietnam War. For the sake of the readers that have not heard, I’ll share a bit of historical background.



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Special points of interest:

- The Khmer Rouge ruled from 1975-1979
- Pol Pot died of old age somewhere safe in Thailand. He was never held responsible for Genocide of millions of his own people
- There are over 470 killing field sites in Cambodia. Tol Sleng is just the largest and closest to Phnom Penh
- Pol Pot? Hitler? Same?

The Killing Feilds



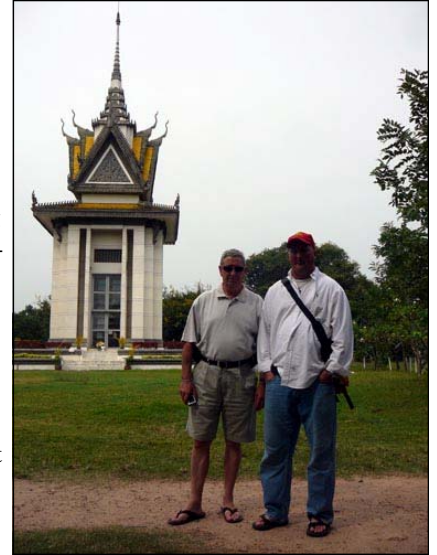
There are over 8,000 human skulls in the Cheung Ek memorial that were exhumed from this mass burial site.

In 1975, when the Americans pulled most of its forces out of Vietnam and Cambodia - noting that we were never “in” Cambodia, a group of Rebels led by the Maoist inspired leader Pol Pot staged a coup and overthrew the Cambodian government.

During the next five years of their rule, Pol Pot and his regime turned Cambodia into a land of a peasant working class overseen by children with machine guns. This transformation began with the extermination of any educated Cambodians!

Pol Pot’s regime, known as the Khmer Rouge, rounded up any man, woman, child, and infant that had a chance of going against the Khmer Rouge. For example, a man with an education— say a doctor, politician, or teacher - was arrested along with his entire family, known friends, neighbors, and suspected friends. Each and every one of these individuals connected to this one man were detained. Most were tortured, many were exterminated, and some were sent to labor camps.

In 1979, the Vietnamese army invaded Cambodia and Pol Pot fled the country. He later died from old age without justice served. What the Vietnamese found were “killing fields”, mass graves, in almost every part of Cambodia. These are the fields where the Khmer Rouge took their own people to die by the thousands. The largest of these mass graves is 15 km south-west of Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodia. It is called Cheung Ek.



“They [Khmer Rouge] had educated and transformed young people and the adolescent whose hearts are pure, gentle, and modest into odious executioners who dared to kill the innocent and even their own parents, relatives, or friends.”

-excerpt from a sign at Cheung Ek, titled The Most Tragic



David and I walked around the killing fields listening to a guide explain how the Khmer Rouge soldiers killed thousands of their own people. Most were killed with farm tools or bamboo sticks. The soldiers didn’t have enough bullets! The guide would stop every once and a while to point at the ground where bones and human remains or pieces of clothing are still in situ. The death feeling of Cheung Ek is heart wrenching to say the least. David was close to tears at more than one point of the “tour”.

There are several signs posted to help educate visitors. There is a tree where soldiers would simply swing infants like a baseball bat against the tree before they dropped the bodies into the holes. There is a sign above one grave site where headless corpses were buried. The headless bodies, according to our guide, were Pol Pot’s leaders that were suspected of behavior betraying Pol Pot. In fact, the single greatest factor allowing the Khmer Rouge to hold power over the country was the elimination of trust. Survivors explain they could trust no one. To trust someone, anyone, meant risk of extermination.

We paid our guide, Mr. Chang, a 10 dollar fee for the half hour walk around the fields. The Cambodian government recruits locals from the outlying provinces to act as guides and helps to pay for them to continue an education.

The final thought Mr. Chang left us was very scary. The Cheung Ek genocide center is the largest (129 mass graves) but not the only mass grave.

According to Seth Mydans of the International Herald Tribune: “Nearly 20,000 killing fields, holding anywhere from a few to thousands of bodies, served as burial grounds for Khmer Rouge victims as well as execution sites.”

source- <http://www.iht.cp./articles/2007/05/15/news/cambo.php?page=2>

Tuol Sleng - a former high school

I was in grade school in the late 1970's. Many of us in the US are still unaware that the Khmer Rouge turned a high school, located in the capital city of Phnom Penh, into a torture and interrogation center. Tuol Sleng, the name of this horrific school, was the beginning of the death trip that thousands of humans were forced into at the hands of Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge.

S-21 (public school 21) sits just a few streets to the west of my apartment in Phnom Penh. I was there earlier when I first arrived in Cambodia in July. I decided to take David there after we saw Cheug Ek.

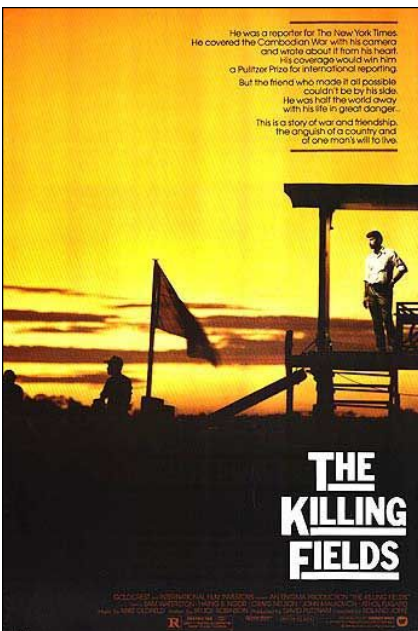
This is not a place to take the feint of heart or children. This is a place of death. If the graphic pictures of torture don't disturb you, perhaps the documentary images will.

One of the most disturbing truths, for me, at the Tuol Sleng museum, is the documentation. Like the Nazi genocide machine, the Khmer Rouge documented each of the thousands of prisoners that were processed through Tuol Sleng. Each prisoner was systematically photographed, numbered, listed, and either tortured, killed, or sent directly to the killing fields. The average long term stay in the prison was one month. Individuals were tortured until they gave confessions or confessed and led the Khmer Rouge to other targets.

The Tuol Sleng of today serves as a somber reminder of Pol Pot's regime. It is once again a place of education, of a different sort. There are no longer any students sitting at desks, nor starving prisoners awaiting torture. Today, it serves to educate the world and remind all of us of the atrocities that dwell in the souls of some.

"Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." - George Santayana

The Killing Fields



David and I ended the day by watching the movie at my apartment (on the bigscreen of course). We frequently stopped the movie to discuss how the scenes related to what we had learned earlier in the day. David tells me now, that he really got a lot more out of the movie as opposed to the other times he has seen it.

Even if you don't plan on coming to visit Cambodia, make sure to see this movie. It has been around since 1984!

"My job here is finished" - a quote similar to one of Paul Mooney's David Wools experiences - is how I would describe the first day David spent in Cambodia. He shouldn't ever forget such a day. Neither will you, reader, if you come to visit Cambodia!

I think David made his wife, Gaynor, watch the movie as soon as he returned to Cairo!



THE SECURITY OF REGULATION

1. you must answer accordingly to my questions - Don't turn them away.
2. Don't try to hide the facts by making pretexts this and that. You are strictly prohibited to contest me.
3. Don't be fool for you are a chap who dare to thwart the revolution.
4. you must immediately answer my questions without wasting time to reflect.
5. Don't tell me either about your immoralities or the essence of the revolution.
6. While getting lashes or electrification you must not cry at all
7. Do nothing, sit still and wait for my orders. If there is no order, keep quiet. when I ask you to do something, you must do it right away without protesting.
8. Don't make pretext about Kampuchea Krom in order to hide your secret or traitor.
9. If you don't follow all the above rules, you shall get many lashes of electric wire.
10. If you disobey any point of my regulations you shall get either ten lashes or five shocks of electric discharge.

This sign is a translation of the "rules" of the S21 center during its operational years.

"One of the most disturbing truths, for me, at the Tuol Sleng museum, is the documentation."