

# POL NGETH



## GROUP REFLECTION

Areej, Amna, Saania &  
Samra

During the interview there was something that surprised us, it was the fact of how young Pol Ngeth was when he was tortured. Tortured is a strong word, but how else would you describe leaving a child hungry all day and forcing them to carry weight larger than themselves. He told us about how at a point he didn't have enough food, water, or sleep that he felt as if he was dying. He told us that sometimes children in the camp would only get four to five hours of sleep and some days they would only get one meal. He told us that while he was in the concentration camp he would wake up everyday hoping that eventually he would leave the camp and reunite with his family. As for the soldiers who took them, well they couldn't care less if they died or lived. This surprised us because in society today kids complain about waiting in line for an extra minute while holding textbooks. "Now you tell us is that even close to what Pol Ngeth would feel everyday working, as an animal. But despite all that, instead of feeling hopeless he was grateful that at least he had something, because he knew that hard times wouldn't last forever."-Samra

Pol Ngeth is a really inspiring human being, but he caught our attention when he said the he lives by the 3 H's; Hurt hope and heal. In just fifteen minutes he taught us that if you get hurt, then heal and hold on to hope because that's what brought you through and that's what will always get you through. Our group member Areej said, "There are parts in my life that are worth giving up on. But in comes this feeling that, it doesn't matter because I believe I can do anything. I get the feeling where when life tells me I can't, I want to turn around and say " watch me", that, is hope. "Areej is not the only one who feels this way, we all do, and Pol made us realize that.

But there were some hard parts during the interview and the most difficult part of the interview was getting organized before the interviewee came to our interview. The reason we found this difficult was because we kept having problems with the camera and the recorder until five minutes before we had to start recording. We also forgot to assign speaking parts. For example, we almost forgot to tell Mr. Ngeth the procedure of the interview. Another reason why organizing the interview was hard was when Mr. Ngeth came we found out that he had also brought his daughter with him and so we had to adjust to the situation by finding a chair and get another cup of water just in case.

Some advice that we would give to other groups is to ask good follow-up questions and also make sure that you don't make the interviewee feel uncomfortable. This is because, you don't want to miss out on something that is very interesting and you also would not like to have the interviewee feel like you are not interested in the story. For example, if you don't introduce your group members, or ask questions like, "how was your day" to your interviewee. Instead start off by asking your interview questions, chances are that the interviewee feels really uncomfortable and will not be able to tell the story.

Pol Ngeth changed some of our perspectives on war. For example, Amna states that, "Yes Pol's story has changed my perspective on war because I never took war that seriously even though it was a serious matter. I would think that it was just a disagreement between two countries so they fight for a while then it is over; but there is actually a lot more behind it. So many people die, people get separated from their families, people are forced into leaving their homes, and young people like us have to be forced into doing labor work"- Amna. Areej shared a different perspective when she stated, "Now conflict is usually a word many people interpret as war or fight, but conflict is not always bad, we just have to choose how we deal with it. War is exactly like that, war is a decision and usually it's a bad one. But if we decide to solve conflicts differently war won't be an option. So war in my opinion is not bad, only the way we choose to react to it is good or bad. Pol did not change my perspective about war; he just gave another example that is the result of a bad choice. I say that if we choose to act differently, stories will respond and end differently, with a much happier note."



There have also been many conflicts in our life. And as teenagers we have decided to act rebellious against others when we feel offended. That clearly is not the right way because we just end up being mad at each other and find faults in each other rather than finding out the truth. Pol reminded us that anger is not the answer, because if we think about it; wars start because of misunderstandings. We accuse and assume things that are not entirely true and that is the reason for conflicts. Pol forgave all the people who were the reason for his pain. If he can do that even after all that have happened; I think we can forgive our friends when they like the same boy as we do. All we have to do is not start world war three and just talk to them in a way that makes them realize that what they did impacts us and ask them to stop.

The way we have decided to react to Immigrants and refugees in the future is to act with kindness and sincerity. We believe that this is a good idea because considering Pol's story if Canada had rejected him he would still be living a life he did not choose to live. It is our obligation as Canadians to provide a safe haven to the people who seek help from us. We have to respond to them in a good way because in return they impact our community as a whole and benefit us in many ways. Refugees and immigrants are humans and have the right to live life freely without persecution or threats. If they can't get that in their country we need to be the country that offers it to them. We will try to make a difference with small steps, by accepting immigrants and refugees no matter what race or religion they are from, because they have been through really hard times and will probably need someone's support. For example if we had a new classmate that was an immigrant, we would try our best to make them feel included, and also tell them that we are there for them, if they need someone to talk to. We will try to act in a nice, calm, and patient manner towards refugees and immigrants, because we all know what it's like to be new to something and not be very good at it.

# CAMBODIA

## THE KHMER ROUGE REGIME



In 1953 Cambodia gained its independence from France after nearly 100 years of colonial rule. As the war in neighbouring Vietnam escalated, Cambodia's elected Prime Minister Norodom Sihanouk adopted an official policy of neutrality. He was then replaced by Cambodian General Lon Nol in a 1970 military coup. The general assumed a pro-Western, anti-Communist stance.

This led to a civil war between the US-backed Government of Cambodia led by Nol, and the Khmer Rouge, the Communist Party of Kampuchea. Khmer Rouge leader, Pol Pot, sought a "new" Cambodia based on the Maoist-Communist model. In 1975 the Khmer Rouge guerillas were finally successful in deposing Lon Nol's government. They began implementing extreme Maoist policies paving the way for the Cambodian genocide.

CAPITAL CITY: PHNOM PENH  
POPULATION: 15,205,539  
SIZE: 181,035 SQ. KM.  
GOVERNMENT: UNITARY PARLIAMNETARY  
CONSITUTIONAL MONARCHY  
OFFICIAL LANGUAGES: KHMER  
GPD PER CAPITA: \$1029 USD

## RELATION TO THE VIETNAM WAR

At the onset of the Cambodian civil war in 1970, the neighboring country of Vietnam was simultaneously engaged civil war between the communist North Vietnamese, and the US-backed South Vietnamese. Cambodia became a battlefield of the Vietnam War; the US used it as a base for troops and air units.

Up to 750,000 Cambodians died in the conflict; many the victims of American air strikes that were targeting suspected Viet Cong targets in Cambodia. In contrast, Pol Pot's regime initially promised peace and an end to the killing. By 1975, he had command of more than 700,000 men.





## TARGETS OF THE KHMER ROUGE

In order to achieve the “ideal” communist model, the Khmer Rouge believed that all Cambodians must be made to work as labourers in one huge federation of collective farms. Anyone in opposition to this system was to be eliminated.

This list of “potential opposition” included intellectuals, educated people, professionals, monks, Buddhists, Muslims, Christians, ethnic Chinese, Vietnamese and Thai, as well as Cambodians with Chinese, Vietnamese or Thai ancestry. Members of the Khmer Rouge who were suspected of treason or sabotage were also targets.



Photo inside the Tuol Seng Genocide Museum in Phnom Penh. Photo by Caly Gilliland. This site is a former high school used as a security prison during the Khmer Rouge regime. The meaning of the name is “Hill of the Poisonous Trees”. This is one of the 150 sites of execution in the country and 20,000 people were killed here.

## HUMAN IMPACT



Skulls of the victims of the Killing Fields near Phnom Penh at the Choeung Ek Memorial. These victims are of the Khmer Rouge regime. Photo is courtesy of Flickr Creative Commons.

Cambodians nationwide were evicted from their homes. Those who could not make the journey to these the camps and farms were killed on the spot. Families were separated and entire cities emptied. Private businesses and institutions were shut down. Religious practices were banned and their practitioners prosecuted.

Cambodians who survived the purges and marches became unpaid laborers, working on minimum rations for endless hours. They were forced to live in public communes, with constant food shortages and rampant diseases.

These conditions of genocide continued for three years until Vietnam invaded Cambodia in 1978 and ousted the Khmer Rouge government.

## POL POT'S REGIME

Pol Pot's economic policies failed and the slaughter of educated working professionals meant that there were no skilled workers to restart the Cambodian economy. The communist Vietnamese government took control of the country. Foreign aid relief from democratic powers was prohibited. The U.S. and U.K. instead offered financial and military support to the Khmer Rouge forces in exile, who had now sworn their opposition to Vietnam and communism.

In the subsequent military conflicts of 1978-1989, an additional 14,000 Cambodian civilians perished. The Vietnamese occupation, and the continued threat of Khmer Rouge guerilla forces kept Cambodia in severely underdeveloped conditions until Vietnam's eventual withdrawal in 1989.

In 1991, a peace agreement was finally reached, and Buddhism was reinstated as the official state religion. The nation's first true democratic elections were held in 1993, but corruption continues to be a widespread issue. The UN called for a Khmer Rouge Tribunal in 1994; the trials finally began in November of 2007 and concluded in 2013.



Impoverished area in the city of Phnom Penh. Photo by Jonas Hansel, 2012



Public attendance of Case 002 trial hearing at the Extraordinary Chambers of the Courts of Cambodia in 2012. Fifty thousand visitors attended proceedings of the trial. Photo courtesy of the Courts.



POL NGETH

Scan here to hear Pol's story of survival and refuge.