

Srun Song

Photographer, S-21 and Prey Sar Prisons



12-year old
Srun Song's school photo,
Phnom Penh, circa 1968

*Interview with his mother, Try Khorn, age 69
and brother, Srun Srien, age 49
Koh Thom District, Kandal Province*

Try Khorn: In 1972, we were having lunch when my village chief and some others came to our house and told my son Song to join the revolution. I asked them to please let him finish eating first. They said they would have a lot of food for him after he joined the revolution.

I asked the chief where she wanted to take my son, and she replied, "Don't ask me like that." Then I cried. I didn't know where she had taken my son or if she had taken him out to kill him.

Two years later, Song was living as a combatant in Prek Sdei subdistrict. Someone met him there and said to me, "Your son is very thin." My husband and I went to visit him and saw that he was very sick; we asked if he could live with us, but the Khmer Rouge wouldn't allow it. My husband then took our son and ran back to our house. We had no money for medicine or food. But I did bring him some sugar; after he ate it, he felt better. I was also able to buy medicine with the little bit of gold that I had.

One day about a half a month later, when we had finished working on the farm, I called my son, but he didn't answer. Someone came and stole Song away. They had taken him back to the battlefield.

He came home again about 15 days after the revolution began. Song told me that if someone asked for another of my sons to join the revolution, I should not allow it. When he visited, he brought a lighter with him so that I could trade it for a chicken. He took these photographs then for us to have as souvenirs. He came back one more time before 1979. We weren't able to meet then because I was working, and when I ran to see him, he had gone.

Someone came to our village later to ask about the biography of my son Srien, and asked if he had a brother who worked in Phnom Penh as a photographer. I told him that Song didn't work in a prison, but in an office in Phnom Penh. Then Srien was arrested and taken to prison.

After the Vietnamese came in 1979, a man told me that Song was living in Leuk Dek subdistrict. I went to see him, but he wasn't there. Someone else said that he saw Song riding a horse in the mountains and asked him to come back to our



The Srun family, from left: Kim, Touch, Try Khorn, Lork, and Sim



Srun Song in Phnom Penh with AK47, post-1975



Srun Song, post-1975



Srun Song, circa 1975

village with him. But Song said he was afraid of the Vietnamese and wouldn't come back until they had left. I have been waiting for him ever since.

Srun Srien: I joined the revolution in 1974. I was in a children's unit working as a combatant, and I had a gun. After liberation, I went to Chakk Ang-Re district in Phnom Penh, where I worked as a guard in Division 12.

In 1975, I was asked to live with Leng, the head of an artillery unit. After Leng was arrested, the Khmer Rouge knew I was connected to him, so they sent me to Office 08 in Phnom Penh [people were sent to this office to write short confessions]. They shackled me then, accusing me of running away from the battlefield, of being a Lon Nol soldier, and of being in Leng's network.

I was sent to Prey Sar Prison in the same year. I'm a good person, but they told my chief that I wasn't, and accused me of being an enemy from the Lon Nol regime. They kept me handcuffed and shackled my legs at night. They also hit my head with an axe handle, and tied electrodes to me and gave me shocks. A man named Chhuon tied my feet and hung me upside down.

In 1976, I saw my brother Song riding by on a bicycle to take pictures of the prisoners. He photographed prisoners in Phnom Penh and sometimes at Prey Sar. I called out to him and he told the guards to look after me. But the guards didn't believe we were brothers because Song had dark skin and I had light skin. Song replied that he looked like his mother and I looked like my father, so they finally believed him.

Before, they gave me only three cans of porridge to eat each day. But after we met, I was given more rice. They also released me from my shackles and sent me to work in the fields. Song then gave me a pair of shoes and sometimes a cigarette. He also took a photograph of me, but I put it in my pocket and someone stole it. Later they moved me to Kadal Pagoda, where I took care of cows and buffalo.

In 1977 and 1978, they sent me to build an airport in Kampong Chhnang province. I tried to work hard and join in the meetings. But in 1978, they sent me back to Prey Sar; I don't know why. They had me look after cows and buffalo again. I did this with old women; most of them were from 30 to 50 years old, and some were older. I stayed there until 1979.

When the Vietnamese came in 1979, I ran to the forest. After a long time without any food to eat and being so thirsty that I had to drink my own piss, I decided to come back home. A man who lived in the village hit my head with an axe and accused me of being a Khmer Rouge, then he drove off in a small car.

Try Khorn: My house was destroyed by fire during the Lon Nol regime. The Vietnamese troops came to our village by boats along the Mekong and burned it down with gasoline. So my children and I took the bus to Phnom Penh and met my brother-in-law there; we had only the clothes on our backs. My husband didn't know how to find work in the city, so he became a *cyclo* [pedicab] driver.

In 1972, my husband said, "It's not easy to live in Phnom Penh," so we went back to our village. I wanted to go to Battambang, but my husband wanted to live in the village because he said there were lots of fruits to eat, and they were



From left: Sim, Srun Song's grandmother and Touch, circa 1975

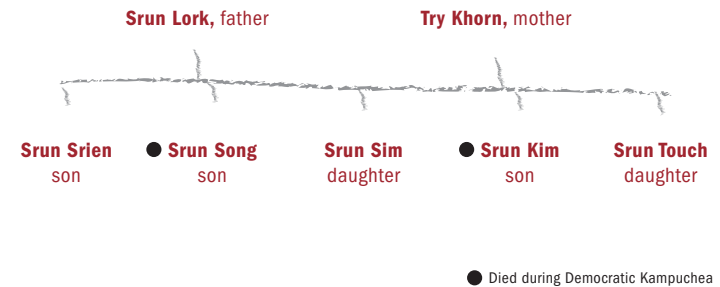


Srun Song,
post-1975

easy to find. But when we came back home, there wasn't enough food and they were still dropping bombs. Someone accused me, saying I acted like a dog. So, I took my son Kim and ran away to find food. I stole some rice and put it in my skirt for him. I did this every day; if I hadn't, he would have died.

After six months in our village, the Khmer Rouge sent me across the river to Por Tonle prison; my mother and four of my children went with me. I hadn't done anything wrong, but they wanted to kill me there. A week later, someone sent a letter to the prison officials saying that I was from a good family and should be released.

I worked on the waterwheel, transplanted rice, and grew vegetables like corn and soy. If someone stole even one ear of corn to eat, they would be killed. I felt pity for my daughter



because she didn't have enough to eat, while the daughter of the village chief had a lot. One day, I was working at the chicken coop and saw some feed corn. I was also working in the kitchen, so I took one ear of corn and cooked it, then mixed it with some rice. I gave it to other people, not my daughter. But then someone accused me of stealing corn for her. But I did steal rice for my daughter every day. I wasn't happy doing this, but I wanted her to stay alive.

One time, the village chief held my head under water at the river after they accused me of stealing a chicken egg. When my mother saw this, she screamed and they released me. So then I tried to learn to swim because I was afraid they would do it to me again.

Srun Song's biography was taken at Tuol Sleng on February 18, 1977. It states that he was a 21 year-old middle class farmer who joined the revolution on May 5, 1973, and that his family escaped to Phnom Penh from 1970 to 1973, and then returned to their village. Only his parents' names are given.