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Beyond survival : a study of factors influencing psychological resilience among Cambodian child survivors.

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BEYOND SURVIVAL: A STUDY OF FACTORS INFLUENCING
PYSCHOLOGICAL RESILIENCE AMONG CAMBODIAN CHILD SURVIVORS

A Dissertation Presented

by

URAKORN KHAJORNWIT FUDERICH

Submitted to the Graduate School of the University
of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirement for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

September 2007

School of Education

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URAKORN KHAJORNWIT FUDERICH

Approved as to style and content by:

David R. Evans, Chair

Jacqueline R. Mosselson, Member

Daniel S. Gerber, Member

Christine B. McCormick, Dean
School of Education

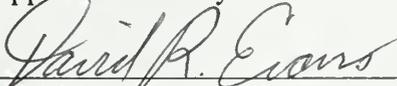
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School of Education

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ABSTRACT

BEYOND SURVIVAL: A STUDY OF FACTORS INFLUENCING PSYCHOLOGICAL RESILIENCE AMONG CAMBODIAN CHILD SURVIVORS

SEPTEMBER 2007

URAKORN KHAJORNWIT FUDERICH, B.Ed., SILPAKORN UNIVERSITY

M.Ed., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST

Ed. D., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST

Directed by: Professor David R. Evans

War is a one of the major causes of child mortality and morbidity worldwide. Research evidence suggests that exposure to war trauma increases a child's risk of developing psychological problems, both short and long term. However, studies of resilience have shown that some children have a remarkable ability to survive trauma with little or no damage to their psyche.

This dissertation is a study of individuals who have survived childhood war trauma and managed to rise above the odds to function well in major areas of life. The study was designed to explore factors contributing to their resilience in the face of adversity. Using in-depth phenomenological interviewing, ten Cambodian child survivors were interviewed. All of the participants were separated from their families in 1975 when the Khmer Rouge took over and suffered extraordinarily difficult ordeals during their internment in the labor camps. Some managed to reunite with their families in 1979 after the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia before fleeing to the refugee camps in Thailand. Others lost all of their family members and came to the US as unaccompanied minors.

Findings emerging from this study reveal that family cohesion, positive childhood memories, supportive recovery environment, stubborn determination to overcome obstacles, and Buddhist values are important factors that work together to produce resiliency. All of the participants were raised by empathic parents and learned to become self-reliant at an early age. The affection and warmth which marked those early years were the most important in sustaining them during difficult times in their lives. The Buddhist values of accepting suffering as their fate allowed them to form greater tolerance of the hardships and enabled them to face adversity with optimism and confidence. As survivors, they are proud and determined to make the most of “the second chance” granted to them. In the resettlement phase, they were able to heal their wounds quickly by letting bygones be bygones and optimistically moving toward the future. The safe and supportive recovery environment combined with easy access to new resources made it possible for them to quickly put their shattered lives back together.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

...things that go right in our lives do predict future success and the events that go wrong in our lives do not forever damn us.
Vaillant, 1977, *Adaptation to Life*

This study focuses on resilience among the Cambodian war child survivors who have made successful adaptation to life despite risk and adversity. My intent is not to highlight their war experiences and post-traumatic symptoms, but to explore the mechanisms they developed and used successfully to deal with the hardship created by war, and for positive transformation from extreme trauma.

Using the case study/life history approach, ten Cambodian child survivors who are now adults and living in Massachusetts were interviewed, their stories detailed the lives of ordinary people who suffered extraordinary experiences and managed not only to survive but to emerge strengthened to function effectively in their adult life. This study explores how such competence is manifested.

I have long been intrigued by humans' and nature's ability to "bounce back" from adversity and to flexibly adapt to the environment in which they find themselves. Coming from Northeastern Thailand, the dry land known as Isarn, I am not unfamiliar with hardship and survival. The extreme hot climate and lack of rainfall frequently creates much hardship for living things, especially the poor farmers whose livelihood depends entirely on the yearly rainfall. One of my favorite activities, as a child, was to observe how plants and small animals survived in a harsh environment. I was amazed to see the vegetables and plants that were burned by hot rays of sunshine during the day came back to life in the morning and I marveled at how some water animals survived in

the nearly dry ponds while others perished. When I heard the resilient frogs sing in chorus welcoming the new rain I thought life was a miracle. Against all odds, life persisted and continued.

The concept of resilience has been known throughout human history. In mythology, as well as in the literature of popular culture, there are numerous stories about ordinary people who triumphed over extraordinarily difficult circumstances. Stories of the resilient send a powerful message that it does not matter what happens; one has the power to overcome adversity. Children, men, and woman who beat the odds are ordinary people who take upon themselves an action that requires not only an incredible will to survive but courage, clear sightedness, and faith in life to deal with their problems.

The role of adversity in the lives of people has been regarded as both an unwanted condition to be endured, and a romantic, virtue producing from brilliant, creative people. Studies of exceptional people reveal that troubled homes, chronic illness, and poverty are common elements in their backgrounds. One of the most amazing qualities of the human psyche is its ability to withstand severe personal tragedy successfully. Despite serious setbacks, most people can recover from trauma, and afterward, achieve a quality of life that sometimes exceeds their prior level of satisfaction (Felsman & Vaillant, 1987; Fine, 1991; Flach, 1998; Garmezy, 1993; Higgins, 1994; Hogman, 1983; Jaffe, 1985; Maskovitz, 1983; Murphy & Moriarty, 1976; Werner & Smith, 1982; Wolin & Wolin, 1993).

The question of what makes people healthy has not received much attention, until recently, in the field of psychology. But evidence of the human capacity to

transform tragedy into personal strength poses an important question: Who rises above adversity? By asking this question, we move away from the traditional concern for the source of pathology to focus on the origin of wellness, an area that has long been ignored in psychological research.

My desire to learn more about what helps people to remain strong in the face of tremendous adversity was first developed while working with Cambodian and Hmong refugees in Thailand. In 1980, I was fresh out of college when I took the job and intellectually unprepared to deal with war traumatized refugees. Having followed the news about the Pol Pot regime (1975-1979) and the horrendous crimes they committed. I was expecting to see the camp full of broken- spirited refugees. I was wrong. Yes, there were a lot of sick and dying refugees in the camp, but amid sickness, hopelessness, and despair there was life. The able- bodied refugees moved briskly around the camp, looking for something to do. Children were everywhere, laughing and playing. Music and ceremonies were being created and performed. From day one, I was impressed by the refugees' commitment to wellness and life. Time and again, after listening to their sad stories, I wondered how these people whose lives had been traumatically altered not once but numerous times, - from the civil war, to the Pol Pot genocidal regime, to terrifying escape through the mine and disease infested forest, to living in the crowded refugee camp were able to live and to even laugh again. I came to understand, after three years of working in the refugee camps that, in severe crises, it is important to somehow keep hope intact and to maintain rituals and societal structures workable enough to keep oneself alive and morally sane. Those who choose life must

strive forward. Through hopelessness and despair they develop a rhythm of decline and renewal.

Putting shattered lives back together after the war is not a small task for anyone. The task is doubly hard for the child survivors who have lost so much of what is considered to be necessary to lead a healthy adult life: nurturance, nourishment, and security. But most child survivors that I have known and worked with were able to heal their wounds quietly, with little or no professional intervention. They grew up normally, and function effectively in their adult lives. Given this experience, I came to wonder what accounts for their recovery from early trauma. What are the sources of their strength? And why do some of them not do so well? What makes the difference?

Problem Statement

War is a major cause of child mortality and morbidity worldwide. Children living in war zones experience constant disruptions in their lives. Death, murder, and torture become the norm rather than the exception. Research evidence suggests that exposure to war experiences increases a child's risk of developing both short and long-term psychological problems (Dyregrov & Raundalen, 1987; Kinzie et al, 1986; Ziv & Israel, 1973).

In summarizing the effect of war on children, Glante & Foa (1986) report, "symptoms tend to be long lasting and do not necessarily disappear with the passage of time...children suffering loss may be particularly susceptible even though their problems may not emerge for years" (p358). Eth and Pynoos (1989) who studied the

effects of war on children wrote, “The endless blur of terrifying scenes” (during wartime) will “succumb (the child) to medical and psychiatric illness” (p. 150).

However, to assume that the child’s emotional state will deteriorate during wartime, no matter what, is to deny the importance of the child’s ecological systems: the family, the environment, and the culture, as a context of psychological response to and recovery from war trauma. These interactive sets of systems determine the child’s ability to adapt and cope during and after the war. Thus, the consequences of war will differ with each child. Some children suffer great psychological impairment, some very little, and others suffer no psychological damage.

Studies on resilience have shown that some children have a remarkable ability to survive trauma (Garmezy & Rutter, 1985; Wyman et al, 1993; Zimrin, 1986) with “little or no residual damage to their personalities” (Sandler, 1967). Some children even make use of the challenge and grow stronger psychologically (Fish-Murray, 1990; Rutter, 1979; Wolin & Wolin, 1995, Yates et al, 2003). Children who cope well with adverse situations have been referred to as “stress resistance” or “stress resilient” or “resilient” children.

What are the reasons that they do well in the face of enormous adversity? What makes them so strong? Until now, we know relatively little about the factors that make the difference between prevailing over or succumbing to adversity. Past studies on children of war have focused primarily on the children’s reaction to war stress and circumstances leading to post-traumatic stress symptoms such as depression, memory impairment, stigmatization/alienation, intimacy conflict, avoidance, emotionally constriction (Wilson, 1989). Child survivors who do not seek therapy for their problems

have rarely been studied, therefore very little literature exists on the understanding of those who are doing well in their adult lives, and the protective mechanisms that provide resistance to risk and foster psychological resilience. Much remains to be discovered.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

There are thousands of studies of maladjustment for each one that deals directly with the way of managing life's problems with personal strength and adequacy. Murphy, 1992, *The Widening World of Childhood*.

The purpose of this study is threefold: (1) to examine methods/strategies of coping and adaptation that facilitate a healthy adjustment among Cambodian child survivors of massive war trauma; (2) to explore factors that provide the child survivors protection against pathological symptoms normally caused by trauma and other long-term hardship; and (3) to explore ways in which knowledge gained from this study can be applied to the development of resilience-based educational programs to help alleviate and/or promote a resilient mindset among children and adolescents who have been affected by adversity.

A number of questions arise from looking specifically at why some child survivors triumphed over the odds and achieved emotional health and high competence while others struggled to overcome their past traumas. Some questions that were used to guide this research are:

1. What are their specific coping strategies as a child and as an adult?
2. What are their personal characteristics, personal faith, values, and belief?

3. To what extent have culture, and religion contributed to resiliency?
4. In what ways do they refer to their past trauma as a means of resolving present problems?

Significance of the Study

While there is a significant amount of psychological research in the area of risk, vulnerability, and resilience as it relates to children who suffer from chronic illness, physical/sexual abuse, poverty, and children who live with mentally ill parents (Bernard, 1993, Garmezy et al, 1984; Masten & Coatworth, 1988; Mastern, 2002; Murphy & Moriarty, 1976; Rutter, 1983; Werner & Smith, 1982), limited literature exists concerning resilience among war child survivors. This study proposes to fill the gap in the literature by studying the Cambodian child survivors, a population whose voices are not yet represented in the current study of resiliency.

Cambodian refugees who came to resettle in the United States after 1980 came from a country which had a complicated history of ancient glory, regional rivalry, foreign occupations, and communist insurgency which eventually led to the brutal rule of the Khmer Rouge regime. Given their array of experiences, these refugees have much to contribute to resilience literature. They can tell us what has been helpful or irrelevant to their survival. Their stories may provide us with insights and some hints that can be added to our understanding of the relationship between adversity and resilience. In this time of general turmoil throughout the world, we need to know what it is that makes children prevail, as well as what makes them succumb. If we can discover what the factors are that make some children recover well from trauma, we

may be able to apply that knowledge to help others who experienced similar misfortune.

It is my hope that knowledge gained from this study will provide the teachers, service providers, and policy makers who work with war affected children with insights that can be incorporated into their prevention, intervention, and rehabilitation programs for war affected children.

Assumptions and Clarifications

This study will be conducted with a set of ideological assumptions and certain limitations which will inform and shape the nature of the research.

Assumptions

Previous research on war- related trauma has been largely influenced by the psychodynamic concept that is based on a homeostatic model of the psyche. According to this model, individuals achieve a state of well being when they are in a homeostatic equilibrium. In other words, when they feel safe and connected with their friends, family, community, and have a predictable and welcoming social and work atmosphere. When they are displaced from this equilibrium as a result of an abrupt change or traumatic events their well being and happiness will be affected. In relation to war trauma, it is assumed that emotional disability will automatically occur after being exposed to trauma (Wilson, 1989). This set of assumptions underestimates the power of humans to overcome adversity and heal themselves, and ignores the fact that the majority of people recover from trauma with little or no professional help. The

overemphasis on pathology has distracted attention from learning valuable lessons from people who break the cycle, and who resume and manage life in a reasonable manner.

War trauma can leave long-lasting negative effects, but it can also produce positive outcomes by creating new opportunities for a positive self-transformation. By taking this viewpoint, I identify with developmental theorists, such as Kegan, Kohlberg, and others who suggested that positive change is often the result of a crisis which encourages us to see ourselves and the world in a different light. This perspective is also consistent with the existential view points of Antonovsky (1979), Des Pres (1976), and Frankl (1984), who express the importance of people finding meaning in life, especially when tragedy strikes. The key concepts that I used to guide this study are heavily influenced by the constructivist psychology framework that refers to the way people make sense of events by constructing them in uniquely personal ways – forming constructs which then determine their actions.

Trauma is psychocultural and recovering from trauma depends a great deal on how the injury is interpreted. In an effort to overcome trauma, the individual may symbolically transform it, willingly re-experiencing or denying it, and those interpretations are deeply influenced by the particular cultural context. The effect of trauma, especially collective trauma such as war, could be ideologically manipulated, reinforced, and exploited by a culture. For example, if the terror or loss is interpreted as heroically meaningful, the effect of trauma will be minimized (Lifton & Olson, 1976; Punamaki, 1987).

Ethnicity, race, gender, social class, religion, personality, developmental factors, and environmental factors, such as the community's belief system, understanding, and

socializing patterns, are all variables that influence individuals' reactions to and recovery from traumatic experiences (Lifton, 1968; Macksoud, 1992, Rayhida et al, 1986; Walsh, 2002; Werner & Smith, 1992.)

Resilient people possess an inner strength, which they may have been born with or acquire through early experience, that enables them to confront adversity with optimism and confidence, to seek for and recruit emotional support from at least one care taking adult, and to develop life objectives to dispel the confusion and isolation that come from the primary source of their distress (Garmezy, 1980; Werner, 1990).

Definition of Terms

Resilience: The capacity to bounce back or withstand both physical and psychological shock (Masten, 1994).

Resilience to Adversity: The ability to cope with unexpected, eruptive events and pressure imposed by strains of everyday life due to the lack of available resource and social supports (Garmezy, 1993).

Cambodian War Child Survivors: Children who grew up in war zones and endured the hardship of living under the Pol Pot regime (1975-1979).

War trauma: Events initiated by war that is intense and overwhelms the person's capacity to cope or master the experience at the time (Chimienti et al, 1989).

Coping: Effort, both physical and psychological, to manage demands (both environmental and internal), and conflicts which tax a person's resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Competence: The capacity to effectively resolve problems presented in daily life, leading to a sense of mastery and positive self-esteem (Garmezy et al, 1984).

Protective Factors: Moderators of risk or adversity that enhance good outcomes – whether it's the individual, the environment or the interaction between the two (Rutter, 1979).

Traumatization: Extreme and painful experiences which are difficult to cope with and they are likely to cause psychological dysfunction both in the short and long term (Janoff-Bulman, 1985).

Uprooting: Experience of being forced to leave one's familiar surroundings and to settle in a new and unfamiliar environment for an indefinite period, which brings stress and can cause various long-lasting adjustment problems (Van de Veer, 1992).

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: A response to trauma in which people alternately experience symptoms, such as anxiety, irritability, distractibility, panic, hyper vigilance, nightmares, flashbacks, or intrusive memories of stressful events (DSM-III).

Unaccompanied Minors: Children who survived the war without their parents.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews literature which provides a conceptual and theoretical context for this study. The first part of the review introduces the Cambodian history and cultural background. Some key events that happened during the Pol Pot regime (1975-1979) were highlighted to give the reader a better understanding of the participants' war experiences. All Cambodians who have migrated to the United States after 1975 lived through extraordinarily difficult ordeals, and it is important to understand these phases of their history as well as their traditional social structure to appreciate their abilities to endure the hardship associated with war and migration.

The second part of the review focuses on psychological trauma. Since war affects everyone who happens to be caught in its path, it is important to know the nature and extent of those possible effects. To understand the strengths that emerged from those whose lives were affected by trauma it is necessary to know what they had to overcome.

The third part of the review presents information gleaned from various resilience studies conducted on various at-risk populations. This part of the review provides important key concepts that were used to guide this study.

Cambodian History and Culture

The Country

Cambodia is a small country located in the middle of Southeast Asia. According to many historians, Cambodia was, at one time, the dominant kingdom of Southeast Asia. From the ninth to about the fifteenth century, the period known as Angkor, Cambodia reached its cultural and political brilliance. During this time, the Khmer Kings expanded the empire to include parts of today's Thailand, Vietnam, Laos, Burma, and the Malay Peninsula and built the magnificent Angkor Wat, numerous palaces and temples, libraries, and irrigation systems (Chandler, 1983; Hall, 1955; Shawcross, 1984; Steinberg, 1959).

When the Angkor Empire began to decline during the fifteenth century, Vietnam and Thailand invaded Cambodia and gradually took over much of what was Cambodian territory. The country therefore was reduced to the approximate size it is today. Under Thai and Vietnamese control, Cambodia was deprived of the opportunity to regain itself economically. During that time, other Southeast Asian countries had the opportunity to do business with the Spanish and Portuguese traders, but Vietnam simply closed Phnom Penh to foreigners. Thus, when Western culture and thought began to spread to other Asian countries, Cambodia was not exposed to them (Chandler, 1983).

In the mid-1850s, overwhelmed by the Thai and Vietnamese invasion, King Daung asked the French for military support. In 1863, France signed a treaty with King Daung's successor, King Narodom, offering him protection in exchange for timber

concessions and mineral exploration rights. Thus began the period of French colonization of Cambodia that spanned nearly 100 years. As a colony, Cambodia was used as an important revenue-producing source for various natural products, and a market for French manufactured goods. The French made no attempt to educate the Cambodians either in the French language or ideology. Instead, they brought in from Viet Nam workers who were proficient in the French language and familiar with the French administrative systems to work in Cambodia. By 1945, more than half of Phnom Penh's residents were ethnic Vietnamese. Cambodian high-ranking officials were reduced to performing a subordinate and ceremonial role while other lower ranking officials were severely underpaid colonial servants (Chandler, 1983; Kiernan & Boua, 1982, Kiernan, 1985; Shawcross, 1984).

The oppressive colonial life had an important impact on the development of Cambodian communism. In 1930, young students who became concerned about colonialism, the Vietnamese domination of the Cambodian civil service, and the Chinese domination of Cambodian commerce formed themselves into groups called Khmer Issaraks or Free Khmers. Their purpose was to fight for the independence of Cambodia. When Cambodia gained formal independence from France in 1954, the Khmer Issaraks were credited as having contributed to Sihanouk's success in negotiating independence from the French. Following independence, Prince Sihanouk abdicated his throne in order to enter into politics and became prime minister in 1955 (Chandler, 1983). For the first twelve years, Cambodia did well under Sihanouk's leadership. Towards the end of the 1960s, Cambodia's stability became increasingly threatened by both internal and external forces. Economic problems, widespread

poverty, chronic corruption, growing resentment and alienation between the government and the people, and the expansion of militant communist groups, weakened Sihanouk and his government (Chandler, 1983; Vickery, 1984).

During the Vietnam War Cambodia was drawn heavily into conflict. In hope to obtain international aids, Sihanouk began to play the East against the West. By ignoring the neutrality agreement, he allowed the North Vietnamese to come across the ill-defined border and build temporary base camps in the eastern areas, and at the same time he pledged his support to the Americans. But when the Americans pressed for support, Sihanouk was not able to give the U.S. the support that they needed. Eventually, the United States terminated its relationship with Cambodia in 1965. Four years later, Henry Kissinger and Richard Nixon authorized the “strategic” bombing of the Cambodian countryside, areas believed to be “enclaves” of the North Vietnamese. This event brought waves of refugees from the countryside into the city. Thus the country was thrown into the social and political turmoil (Chandler, 1983).

Overwhelmed by both external and internal problems, the government leaders persuaded Lon Nol to institute a coup to oust Sihanouk while he was out of the country visiting China. Sihanouk was toppled from power in 1970 and replaced by Lon Nol, the American-backed chief of the military, who later became the prime minister of the Khmer Republic (Chandler, 1983; Criddle & Mam, 1987). Under Lon Nol’s weak leadership, Cambodia’s political and economic problems worsened, and they were further complicated by the war in Vietnam. During this time, the Cambodian communists known as “Khmer Rouge” rapidly expanded their control over the countryside and its population.

The civil war between the government and the Khmer Rouge, as well as the United States strategic bombing destroyed much of the Cambodian countryside, and created an influx of Khmers fleeing to Phnom Penh and drove a large number of Cambodians to join the Khmer Rouge. On June 30, 1974, the American government terminated its diplomatic relationship with Cambodia and withdrew its forces, leaving the country in total chaos. At this point, the Khmer Rouge gained in both popular and territorial control and captured the city of Phnom Penh on April 17, 1975. The fall of the capital city marked the end of the civil war and the beginning of the horrific period of the Cambodian genocide engineered by the Khmer Rouge regime (Chandler, 1983).

The Reign of Terror

The Khmer Rouge envisioned a new Cambodian society that was free from the Western colonialist, imperialist influence (Chandler, 1983; Shawcross, 1984). The goals of the new regime were 1) “Breaking the System”- the social, political, economic and cultural infrastructure of the old society; 2) “Socioeconomic Transformation” with collectivization, work battalions, abolishing private property and religion, and instituting a new value systems; 3) “Defending against External Threats”, primarily perceived as coming from Vietnam (Quinn, 1989, p180). “We want to build socialism quickly; we want our people to be glorious quickly. This is especially to prevent the enemy from harming us,” explained the Khmer Rouge leader, Pol Pot, in an article that appeared in a journal, *Tung Padevat*, in June 1976 (Shawcross, 1984, p 80).

Within days of Pol Pot’s coming to power, a ruthless and radical revolutionary movement to reshape the fabric of Cambodia was instituted.

The goal of the new Cambodian rulers was fundamentally and drastically to change the nature of Khmer society. Cities were viewed as creations of Western influence, centers of the decadence and conspicuous consumption, and impediments to change...By literally tearing the great bulk of the country's population from its roots and familiar patterns of work and life, the Khmer Rouge leadership intended irrevocably and irretrievably to move toward a new egalitarian agricultural society. (Quinn, 1989, p.181)

When the military tanks driven by the Khmer Rouge soldiers rolled into the city of Phnom Penh the inhabitants of the city lined up the street to greet them. What was thought to be the liberation from imperial control quickly turned into nightmares. The people were told that the Americans were going to attack Phnom Penh and they need to get out of the city immediately. In panic, everyone left their houses and headed out, believing that in a few days they would return. In the book, *Murder of a Gentle Land*, Barron and Paul (1977) detail the chaotic exodus of Phnom Penh commanded by the Khmer Rouge and the tribulations that followed.

Almost overnight Phnom Penh residents, who had been known for their spontaneity and gaiety, their uninhibited curiosity and friendliness, became a silent, cowed heard fearful of speaking to one another or doing anything which might single them out of the attention of the Angka. (Barron & Paul, 1997, p. 28)

Among the driven multitudes a new realization soon spread: Each soldier servant of Angka held death at his or her fingertips, and to disobey Angka or displease its servants invited instant death. (Barron & Paul, 1977, p. 26)

The main goal of the Khmer Rouge was to make Cambodia economically self-sufficient by maximizing agricultural production. To achieve this, they evacuated the city dwellers and urbanites to the countryside and converted the entire population into agricultural laborers.

In the countryside, the people were divided into groups of about one thousand people, and forced to work extraordinarily hard, up to sixteen hours a day, producing a different crop or commodity, and building

irrigation systems. They were denied food, medical treatment, and other social needs such as education and religious activities. Children as young as six or seven years old were separated from their parents and put in the children's mobile work units, and were "forced to work in the fields as beasts of burden, given scant meals at communal kitchens, and often punished with death for complaining about hard work (Shawcross, 1984, p. 80).

Determined to build an egalitarian society, the Khmer Rouge felt that it was necessary to deconstruct the old systems and reconstruct a new society as well as its members. This process involved tearing down, "through terror and other means, the traditional bases, structure and forces which have shaped and guide and individual's life until he is left as an atomized, isolated individual unit" (Barron & Paul, 1977, p. 60). Religion, family, and tradition came directly under fire. People who they perceived as obstacles of the revolution, such as Buddhist monks, former government officials and army officers, the educated urbanites, other religious groups and ethnic minorities, including Chinese, Sino-Khmer, Vietnamese, Lao, Thai, Indians and Pakistani became targets of the annihilation. As time went on, however, the killing became indiscriminate, and not even the poor peasants who helped bring the regime to power were spared of the abuse and killing.

By that time nobody showed any reaction to anything anymore. We simply followed each other like cattle. All courtesy, all respect of hierarchy had vanished. It was every man for himself, with only one idea: how to survive. (Barron & Paul, 1977, p. 32)

Under the Khmer Rouge regime, the people had no control over their lives. They were told that nothing was more important than Angka, the high revolutionary organization. Their most important duty was to serve the "Angka." Normal emotional ties to family were not permitted. Husbands and wives were separated from one another. Children were "singled out for the most intensive brainwashing calculated to

estrangle them further from their parents and transfer loyalty from the family to Angka” (Barron & Paul, 1977, p. 136). Buddhist temples were destroyed, and monks were either killed or unfrocked. Ritual activities were forbidden. In place of religion, tradition, and family, the Khmer Rouge instituted a political ideology that emphasized new values and conduct (Chandler, 1983; Kiernan, 1985). Vocabulary denoting former social and family relationships was abolished. Parents, teachers, monks, elders, children, all became “comrades.” The brief rule of the Khmer rouge killed more than a million people of the estimated population of 7.3 million. Many died from execution, but most from starvation, exhaustion, disease, and illness (Kiernan & Boua, 1982; Kiernan, 1985; Knight, 1995; Vickery, 1984). In four years, the regime left the country in ruin, and the country’s culturally rich foundations were completely destroyed.

Kampuchea was reduced to ashes. The whole Kampuchean people became slaves and convicts under death sentence. The whole social and material infrastructures were destroyed. In no time at all, everything that was built by the Kampuchean people during the thousand years was torn to pieces (*Kampuchean Today*, 1988)

The short reign of the Khmer Rouge resulted in the death of hundreds of thousands of Cambodian. Estimate number of the casualties range as high as three millions (Kiernan & Boua, 1982). In 1979, Vietnam invaded Cambodia. Following the invasion, a large number of urbanites, peasants, and Khmer Rouge cadres who survived the regime fled to the western border of Thailand where they temporarily settled in the refugee camps organized by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other refugee relief agencies. Those who did not flee at the time returned home, hoping to start over again, but later on that year famine hit, so starvation and the

continued fighting between the Khmer Rouge and the Vietnamese also forced them to flee to refugee camps at the Thai borders.

The Refugees

The end of the Khmer Rouge reign did not bring much needed relief to the Cambodian people. In mere four years, the whole country was left totally ruin. The new government's efforts to revive and reconstruct the country and its social systems were slow due to the ongoing war led by different political groups. To resist the Vietnamese backed government, Prince Sihanouk led the National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful and Co-operative Cambodia (FUNCENPED), Son Sann led the Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPLNF), and the Khmer Rouge led the Party of Democratic Kampuchea (PDK). These fractions continued their activities on the Thai-Cambodian border and threatened the Phnom Penh Administration. The ongoing fighting, the blockage of international assistance and the loss of the much of the skilled work force hindered the economic development (Ebihara et al, 1994). By the end of 1979, famine set in and forced the people to flee to the refugee camps in Thailand. For most survivors, the decision to leave Cambodia to face the unknown was very difficult. In one of the most moving descriptions of the emotion during the flight Yathy Pin (1987) wrote:

I headed west, a dead soul, pushed by my voice. I felt strangely light, freed of hope, freed of fear, I, who had once been so ambitious and so confident, had lost everything, I had been unable to save two of my children, I had abandoned a third, and now I had lost my wife. I had nothing left to lose. What was there to fear? No longer fearing destruction, I was indestructible. (p. 202).

The journeys to the refugee camps in Thailand were terrifying for most survivors. Some were robbed and abused by the pirates, smugglers or even the Thai soldiers who were supposed to provide them protection (Shawcross, 1984). In the refugee camps, the refugees continued to experience hardship and deprivation. The lack of personal control and the experiences they had earlier under Pol Pot regime, continued to plague their existence as refugees. Once settled in a camp, their lives and fates depended much on decisions made by foreign people who had little or no understanding of their culture (Westermeyer, 1986). For many years, the refugees lived in limbo. Some refugees managed to reunite with their families, but many did not. Some managed to find sponsors in western countries and were granted permissions to resettle there. Participants in this study were among the “lucky ones” who were selected for resettlement in the United States.

This stage of liminality, of being neither what you were nor what you will become, is characterized primarily for the refugees by powerlessness. Refugees can not control the most basic activity of their lives: procuring food, water, and fuel. They do not know how long they will be where they are or how to change their situation. Refugees are exploited by others, even by themselves (Ebihara et al, 1994, p. 20).

Starting a life all over again in a foreign country where climate, language, life style, landscape, and cultural expectation are dramatically different from the ones previously known was not an easy task. Cultural differences often caused confusion, stress, and embarrassment. The language barrier made it difficult to express their thoughts and feelings and established friendships with people in the host country. Moreover, they were not always treated with respect by those who had no understanding of the situation from which they came. From time to time, they were confronted with racial prejudice (Van der Veer, 1992). But, despite these problems,

most Cambodians adapted well to the new environment. They were grateful to be alive and determined to make the most out of the “second chance” granted to them.

The influx of Cambodian refugee resettlement in Western Massachusetts began in the early 1980s. In the initial stage of the resettlement, the refugees lived in four towns within the Hampshire County. Each town set up committees for a small cluster of refugees. The clustering provided support to both sponsors and refugees by pooling resources of employment opportunities, English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, and access to emotionally supportive people among Cambodians and between sponsors. In Hampshire County, where the majority of the participants in this study lived, the cluster concept was put in action through the efforts of Peter Pond of the Lutheran Services Association. By the time the participants arrived in mid 1980s the host communities were ready for them. There was a big pool of sponsors who either took the unaccompanied minors to live in their homes or to give help during the transitional periods. School administrators put extra efforts into constructing the ESL and transitional bilingual programs to fit the needs of Cambodian children. Mental health and social service agencies were also well staffed with professionals who were familiar with Cambodian cultures and issues associated with the traumas the refugees experienced prior to their arrival. The welcoming atmosphere and the availability of resources definitely helped alleviate the shock and confusion the refugees felt at the time.

The Culture and Religion

The root of Cambodian culture can be traced back to India. India never colonized Cambodia but its influences came through diplomatic relations, traders and travelers between the two countries, intermarriages between the Khmer and Indians, and Brahman advisers to the Khmer kings at the beginning of the Christian era. Over a thousand years, Cambodia incorporated several aspects of Indian culture into its own. During this time, the traditional tribal culture was replaced by the Indian monarchic system. The Khmer also borrowed from India a vocabulary for the social hierarchy, a system of codified law, a writing system, and meters for poetry, Buddhist concepts and religious teaching which emphasize reverence for all life, architecture, iconography, and astronomy (Chatterji, 1964; Bit, 1992).

Religion is very important for Cambodian people. Buddhism, as practiced by the majority of Cambodians, has been a unifying force in creating a strong sense of national identity and is one of the basic institutions of society. To most Cambodians, Buddhism is more an expression of the Cambodian way of life than a separate institution of faith. In other words, Buddhist religion is a system of thought, a way of understanding life, and “a series of well-constructed arguments which point towards the adoption of certain attitudes and values and practices which may create the conditions for a new vision of human life and purpose” (Bit, 1992, p. 19).

Most Cambodians are Theravada Buddhists. The fundamental teaching of the Buddha is that in life suffering is unavoidable. This “suffering”, according to the Buddhist religion, is largely caused by the desire to possess or dominate. In order to alleviate sufferings, one has to accept the Four Noble Truth and follow the Eightfold

Path. The first Noble Truth indicates that that all existence can not avoid unhappiness/suffering. The second Noble Truth tells that suffering is caused by desire to possess. The third Noble Truth shows that by suppressing certain desire suffering can be lifted. The fourth Noble Truth suggests that by strictly adhering to the prescribed eightfold path one can reach a state of total contentment.

Buddhist teachings generally promote a sense of both individual and social responsibility (Lester, 1973). The aim is to avoid causing harm to others through one's conduct. Thus, a Buddhist a way of life for lay people start with the first five precepts of the code of conduct: avoid killings any living being, stealing, immoral sexual conduct, lying, and consuming intoxicants. Another important guiding principle of living a Buddhist way is the concept of following the middle way. Simply put, this can be described by acting in a non-extreme manner, and pursuing all that life has to offer in moderation.

Buddhists believe in reincarnation. They accept their current life situation, good or bad, as their fate but hope to achieve better status in the next life. Power, ability, wealth, or good fortunes are seen as rewards for living virtuously in the previous life. A better existence in the next life can be acquired by adhering to the eight-fold path to life: the right understanding, right purpose, right speech, right conduct, right vocation, right effort, right thinking, and the right mediation, and through meritorious actions, such as becoming a monk or novice; observing religious holidays; participating in temple festivals; helping kinfolk; and contributing food, money, and labor to the temple (Brahm, 1980).

In pre-war Cambodia, the concepts of Buddhist religion were taught to the children by monks, teachers, parents, and elders. Children were guided to develop nonviolent, non-aggressive, cooperative, and tolerant habits through an emphasis on the avoidance of causing suffering, self-discipline and improvement, humility, temperance, non-accumulation of wealth, and harmonious relations with others. The moral teachings of Buddhism provided the children with an understanding of the world around them as well as the basic values and principles underlying their actions, and defined acceptable behavior (Brahm, 1980; Lester, 1973).

Apart from Buddhism, another important part of Khmer culture is spiritism (or animism), a belief in magical or supernatural spirits. The combination of animistic belief of the indigenous Mon-Khmer and Buddhism formed a unique folk religion. Ebihara (1968) summarizes this aspect of religion as follows:

Buddhism can explain the transcendental questions such as one's general existence in this life and the next. But the folk religion can give reasons for the means of fortunes of one's existence (p. 442).

Folk religious beliefs in spirit worship and the supernatural existed in Cambodia long before the Hindu influences. An array of guardian spirits (both benign and more malevolent) called "neak ta" inhabited the mountains, rice paddies, trees, etc. of the physical environment. Others were ancestral spirits, and still others are composites of mythological heroes from legends and Brahman or Buddhist gods. The cults combined astrology, magic, animism, sorcery, talismanism, etc. in attempts to tap the spirit world for its magical powers to provide protection urgently sought by believers to ward off evil. Spirit worship has centuries-old roots in Cambodia and today often exists side by side with Buddhist practices: magical tattoos on the body and carrying magical objects and potions conveyed invulnerability for soldiers in the battle fought to defend Buddhist interests of the Khmer Republic in the early 1970s, for example. (Bit, 1991, p.16)

Buddhism and animism, the belief in supernatural spirits, heavily influenced the Khmer's attitudes toward health and illness, especially among rural people.

Cambodians believe the main cause of illness is evil spirits. According to folk religion, different spirits cause different illnesses; i.e., unusual behaviors are caused by the spirit that lives in the forest; stomach pain, vomiting, high fever, constipation, and nightmares are caused by spirit of the old man who resides in the big tree in the forest; illness in children is caused by angry ancestral spirits who didn't like misbehaving children (Ong, 1985). In a traditional society, illnesses are treated by culturally sanctioned traditional healing practices, such as pinching, coining, and cupping. If self-treating does not yield good results, the family member will turn to the spirit doctor or "Kru Khmer" for help.

Mental illnesses are believed to be either hereditary or caused by evil spirit. Cambodians generally do not believe that stress brought by war or the problems of day-to-day living or war related stress can cause mental problems. Like a western doctor, "Kru Khmer" is a healer of mental and physical illness. He uses astrology to make a diagnosis and prescribes treatment in the form of appeasing the spirits by offering them food and asking for forgiveness (Ong, 1985). In the Thai refugee camps for Cambodian refugees, the International Committee of the Red Cross and Red Crescent applied this principle to establish treatment centers that combined the western and traditional methods of healing. The Sorcerers or Kru (meaning "he who knows") were consulted and worked side by side with the western doctors to provide the needed treatments to war traumatized refugees.

The People

Cambodia has always been agrarian nation. The majority of people lives in rural areas as peasant and cultivates rice, vegetables, and fruits; as artisans producing wares

such as pottery or cloth; and as fishermen. Most rural households before the war were self-sufficient. To earn additional income some households engaged in the market exchange of commodities. The cities and urban areas were predominantly occupied by the members of the royal family, the elite, the intellectuals who had studied abroad, government workers, military bureaucrats, religious personnel, Vietnamese, Chinese, and middle class professionals. When the Khmer Rouge took over the country in 1975, Cambodia's population was estimated to be 7.3 million. Of this, 90 per cent or more were ethnic Khmer who speak Khmer Language and practice Theravada Buddhism. The rest of the populations were made up of other ethnic groups, such as Vietnamese, Chinese, Cham-Malays (Muslim), Khmer Loeu or tribal peoples, Thai, and Indian (Brahm, 1980).

In the period prior to the 1970s, Cambodia was frequently referred to as the "Gentle Land of Smiling People." From an outsider's view, the people seemed to be happy, led simple but self-sufficient lives. In reality, the Cambodian people had to constantly struggle to adjust themselves to the country's turbulent history of decline, colonialism, and war. But despite those facts, the richness of Cambodian culture has persisted and survived. Its survival today attested the culture's high capacity to cope and adapt under adverse circumstances. Cambodians regard themselves as resilient people and take an immense pride in their cultural heritage (Bit, 1991)

To be Cambodian is be the warrior, the creator and the builder of Angkor Wat. More accurately, to be a Cambodian is to be a descendant of a people that produced architectural masterpieces of the Angkor era which rival the achievements of any of the ancient civilizations (p.3)

Khmer people are generally mild mannered, good-natured, and playful. Joking, humorous bantering, teasing, and witticisms, are very much a part of social

discourse. A sense of humor is appreciated, as is any opportunity to join together at parties, dancing, or informal celebrations with friends or families.

The Cambodian appreciation for a good sense of humor and the ability to make light of life's predicaments serve some well. Humor which deal with the pain in life by reducing it to the ridiculous and an object for laughter reinforces the resiliency of the Cambodian spirit. (Bit, 1991, p. 125)

Cambodian culture places high expectation on the behavior considered to be "proper" to one's status in life. People are expected to be calm in all matters, refrain from displays of excessive emotion, exhibit harmony in one's person and in one's relationships. Additionally, they are expected to be diligent and self-disciplined. Most people will go to a great extent to suppress their unpleasant feelings to protect harmony.

Apart from religion, family is extremely important to Cambodian people. Family is the strongest and the most important social unit in Cambodian society. Unlike the common American nuclear family, the Cambodian family is typically patriarchal and multigenerational, with several generations living under the same roof. Members of the family are close, resulting in a strong sense of family solidarity. The bonds are particularly strong between parents and children, and more particularly between mothers and children. The closeness of family relations usually includes extended family.

The nuclear family can be considered the most fundamental social group, bound together by a variety of affective economic moral and legal ties. The strongest and most enduring relationships in village life are found in bonds between husband and wife, sibling and sibling, and especially parent and child. Even after a family of orientation has split into various families of procreation of the different offspring, members of the former often retain deep affections for and frequent contact with one another. According to both legal and cultural norms, family members should offer one another daily support, loyalty, and consideration, as well as special assistance in time of trouble (Ebihara, 1964, pp. 110-11).

The hierarchy of authority within the families is determined by age and gender. Generally, the husband has control over decision making and assumes absolute power over his family's affairs. Females usually occupy lower status than males but they hold key positions that include taking care of the family's finances, maintaining harmony among both sides of family or Kin, and taking care of the family members' well being. These matriarchal duties are passed down from mother to daughter (Steinberg, 1959).

For the most part, Cambodian children are affectionately treated, well cared for, and receive a lot of attention when they are young, not only from the parents but also from other adults in the community. As they grow older, they are encouraged to take care of themselves, to develop a sense of duty and obligation. Respect for authority is a must. In principal, the authority of Cambodian parents is sacred and unqualified. Parents generally teach approved behavior by means of good examples set by adults and older children (Brahm, 1980). Children usually look up to their parents as role models and try not to disappoint them. Children who grow up in rural area commonly have to learn how to fend for themselves at an early age, and they are expected to help their parents out with chores as soon as they are able.

Cambodian children are taught to be soft-spoken, poised, well-behaved, obedient, humble, sensitive, and polite to reflect the family's good background and good upbringing. The observances of social rules are taught by the parents, elders, and school teachers. Khmer literature is full of stories and proverbs that illustrate and inspire desirable attitudes and conducts. Most Cambodian children grow up knowing some of the stories and proverbs that aim to teach humility, adaptability, and flexibility. For example, the proverb "Ngoey skat aon dak kroap" – The immature rice stalk stands

erect, while the mature stalk, heavy with grain, bends over, aims to teach children to humble themselves and show respect toward superiors and elders by stooping over when every they walk near them (Fisher-Nguyen, 1994, p. 93). At all time, children are expected to remain patient and considerate of others, and to be thoughtful of their feelings of their family and friends. They may sometimes hide their feelings to avoid conflicts for fear of offending others. It is quite common that Cambodians would try to avoid confrontation at any cost to maintain harmony within their living environments.

Cambodians place high value in education. Teachers are highly respected in Cambodian society. Students are expected to excel. Academic achievement and good behavior is supposed to bring honor to the family. Traditional learning was done by rote with emphasis on mathematics, Khmer history, language, and literature, as well as Buddhist doctrine. Cambodian villagers considered education as a means to become useful members of society, while urban Cambodians saw education as a power tool. The higher one's education, the more power one could acquire. For most Cambodian refugee children who resettled in the United States, the combination of good behavior and positive attitude toward school often worked to their advantage. Teachers appreciated their obedience and devotion to education, and friends found them easy to include in their activities both in and outside the schools.

Psychological Trauma

The word "trauma" has both medical and psychiatric definitions. Medically, "trauma" refers to a serious or critical bodily injury, wound, or shock. Psychiatrically, "trauma" refers to an experience that is extremely terrifying. This experience is

typically painful, distressful and often results in lasting mental and physical effects. Psychological trauma “occurs when an individual is exposed to an overwhelming event that renders him/her helpless in the face of intolerable danger, anxiety, and instinctual arousal” (Eth & Pynoos, 1985, p. 90).

Erikson (1976) distinguishes two types of trauma: individual and collective trauma. Individual trauma refers to “a blow to the psyche that breaks through one’s defense so suddenly and with such force that one can’t respond effectively.” Collective trauma is “a blow to the tissues of social life that damages the bonds linking people together and impairs the prevailing sense of community” (p.302). In most large-scale human disasters such as war, the two traumas occur jointly and are experienced as two halves of a continuous whole. Cambodian war child survivors suffered both types of traumas.

Unlike common stress and misfortunes, traumatic events are likely to overwhelm ordinary human adaptation to life because they involve threats to life and close personal encounters with violence and death. A trauma event not only shatters the victim’s psyche but also alters his/her brain chemical. Van de Kolk (1987) maintains that trauma creates speech problems. In PET scans of survivors’ brains, the left side of the brain, which is responsible for language, was revealed to be mainly inactive. Thus, it is not uncommon that some survivors become speechless in the aftermath and have difficulty telling their trauma stories, which is a crucial part of healing.

According to cognitive theorists, psychological trauma causes a shattering of fundamental assumptions on which most people’s lives are based. Generally, most people live their lives believing that nothing really bad is going to happen to them.

People are generally not constantly worried about potential dangers, even though they may be real. They live in a pleasant illusion of personal invulnerability, and as a result may fail to take adequate precautions: for example, they drive without a seat belt. In general, however, the illusion of invulnerability is the cornerstone of mental health: it protects people from much anxiety and stress. In those who become victims the illusion of safety disappears and is replaced by the fear that the disaster may recur at any moment and that they will be even less able to withstand it. (Janoff-Bulman, p.74)

According to Janoff-Bulman (1992), people who became victims have undergone an experience that they did not believe could happen to them.

They have experienced mortal danger and this alters their worldview. They experience the world as threatening, feel less safe than before and tend to interpret various natural phenomena as heralding danger. Their self-image also changes, to the extent that they feel powerless in the face of these perceived dangers (p.73)

Freud used the term “helplessness” to describe the concept of trauma. It is assumed that a traumatic event propels the individual into a state of helplessness. This state may last long after the trauma is over. In order to overcome the feeling of helplessness, the person has to take an active role in mastering the trauma as opposed to taking a “victim” position and feeling helpless. The feeling of helplessness/ powerlessness will prevent the trauma survivors from experiencing new stimuli and they get fixated with the old trauma (Van de Kolk, 1987). Freud stressed the importance of the creation and acceptance of new reality in the healing process.

Learned Helplessness Theory

The term “learned helplessness” has been used to describe the passivity, apathy and attitude of helplessness that the victims of traumatic experiences sometimes exhibit (Van de Veer, 1992). The origin of this term can be traced to Martin Seligman’s experiment conducted between 1965 and 1969 with approximately 150 dogs. These dogs were caged and tormented with electric shocks. Twenty-four hours after the dogs were given the electric shocks, they were returned to the cage. This time only one side of the cage was electrified. This means, the dogs could escape from being shocked by jumping over the barrier on the other side. Each dog was tested on ten separate occasions. Sixty-six percent of the dogs repeatedly endured the painful shocks and remained passive. Feeling utterly helpless they simply lay down and whimpered. Seligman named this behavior “learned helplessness.” Apparently, thirty-three percent of the dogs in the experiment learned how to escape and repeatedly did so. Only one percent of the dogs quickly learned about the threat. These dogs managed to escape immediately and never returned (Seligman, 1975).

Seligman’s study has been linked to abused women’s behavior. It is believed that the repeated experience of victimization with no escape teaches helplessness. When options are available, the victim fails to take advantage of them, and resigns to the “fate” as victim. According to Seligman et al. (1968), learned helplessness behavior can be unlearned if the victims are shown that they can avoid being tormented. In their experiment, the traumatized dogs were literally dragged to the other side of the cage. After several times, the dogs finally learned how to jump over the barrier and escape. For the human victims of traumatic experiences, the therapeutic equivalent of

“dragging them over the barrier,” as happened with dogs in Seligman’s study (Seligman, 1975; Seligman, 1990; Van der Kolk et al, 1985) could help eliminate the feeling of helplessness felt by the victims.

To protect themselves from feeling utterly helpless, victims will try to minimize their traumatic experiences in an attempt to avoid seeing themselves as victims. For example, some may interpret their trauma as a blessing in disguise. Some may think that much more serious things could have happened to them. Some may compare themselves with others who are less capable of coping with their traumatic experiences. This makes them feel privileged and strong. Minimizing traumatic experiences is not the same as denial in the psychoanalytic sense of defense mechanism.

Denial means that something which was conscious, or could have been conscious, becomes or remains unconscious. When experiences are minimized they remain together with the associated emotions, conscious. Then negative side of the emotional meaning of the experiences is revitalized rather than simply denied (Van der Veer, 1992, p. 75).

The abrupt changes administered by the Khmer Rouge regime in 1975 propelled the Cambodian people into the state of “helplessness.” Everyone obeyed and followed the orders like sheep and felt they had absolutely no control of their lives and situation. Fear, starvation, and illnesses led some people to give up fighting and become robot-like. However, amid bleakness and hopelessness, some people, the participants of this study included, decided live and fight. For those victims, survival meant to have a strong will to survive, and to be flexible and creative. Sometimes it was necessary to block out the whole brutality scene entirely and resort to the comfort of one own fantasy.

During the internment in Khmer Rouge slave labor camps, the only escape from the severity of daily life was a retreat into the sanctity and privacy of one's own mind. The break from everything familiar in one's past was so abrupt and so drastic that it had the effect of reinforcing the positive role of illusion to preserve a sense of sanity. Dreams and fantasy held out the images derived from past experiences were the true representation of the self in the face of political oriented propaganda, that they could still see themselves as triumphant over adversity (Bit, 1991, p.125).

So instead of succumbing to the mode of "learned helplessness" the victims adapted the attitude and behavior described by Rachman (1979) as "learned helpfulness." While they could not physically "jump over the barriers" and ran away from the labor camps the resilient survivors rejected feeling "victimized" and relied on their creative minds and inner strength to do what they could to create a kinder and gentler world to which they retreated after long hours of laborious work.

Children and War Trauma

War has devastating impacts on children, and the children's wartime experiences may require long-term physical and psychological recovery (Baker, 1990; Chimienti & Abu Nasr, 1992, Fraser, 1974; Garbarino et al, 1991; Macksoud, 1992; Mahjoub, Leyens, Yzerbyt, & Di Giacomo, 1989). While the impact of war on soldiers, such as shell shock, battle fatigue, and post-traumatic stress syndrome have been extensively documented, the effects of war on civilians, especially children, remained essentially unknown until mid-20th century. Studies of adults' responses to traumatic events, especially among war veterans led to the development of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-III) of the American Psychiatric Association in 1980. The various negative symptoms that emerge after being exposed to extremely stressful and frightening events are known as post-traumatic stress

disorders. The central features of the PTSD described in the DSM-III are alternating states of intrusive phenomenon related to the event (e.g. flashbacks, nightmares, hypervigilance, pangs of emotion, and recurrent recollections of the event and avoidance phenomenon to the event (e.g. emotional numbness, avoidance or reminders of the events, social or emotional withdrawal). Initially, the DSM-III was thought to be a suitable tool for assessing the PTSD in children, but several researchers later cautioned that PTSD as applied to adults may not be applicable to children (Pynoos & Nader, 1988; Terr, 1988). The arguments were based on the differences observed by the researchers in children's and adult's behaviors following trauma.

Early studies on the effect of war on children, such as the one conducted by Freud and Burlingham (1943), focused mainly on the relationship between the child and the parents who lived under stressful conditions during the aerial bombing in London during WWII rather than the subjective experience of the children's terror. In their study, Freud and Burlingham maintains that war experience has little or no negative impact on children as long as they are under competent care and guidance of at least one adult. According to this study, adults need to remain composed during crisis and try not to impose their fear and anxiety on the children. Apparently, the anxiety and stress expressed by the adults are believed to have more negative effects on the children than the events created by war itself. Similar statements were made in studies of Israeli and Palestinian children who were caught war zones (Punamaki, 1989; Punamaki & Suleiman, 1990; Rouhana, 1989; Ziv & Israeli, 1973). Later, as war spreads its wings to nearly every continent of the world, there have been studies of the affects of war and violence on children in the Middle East, Europe, Africa, Latin America, and Asia. With

severe enough exposure to traumatic events no child is immune (Pynoos et al, 1987; Rayhida & Armenian, 1986).

Terr (1990), in her study of the school bus kidnapping incident in Chowchilla, California, found that all of the children had post-traumatic symptoms, both in the immediate aftermath of the event and on follow up four years later. She maintained that child victims can be traumatized by small direct or indirect exposures to traumatic events as well as direct or indirect exposures to the post-traumatic symptoms of others. Psychological trauma can cause memory impairments and distortions of reality testing. The affective effects are characterized by social and emotional withdrawal, anxiety and hyperactivity, anger, rage, irritability, fear, and helplessness. As for the behavioral affects, aggression toward peers, inability to establish friendships, and poor social competence have been observed among children who were affected by severe trauma (Green, 1985; Milgram et al., 1988; Pynoos et al, 1987; Terr, 1984; Van de Kolk, 1987; Zimrin, 1986).

Children differ greatly in the nature of their war- related experiences. Variations in experience may range from mild to severe trauma. One important hypothesis that has emerged from the literature is that it's not the number of war events but the types of war experiences, i.e., loss and bereavement separation and displacement, witnessing violent acts, participation in violent acts, witnessing parental fear reactions, and physical injury and handicaps, that predicate different developmental outcomes (Kuterovac, Dyregrov, & Stuvland, 1994). The impacts of traumatic experience also vary depending on the child's emotional and developmental stage prior to being exposed to trauma. For example, if trauma is inflicted at the time when the child is

physically ill or preoccupied with certain anxieties to which the trauma has some degree of relatedness, its impact is intensified. In other words, a child may be vulnerable to a particular traumatic event at one stage of his/her development and invulnerable to the same event at another developmental stage (Anthony & Cohler, 1987; Rutter, 1979; Rutter, 2002).

There is discrepancy in the literature concerning how war events affect the children's psychological well-being. The differences in opinion that emerged among the investigators can broadly be divided into three groups. The first group maintains that war has no effect on the children (Milgram & Milgram, 1973; Ziv & Israeli, 1973) because repeated exposure to war trauma elevates the children's trauma thresholds and desensitizes them until they eventually accept war as a way of life (Garbarino et al, 1991; Ziv & Israeli, 1973). The supportive environment provided by a community and caring adults can also contribute to the child's ability to cope successfully with stress of war. I personally find this point of view difficult to accept this perspective. It maybe true that the children could "get used to" living in the war zone but to say they do not suffer is an understatement. Chronic exposure to violence will undoubtedly derail their physical, social, intellectual, and spiritual developments.

The second group believes certain mediating factors have a determining effect on the outcome regardless of the severity of the war events (Elbedour, 1992; Elbedour et al, 1993; Freud & Burlingham, 1946; Punamaki, 1989; Rayhida & Armenian, 1986). Some of the mediating factors are age, gender, cognitive competence, presence of the family members, reactions of adult caretakers, and the available of social and cultural support.

The third group suggests a causal relationship between war and a child's emotional state by assuming that the child's emotional state will deteriorate during war time no matter what (Rouhana, 1989; Sack, Angell, Kinzie, & Rath, 1985; Williams & Westermeyer, 1983). Children exposed to war trauma are expected to develop a number of psychiatric symptoms and post-traumatic stress disorder.

In sum, war is of the most extreme form of violence known to human. In earlier times, soldiers and the military personnel constituted most of the casualties but in recent times the situation has been reversed. The addendum to the 1949 Geneva Convention regarding the military protocol in war clearly stated that civilian population should not be the object of attack but the opposite has become reality in current conflicts. The nature of modern warfare has significantly changed and many current wars are waged between ethnic groups, often within one country, and there are no rules or code of conduct applied. As a result of this practice, civilians make up more than 80 per cent of the casualties. Many of these are children. In the last decade and estimated 2 million children died in wars. Another million have been orphan and 4 million were disabled. An estimated 250,000 children have been forced to participate in fighting as child soldiers (Ahearn et al, 1991; Ajukovic et al, 1993; Sutton-Redner, 2007). No one can escape from war unscratched and children, because of their age, are particularly at-risk for developing post-traumatic stress symptoms. Age at the time of the exposure to war, gender, cognitive competence, health condition, and the presence of the family members when the trauma occurred are likely to be factors influencing the severity of the symptoms. Repeated exposure to war and violence can elevate the children threshold and desensitize them to accept war as a way of life. It is believed that

as long as they have strong support from the families and community war will have little effect on their well being.

Trauma and Recovery

A trauma is an extraordinarily frightening event that overwhelms the victim with feeling of terror and helplessness (Wilson, 1989). Unable to cope with the force of terror, the psyche of the person affected will be shattered and he/she will experience emotional pain and confusion. Recovery from psychological trauma requires reestablishing cognitive stability and emotional, physical, and spiritual health by rebuilding assumptions which integrate the old world view (about the world being a safe place to live) with the new traumatic experiences. This integration involves a reflection of the lessons learned through the victimization process, about self-worth, courage, and reappraisal of life's meaning (Janoff-Bulman, 1992).

Healing psychological wounds requires time, understanding, support, and protection provided by significant others (Herman, 1992). Disasters and catastrophes such as war often hit entire families and large segments of the community. Recovery from these calamities may be fostered by the shared nature of the ordeal and positive effects of community involvement in reconstruction efforts. In other words, when the whole community is victimized by war, for example, there are opportunities for mutual support and coping. Whether the larger community responds with resilience or despair, the impact of the events will predictably have a wide range of results on the survivors (Herman, 1992; Janoff-Bulman, 1985; Kobasa, 1979; Lifton, 1988).

The literature on children and war trauma maintains that there are several factors that mediate the victim's response to and recovery from trauma. The importance of family cohesiveness during wartime is documented in many studies. Freud and Burlingham (1943) observed that:

War requires comparatively little significance for children so long it only threatens their food rations. It becomes enormously significant at the Moment it breaks up family life and uproots the first emotional attachments of the child within the child family group. (p. 37)

...so far we can notice there were no signs of traumatic shock to be observed in these children. If these bombing incidents occur when small children are in care of either their own mothers or a familiar mother substitute, they do not seem to be particularly affecting by them. Their experience remains an accident, in line with other accidents of childhood....It is widely different matter when children, during an experience of this kind, are separated from and even lose their parents. (p. 20-21)

Ressler, Boothby, and Steinbock's (1984) report on refugee children who fled their countries due to war and violence also indicates fewer disturbances among children who remain with their parents than in those who were separated from their families. Children who were able to handle the evacuation best were those who had a strong, healthy relationship with their parents. Although common reactions to stress, such as anxiety, nervousness, nightmares, or regressive behavior may exist during and after the events they will not last long if the children remain with their families.

Age and developmental level of the children at the time they were traumatized also influence their ability to cope with trauma. However, research findings on this topic have provided conflicting data. Glasser, Green, and Wright (1981) believe psychological damage increased with age. Eth and Pynoos (1985) say younger children, because of their inability to clearly understand the trauma, are more vulnerable to stress

and trauma. Rutter (1983) finds no drastic impacts of age on coping with stresses. Punamaki (1989) discovers no relation between age and psychological symptoms among the Palestinian children she studied.

As for gender, it is generally maintained that boys are more vulnerable to stress than girls (Milgram, 1976; Rutter, 1985), but there is no substantial evidence to support the claim that gender plays a significant role in the coping process. Rutter (1983) theorizes the lack of parental support for boys in their attempts to cope with the changing life circumstances or negative response to their distress reactions increases their chance for developing psychological or behavioral problems. Boys are supposed to be tough and are expected to deal with their own fear themselves while girls' expression of fear is seen as normal, and in some way it is encouraged.

Strong religious and political beliefs have been found to play an important role in bringing stability and meaning to children's lives in time of stress (Baker, 1990; Punamaki, 1988). For Palestinian children, a strong political belief is a sustaining factor that helps mediate the stressful conditions in which they live. Political ideology is also crucial in determining the individual's vulnerability to stress and trauma in Nazi concentration camps. Those who bore up best were the ones with intense ideological commitment (Frankl, 1984). Similarly, religious belief, such as the Buddhist belief in karmic law that stresses the inevitability of personal misfortune and the responsibility for current life circumstances contribute to the psychological acceptance of the suffering the Cambodians had to endure during and after the war (Kinzie, 1984). Religious parents might teach children to cope with emotional arousal by stoically accepting as it is or reaching out to other for help or through prayers. Strategies that

involve enduring suffering and delay of gratification might help prepare the children to competently cope with adversity.

In summary, trauma occurs when a sudden, extraordinary external event overwhelms an individual's capacity to cope and master the feeling aroused by the experience. The event or events may be of very brief duration or over a long period of time. No one escapes trauma unscratched. When we are confronted with severe stress some degree of breakdown (somatic or psychological) will occur. The severity of traumatic experiences varies depending on the degree of life threat, the degree of bereavement or loss of significant others, duration and severity of stressors, the level of displacement and dislodging of person from their community, the exposure to death, dying, injury, destruction, and social chaos, the location and role in trauma, the complexity of the trauma (single versus multiple), and the impact of the trauma in the community (Pynoos et al, 1987; Van de Kolk, 1987; Wilson, 1989).

Reactions to traumatic events vary greatly from person to person due to cultural, social, personality and developmental factors, as well as the nature of the stressors. Cultural factors play an important role in determining the individual's vulnerability, symptom expression, and response to treatment. For instance, differences in language and religious tradition have a significant influence on the characterization of events, subjective experience and psychological appraisal of the events (Mollica et al., 1990; Westermeyer, 1985). Environmental attributes, such as community's belief systems, understanding, and how its members are socialized, also have an influence on individual trauma responses (Wilson, 1989).

Recovery from trauma, in most instances, is not quick. The core experiences of psychological trauma are disempowerment and disconnection from others. Recovery, therefore, is based upon the empowerment of the survivor and within the context of relationships with others; it cannot happen in isolation (Herman, 1992). Child survivors of trauma look to their parents, surrogate parents, or other caring adults in their lives for love, reassurance, understanding, hope, and humor to help heal their wounds (Pynoos, 1985).

According to Herman (1992), trauma recovery comprises three stages: The first stage involves establishing a safe environment for the person affected so he/she can feel safe again. The second stage requires the person to remember the event/s, mourn, and try to make sense of it. In the last stage the person attempts to reconnect with the ordinary life. No single course of recovery follows these stages through a linear sequence but this basic concept has repeatedly emerged in trauma literature. The recovery process for the participants of this study appears to move along these three steps. The relocation to the United States, particularly, to the Pioneer Valley, offered a safe and secure place for them to heal, reflect and make sense of the senseless experiences.

Transcending Trauma

For some, physical survival was sometimes the luck of the draw or a matter of timing. Wandering about until happening upon a village where the local authority had a slightly more benign approach to forced labor, arriving at a checkpoint just minutes after the truck had left carrying fellow members to their deaths in the infamous “killing fields”- the circumstances for even a chance at survival seemed to a matter random happenstance. Survival of the psyche was not simply a matter of luck or good fortune, however. To move away from imminent death of the spirit

to embrace the possibilities of ascendancy was a journey to be traveled on what Cambodian wisdom calls “the curved path. To summon life’s most difficult challenges, a Cambodian proverb advises: “Do not abandon the curved path; don’t travel on the straight path” (Bit, 1991, pp, 123-124).

The Chinese character for crisis contains two symbols. One represents danger, and the other opportunity. Traumatic experience is undesirable but if it can be successfully dealt with, strength and opportunity can be gained from it. There are at least two ways that survivors deal with traumatic experience. One way is to numb their feelings, seal off the wound and let it stay inside without dealing with it emotionally. Another way is to transcend it, using the process of self-renewal (Jaffe, 1985) to generate different identity, and to emerge as a substantially different person. Both Herman (1992) and Janoff-Bulman (1992) stress the importance of creating a new frame (to replace the shattered assumptions about the world) by integrating the old (traumatic) experience into the new one. As the survivors assimilate the knowledge of the prior trauma, they need to maintain harmony with the elements of life over time and space. Lifton (1976) who studied survivors of Hiroshima and veterans of Vietnam War says it is necessary for the survivors who had struggled between life and death to assemble positive images and feelings that would propel them onward to the future. They have to try to accept the dark side of life without being defeated by it as negativity will dampen the creation of nurturing and productive future. Transcending trauma begins with accepting the past as something that can not be changed and using the lesson learned to chart the new life course.

The movement from extreme experience to renewal can be likened to a death and rebirth process (Lifton, 1988). Survivors frequently experience massive

disillusionment and profound change in ideology, beliefs, attitude, and values (Wilson, 1989).

Trauma produces a wake which extends its effects into the fabric of society, and the lives of ordinary people, and the generation of children that will follow along the common pathway of humanity. To study traumatic stress is to learn a great deal about the extremes of human nature in terms of life, death, and the transformation of the spirit. (Wilson, 1989, p. 263)

Survivors generally move through several stages in the process of coming to terms with their traumatic experiences. Commonly, the first stage is denial and numbing. In this stage, a person lives in an emotionally flattened world and there needs to be a breakthrough or special experience to move the person out of this stage. The second stage is anger and resentment. The person acts like victim and asks “Why me?” The third stage is bargaining. People make magical requests in hope that they can be spared and escaped. The fourth stage is depression, giving up, and feeling helpless. A lot of people get stuck at this point. People who get stuck in the grieving process are likely to succumb to post traumatic stress disorders. The final phase is acceptance. In this stage, people accept that they have had a terrible experience in their lives but they make a decision to move on. Often, self-renewal emerges at some point after this stage. This new phase is characterized by hope, commitment to the future, and sense of purpose and mission coming out of their experience of trauma (Jaffe, 1985).

Vulnerability and Resilience

As you encounter one stressful experience it strengthens you, like a vaccine, for a future crisis. One acquires callousness and builds up a sort of reserve. When you're young there is a natural ability to survive crisis, you aren't as deeply involved; even though a minor crisis may seem great or is exaggerated, it disappears quickly. As one grows older, the natural ability to live ahead and forget diminishes, but experience and living give you a maturity that takes the place of your natural ability to survive – in something like Topeka tornado, you have to bounce back or you couldn't go on. (Murphy & Moriarty, 1976, p. 263)

Resiliency has been defined in many different ways, but despite the differences, all definitions aim to explain three kinds of phenomena – positive developmental outcomes despite high risk or adversity, sustained competence under stress, and successful recovery from trauma, especially the horror of war and concentration camps (Garmezy, 1981; Rutter, 1979). Anthony (1974) first used the term “invulnerability” to describe the strength and seeming invincibility among high- risk children in his study. Garmezy (1981) prefers the term “stress-resistant” because the term invulnerability implies indestructibility which is an antithesis of human nature.

In current literature, the term “resilience” has been used to explain an ability to maintain competent functioning in the face of risk or adversity (Masten, 1994). Resilience, therefore, is evident when the individual experiences positive outcomes despite high risk status, shows sustained competence under threat, and/or recovers successfully from trauma or a major stressor (Masten et al., 1991; Werner & Smith, 1982). Sometimes resiliency is referred to as a protective mechanism that modifies one's reactions to stressful situation or chronic adversity as well as the ability to overcome adversity, to survive stress, and to rise above disadvantage.

The concept of resilience is usually discussed in relation to risk and vulnerability. Risk is a concept based on epidemiological studies (Garmezy, 1976). Any variable may be considered a risk factor if there is epidemiologic evidence of a relationship with pathological outcomes. The concept of vulnerability involves the assemblage of a variety of risk factors, which lead to increased likelihood of the development of maladaptation or a specific illness. Individuals are considered “at risk” if there is a presence of risk factors; i.e. extreme poverty, war, and abusive environment. In contrast to risk factors, “protective factors” increase the likelihood that individuals will adapt or cope effectively with stressors.

Resilience research has emerged out of two complementary lines of investigation – genetic risk studies, which focus on the effects of parental mental disorder on their biological offspring, and risk research that concentrates on the impact of life stressors such as chronic poverty, chronic illness, and poor home environment, sexual or physical abuse, on the well-being of the children. From these studies, the investigators have observed that, despite the difficulties of stress in their everyday lives, the majority of children and youth appeared to make successful adaptation. Instead of succumbing to illness and/or pathology, they were able to cope with the hardships and thrive in their environment (Anthony & Cohler, 1987; Bleuler, 1978; Chess & Thomas, 1984; Felsman, 1989; Garmezy, 1981; Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990; Murphy & Moriarty, 1976, Rutter, 1979; Werner & Smith, 1982; Wyman et al, 1993; Yates & Stouff, 2003). The positive findings that emerged from risk research have generated a new crop of researchers who are interested in looking for the source of competence rather than focusing on identifying the source for pathology among high risk

populations. On this issue, Rutter (1979), one of the leading authorities on resilience research, poignantly wrote:

There is a regrettable tendency to focus gloomily on the ills of mankind and on all that can be done wrong. It is equally unusual to consider the factors or circumstances that provide support, protection or amelioration for the children reared in deprivation....Would our results be better if we could identify the nature of protective influences? I do not know, but I think they would. The potential for prevention surely lies in increasing our knowledge and understanding of the reasons why some children are not damaged by deprivation. (p. 49)

The exploration of protective factors in children's responses to stress and disadvantage has only just begun. We are nowhere near the stage when any kind of overall conclusions can be drawn. What is clear, though, is that there is an important issue to investigate. Many children do not succumb to deprivation, and it is important that we determine why this is so and what it is that protects them from the hazards they face. The scanty evidence so far available suggests that when the findings are all in, the explanation will probably include the patterning of stresses, individual differences caused by both constitutional and environmental factors, compensating experiences outside the home, the development of self-esteem, the scope and range of available opportunities, an appropriate degree of environmental structure and control, the availability of personal bonds and intimate relationships, and the acquisition of coping skills. (p. 70).

Historically speaking, resilience research has occurred in three waves. The first wave of research focused on the "invulnerable" children who managed well against all odds (Anthony, 1974). Research conducted in this phase employed both person-focused and variable-focused approaches to research. The person-focused approach looked at resilient individuals and tried to understand how they differ from others who were in the same predicaments but did not fare as well as they did. Case studies and longitudinal studies exemplify this approach. Some of the most notable longitudinal studies are the Kauai Study, the Minnesota Parent-Child Study, Project Competence (Minnesota), The Virginia Longitudinal Study, and the Rochester Longitudinal Study.

In contrast to person-focused approach, the variable-focused approach examined the linkages among characteristics of the individuals and their environments that contributed to good outcomes where risk and adversity were high. This method focused on variables that cut across large, heterogeneous samples, and drew heavily on multivariate statistic. Findings from this first wave of research revealed remarkable consistency in findings, identifying a common set of broad correlates of better adaptation among children at risk for diverse reasons. These correlates were later called protective factors. The first wave of research provided a number of important factors associated with resilience, but did not provide enough understanding of the process leading to the development of resiliency.

The second wave of research moved beyond the developmental perspectives to include ecological perspectives as a framework to study the development of resilience. Studies conducted during this phase focused specifically on understanding the complex, systemic interactions that shape both pathological and positive outcomes, emphasizing resilience as a phenomenon arising from many processes (Masten, 1999). Resiliency was viewed as “a diverse set of processes that alter children’s transactions with adverse life conditions to reduce negative effects and promote mastery of normative developmental task. In the last ten years, resilience research has focused on contextual issues and emphasized the role of relationships and systems beyond the family and attempts to consider and integrate biological, social, and cultural processes into the models and studies of resilience (Luthar, 2003; Masten, 2002). The ecological, transactional systems approach to understanding resilience marks a dramatic shift from

the traditional focus on the individual to a broader focus that includes family and community networks (Walsh, 1998).

The third wave of research concerns program prevention and policy efforts directed toward creating resilience when it's not likely to naturally occur. This wave of research represents the coming together of goals, models, and methods from prevention science and previous studies of resilience (Cicchetti et al, 2000; Masten & Coatworth, 1998; Werner, 1990; Wolin & Wolin, 1995). Findings from previous studies were used to guide the development of the programs to help improve the odds of at-risk children as well as to help alleviate the pain and suffering of those who have been affected by misfortune. The Head Start Program is an example of a program that aims to promote resilience among children who are considered "at-risk." Intervening to alter the life course of the child at potential risk for psychopathology or other problems, whether by reducing risk or exposure to adversity, boosting resources, or mobilizing protective systems, is itself a protective process.

The evidence of resilience that consistently emerged among high-risk populations has left some researchers with the impression that "pain and suffering can have a steeling – a hardening – effect on some children, rendering them capable of mastering life with all its obstacles" (Bleuler, 1987, p 409). In the concluding paragraphs of his 20- year longitudinal study of children who grew up with schizophrenic parents, Bleuler wrote:

...it must be emphasized, that only a minority of the children of schizophrenics are in any way abnormal or socially incompetent. The majority of them are socially competent, even though many of them have lived through miserable childhood, and even though there are reasons to suspect adverse hereditary taints in many of them. Keeping an eye on the favorable development of the majority of these is just as important as

observing the sick minority. It is surprising to note that their spirit is not broken even of children who have suffered severe adversities for many years (p. 400).

Werner and Smith (1977) who conducted longitudinal studies of high risk children in Hawaiian island of Kauai took a similar position when they wrote:

We could not help being deeply impressed by the resiliency of the overwhelming majority of children and youth and by their potential for positive change and personal growth (p. 210)

Three types of research have been carried out to search for protective factors. The first are epidemiological studies, such as the Isle of Wight (Rutter, 1976) and the Kauai studies (Werner & Smith, 1982) that examined large, normative samples to identify the correlates of subsequent maladaptation and adaptation. The second type of investigation focused on the range of adaptive outcomes in larger, normative samples of individuals exposed to higher than usual stresses, such as studies of children exposed to bombing of London in World War II by Freud and Burlingham (1943) and studies of Israeli children by Milgram (1982). Variables associated with positive adaptation in this context constitute potential protective factors. The third type of studies examined smaller, high-risk samples of selected individuals within the general population who are presumed to have a heightened vulnerability to disorder; i.e., children of mentally ill parents, poor children, and children that were born with chronic diseases (Masten & Coatworth, 1998; Pellegrin, 1990; Rutter, 2002). From these studies, three clusters of protective factors were identified. The first protective factors rest within the individual. They include a positive temperament, motivation, positive self-concept, effective coping style, a sense of self-efficacy, and a sense of mastery. The second set of protective factors is within the family. They are characterized by family cohesion,

warmth and absence of discord, culture and ethnic identification. The third group of protective factors is within the community. Schools, churches, and neighborhood organizations have been found to be the important sources that effectively promote competence in social and cognitive domains.

Protective Factors Within the Individuals

Murphy and Moriarty (1976) believe disposition to resilience emerges early in life. For children who have been under severely stressful conditions, positive outcomes are thought to be related to qualities such as easy temperament, high self-esteem, self-efficacy, and a high level of cognitive skills (Chess & Thomas, 1984; Engleland & Stroufe, 1993; Garmezy, 1991; Murphy, 1976; Rutter, 1990; Werner & Smith, 1982). The well-adjusted children in the Kauai study were found to be gentler, more appreciative, sensitive, and more socially perceptive than those who had difficulties coping with the world around them (Werner & Smith, 1982). The resilient boys and girls in the Topeka study (Murphy & Moriarty, 1976) were active, perceptive, had a great deal of self-reliance and autonomy, high sensitivity, and a strong curiosity about people, things, and ideas. These qualities equip children to make adaptive, personal responses to challenges and to access environmental resources that facilitate healthy and normal development.

An easy, active temperament is a significant protective factor just as difficult temperament tends to place children at increased risk for adjustment problems (Chess & Thomas, 1984). According to Kagan (1971, 1979), about 10 percent of children are born with a sociable, effervescent, spontaneous temperament and are usually intrigued

by a change in routine. As they grow, these “easy children” continue to show less vulnerability to stress. At the end of the other spectrum, 10 percent are born with the tendency to be shy, vigilant, fearful, and easily upset by routine that is out of the ordinary. Those of the 80 percent who fall between the naturally anxious and naturally resilient can be nurtured and influenced by the environment to which they are exposed. It is possible that some of the participants fit into the “naturally resilient” category, and if they were not born hardy then the circumstances in which they lived during the war made them “tougher.” They do not condone war, but have no regrets about experiencing it. War has made them psychologically stronger, more mature and sensitive, and more capable of dealing with life in general.

A strong sense of mastery or competence is a prominent characteristic of individuals who do not succumb to adversity. Werner & Smith (1982) describe competence as the ability to love, work, and expect well (hopeful). Loving well refers to an ability to maintain good relationships with others and to be able to show empathy. Working well implies the fondness for and commitment to one’s work. Expecting well speaks to an optimistic outlook toward life in general. Garmezy et al. (1997) add a positive self-concept, autonomy, accurate perception of reality, and environmental mastery in their conceptualization of competence. Individuals with a high sense of mastery develop many self-help skills, demonstrate a strong sense of independence, and are able to create a sense of normalcy even in chaotic situations (Anthony, 1987; Block & Block, 1980; Felsman & Vaillant, 1987; Werner & Smith, 1982). As autonomous individuals, they have a positive identity, a sense of personal power, and a belief in their capacity to exercise a degree of control over their environment. In the Kauai

study, the overwhelming majority of resilient individuals considered competence and determination to prevail to be their most effective resource in coping with stressful events (Werner & Smith, 1982). In the longitudinal study of 456 inner city men whose families were predominantly of lower socioeconomic status, “boyhood competence” (Felsman & Vaillant, 1987) was also identified as the most significant discriminator of well adjusted or poorly coping men.

As for cognitive intelligence and/or scholastic competence, Garnezy (1983, 1987) maintains that they are positively related to the ability to overcome difficult circumstances. However, above- average intelligence was not considered a protective factor in Anthony’s (1987a) and Felsman & Vaillant’s (1987) longitudinal studies. Werner & Smith (1982) also did not find resilient children in the Kauai study especially gifted. They wrote:

The resilient adolescents in our study were not unusually gifted, nor did they possess outstanding scholastic aptitudes. What attributes they had, however, they put to good use. They were responsible, had internalized a set of values and made them useful in their lives, and had attained a greater degree of social maturity than many of their age mates who grew up under more favorable circumstances. They display a strong need for achievement as well, with an internalized appreciation for the need for some structure in their lives (p. 89).

However, in Block’s study (1971), below average levels of intelligence did show correlation with lower levels of adjustment, but above- average intelligence was not predictive. Perhaps it’s the adaptive use of intelligence, not intelligence per se, that serves as a protective factor. Cognitively skilled individuals may be able to cope more effectively with stresses because they can better appraise what is happening in their environment, and thus are better able to figure out strategies for coping with the adverse circumstances.

Physical robustness and vitality enable people to be more responsive to their environment and the challenges they encounter (Anthonovsky, 1979; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Resilient people tend to have fewer physical illnesses and recover more quickly than their more vulnerable counterparts (Murphy & Moriarty, 1976; Murphy, 1987; Werner & Smith, 1982). For the Columbian street children, physical strength, agility, coordination, endurance, resistance to exhaustion, and the quick recovery of physical equilibrium all contribute to their active mastery of the street environment (Felsman, 1989).

Given the harshness of their environment, much of the gamins' daily life is an irony. Most appear to be in better physical health than many same age peers in the squatter settlements. While they are not free of emotional problems, the lack of overt, severe psychopathology in the gamin population is striking. When viewed contextually, their daily survival strategies and the nature of their group life demonstrates a range of adaptive resilient behavior (p. 71).

Resilient individuals have a strong propensity for establishing positive relationships with others. They are friendly, easy to be and work with, well-liked by others, interpersonally sensitive, socially responsive, cooperative, and emotionally stable (Garmezy, 1981). Linked with these skills are adaptive copings that appeared to be used by those who made successful adaptations despite difficulties.

Protective Factors Within the Family.

Quality of relationships and bonds between parent/s and child has been found to have particular significance to the development of resiliency. Various studies suggest that a stable relationship with an adult, not necessarily a parent, is associated with better adjustment outcomes (Garmezy, 1981; Masten et al, 1990; Rutter, 1979). Werner

(1988) found resilient children in the Kauai study had “at least one person in their lives who accepted them unconditionally regardless of temperamental idiosyncrasies, physical attractiveness or intelligence” (p. 5). Findings from Rutter’s studies of children of mentally ill parents and children from severely discordant families (1979), Anthony’s study of children growing up with psychotic parents (1974), Egeland et al (1993)’s study of abused children (1988), and Garmezy’s study of competent black children (1983), also report resilient children to have received good enough nurturing to establish the basic sense of trust. Much of the nurturing came from the parents and substitute caregivers within the extended family, such as grandparents and older siblings. Positive attachment to the primary caretaker in the first two years of life is thought to be crucial for the child’s future development. This positive relationship will provide the child a foundation for trust and serve as protective mechanism for coping with later stress (Anthony, 1987; Bowlby, 1969; Egeland & Farber, 1987; Werner & Smith, 1982).

Parental attitudes and child-rearing orientations have been found to have a major influence on the psychological well-being of the child. Block and Block (1980) describe parents of resilient children as competent, loving, and having shared values. Anthony (1974) observes that parents of “invulnerable” children were less possessive and anxious and more likely to allow the child his/her own autonomy. Werner and Smith (1982) reported the resilient children and adolescents in their study often come from homes where there were loving parents and consistently enforced rules.

In summary, resilient children tend to come from relatively stable, consistent families with little discord (Block & Block, 1980; Garmezy, 1987; Murphy & Moriarty,

1987; Rutter, 1979; Werner & Smith, 1982). A good relationship with and between parents, who were described as more understanding and supportive of their offspring, set rules and regulations at home, and showed parental respect for their children's individuality while maintaining the stability and cohesion of the family, differentiated resilient from troubled children and adolescents in the Kauai study (Werner & Smith, 1982). Good family communication and parental perceptiveness also contribute to competence and more adaptive behavior under stress (Garmezy et al, 1984).

Social Support.

Social support generally refers to as an emotional, cognitive, and/or concrete action performed by those in an individual's family, group of friends, or community, which is perceived as being available, positive, and satisfactory." (p. 13). Sarason (1987) identifies three types of social supports. The first type is emotional and self-esteem support (e.g., emotional comforting during difficult times and assurance that things will be better). The second type is cognitive/information/appraisal support (e.g., the provision of information from which to act or to cope in more effective ways). The third type of support is concrete and tangible support such as money, food, clothing, and other needed materials.

Social support is crucial to fostering resiliency because it provides the individual with feedback, validation, and a sense that one can master one's environment, material resources that individuals are lacking, as well as information about being loved, esteemed, and valued members of a social network. The important role of social support systems in the community has been emphasized in several studies

(Cobb, 1976; Cohen & Wills, 1985; Flannery, 1990; Garmezy, 1983; Rutter, 1979; Werner & Smith, 1982). Seen as particularly significant are supports provided by the schools, church organizations, and other caring people in the community.

Support from an informal network of kin and neighbors and the advice of the ministers and teachers were more often sought and more highly valued than the services of mental health professionals among the people of Kauai. The families of these children preferred personal rather than impersonal, bureaucratic relationships in times of stress, as do other minority cultures in the U.S. and the majority of people in the non-Western world. (Werner & Smith, 1982, p. 162)

School environment is an important source of support for high-risk children and adolescents. Favorite teachers are often cited by resilient children as positive role models (Henderson & Milstein, 1996; Wang, 1994; Werner & Smith, 1982). Rutter (1979), Werner (1982, 1995), and Garmezy (1983) also note the protective factors brought about by the scope of opportunities, such as non-formal adult education programs and church activities. Werner (1995) finds “the opening of opportunities at major life transitions enabled the majority of the high-risk children who had a troubled adolescence to rebound in their 20s and 30s” (p. 83). Among the most important opportunities for the Kauai youths were adult education programs in the community colleges, active participation in a church community, and a supportive friend or marital partner. The participants in this study also identified such opportunities as stress buffers during their transitional and recovery periods in the United States.

Coping Styles

Coping is a purposeful effort by an individual to preserve or restore either the self or the quality of adaptation to the environment in the face of a significant challenge to survival (Lazarus & Launier, 1897). There are two basic functions of coping: dealing with the problem and regulating one's emotional response. Folkman & Lazarus (1980) termed these two functions problem-focused and emotional-focused coping. Problem-focused coping is an individual's attempts to alter the sources of distress, i.e., rational efforts to solve problems or aggressive interpersonal efforts to change the situation. In emotional-focused coping, an individual tries to regulate the emotional reaction to the threat by activities such as distraction or avoidance. The effectiveness of the two modes of coping is thought to depend on the situations. Emotional-focused coping may be useful in situations in which the source of threat can not be influenced, whereas problem-focused coping is effective in situations in which threat can be altered.

The individual's reaction to traumatic experiences depends a lot on the quality of his/her personality structure. One factor that is thought to be important is the quality of his/her coping repertoire which is developed prior to experiencing trauma. In a study of the coping behavior of victims of the Nazi concentration camps Schumacher (cited in Van der Veer, 1992) divided the victims into three groups based on the types of coping that they employed. The coping styles identified in this study are regression, adaptive defense, and progressive coping. The victims who survived by regression described their behavior in a concentration camp as passive and apathetic. They avoided perceiving what happened around them. The victims who survived by adaptive defense acknowledged the reality and tried to adapt to it by submissive behavior, keeping the

relationship with the guards as good as possible and considered themselves lucky to be alive. The ones who survived by progressive coping tried to analyze their situation, recognized possible danger before it became reality, took adequate action to protect themselves from it, and made use of every possibility to improve their situation. The participants of this study used the combination of all three styles but the adaptive defense was the one they cited most often during the interview sessions.

Relating these three coping styles to personality development theory, Schumacher concluded that the survivors who used regression were children of good strong and protective mothers. He hypothesized that the nurturing experiences that they had led them to develop the trust that eventually everything will turn out right for them. The victims who used adaptive defense had weak and helpless parents from whom they learned how to survive by submissive adaptation. The victims who used progressive coping had strong successful fathers who were supported by confident mothers. These victims' self-confidence was a result of their positive relationships with their parents. In Schumacher's study, the victims who used adaptive defense suffered from psychological damage the most. They suffered from fears, nightmares, and depressions and so on. Those who used progressive coping did not seem to be affected too much by the traumatic events. They seemed to also remember the events that happened in the camps very well (Van de Veer, 1992).

Taylor (1983), in her article on a theory of cognitive adjustment to threatening events, maintains that when an individual has experienced a personally threatening event, the readjustment process centers around three themes: a search for meaning in the experience, an attempt to regain mastery over the event and over one's life, and an

effort to enhance one's self esteem – "to feel good about oneself again despite the personal setback" (p. 1162). Searching for meaning is an effort to understand the event: why it happened and what impact it has had. Regaining mastery is an attempt to gain control over the event and one's life. What can I do to manage it now? Self-enhancement is an effort to find a way to feel good about oneself again as victimization often reduces the victim's self-esteem. The individual's efforts to successfully resolve the three themes, Taylor insists, rest mainly upon the ability "to form and maintain a set of illusions" (p.1161). Illusions, in this context, refer to positive thinking about the condition of the known fact. For example, a cancer patient thinks she can beat the disease despite the serious nature of it. She does not deny it, but acknowledges her condition and creates an illusion of the cancer being contained or even cured. Belief in control over one's illness despite little evidence that such faith is well placed can help relief stress and bring about psychosocial adaptation. Previously, this mode of coping was not thought of favorably since one of the goals in therapy has been to steer away from illusions and create a more accurate view of the world. Self-deception was seen as a "tantamount to mental disorder" (Lazarus, 1983, p. 1). However, the idea that normal functioning depends upon illusion is gaining increasing support.

Denial is no longer denounced as the primitive, ultimately unsuccessful defense it once was; rather, clinicians and health psychologists are now recognizing its value in protecting people against crises, both in the initial stage of threat and intermittently when people must come to terms with the information that is difficult to accept, such as the diagnosis of a terminal illness" (Taylor, 1983, p. 1168)

Resilient people generally have good coping skills. They are divergent thinkers who perceive alternatives to problems, make flexible use of their internal and external resources, and employ a wide range of strategies to manage the problems. Confident,

flexible, persistent, resourceful, and optimistic, they actively approach their environment, see difficulties as problems that can be worked on, overcome, changed, endured, or resolved in some way. Resilient people are persistent, yet know when to redirect their energies, and what skill to use in the particular situation and for a given problem. Antonovski (1979) maintains that effective coping consists of three components: rationality; flexibility; and farsightedness. Rationality is an accurate and objective assessment of the situations. Flexibility is the ability to generate alternative solutions and the ability to correctly appraise the consequences. Farsightedness is a planful behavior on a longer-term basis. The best copers make flexible use of defense mechanisms and employ a wide range of coping resources (Murphy & Moriarty, 1976). Salient characteristics of good copers include personal charisma, a healthy narcissism, and a large capacity for delayed gratification and tolerance for frustration.

In summary, the resiliency paradigm is a new perspective on how adults and children bounce back from stress, trauma, and risk in their lives that has emerged from the field of psychiatry, psychology, and sociology. A growing study in these fields challenges the notion that stress and risk inevitably doom people to develop psychopathologies. Numerous studies of risk factors have shown that even with the most severe traumatic experiences a substantial portion of individuals escaped pathology.

At first, the term “invulnerable” was used to describe the individuals who triumphed against the odds. But this term was later on considered unsuitable because it implies indestructibility which is an antithesis to human condition. The reality is, of course, that no one is invulnerable. All of us are susceptible to stress. Some are more

resistant than others, but everyone has their own limits. Recently the, more acceptable term “resilience” has been used to define positive adjustment to adversity.

In current studies, the term resilience refers to the ability to bounce back after experiencing serious setback. It is not a unitary trait but an ability to withstand stress and take hold of life. The core construct of this ability seems to reside within the individuals, their family, and the environment in which they live. Within the individuals, good physical health, quick physiological adjustment to stressors, and positive temperament has been posited as biological protective factors. Cognitive protective factors and personality traits include a sense of mastery, high self-esteem, good social skills, and an objective view of the environment. Environmental factors that have been found to have the protective effects for high-risk individuals include a close relationship with at least one adult who cares, family harmony (i.e., warmth and absence of discord), external support systems (i.e., school, church organization, neighborhood organization), and informal support from peers, teachers, marital partners, and other caring people.

Individuals who are considered resilient share many common characteristics. Personality characteristics associated with resiliency in adults include self-efficacy, resourcefulness, optimism, and constructive thinking (Lazarus, 1993). For adolescents, control, challenge, commitment to school, and commitment to self are the components of the “hardy” or “resilient” personality. Bernard (1991) characterizes resilient children as socially competent, with life skills such as problem solving, critical thinking, and the ability to take initiative. Additionally, resilient children have a sense of purpose and

foresee a positive future for themselves. They have special interests, goal directedness, and the motivation to achieve in school and in life.

Resilient people are oriented toward the future, are living ahead, with hope. They seem to possess an inner strength which may be endowed from birth or acquired through early experience that enables them to confront the unexpected changes in life with optimism and confidence. During stressful events, they are able to make use of any opportunity for purposeful action in concert with others, while ordinary people are more easily paralyzed or isolated by terror.

The evidence is sturdy that many children and adults do overcome life's difficulties. Everyone has a capacity for resiliency. In fact, the process of resiliency development is a process of life, given that all people must overcome stress and trauma in the process of living. Strengths may emerge during developmental transition throughout the life course as well as during periods of acute stress. Triumph over adversity is about facing your own pain rather than avoiding it, and soaring on your own strength. Residues of experiences after physical or emotional disturbance contribute to both a sense of "accomplishment" and also a consolidation of confidence, optimism, and ability to respond or to seek help when faced with threat in the future (Murphy, 1987; Rutter, 2000; Rutter 2002).

Conclusions

This chapter has reviews the history of Cambodia, literature on trauma and recovery, resilience theory, and coping theory that are relevant to the study of psychological resilience among war child survivors of the Pol Pot regime. The first part

of the review provides information on the rich history of Cambodia, the source of pride of Cambodian people, descriptions of the traditional family, an important source of the participants' strengths, descriptions of events that led to the take over of the murderous regime and conditions that people had to live under from 1975-1979, and information on Buddhism, the religion that has served as an anchor and a guiding light for the Cambodians in both good and tough times.

The second part of the review elaborates on the literature concerning war trauma. In this section, various viewpoints on trauma and recovery are presented. It is generally believed that no one is spared from being affected by trauma associated with war, but some are more affected by it than others depending on various factors such as the nature of the trauma and duration the persons were exposed to it. Age, gender, culture, and recovery environment have been identified as influencing factors in the recovery process. Various coping theories were also discussed in this section.

The third part of the review provides important conceptual and theoretical framework for this study. The seminal work of Garmezy (1980, 1987, 1993), Rutter (1985, 1987, 2000), Werner & Smith (1982, 1997), and others, who "discovered" a vast number of at-risk children show few or no signs of pathology and often exhibit high levels of competence, guided the design of this study. Instead of looking for the source of pathology this study focused on the source of wellness by trying to understand factors that may have prevented the participants from succumbing to pathology when exposed to war trauma during their childhood. Rooted in the fundamental belief that most people have the ability to "bounce back" from adversity, and are able to move on to live normal and healthy lives afterward, this study was carried out.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

This study analyzes the development of resiliency among Cambodian war child survivors twenty years after they were exposed to extreme trauma under the Pol Pot genocidal regime. A phenomenological approach which employs qualitative methods was used to conduct the study. The discussion begins with the pilot study conducted in 1995. Afterward, data collection methods, analysis, the presentation of the findings, and limitations related to the research methodology are discussed.

Pilot Study

In June of 1995, I conducted a pilot study focusing on how Cambodian war child survivors make sense of their survival in later years. The study involved face-to-face in-depth interviewing with three child survivors. An underlying assumption of the in-depth interviewing methods (Seidman, 1991) is the idea that we can best understand the participants' world by listening to their stories and the meaning they make of their experiences.

Each participant was interviewed three times on separate occasions. Each interview took at least 90 minutes. During the first interview I asked the participants to tell me as much as possible about themselves, beginning from the time they were young children living in Cambodia up to the time they were interviewed. The second interview focused on their war experiences. The participants were asked to describe their memories, thoughts, and reactions, how they coped with the situations, and how they reorganized their lives after the war. The third interview was about meaning

making. The participants purposefully reflected on their past and tried to make sense of it in relation to their current lives. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim. Each participant received a copy of the transcription.

While conducting the pilot study, I stumbled onto survival and resilience literature. I was fascinated by the repeated claims that most people can overcome the odds, with or without help. The three survivors whom I interviewed are “resilient” people who managed to overcome the incredible odds. Their stories provided fascinating information about the tragedies that they faced and what they had to do to overcome the obstacles. At the end of the interviews I developed a strong desire to interview more survivors like them to learn more about the sources that contribute to the success in the aftermath of war trauma.

The pilot study helped define the focus of this work and to fine tune the interview technique. The three profiles were not included in my dissertation research but I built on what I learned from them. Instead of using the three 90 minute open-ended interview format I decided to use the interview guide instead because I felt that I needed more structure to the interview process. The interview guide helped organize the narratives while giving me the necessary flexibility to build on the conversation of each participant. This format was also effective in collecting a vast amount of data in a short amount of time.

Research Framework

“Every man is, in certain respects, like all other men, like some other men, like no other men.” Kluckhohn & Murray (1964, p. 53).

The above words clearly point out the complexities inherent in achieving an understanding of human experiences. Since this study explores coping and adaptation processes as well as the survivors’ psychological characteristics and modes of thought, I did not believe that experimental research would yield the insights that I was seeking. The experience of the Cambodian child survivors is too complex to be put on a rating scale and presented by an array of scores.

The methodological framework of this study was based on a qualitative research paradigm. To capture the participants’ experiences and the meanings that they made of those experiences, a phenomenological approach was employed in collecting data. The in-depth interviewing method was the basis for learning about the survivors’ “lives, experiences, or situations as expressed in their own words” (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 77).

The traditional quantitative research paradigm stresses empiricism, scientific methodology, identification of the objective truth, and validity. It is assumed that there are fragments of reality “out there,” any of which can be studied independently of others (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A qualitative research paradigm emphasizes the creation, rather than discovery, of personal and social realities. This paradigm stresses the viability, as opposed to validity, of knowledge claims. The researchers focus on how people know what they know, as well as the meaning that they construct from their experiences. It is believed that this meaning can be understood only by taking into

account the context within which it is constructed (Agar, 1980; Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Merriam, 1988; Patton, 1980).

In qualitative research there is no manipulation of treatment of subjects. The researcher takes things as they are. Thus it is not possible to identify all the important variables ahead of time. Findings are presented qualitatively, using words rather than numbers. The purpose of qualitative research is to understand the meaning of an experience for the participants involved from the inside rather than the outside (Merriam, 1988)

Case Study/Life History Approach

Life histories are useful in understanding continuity and change within lives over time because they give personal backgrounds as well as historical context for understanding the extent of the change the individuals have endured. Through the details of their lives we can see the individuals in the context of historic events as well as images of role shifts, rapid changes in social identity, and losses and trauma the participants of this study had to face during the war and afterwards as refugees and citizens of a new country.

Another useful tool for studying a life course is the case study. Merriam (1998) referred to the case study approach as a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding the phenomenon.

Anchored in real-life situations, the case study results in a rich and holistic account of phenomenon. It offers insights and illuminates meanings those expand its readers' experiences. These insights can be constructed as tentative hypotheses that help structure future research (p. 32)

This study employed multiple-case sampling (Miles & Huberman, 1984) to ensure that similar and contrasting cases could be examined. Multiple cases sampling provides not only a broader understanding of the phenomena under study but also helps strengthen the precision and validity of the findings as well.

Identification and Selection of Participants

Over the years, through professional work and personal contact, I got to know many of the Cambodians who live in the Amherst and Northampton areas. At the time when the idea for this study was conceived, I was working closely with staff of the Cambodian American Association in Amherst as an Outreach Counselor for at-risk Cambodian youth. Many of my Cambodian colleagues here played an important role in helping me locate the participants.

At the beginning of March 1996 I started to recruit volunteers for this study. Letters outlining my objectives and plans for this research were sent to key members of the Cambodian community, teachers/professors, and social workers/therapists who know or used to work with the child survivors when they first arrived in Massachusetts, specifically stating that I would like to interview the child survivors who were between 6-12 years old in 1975. I specified this age group because I wanted to find out how the child survivors transformed traumatic childhood into healthy adulthood. They had gone through so much in life, and they have a lot to contribute to our understanding of resilience.

A few days after the letters were sent out, I was contacted by several potential participants and people who wanted to refer someone whom they thought fit the

descriptions to me. The responses were encouraging. At the end of the second week, I had accumulated twenty names. I contacted all of the twenty people by phone. All expressed their willingness to participate in the study. At the time, I was not sure how many people I needed to interview. I knew I wanted good, solid data but did not want to overwhelm myself with too much data that I could not properly manage. I was told that I could interview as few as one or two or as many as sixty people. On this issue Miles and Huberman (1984) wrote:

We have to deal with the issue conceptually: how many cases, in what kind of sampling frame, would give us confidence in our analytic generalization? It also depends on how rich and complex the within – case sampling is. With high complexity, a study with more than fifteen cases or so can become unwieldy. There are too many data to scan visually and too many permutations to account for (Miles & Huberman, 1984. p.30).

Taking into consideration my own resources (skills, time, and finances) I decided that I would begin with ten participants. My sense was that I would know if I had enough or needed more data at the end of the ten interviews. If I finished the interviews without having all of the questions answered, then I would know that I need to interview more people. I was prepared to interview as many people as needed to get the necessary data that would help me to understand the phenomenon being studied.

Using a purposeful sampling technique (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992), combined with consultation with my Cambodian friends and colleagues in Amherst, the list was narrowed down to thirteen people. We ran into a bit of a problem at the beginning with trying to define criteria for the term “doing well.” I made it clear to the colleagues (as well as the potential participants) that “doing well” in this study had little to do with financial or academic success. In my opinion, people who “do well” are able to function effectively in major areas of life. High functioning people generally have good

self-esteem, communicate and work well with others, like their work, are not self-centered, and have great empathy.

Based on the above criteria the names were prioritized. I chose a sample that included both male and female survivors who grew up in rural areas as well as in the city; unaccompanied survivors as well as survivors who were separated from their families but reunited after the war. I also wanted diversity in their socio-economic and educational backgrounds prior to war. All ten people chosen were children between 5 and 15 years old when Pol Pot took over the country on April 17, 1975. To protect their identity and ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms are used instead of their real names in all written and oral reports.

After the list was finalized, I phoned each individual. At this point, I discussed with them the details of the research process, explaining the extent of their participation in terms of time and activities as well as ways in which the data gathered would be used. This process resulted in the identification of ten participants. Afterward, I sent to each participant a written description of the study, consent form for voluntary participation, and the interview guide (See Appendix A). Two weeks later, I called them back to check if they still wanted to participate in the project. Upon receiving their commitments I scheduled a date, time, and venue for the interviews.

Table 1. The Participants

| Age/Pol Pot Takeover | Age at Interview | Sex | Status | Losses in War | Educational Level | Work |
|----------------------|------------------|-----|--------|----------------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| 11 | 31 | M | S | Dad, bros, relatives | M.Ed. | Teacher |
| 6 | 27 | M | S | Siblings, relatives | B.Ed. | Comm. Dev. |
| 8 | 29 | F | M | Sisters, relatives | B.A. | Retail Business |
| 12 | 33 | F | M | Parents, bros | Jr. College | Teacher aide |
| 9 | 30 | F | M | Dad, bros, sisters | M.Ed. | Teacher |
| 7 | 28 | M | M | Whole family | M.Ed. | Teacher |
| 10 | 31 | M | M | Whole family | MSW | Social Worker |
| 7 | 28 | M | S | Parent,s siblings | M.Ed. | Counselor |
| 11 | 32 | M | M | Sibings, relatives | B.S. | Teacher |
| 7 | 28 | F | M | Dad, siblings | B.Ed. | Counselor |

Data Gathering

The main source of data for this study came from the in-depth interviews with ten participants. Additional data came from the literature review, interviews with service providers and teachers who worked with Cambodians in the area (including some of the participants in this study), field note entries that I kept throughout the research process and personal communications with various people who are knowledgeable about the research topic and refugee related issues.

The interviews were conducted over a period of three months. Each interview took a minimum of 3 hours. Some interviews were done in one session due to travel distance and time constraints. Some took several meetings to complete. The interviews were held at various time and places, all chosen by the participants.

The questions used during the interview centered on five major areas: personal history, the role of faith/belief/tradition, responses to war traumas, support networks, and strategies for coping and adapting to adversity (See Interview Guide, Appendix B). The interviews were divided into two parts. In the first part I asked the participants for a description of their life before the war, of traumatic events during the war, and of the supporting networks at that time. The second part of the interview focused on their adult adaptation strategies, work, social relationship, and family lives. Some of the core questions used during the interview were: How have you been able to cope so well? What are the sources of your strength? What kept you going when things got tough? What kinds of advice do you have for others who are caught in a similar situation?

During the interview, the participants narrated their story at their own pace. I listened as they relived and told their stories, asking additional questions only when I needed to clarify a statement they had already made. At times, I redirected the conversation in order to bring it back to focus. All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim by me. Copies of the interview transcriptions were given to each participant. I asked the participants to review the information in the transcripts and let me know if there were corrections that needed to be made or some information in the interviews they did not want me to use. Only one participant asked me to remove certain quotes in her interview. All of the ten interview transcriptions served as the primary source of data for this study.

Data Management

Qualitative research methods usually generate a significant amount of data so it is important that the researcher is constantly organizing, selecting, and simplifying the raw data collected from the interviews (Miles & Huberman, 1984). To manage my data, I developed a separate file for each participant and analytic files. Additionally, I kept a reflective journal which I regularly recorded my thoughts, insights, impressions, ideas, and how I perceived the data throughout the research process. In each participant's file I kept a copy of the audiotape from the interview, a copy of the original interview transcript, a copy of interpreted transcript with underlines and color cods, and all other information I accumulated.

The analytic files (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992) were organized at first by generic categories; i.e., interview questions, correspondence. As the data grew I gave the file more specific code names; i.e., thoughts for introduction, themes, thoughts for conclusions, quotes, suggestion for future research. These files helped me to organize the data.

Data Analysis

Using the grounded theory approach, a method using analytical induction to develop concepts and propositions (Glaser & Struss, 1967) as a framework, my approach to data analysis followed that suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (1992), Marshall and Rossman (1989), and Patton (1980), in its emphasis on generating categories, themes and patterns, testing emerging hypotheses against the data, and searching for alternative explanations of the data.

The initial data analysis began as soon as the data were collected. This was done rather casually. I kept notes on issues and ideas about possible themes, patterns and interpretations as they occurred to me. By constantly reflecting on the data, I was able to focus and shape the interview as they proceeded. During this time, I was also conducting the literature review. Issues and themes that emerged from the reading also became a part of the data that influenced the interview process. The later stage of analysis was done by repeated reading of the interview transcripts to search for specific ideas, themes and patterns. I marked passages that stood out for me as I was reading, took notes on the margins of the pages, and grouped the similar pieces together into the “data clumps” (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Afterward, I assigned each data clump a code name and put them in separate files.

It took numerous readings to finally see some patterns emerge from the data. During the first few readings I came across some repetitions in the narratives but I was not sure if they could be considered themes. Later, I was told by my peers whose studies employed similar methodology that a theme can be considered “theme” only if five or more common occurrences appeared in the ten narratives. To induct the themes, I used research questions and information found in the literature reviews to guide the search. Resilient people in the literature have positive characteristics, good relationships with at least one adult either within or outside their families, and good support networks. I began my search by looking broadly at their family backgrounds, coping mechanisms, support networks, and recovery environment. When the information began to cohere and form into a “clump” I established a more specific file for each category; i.e., values and beliefs, coping techniques, parenting/child rearing,

lessons learnt, outlook towards life. After each file was established I reread the transcriptions, cut out the passages and placed them in the appropriate files.

In the final stage of the analysis I checked to see if the themes identified appeared in at least five histories. In Chapter 4, direct quotes from the interviews with the participants were used to present the generative themes. Qualitative methodology produces descriptive data that includes people's own written or spoken words and observable behavior. Their words can "speak for themselves" regarding how they feel, think, and see (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 2).

Trustworthiness

Initially, I was hoping to make this project a collaborative work between the participants and me. Unfortunately, for various reasons, it did not turn out that way. I had willing participants who are interested in the research topic and willing to be interviewed but they did not have much time to engage in the process of analyzing and interpreting the data. Like most young professionals in America, they have busy lives, a demanding schedule to meet, and family to care for. But as much as possible, I engaged in the collective interpretation with them. Each participant was given a copy of the transcript so they could review what they said and make changes or clarifications as needed. Sometimes I called them up to discuss the information in the interviews. Involving the participant's view through member checking helps add the validity to the research result (Reason & Rowan, 1981).

To strengthen the credibility of this study I used multiple sources of data to conjoin the emerging findings and to determine how they related to each other. Sources

of the data that I used include library documents, books and journals on refugees, trauma, children and war, resilience, and Cambodian history and culture. Also, I relied heavily on a process of self-referencing. Having come from the same region as the participants, had the same religion, and left my own country to resettle in a foreign land I can relate quite well my own life experience to theirs. Additionally, I was fortunate to have a large group of professionals who are familiar with refugee issues and war trauma to discuss my findings with. Their insightful feedbacks and comments kept me focused.

As a means of addressing my own subjectivity, I kept field note entries throughout the research process. I also kept records of how the data were collected, how categories derived, and how decision were made and interpreted. And, as much as possible, I shared my thoughts on the findings with friends and experts in the fields of education and mental health. Their comments and suggestions proved to be invaluable in keeping me grounded.

Limitations of the Methodology

The method of in-depth interviewing can gather, in a short amount of time, a wealth of information concerning the individuals' experiences and worldviews, but the depth of the information collected will vary depending upon the interviewer's skills and the interviewee's ability to narrate his or her story. For this study, all interviews were conducted in English. All of the participants were, at the time, more or less fluent in English but there were instances when they had to struggle to find the right words to explain their thoughts and experiences. It would have been far easier for them to

express their feelings on difficult and painful topics in their own language, so my lack of Khmer language competence can be considered one of the methodological limitations.

It is important to point out that there is a strong element of judgment inherent in this study, both in the way I elicited the information and in the cognition and identification of common themes. My background as a Southeast Asian Buddhist and my familiarity with Cambodian people and culture definitely contribute to a subjective element in the design of this study as well as in the findings.

Another limitation rests in the sample size and the participant selection process. While the ten life histories reveal important information on how the war survivors managed to successfully cope with the adversity in their lives, the result can not be generalized. A more in-depth look at resilience among this population would have to involve study of individuals from various locations as opposed to from just one region. The ranges of the traumatic experiences have to be taken into consideration during the participant selection process. In other words, if the main aim is to find out how people who were tested again and again managed to overcome trauma, then it is important to look critically at what they had been through and how they managed to rise above their experiences. Most of the participants in this study resided in college towns where services were good and the college atmosphere definitely influenced their motivation to go to college. It would be interesting to include resilient people from the areas where services are limited to find out how they managed to recreate their lives after war.

CHAPTER 4

INTERPRETATIONS AND FINDINGS

The following analysis draws heavily on the responses of the 10 child survivors whom I interviewed. Additionally, as a Thai who grew up near the Thai-Cambodian border, raised as a Buddhist, and had the opportunity to work with Cambodian refugees both at the Thai refugee camps and in the United States, I have a pretty sound understanding of the participants' cultural and religious background as well as the nature of their plights. These factors significantly influenced my interpretation of the data.

The main goal of this study is to find out how the Cambodian war child survivors managed to do well despite the adversities that they had faced. Since resilience literature consistently identifies family cohesion, positive assets within the individual such as self confidence, good coping and networking skills, and availability of supports when the trauma is over to be the three main factors that help buffer stressor and promote resiliency, I decided to structure my search for the common themes within these three areas.

Within the family realm I looked specifically at what the participants said about their growing up, their relationship with their parents and other family members, how they were raised, problem-solving methods and other life skills that they learned when they were growing up, and the values/beliefs that were instilled in them by their families.

With regards to their personal characteristics, I paid special attention to the descriptions of the coping methods that they successfully used in tough times to deal

with the hardships, how they recruited help from others when needed, and how they made sense of their experiences, and what impact those experiences have on their current lives. As for their recovery environment, I looked for the common occurrence in their narratives about the nature of the resources that were available to them during the readjustment period, which of the resources were the most helpful and why, how did they managed when the resources were not available, and how they maintained the balance between seeking help and doing it themselves.

From looking through these lenses, a few common themes surfaced. Positive childhood memory was one of the themes. All of the participants remembered their childhood experiences before the war positively. They were raised by empathic parents who taught them a good work ethic and Buddhist values. The family members were close, loyal, and cared a great deal about one another. The affection and warmth which marked those early years were most important in sustaining them during and after the war. The Buddhist values that they learned from their parents also helped them to accept suffering as their fate and develop an attitude that allowed them greater tolerance of the hardships. These attitudes shielded their feelings of unhappiness and despair and enable them to face adversity with optimism and confidence.

As individuals, the participants have many things in common. All of them, I observed, appeared to be content about their lives. They are generally attractive people, charismatic and self-assured. I could see why they are well thought of by others who know them. Throughout the interview process they showed enthusiasm, and were thoughtful and insightful when they narrated their stories. Their dispositions and personality seem to fit in what Bit (1991) called “ascendant personality” (p.133).

Similarly, Sheehy (1986) used the term “victorious personality” to describe individuals who are resourceful, industrious, optimistic, and possess “stubborn” determination to overcome obstacles and tend to function well in the major areas of life in the aftermath of war trauma. These resilient individuals do not get affected by adversity easily, and do not feel helpless when challenged. They have a strong sense of mastery and believe in their ability to handle adversity. Despite their young age they were able to retain a sense of self and constructively mobilize the available resources to help alleviate the hardships that they experienced while living in the Khmer Rouge camps. Certainly, it was not easy to maintain energy and hope in such harsh conditions but throughout the ordeals they never gave up hope. Their defiance was expressed through a determination to remain alive – not to be helpless.

Defiance, optimism, and strong faith in life were uniformly expressed as the core of their survival. As Buddhists, they have learned and accepted the importance of forgiving and letting go. Despite the obvious hurt, they were able to maintain a positive outlook toward life and move forward. The determination to do well in life was often expressed through the metaphor of rebirth. They believe that they were spared and given a “second chance” to live because they have good “Veasna” and “Barami.” In Cambodian Buddhism the term “Veasna” is used to describe the sense of vitality, endurance, and commitment to call on superior energy (Bit, 1991, p. 126). Barami is the role of destiny and the consequence of having performed good work in past lives. By taking this position, they feel proud instead of guilt to have survived while others did not. The feelings of “specialness” served as a beacon of hope and strengthened their will to do well in their new lives.

Recovering from trauma depends a great deal on having the right environment and understanding people to help. All of the participants credited supportive and safe environment as the most crucial factor that helped them to heal the wound and bounce back quickly from early trauma. Schools were instrumental in helping them assimilate quickly into the new culture. Teachers were kind and sympathetic to their learning and emotional problems. The generosity of the host community and its people was also a key factor that helped them to put their lives shattered lives back together quickly.

In sum, the main themes that emerged from the interviews can be placed in three groups. Within the family, the common themes consist of family harmony, practical child rearing practices that promote independence and self-reliance, and Buddhist values that emphasize accepting, letting go of something that one does not have control of, and delayed gratification. Within the individual, the themes include “victorious” personality, stubborn determination to survive and to do well in life, ability to forgive and forget (let bygones be bygones), seeing crisis as opportunity (glass is half full as opposed to half empty), ability to delay gratification, and strong commitment to help others who have suffered similar fate. Within the recovery environment, good teachers, understanding surrogate parents (for those who came as unaccompanied minors), good schools, helpful sponsors, and educational opportunities are the common themes found in the narratives. In the following discussion, these themes will be elaborated. Case vignettes of the participants whom I interviewed are included here to provide the reader the insight into who they are. Some interview excerpts are included in the discussions. The ones that I selected are the ones that I feel make good representation of the context discussed.

Kane

Kane, a happy and humorous person, was born in 1964 in Kampong Chhnang, a province in the central part of Cambodia. He grew up in a large extended family where “love is enormous.” There were eleven children in the family but only three survived after the war. His father died during the war, and his mother remarried while living in a refugee camp in Thailand. Kane has a good relationship with his stepfather. There is always harmony in his family, Kane explained. “Life is too short to live an unhappy life,” he cheerfully added.

As a child, Kane grew up in the countryside but the family moved a few times due to the father’s job as an army soldier. Kane was aware of the instability in the country before the Khmer Rouge took over because his father often talked about politics at home. His father was aware of the upcoming bloodshed and the family had the opportunity to leave Cambodia for France in 1974, but declined to do. “My father was a patriot. He loved his country and wanted to stay,” Kane explained.

Kane described himself as a happy person. As a child, he was easy to care for and got along well with everyone. As young as five years old, he took on many responsibilities that included taking care of the family farm and animals in addition to doing regular household chores. His mother also owned a general store where he had to help when he was available. He loved to help his parents out and enjoyed school. His family put a lot of emphasis on education. His older brother was an accomplished student who worked in the Foreign Service department.

Kane adores his family. The parents and older siblings are his role models. During the interview Kane talked about how surprised he was and still is at how many

young American children identify sport stars as their role models. In Kane's opinion, role models are those who set good standard which one can follow and live a disciplined and admirable life. In his case, his parents have always shown him good paths to follow.

Prior to the Khmer Rouge taking over the country in 1975, Kane's parents spent quite a lot of time preparing their children for the worst. They were told that in tough situations they need to stay positive and do whatever they can to survive. There should be no resistance and always try to be polite to everyone so not to get punished unnecessarily. They were also told to believe in the spirits of their ancestors who will always look after them and protect them. This was important to Kane because throughout the ordeal this was something that he remembered and it helped sustain him. It gave him hope.

In the initial stages of the war the family stayed together. After about four months Kane and his siblings were assigned to different work groups. Kane, being large for his age, was assigned to work with older children where work loads were much larger and more difficult. For Kane, physical work was not a problem since he was strong and did not mind working hard. When asked how he coped with the separation from his parents Kane said it was rather surprising that he did not feel too miserable about it. He loved them very much but he understood that the longing for them would only weaken him and he needed to remain strong. He took comfort in the knowledge that the situation was temporary, and that good people would eventually prevail and the war would eventually end.

To cope with the harsh reality, Kane relied on his optimism and humor a lot. His easy disposition and respectful manner drew affection to him from adults in the camp which helped make his life easier. Sometimes he was even granted special permission to visit his parents at another camp site and sometimes he got something special to eat as a reward for his good work. His positive personality served Kane well beyond the Khmer Rouge and Thai refugee camps.

When Kane arrived in Massachusetts in 1982 he was enrolled in 8th grade with no English. Kane said this experience was harder than living in the Khmer Rouge camps. In Cambodia he knew how to take care of himself but, here in America he had to rely on so many people. "It was like being a baby and learning how to walk all over again," said Kane. At school he was "tortured" by some children. They laughed at his poor English and made fun of his accent. One day, in a cafeteria, he asked for a cup of soup but the children thought they heard him say "soap" and began to taunt him. He got so fed up that he stopped eating lunch in the cafeteria and stayed hungry until he got home. This went on for some time, but before Kane let himself slip into depression and despair he decided to do something to change the situation. He thought if he had survived the Khmer Rouge, the minefields, and the Vietnamese bullets while trying to escape from Cambodia to Thailand then he was not going to let some "stupid kids who knew nothing about Cambodia and Cambodian people" push him around and demoralize him. His defense was his humor. When they laughed at him he started to laugh with them. Laughing with them, said Kane, made him feel less vulnerable. Cambodian people, Kane explained, laugh at their own mistakes and silliness a lot. It is, in his opinion, a good way to minimize the distress. It did not take long for Kane to be

known as a “funny” and fun guy. When he became less guarded about himself the students began to approach him and ask questions about his homeland. Kane told them funny stories that he made up like his kung-fu ability. He dealt with the bullies by telling them that he had seen the “killing field” and he certainly knew how to do it. This remark did not sit well with the guidance counselor and the teachers. Kane was summoned to the office of the counselor who gave him a few sessions of therapy. Looking back, Kane thought it was funny. He does not believe in therapy because in Cambodia, he said, everyone dealt with their own problems in private. Parents and trusted family members are the ones who normally help solve the problems. But in America Kane said he was going with the flow. He did not mind talking to the counselors because most of them were very kind and had good intentions to help the Cambodian children to overcome their difficulties.

School was difficult for Kane at first because of the language barrier but he worked hard to master the subjects he had to study and successfully graduated and went on to study at the School of Education, University of Massachusetts. At the time of this interview, Kane had received a bachelor degree in education and worked as a Chapter 1 teacher at a public elementary school in Amherst. At the same time, Kane remains involved in serving the Cambodian Community. He enjoyed working with young Cambodians teaching them the Khmer language and culture. Kane is much loved by the elder Cambodians and much appreciated as a resource person by the service providers who work with the Cambodian community.

Despite his achievements Kane does not believe he is successful by American’s standards. In Kane, opinion, success in an American’s sense means achieving material

and economic wealth. But In the eyes of his parents he is successful because he has finished school and college. Kane desires to further his education and to have a nice family of his own some day. For the time being, Kane can say for sure is that he is happy, happy to be alive and to be free in a country where he can control his own destiny. He is also grateful that his family is with him.

Somalee

Somalee is attractive and extroverted. She was born in Battambang province in 1967. She had four siblings but only two survived after the war. Her parents were rice farmers and the family lived comfortably in a very large extended family. Somalee talked fondly and at times emotionally, about her childhood in the rice bowl of Cambodia where everyone knew each other in her village. Being the youngest child in the family, she was doted on and did not have to do as much work on the farm as other siblings, but her parents instilled in her the importance of a good work ethic. Tears welled up in her eyes when she talked about the morning ritual when her father poured water on her hands to wash her face in the morning while singing songs about the hard work of the rice farmers. She was particularly close to her father. She described him as an intelligent, kind, honest, hardworking, adventurous, and extremely funny man. Neither of her parents had much schooling but her father did attend, for a short period of time, a temple school and learned how to read and write in Khmer.

Somalee was eight years old in 1975 when the year known as year zero took place but prior to this, the province where she lived was already rocked by the fighting between the Khmer Rouge soldiers, who used the province as their stronghold, and the

government troops. She remembers hearing gunshots and seeing the markets being burned down, but the family was not directly affected by the violence. Life went on as normal and no one expected the situation to turn out as badly as it did so when the forced evacuation occurred there was a great sense of fear. The parents gathered what they could to take with them and tried to stay together as a family as long as they could. Her mother put some valuables in tin pots and buried them in the ground in the garden. The immediate family members managed to stay together when they arrived at the first base camp, but it was not long before they were sent to work in different sections. Somalee's brothers were sent to a faraway camp and lost contact until they were reunited at a refugee camp in Thailand. By a stroke of luck, she and her sister were put together in a mobile working team with her parents in a nearby camp. This situation helped ease the harshness of the situation and made life bearable for an eight-year old girl who never spent a night away from her parents.

Since Somalee was large for her age she was assigned to work with a team of teenage girls to dig ditches. They worked all day with very little to eat. They all had only one set of clothes and had to wear them to bed even when they were wet. Fear and uncertainty always loomed large over everyone as one small misstep could mean beating or even killing. Children were not kind to one another as everyone had to compete for their own survival. Manipulation and back biting were the norm. Somalee witnessed cruel punishments being carried out unjustly but, despite her young age, she was able to keep herself composed and continued to carry out her work well and was spared from mistreatment.

In the first year in the labor camp, Somalee saw her parents a few times because they lived not far away from her camp. This proximity and the knowledge that they were near provided her a sense of security and inspired her to keep on going. Life became much harder at the end of the year when Somalee and her sister were assigned to another camp much further away. She lost communication with her parents and it was not until a year and a half later that she learned of their whereabouts from a camp leader who got transferred to her camp. At that point, the news of her parents renewed hope and motivated her to continue the struggle.

It was a strange existence but somehow you got used to it. I got used to it and accepted it. I lived day by day and did what I had to do. I was young so I did not know what is out there. I just knew that I wanted to live so I can see my parents again.

The Vietnamese invasion in 1979 came as a welcome relief. The family regrouped and went back to the village, but only to find it in a state of disarray. Their houses were destroyed and the abandoned farmland infertile. The members of the family, not being in good health due to many years of starvation, did not have the energy and resources to work the land so famine gradually set in while the fighting between the between the Khmer Rouge and the Vietnamese continued in the area. Late that year, the parents decided to abandon their home and take the dangerous journey toward the Thai border where humanitarian relief camps were set up by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and several relief agencies.

The journey was difficult and dangerous and Somalee still has nightmares about the experience sometimes.

We had to trek into the mountain range called Phnom Dong Rek. The area was infested with malaria. There were soldiers there in the wood fighting the Khmer Rouge. The Thai soldiers were there as well and I

don't know why. There were also smugglers and bandits. Everyone was fighting or trying to take advantage of the refugees because some carried valuables with them, you know, like gold and stuff. So the smugglers and bandits were there to rob them. It was totally crazy.

The family eventually arrived at the temporary camp at the Thai-Cambodian border and was given some blue plastic sheets to construct their shelters.

We slept on the ground and got canned fish, rice, and oil to eat. We ate that everyday for I don't know how long. It seems, at the time, like forever. We got transferred to live in four different refugee camps between 1979 and 1982. When we moved to Kao I Dang, one of the main camps, I went to school. Early in 1982 we found a sponsor and were sent to learn English in another camp near Bangkok. This was the time that we first really learned about how to live in the west. They showed us how to use the toilet on the airplane and how to say simple phrases in English. I can not say that we were prepared to live here but it was helpful to at least be able to understand something in English.

Somalee's family was one of the first to arrive in Amherst, Massachusetts. Her older brother got sponsored to come here first so he was helpful in getting them settled into the new environment. Somalee was enrolled in 5th grade at a local primary school and got a lot of support from the Transitional Bilingual program there. She loved her ESL teachers who went above and beyond their teaching duty to help Somalee and her family. The transition was not easy but she managed well and went on to graduate from the local high school and college.

At the time of this interview, Somalee was working in a retail store and was happily married to a fellow war survivor from Cambodia who graduated from college and had a stable job. The young couples lived in a suburb of Boston and remain committed to working with the Cambodian community in their area. Somalee is very proud of her Cambodian heritage. Over the years she has perfected her ability to read and write Khmer and, as much as she can, she volunteers to teach Cambodian children

who were born in the refugee camps or in the United States the Cambodian history and culture. Her long term goal is to become a pharmacist. She would like to gain work experiences and soon go back to graduate school.

Panya

Panya, a serious and self-assured young man, was born in Phnom Penh in 1965 to a well- to- do family of a politician. He is the youngest of six children. Most of his immediate family members were killed during the war and he became an unaccompanied minor in a refugee camp when he fled the country to the Thai border at the beginning of 1980. He remained in the refugee camp until October of 1983 before being sponsored by the Lutheran Church Services to resettle in the United States.

Growing up in a well established and well connected family, Panya, as a child, enjoyed a comfortable life and had the opportunity to get a solid early education in a recognized school. He was able to read and write fluently at an early age and was very confident and self sufficient by the age of ten when he was separated from his family. One of Panya's most important goals, as a child as well as an adult, was to obtain the highest level of education he possibly could. His oldest brother received a prestigious scholarship, a top distinction in his country, to study in France. His father was also a highly educated and spoke French fluently. As a high ranking military officer, his father had access to the elite social circles of Phnom Penh. Some of his father's colleagues from the West frequently visited his house. Panya was always intrigued by their mannerisms and dreamed of studying in a western country when he grew up.

When the Khmer Rouge took over the country in 1975 the well to do and well educated were at risk of being eliminated. His parents had to do what most urban dwellers in the same predicament did – to disguise themselves and hide their true identities. Overnight, the family was transformed. They left their former lives behind and joined the rest of the city dwellers in a forced march to the Khmer Rouge labor camps. The family members were able to stay together during the march and for about three months before they got sent different directions. Panya lost touch with all of his family members completely after that.

As expected, it did not take long before the parents' true identity was discovered and both were executed. Panya was devastated to learn the news but at the same time felt oddly relief.

I don't want to appear impolite. I loved my parents more than anything but at the time it was not a time to think about anything more than your own survival. It was not a time, you know, to feel sad too long. Your own survival is more important than anything. So anyway, I had to move on. Before I knew that my parents were killed I worried all the time about them. So when they were gone I felt somewhat relieved because I knew they did not suffer anymore. I did not have to worry about them anymore which made it easier for me to cope. Also I felt that their spirits will always protect me. Even now, here in the United States, I feel that they continue to protect me, watching over me and helping me in every step. I gain so much strength from believing this. Now, before I make any decision, I pray for their guidance, approval, and protection and I know they are always there for me, ready to help me.

Panya credited his survival to his luck, courage, and resourcefulness. He proudly talked about the "personal power" that he had.

I would not say that I was treated well, you know, but fairly. I was treated fairly. It was amazing that not only I was able escape the abuses, but to be loved, and to be cared for by the camp leaders. It was not easy for a city person to survive in such unfamiliar environment but I did well. Most people were working to death, but I managed to find easy work. After my parents died I put all of my energy into establishing trust. I obeyed the

policies, worked hard to help with the teaching. So my existence in the labor camps was not as unbearable as others would tell you.

After the Vietnamese invasion, Panya went back to Phnom Penh hoping to reunite with his siblings. He stayed with a group of youth and scavenged in the city. When he realized that he was not going to be able to find them in Phnom Penh he decided to head for a refugee camp at the Thai border. He traveled with a group of friends that he lived with in the city and made it to the camp after several weeks. Because of his age, he was put in the Unaccompanied Children's Center temporarily while the Tracing Agency run by The International Red Cross and Red Crescent looked for the surviving members of this family.

In 1981, Panya was sponsored to come to the United States. Panya described the news of his acceptance to come to the USA as "unbelievable." This opportunity was a dream that came true for him. From that moment onward, he decided to never look back at his traumatic past. The future, as he said, was in his hands and he was determined to achieve.

Roger sponsored me and another friend from the Children Center. I was happy because it was good to have someone to share my experience with. After the papers came we went to a transit center to learn English and have cultural orientation. We arrived in the US in October 1983, not totally prepared but Roger was familiar with my culture and was an excellent friend and mentor. He is an excellent parent to me. I was so lucky to have him as my mentor and parent. I could not have come this far without his help.

Panya made a quick adjustment to the new culture. His quick assimilation alienated him from the local Cambodian Community. He was accused of being too eager to accept American values. This did not bother Panya much at all. He disregarded the gossips and purposefully distanced himself from the Community.

I dreamt about coming to America to study. My parents would have been so proud if they were living. I got out of the war zone and the most important thing that I had to do was to become successful. I was determined not to fail. The most difficult thing was learning the language but living with an American foster parent helped a great deal. I did not get bothered by the comments about me made by some people in the Cambodian Community. It did not matter because I did not have much in common with them anyway besides the fact that we had experienced the war at the same time. Most of the elders were and are still in shock. As a young kid, I have the future in front of me. I was not going to let anyone destroy that for me and my hope for a bright future. I listened to Roger and took his guidance. He cared about me and my future. I just kept on going and did not look back.

In high school, Panya had only kept a few Cambodian friends. He hung out with American friends and participated in some “strange” activities. He dated, drank, smoked, but always in moderation.

A lot of the Cambodian kids liked to hang out together and always did the same thing, talked about the same thing. I did not want that. I wanted to integrate. I did not want to be different than the mainstream. I drank with my American friends and tried smoking as well. I did it only to fit in. When my friends went overboard I told them and they listened to me. They really liked me. Even their parents loved me. They thought I was cute. I was a good student also and the teachers adored me.

In all, Panya had positive school and college experiences. After college, he went directly to graduate school and earned a masters degree in social work. His role as a social worker later connected him again to the Cambodian community. “Those who did not like me earlier became friendlier because they knew I sincerely want to help them,” said Panya proudly.

Panya is, no doubt, an asset to the community. When asked if he had realized his dreams his reply was “absolutely.” He did not view his war experience as a negative thing in his life. In his opinion, hardship during the war helped build his character and strengthen his will to be a kinder and gentler person. At the time of this interview Panya

and his wife were about to have their first child. He was looking forward to becoming a father and was optimistic about the reconstruction of Cambodia.

Cambodia has been destroyed by war before in the past and it was able to build itself again. This time it should not be any difference. People should be more aware of the destructions that war brings and try not to let the history repeat itself again.

Pran

Pran, an artistic and outgoing person, was born in 1969 and grew up in a remote village in Battambang province. His childhood memory before the war is rather limited. There was nothing “special,” said Pran, except that his parents were very content and life was simple and free of the stresses that people living in the modern society now feel. He spent his daily activity on the farm where he helped out as much as a six-year-old child could. One thing that he remembers is the hard work that everyone had. All day long, his parents and other family member seemed to engage in endless chores from early morning till dark. The father worked on his farm all day while his mother tended the house, vegetable garden, and wove clothes. He started to attend school but did not remember any details, except that at one point the school was burned down just before the Pol Pot took over in 1975 and since the father had a big house the area under his house became a temporary school.

Before the war, Pran had only an older sister. His younger sister was later born in a refugee camp in Thailand, but the extended family was large. He knew all of his aunts, uncles and grandparents.

It was fun growing up with a lot of cousins. We played together all day long. During the rainy season we went fishing. I was young but I was very exposed to the outdoors. In fact, we rarely spent time inside the house in

Cambodia. The houses are different than here and it is always hot. It was not common to have air conditioners or even fans. We did not have electricity so most of the time we stayed underneath out houses where cool breezes come in. Young children grow up fast in the countryside. We had to help our parents doing work in the farm and household chores. The older they get the more responsibility they have. It is a tradition. I was used to working at a young age. I did not mind it at all. It was fun because everyone was busy. But we did not always work though. We spent a lot of time together having fun also. We did not have TV or anything so we relied on one another for entertainment. Older relatives entertained the kids. My uncles, for example, always played with me or taught me something.

When Pol Pot took over the country Pran and his family were evacuated to a camp within Battambang province. In some ways, this was easier for Pran compared to the city kids that were evacuated here since he did not have to make such a huge adjustment to the living conditions. He was used to the geography and the nature of agricultural work demanded by the new regime. Being a large child for his age, he was put in a camp with the older children. Pran said he did not mind it and just lived day by day “like a robot.”

I was young and did not know anything. I did not know about the life outside. I did not know what the future for me would be like. So the only thing that I know was I did not want to get beaten, and I wanted to have food to eat and a place to sleep at night. That was all. Very simple wishes and I think that was why I could move on. Being young is definitely an advantage at that time. Older people had a much harder time because they resisted change.

Like most people Pran reunited with his family after the Vietnamese invasion. The family went straight to their village but soon found that it was impossible to pick up farming without help from the government. The uncertainty of the political situation and the lack of resources forced the family to flee to a refugee camp in Thailand in 1983. The family remained in the refugee camp for four years, during which time his sister was born. In 1987 the family got a sponsor and came to the United States. Pran

remembers fondly the time he spent in the refugee camp where he became very happy after a long time. “I attended school, made friends, learned how to play the traditional instruments and traditional dance.”

The new life in a new country proved to be extremely hard for Pran and his family. The lack of language and understanding of the new culture sometimes created frustration, depression and despair.

We expected a lot, you know, America. We thought we were coming to a comfortable place and meet, you know, nice people since every American who worked in the camp were so nice to us. But when we came here it was totally different. Initially, we were happy with the great buildings and food, you know, but after a couple of months we felt so alone and helpless. It was very difficult, especially for my parents, to adjust to food, communication, etc. The culture shock was so severe. We did not know how to do anything by ourselves. We had to rely so much on our sponsors. We also came to understand racism and discrimination, you know. I thought the only two good things for me then were education and housing. If I can have the same I would go back to my country without a doubt.

Despite the hardship he initially experienced, Pran was optimistic and put a considerable amount of effort into school. He admitted that he is not a natural when it comes to learning. “There are too many gaps and the foundation was very inadequate,” he explained. There was a lot of catching up to do which at times made him feel he would not be able to make it. In high school, he became close to a Cambodian teacher who helped him his problems. He enjoyed studying Khmer language and history.

It grounded me. It gave me something important. I needed to know who I am and where I came from. It would be difficult to be in this country and not being able to speak your own language. I felt a strong sense of responsibility to help the younger kids learn about their roots. Most of the kids who were born in the refugee camps missed out a lot. They don't know anything about Cambodia. I volunteered to help tutor them after school. I also taught them how to do Khmer traditional dances.

College was not much easier than high school for Pran. He had to work hard to get over the obstacles. He at first wanted to study engineering but at the end he found education to be something he feels more connected to. Pran made a big jump in his life after he earned a degree and obtained a job. He takes care of his parents and helps them out financially.

My parents are still living in their old world. They are too old to assimilate to a new culture that is so different from their own. For a very long time, I lived in two different worlds. When I was out of the house I had to try to act in a way that I can blend in but when I was at home I had to be the good Cambodian son. Cambodian culture requires unconditional respect from the son or daughter, you know. I respect my parents always but here in the US they lost some of their credibility because they could not assert their ideas or opinions as much as they used to. That's because they don't know a lot of things here. They have to rely on us children for a lot of things. Sometimes that frustrates them. We argued and still argue. Like when they tried to prevent my sister from going to college in Connecticut. They did not trust her to be alone. I had to remind her that this is not the right way here in America. At the end, they did let her go. There are so many incidences that require that kind of energy and negotiation. It can be very hard sometimes.

When asked what has helped him to stay afloat in tough times, Pran singled out optimism as his best weapon. He is generally a happy and optimistic person who does not get himself get tangled up with problems that can not be solved. Pran said he does not expect too much from himself, which he sometimes sees as a problem.

In this culture, everything is about motivation and self-esteem. Coming here as a poor refugee it is not difficult to have poor self-esteem. You don't feel like you have that much power to do or change anything. I am happy that I sort of stay in the middle path. I did not do that well in school but I managed to graduate. I have to be happy with that. I am generally happy regardless of the circumstances, you know. I started off with very little and I am happy with what I have now. My family is all here and all of us are doing quite well. I am pleased with the progress that we have made since we came here. I don't have any bitter feelings about the war. It was bad but if it wasn't war we would have been back in my country and farm just like my father. War is bad but I gained more than I lost from it.

Nisit

Nisit, a poised and athletic community leader, was a senior at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst when this interview took place. He is well thought of by not only his peers but also by the elders in the Cambodian community. His friends consider him a leader and regularly seek his company and good advice.

It was easy for me to see, when I first met Nisit, why his friends would consider him a leader. He is intelligent, friendly, and carries himself well. Throughout the interview process he impressed me with his mature attitude and thoughtful reflection of his war experiences. He seems to have assimilated well into the American culture but strongly stated that he is first and foremost Cambodian. He is very proud of his roots and has taken a serious role the Khmer Cultural Institute to help educate the young Cambodians about their culture.

Nisit was born in 1964. He remembers fondly his childhood growing up in the countryside of Cambodia. As a child, Nisit was active and adventurous. He learned how to work at an early age by helping his mother with her trading and bartering business at a Thai-Cambodian border. Sometimes he traveled with her to the Thai border to purchase goods and then helped her to sell them in the market back in Cambodia. He was particularly close to his mother and an aunt who was accidentally killed during a market bombing just before the Khmer Rouge took over in 1975.

Nisit attended a primary school at the age of 6 and was a very good student. His leadership skills were apparent even when he was young. In school, he was always the head of the class, and out in the social realm he led his friends to do activities. When the war in the countryside broke out, Nisit and his friends combed the ground because

they did not understand the dangers. Life was carefree and in his words, "it was the years of learning to be tough both physically and mentally." Luck has kept him out of harm and he considers himself a very fortunate person. "I could have died or been injured many times, but somehow I was spared. It was incredible," he added.

His war experiences during Pol Pot were typical ones. He got separated from his family and was sent to a work camp. Good work ethic and a strong body shielded him from being abused. He worked hard and never got sick. "I did such a good job that the leaders made me a leader of 20 people in my group. This was good because I received privileges." In the first two years of communal living, Nisit remained in touch with his parents until right before the Vietnamese invasion. "I ended up following people into the jungle and lived there for a year. It was difficult. I relied on myself mostly to get by. When I felt low I thought of my parents and that helped me get my hope back."

When the fight between the Khmer Rouge and Vietnamese intensified, people in the forest headed toward the Thai border. Because Nisit had no parents to accompany him he was placed in the Unaccompanied Children Center.

They tried to locate my parents but could not find them. It was sad but then I got used to living with the other orphans. We attended school together and we had house parents that were hired by some International Organization. Life was not so bad. In fact, I enjoyed some aspects of it. I had many friends and the camp was safe. I learned how to read and write Khmer there, and played a lot of sports like volleyball and soccer. I thought about my parents all the time. I did not know if they were alive or dead but there was nothing that I could do and I was not the only one. All of the children in the Center were waiting to reunite with their parents as well. We hung out together and form good friendships. Some of us came to the United States together and remain close friends.

In 1982, after two years of living in the refugee camp in Thailand, Nisit got a sponsor.

I was supposed to go to France but somehow I ended up here. The sponsors in France changed their mind. The same happened to my friend, Boreth so Boreth and I came to stay with the same family in Amherst. Our foster family was nice but the father was tough. The mother was very nice, very understanding. The father was a disciplinarian. He wanted us to become Americans right the way. We were pushed to the limits and felt miserable. We even thought of running away, you know. Boreth wrote all the poems about not being happy here. I was feeling really bad because in Cambodia I knew a lot and I always felt that I was in control but here I was nobody. When we first arrived the father sent us to split wood for the fireplace. We freaked out completely because that was what we had to do during the Khmer Rouge time. We did not understand that we wanted us to get some fresh air outside after such a long flight. There were a lot of misunderstandings like that of a long time so there were tensions, you know. School was also hard because we did not speak English. They put us in grade 10th. I was so lost, so depressed. The father always pushed us to get good grades but we could not. I did not feel good at all. Not until I began to get involved in sports and became a volleyball star. Boreth and I became stars. That was the year our school won the state championship. So it took me a long time to feel at home here. I knew that we were lucky to live in a nice and safe town but, yeah, it was not easy.

In the initial period of adjustment Nisit relied heavily on his Cambodian friends and stayed close to the Cambodian Community.

There were social workers whom I like and they were always helpful. My foster brother was very supportive. He was in college but always wrote me beautiful letters to encourage me. And there was Sovanh, a Khmer case worker, who acted as a liaison person between the foster families and the children. He was a bit older and had arrived in the US before me. He helped us out a lot. I did OK in school. At first, my foster parents thought I should not go to college because my grades were not good. They thought since I was good at doing things with my hand I should become a carpenter. That was a real blow to my self-esteem, you know. In my culture, only uneducated people become carpenters. I was not happy with that. I applied to Umass anyway and got accepted. I was going to study engineering but that proved to be difficult. I did not do well the first year. Was down and did not feel good about myself. Later on, I met a fellow student from Africa. He asked me about my background and I told him. He was amazed and really lifted me up. He said if you could survive that you are no ordinary. You are great. That meant a lot to me. We became good friends and from then on I felt so proud of myself and began to do better in school. I realized now how important it is to find the right person to talk to, to lift you up when you are down. The right person will understand and encourage and it will make all the difference in the world.

Nisit earned a bachelor's degree in education and became a bilingual teacher at a public school outside Boston. He got married a year after college and maintained a cordial relationship with his foster family. He plays an active role in the Cambodian community where he lives.

I feel a deep commitment to my people. I went back to Cambodia and located my family. That visit gave me a purpose. I have a responsibility not only to help my family back in Cambodia but to help everyone who is in need. I am in deep now and I think my wife suffers a bit from me being absent sometimes. But I am trying to maintain a balance. I think I am doing pretty well so far. Life is a struggle, you know, but I have found a new way of defining it. I have gone through tough time and I never want my kids to experience that. I want to contribute to the society in which I live, you know, to make it a better place for my kids and for others.

Apsara

Apsara, an attractive Khmer traditional dancer, artist, and teacher, was born in Phnom Penh in 1964 but moved with her family to live in a small village in the Northwestern part of Cambodia where her father took a teaching job. She remembers her childhood as unremarkable.

It was a very small village and not much going on. My father was a teacher and my mother a housewife. I have six siblings and we all went to school and helped out with chores since we were very young. My father's teaching income was not very much so my mother had to help out as much as possible by making sweets to sell at the market. She woke up very early in the morning to work so my siblings and I had to wake up to. I did not mind it at all since I loved helping her out. I was very good at doing that. I was very good at using my hands. My parents loved me a lot because I was an easy and obedient child. I got along with everybody.

Unlike most of her peers who grew up with big extended families, Apsara had very little contact with her grandparents. The distance was so great and the

transportation not available so the family was pretty much confined in the village where they lived. Yet, despite that, her world was enriched by frequent visitors - artist and musician friends of her father who traveled from Thailand to visit.

My father was a talented person. He played several musical instruments, wrote songs and poems, taught traditional dances. I inherited the love of music and traditional culture from him. As a child, I learned how to perform several Cambodian dances and participated in many of the play performances. My father told me a lot of stories, like Ramayana, you know. I learned a lot from him. Sometimes his friends stayed at our house and they told us Thai stories as well. Our house was always the center of activities. We entertained a lot and I helped out a lot. I think this made me a very sociable person. I am easy with people and I like having people around me.

Apsara and her parents never talked about politics at home. Life just went on as usual until the war broke out. Apsara did not remember being in a panic.

Everyone moved along and went to the camps. We set up in a village and we lived in a regular house but everything belongs to Angka (the organization). We ate together and worked together. My father understood that he had to hide his identity as a teacher because the Khmer Rouge did not like educated people. He joined the basket weaving group. My mother was, at the time, in her third trimester so she was assigned light work at the camp. I was only 9 but a big girl for my age so I was sent to work with the teenagers digging ditches and planting rice. It was miserable because all day I had to stand in water. I had a skin problem which was very bad from standing all day in the water.

Apsara coped well with the work and being physically strong helped a lot. She did what she had to do and totally dissociated herself from her parents.

At the time the family wasn't necessary. Being alone and working with other kids was fine. I never thought about my family, never thought about wanting them close to me. I think it was just my way of coping. I did not know what else to do. I was fortunate enough to not see any direct murdering. My unit was not as harsh, punishment wise. The hardest thing was to cope with hunger and sickness. I dug up roots and ate when I was hungry. The camp leaders were kind to me because I was very compliant. Sometimes I got a bit more food to eat.

In 1979, after the Vietnamese invasion, the family regrouped but her father was seriously ill and died shortly afterward. Life was difficult for the family because of the famine so her mother decided to take the family to a refugee camp in Thailand. The risk was great but they had no choice. After several weeks of walking and living in the jungle they reached a border camp and received assistance. Apsara attended school in the camp and got involved in many extracurricular activities.

I wanted to get involved in everything. I even asked the nurses if I could help as a dental hygienist and they let me. So I helped out in the hospital which was interesting. That was when the idea of becoming a nurse came to me.

The family live in three different camps for two and a half years before her uncle, who arrived in California before, sponsored them to come to America.

It was not as we had expected it to be. It was so hard to adjust and I had the most miserable time here. The uncle was nice but he was a gambler and was not much help to us. We were on welfare and were like the cripples waiting to be helped all the time. It did not feel good. School was really hard also. I struggled and eventually I had to leave and went to work in a nursing home. Later on, I studied for a GED because I wanted to go to college, to become a nurse or nurse's aid.

As Apsara struggled to assimilate, her family began to fall apart. Her mother became depressed and her siblings did not do well. Everybody's morale was low, but Apsara was determined not to get down too low. She made more American friends at the Community College where she learned to become a nurse's aid and began to look for a place to relocate.

I did not like the atmosphere at Long Beach. Kids were not motivated here. They just want to get married young and have kids. They did not think about college. I am not like that. I want to get a good education. I want a good job. I heard that Massachusetts has good programs for refugees from Cambodia so I decided to move east. I had some friends here and they welcomed me. I left and came to Lowell. I continued my education here and worked part time to support myself. The Cambodian

community in Lowell is big. Good support, you know, and I feel at home here.

Apsara found her niche in Lowell. She completed her education and landed a good job working as a teacher at a local school. She got married to an American colleague whom she worked with at one of the non-profit agencies, although the couple was temporarily separated at the time of this interview. She went through many rough stages during the time of the adjustment to the new life in America. Her marriage suffered after two years because there were many unresolved issues that she needed to work on. Traumatic past came back to disturb her from time to time. "For a long time I just could not cry," she quietly said.

I felt very sad but I could not express my sadness in a normal way that most people do. I saw a couple of therapists who helped me sort things out. This was when I learned about the post-traumatic stress syndromes. My husband was very supportive of me. We agreed to separate for a while until I feel happy with myself again. I love him very much and I hope we will be able to get together very soon. We will see. This problem with my emotion also has had negative effects on my relationship with my mother. Recently we got into a huge fight that almost turned physical. I disagreed with something that she did and she took it personally and tried to attack me. Yes, with a knife. It was terrible but I knew it was just an event. She lost control and I lost control. My husband asked me to apologize. I did but my mother and I have not been talking for a while now. I do hope though that we will soon be able to face each other again, in good terms. I am a forgiving person. I do not hold grudges.

Despite the ups and downs Apsara was able to keep balance in her life. She never let her emotional problems affect her professional and social life. Like most resourceful and resilient people, she faced each challenge in stride and did what she could to better the situation. Apsara considers herself an optimistic person who does not dwell in the past.

The war for me was just a memory. In fact, I don't even remember much. I focus on the future more. It is better that way for me. These days I allow

myself to reflect. Like talking to you during this interview is good for me. I am not sad talking about it anymore. I am proud to be a survivor. I am glad I had gone through it. It has made me a much stronger and more able person.

Rah

Rah is slight, quiet, and rather shy. He appeared nervous when we first met, but quickly gained his composure and became focused when narrating his story. He admitted that it never was easy to talk about his war experience regardless of how many times he had done it. The painful past does not bother him anymore, but “sometimes it is easier to bury it,” he said quietly. He went back to Cambodia last year and reunited with the relatives who survived the murderous regime, but he did not feel connected with any of them. He felt guilty about that but he realized that was the reality. He departed from this homeland when he was young, too young to have the opportunity to establish a close relationship with them. Despite that he cares a great deal about their well being and is determined to support them both emotionally and financially.

Rah was born was born in 1968 to a very large family. His parents had eleven children and, at one point, Rah was sent to live with his relatives because the parents found it hard to support them all. This was a common practice in Cambodia, Rah told me. Rah lived with his aunt and uncle for two years at the age of 3 or 4. He rejoined his family again two years afterward. When the war broke out Rah was 7 years old. Rah lost contact with his family after the separation. He lived in different work camps until the Vietnamese invasion in 1979. When the refugees began to flee Cambodia, Rah followed a stream of people into the jungle. There he met a young couple and stayed with them until he reached a refugee camp in Thailand. At the refugee camp, Rah was

registered as an “unaccompanied minor” and lived at the Children’s Center along with the rest of minors who lost their families.

At the refugee camp, Rah attended school, which was important to him since his parents put strong emphasis on education. His eldest brother was a “star” student and won a scholarship to study abroad. Rah considers himself a resourceful and well-adjusted person who tends to see a glass as half full rather than half empty. He is sensitive but also very practical. During the Pol Pot time, he talked about being like a “sheep” that followed. He used his “radar” to scan the environments and managed well.

I was not strong physically as you can see that I am small but I was a willing person. I can sense things pretty well so I knew what to do to avoid being caught or being punished. By sensing things I mean I can tell where danger is. Sometimes I think I was protected by spirits of my parents or grandparents or something like that. My mother was pretty superstition and I think to some extent I am as well.

Rah’s adjustment to the new life in the United States was rough at first. He lived with the family of a social worker who worked with Cambodian refugees in Amherst.

She took me into her family and treated me well. They have children around my age which was very good. We became “siblings” and had, you know, the usual rivalry. Being with the American family helped me understand the American culture quicker but I kept close connections with the Cambodian community, especially with the unaccompanied minors group. Friends are important to me. We shared a lot of things in common. I got involved with the Children of War program. During this time I traveled to different places with the group to talk about my war experiences. I would say that this helped me a lot. Talking about it helped ease some pain and I gained confidence from doing this. The group gave me a sense of purpose. It made me feel that I am somebody, you know, and not just an orphan from Cambodia. I came here because of the war and I wanted to do well here. Someone asked me once about revenge. Do I want revenge? I don’t think I do. There is no point. What happened happened. Living a good life, a successful life is the best revenge for me.

When asked about his source of strength, Rah used the concept of a salad bowl to explain his support network.

War made me weak and needy but it also gave me strength when I survived it. As a young kid I don't think I have that much strength to begin with, but over time I gained it. Many people helped me out before I came to this point of my life. My parents were the first to give me the strength. They gave life to me and taught me how to protect my life. I was very young when I got separated but I still remember something that they taught me. Buddhist religion also gives me strength because from it I learn how to deal with life. And the people that I met along the way - friends, family, teachers, and even strangers taught me something. It is like in a salad bowl, you know. You need a combination of carrots, lettuce, tomatoes so some people are my carrots and some are my tomatoes.

Davi

Davi is a well-educated, attractive, sophisticated, and artistic person. I first met her when she was about 8 or 9 and living at the Unaccompanied Children Center at Sa Kaew Refugee Camp in Thailand. At that time I was working with the International Rescue Committee, an organization that was in charge of the Children Center.

Although I did not work directly with the unaccompanied children but I remembered hearing about Davi from a housemate who was the Director of that Children Center. She would refer to Davi as a special girl who seems to stand out from the rest of her peers. Not only that she was physically attractive but she had an unusual ability to make herself be recognized. She was smart, curious, and talented artistically. So it was not surprising for me to meet up with her again over a decade later to hear about her personal and academic success. Those who met and knew Davi when she was young knew that she would do well wherever she ended up.

Davi had very limited memory of her growing up before the war but she believed that she grew up comfortably in a well-to-do family in Phnom Penh where her father, a high-ranking military officer, worked. When the Khmer Rouge took over, the

family got separated and her father was killed soon after because of his status.

Throughout the four years of the Khmer Rouge rule, Davi was placed in different work camps. In 1979, she ended up in a refugee camp in Thailand as an unaccompanied minor.

Her experience of living under the Pol Pot regime was not much different from others in this study. She had to spend days working with very little food. Being small for her age, Davi sometimes suffered from severe physical discomfort resulting from the hard work and from being malnourished. Her city look also made her a target of abuse from her “peasant” peers who lived in the same work compound. To defend herself, Davi invented scary stories to intimidate them. She had learned about the Khmer folklore from her grandmother who helped bring her up. Each time she scared the bullies away her confidence grew and eventually she was pretty much left alone.

While living in the Thai refugee camp, Davi began to learn how to read and write Khmer. She spent several hours a day in the camp library and at the Performing Arts Center.

I was happy in the camp. I made friends and felt secure living in the Children Center. I had no idea then where my life would end up but I saw that sometimes children got adopted and they left for the third country. To be honest, I really had no such hope. I don't know anything beyond the refugee camp. There were many foreigners working in the camp and at the Center. They were all very nice and very kind to me. I felt at home there. I had an opportunity to somewhat enjoy my childhood in peace, even though it was in a refugee camp.

Davi arrived in the United States in 1982. Her adopted parent had met her while visiting the refugee camp in Thailand where she lived. Davi lived in New York with her new family and was sent to a private school. The small school with a strong focus in

tending the light in every child suited her perfectly. She learned English quickly and made a smooth transition into the new life.

My mother is very determined to help me get in touch with my Cambodian roots. She did what she could to connect me with other Cambodians in the areas. I attended a Khmer dance class and traveled with my mother miles to see Cambodian friends on the west coast. It was thought to be necessary for me to connect with them then, but I realized that my life and their lives are so different. A lot of my old Cambodian friends were not interested in going to school. Some of them got married and had kids so we gradually drifted apart. Then I became involved in the Children of War group. I liked it because the children in this group had more in common with me. I traveled with them to speak in many places. It was fun but I had to leave the group because my mother wanted me to focus more on school and college admission. Education is one of the most important things for my family. I studied hard, made good grades and got accepted into a college of my choice – a small liberal arts college in Boston. It was a good place for me to think and reflect. A lot of things – feelings resurfaced during my college years. Earlier on it was all about surviving, adapting and all that. In college, I longed to know about my roots and what my parents were like. I knew that I had survived for a purpose but it was not clear to me what the purpose was. For a while I was a bit lost. My self-esteem went down. I lost so much during my childhood years. I had the idealized version of my family and my childhood that might not be true. I became very confused. I had to work very hard to get over that period and to come to terms with the present, and to accept certain things that I don't have the power to change. I got some counseling and as I got older things became clearer to me. I am more peaceful now and I can only hope that things will continue to get better. It has to be.

At the time of this interview, Davi had graduated from a prestigious college and was working in Boston for the government. She was also engaged to be married soon and planned to continue her education in psychology. She and her fiancé live outside of Boston in a neighborhood with a lot of Cambodians living in it. She is keen to raise bilingual, Khmer-English, children and is optimistic about her future. Davi believes the past trauma has strengthened her more than harming her. “I can never be free of the past. It sometimes haunts me but I must focus in the future. There is a lot more in the future that I can do to help promote peace in the world.”

Malee

Malee enthusiastically accepted the invitation to participate in this study because she believed it was important to educate others about what happened in Cambodia and to let those who are still suffering in the war zones know that “they should never give up hope” because “everything will work out at the end if hope is kept alive.” Hope, faith, and luck, she maintained, played an instrumental role in her survival. It kept her spirit up during the darkest moments of her young life.

Born in 1960 in Phnom Phenn city Malee grew up in privilege as her father was a high ranking government officer. Before 1975 she attended a private school in the city. After the Pol Pot took over, the family members got separated and she believes her parents died soon after. Malee affectionately talked about her childhood growing up in a large extended family. The family members were close and spent a lot of time together. As a government official, her father was aware of the instability and the possibility of the country being thrown into a serious civil war. But no matter how well informed they were, no one was prepared for what happened after Pol Pot captured the city.

The whole event remains a blur. It was confusing and frightening. My aunts were crying and we kept telling each other that no matter what we will try to stay close together. We walked and walked for days in the heat of April. No one knew what was going to happen but there was hope that we would be allowed to return home in a few days. That actually kept all of us going. We arrived at the first camp and everyone tried to help each other to set up a shelter. I think we stayed there at least a few weeks before I got assigned to go to a mobile work camp with the other children. I knew then that we were not going to go back to the city. Actually, I met a soldier, a kind of friend who used to live across the street. He told me the truth about the revolution and told me to do whatever to stay alive. That means to obey the new regime, you know. As a city person, it was extremely difficult for me to do the kind of work the soldiers asked me to do, like digging the ditches, cutting and carrying wood, etc. I suffered a lot

but I tried hard to carry out the work. There was no time to think, you know. Everyone had to follow the orders or be killed. I did not want to die because I wanted to see my parents again. I wanted to be back with my family. That meant I had to be careful not to make the soldiers angry.

In 1979, Malee and her cousins fled to a refugee camp in Thailand. She could not locate her parents and assumed they did not survive. In 1980, Malee found a sponsor and came to the United States.

It's a destiny. It does not matter how clever or strong you are in Khmer Rouge time anyone can be killed. I don't know why I was not killed so I think it must be my destiny to survive. Many people in my family died and they were all good people. We struggled in the same place but I live. It is a miracle. We are Buddhists and we believe in destiny. If you did good thing in the past life this life you will have it easier, you know. I must have had done something good before to have good luck in this life.

At the time of this interview Malee was working as a teacher's aid in a public elementary school. She enjoys her work with the children tremendously and believes that her war experience has helped her to make the strong person she is today. "I understand life better and I know what suffering is. I understand when I see others suffer and I always try to reach out to help them." She is married to a fellow survivor and keeps a close connection to the Cambodian community in which she lives.

Khon

Khon is quiet and rather pensive at times. He was pleased to be invited to participate in this study and felt, in his own words, "honored to be considered a war survivor who is doing well." I asked if my perception about him was wrong his answer was negative. "I guess I have come a long way," he said quietly. "It was not easy but I overcame many hurdles. I cried a lot, felt hopeless and suicidal at times, but at the end I found my way out. I don't know how but I did it."

Khon grew up poor in a small village of Battambang province. His parents were farmers and the family lived simply in a small village. In 1975, Khon got separated from his family entirely. He was nine years old at the time.

I was put in a children camp and we collected soya leaves and planted rice. I knew that my parents were in the same area but I did not get to see them. About a year and a half later, I was sent to a totally different part of the country to work in another camp. I was always afraid of being beaten, and I was faced with constant hunger. We were not allowed to form friendship groups, or talk to each other for that matter. Under the Khmer Rouge regime, you have to obey the rules set by Angka. Angka was the supreme power. We had to work hard and attend meetings to learn about Angka's ideas. As a nine years old kid, I was in awe of the power the Khmer Rouge soldiers had. They carried guns and went around barking or beating up people and wished I had that power, you know. I wanted to be a soldier like them. This was just a thought, of course. I never had a chance to be a soldier except when they fought the Vietnamese troops in 1979 that I briefly got assigned to carry weapons for them from one place to another. During this period there was a lot of confusion. A lot of people died of sickness and starvation. Some fled into the wood trying to reach the Thai border. As I did not have any place to go I followed a group of people into the woods. It was a very miserable time and I still have nightmares about it. Somewhere along the way I met a young couple and I lived with them. They took care of me as much as they could. When we reached a refugee camp in Thailand they told me to go live in the Unaccompanied Children Center because they thought I would have a better chance to go to another country. I did not want to go but I had to, out of necessity.

Life in the refugee camp was good for Khon, as he had the opportunity to go to school and learned how to read and write Khmer. In 1982, he was sponsored to come to Massachusetts. The transition to the United States was traumatic for Khon.

I had a very high expectation about America and I realize now that I was very naïve. People of my background always thought of the West of being like heaven, you know, where everyone lives happily in a big house and owns big cars. I was just a farm boy. What I heard about America was more or less a rumor generated by those who themselves really don't know much about this place at all. It was all a fantasy. So to make it short, I arrived in the States totally unprepared. My American sponsors live outside Amherst in the wood. I arrived in the winter so trees had no leaves and the place looks deserted. I freaked out because I thought I was in

another camp, you know. I thought Americans only live in big houses in the city. I was so disappointed. The parents were very nice but I did not understand them and they did not completely understand me and where I came from. There were misunderstandings and anger in me that sometimes hard to control. School was hard because of the language problem. I became withdrawn and was very depressed to that point that sometimes I thought about killing myself. Fortunately, there was a Khmer case worker who was very understanding and helpful. He worked with an agency as a translator. He looked after me and helped me to communicate better with my parents. It took me about a year and a half to get my feet on the ground and to realize that this is the only place I can make my future. I came out of my shell, and decided to try to do my best. I began with connecting myself to the Cambodian community. I needed to speak better Khmer as well as to read and write better. It was necessary for me feel good about myself. I needed to know my own culture better before taking in another, you know. Most importantly, I worked on facing my past. I was never good at recalling the experiences during Pol Pot. When people asked me I broke down easily. I got some help and little by little I became better. I did OK in school and went on to college. There were many dreams but I decided to study education because I felt that I like working with children. I have been very happy with my decision so far.

Khon stayed close to the Cambodian community and has been active in organizing events that bring the community together. At the time of this interview, he was living in Lowell, Massachusetts, and works at a public school there. Khon went back to Cambodia once to visit his brother and sister who managed to survived the ordeal. The reunion was somewhat anti-climatic because he felt little connection to them.

I was young when we got separated and I did not remember much about them. Then I came to live here in America and have been exposed to a different way of living and communicating, you know. I am so different from them. It was so strange because I was so much looking forward to seeing them but when we met there was nothing. I felt nothing. In fact, I got angry at my sister for wanting to be too involved with my life. I know it is not right and I am trying to allow her to gradually get to know me. It is not easy but I am committed to helping them. I am in a better position to support them as they are poor. I feel fortunate to have come to this point and as a good Buddhist and family member I shall try my best to share what I have with the less fortunate ones, especially if they are my family.

Discussion of the Themes

Family Cohesion and Positive Childhood Memory

Family cohesion and positive caretaking environment in early infancy are believed to be major factors in the development of competent coping later on in life. Resilient children in several studies had supportive environment and resources while growing up (Anthony, 1987a; Egeland & Farber, 1987; Werner & Smith, 1982) and they formed close relationships with their primary caretakers in their first year or two of life. This early attachment provided a foundation for trust in the environment and served as an important protective factor for coping with stress. The children who were well cared for and accepted by their caregivers tended to become more self-reliant, caring, and responsible adults (Werner & Smith, 1982). Their families or the significant figures in their lives have clear limits and rules, respect individuality, and foster a feeling of closeness (Werner & Smith, 1982).

The participants in this study had positive childhoods despite instability due to the civil war. They had good relationships with their parents, whom they described as “strict but flexible.” Cambodian parents are highly respected and above criticism despite their flaws, explained Kon. “It’s a Cambodian way. In fact, to think badly of your parents is a sin. Parents are placed way up there, alongside the Buddha,” said Somalee. The others expressed similar sentiments. They believe in the “special power” that parents have. This power, they insisted, can shield them from danger or negative life events even after the parents passed away.

Kane said:

I grew up in a family where love is tremendous. I am sure we had problems but I don't remember seeing my parents arguing or fighting, at least never in front of us. My parents loved their kids, but they never spoiled us. They raised us to be tough, you know. We had to study hard and worked around the house. My mother always said never sit around when you are not sick. Get up and do things. Look around and ask people if you can be helpful. That's what I learned early in life – to be helpful to others. I love and respect my parents a lot. They are my role models. In America, children do not always identify their parents as their role models, you know. They choose to worship rock stars or sport personalities. For me, most of those people are not fit to be role models. Some of them are scum bags. They behave badly so it is surprising to me, you know, this role model things. My parents are everything to me. I felt close to them when I was living away from them. When I was sad or depressed my parents' images came to me, to comfort me.

Pran stated:

My childhood was simple. As a family we were close and we spent a lot of time together because we never had much to do in terms of activities and entertainments. It is very different there than here, but when I look back I appreciate it. My father taught me how to use tools to fix things, and to fish, etc. I knew how to do a lot of things and I was very independent since I was around four or five years old. Growing up in rural Cambodia was different from growing up here. We did not have much so we had to be creative, you know. My parents did not have much education but they are creative, and they trained me to be creative too. Like to be street smart, you know. I remember feeling very good as a child. Always felt valued and loved even though sometimes I got punished badly because I misbehaved. As a child I was tough, physically strong and now when I think about it I was strong inside as well. Strong self-esteem, you know. It is all because the way I was brought up and I am thankful for that.

It is common for young children to look up to their parents or other loving adults in their lives for protection. When the caring adults are not present, loving thoughts about the parents will continue to provide the necessary comfort and reassurance the children that they are special and loved. The strong bonds between participants and their parents positively served as stress buffers for them in bad times (Hogman, 1983). Good memories of their early lives laid a foundation for faith in the

universe that even the darkest experience could not eliminate. Caught in the madness of war, the children maintained an emotional link to their families, and cultivated fantasies about their absent parents – my parents are good people and they have the power to protect me (Moskovitz, 1983). Davi, for example, kept beautiful images of her parents even though she had very little recollection about how life was for her before the separation. In her imagination, her mother was always beautiful and caring. Her father, she imagined, was handsome and intelligent. Her house where she grew up was lovely and comfortable. In short, life was perfect before the catastrophe struck. These positive images became Davi’s security blanket that kept her warm in the bleakest moments of her young life. It was not until years later that Davi began to realize that the images that she had about her family may not be completely accurate. In college she felt a strong urge to search for the answer. She traveled back to Cambodia with her adopted mother, but did not manage to find any surviving relatives. Despite the lack of concrete evidence to support the “idealized” version of her childhood memory, David believes that she came from a good background. “I am a good person. I am sure I was well brought up,” she simply concluded.

Davi’s application of the “fantasy” about her childhood to help alleviate the stressful events was not an anomaly. Child survivors of the Nazi Holocaust in Hogman (1985), Krell 1985), and Maskovitz (1985) talked about this same phenomenon. Of his survival in Auschwitz and Buchenwald, Daniel who was 10 years old in 1939, said:

Survival is a funny thing. (It was) based on memories and brute force. Memories are a bit different. For nights I dream about sitting at a table, singing and eating. Holidays used to come. I smelled food. I went through the motions of what we always did. (Hogman: 1985, p. 391)

The experience of traumatic losses usually creates a big void to be filled. Children, because of their immaturity and lack of different array of coping mechanisms, tend to gravitate toward using fantasy as a temporary source of stress relief. For children who got separated from their parents by war, the longer the separation the more myth- like images of their parent appeared – my parents have the power to protect me. The love and respect that they felt for their parents and the longing to reunite with them helped generate the necessary hope and strength to cope with the situation. For the participants whose parents were killed, the determination to survive came from a strong desire to honor the parents’ wishes – my parents are gone so I have to do the best that I could to honor them, to make them proud of my achievements. Memories served to perpetuate a continuing attachment to their families. Their vivid and fulfilling memories substituted for the absent parents and made their absence bearable (Hogman, 1985)

Pran said:

I was not afraid when I got separated from my parents. Somehow I knew I was not gonna die. And my parents were not gonna die. I don’t know how I came up with that thought. I just had it in my head. Just tried to think about good things, you know. Like the fun I had with my family. I went with the flow, you know. Like a robot I worked. Everyday I waited for the next day.

Panya said:

I felt protected. I must admit that I am a bit superstitious. At the time my parents were already murdered but I knew that their spirits were with me, and always would be. They loved me and wanted me to be safe. This made me feel confident and secure – like nothing is going to happen to me. I did not have many bad thoughts in my mind. Maybe it was because I was young. The thoughts about my parents and the good life that I had before definitely helped.

Davi said:

In reality I don't really know much about my parents and my family. But when I was in the camps I relied on the "idealized" version of my growing up. It was strange because in my mind I saw them clearly and vividly. My mother was small and beautiful. My father was commanding and intelligent. I could see the house that we used to live in. It was a nice house. Like everything was perfect, you know. I don't believe I made this all up because I had a lot in me, you know. I was aware and knew how to take care of myself. People were kind of treating me differently, you know, kindly even. I think it was because I showed good manners. I was not spoiled at all so that showed that I was well brought up. Thinking that I came from a good family and my parents loved me very much made me feel good. I knew that my parents were murdered and I knew also that they wanted me to live. This thought kept me going.

Somalee said:

I came from a loving family and I was very close to my parents, especially my father. They loved me very much. All I knew was I did not want to die. I wanted to go back to my parents. That was enough to get me going as a kid. I don't know how to explain it to you, but when I thought about my family and my parents I felt happy. Even though there was nothing to be happy about, of course, but you have to keep some hope going.

Optimism and Strong Faith in Life – Buddhist-Based Values.

Traumatic events usually overwhelm the victims' psyches and disrupt the normal functioning of their daily lives. It is therefore common for them to temporarily lose their bearings and feel helpless, confused, and disillusioned. In war zones, the horrors, violence, and different forms of deprivation can easily drive the victims to the edge. Survival in extremity requires a strong "will to live" (Des Pres, 1967; Frankl, 1963). Those who can sustain the trauma well are likely to be the ones who are "anchored" by strong faith in life, religious beliefs, and/or political ideology. Among the participants in this study, Buddhism played an important role in shaping their positive worldviews and attitudes toward war, trauma and other life adversity. The core

teaching of the Buddhist religion emphasizes self-reliance, tolerance, and the acceptance of the current life situations, good or bad, as the person's fate. Accepting the negative events as something that was meant to happen minimized the amount of psychological pain that the survivors felt at the time.

Kane said:

I don't think that suffering is such a bad thing. Everyone has to suffer every now and then. I learned that my duty as a Buddhist is to do good things and not be greedy. Even when I was in the Khmer Rouge camp I continued to do good things. I was not angry at the Khmer Rouge soldiers because I felt they did not know any better. They just followed orders. I accepted the situation and dealt with it. My parents always told us not to question too much about things that go wrong. Just deal with it, you know. It is better to use the energy to try to solve the problem rather than wasting time getting upset because bad things happen to you, you know. I think I am a practical person. If there is something that needs to be done I will just get it done. That's what I did in the Khmer Rouge camps. I respected the elders in the camp, even the soldiers because I did not consider them my enemy. Good Buddhists do not hold grudges against anyone. At least trying not to, you know, because it is not good to be angry. Anger creates bad energy and that is not good. I am a happy person so one bothered me because I did my work well. I was not too worried because I knew the war was going to end. So everyday I said to myself like... OK one more day and I then I am going to be home. Yeah... optimism, you know. It is important to believe that. I just wanted to go home to be with my family.

Davi said:

Children usually don't search for life meaning or anything like that. Survival is instinctive. No one wants to die. I never thought about dying or giving up living. In Buddhist religion, the current life is supposed to be the result of the previous life. So if something does not go right in this life it probably has something to do with what you did in the past life. I don't think I consciously thought about this when I was little, but it is something everyone knows about and lives by. I mean if you are a Buddhist you know this. I guess I just accepted it and dealt with it. I am pretty sure it has something to do with me being a Buddhist. This religion does not make people feel pessimistic because they know that their destiny can be changed in the next life by doing good things now. This gives people hope, you know. In general, I think Buddhists are optimistic and hopeful. At least the one I know.

Pran said:

I am not a devout Buddhist but my parents were and still are, especially my mother. When I was growing up I always went with her to give food to the monks at the temple in my village. From the monks and from my mother I learned that we have another life after we die. The next life can be much better than the current one if we concentrate on doing good deeds and being a good person. I remember that always. When we got separated I knew my parents wanted me to continue to do good deeds. I did not rebel against anything. I just focus on doing the work that the soldiers asked me to do. It was hard but I was not feeling too miserable.

Malee said:

I am an optimistic person, you know. I am happy with whatever I have in my life. Even when I don't have much I still can be happy. Good health is more important to me than wealth for sure. This is how I was raised. My parents always said good Buddhists do not ask for a lot in life. They give more, like giving to the temples, or to poor people. By giving they gain more happiness. I believe in destiny strongly. Everything happens for a reason. If you are a good person you will survive anything. That was the kind of idea I had when I was in the camps. I knew I was going to survive because I am a good person. You have to believe because if you don't thing will turn out bad. Negative people don't do well in life. They have bad energy and they don't think well. I think it is true.

Buddhists commonly do not regard themselves as "victims" of negative life events. Life adversity is considered to be caused by the negative deeds that they perhaps committed in a previous life, so they have to accept the consequences and try to deal with the problems the best they can. In regard to the suffering caused by war, they found the explanation in a prediction that was supposed to be written in the ancient prophecy. According to this prediction, Cambodia was to experience a major decline. The savages and ignorant would ruin the country and the streets of Cambodia would be covered with blood. During this period, many would die, but Cambodia would soon rise to glory it once was again. Finding an explanation for the cause of suffering is important. When trauma is put into perspective it is somewhat easier to cope with. For

many Cambodians, the ancient prediction, whether it is accurate or not, help put the incomprehensible acts of brutality committed by the Pol Pot regime into the context that is comprehensible. This was the collective fate the whole nation had to endure. With this realization, the Cambodians quietly accepted their fates and endured the trauma.

Nisit said:

I did not know much about the prediction when I was living in the camp but I remember hearing it. I did not need that story to help me cope. It was a common understanding that the whole thing happened because it was meant to happen. No, I did not feel “victimized,” but I did feel unlucky, sad, and even depressed sometimes. We were deprived of most things and had to work all the time which was hard. But because everyone had to do it I did not feel I was being punished. I think we Asians generally have a greater ability to accept misfortunes better than some Westerners, you know. For sure. Buddhist religion has a lot to do with this. It is not always a good thing to accept things unconditionally, to accept things that you can not change and focus on things that can be change is a smart thing to do. Especially, when living in the Khmer Rouge camps, you know. If you kept feeling miserable then you won't make it. It is important to keep hoping. But before you can hope you must accept the situation as it is first.

Rah said:

When I was a child I once tried to kill a bird. My mother was angry and said I should not do that because same fate will sooner or later come to me. When I got separated from my family, I thought immediately that I must have done something bad in the past life to deserve it. That was what I had in mind. I accepted it as my fate and tried to correct it by being a good kid and doing what was asked of me. That helped a lot because that was what the Khmer Rouge wanted. As for the prediction, I heard it later when I was in the refugee camps. It helped a lot of people to make sense of that happened to them. It probably helped me also although I never thought of it that way. When people talked about this their heads would nod, you know. It's like that were saying...Oh, that's why. Now I know. It can only help.

Apsara said:

I am a Buddhist and an optimistic person. Sometimes people asked how I do it, you know, smiling when I don't feel that happy inside. I don't know

how to answer that. I think unhappiness can only be improved by happy feeling. For sure war had a negative effect on me. I suffered, oh yes, I did. But it was over now. What happened was meant to happen. No one could have stopped it. Sometimes you have to face bad things in life. It's fate, you know. It's all about destiny. No victim. I don't think of myself as a war victim although American people often use this word when they talk about us Cambodians. I never heard of the prediction when I was a kid. I heard it when I came to America from some elderly Cambodians. It's interesting. I don't know if it was made up or real, but it does help. Some people need that to confirm the reason for their suffering.

Panya said:

Cambodians are different from Americans when it comes to dealing with bad situation. The Americans use the term "victim" to describe someone who gets affected by bad luck or bad situation. For the Cambodians, bad luck happens, you know. War happened and we had to deal with it. When it is over we have to move on and be optimistic about the future, you know. There is no time for self-pity because there is much to do in life. People who think of themselves as "victims" will continue to suffer until they get out of that mode. Cambodians don't see themselves as the "victims" of Pol Pot because they believe this whole thing was meant to happen. Supposedly, it was predicted by some sage, you know. So they accepted it and did not feel victimized.

Defiance - Playing a Poor Hand Well

When misfortune struck the persons had two choices: accept the victim role or reject it. The participants of this study chose the latter. They were young but determined to live. In order to cope effectively with a traumatic event it is necessary for the person to first try to understand why he/she is caught in that situation. Why does this happen to me? Did I do something wrong to deserve this? How can I best deal with this situation? By asking these or similar questions the person will be able to put the negative event or events into perspective, and be able to appropriately devise a suitable plan to counter it.

Cultural differences definitely affect the way people view or define a negative life event. In the Cambodian context, no one was prepared for the magnitude of the catastrophe generated by the Khmer Rouge regime but the political instability and widespread poverty were present in the country long before 1975 when the Khmer Rouge took over the corrupt government led by Lon Nol. The participants who grew up in the Battambang province, where the Khmer Rouge had their bases, were exposed to some violence or disturbing events such as the market bombing and burning of government buildings. Nisit, for example, lost his beloved aunt to the market bombing. Those who grew up in the city also remembered hearing guns firing or bombs exploding from afar. While the economic hardships were not felt by the participants they, to some extent, became desensitized and ultimately accepted the conditions as part of their daily lives. They were adequately “prepared for the worst” by their parents, who reared them to be “tough,” adaptable, and hopeful. When the worst finally came they were “shocked” but not helpless. Briefly they allowed themselves to grieve but they knew what they had to do to survive. Like chameleons, they blended into the scene and used whatever resources they had to manipulate the environment to their advantage.

The participants talked easily about their camp experiences, got very animated at times, and looked visibly proud when they talked about how they used their wit and resourcefulness to outwit the camp leaders and some “bullies” who tried to take advantage of them. They mentioned the “special power” that they felt they had within themselves, and how they used that to alter certain unfavorable circumstances. This “power” could mean their charisma that drew sympathy to them from others.

Nisit said:

I don't want to make it sound like it was easy to live in the war zone but I managed pretty well. The camp leaders really liked me and appointed me to lead a work group of 20 kids and I got certain privileges. Under the Khmer Rouge regime kids were considered important and they were treated better than adults. If the soldiers liked you they would give you a break. I got a lot of breaks because I knew how to make them like me. They gave me responsibility and the more I got it the more I felt confident. The kids in my group listened to me and followed me without any questions. Even older people listened to me also. It's like I had some power and I can take control over certain things. When people read about what happened in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge regime they always think of the killing and beating, you know, but it is important to understand that people experienced this period of time differently. Some had it very hard but some were able to avoid that. Maybe luck has a lot to do with it but for me it's about knowing how to adapt to the situation. I think I adapted very well and that's why I was able to survive.

Apsara said:

I don't know exactly how I managed it but I did survive. I guess I was a pretty strong kid. Under the Khmer Rouge regime, you have to be very careful because if the wrong thing is said or done you can easily be killed. You have to use all your good senses to observe and listen to what people have to say so you know what to do or to avoid. I never got into trouble because I always listened to what people had to say and I knew my way around the camp very well. And I sometimes took charge. Like one time I missed my parents so much that I sneaked out to see them at their worksite. I wasn't afraid at all because I knew how to get there because when we went out to work I looked around and I drew up a map in my mind. So I went and felt good to be able to do that, you know. It gave me confidence in my ability. It's good to know that if I wanted to see my parents I could do it without getting caught. My instinct is pretty good. Sometimes I can sense that a bad thing was gonna happen to be and I avoided doing what I was supposed to do, you know. I guess because I was optimistic and knew how to be at the right place at the right time helped me to survive. It was hard to live there but I never thought about death, you know. I was always optimistic.

Panya said:

After I knew that my parents died I blocked off everything and focused on staying alive. I convinced the camp leaders to let me teach some people how to read and write. They allowed me so I had an easier time while living in the camp compared to other kids my age who had to go out

working hard everyday. It was strange that a kid like me can persuade adults to let me do what I wanted. People were surprised to see that even the robbers let me sit and have meal with them. This happened when I fled to the Thai border and had to live in the jungle for a while during the journey. At that time there were a lot of robbers roaming around the jungle and people were afraid of them. I had no problem at all with them. They were nice to me. I was very confident and I felt that I had some control over the situation.

Pran said:

As a kid, I just went with the flow. I was not afraid of the Khmer Rouge at all, you know. They were just ordinary people, and some were as young as me. I was nice to them and always showed respect to the older soldiers so I never had any problem. I worked hard because I didn't mind it. The camp where I lived was similar to where I grew up so I knew the geography very well. It was hard but kids are kids, you know. We tried to have some fun while working as well. Overall, I was OK during that time. Some people had a hard time because they were sick or sometimes they were beaten. For me, I just blended in and I don't think the soldiers even noticed me. It was good to be invisible because it kept you out of trouble.

Malee said:

Because I grew up in the capital all the things in the camp were unfamiliar to me. The Khmer Rouge had plans for city people and if they did something slightly wrong it could mean death or brutal punishment. I knew I had to learn quickly and acted like a peasant. I rubbed my hands on the ground to make them rough and tried to get rid of some of the words that I normally used so not to give my identity as a city kid away. I think I did a very good job because the soldiers did not bother me. Quickly I became part of the whole scene. In that situation it did not matter who you were or how much money you had. Everyone had an equal chance to be killed or died from hunger or diseases. It was very clear to me that I had to be creative. I had to be flexible and use every ounce of my energy and wit to my advantage.

Davi said:

I was very determined to stay alive. Not sure how I got such determination but I had it. My parents were dead but I knew I wanted to stay alive and I knew I could make it. Yah...you can say I was a stubborn little kid. But you know, you have to have that kind of mentality or you won't make it. You have to believe in yourself and hope keep alive. And of course hope would not take you too far. You have to be active and engaging. This I mean, you have to understand the situation you are in and adapt yourself

well to it. I tell you, there is no one single moment that I felt I could let my hair now. I had to be alert and I had to think all the time about my next move. It may sound tiring to you, but strangely sometimes you got excited. I got excited when I outwitted someone who tried to bully me. Or I got witted when I successfully persuaded the camp leaders to give me certain privileges.

Seeing Crisis as Opportunity – Survivor Pride - Let Bygones be Bygones

When the traumatic event is over, the most difficult part for most survivors is to try to recover from it. In some ways, it is like waking up from a nightmare, except the psychological, mental, and physical pains are real and the feelings will linger on until they are appropriately dealt with. Some people remain helpless and feel “victimized, long after the crisis is over, some quickly bounce back and transform the traumatic experience into strength. Transformation and self-renewal through extreme experience are not uncommon among trauma survivors, but it takes strong will and commitment to life and wellness to do it successfully. In survival literature, Des Pres (1976), who studied the Holocaust survivors, concluded that the transformation process depends a lot on two major components: connection with other survivors to share the common experiences, and a “deep” encounter with psychotherapy. In most cases, the survivors who embarked on the transformation journey reported

...a deeply meaningful, intense, and almost mystical or religious rebirth and change experience. Their whole feeling about themselves changes as they release the feeling of pain, self-pity, anger, or helplessness. They feel qualitatively different, without denying or forgetting the wound they have experienced. Their determination to overcome the adversity becomes the most important, if not the only, reason for being.” (Jaffe, 1985, p. 107)

The participants in this study used the metaphor of “rebirthing” to describe their survival. They are proud to have “made it” while millions of their fellow countrymen

did not. But they feel no survivor guilt. For them, survival was their destiny. They were given a “second chance” to live. In Buddhist religion, guilt is a less important concept. What is important is to fulfill the existential identity set at this life so one can move higher in the next life. Seeing their survival as a merit is definitely helpful in the healing process (Sheehy, 1986). They were young when they arrived in the United States and there was a lot catching up that they had to do after so many lost years. But they wasted little time on self-pity. The past will always be part of their lives, but it’s the future that they care most about. They let bygones be bygones. No guilt and no desire for revenge. They have a “second chance” to live and they have to make the most of it. For them, doing well in life and living well is their best revenge to the Khmer Rouge.

Malee said:

It was my destiny to survive and to have another chance to build a new life here in United States. It was sad that my parents did not make it, but I know they wanted me to do well here and to be happy. I don’t know what my life would be like had there been no war. I don’t regret that I lived through it. I am a better person today because I had gone through so much. It made me appreciate life more.

Khon said:

I was a farm boy and I would not have had an opportunity to go to college or even high school had there been no war. So it was not that bad for me to suffer a few years and then got this opportunity to make a better life. I am happy. I mean now I am but before this I had a tough life. I don’t look back at all. This is where I am now. My future is here. I am young and I have to take care of my parents. I have no excuse, you know. I have to try to do my best.

Panya said:

For me, this is my dream. I have always wanted to come to America to study. I have no regrets whatsoever. I have realized my dreams here and I am very proud and happy. I came here with nothing and now I have a

good job and good family. It did not happen easily but this is life, you know. Sometimes you have to suffer before you gain. I am very proud of myself, for what I have done. I have no bitterness. My past is my past. I only look forward.

Rah said:

Yes, war gave me an opportunity to come to America and it's definitely a good thing for a young person like me. But of course, I would rather come via a different route. It would have been so great if my parents and siblings were also here. I am an orphan, you know. This is hard for me. I had my foster parents but it's not the same. Anyway, I am not complaining. I am grateful really. I feel good about myself. Things are going well for me so far. I am proud of that. Sometimes people asked me if I am still angry at the Khmer Rouge. My answer to that question has always been no. I was not and am not angry at anything. Revenge is not an answer and not a Buddhist way. We have to let bygones be bygones.

Apsara said:

In general, I am better off because of war. I got to come here which is incredible. I don't like war, but it happened, you know, and there was nothing I could do about it. It is life. Sometimes you suffer. A lot, but then you have to think about what to do afterward. I chose to work on my future and forget about the past. Forget, I mean I don't let it bother me or prevent me from achieving my goals. It could be much worse. Yeah. It could be much worse.

Malee said:

When the war was over part of me died and new parts grew. It was like being born again because there were so many things I had to relearn. I am very grateful for having survived and for being sponsored to come to America. It was a gift really. When I learned the news of coming here I was happy and I was determined not to let myself or anyone down. I wanted to show that I deserved a second chance to live.

Safe Haven - Supportive Recovery Environment

Social support systems have been shown to be important in determining both vulnerability to stressors and subsequent resilience. Victimization often leads the survivors to feel "alienated or increasingly attuned to social ties and social

responsibility. Society and significant others play a role in determining in which of these directions the survivor will move” (Lyon, 1991, p.100). If social support is inadequate following the trauma, the risk of pathological adjustment is likely to increase. The responses of parents and teachers may actually account for “more of the variance in children’s adjustment than is accounted for by characteristics of the traumatic event itself.” (Lyon, 1991:101)

Eight out of ten participants initially lived in Franklin and Hampshire Counties. This area had five colleges and vast arrays of high quality social services for refugees at the time of their arrivals. Most of the local residents are educated and were interested in helping the refugees. Schools in both Amherst and Northampton created special programs to specifically help the Cambodians. The participants talked appreciatively of the generous support that they received from the teachers, sponsors, foster parents, therapists, and friends who patiently and tirelessly supported and guided them. They admitted that they would not have turned out so well had they not have such supports from all fronts. School played a multifaceted role in aiding accommodation to a new country, a new language, and new cultural demands. All of the participants had at least one teacher who mentored and inspired them.

Somalee said:

My family got a lot of help from our sponsors. They spent a lot of time with us to make sure that we know how to use the appliances in the house. When we needed to get grocery they took us to the supermarket and explained to us how choose the products and so on. I was enrolled in school the first week that we arrived. The teachers were so good and they always looked happy which I liked a lot. My ESL teachers were very nice. I had two. I was very close to Mrs. Brown. She sometimes took me to her house and explained to me about the American culture. Sometimes she brought me some cookies that she made. Her class was always fun. I think we are so lucky to be in Amherst. Most of the kids my age who came to

Amherst or Northampton all graduated and went on to college. It was not the same for the kids that lived in Lowell. Some of them went to college but most ended up working after high school. I think since the atmosphere in Amherst and Northampton is very academic the kids naturally aimed for college. Also the teachers were supportive of us to continue our education so most of the kids that came here the same time I did ended up doing pretty well.

Rah said:

When I was living in a refugee camp in Thailand I met a social worker from Northampton. He was the one who found me my foster parents who lived in Amherst at the time. I am really glad that I came to this town. I like it because it is a peaceful place and it has good schools. I had some really nice teachers who gave me so much help. It was not easy to start everything new here since I had very little schooling before I came here and I had to be in Junior High right the way. For a while I was very confused but my family helped me a lot but sometimes we had communication problem because of the language. So from time to time I got depressed and sad. Luckily, my friends helped out a lot. I have a lot of Cambodian friends. Also there was a therapist who worked with Cambodian children. She also helped me out quite a lot. It took time to adjust but I was lucky to be in place that is safe.

Apsara said:

My family went to Long Beach, California. We went there because of an uncle who sponsored us. Long Beach is a different kind of community, working class community, you know. Kids do not go to college after high school and they tend to get married and have kids early. Services were adequate but not as good as the services in Massachusetts. I had a difficult start there and did not get a high school diploma. I dropped out and later got my GED. After GED I attended a community college for a while before I decided to move to Lowell. Some friend told me about Boston and Lowell, you know, about the services available here and I thought I would have a better chance to get a college education. It was a good decision to come here. Here I felt valued and understood. I was able to achieve my goals because I had the right kind of environment.

Panya said:

I am lucky to have a great foster parent who understands me as much as my parents did. Northampton is a great town for me. It is not too big and it has good schools. People are friendly and helpful here. I think I made a quick adjustment not only because my foster parent helped me out a lot, but the environment was very good also. The teachers that I had were all

really good. They liked me a lot because I was a serious student and did well in school. My friends were very good also. They made me feel at home right way and included me in their activities. So my life here has been great but I could have not done it without my foster parent, friends, and teachers who were so kind and generous to me.

Undoubtedly, the balance between the participants' needs at the time and the support available for them led to a quick recovery from early trauma. But it must be emphasized that, while social support is valuable to the recovery process, only the right one will make a difference. In other words, it is not entirely correct to assume that all supports are positive. Some may constitute added stressors because they place high or conflicting demands on the individuals. Case in point, Nisit suffered from his foster father's high demands on him. He was expected to acculturate quickly and to excel in school. The expectations came too much soon. Nisit was not ready to handle such pressure. He felt resentful and lost his confidence. It was not until many years later that he felt good about himself again. The catalyst was a fellow classmate from Africa whom he met at the University of Massachusetts. The sincere comments made in regards to Nisit's war experiences, "if you survived that madness you are not ordinary," validated his strength and self worth. For Nisit, that moment was the major turning point. "It was not the first time I heard it, but somehow something happened." The support came from the right person, at the right time, and it made all the difference. On the other hand, a mismatched support, albeit unintentional, can generate negative relationships between the helpers and helpless. Thus, the type of support and source must be well matched. Emotional support is most valuable when it comes from family and friends. Some information may be considered intrusive if offered by family members or close friends but is welcomed from professional sources such as

psychologists, counselors, or teachers. Choosing the right time to offer the right support is also critical. Empathic understanding is apt to be the most advantageous in the early stages of readjustment, while concrete assistance maybe offered at a later date. Generally, understanding relationships that facilitate the expression of thoughts and feelings regarding the traumatic event will have more positive effect than those that reinforce denial or numbing by minimizing or invalidating the survivor's experience (Lyon, 1991).

In the early stage of the readjustment, all but Apsara, who lived in Long Beach, California, received counseling. Talking about their experiences in a safe environment with professionals who understood the context and cared about their future development made the recovery easier. Despite their initial reluctance to open themselves up to "strangers," they benefited from those therapeutic sessions.

Nisit said:

When we got here all of the unaccompanied kids had to be in therapy. It was something that we all had to attend. There was a counselor who talked to us and asked us to draw pictures. I didn't really understand why at the beginning. We all drew pictures of the scenes that we remembered. Later we talked about the pictures alone with her. She was interested in every single detail about the pictures that I drew. Sometimes I did not like her questions, but now I knew why she asked those questions. She wanted us to connect the past and present. I did not mind going to see her because sometimes I could tell her things that I could not tell others. I had a lot of issues with my foster father so it was good to talk to her about that with someone.

Davi said:

My mother believes in therapy. She wanted me to talk about my feelings whenever I wanted. I did a lot talking about myself and my war experiences. I joined the Children of War group and I saw a few therapists. It was kind going with the flow, you know. I don't know if I really needed it but it was good to be listened to. The attention was good. It made me feel good. People who heard my story always felt I was

special, you know. They made me feel special. Every kid likes to feel that way. For me, it was important to talk about what I had gone through because there were doubts and questions in my mind. Sometimes there were strong feelings that came up and overwhelmed me. I did not know how to deal with those feelings so help was good. It was necessary.

Khon said:

I did not think counseling was necessary. That was probably because I came here with my family. But I know the unaccompanied kids did not have what I had. They suffered more than I did in many ways. They need someone to listen to them. So I guess the counselors sometimes acted like their parents. I saw some counselors at school and they were always nice. In my opinion, it is always helpful to talk to nice people.

Apsara said:

I did not have any counseling when I lived in Long Beach. I am sure I could have it if I wanted but I did not know. No one told me about it. When I felt bad I just kept everything inside and never let anyone know about how I felt. I never cried. In fact, I couldn't even if I wanted to. When my father died I shed no tears. I couldn't. That was my problem. Then I came to Lowell and studied. During this time I was so busy and I ignored my feelings completely. I had more time to think when I finished my study. This is when the depression set in. I am not sure how it happened but I became very unhappy for no apparent reason. I got married and loved my husband. But things did not go well between us. So we decided to separate and I went to see a therapist. This is when I learned about the Post-Traumatic Stress Disorders. Some of the symptoms I had were caused by my past experience. Like the crying thing. During the Khmer Rouge time children could not cry. They would be punished if they showed feelings or weakness. My therapist told me that I was probably too afraid and I had to numb my feelings all the time. So my therapist talked to me and made me understand why I acted the way I did. It was so helpful. I am much better now and I cry all the time (laughed) even when I am happy. I think talking is important but you have to talk to the right person.

Conclusion

All our lives long we are engaged in the process of accommodating ourselves to our surroundings; living is nothing else than this process of accommodation. When we fail a little, we are stupid. When we flagrantly fail, we are mad. A life

will be successful or not, according as the power of accommodation is equal to or unequal to the strain of fusing and adjusting internal and external chances. Vaillant, 1977, *Adaptation to Life*

Resilience is a result of successful adaptation. When a person encounters adversity he/she has to quickly assemble both internal and external resources to help fend off the stressors. Three groups of protective factors emerged from this study. The first one was found within the family. As in other studies, family cohesion and positive relationships with the caregivers played important roles in the development of the participants' positive sense of self and optimistic worldviews. Cambodian child-rearing practices that emphasize independence and self-reliance early in life fostered their sense of mastery and internal locus of control. The traditional Cambodian and Buddhist values of passive acceptance provided a useful tool of coping with traumas during the war and the aftermath of it. When faced with a challenge that was beyond their control, denial or avoidance of thinking about the problems was the most common technique that they used for coping. This mechanism remains their preferred choice of coping when dealing with problems that can not get solved easily. Since the participants had suffered a lot in the past, they became more careful about protecting their mental and physical well being. Maintaining a balanced life is one of their most important priorities.

The second protective factor resides within the participants themselves. They possess what Gail Sheehy (1986) called "victorious personality." Individuals with victorious personality are charismatic, resourceful, and hopeful. They are engaging to other people, adult and peer alike, have good communication and problem solving skills, and have faith that their own actions can make a positive difference in their lives.

Victorious people also tend to have an easy temperament that enables them to face life stress without succumbing to pathology.

The third protective factor is embedded in the recovery environment. The positive transformation could not have happened had the participants not had a positive recovery environment presented to them upon their arrival in the United States. Good schools and understanding teachers, who offered them guidance, comfort, and inspiration made all the difference in their lives. They had a lot to learn and many gaps to fill, and they were able to manage all the complications that were associated with the acculturation process and realize their goals only because they had help from so many capable hands within their community.

For the participants in this study, triumphing over the odds is not magical. Luck, as well the ability to play a poor hand well, contributed to their achievements. Their strong will do well in life also speaks volumes, but they could not have done it alone. They maybe have been born “tough” but if they were not the circumstances made them become hardy. They were born at the dawn of the civil war and grew up quickly, as did most of their cohorts during that time because they had to. Thrown into chaos, they blended in and learned how to manipulate the tides. They were imaginative, inventive, and resourceful. Each time they managed to beat the odds, they felt luckier and their confidence grew, to the point that they came to believe that were truly “special,” protected, and no harm could come to them. This positive feeling carried them long way, from the battlefield to the idyllic settings of New England, where they made a new beginning. It was difficult but they were young enough to begin again. There was no survival guilt felt in any of them. Instead, they felt proud, proud and ready to take

advantage of the “second chance.” Certainly, the readjustment periods were difficult, but they were good at coping. When they could not handle themselves, they knew to whom to reach out. When things got too complicated, they sometimes numbed the feelings and focused their thoughts on other things. They were always good at delaying the gratification. For them, the glass is always half full rather than half empty. They have gone through so much and lost so much in life. The former suffering has made them stronger, more understanding of others, and more appreciative of what life has to offer in general. Hard life is supposed to breed cynicism or pessimism, but in this population the opposite exists. There are no bad feelings, no self-pity, and, most importantly, no excuse for not trying to do the best that they can do. They knew what it cost them to come to where they are, so they are determined to make themselves useful to others, especially to those who had suffered similar trauma. One of the reasons that motivated them to participate in this study was the hope to spread the positive message. They want war survivors to know that help is available, and there is always hope. Optimism and fierce determination to overcome can make all the difference.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Sir Claude: If you haven't the strength to impose your own terms upon life, you must accept the terms it offers you.

T.S. Eliot, 1954, *The Confidential Clerk*.

Resilience has been defined in many different ways in the literature. In this study, resiliency refers to successful adaptation after experiencing stressful life events. The findings that emerged from the ten life histories of the Cambodian war child survivors reinforces the earlier claim about human's incredible strength to face adversity. This impressive quality definitely transcends across all cultures. Ordinary people, regardless of their nationalities, genders, or religious beliefs, have a chance to beat the odds. Not everyone adjusts well after being affected by severe personal tragedy, of course, but the majority of the people do manage to overcome the setbacks, with or without much help, and achieve a quality of life or level of happiness that sometimes exceeds the one they had before. Rising above the odds is about being defiant. It is about believing and giving life a fighting chance.

Sometimes resiliency is referred to as a trait. This is based on the belief that some people are naturally resilient. They were supposedly born that way. But in most cases, resilience is a combination of nature and nurture. Like ability, it can be cultivated and improved. Throughout the course of life, people will move up and down the continuum on the resilience scale. Their ability to sustain difficult life circumstances can be affected by several factors. Age, gender, culture, health, family, work, and relationship with others can strengthen or weaken their ability to face adversity.

The positive outcomes achieved by the Cambodian child survivors in this study were mediated by three major factors. The first protective factor resides within their personal characteristics; i.e., good health, optimism, and good social skills. The second protective factor is rooted in their culture and families, where they learned traditional values and formulated their Buddhist-based belief systems. The third factor is within the realm of social support. The educational programs that were offered in the refugee camps in Thailand, where they temporarily lived, enabled them to learn how to read and write in their own language and, via performing art programs, to reestablish some connection with their cultural heritage it was very important for them as young refugees to develop a good sense of their own identity before being resettled abroad. In the United States, schools played the most crucial role in helping them acculturate and chart their career goals.

This study sought to answer four questions. The first one concerned the mechanisms that the participants used to cope with adversity as a child and as an adult after the war ended. The second question asked how their personal faith, values, and belief contribute to their ability to mediate the trauma that they experienced during the war and afterward. The third question investigates the role of the Buddhist religion in helping the participants deal with the hardships. The fourth question sought to understand how the participants made sense of their war experiences and how they used what they learned from the past to solve problems in their current lives.

The most notable coping mechanism the participants used as children was dissociation/denial. This is probably because their coping skills had not yet matured. Trapped in the Khmer Rouge camps without any parental protection they had no choice

but to comply with the rules and regulations imposed by the regime. At the time they were between 6 and 12 years old, a developmental stage known as latency. According to Erik Erikson's psychosocial development theory, children in latency are industrious, eager to please authority figures, and desire to be thought of as good. To cope with the situation, they offered no resistance, completely numbed themselves, and willingly plunged into new routines dictated by the Khmer Rouge soldiers. Their most important goal was to protect their own lives. While they loved and respected their parents very much, they suppressed their longings for them because such feelings would weaken them. Instead, they used the few resources that they had to their advantage. Resourcefulness has always been their second nature. This attribute has a lot to do with the way they were raised. Unlike Achilles' mother's, Thetis, who is overly protective of her beloved son and tried to make him invulnerable by dipping him into the river Styx, the participants were raised to be "tough" and were given responsibility and autonomy to freely explore their surroundings and learned how to fend for themselves at an early age. Growing up that way, they learned to rely on themselves and developed a knack for dealing with problems.

As adults, after being tested again and again, their coping skills became more refined. This is not to say that they did not falter when dealing with adverse circumstances, but their chances of overcoming the odds were pretty good taking into consideration their mental toughness, resourcefulness, and a strong sense of mastery resulting from past successful coping experiences. One of their best features in coping was the ability to defer or defend against some overwhelming anxiety or depression. This required compartmentalizing the pain and deferring the experience of

overwhelming emotion until a time when it was safe to experience it. Suppression of feeling is something they all seem to do very well and it is important to note that this type of coping is largely influenced by their culture. While some cultures encourage articulating the pain and making it explicit, the Cambodian culture emphasizes the importance of suppressing distressing emotions.

The ability to use suppression or even denial when necessary for maintaining psychic sanity and ensuring survival is essential for anyone as long as it is not so excessive as to impair one's ability to assess danger and/or possibilities of getting out of it. Usually, the participants used this type of coping when the circumstances were beyond their control. Otherwise, most problems were dealt with by using the flexible array of defenses that they had developed over time.

Another notable coping mechanism was the ability to laugh even in the most trying circumstances. There were numerous passages in their narratives that indicated the usage of humor as a means to resolve their problems. This aspect of coping may well be culture specific because Cambodian people, as Kane pointed out during the interview, have a penchant for using humor to deal with everything from embarrassment to major problems. But ultimately, it's the ability to accurately appraise the situation and garner or create resources – both concrete material resources and emotional resources to help them deal with difficult situation when needed that enable them to fare better than their peers who suffered comparable trauma but did not do as well as they did.

As for their personal faith, values, and beliefs, the participants were profoundly influenced by the society in which they were raised. Cambodians consider themselves

to be resilient. Despite the perpetual upheavals that Cambodia as a country has had, its people, by and large, are able to remain optimistic and hopeful. As Buddhists, they perceive suffering as part of life and understand that it is inevitable that this is something one has to experience throughout one's lifetime. Seeing the world this way, makes coping with adversity somewhat easier. This worldview reflects the confidence that the outcomes of situations will be positive. In Buddhism, suffering leads to higher awareness, implying that there is something to gain from experiencing it. This point of view explains why most survivors of the Pol Pot regime show no bitterness against the perpetrators. While it was difficult to endure the pain inflicted on them by war and numerous life transitions, the participants in this study agreed that the end result of their plights rendered them stronger and gave them the opportunity to live a better life. Educational opportunity in America is a huge benefit, something they could only dream of having had there been no war. The combination of the survivor's pride, the gratitude for a chance to pursue education in a country of their dreams, and strong family values that emphasize the importance of education produced the perfect ingredients for healing and success.

There is no easy road to recovery after extreme trauma no matter how strong a person is. Just as it takes a village to raise a child, recovery from traumatic experiences will need all the support a person can get. For the Cambodian survivors in this study, cultural traditions, religious rituals and ceremonies, and community support services undoubtedly provided them a wide variety of protective functions in various stages of their plights. As stated in the review of the literature on war trauma, the age, nature of the threat, and duration of the trauma significantly affect the recovery process. The

participants, because of their age when the trauma occurred, were able to sustain it perhaps better than older people, despite the early losses thought to be necessary for healthy development. Furthermore, it is important to note that since trauma created by war is collective trauma it is somewhat easier to deal with the pain than individual trauma when one may feel that he or she is the only “unlucky” one. The notion that “I am not alone” is helpful when trying to recover from trauma.

Humans’ behaviors are positively affected by their cultures. Their reactions to trauma will therefore be influenced by what they have learned while growing up. Each culture has its own unique way of defining the meaning of pain caused by traumatic experiences. When it comes to finding the meaning of pain, Cambodian people rely on at least two sources: Buddhism and animism. Buddhism can help explain the transcendental questions such as one’s general existence in this life and next, and Animism, a belief that magical spirits cause misfortune, can explain the immediate and incidental pain. As for the pain caused by the Pol Pot regime, many Cambodians turned to the ancient prophecies. These prophecies, translations of Pali scriptures, are predictions of supernatural signs of doom, including the ruin of Buddhism (Mortland, 1994). Apparently, what was said in the ancient prediction happened exactly. The Khmer Rouge represents the worthless and drunkards that rose to power that were mentioned. The killings and the empty houses fits into the mass evacuation and the indiscriminate killings that happened when the country fell under the control of the mad regime (p. 81-83). There are other explanations that the Cambodians use to explain the dark years under the Khmer Rouge. One deals with the notion of the Khmer Rouge as uncivilized, barbaric, and “not fully human,” because the Khmer Rouge soldiers ate

human lives. Those who have difficulty understanding the killings committed by fellow Cambodians went on to hypothesize that Pol Pot was not Khmer but Chinese. This interpretation provides some comfort because the enemy does not have the same origin as they do. For most Cambodians, the thought of Khmers killing their own kind is difficult to accept.

Finding meaning for one's painful experiences is a necessary step toward healing. Traumatic events are supposed to shatter a person's assumption of the world being a safe place. When that happens, it is important for the person to recreate an orderly universe to believe in. He/she needs to understand what has happened and to reestablish a sense that he/she now lives in a structured or ordered world again. Naturally, the Cambodians, after what they had gone through, have a heightened desire for interpretation, for finding a comprehensible meaning for their experiences. So it does not matter what version of interpretation they subscribe to. The most important thing is that they must articulate the sources that caused them the pain before they can move forward with their lives. All of the participants in this study are aware of the ancient prophecies but, as modern people who have studied in the United States and fully acculturated their interpretations of the country's downfall are more historically based. They do not discount the predictions in the ancient prophecies but believe the real culprits of their country's downfall are the lack of sincere and competent leaders, corruption, ignorance, and foreign interference.

The journey from the killing fields of Cambodia to New England was stressful but, like a diamond which is transformed from a chunk of coal under pressure of the extreme heat, the participants emerged strengthened. Like Hercules, who grew stronger

after each encounter, they became more resilient, more capable, and more mature after years of living with extreme hardships. War toughened them and they learned valuable lessons and skills during those traumatic years, all of which they use often to help solve the problems in their current lives. Their general attitude is “I have been through the worst, and there is nothing worse (than war) that could happen to me.” Having gone close to the edge and nearly lost their lives, they developed a deep appreciation for life and empathy for others. They have come to terms with their losses and bereavement and feel that they have a lot to contribute to the well-being of others.

Throughout the course of this study, friends often asked if I had found anything unusual emerging from the data that I collected. I do not believe that I discovered anything “unusual” because profiles of resilient people are remarkably similar despite their different experiences. However, one finding that emerged from this study that was not mentioned much in other resilience studies is the significant role that culture and religion played as mitigating factors. The influence of the Buddhist religion on the participants in this study was and is monumental. It guides their behaviors as well as provides comfort and support in both good and bad times. Hard lives or tough going often breed bitterness and cynicism, but instead of that altruism emerged among these participants. By following the Buddhist precepts that emphasize impermanence they become less egocentric and are able to give more of themselves to others.

Applications of the Findings

Over the past 20 years the study of resilience has significantly expanded. There are a number of reasons for this phenomenon. First, as the complexity of our society

increases, the number of people, especially youth, facing adversity and the number of adversities they face is increasing. Second, there has been a shift in approach to treatment among practitioners from the problem-based approach to a resilience-based approach.

After decades of preoccupation with pathology, researchers/practitioners have begun to move toward finding out what gives people the power to persist and survive in the face of adversity. As evidence from numerous resilience studies began to reveal that there are significant numbers of children and adults who managed to rise above adversity, attitudes about survivors and treatment have gradually changed, especially as the psychodynamic approach to the treatment of post traumatic stress disorder was seen to have little utility. The therapists began to adopt a strength perspective/resilience-based as their framework (Henderson & Milstein, 1996).

In recent years, the resilience-based approach to treatment/intervention has become popular among practitioners who believe that people possess the capacity for self-healing. Instead of getting too caught up with trying to find a solution, the practitioners/therapists focus instead on empowering the persons affected by affirming their stories and abilities to regain their strengths. It is believed that when given positive support, most people have the power to transform their own lives so the survivors should be approached as individuals who have shown the capacity for self-healing.

Within the educational realm the attitudes toward helping children who experienced difficulty have also gradually changed, as counselors, administrators, and teachers began to appreciate and see the benefits of the wellness/resilience-based model that focuses on the emergence of competence, empowerment, and self-efficacy. The

main assumption behind this model is that adversity does not automatically lead to dysfunction but can result in a number of outcomes for the individual experiencing it. Everyone has a capacity for resiliency. The characteristics of resiliency can be discovered in almost everyone if they are examined for signs of resiliency with the same interest and enthusiasm used in looking for deficits. With an adequate supporting environment, strength can emerge from adversity.

Schools have repeatedly been identified in various resilience studies as one of the most important protective factors that helped mediate the affects of traumatic experiences on children. Particularly in war zones, where family structures are weakened, school can help establish some order and sanity in the lives of the children traumatized by violence. In the refugee camps and resettlement countries, schools are likely to continue to provide the children the necessary supports to recuperate and reestablish normalcy in their lives.

War trauma shattered the children's lives and their assumptions about the world being a safe place. A long period of deprivation often causes feelings of depression and helplessness. Resilience-based intervention should first try to restore the children's morale and then strengthen their coping abilities. Careful exercises in art, drama, games, and story-telling of the terrible events they have experienced and of the meaning of those events to them could have a considerable impact on their ability to cope. Such programs could be modified to fit different cultural settings and different cultural expectations around emotional expression and suppression.

In Cambodian refugee camps on the Thai border, there were programs that emphasized the importance of rebuilding the morale of the monks and some traditional

healers within Cambodian society. These programs, at the time, were run by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) combined traditional healing methods with Western methods. The services were well received by the Cambodians in the camps, and proved to be successful, because the refugees felt their traditional culture was respected and valued. In traditional Cambodian culture, monks are responsible for providing education so they, too, were incorporated into the educational programs development at the time. Children learned how to read and write in Khmer from the regular trained teachers while monks took charge of introducing the core teaching of Buddhist religion, as well as performing healing rituals. It was important for the children to learn about traditional healing methods again after being deprived of the opportunity during the war. Children needed to hear the traditional tales, to rediscover their heroes/heroines that may have been destroyed while experiencing trauma, and to reestablish a connection with something older and larger than themselves and their parents. These elements are an essential part of their personalities.

The success of these programs in Cambodian refugee camps in Thailand stems largely from the practitioners' sound understanding of the Cambodian culture. Respect for the refugees' cultural heritage and belief in their ability to bounce back from trauma are essential for the development of resilience-based programs. First and foremost, refugees afflicted by the trauma of war must never be given the impression that they are unusual, crazy, or insane because they experienced psychological distress. Cambodians, in general, believe mental health problems are caused by bad spirits rather than stress. The traditional healers are the persons who could help get rid of the bad spirits or curses. So it would have been a different story had the traditional medicine not been

incorporated into the treatment of the refugees' mental health in the camps, because going to see "Western doctors" for their mental problems would mean they are "crazy" and because of stigma attached to this would prevent the refugees from seeking treatment when needed.

In the resettlement phase, the same principles should be applied when helping the refugees deal with their traumatic past. One of the complaints I heard from the participants in this study was that too much emphasis was put on their emotional health. It was assumed that traumatic experiences they had prior to coming automatically qualified them for post traumatic stress counseling. They welcomed the counseling sessions but admitted feeling uncomfortable at being singled out, and with too much probing into their psyche. They wanted to feel "normal" and to be left alone. As mentioned earlier, Cambodians normally deal with their pain in private. If they need to talk to someone about their problems, that someone would first be one of the family members, close friends, monks, or Kru Khmer (traditional healer). This is not to suggest that counseling should not be offered, but it is important for the practitioners to be cognizant of the cultural differences in view of this. Resilience-based program planning requires the practitioners to first carefully assess the traumatized children's strengths and supports in their existing networks. It is important to recognize that children are in the best position to identify their most salient needs. The commitment to change can be greatest when the children's needs are self-determined. Capacity building must begin with an understanding and appreciation for strengths, rather than treating problems or trying to reduce deficiencies. Approaches should strive to promote the children's resourcefulness and resiliency.

Fostering Resilience in Schools

Schools are critical environments for children to develop the capacity to bounce back from adversity, adapt to pressure, and develop the social and academic competencies that are necessary for them to do well in life. The major findings that emerged from this study show how schools and communities can help mediate the affects of war trauma and foster resilience among traumatized children. The right kind of interventions can make all the difference in the children's lives (Wang & Gordon, 1994).

The best place to begin when fostering resiliency is within the individual children. We know the main characteristics of resilient people include good social skills, strong internal locus of control, self-motivation, flexibility, resourcefulness, positive view of personal future, and feelings of self-worth and self-confidence. Thus, interventions should aim to foster these positive attributes among the children affected. Traumatized children depend a great deal on adults who understand them and their needs. Teachers spend a great deal of time with children at school. Understanding and insightful teachers can have a great impact on the child's future development.

Schools that foster resilience have unique characteristics. Teachers and administrators value education and are well informed about the empowerment approach to helping, and are committed to making a difference in the child's life. These schools promote close bonds between the teachers and students, appreciate the unique talents of each individual, encourage prosocial development of value, encourage goal setting and mastery, and provide adequate resources to meet the basic needs of the students. High

warmth and low-criticism is a preferred style of interaction in resilience-based programs. (Bernard, 1993; Seccombe, 2002; Ward, 2002; Werner & Smith, 1992).

In order to effectively promote resiliency in school settings it is important that all parties involved in the children's lives understand the main mission of the approach. Clearly communicated objectives and adequate support given to the parents, teachers, counselors, and administrators are likely to ensure the success of the programs.

Building Resilience in Children and Adolescents

Evidence is clear that resilience can be nurtured and taught. In the aftermath of life threatening events such as war, support given can make a huge difference in the persons' lives. For most children and adolescents, schools play a crucial role in their development of resilience. When emotional support can not be found at home, schools can help fill the void. Caring teachers can offer the children moral support and inspiration while they try to cope with the difficulties in their lives (Bernard, 1993; Brooks & Goldstein, 2002; Henderson et al, 1996).

To promote resilience among children and adolescents affected by life adversities, practitioners have to employ multi-systemic helping strategies appropriate to the children's life context and life cycle. Based on the knowledge gained from this study and extensive reviews of resilience literature, the following recommendations are formulated to help guide the development of resilience-based programs in schools.

1. Carefully perform assessment of the children's internal and external resources. The internal resources may include self-esteem, autonomy, trust, and interpersonal abilities. External factors explored may include

family environments, trusting relationship with certain individuals, and religious affiliation. Becoming more aware of their strengths and affiliations will enable the practitioners/teachers to formulate programs that appropriately attend to diversity, race, ethnicity, and gender.

2. Minimize risks and increase resources. Since risk is the main cause of vulnerability, the first step is to try to minimize the risk and add more resources to the children's lives. In emergency contexts, basic needs, safety, food, and water need to be provided. It is essential to normalize and stabilize the situation before moving on to plan other interventions. In more stable conditions, creating resources and teaching the children how to access them is crucial to their survival and resilience. The community should be encouraged to engage in actions and strategies to provide access and services to the affected children.
3. Promote the establishment of bonding. Based on the evidence in the literature people with strong bonds are less likely to be affected by risk than those without. Big Brother and Big Sister program is one of the examples that can help promote bonding. Children need at least one positive relationship with someone who sincerely cares about them. The strong bond does not have to come from family member/s, although it would be better if they have a good relationship with their parents and other family members. Teachers, neighbors, youth workers, volunteers from the community, and peers, can offer extra supports. For school children, strong bonds with at least one teacher can make all the difference

their lives. Caring, creative, and flexible teachers who are sensitive to the children's needs and different learning styles are likely to easily establish bonds with the children.

4. Teach resilience enhancing skills. These skills include basic life skills, conflict resolution, resistance and assertive skills, communication skills, problem-solving and decision-making skills, and stress management skills. When these skills are effectively taught and reinforced, the children will be able to manage their environment better.
5. Motivate and engage the children by focusing on their strengths. Help the children set high but achievable goals. Children often thrive when they are appropriately challenged and feel appreciated by the adults in their lives. To make them feel empowered, adults need to employ active listening and allow the locus of decision making to rest within the child.
6. Be concerned with the process as well as the outcomes. The emphasis in the child-centered approach to promote resiliency is not only on the final outcomes, but on the processes by which the children work towards the desired outcomes. Focus on their existing skills, strengths, and competencies and help create opportunities for their acquisition of new knowledge that can be used to deal with the crisis in their lives.
7. Offer opportunities and create meaningful avenues for participation. Children, particularly refugee children, often feel helpless and useless when they first arrive in a new country because their existing knowledge and skills can not be readily applied to the new environments. To prevent

them from slipping into depression and self-doubt, it is important for the teachers/practitioners to tap into their innate abilities and engage them in meaningful activities that they feel comfortable with.

8. Strengthen the children's spiritual anchor. Acknowledge and respect their beliefs and practices. Encourage the children to articulate their feelings, hopes and dreams in a safe and respectful environment.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study investigated factors that may have contributed to psychological resilience among children who have survived the Pol Pot regime as children. They endured the hardships associated with war as children and adolescents and went on to deal with the stresses associated with the acculturation process as young adults. The findings from this study shed some light on their coping mechanisms and crucial support that helped them to overcome their trauma. While the knowledge gained from this study is relevant to the existing literature on resilience, the findings can not be generalized because of the small sample size and lack of diversity in resettlement locations. Future research in this vein should include populations from more diverse locations. It would be interesting to know how other survivors managed to overcome when they do not have such supportive environments as the participants in this study had, and what alternative source/s may have provided what they needed.

In terms of methodology, the life story method is appropriate for this type of investigation, but I believe the research validity could be strengthened if it were combined with quantitative measures. For example, the induction of the participants

could be done more systematically. To begin with, if the investigation's chief aim is to study people who overcame severe traumas then the levels of trauma experienced have to be taken into account, and the effectiveness of their ability to cope with the post traumatic experiences has to also be determined by some culturally appropriate assessment tools. Following careful resilience screening, the in-depth interview method can be utilized to extract a more complete understanding of the phenomenon.

From this study, the Buddhist religion and Cambodian traditions stood out as two of the most important protective factors. To date, there has been very little written on the role of religion or culture in the development of resilience. Although these two elements were mentioned in the studies of the Holocaust survivors, further investigation is needed. Cross-cultural research on the role of cultural tradition and ethnic identity as protective factors would greatly contribute to the resilience literature. Knowledge gained from this research could significantly enhance our intervention efforts for people who came from different cultural backgrounds.

APPENDIX A
CONSENT FOR VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

A Study of Factors Influencing Resilience among Cambodian Child Survivors

I _____ volunteer to participate in this study and understand that:

1. I will be interviewed by Toon Fuderich for at least 3 hours.
2. The main purpose of this study is to understand how the Cambodian child survivors managed to overcome war trauma and function well in their adult lives.
3. The interview will be tape recorded and transcribed to facilitate analysis of the data.
4. Pseudonym will be used in all written materials instead of my real name.
5. There will be no financial compensation for my participation in this study.
6. I am free to participate or withdraw from part or all of this study at any time without prejudice.
7. I understand that some of the interview material will be used in Toon Fuderich's doctoral dissertation. Also it may be used in manuscripts submitted to professional journals for publication, or presentations to interested groups.

Researcher's Signature

Participant's Signature

Date _____

Date _____

Center for International Education
285 Hills House South
University of Massachusetts
Amherst, Mass 01003

APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview Guide

(Adapted from the Interview Guide of Project for the Study of Survival, 1993)
Director: Dr. Bea Hollander-Goldfien

Current Background Information

1. Name
2. Age
3. Gender
4. Birth date and place
5. Birth order
6. Marital status
7. Educational level
8. Employment status
9. Work experience
10. Economic status

Before the War

Demographic Information

1. Where did your family live before war?
2. How big was your family of origin and extended family?
3. What work did your parents and others in the extended family do?
4. What was the economic status of your family?
5. What was the level of education of your parents and other family members?

Description of Family relationships

1. Tell me about your family before the war.
2. How would you describe your relationship with your parents, grandparents, siblings, and other extended family members?
3. Who were the most important family members to you, and why?

Other friendships and special relationships

1. Can you tell me about other special relationships within or outside your family that you consider important and meaningful to you.

About the Family of Origin

1. Strategies for solving and decision making
2. Conflict management
3. Earliest childhood memory, positive and negative
4. Family loss before war
5. Expression of affection by the family members
6. Emotional expression by the family members
7. Methods of discipline
8. Family view of life, attitude-and philosophy
9. General description of the family – use five adjectives

General Areas of Inquiry

1. Typical family routine before the war started
2. Worldview, philosophy or approach to life
3. Expectation for your future before war
4. Were you in the same mold or different from your family
5. Personal faith system

Winds of War

1. Age when the civil war between the government and rebel group started
2. Family response to the events
3. Responses of friends and community to the events
4. At what point your family became aware of the seriousness of war
5. What actions were taken by you, or your family in response to the life-threatening events

During the War

1. What happened to you and your family when Pol Pot took control of Cambodia
2. Describe when you were separated from your family
3. Describe your experience in the Khmer Rouge concentration camps
4. Did you develop special bonds during your war experience? If so with whom?
5. How did you experience the loss of your loved ones? Were you a witness? How did you find out about the loss?
6. How did you cope with the experiences that you were going through? What kept you going?
7. What were your thoughts and feelings during the war?

8. Tell me about your journey from Cambodia to the refugee camps in Thailand.
With whom did you travel from Cambodia?
9. Describe what your experience in the refugee camp. Was it positive or negative?
What was easy or hard about living there.
10. How did you get sponsored to come to the United States? When did you arrive?
11. What do you think helped you to survive? What were the sources of your strength?
12. What happened to your personal faith, beliefs, values, and feelings after the war events came to an end?

After the War

Starting Over in America

1. What was it like to be a refugee in the USA?
2. Do you think that you have adapted to America?
3. Describe your support network in the US
4. How do you relate to the Cambodians in your community?
5. To what extent did you trust you're your community? And to what extent do you trust people in your community now?
6. Did you experience a conflict values between Cambodian and US culture? How did you manage the conflict?
7. How did you cope with the hardships and with beginning again with almost nothing?
8. What was the most difficult part of being here?

Support Networks/Supportive Factors

1. Who did you talk about difficulties, decisions, feelings?
2. How did you take care of yourself and your own needs?
3. How do you describe a friend?
4. Are friends more important in America than they used to be in Cambodia? What do friends do for each other here?
5. Do you have any friend that you tell anything to? If so, how often do you see that person?
6. What things about friends that are most important?
7. What has been the role of friendships in your life since war?
8. How do you make friends with people outside your community?
9. Are there some of the American custom that are hard to understand? What makes you comfortable or uncomfortable about the custom?
10. Are you generally interested in what goes on in your community and outside your community?
11. How close is your current relationship with your family?
12. How much influence does your family have in your life? Tell me about their influence.
13. How do you feel about your parents' attitude and guidance?

Success/Failure

1. What do you see as the success of your life and how have you achieved them?
What do you think contributed to your success?

2. How would you advise others in this situation to best help themselves?
3. How would you describe your school experiences?
4. How would you describe your work experience?
5. How do you understand yourself and your current situation?
6. What have been the roles of faith and tradition in your life since the war?
7. What roles have these play these played in your current family?
8. Is the Buddhist religion important to your life?
9. What things about Buddhism are the most important to you?
10. Do you pray or go to the temple?
11. Do you feel tension or support from the Americans because of your religious practices?
12. Are the other religions important to you? What religion? Why?
13. In what ways the Cambodian culture and traditional belief affect you?

Making Sense of the Trauma

1. Do you read about what happened to Cambodia or see films? How important is this to you?
2. Does the war affect you worldview and political belief?
3. How do you perceive my interest or others people's in your war experiences?

Strategies for Coping, Adapting, and Surviving

1. What have been the happiest moments since war and what have been the most difficult moments since war?
2. How has your family background influenced how you lived and your life since war?

3. Looking back over the past 20 years, how do you feel about your life, and your family relationship?
4. Looking back, how would you describe the mechanisms by which you were able to rebuild your life?
5. Looking back, how did you cope with the memories of war experience?
6. Looking back, how did you sustain the energy to work hard and look towards the future?
7. How did you cope with the hardship, disappointment, and fear?
8. How did you cope with the good times, happiness, success?
9. What memories are the strongest for you? Are you aware of feeling of guilt? Any shame of having survived where million others did not?
10. What do you think the impact of the Pol Pot regime will be on future generation? Why?
11. How would you summarize the impact of the war on your life?

Emotional responses/Beliefs/Attitudes

1. How would you describe yourself? Hopeful or pessimistic?
2. Do you experience flashbacks or nightmares about the war?
3. Are you generally trusting or suspicious?
4. Do you generally feel safe or frightened?
5. How do you feel when things go well in your life?
6. How do you feel when things do not go well in your life?
7. Do you associate your sad or depressed feelings with your war experiences?
How do you cope with the reality?

8. Do you think the hardships experienced during the war have help you to become stronger, a more able person?

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