

**CHOEUNG EK GENOCIDAL CENTER
THE KILLING FIELDS**

Narrowcasters Audio Tour

English

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As Recorded Script**

Final

Media Version

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Stop 1 – Introduction and walk to Stop 2

SFX – ‘Oh Phnom Penh’ music only in clear for a few seconds. Music fades as narrator starts. Music out around ‘The Killing Fields.’

NARRATOR:

Hello, my name is Ros Kosal. I'd like to thank you, first of all, for coming to the Choeung Ek Genocidal Center, known to many as The Killing Fields. I know this is not an easy place to visit – unlike our beautiful National Museum or Royal Palace in Phnom Penh – but we are grateful that you have come here today to see this place of memory, and of healing.

Before we get going, please make sure you know how to work your audio player. It has a pause button -- and also a rewind button, in case you'd like to hear something over again on this Narrowcasters tour.

If you're ready, let's start walking now toward Stop number 2. As you can see on your map, it's to the right, before you get to the tall Memorial Stupa. The stupa will be our last stop.

On your way to number 2, let me tell you a bit more.

I was born in Phnom Penh, and I am Cambodian. Every one of us suffered, in one way or another, after what happened in our beautiful country on 17th April, 1975. That day, the fanatical leader Pol Pot destroyed our world and replaced it with his deranged vision of a 'pure' communist society.

I was lucky – I managed to escape the killing fields ---but after leaving Phnom Penh on April 17, 1975, my family was separated and we rarely heard any news of each other. We were sent to Prey Veng Province, known in the Khmer Rouge era as the Eastern Zone --- all nine of us --- my father and mother, my four sisters, my two brothers and I. It was terrible, not knowing whether they were alive or not. My father and my mother lived and worked as farmers in the village of Kompong Popil. My youngest sister lived with them but she labored in the fields too. But I was not with them I lived and worked in what was called a mobile teenager labor unit.

Only after Cambodia was liberated on January 7, 1979 were we reunited again. But there were only four of us. I remember my father being overwhelmed and perplexed with feelings of fear, sadness and unexpected joy. My mother was cheerful and she went around looking for rice to cook us the first great meal together after more than three years. Apart from being sure the hell I had gone through was over, I felt numb, with just the first stirrings of hope again after so long without it.

When the regime of Pol Pot fell, my two brothers and three of my four sisters did not return. To this day, we have no way of knowing if they will ever come back. We will keep waiting for them and hoping that they will be at peace no matter where they are.

Under Pol Pot, as many as 3 million Cambodians died. Out of 8 million. Wherever you come from, imagine if more than one out of every four people in your country was killed – and by your own people. That is what happened in Cambodia.

Over 20,000 people were murdered right here at Choeung Ek. Yet this was only one of more than 300 killing fields throughout the country. Today, it's our main memorial site to all who perished. They were executed in cold blood because of hatred, ignorance, and fear – all for a false cause.

Stop number 2 is a simple sign marking what was once a Truck Stop. Before you listen to it, if you want to hear about how this place came to be The Killing Fields, press 101. You might want to sit down to listen.

101 LAYER Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge

NARRATOR:

On the 17th of April, 1975, Pol Pot's army marched into Phnom Penh. They were called the Khmer Rouge -- the red Khmer. Khmer is the main ethnic group of Cambodia. And red, of course, was the color of communism.

Within 48 hours, the Khmer Rouge had closed schools and offices, places of worship and entertainment, hospitals, factories and police stations. Every man woman and child in the cities, no matter what their age or health, was forced to leave. Families were split and sent in different directions. In three days every city was empty. They were sent to work nights and days, without rest and almost no food. These places were called collective farms. But they were really cruel places of forced labor.

Pol Pot believed in class struggle between capitalists and workers. He envisioned a pure communal society lead by those who worked on the land. City people – their corrupt institutions and personal possessions – had to be destroyed. He set out to begin anew, at what came to be called “year Zero.” He claimed the peasants were his heroes. He called them the Old People, or Base People. But they suffered too.

He ordered all of us to throw away our ancient roots and beliefs – our religions – and replace them with blind devotion to his extreme communist regime, the Khmer Rouge. It was headed by a secret Standing Committee called Angkar, which means, simply, the Organization. Pol Pot had absolute control. We were already weakened by conflict and civil strife. We had also been pounded by American bombs – a spillover from their war with Vietnam. To escape that horror, many people from the countryside had already fled to our cities in search of shelter.

When Pol Pot then forced us out of the cities with no way to sustain ourselves, thousands soon died. Later, he began killing everyone he thought would undermine his plan – even members of his own family. In only 3 years, 8 months and 20 days, his Khmer Rouge was responsible for the deaths of as many as three million people.

Stop 2 Sign: Truck Stop

NARRATOR:

This is the real start of our journey – but for those who were brought here in trucks, it was the end. Most came from the torture prison called Tuol Sleng in Phnom Penh. There, they had been accused of crimes against the state. They came here at night, starved and terrified, bound and blindfolded. They had been beaten and tortured. The road was rutted and bumpy.

They were told they were being moved to a new house. Maybe some held onto that scrap of hope on that dark and terrible drive. Maybe some thought of home, of food to eat, a future, seeing their families again.

They were wrong.

Many knew in their hearts that this was their final journey. Perhaps some were even relieved. They had suffered enough.

They may have arrived here in 1976, or 77 or 78, it doesn't matter. The same thing happened again and again. People were brought here to be killed. Two or three trucks pulled up to this spot every few weeks, bringing 50 to 70 people. But in 1978, trucks began coming every day, with as many as 300. There was no tall memorial stupa here, of course. A fence surrounded this place on three sides, and a lake on the fourth. No one knew what lay within – a military base maybe? A training camp?

The people were dragged from the trucks, and were either taken away to be killed or were led to a place just a few meters farther on. There you'll find another sign board marked Stop #3: Dark and Gloomy Detention. That's where our tour continues.

But before you walk over there, if you want to hear a Khmer Rouge guard and executioner speak about the journey in the truck, press 201.

By the way, remember that you can listen to any stop at any time, wherever you are. But following the stops in order may help you understand the story of Choeng Ek better.

201 LAYER Him Huy, Guard and Executioner**HIM HUY [ACTOR]:**

We worked in teams. We loaded them onto the truck... They were cuffed behind their back and they were blindfolded, but the guards were there on the truck just to make sure no one jumped off.... It took about 30 minutes. They had a torch because it was at night.... They tricked the prisoners so that during the transportation they did not cause any sort of chaos or chaotic situations ... They were told that they were being transferred to a new house. They didn't know that they were being taken to be executed.... Everything was in secret. Nobody knew.

Stop 3 Sign: Dark and Gloomy Detention

NARRATOR:

The building that once stood here was known as the Dark and Gloomy Detention. Prisoners were usually killed the night they arrived, one by one. But after 1978, when there were too many to kill right away, sometimes they were held until the next night and kept in the simple wooden structure. It had no windows, and double thick walls. Sounds were muffled. In the darkness, no one inside could see each other or look out.

Who were these people who were such a threat to Pol Pot's new, pure society? They included educated people, professionals of all kinds -- teachers, doctors and lawyers. Anyone who spoke a foreign language, or had soft hands -- or wore glasses. Monks and nuns were suspect too. Every city dweller -- even people from the countryside who had fled the American bombs. All these were known as the New People, or the 17th April people, and were potential enemies of the glorious state -- the Angkar. And, of course, anyone who questioned or defied the Khmer Rouge.

They were called traitors. But they were ordinary people, and most had done nothing. In prison they were forced to write and sign false confessions that they had not done the work required of them, or they had stolen rice that belonged to all, or had ignored an order. Many even confessed that, when they were teenagers, they were spies for America's CIA, or Russia's KGB.

After days and weeks, even months of torture, many swore that their family and friends and fellow workers had done such things too. It is not so easy to judge what they did. Under such conditions, can you say you wouldn't do the same?

To hear more about more about the history of Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge, press 301.

301 LAYER Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge

NARRATOR:

Pol Pot studied radio electronics in France in the late 1940s. There he joined the Communist Party, and came to revere the Chinese revolutionary Chairman Mao Zedong. Back here, he became a teacher, and organized other teachers to advance his own radical revolutionary vision. But when he actually took over our country, he condemned teachers to death.

Pol Pot never appeared in public, but he held absolute power. Like so many dictators, he built his army from boys and young men mostly from the countryside who had little education or knowledge of the modern world. They were from the peasant class, which he called the Old People. We were already racked with corruption and hunger, and traumatized by bombing as Americans tried to destroy North Vietnamese supply lines. Eighty percent of the population lived in extreme poverty.

The recruits were told that city dwellers were selfish and evil, and responsible for the way country people suffered. These young men were promised equality, prosperity, and a glorious future. And of course, food and a steady job. Pol Pot's radical regime was officially called Democratic Kampuchea. It reinforced its ideas through dreadful sayings and slogans. This was one of them:

17th April people are parasitic plants. They are losers of war and prisoners of war.

This one is even worse:

To keep you is no gain; to lose you is no loss.

Stop 4 Sign Board: The Executioners' Working Office

NARRATOR:

Maybe you're wondering why you're reading signs instead of looking at buildings. Well, the structures that stood here did not last long after the Khmer Rouge were driven out in 1979 by their own defectors and by the Vietnamese. Soon after, this place was discovered. By that time, we were all starving, desperate for food and shelter. And people were angry. So those who lived nearby tore apart everything here and used whatever they could.

The simple building that once stood here was where the Khmer Rouge kept their office. Record keeping was precise. Every prisoner in every truck had to be checked off a list and accounted for. Occasionally, prisoners had to sign the roster themselves. When they did, they were signing their own death warrant.

Many Khmer Rouge soldiers were recruited as teenagers. One of them, named Him Huy, joined at 17. Later, he was assigned to a guard position at Tuol Sleng prison in Phnom Penh. From there, he brought victims to this Killing Field.

HIM HUY [ACTOR]:

Every time I went to Choeung Ek, the same things were happening routinely. Prisoners were taken out to be executed at the graves in the compound. There were ... executioners waiting by the grave. Once the prisoners were at the location, when the executions began, they would turn on the light... and my job was to take names and bring the list of all the prisoners to be executed to compare with the list of prisoners removed from the prison, just to make sure no one has escaped and they had not missed anyone.

NARRATOR:

After killing everyone on the list, the Khmer Rouge soldiers dug deep pits as graves for the next shipment of prisoners.

Stop 5 Former Ceremonial Kiosk used by local Chinese community

NARRATOR:

The Khmer Rouge picked Choeung Ek for its execution grounds partly because it was out of the way – and partly because it was already a graveyard used by local Chinese people. In this simple kiosk, the Chinese held traditional ceremonies for the deceased before burial.

The coffin would be laid out, and the family would gather here – how different from what happened when the Khmer Rouge ripped apart our society. Religion was forbidden. So was commerce and education. Our families were split up, even sent to different parts of the country. Men lived with men, women with women. Only small children stayed with their mothers. The reverence given to our parents and our worship was now due only to Angkar – the state.

Once the Killing Field was established here, there were no more burial ceremonies.

A generator provided power for the lights that illuminated the executions, and for a loudspeaker system that blared revolutionary songs in the daytime. But at night the music was played to cover up the screams of prisoners being killed.

Stop 6 Sign: Chemical Substances Storage Room

NARRATOR:

Once more, you're standing in front of a sign where there was once a building. This time, a shed that housed chemical substances – such as DDT in powder form.

Sometimes, victims were not actually dead when they were pushed into the pits that served as graves. DDT spread on the bodies finished the job. Its smell also disguised the stench of decay.

A few steps away is a sugar palm tree with large spiky leaves.

You see many such trees here in Cambodia. The sugar palm has many uses – for sweetening, for example, for thatching, or to make palm wine. Today, even for biofuel. But take a close look at the stems that support those big fan-like leaves.

Along them, you'll find dark jagged ridges, like the teeth of a shark or a saw.... Those ridges are so hard and sharp that at Choeung Ek, they were sometimes used to slit prisoners' throats. When a person's throat is cut, he or she cannot shout or make a sound.

It's hard to believe that people can do such things, Cambodians killing Cambodians.

As you face the sugar palm, to your left is a line of trees setting off the area where executions took place – the actual Killing Field. Just beyond, there's a grave where 450 victims were murdered. Number 7 on your map.

Stop 7 Mass Grave: 450 Victims

NARRATOR:

You are standing at a grave where 450 bodies were found. A few steps away is a line of flowering trees that marks the boundary of the actual Killing Field. This is where the graves are.

In 1979 – a few months after Pol Pot’s army was driven west by defectors from the Khmer Rouge and Vietnamese troops, the terrible truth was revealed --129 mass graves, scattered over 2.4 hectares – that’s almost 6 acres. They held almost 20,000 victims, killed as quickly and efficiently as possible and pushed into pits, as if life had no meaning. Today, the largest of those mass graves have been marked and covered with a protective roof, like this one. As Pol Pot’s paranoia grew, as many as 300 prisoners were killed here in a single day.

Today, this place is known as the Choeung Ek Genocidal Center. With its trees and birdsong, it has a peaceful feeling. But as you walk, look down -- you’ll see the terrible truth in the fragments of bone and cloth at your feet.

What you see here today is nothing compared to the horrors found by those who first discovered this place. The stench was unbearable. The graves were mounds, like infected sores covering the earth. They had swelled as gasses were released by decaying bodies. Some graves had cracked open, revealing dreadful sights.

We ask that you treat the graves with respect and stay on the path. Try not to step on fragments, and please don’t pick them up. Keepers of Choeung Ek will care for them.

Stop 8 Sign: Killing Tools Storage Room. How people were killed**NARRATOR:**

The shed that once stood here held tools intended for agriculture, construction and repair. At Choeung Ek, these tools were used for murder.

The Khmer Rouge did not shoot people here. Bullets were expensive. Victims knelt in front of pits that would soon be their graves. Then they were beaten and hacked to death with whatever was cheap and available – axes, hoes, cart axles, bamboo poles, hammers, machetes.

After the Khmer Rouge fled in 1979, the survivors who tore down this storage room for its building materials took those tools too. Later, before you leave today, you can see examples of the killing tools in the museum near the entrance. These tools were used a lot. Another Pol Pot slogan:

Better to kill an innocent by mistake than to spare an enemy by mistake.

Stop 9 Chinese Grave. Bones and Teeth Fragments

NARRATOR:

Before Pol Pot, this place was a graveyard for the local Chinese community.

This is the remains of a Chinese grave. You'll find others as you walk along. There were around 16 in the original cemetery.

A few steps away, you'll see a marked-off area. It's one of many where bones and teeth still surface, especially during the rainy season, as soil shifts and rain washes dirt away. Please walk over to take a look at it now.

In 1980, they excavated 86 of 129 graves here, unearthing almost 9000 victims. Their bones, still covered with decaying matter, had to be dried and cleaned before they could be removed for study and reverent display. Remains were piled nearby. You can see photos in the museum.

From here, you can see many depressions in the earth. They mark the pits of the mass graves. They are empty now. And with time and weather, soil has shifted. Some of the pits are now just shallow depressions in the ground. Once, they were as deep as 5 meters – that's more than 16 feet.

Today, fragments still remain in the ground. The skulls and large bones from the bodies were put into a temporary wooden shelter until 1988, when the stupa was built to house them. First in 1980, and then in 2000 and 2001, forensic tests and skull measurements were done. They determined who died here, and how they died, and where they came from. Among the Cambodian remains lay nine Westerners – one Australian, two French, and six Americans. But, the world didn't know what was happening to our country – the borders with Thailand and Vietnam were closed with land mines, and only diplomats were allowed in or out.

Stop 10 Longan Orchard

NARRATOR:

Before the Khmer Rouge came to Choeung Ek, this whole area was an orchard. There's a grove of fruit trees around you here, and you'll find others as you walk around.

People in this area had always been farmers. But under Angkar, farmers no longer owned their land. It all belonged to the state. Pol Pot's goal was a society that was completely self-sufficient. The Angkar decreed that rice production must be tripled immediately – an impossible goal. Those driven from the cities were forced to join work brigades on collective farms. Work started before dawn and could last into the night – hauling manure, standing in water planting rice, digging ditches, building dikes.

But the people from the cities knew nothing of farming, and they got little or no training. They'd been sent away with nothing. Money and personal possessions were officially banned. Many had little more than the clothes on their backs, and a rice bowl – like a begging monk. No wonder thousands quickly died of starvation and disease.

Those who managed to reach their assigned districts were expected to work 12 hours or more a day, without stopping, often on just a couple of bowls of rice soup. Many couldn't keep up. They were simply worked to death. The people in charge were terrified of being punished if they didn't meet the quotas set for them by Angkar. So the harvests were exported to pay for weapons and supplies, especially to China, even when the workers on the farms were starving.

Stop 11 Walk on path by lake: Music and Memories**NARRATOR:**

This path heads away from the excavated graves. Bordering one end are rice fields. It runs along the top of a dike built to protect Choeung Ek from flooding during the rainy season. If you want to, you can take a quiet walk along the lake, which is often only partly filled with water.

On either side of the dike are over 40 graves that are still undisturbed – some are under water. We have chosen to let the victims who lie here remain in peace. You'll find benches along the path. At one end, there's a kiosk that juts out over a pond that's often carpeted with bright green water plants. These are good places to sit and listen. Or just think.

Your map offers you some choices of things to hear.

Number 111 is an excerpt from 'A Memory from Darkness', written for orchestra by Him Sophy in 1990. It's a deeply moving musical response to the genocide and what happened in this place.

There are also some Survivor Stories. They're shown on your map as Stop number 12, and I do hope you'll listen to them, now or later. The details vary, but they are the stories of all of us who lived through that terrible time under Angkar.

**Stop 111 LAYER Commemoration music: Excerpt from A Memory from
Darkness**

Stop 12 Survivor Stories – may be heard anywhere at any time**NARRATOR:**

These stories are true accounts from a range of Cambodian people. For them, the years under Pol Pot are still very real. As they are for so many of us.

The first three stories were told by traumatized survivors over thirty years later. All of them had psychological counseling, which is very rare. Later, they came to Choeung Ek, then attended a Buddhist ceremony nearby. They hoped to gain peace for themselves, and put the spirits of the dead to rest. Their testimonies were read out loud, and the monks blessed them.

The last story is longer. It's from a man who has dedicated his adult life to healing our country. His story is broken into several episodes. You can listen to them individually. But together they paint a moving picture of a chilling odyssey.

121 Loss of an infant**CHUM NAO:**

I still miss my son. He would be over thirty years old now if he were still alive. But he died in 1978, around August, when he was around 8 months old. He was ill, and there was no medicine and I didn't have enough food. So I did not have enough milk to breast-feed my child. I was forced to plant rice all day long. I could only feed him at night. I will never forget his death. Even if I try to, it's still so painful.

122 Witness to a killing**NARRATOR:**

The survivor you're about to hear has been traumatized, filled with grief and anger. He has suffered from nightmares and does good deeds to try to relieve painful memories. He was arrested by the Khmer Rouge and detained in Kok Thom, Siem Reap province. In prison, he was tied up and tortured many times, beaten unconscious and made to eat excrement. Once, he was forced to beat a child, then beaten himself, in great pain and terrified. Another time, he witnessed the killing of a woman:

SAM RITHY:

A guard found two bananas on the body of a female prisoner. He asked her, "Where did you steal these from? I asked you to work, not to steal!" She answered, "I didn't steal. The guard who took me to work gave them to me." But the guard, Comrade Chhorn, did not believe her and continued to accuse her. He took a hatchet from his back and beat her neck until she fell down. Then he took a hoe from where people had been cleaning the sewers. And he hit her in the neck. She convulsed and died. They asked the cleaner to bury her. I saw this with my own eyes, even though I could hardly look at it. I couldn't say anything. It was so painful. That's how they tortured and killed people. She was killed for two bananas. I felt so painful, but I didn't know what to do. I felt so sorry for her.

123 Rape leads to shame

LEANG KAN:

I always feel pain inside myself. I fled my hometown to hide my story.

NARRATOR:

This woman's written testimony was read at the Buddhist ceremony:

TESTIMONY READER:

About 10 to 12 men beat me and raped me until I was unconscious. When I woke up in the field, I was naked, just like an animal. There was nothing left for me. I cannot forget my physical and psychological pain. From the Khmer Rouge time to now, me and my family are discriminated against by the community. This is why I fled my hometown – in order to hide my story. I am sad every day and feel different from other people.

124 One man's story (125 – 129)**NARRATOR:**

This is the story of Youk Chhang, a survivor who later founded and became the head of DC-Cam -- the Documentation Center of Cambodia. It's a non-profit organization based in Phnom Penh and dedicated to justice and memory – justice through collecting information on Pol Pot's regime for legal purposes. Memory in the form of teaching, so our young people and others around the world can help prevent genocide in the future. You can find more on its website. The address is on your map.

The story you'll hear today begins when Youk was a teenager, the day the Khmer Rouge arrived in Phnom Penh -- 17th April, 1975. It's number 1-2-5. Or you can hear other parts of his story.

125 LAYER The first day, forced to leave home**YOUK CHHANG:**

I was a teenager, age about between 13 or about 14 when Khmer Rouge came to power.

I lived in Phnom Penh City and I do remember, but I did not understand what is going on to be honest. I had no idea....

I was alone at home, alone at home. I remember our neighbor asking me to join their family, because the Khmer Rouge soldiers come and force us to leave the house. I did not know who they are.

But I decided to get out the house alone, onto the street to join the crowd. There is millions of people in the crowds at that time. But people were silent. I didn't speak to anybody on the street. I just walk, because the soldiers direct you to where you should go. They have a clear plan to evacuate the whole population.

I remember that I brought with me a fairytale book, and a couple of clothes, and a bicycle. I was hungry, and I in fact asked the Khmer Rouge for food, and they give me a palm fruit cake. The accent of the soldier frightened me a bit. I know these are not my neighbors. They are somebody else. Who are these people? Then they announced that you have to go to your home village. But I just left my home village, Phnom Penh, you know. Where should I go?

126 LAYER In the village, his cousin killed in front of him**NARRATOR:**

Youk reached his grandmother's village, and was put to work. Because his family was respected, the villagers helped him. For some months, he was the center of attention. Then, his mother arrived with his sister, her baby, and his uncle. They drew a crowd.

YOUK CHHANG:

And then all the attention that was on me went to them, and I got jealous. But I did not say a thing. Then I overheard a conversation that they returned because they could not get across the border to Vietnam. The border was closed. So I thought, if they had made it, they would not be back for me.

NARRATOR:

A few days later, one of Youk's cousins came too -- the brother of a spokesperson for the former government of Cambodia, the enemy of the Khmer Rouge.

YOUK CHHANG:

The day my cousin's youngest brother arrived, the village chief quickly grabbed him and stabbed him with a knife. And he screams and he died. They kill him immediately right in front of all of us! My whole family was frightened. We heard screams -- and then the whole village was silent. We were just so scared.

NARRATOR:

It was the first time Youk saw a family member killed.

127 LAYER Anger, Isolation, his mother's dream, hope**NARRATOR:**

Youk's family, like many others, was relocated a second time. At first, they thought they were being taken home. But the train passed Phnom Penh and continued on.

YOUK CHHANG:

That day I began to become very angry. I promised myself one day I would return and arrest these people.

After we got off the train, we were put in a truck and sent to assigned villages. We were all separated quickly. My sister went to a woman's unit. I went to a child's unit. By then you had nothing to eat. You had no supplies. You didn't have a home. You had to build your own. This was completely jungle, in the mountains.

You had to work for food, and you had to be separated. I can feel the selfishness, the anger, the sadness began to emerge at that time. It changed me. When you feel so isolated among your own people, even if you speak the same language, it's the most frightening moment in your life. You can die of loneliness because you're not with your family.

Khmer Rouge did not need to kill people. Because there's not enough food to eat, because there are so many hours of work, because there's no hope. And that's what's the most important; hope. Some people got executed, but some just died of sickness, and sickness came from loneliness, hopelessness.

That's how I came to see it – only later on. Because I always had hope. I had hope that one day I would speak English, and one day I would go back to school. I never ever lost that. And also because of a dream my mother had as well.

When I was a child, she told me that when she was pregnant, she dreamed that she lost me in a jungle. She was scared. She cried a lot. Suddenly she saw me swinging in a hammock between two mountains. Her dream told her that someday I would become somebody who had a good life. So my mother told me, you don't have to worry son, you will be okay. Her love is so powerful, and her dream is so truthful. And that was the strength of my hope -- that someday I would become something. Can you imagine? All because of my mother's dream. I never lost hope, and I never thought of dying when I lived under the Khmer Rouge.

128 LAYER Arrested and beaten; saved by a stranger's sacrifice**NARRATOR:**

Youk's pregnant sister was starving. He stole food for her, was arrested and beaten, then sent to the village prison.

YOUK CHHANG:

That prison, when it rained, snakes would come in, rats, insects next to you. It got flooded. The roof was leaking.

Every night, they would release the prisoners for a livelihood meeting. You had to make up a story, you had to say that you did something wrong, and then you asked for forgiveness. You had to make up a lie, and you had to believe your own lie, so you can be forgiven.

So one night I ran out of stories. I was the youngest prisoner in that prison – about 15, 16 maybe. There was an older guy in prison next to me, and he got scared for me, because when you run out of stories, then it's time for execution. Every night he would beg the prison guards to release me. He would always say, please release this boy. You know, this prison is for adults. Why did you bring a boy to put in prison with us? He has no idea what is going on.

As of today, I have so much regret that I cannot remember his name, and I regret that I cannot locate his family members to thank them. What he did, I understand now. In order to release me, he chose to sacrifice his life. He was executed because he kept asking the prison guards to release me. I was released, you know. I was released. But at the time, when they released me, I had no idea why.

That prison is still there today. It's used as a warehouse now. I visited that place many times.

129 LAYER Escapes to America, returns for revenge, healing [time]**YOUK CHHANG:**

I began to witness killings and I got very, very angry with the Khmer Rouge. I wanted to kill them. I always promised myself one day I would come back and arrest them. I promised myself that, and I wanted my mother to be happy about it. That's all I wanted in my entire life. That's all I wanted to do.

NARRATOR:

When Youk turned 18, his mother feared he would be recruited by the Vietnamese.

YOUK CHHANG:

So she told me to go away. Can you imagine? You want so much to be with someone you love and then you cannot. My mother said, you have to leave the country. Go to America. That's what she told me, you know? I knew nothing about America. I had five dollars she borrowed from a neighbor. I left about four o'clock in the morning, and made it all the way to Thailand by foot, and a couple of years later, I was in Texas.

The point is that I carried her love, her dream, her wish, and I wanted to get back at the Khmer Rouge to make her happy. That's what I wanted to do. So I started a new life in America, went to school, graduated, got a job, thinking that it's not over yet with the Khmer Rouge.

I worked for the UN. I returned to manage the election for the first time in Cambodia. I came to this work for revenge, to make my mother happy. That was my mission. Not because I cared for others. I discovered later that it was not what she wanted me to do at all. All she wanted was to see me safe and happy. That's all she cared about. I didn't know that. She had even forgiven the guy who killed my sister 30 years ago.

I see my mother everywhere. I see my sister everywhere. I see the whole country as my family. When I go out to meet a woman who lost their child, I treat them like my mother. When I see a woman who lost their child, who is poor, who lost her brother and sister, I see my sister. They become like my whole family.

I see myself like a broken glass, and only I can find those broken pieces and put them back together. It's very personal. Everyone has different means to deal with what they went through, to put those pieces together. I do this on my own. That's the only way.

I'm physically now well; I have food to eat, I have air conditioning, I live in a good house, I have a car, but emotionally, I'm broken. And that is why it's so important that genocide be prevented, because you destroy the strings of humanity and you destroy the family, not just physically but emotionally. Reconciliation is not about talking to each other. It's about the responsibility and obligation of each of the victims to put all these pieces back together.

Stop 13 Mass Grave: 166 Victims without heads**NARRATOR:**

Some of the people buried here like the 166 discovered in this grave, were actual Khmer Rouge soldiers, with uniforms and ID numbers. They came from the Eastern Zone, on the Vietnam border.

Pol Pot had been secretive and paranoid from the start. By 1978, his new, pure society was disintegrating from impossible expectations and mismanagement. The Angkar began to see enemies everywhere. A few words of accusation from a fellow worker could lead to imprisonment, or even death. Many Khmer Rouge soldiers from the Eastern Zone defected – asking for help, or joining with their communist neighbors. If caught, they were killed as traitors. The soldiers who lay here had been decapitated, perhaps as an example to their comrades, according to the Khmer Rouge accusation of "Vietnamese head, Cambodian body". The headless bodies were brought here for burial.

Him Huy was 17 years old when he was recruited from his small village into the Khmer Rouge and sent for training.

HIM HUY [ACTOR]:

We were not arrested, but our names were called out so we had no choice whether or not we went.

NARRATOR:

A few years later, he was ordered to kill prisoners at Choeung Ek.

HIM HUY [ACTOR]:

It was difficult, but I had no choice, otherwise I would be killed. We were told that we had to catch up with the circle of history. We had to do what we were told to do. If we didn't do what we were told to do we were traitors of the revolution.

Stop 14 Glass Box: Victims' Clothing

NARRATOR:

Every two or three months, the staff of the centre gather rags, bones and teeth that have come up to the surface. The clothes inside this box have been collected since 1980. Though most are just rags, if you look at them closely, you'll see some that belonged to children. They are here to help us think about the people who came to this place and never left.

You may also see strips of cloth used for blindfolds... or cords for making hammocks that were used to bind hands. All has been preserved.

Guards stripped the clothes from early victims, and covered the bodies with DDT to mask the smell. But at the end, when so many were being killed at once, there was no time.

In 2007, the four surviving members of the Standing Committee who ran the Khmer Rouge under Pol Pot were brought before a tribunal -- a Cambodian court with international participation. As of 2011, these senior leaders were still on trial. A year earlier, the head of Toul Sleng prison was convicted for war crimes and crimes against humanity. I'll tell you more about him later.

Sometimes, clothes were left on the ground as evidence for the prosecution. You may still notice scraps as you walk, caught in the roots of a tree, or even just lying around.

To find out what happened to the Khmer Rouge and Pol Pot after they were driven from Phnom Penh, please press 141.

141 The Khmer Rouge at the UN. Pol Pot's last years

NARRATOR:

In 1979, when Pol Pot was finally overthrown, he fled with what was left of the Khmer Rouge to the Thai border. For ten more years – the last decade of the Cold War – the West continued to fear communism, and our country remained isolated from much of the world.

Because Vietnam had established our new government, many countries refused to recognize us.

Meanwhile, the Khmer Rouge regrouped in the jungle. Incredibly, they – the Khmer Rouge – were still recognized as our legitimate leaders by most First World countries – the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, France and Germany. And by their Chinese allies too. Yes, the Khmer Rouge were given a seat in the UN. They sent representatives to New York City. They even received financial aid while we struggled to put our country back together. It's hard to believe, but that's what happened.

And Pol Pot? He continued as leader of the Khmer Rouge for almost 20 more years. In 1997, when the group split into factions, he was finally put under house arrest. He died less than a year later, maybe poisoned by those who had once obeyed his every whim.

But his life had been good. He had married a second wife, enjoyed his grandchildren. It is said that he listened to Voice of America every day on the radio. When he died, he was 82 years old. Some of his victims didn't even reach the age of 2.

For babies were killed here, as you will see at our next stop.

Stop 15 The Killing Tree.

NARRATOR:

Of all the graves here at Choeung Ek, this may well be the most difficult to think about. The victims who died here were women and children, more than 100 of them.

Most of the women who were pushed into this pit had been stripped of their clothes. It is said that some of the buried women had been raped as well. But there was worse to come. Babies died here too. Many were killed before their mothers' eyes. Do you see that big tree nearby? It is called the Killing Tree. Soldiers grabbed babies by their legs, smashed their heads against it, then tossed them into the pit. All this at night, in the glare of florescent lights. And, as I'll explain soon, with the sound of revolutionary music too.

Why kill children? Why this brutal way? First, it was quick and easy. Also, when one member of a family was murdered, all the rest were often killed too. So no one would be left alive to seek revenge.

Another Khmer Rouge slogan:

To dig up the grass, one must remove even the roots.

The people who discovered this place found blood, brain and fragments of bone on the bark of the tree. They did not understand why until the grave was opened.

Neang Sai stumbled on this place just after the Khmer Rouge fled. He had come to look for food, but this is what he found.

NEANG SAI:

I dug up some potatoes, and I smelled the stench. I looked around and I found bodies in a pit. I was so shocked and scared. I didn't think there would be more bodies elsewhere. When I saw the tree, I saw marks indicating young children were smashed here. I saw hair, brain and blood stains all over the tree.

NARRATOR:

The man who once headed the notorious Toul Sleng prison also came to Choeung Ek. To hear what happened, press 151.

151 LAYER Former Prison Director Duch at Choeng Ek: A Killer Confesses**NARRATOR:**

In February, 2008 the man known as Duch was also brought here as a prisoner. The official tribunal – the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia -- later sentenced him to 35 years in prison for war crimes and crimes against humanity. The sentence was reduced by five years, since from 1999 to 2007, he had been detained illegally.

For a long time, Duch had denied knowing what happened at Choeung Ek. But here, at the Killing Tree, he fell to his knees and wept. In this excerpt from the tribunal, we hear him, in a calm moment, admitting his guilt for the deaths at Toul Sleng:

DUCH:

As an emissary, I do not evade responsibility. I am mentally responsible for the souls of those who died. Particularly, I am legally responsible for the deaths of more than 10,000 people and bow low to the ECCC as an individual who does not implicate any of my subordinates. This is my total admission. And I constantly pray for the souls of those who have died. I never forget that....

Stop 16 Glass Box: Victims' Bones and Teeth. Spirit House**NARRATOR:**

Since 1979, bones and bone fragments have been collected from the graves at Choeung Ek. There are many large bones and skulls in the Memorial Stupa that we'll talk about soon.

Like the shreds of clothing, bone fragments keep coming to the surface – caretakers collect them every few months. It's as if spirits of those who died here will not lie still.

You'll see teeth among the bones. They could have been knocked out when victims' heads were smashed. Teeth were also pulled out during torture, or just fell out as the body decayed. It's hard to tell. After all, the business at Choeung Ek was murder.

If you don't know much about Cambodian tradition, you may be wondering about the small structure nearby – it's about the size of a bird house. It may have incense sticks or flowers in front of it. In fact, it's a spirit house -- a reflection of cherished beliefs so ancient that they predate Hinduism and Buddhism. You'll find them all over the country. They are an expression of caring and respect for those who've gone before – and a dwelling place for spirits that have not found rest.

Stop 17 The Magic Tree**NARRATOR:**

This 'chhrey' tree looks very much like a bodhi tree, the type of tree that Buddha sat under when he attained enlightenment. But no miracles happened here, though it is called the Magic Tree. The "magic" was sound -- loudspeakers hung in branches broadcast revolutionary songs throughout Choeung Ek. At night, it is said, they gave outsiders the impression of a Khmer Rouge meeting. In fact, the music was to drown out the screams of people being murdered.

It's hard to imagine what the prisoners waiting in detention must have thought when they first heard the songs. This may well have been one of them:

SFX: MUSIC UP LOUDLY, IN THE CLEAR FOR A BIT, THEN FADES UNDER

The music blended with the noise of the diesel generator to create a true nightmare of sound.

SFX: GENERATOR JOINS MUSIC

These were the last sounds the victims ever heard.

SFX: MUSIC UP AGAIN, ABRUPTLY, WITH GENERATOR**SFX: MUSIC ENDS**

SFX: The GENERATOR however continues for two seconds or so and then slowly fades for several more.

Total silence, to give the impression of it all being over, they're all dead.

NARRATOR:

When you're ready, please walk around the tree to the stupa, where the memory of those who died in this place is honored. It's our final stop.

Stop 18 Memorial Stupa

NARRATOR:

This magnificent memorial stupa was built by the government of Cambodia in 1988 in memory of those who died here at Choeung Ek. Before that, their remains had been housed in a temporary shelter. Please stay outside as you listen.

As of 2011, over 300 Killing Fields had been discovered our country – places with mass graves containing ten to a thousand people. About 80 had been established as official monuments and marked by a memorial structure. Some killing fields are not accessible, because they are surrounded by land mines or hidden deep in the jungle. And many have been lost. Some memorials are simple. This is the biggest one.

You can go inside the stupa and take pictures, but you must take off your shoes as a sign of respect before you enter. You may want to pray briefly, or leave flowers. If you do go in, please finish listening to this stop first. Inside the stupa, there are 17 levels. Skulls or bones of those who died here at Choeung Ek have been carefully examined by forensics experts. They are laid out on each level.

The first ten levels house almost 9000 skulls, arranged in scientific categories and labeled. As you look at the skulls, you can see how these victims were killed. A huge crack where a machete struck, for example, or a hole from a hammer.

The upper levels are used for other major bones, such as leg or arm bones, and jaw bones. Ribs and hip bones and smaller bones were left in the earth. There was no room to display them all.

Traditional music is usually playing inside.

Each 20th of May, a commemoration ceremony takes place here at the stupa.

MONK STARTS TO CHANT, OTHERS JOIN IN, CONTINUES UNDER SOFTLY

Hundreds of monks pray and thousands of Cambodians gather. The date recalls the day Pol Pot ordered communal living, destroying the Cambodian family. Once known as the Day of Anger, it's now called the Day of Remembrance. Offerings are made, and performances put on to recall the horror of life under the Khmer Rouge.

CHANTING UP AND OUT AT A DEFINED END OR FADES UNDER

When you come out of the stupa, if you'd like to hear more about why the design of the building means so much to us, just press 181.

181 LAYER Design and Meaning of the Stupa

NARRATOR:

I'm so glad you want to hear more about this building, for every part of it has meaning. I can explain it to you best if you walk back quite a bit, so you can look up and see the whole thing.

Please pause your player until you are ready.

The stupa is a Buddhist form – a structure in the shape of a mound or dome originally used to house sacred remains or relics. This one is taller than most, and it's decorated with both Hindu and Buddhist symbols.

First, look underneath the roof, at the top of the pillars. You'll find birds at each corner.... Those are Garuda birds. The great Hindu god Vishnu rides not a horse or a dragon, but a huge Garuda. This divine protector combines features of giant birds, lions and humans.

Now look at the corners of the roof jutting out above. There, you'll find magical serpents known as Nagas. They are like dragons. Their golden tails trail up the roof beams and twine together in the spire at the very top. Nagas are a legendary race said to have fathered the Khmer people. You'll often see them represented with seven heads outside of temples. Nagas are the traditional enemies of Garuda. When these enemies come together as you see here, they are a symbol of peace.

Stop 19 Farewell – walking away from the Memorial Stupa

NARRATOR:

As you walk away from the stupa, you'll see a building to the left. That's the Choeung Ek Museum, where you can learn more about the background of the people who brought such horrors to our country. Khmer Rouge uniforms are displayed, and killing tools as well. There is also a film that shows this place when it was first discovered.

Before you leave, near the ticket office, you'll find a visitors' book where you can share your impressions of Choeung Ek. I hope you will. The book is also near the place where you can return your audio player.

In Phnom Penh, I encourage you to visit Toul Sleng Genocidal Museum. It too will break your heart. And any time, you can find out more about what happened under Pol Pot online, by visiting the website of the Documentation Center of Cambodia. Its address is on your map.

This was hardly the first case of genocide. We never thought it could happen here. But it did. And the thing is, it can happen anywhere. It did in Nazi Germany. And in Russia, under Stalin. And in China. In Rwanda. In the US, with its Native Americans. And in Argentina, and in Chile. Tragically, it will probably happen again. So for your sake, remember us – and remember our past as you look to your future.

MUSIC "OH PHNOM PENH" COMES UP CONTINUES>CROSS FADE.

NARRATOR:

I'd like to say good bye with this song, written soon after the liberation of Phnom Penh in 1979. It speaks of love for the city, and sadness for all that was lost.

SONG UP IN CLEAR AND CONTINUES TIL A GOOD ENDING.

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