



Fortune brings a family together, 36 years later

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Never in her life did Chhea Vat imagine she would have such an occasion: meeting her husband again after 36 years.

The 73-year-old Cambodian-Canadian had always thought her husband, Peou Nam, was killed when soldiers of the regime took him away, so many years ago.

“I never imagined this meeting before, because I thought the Khmer Rouge never left their captives alive,” Chhea Vat said in a recent interview in Phnom Penh, where her family had found him at long last.

Peou Nam was a soldier in Lon Nol's government, a target for execution by the Khmer Rouge. He has seven children with Chhea Vat.

“It's like I were living with him in the old regime now,” Chhea Vat said. “I'm still thinking that way.”

Chhea Vat and her children escaped Cambodia in 1975 and ended up in Canada in the early 1980s. Only in recent months did she and her children decide to look for her lost husband—after a fortuneteller told them he was still alive.

Peou Phearun is one of the family's five sons. He had been trying to find his father for several months in Cambodia. Eventually, the two met by chance at a market in Banteay Meanchey province along Cambodia-Thai border.

“Some nights when I wake up, I ask myself if this is true or just a dream,” Peou Phearun said. “Then I know it is true and that I have joined my father again. For the first four or five years in Canada, when I thought of my father, every night I burst into tears.”

Peou Nam was taken twice for execution in a pit by the Khmer Rouge. By chance, he survived. He carried on in Cambodia without his family.

After the regime collapsed, in 1979, he tried to find his missing wife and children, but it was hopeless. They were gone. He thought them dead.

His youngest son, Peou Sambo, was five years old when he last saw his father. All these years later, he said, “I wept when I embraced him. I've never known my father.”

Over all these years, Chhea Vat has kept two things: a photo of her husband and a statue of the Buddha, a gift from her beloved bestowed on her before he was taken away by the soldiers.

“He loves this Buddha statue very much, and I have kept it as a souvenir,” she said. “But now that I’ve found him, I have to return it to him.”