

CAMBODIAN RESILIENCY

SUPPORTING STUDENTS
Golden Leaf Education Foundation

CHANLY BOB

ARTREACH GALLERY

at First Congregational UCC

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WWW.UCCPORTLAND.ORG/ARTREACH

*The Mekong was the river of my youth.
My eyes caught the golden glitter of sunlight
vibrating on its rumpled waters;
my melancholy mood dissolved into the promise
of better days to come, and my spirits sang.*

-- John Swain, "The River of Time"

GOLDEN LEAF EDUCATION FOUNDATION

The mission of Golden Leaf Education Foundation (GLEF) is to empower humanity by enhancing educational opportunities internationally, in memory of genocide victims and in honor of survivors--“golden leaves”:

golden leaf (gōl'den lēf) – n., pl. golden leaves (gōl'den lēvz)

1. a survivor of a heinous act against humanity, especially genocide.
2. Golden Leaf: A person who survived the Khmer Rouge genocide: *Golden Leaf, A Khmer Rouge Genocide Survivor* by Kilong Ung.
3. one who survives against extreme odds.

GLEF leverages Cambodia's history of genocide to foster “Building the Foundations for Peace” through renovating existing schools, building new schools, and providing education support such as school supplies, supplements to teacher salaries and student uniforms.

GLEF'S VISION

- + Renovate existing schools with a subtitle “A Golden Leaf School.”
- + Establish new schools with the title “Golden Leaf School.”
- + Create Sibling Schools, paired with others to support each other.
- + Lead Golden Leaf Equity Tours to support the Golden Leaf Schools.
- + Increase student awareness of genocide and global conflicts.
- + Increase student experience of conflict resolution.
- + Assist student awareness of “paying it forward.”
- + Encourage student awareness of “service above self.”
- + Encourage students to have faith in humanity.

PROJECTS

Recently: Funds approved for Don Tret Community School.

Starting in 2015: Soeur Village School. This project called for a new building and basketball court, and the funds have been given.

December 2014: Phoum Bourn Svay Klaing School. A new building was created in order to insure the safety of 167 students.

October 2013: Koh Broteal School. A new five-room building serving over 140 students was constructed; it is growing.

November 2011: Ang School. 5-rooms with supplies for 425 students.

CHANLY BOB : BIOGRAPHY

Chanly Bob came to the U.S. as a refugee in 1982 and became a United States citizen in 1998. He is the youngest of 11 children of which three are deceased; his father is also deceased, falling victim to the Khmer Rouge in 1975. Chanly is one of two children in his family who graduated from Oregon State University with an Information Technology degree. During his years in college, he was an active volunteer and served one term as Vice President of the Cambodian Students Association.

From 2009 to 2015, Chanly Bob served as the President of the Cambodian-American Community of Oregon and he has been an active member of CACO since 2003. With CACO, he helps lead humanitarian trips to Cambodia. In 2009 he helped lead a bike drive fundraiser; enough money was raised to give 91 bicycles to Cambodian children. In 2011 he and volunteers from CACO and GLEF organized a tour in which 38 people traveled from the US, Canada, and Europe to Cambodia, funds were raised for 300 bikes, and nearly \$17,000 was raised for medicine, rice and school supplies. In 2015, a group of 25 people joined a similar tour in which bikes, medicines, rice and school supplies were donated. In each instance, the bikes were purchased in Cambodia and given to orphans, students and families in need. In 2016, Chanly joined the GLEF board.

Chanly Bob is currently a Unix Support Specialist for Portland General Electric. He is past driver for PGE's Meals on Wheels, a member of the FBI's Council On Community Outreach (formerly Multi Cultural Advisory Council) in Portland, and he also serves as a youth mentor, offering career guidance to those with an interest in the Information Technology career.

CHANLY BOB : CHECKLIST

The photographs were taken during various trips to Cambodia as part of the Golden Leaf Education Foundation projects established to fulfill their stated mission of enhancing the educational opportunities in Cambodia.

ACTS OF COMPASSION

*Reality demands
we also state the following:
life goes on.*

Wisława Szymborska (290)

No doubt we all experience moments when we pause to reflect on the fact and implications of Reality's demand. In the end, we may discover that the demand is actually permission: permission to experience the flow of life--there is something more in the human spirit than mere resignation to fact. How do we act within this flow in ways faithful to the reality of who we are?

I first visited Cambodia in March of 2016. The experience put me in contact with an amazing country and its incredible people. I was deeply moved by two realities that seemed to be at work: the memory of the genocide was palpable still; the resolve to move on was equally indisputable. I walked through the cities, into the countryside, among the people and around the monuments aware of the tension between these two realities. Szymborska's poem captured this tension for me. She wrote from her own Polish experience and perspective, but her insight is not limited in time or place. The result is her statement of a universal experience: life goes on.

With my visit to Cambodia came the realization of the centrality of dance in the life of the people. I was mesmerized by the ubiquitous nature of this art form. Gesture, movement, dress, crown, smile: together they express the beauty of the Cambodian spirit. During the rule of the Khmer Rouge, however, dance was one of the imperiled aspects of identity. Only a few dancers survived the extermination of those days. The tenacity and dedication of those who did are caught in the photos of Anders Jiras. They teach anew: the dance will go on!

The great Martha Graham's 1952 statement entitled *I Am a Dancer* is a wonderful account of her life of dance and what she became through this identity. She spoke clearly of the work she performed and the realization of how necessity shapes us to respond with the life force that moves within us. The very act of dance is life. She finishes her statement with this reflection:

The Greek myths speak of the spindle of life resting on the knee of necessity, the principal Fate in the Platonic world. The second Fate weaves, and the third cuts. Necessity to create? No. But in some way to transcend, to conquer fear, to find a way to go on.
(71).

The flow of time is relentless. But for Graham, dance was the declaration of another of reality's demands -- "to transcend, to conquer fear, to find a way to go on."

The beauty of the Cambodian dance is captivating. That is for sure! It has become one of the cultural forces that re-affirms a people and confirms the value of life itself. And it exists along side of and because of acts of compassion. Anders Jiras' photo of Sin Samadekchho is powerful to me. One of the few still-living dancers from the Royal Palace, Sin teaches a young girl at the Apsara Arts Association in Phnom Penh. This act of teaching is an act of compassion; it is an expression of deep love that has been nurtured through years of training and affection for the art AND for the student AND for the cultural dynamic that comes alive in it all.

I look at the act of teaching dance as one way in which compassion is lived in Cambodia. But teaching in every discipline is an act of compassion. The work of Golden Leaf Education Foundation is a compassionate outpouring of care and love. Chanly Bob's photographs attest to this. They capture the realities and the results of the efforts of GLEF to work with schools in Cambodia in order to upgrade the buildings and programs for children. In the face of difficult memories, Cambodians in America reach out to those in need back in their country of origin. Compassion is at the heart of this action. In real time, life goes on: it goes on with acts of kindness that transcend and conquer fear.

The compassion of those participating in GLEF comes from the deep and profound respect for and memory of those who died in the genocide. The death of loved ones, of relatives, of so many who were denounced as worthless by the Khmer Rouge -- their dying has become transforming. Their great value is claimed. Grief and anger, frustration and fear have been metamorphosed into the positive acts of compassion that encourage the education of valued children who need support.

The identity of the Cambodian people is still shaped by the visionary works of those who built the ancient Angkor; it is still molded by the atrocities of the killing fields; it now embraces a vision and rebounds from horror by saying “YES!” to the children who will become their leaders in the future. Those Cambodians who made their way to the United States do not forget those who continue to live and struggle in Cambodia. GLEF testifies to this fact. And many non-Cambodians have also caught the vision and share in the compassionate actions it effects.

Other such compassionate groups and actions in Portland also give witness to the resiliency of the Cambodian people. By giving recognition to GLEF, we seek to affirm all the efforts and achievements being made which defy the mere passing of time in order to transcend and conquer fear. Indeed, resiliency at its heart is manifest in these hopeful acts of compassion.

Sheldon Hurst, Curator

SOURCES

Martha Graham: “I Am A Dancer” written for the radio program *This I Believe* and published in *This I Believe*, vol. 2, 1952.

John Swain. *River of Time*. London: Random House, 1998.

Wisława Szymborska. *Map: Collected and Last Poems*. Trans. Clare Cavanagh and Stanislaw Barańczak. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2015.

Kilong Ung. *Golden Leaf: A Khmer Rouge Genocide Survivor*. Portland, OR: kupublishing.com, 2009.



*I believe we learn by practice.
Whether it means to learn
to dance by practicing dance or
to learn to live by practicing living,
the principles are the same.
In each it is the performance
of a dedicated precise set of acts,
physical or intellectual,
from which comes shape of achievement,
a sense of one's being, a satisfaction of spirit.
One becomes in some area an athlete of God.*

-- Martha Graham, "I Am A Dancer"