



Courtesy Coventry Evening Telegraph

Hon Vars story

Last month, mention was made in *Link* of the Cambodian family living in Busbridge. This is their story, as told to Pat Ashe.

I became a Christian in 1974 after making friends with some Americans, and my sister Vyada and I joined the Maranatha Protestant Church in Phnom Penh. Before leaving Phnom Penh I was teaching the 8th Grade in a school not far from my home. There were forty two children in my class. Often the school had to close owing to the rocket bombardment by the Khmer Rouge. In spite of the bombing, life was fairly normal. I could buy food in the shops, and as we had a large garden in the suburbs I kept some chicken, ducks and a pig.

On April 17 1975 the Khmer Rouge came into the City at 9.30 a.m., and at 12 noon told us all to leave. They said it was so that they could find any American soldiers. My father was a Colonel in the Cambodian Army. He 'phoned up and said he was going to stay with his troops. My mother and I, and my two children Somali and Panita (just 20 months old), set off southwards with three sisters, two brothers and a brother-in-law.

When we were told to leave home by the K.R., they said we would only be away three hours, so we took nothing with us. We had to walk over 58 km. and gathered vegetables from people's gardens who had left before us. We cooked in the empty

houses.

One day I was arrested by the K.R. as I had bought some rice with some gold I had. This was not allowed, and the K.R. were usually very severe with anyone who disobeyed them. I was called up before the Village Chief, and I was very frightened as I knew they never let anyone off without punishment. I prayed to God to save me and - what do you think? To everyone's amazement they let me off and just told me I must not do it again. I believe God answered my prayer.

We tried to go to our native village, but were stopped by the K.R. They took away my Bible and burnt it. They burnt all the books they could find. We were ordered to work in the fields planting rice, and moving earth to make irrigation channels. The children were sent to gather dung as fertilizer.

We were each given one tin full of rice each day. (A small condensed milk tin.) Only those with gold were able to buy extra food. There was no money. My mother was blind, so she was not made to work, but stayed and looked after the baby.

For eight months we worked there, and then there was such a shortage of rice, that we were sent up to Battambang, north west of Phnom Penh, and remained there. One of my brothers was killed by the K.R. because he had been in the army.

I planned to escape to Thailand at the

first opportunity, which came on the 10th March 1979. There were 209 of us who managed to get across the border, and only my young sister and I were Christians. When we left the village in Battambang Province, we had to walk about forty km. to the border. Nearly all the people in the village were going, so we followed them through the forest. Some men knew the way, as they used to go to the Thai border to sell goods before the take-over. It took us sixteen hours, we crossed the border near Ta Phrya, and we did not meet any K.R. on the way.

My sister and I, and my two children, were the only ones who were not sent back to Cambodia. A few days before I left I helped a man cut up a water-buffalo, and I noticed a small red patch on my hand. I thought it was a mosquito bite, but after I got into Thailand it got very bad, and a doctor diagnosed it as Anthrax. There are

no medicines in Cambodia, and I was very lucky to be near the hospital at Aranya Prathet. After a while I was transferred to the Hospital in the camp, and my two children and sister stayed with my cousin Peng Si who runs the Christian Outreach Training Centre in the Camp.

It was while I was visiting them one morning that all the new refugees in the hospital were taken out and sent back to Cambodia. We were the only ones left.

Although we had no Bible, every day we prayed with the children, and I taught them all I could remember about Jesus. When we prayed things did not seem quite so bad, and we knew God was helping us.

With Robert Ashe's help we were able to come to England, and we are very grateful to the British Government for letting us come, also we thank all the kind people who have prepared our home and provided everything we need.