

Kilong Ung: Forgiving the Unforgivable

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The recent "Non-Violence is a Choice Conference" that was held in Oregon had some amazing presenters. Among them was Mr. Kilong Ung who has presented at three of our four non-violence conferences. Last year he could not attend because he was working on his nonprofit project building schools in his native Cambodia. He has now completed five schools in Cambodia.

Kilong's testimony is a heart-wrenching one. His life is an inspirational story about the experiences of a Cambodian genocide survivor, a boy who spent over four years as a slave laborer under the tyrannical Khmer Rouge regime of Pol Pot, who killed nearly two million Cambodian civilians between 1975 and 1979. Over fifty of his relatives,

including his parents, grand-parents and sister, were killed. Some were brutally murdered and others were starved to death.

For four years, Kilong worked at a handful of slave camps, thirteen hours a day, every day, digging, plowing, clearing wood, and farming rice. Many around him died each and every day. Against all odds, he survived by living on a diet of two tablespoons of rice with water twice a day supplemented by eating snakes, rats, bats, bees, mice, caterpillars, roots, and leaves.

In 1979, he escaped into Thailand with his sister Sivheng Ung. He was sent to San Diego as a refugee and then moved to Portland, Oregon in February of 1980. He learned English in school, graduated from Cleveland High School, got his Bachelors at Reed College and went on to obtain his Master's Degree in Applied Statistics from Bowling Green State University. He currently works as an online banking software engineer at Fiserv. He was also a computer language adjunct instructor at Portland Community College.

Despite all these life challenges, Kilong was able to overcome the desire for hatred and revenge to forgive. He had the opportunity to exact revenge on one of his former captors, yet through the power for forgiveness, he was liberated and able to move on. His is a powerful story of tragedy, forgiveness, liberation and love. We are very grateful to Kilong for his example of living non-violence, forgiveness and true peace. If you would like to learn more about his story, he has written a book called: Golden Leaf, available on Amazon.com.

