

"Mom" of Kruosa Rikriey



Whenever you visit the Kruosa Rikriey, Mrs. Thou Raem would welcome you with her characteristic warm smile. She was born in 1950 and is 57 years old as of 2007. When I first met her, I felt as if a goddess was in front of me, though behind her generous smile hid the terrible experiences which many Cambodians had suffered from.

Mrs. Thou Raem grew up in a distinguished family in Siem Reap. If you had a chance to see her picture in her early twenties, you would think of her as an actress with elegance and beauty. She would surely have attracted many guys. In 1975, having just married, Khmer Rouge came to occupy Siem Reap for four years, the days of nightmare. Mrs. Thou Raem's parents became the first victims as they were bourgeoisies, and her husband was taken away for a soldier, never to return. Mrs. Thou Raem herself was put to a slave worker and forced on harsh working on Mt. Phon Kulen, for she was one of the New People (urban residences). That must be too bitter a memory to remember. Excessively and without reason hit by soldiers, her hands and legs still have the scars of a horrible past, and she has even a hollow on her skull. Those days of oppression sucked up the lives of 1,700,000 people, nevertheless, she fortunately survived. In 1978, when Khmer Rouge left Siem Reap, Mrs. Thou Raem came back her home alone to find that many of her brothers and relatives were killed. She struggled to live day by day taking care of young relatives who lost their parents.



In 1988, Mrs. Thou Raem began to work as a cook at the Siem Reap state orphanage managed by the government, a former facility of Kruosa Rikriey. Her duty, of course, was not only cooking but also washing, cleaning, and taking care of babies...that is, total care of children. Since then, she has been raising all the children in Kruosa Rikriey as her own children. As they write in "children's letter" on this site, they say they've been brought up by their "mother", Mrs. Thou Raem. She has been always beside them. In 1997, after Mr. Moug Thy left, Mr. Mouen Sokun came as the chief manger of the orphanage. Since then Mrs. Thou Raem has actually been managing it all by herself, as this new chief manger was obsessed about making money by taking advantage of the children. According to Mr. David Jarboe, Mr. Mouen Sokun conspired with some government agents to let the children perform Khmer dance for tourists in order to gather donation, which went straight to their pockets and was never used for the children. He was also a diligent adoption broker with his American partner Lauren Galindo who is now in prison for human trafficking.



From 1999 to 2004, Mr. David Jarboe was working closer to Mrs. Thou Raem than anyone else to support Kruosa Rikriey, and I (Satoshi Ito) have been working with her since 2002, watching her in full admiration. We two could insist that she has literally been dedicating "everything" to her children. Mrs. Thou Raem and her children are tied together so tightly like a mother and her own children, not just a caretaker and orphans. Every time you visit Kruosa Rikriey, you would see Mrs. Thou Raem working for her children, cooking, sewing, planting vegetables in the garden, doing side jobs with elder girls etc. Sometimes you can't find her in Kruosa Rikriey, but later you would see her coming back from the market with foods, or the distant farm with crops in sweat. I have never watched her doing something for her own, or taking a siesta. She is working about 18 hours everyday all year long for her children. Mr. David Jarboe said that if she was working there for money as Sunrise claimed, she would have left the orphanage with money. Of all Cambodians, no one would be willing to cover for her with as much payment as the foreign NGO staff. If I was told to take her duty, I would give it up within 3 hours, and be groggy in 2 days, finally in bed for 3 days. No one knows better than her children that she has been giving her selfless concern for them like a real mother. That's why they protested strongly against Sunrise and the government when they tried to fire her, screaming not to take their mother away. Sunrise defames that Mrs. Thou Raem is mindcontrolling the children, however, who in the hell would call a maternal love mindcontrol ?

Mrs. Thou Raem exemplifies modesty, or humility. While engaged in support activities in Cambodia, we are often disgusted

with their relentless attack of requests. “Thank you” comes always in company with “Give me more”. Cambodians don’t hesitate to ask for what seems to be too much, although Thou Raem never has such rude, direct manners. She won’t ask for anything unless we ask her. Her nobility, perhaps, would allow her to behave so independently. Furthermore, she doesn’t speak ill of anyone. Whatever Sunrise does or says, of course it would hurt her within, but she never blames anyone. She just obeys what her moral fiber tells her, paying no attention to what they say. She seems to have an aura of dignity.

On the end of September 2005, as the government ordered Mrs. Thou Raem to leave Kruosa Rikriey, she was highly likely to be displaced and imprisoned by the police force, nevertheless she refused to go anywhere and leave her children alone. “I did nothing wrong. Being good will never lead us to a bad ending.” she said, smiling. What a firm belief she has! She isn’t trying to fight against power or corruption. She is just trying to be honest with what she believes and to her beloved children.