

*Film begins.*

On-screen text: BROOKLYN

On-screen text: PETE PIN

Pete: My name is Pete Pin, and I was born in Khao-I-Dang refugee camp along the border of Cambodia and Thailand. My family resettled in the States from Cambodia as refugees in 1985.

On-screen text: MY CAMBODIAN AMERICA

On-screen text: After the fall of the Khmer Rouge in 1979, over 600,000 Cambodians fled to refugee camps throughout Southeast Asia. Over 150,000 Cambodians were resettled in the U.S.

Pete: My upbringing was slightly different from a lot of Cambodian people I knew growing up. My father was a Christian, both my parents were learning English. In fact, when I was born, I was named "Pete" because my father wanted me to have an American name. They only spoke to me in English, didn't speak to me in Khmer. I grew up kind of disassociated from my Cambodian identity. Never went to temple, never participated in anything that was Cambodian that was cultural.

Given the history and given their background in Cambodia, they wanted to walk away from that. They wanted to start over again. Every single Cambodian family that resettled came here with nothing but the clothes on their backs and the assistance they received initially from the resettlement agencies. I guess that upbringing was very influential for me, in terms of seeing how my family lived and also seeing how the other Cambodian families lived.

When I photographed my grandmother two and a half years ago in Stockton, California, and I asked her for the first time about my family's experiences in the killing fields, that for me was kind of a big awakening, when I learned how she kept my family together and kept everyone alive. At that point, when I took that photograph, I didn't know that I was going to be doing what I'm doing today. But that was just kind of a starting point. To give meaning to the Cambodian experience and my own upbringing and my reality through photography.

The fact that I'd never been to Cambodia is something that...it's...I feel as if half of who I am exists in a place that I have no idea [about]. Cambodia is always something that's calling.

This work has made me become aware of the importance of my family's stories and the importance of having the opportunity, as I'm doing now, to tell that story, and to be a guardian of that history. I'm working on a series of portraits with elders at the Cambodian Association of Philadelphia. I take these photos and then create diptychs out of them. I take a portrait and put it adjacent to anything that's tangible that connects us to our diaspora and to Cambodia as well.

*Diptychs are shown.*

On-screen text: PETE'S FATHER

Pete (talking to tattooed man): We met, what? We met, like, Khmer New Year 2010, right? Yeah. No, 2011.

Tattooed man: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. Right there. Yeah, right there.

Pete: You were playing Klah Klok, which is a Cambodian game...Cambodians play during the new year. It's like a gambling game. And I saw...I saw these fists.

Tattooed man: I'm Cambodian. Cambodia is over there and this is Philly. But it's just like the same thing as the killing field. They kill over there, and they kill over here.

Pete: And a lot of people don't get this at first, you know? Angkor Wat and then Philadelphia.

Tattooed man: Philly skyline. Yeah.

Other man: His tattoos, you know, it means a lot to me too. It takes us back to our parents, when they was going through the killing fields and all that, with the Pol Pot regime that came in there and did all that work to our people.

My parents especially, they told me a lot of stories about how my grandparents got murdered over there. How all of the smart people—teachers, professors, anybody with any type of talent or any type of education—was just murdered.

We're all Americanized now. Most of us came here at, like, the age of two, so we barely know anything about anything else. We just know about what we grew up in and our environment. Philly's all we know; we're basically sons of Philly. Philly basically raised us, so we got Philly in our blood. There's no place like home. This is like home to us.

Pete: I grew up in Long Beach. I grew up in Stockton. I've photographed in both areas, and I've photographed in Philadelphia and Lowell and the Bronx. As I've been photographing and spending a lot of time in different communities, when you walk into a Cambodian home—you can be in a rowhouse in Philadelphia, you can be in a subdivision in southern California—and you know it's a Cambodian home.

All immigrants share the same story of cultural assimilation, loss of culture, loss of language amongst the generations after, the younger generations. And that's absolutely true with Cambodians, but then you have in addition to that the added layer of having survived one of the great atrocities of the 20th century.

Pete (speaking to Cambodian family): What I'm trying to do with these portraits is to talk about the past, but then to be able to have people recognize within even their own families and other Cambodian Americans the importance of these documents, or these photographs, or stuff that we brought over from Cambodia as a connection that we have to the past. As a young Cambodian American, I feel like my generation...that we're severed from our family history.

Cambodian woman: For our pictures, from what I've heard from my family, they all burned. *[Speaks in Khmer.]* Because my mom, my dad, and my brother tried [to] protect the family. They say if you have a picture and you carry [it] with you, obviously you are someone else who may be working for the government back then or rich so everyone just buried it away or burned it.

Pete: Do you have anything from the refugee camps?

Woman: Yeah, I have, like, two. [Do you] want me [to] get it for you?

Pete: Yeah, yeah.

Woman: That's me. And this [is] a group of friends that we went to Khmer language class and dance class together. This would be me [and] all the friends.

Pete: You still look the same!

Woman: Oh, thank you!

Pete: OK, I think we're going to set up.

Woman: When I look at Pete's photo, it's like it's real. Especially when he takes some pictures from community homes, from home to home. This is how we look. This is how [the] Cambodian community looks. He cares about the community. He wants to show the world all of us. This is not just a picture; something's behind it. That touched my heart.

Pete: In late April [2013], the royal dance troupe in Cambodia came to New York for a performance as part of the "Season of Cambodia" festival. The significance of that is that the last time the royal dance troupe came to New York was in 1971. There is a famous photograph that was taken of them in Times Square. We tried to recreate that image, pay homage to that image. During the killing fields, 90 percent of all royal dancers were executed. For me, having the opportunity to take that photograph meant so much to me. It was incredibly moving to be able to be a part of that, because I understood how significant that photograph was—is—for my community—for Cambodian Americans and for Cambodians. In spite of what happened, here we are. We're in Times Square, 2013.

I seek to inspire other young Cambodians, and try to use photography as a means to create a space for that conversation. What your parents went through, what they lived through—and your grandparents, and your entire family, and yourself as a refugee—is an extraordinary experience. And it's an extraordinary story.

*Credits roll.*