



A Teenager's Survival

The Siv Ashley Story

CAMBODIA

Siv Ashley



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*My special thanks to Ms. Katie Streit.
She has helped me with the writing of this book
tremendously. She was able to put things
into words that I would not have been
able to say so eloquently.*

*Thank you, Katie.
God bless you.*



An Excerpt from the Chapter
"A Moment on the Mountaintop"

I stood just below the summit of the mountain. The group of refugees and I hid amongst the trees, waiting for just the right moment to race to our finish line, the Thailand border. Even in the coolness of the night, beads of sweat dripped down my face, and my heart pounded with anticipation and worry. I thought about my brother. *Where was his body now? Had I really left him behind? Was he really dead?* In my upcoming moment of escape, I had precious time. *But could I really believe what the old lady had said?* This was not the time to question myself. This was the time for concentration.

In a few moments, I would run through the forest with the others. Since I was one of the smallest, I would have to be quick to keep up with them. My lack of food already had left me feeling weak and feeble. As if my stomach weren't queasy enough, my recent actions of random hope for redemption had left bile boiling up my throat into my mouth.

I was suddenly jolted from my worrisome thoughts by the sound of a screaming baby. His piercing cries were sure to blow our cover. We would certainly be found if his hungering wails didn't cease. I watched his mother in panicked tears cover the child's mouth with her hand. Her breasts had already gone dry from starvation, and she

was no longer able to provide for her young. She did the only thing a mother could do to save her own life. She smothered her baby to death. It was then that our group decided to travel down the mountain. Regretfully the woman wrapped her infant in a tattered piece of cloth and left him at the top of the mountain.

We quickly raced past the banana and coconut trees. Those trees had once meant food and playtime in my life, but as we ran, they filled my heart with devastation. *How had a place that was as beautiful as Cambodia been filled with such foul-souled scum?*

Suddenly I heard a noise. It was a loud, grinding sound that came from the sky. Though different from a seasonal storm, the noise reminded me of the terror that had instilled my surroundings on day one when we were forced to leave our home: the day after the parade. Just then, a helicopter loomed above us, and at that moment, I was sure it would be my last. A package dropped from the helicopter and dozens more packages followed. *Gifts? Could it be?* I watched cautiously as one of the men reached for a package. Just as he held it between his hands, it exploded in a cloud of dust and fire. All refugees who were nearby were blown back several feet. Those weren't gifts. They were grenades.

I couldn't run because I went into a state of shock. With my free land closer than ever, I begged God to help me to survive. Bombs blew apart on both sides of me and exploded those who once led me into these woods into fragments. My ears rang so loudly that I thought surely the explosions had deafened me. With more packages settling all around me and my head throbbing from my broken eardrums, I fell to my knees and began to cry.

I looked into the sky and remembered my father telling me "believe in God and one day you will go to a place called America and you will be free." I began to pray.



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Prologue

Thirty years, and what seems like several dozen lifetimes, have passed since the events that I have described in this book. The following will tell you about my struggles, although I can finally look back with less emotion. The memories of that time are as vivid as if they happened yesterday. I can truly say that my reasons for writing about these experiences were as a testimony to those lives that were lost and for those who can no longer speak for themselves. Oh yes, God was on my side, but I didn't know it then.

In my current world of peace and comfort, I am removed from the horrors of war, the pain of hunger and starvation, and the diseases that caused much suffering, hardship, and even death. However I share the pain, the terror, and the anguish of children, elderly people, and innocent people who have grown up in war-torn countries like Pakistan, Kuwait, and Cambodia.

During the first 13 years of my life, I saw, experienced, and tasted the wraths of war, which will stay with me for eternity. I am hopeful that by sharing my story of war, hunger, suffering, despair, and death, I will shed light on the events that occurred throughout my youth. Eventually I found happiness and a sense of calm. I grew up to live a peaceful life. But it was not always that way.

Everyone says, "This is the stuff that you only see or hear in the movies."

My story is like that of many other Cambodian refugees who were fortunate enough to survive to tell the tale of their hardships, and it is painful and emotional.