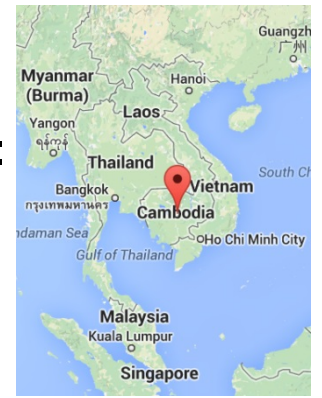


ESOL VOICES: Student Spotlight

Maneth Kheng

Maneth is an ESOL student who has lived in the United States for four years. She is from Cambodia. Maneth currently works as a tailor at Hickey Freeman and hopes to one day study dental hygiene at MCC. In this story, Maneth writes about a very important day.



Google Maps, 2014

Why Was I Crying?

I have only cried bitterly twice in my life: first, when my best friend passed away in front of me in a car accident and second the day that I found my mother. My mother was the person who I always prayed for God to help me find every single day. “God please help me,” I said to God with despair while I was waiting day after day.

It was a beautiful day in early autumn in 2004 with a blue sky; a very nice breeze was blowing through and over the leaves in the afternoon. I was sitting in the front porch doing my homework. At that time, I was fourteen years old and my brother was just one year older.

“Hay Bong! Look at those clouds.” I pointed to those clouds to show to my brother. “Do you see a huge Dragon in those clouds?” I said to him.

“Oh! Yes, it isn’t only dragons. I see another animal too,” he said.

Then I saw my uncle, my aunt and my grandmother come and tell us to get ready in five minutes. We were wondering

why, but we were afraid to ask them where we were going. Everyone in the car was very serene, yet distressed. I looked at my grandmother’s face. I saw her tears on both her big cheeks, but she tried to get away from my eyes. Then I whispered to my brother to ask them what was going on in our family.

My brother said, “No, I’m scared, you ask them.” His whispered voice went through both my ears like a few birds that were singing non-stop.

Then, I decided to ask them, “Can you tell me, what’s happened and where we are going?”

But, no one answered my questions. It was long hours of driving, almost six hours. No one talked or said anything at all.

Finally, my uncle began, “We are almost there. I think just half an hour more to go,” he said. Then he continued, “We are going to your mother’s cousin house that is located close to the ocean in a small village to bring someone back home with us.”

I was confused. Who did we have to bring back home? But I didn’t ask him because I already knew that he wasn’t going to tell me.

Finally, we were there, but we had to leave the car behind and walk for forty-five minutes more on the rice paddies to my mother’s cousin’s house. In that moment, the sky was turning dark so quickly it was hard to see our steps. I saw a flash of lightning in the very dark sky; the weather started to get a little bit cold. Frogs croaking surrounded the rice field and loud sounds of thunder, as if it would rain at any minute.

“I hope it’s not going to rain right now,” I said to myself.

When we arrived there, I saw a small hut under the big mango tree brightened by candles and I heard many people inside saying, “You will be ok.”

I glanced inside the hut and saw a skinny woman’s feet. She was laying on a bamboo bed moaning panicky.

We walked in to that hut slowly and I saw many people were

standing around the bamboo bed that I couldn't see who it was on the bed. Then my uncle said "Can I see her, please?"

At first, I was appalled. My feet couldn't move. My heart was beating so fast. My tears started to drop across my face more and more so that I couldn't stop them. It was a very painful and sorrowful day of my life when I saw my mother laying on the bamboo bed looking very awful. I couldn't find a word to describe how bad she looked at that time. In fact, we could see her ribcage like a

skeleton and her skin covered with bad sores everywhere. My uncle scooped her up and carried her to the car in the darkness to bring her to the hospital in Phnom Penh City, Cambodia. Luckily, my aunt is a nurse and she gave a sleeping pill to my mother to reduce the pain while we were on our way to the hospital.

My mother had been kidnapped and sold into sexual trafficking when I was five years old until that day. My family had looked for her everywhere for many years until my mother's

cousin saw her by accident. Then my mother's cousin brought my mom to her house and took care of my mom the best she could.

On our way to the hospital in Phnom Penh City on that very dark night, heavy rain was falling so hard to the ground. My brother and I were still crying with sorrow, but also with glee to have the opportunity live with our mother again. We were thankful to God that brought her back to us and gave us a life time to live with her who we loved so much.



ESOL Voices a collection of stories written by ESOL students at Monroe Community College. This semester, we are highlighting students from Asian countries. Look for a new story in the Tribune each month. We hope you will find these stories interesting and inspiring.

Katie Leite & Pamela Fornieri, ESOL Program, March 2014
