

By Austin Holt

# Coming Full Circle

For Kim Khauv, life in war-torn Cambodia began with uncertainty and hardship. Today, this DC is giving back by retracing his roots.

**F**or a moment, we sit in silence as Dr. Khauv digests my question. Presumably, he is asked one like it fairly often. After all, when someone has started life under particularly harrowing circumstances, others become intrigued and even a little curious. How did you and you family survive? What hardships

did you endure? What effect did your experiences have on you?

Today, the question is a little simpler. "Would you tell me a little bit about your childhood?"

After a couple of false starts, Khauv replies with another question. "Have you ever seen 'The Killing Fields?'"

Khauv, 37, was 2 years old when the Khmer Rouge took control of Cambodia in 1975.

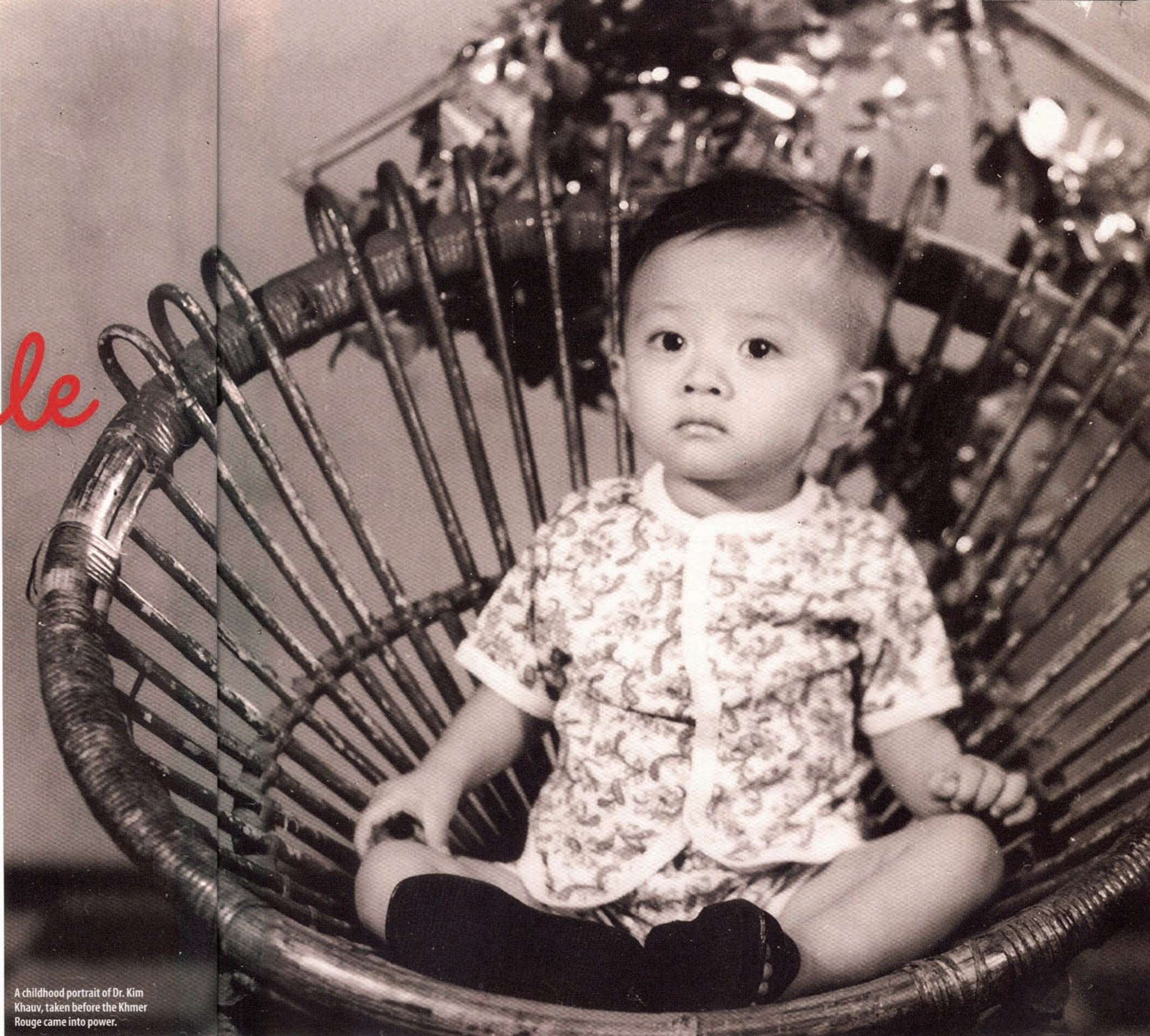
He and his family—mother, father, brother, grandparents, aunts and uncle—were forcibly evacuated from the capital city of Phnom Penh along with nearly two million of their countrymen. Some died on the journey to the rural countryside. Some were forced into agricultural labor; others were executed for political purposes; still others simply starved to death as the communist revolution slowly resulted in one of modern history's most tragic genocides. The award-winning 1984 film, "The Killing Fields," tells this tragic story.

"There wasn't enough food," Khauv says. "I remember being malnourished, as was my younger brother. The older people, who worked in the fields, basically worked from sunrise to sunset. Many died from starvation and hard labor. That's what happened for four years. Two million people died during that time."

A chance for escape came for Khauv in 1979. As the Khmer Rouge began collapsing during conflict with Vietnam, his family sought refuge. After more than six months of traveling by foot and by boat, avoiding capture and landmines, young Khauv and his nine relatives miraculously made it to a refugee camp in Thailand. "Someone was look-



Dr. Kim Khauv with his father during a return trip to Cambodia.



A childhood portrait of Dr. Kim Khauv, taken before the Khmer Rouge came into power.

ing after us during that ordeal,” Khaav says.

While the family was out of immediate danger, difficult times still lay ahead. After six months in the camp, Khaav’s father’s name came up on a UN list, saying that he, his wife and two sons had been sponsored by a relative in the United States. After difficult deliberation, the choice became clear. Khaav would go to the U.S. and leave six members of the extended family behind, unsure of when, or if, they would be able to leave. Eventually, the extended family was sponsored—to

better acquainted with their new home. Eventually, Khaav went to college at California State University, Fullerton, where he graduated with a degree in communications. And shortly after graduation, his life changed when he discovered his true passion.

“I was under chiropractic care at the time, and it changed my life,” Khaav says. “One day, I was at an ICA convention, and I heard Dr. [Gerard] Clum speak. I wanted to go to the college where he was President, so I followed him up to San

Francisco and started [at Life Chiropractic College West] in 1997, just a few months after graduating with a bachelor’s degree.”

Khaav graduated from Life West in 2000, and as a gift, his father took him back to Cambodia for the first time since fleeing in 1979. Much of his father’s family was still in Cambodia, and Khaav had cousins there he had never met. What began as a family reunion ended up providing Khaav with his next life goal.

Dr. Kim Khaav (front row, right) with his family while living in a refugee camp.



Paris, France, where they reside today. “My life would have been different if I would have stuck around,” Khaav speculates. “I could have been French, living a completely different life.”

Finally, in 1981, after six years of torment and uncertainly, Khaav and his family made it to Orange County, Calif., without a dime, uncertain about their new home. Despite a new type of poverty, the family made it through. Khaav describes this period of his life as the one that shaped him the most.

“I started school in the second grade, not knowing a word of English,” Khaav says. “My parents didn’t have any money when they came here, so my father took evening jobs and odd jobs. Jobs for teenagers, but he would work all the same.”

“For example, I always watched my parents put food on the table, and put a roof over our heads. We were on welfare, of course, and we barely made it through, but we were never homeless here in the United States, because of their hard work.”

As Khaav grew up, he and his family became

“I met cousins, who were born after the ordeal, for the first time,” Khaav says. “I was asking them questions, asking them what they wanted to do with their lives, and they couldn’t give me an answer. It was heartbreaking, just looking into their eyes—all they could tell me is that they were just looking toward what the next day would bring.” Khaav looked into their eyes and at the rudimentary educational system, and saw a gap that he could help fill.

“I started thinking. First, I definitely wanted to bring chiropractic to Cambodia. Secondly: I also wanted to offer English lessons and computer classes, all under one roof, and I wanted to run it as a non-profit. I just didn’t know how I was going to go about it.”

So Khaav went back to school again, this time to UCLA, where he obtained a Master of Public Health. The additional degree served two roles. On one hand, it would give him the skills necessary to expand chiropractic into a public health arena. On a personal level, he learned how to run a non-profit, write grants and bring those skills to Cambodia.

“We can actually start thinking outside of our private practices,” Khaav adds. “Generally, everyone in chiropractic is thinking one patient at a time—that’s how they’re serving people. I want to start thinking about community centers that serve underprivileged populations who cannot otherwise afford chiropractic care. So we can serve the community as a whole, and not just one patient at a time—especially in underprivileged parts of the world that can truly benefit from chiropractic.”

Thus, Khaav’s non-profit organization, Well-Balanced World, was formed. In December 2009, the organization made its first formal trip to Cambodia. Three chiropractors (Khaav and two others from Seattle) and 12 Life West interns set up service sites in rural areas outside of the burgeoning city of Siem Reap. For two weeks, they cared for the locals, most of whom had never heard of chiropractic, let alone been exposed to it.

“A lot of these people bend over in the rice fields day in and day out—we saw a lot of hardened spines out there that had been subluxated for years,” Khaav explains. “It was great to have them come and be able to trust us enough receive care. In certain places, we were there for three days at a time, and there are some who would come all three days, and even bring their children and friends. It was a beautiful thing to see.”

The trip also helped solidify the future of Well-Balanced World. About an hour and a half’s drive outside of Siem Reap, an orphanage is expanding its operations. Following a few meetings between Khaav and the orphanage’s director, a deal was proposed: the orphanage will offer the use of a new facility that is being built, and Khaav will supply interns capable of providing chiropractic care, as well as English lessons and computer classes.

“In two to three years, I would like to see a situation where we can have interns there year-round, rotating,” Khaav says. “In addition to providing care, we’d like to teach the orphans how to land jobs, perhaps in Siem Reap’s tourism industry, or in the hospitality industry.”

But for now, things are moving along well—both for Cambodia and for Khaav. While the nation has a long way to go, Khaav has faith in it. In the 10 years that have passed between his first trip and his most recent one, he’s noticed flourishes of development, more than a decrease in poverty and the overall effects of a decade-plus of stability. It’s still a young country, Khaav says, but one with potential. **TCL**