

'The Charmer' on PBS

Lena Horne's triumphs

No sinking Debbie Reynolds

Press-Telegram

LONG BEACH, CALIFORNIA, APRIL 30, 1989

75c

AT A GLANCE

WEATHER



Sunny, warm

Highs 70s, lows 50s. Complete weather/H5

SPORTS



Fernando Valenzuela

Dodgers edged by St. Louis, 1-0

Valenzuela pitches seven scoreless innings, but Dodgers still lose/B1

■ Lakers ready for Game 2 against Portland/B1

PEOPLE



Her kid can kick up heels

Former Miss America Vanessa Williams, expecting her second child, says her 2-year-old daughter can really move/A2

LEGAL

Bellflower woman takes 3 children hostage

SWAT team rescues kids after 3-hour standoff/C1

NEWS/STREET

■ **Cambodia today:** When Press-Telegram staff writer Susan Pack and photographer Bruce Chambers accompanied Chantara Nop on his return to Cambodia, they found a country that has yet to recover from the barbarous Khmer Rouge, a primitive country mired in poverty. Yet, they also saw promising signs of revival/J1

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"What has he done? What is his agenda? People say they don't know."

Political consultant Frank Greer on President Bush's first 100 days in office/A6

COMING UP

■ **Monday:** It took a lot of cars to make "Gabby" Garrison's dream mobile. It has a Ford front for a back, and its doors are taken from a Dodge roof/Life/style

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Abortion showdown a war of words

Each side claims victory in 6-hour confrontation

By Helen Guthrie Smith
Staff writer

While hundreds of anti-abortion demonstrators were being arrested in confrontations throughout the United States Saturday, it was a war of words that was being fought outside a

family planning clinic in Inglewood.

The words were sung in hymns and parodies, whispered in prayers, shouted in slogans and printed on shirts and posters.

And, well before the relatively peaceful, 6-hour event was over,

both sides of the super-heated abortion issue were claiming the right to have the last word: victory.

"It's a total victory for us," said pro-choice spokeswoman Kathy Spillar, national coordinator of the Feminist Majority, a coalition of groups supporting a

woman's right to choose whether to have an abortion.

The pro-choice proponents had outmaneuvered their opponents, she said. They got there first with the most. The clinic remained open and patients got in with the help of pro-choice "escorts" and clinic security officers.

Claiming victory for the other side was Susan Finn, a spokes-

woman for Operation Rescue, a New York-based group that organized the nationwide protests, and which views abortion as murder.

"We're very happy and pleased with what's happening here. No Operation Rescue people have been arrested ... (and) most likely there were babies

CONTINUED/A12, Col. 1

A long journey home to Cambodia 188



Chantara Nop celebrates with Long Beach friend Vandeth Nal, right, as he nears his destination. "I never forget you," he said in a poem to his native Cambodia.

Editor's note: Chantara Nop is torn between two worlds — a cruel Cambodia, where his mother and sisters struggle to survive, and a challenging Long Beach, where he is tenaciously building a new life with his wife and children.

It's a conflict shared by many of the more than 40,000 Cambodian refugees living in Long Beach, the largest community of Cambodians outside their homeland. Yet, fearful they will be killed if they return to their native country, few have bridged the two worlds.

Nop is one who did. Ten years after he escaped, the 34-year-old Long Beach social adjustment counselor returned to his homeland in February, accompanied by a Press-Telegram reporter and photographer. After an agonizing farewell to a family he may never see again, he came back to Long Beach in March. During the next four days, the Press-Telegram will chronicle his wrenching odyssey.

STORY BY SUSAN PACK

PHOTOGRAPHS BY BRUCE CHAMBERS

CAMBODIAN ODYSSEY

RETURN TO THE KILLING FIELDS

សំឡេងនៃការរស់រាន

CHAPTER I: THE JOURNEY BEGINS

Soldiers came to kill Chantara Nop in the middle of the night.

His mother and two sisters would not allow it. He was the only son, the only brother, the only man left in a family butchered by the Khmer Rouge.

His mother and sister grappled with one soldier, shoving him and his AK-47 into a pond. His other sister ordered her brother to run.

"I just go, go, go," recalled Nop. "I run about a mile. I shout to my mother, 'I'm alive! Don't worry! Don't worry.'"

"From that time, I don't see her at all. I'm gone."

That was 10 years ago. Now the 34-year-old Long Beach counselor was aboard a Northwest Airlines 747, flying home to see his mother and his sisters, flying home to a Cambodia rechristened Kampuchea by the Vietnamese-backed Communists who tried to kill him in the middle of the night.

"I miss much my mother," he said as the jet pierced a tranquil night. "She leave me soon. If I stay longer, I won't see her again in her life. The last word I want

CONTINUED/A8, Col. 1

■ Life in Cambodia today/ J1

■ The struggle for peace/ A11

Soviets among 14 nations represented in L.B. Marathon

By Nell Strassman

Staff writer

The Russians are coming! Top Soviet athletes will be running for the first time in the Long Beach Marathon next weekend, but to win they will have to get by a 29-year-old police officer from Jakarta, Indonesia.

Naek Sagala surprised everyone when he won the 1988 race and became the first Pacific Rim Marathon champion. A frantic search for a translator followed, so that Sagala could say a few words about his victory.

When an interpreter was

CONTINUED/A12, Col. 1

Marathon events

■ **FRIDAY:** Running and fitness expo, 5-8 p.m., Hyatt Regency. Free to the public.

■ **SATURDAY:** 8k run, 8:30 a.m., in front of L.B. Plaza on Long Beach Boulevard;

running and fitness expo at the Hyatt, 9 a.m.-5 p.m.

■ **SUNDAY:** Wheelchair race, 7:25 a.m., L.B. Convention Center; marathon, 7:30 a.m., the center; children's minimarathon, 8:30 a.m., the center.



The Long Beach MARATHON

CAMBODIAN ODYSSEY

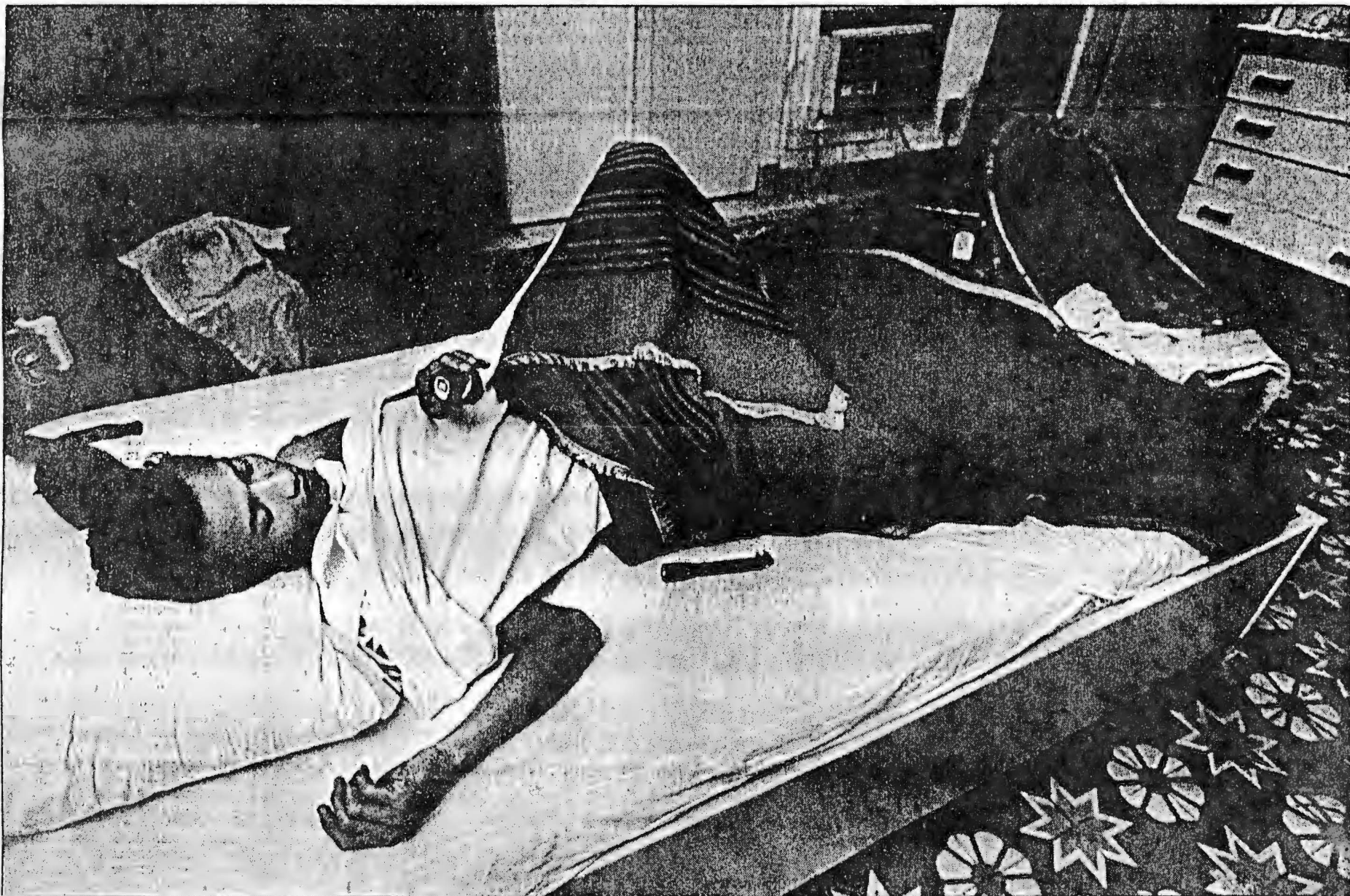
THE JOURNEY BEGINS

"I miss much my mother. She leave me soon. If I stay longer, I won't see her again in her life. The last word I want to say is farewell. She can't stay longer in this world, She is too old. She is 76. I don't care about my life. I just want to see her."

— Chantara Nop



Nop and his wife, Kimberly, could do little to console son Channimol on departure day at LAX, when friends and family came to say goodbye. The 10-year-old boy had cried all night at the thought of being separated from his father.



Chantara Nop's watch was a painful reminder of the time separating him from his family in Cambodia. After 10 years of waiting to see his sisters and mother, a night in a Ho Chi Minh City hotel brought no rest.

Chantara Nop's family



- **Father:** Sem Nop. Died at 58 of bone disease in 1971.
- **Mother:** Young Trak, 76. Lives with daughter in Phnom Penh.
- **Sisters:** Narin Nop, 37. Lives just outside Phnom Penh. Bopriek Nop, 33. Lives in Phnom Penh.
- **Brothers:** Mora Nop. Killed at age 37 by the Khmer Rouge. Morum Nop. Killed at age 35 by the Khmer Rouge. Moreah Nop. Killed at age 34 by the Khmer Rouge. Soben Nop. Killed at age 17 by the Khmer Rouge.

FROM ▲ 1

to say is farewell. She can't stay longer in this world. She is too old. She is 76.

"I don't care about my life. I just want to see her."

His struggle to see her already had been arduous. He waited month after month for word on his Cambodian visa. He packed his bags and waited by the phone, only to be told day after day the trip had been delayed.

It would only get worse. He would face stern customs officials and armed border guards in Vietnam, not knowing whether he was a wanted man by a vengeful government that had once sent soldiers to kill him. If he made it into Kampuchea, he would be consumed by the same fear every day. "Eighty percent, I think I die in Cambodia," he said. "I don't care. I see my mother, and I still have 20 percent to come back. I get killed in front of those people, I so happy to die that way."

Nop, a social adjustment counselor with a non-profit agency that serves refugees, decided last November to return to his homeland with two other Long Beach Cambodians, one of whom had visited the country several months earlier.

The trip was scheduled for the beginning of February. But there was no response to the visa applications, and urgent telegrams to the foreign ministry went unanswered. Nop waited anxiously, wondering if his dream would be dashed.

Finally, at the end of January, the coveted Mailgram arrived, and Nop packed his two big brown suitcases. He was told by the trip organizer to be ready to leave any day, any day for three interminable weeks. And nearly every day, the departure date changed without warning or explanation.

"Four times I change my vacation," Nop said.

"Withdraw it, do a new one, withdraw it, do a new one. It feels so sad. When waiting for something, an hour takes so long."

Nop waited hour after hour by the phone, unable to concentrate on work, wondering if he had been the victim of a scam. His relatives had no telephone, so he couldn't tell them he'd be late. He was afraid they thought he'd abandoned them.

"Maybe they think I liar," he said. "Maybe they think I don't miss my family."

The phone rang. The visa for Vietnam, the only legal entry point into Cambodia, had been turned down. Once again, the trip appeared doomed.

The travel agent filed another application. And still Nop waited with his bags packed.

"I never give up," he said. "Just waiting, waiting, waiting. If I cannot do it, I can find another way to do it. In America, you can go to moon. It's not impossible."

It wasn't. The Vietnam visa, which had been inexplicably rejected just five days before, was finally approved. On Feb. 21, four months after he applied for his visa, three weeks after his original departure date, Nop loaded his big brown suitcases into his burgundy Honda Accord.

He looked the consummate Californian in his shades, stone-washed jeans and shiny black Screen Actors Guild jacket. Walkman earphones were draped over the gold chain that glittered around his neck in the February sun.

A Styrofoam coffee cup in one hand, a cigarette and plane tickets in the other, he paced outside his three-bedroom green stucco home in central Long Beach. His 32-year-old wife, Kimberly, remained behind the white-barred windows with their children, 10-year-old Channimol and 7-year-old Nancy.



Natives freely cross the border, looking west from Vietnam to Cambodia. For those like Chantara Nop, who fled his native Cambodia 10 years ago, checkpoints like this are unnerving.



Once inside Cambodia, Nop waits impatiently in the van at a river crossing. A food vendor offers her wares to the foreigner.

“I just dream of my brothers. I hear a sound, and I think my brothers call me. We care for each other. We share everything. We never see each other. We never say goodbye.”

— Chantara Nop

FROM/A8

“I couldn't sleep last night,” said Nop's wife. “I was thinking about him, when he goes to Cambodia, whether he will be all right. When he runs from Cambodia, someone tries to kill him. That's why he runs to Thailand. Now, he tries to go back. That's why I worry.”

Channimol had cried all night, cried himself sick. The last time Nop took a trip, the boy had searched for his father all over the house.

“He opened the cabinet, looking for me,” he said.

Now the child was feverish and listless as his father prepared to leave him at Los Angeles International Airport.

At 11:30 a.m., Nop hugged and kissed his family goodbye. A Kleenex at her glistening eyes, his wife waved. His own eyes filled with tears, Nop strode resolutely onto the plane, not daring to look back.

Later, his voice barely audible above the thrumming of the jet engines, chain-smoking Winstons, Nop talked about his life in Cambodia. He talked about the promise he made to his dying father, the pledge that compelled him to go back.

His father was suffering from a bone disease in 1971 when he called Nop to his bed on the family farm in the province of Takeo. He asked his son to take care of the family after he died.

“You have to survive the Nop, keep the Nop alive,” his father told him. “You are the one I trust.”

Eight years later, he would be the only son left.

When the Khmer Rouge marched into Phnom Penh in 1975, Nop was a university student, majoring in mathematics and science, planning to become a teacher.

“First, all the Cambodians, they hold the white flag,” he said. “They think there will be peace. Four or five hours later, everything is going to be brutality, changed, killing. They come to you with guns and knock on the door, and everybody has to move out of town.”

The Khmer Rouge told him the Americans were planning to bomb the capital, that everybody had to be out within four hours, by sunset. He was assigned to a mobile work camp.

For the next four years, Nop dug canals, built dams, cut down trees and planted vegetables, 12 to 14 hours a day. Because educated people were killed, he changed his name and told his captors he was an ice cream seller.

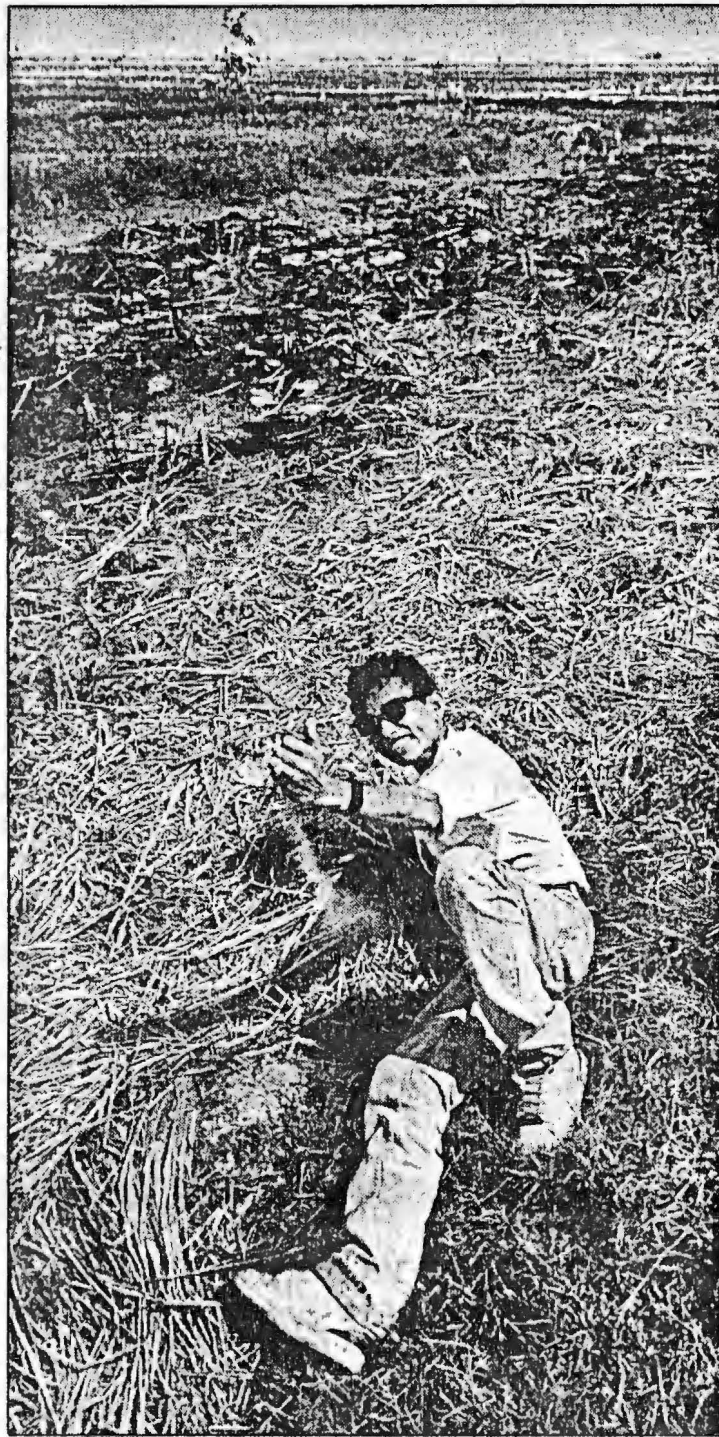
They gave him rice soup once or twice a day. “They have less rice, they put more water in it,” he said.

“You have to eat roots,” he said. “You have to eat leaves.”

You have to pretend to love the regime, and you can't get sick or tired or they may crack you across the back of your neck with a bamboo pole.

“They say a bullet is a waste of money,” Nop said. “Before they kill you, they ask you to dig your grave. They take all your clothes. I saw it with my real vision, with my real eye.”

After the Vietnamese overthrew Pol Pot in 1979, Nop returned to his village to fulfill his father's dying



After crossing into Cambodia from Vietnam, Nop sifts the dirt of his native land.

wish. He found only his mother and two sisters.

“I started looking for my brothers,” he said. “I have to go from village to village, province to province. It was all bad news. They all killed.”

Tears spilled from his eyes, and he covered them with his shades before reciting the death list: Mora, 37, English professor; Morum, 35, military officer; Moreah, 34, military officer; Soben, 17, high school student.

“I have a lot of nightmares at that time,” he said. “I just dream of my brothers. I hear a sound, and I think

my brothers call me. We care for each other. We share everything. We never see each other. We never say goodbye.”

His opposition to the new Vietnamese regime sent him fleeing for his life in the middle of the night. He eventually crossed a river, jungle and minefield to reach a Thai refugee camp. It was there he met his wife.

The couple arrived in New York in September 1981, sponsored by Nop's cousin, Than Pok, director of United Cambodian Community Inc. in Long Beach. The next year, Nop moved to

Long Beach, and in 1985, he joined the UCC staff.

In his spare time, Nop managed apartments, operated a janitorial service, served as a translator for the city. He broke into movies, playing a security guard in “The Golden Child,” a Cambodian soldier in “Above the Law.”

He became an American citizen, and as he flew toward Cambodia, he knew he couldn't stay. He beamed when he spoke of what he hoped would be the imminent reunion with his mother, but his smile faded as he worried about his lonesome little Channimol.

“That's why I have to share my heart in two,” he said.

Nop sent his son a postcard from every stop along the way. First, Hong Kong, then Bangkok. Finally, four days after leaving America, he landed in Vietnam, the country that once wanted him dead.

As he approached the brown wooden entry huts that housed the customs officers in the Ho Chi Minh airport, Nop tensed. He hadn't slept the night before. He was afraid he would be captured in the airport and taken away.

“I'm a little nervous,” he whispered.

He covered it with fast, friendly chatter. But when it came time to note his citizenship on the customs form, his nerves prevailed. “Oh, I wrote ‘S.U.A.’” he told the customs officer with a little laugh.

The man in the khaki uniform stared at him. Then he returned Nop's timorous smile and retracted the wooden bar that blocked his path.

It was muggy in the dingy customs room, where luggage was unceremoniously shoved off a belt onto the scuffed gray and white linoleum floor. Nop retrieved his suitcases, filled out more forms, stood in another line, waiting for final permission to enter enemy territory. He resumed his nervous prattle as sullen customs officers rummaged through his big brown bags.

Finally, 30 minutes later, he emerged. Wrung out, he slumped to the ground, leaned against a post and lighted a Winston.

“It's OK now,” he sighed. “I feel much better at last.”

Yet, it would not be the last time he would feel the rush of fear. He still had to confront armed border guards when he left Vietnam. He still had to confront armed border guards when he entered Cambodia.

Wearily, Nop climbed into a van, which took him to a sleazy hotel booked by a cunning travel agent. Motorbikes filled the lobby, which smelled like a garage. Toilets were dismantled, and buckets of water doubled as showers. Drug gangs roamed the halls.

It was a disgusting place, a dangerous place. Nop was ordered to guard all the luggage behind a locked door while his traveling companions searched for another hotel. They found one, and hours later, Nop finally collapsed on a clean bed in a spacious

CONTINUED/A10

CAMBODIAN ODYSSEY

THE JOURNEY BEGINS

“My homeland, my mother, please forgive me. I never forget you. I still remember everything.”

— Chantara Nop

FROM/A9

room with a ceiling fan.

The next morning, Nop was summoned to the Kampuchean Consulate, where he was ushered into a large living room with long gold couches, Persian rugs and lace curtains. He stiffened when the vice consul frowned at the crinkled Mailgram giving the small delegation permission to enter Cambodia.

“I’m worried much,” Nop said. “I think this is the telegram for nothing.”

But \$100 was slipped into an envelope to “clear the road,” and soon, the final visa paperwork was being processed. That night, a consulate aide came to the hotel to tell Nop everything was OK.

“God, I got so much painful,” he said, pointing to his heart. “I waste a lot of time and kill a lot of time and it take me so long. He hug me and he tell me and I hug him.”

“So tomorrow, pack your stuff,” Nop said.

“Yea!”

Nop got up at 4 a.m. to pack his stuff. The precious Kampuchean visas were distributed. Today was the day!

But it wasn’t. After hurried visits to several airline offices in an attempt to make return reservations, it suddenly was too late to leave.

“I feel so disappointed,” Nop said. “Very, very disappointed.”

The next day, on Feb. 28, one week after leaving Los Angeles, Nop arose at 12:30 a.m. He had showered and dressed by the time he realized it wasn’t 6:30 a.m. He was wearing his watch upside down.

He waited six more agonizing hours.

Finally, he climbed into the blue van that he hoped would take him across the border. He clambered over the seats, focusing his camera on familiar rice fields, humming Cambodian songs.

Today was the day!

At 8:45 a.m., there it was. At last. A red wooden arch with a yellow temple on top loomed over a hot, brown, scrubby rice field. Republic of Kampuchea.

Nop was hovering at the edge of his homeland.

But he remained silent. There were brown wooden shacks on the Vietnam side. There were yellow concrete huts with red tile roofs on the Cambodian side. On both sides, there were men in olive green uniforms with guns.

Would they recognize him? Would they drag him away from the country that lay just down

the road? Tension seized the stifling blue van.

Nop looked at the coconut palms, the trees of his childhood. He thought about his father and his deathbed plea. He pulled out his Vietnam visa, turned it over and began writing a poem on the back.

“My homeland, my mother, please forgive me,” he wrote in the swirled letters of his native language. “I never forget you. I still remember everything.”

He set aside his poem and filled out customs forms. He got out of the van and opened his suitcases. Again, uniformed men rifled the contents. Again, he waited.

At 9:10 a.m., the gate slowly rose, and the blue van left Vietnam.

In the hot, barren middle ground between borders, Nop answered the questions on the next set of customs forms. Was he bringing in an air gun? How many pairs of blue jeans?

The Cambodian border guards asked him to count out his money, then pawed through his luggage. He had brought letters from other Cambodians living in Long Beach, and the guards held each one up to the merciless sun. One contained undeclared money. They confiscated it.

The search continued. A bony cow trudged past. The sun seared the dust. The guards found a bracelet hidden in a film packet in someone else’s suitcase.

They sternly ordered the offenders to follow them into a green hut. Nop was grim as he entered the dim shack.

Muted conversation, grave tones. He was so close, just a few feet away. In a hut with armed guards.

Moments later, the tension was suddenly shattered.

Laughter broke out. Another \$100 was slipped to the guards, and the road was clear once more.

At 10:30 a.m., the second gate rose. Nop was home.

Jubilant pandemonium erupted. Nop gave his traveling companions resounding high-fives as they all yelled and clapped and stomped on the floor. Feet pounded the battery housing, killing the engine. Nop leapt out of the stalled van and deliriously rolled around in a stubby rice field, raising brown stalks in victory.

“I’m going to see my mother!” he thought. “I will reach my goal.”

The torment and uncertainty weren’t over yet. He was entering a country he’d fled, a country patrolled by soliders who had tried to kill him. He’d waited a decade to embrace his mother. He was a month late. Was today really the day?

But all Nop wanted to do at that moment was celebrate. Back in the van, he kept slapping hands, clapping hands, whooping, holiering and bounding out of his seat. The driver honked and honked.

As the van lurched forward, an ecstatic Nop leaned out the window.

“Goo-o-o-d morning, CAM—BO—DI—A!” he yelled.

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