Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE1936

Engly, Piphal

(1944 -)

Born	19440101, Kampong Cham province Cambodia
Occupation	Community worker, Interpreter, Teacher

Summary

Born in 1944 in Kampong Cham province, about 120km from the Cambodian capital of Phnom Penh, Piphal Engly arrived in Australia in 1977 with no money and very little English.

Details

Raised by a mother who instilled the importance of education and an active life in all her children, Piphal matriculated in 1962 at age sixteen, when most others were doing so at twenty. She obtained numerous medical diplomas and Licence des Lettres from Cambodian and European academies. She worked as a teacher in the Public Health Model Centre, applying and implementing Public Health to the rural districts around Phnom Penh. Operated by the World Health Organization, the Model Health Centre focused on women's health needs by providing neo natal care and training rural midwives. In the early 1970s, Piphal was employed as a coordinator for the World Health Organization, and as a Pharmaceutical and Medical Supervisor. She was also employed by the Department of Public Health as an International Public Relations Officer, thanks to her French language fluency.

Piphal married in 1963. Twelve years later, in 1975, her husband was selected by the Department of Commerce to travel to Australia for training. Later that year the Republican Cambodia fell to the Khmer Rouge and his scholarship was cancelled. Piphal managed to join him in Melbourne in 1977, but without their two children, whose whereabouts remain unknown.

Piphal initially took on casual work as a cleaner, but was unaware of her rights under Australian industrial law and was exploited. Nine months later she enrolled in English classes at a Migrant Resource Centre. She eventually completed her High School Certificate and worked as a teacher assistant and as an interpreter for the Health Commission of Victoria and the Victorian Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs.

Enraged by racism toward Cambodian students in one school, Piphal set herself a two month period to make those students sufficiently literate to keep up with their schoolmates. She succeeded, and her efforts won her widespread respect within the Melbourne Cambodian community.

Today Piphal lives in Canberra. She retains links with her country of birth through the Meada Khmer Development (MKD) Organization – a non-government, non-profit, non-sectarian, non-political organization which aims to improve the lives of disadvantaged women in Cambodia. (The MKD Organization is located at: N° 54 Samdech Sothearos (St. 3), Phnom Penh 12207, Cambodia. Ph: 012 728 049; Email: tepsavery@online.com.kh). She has performed senior roles at the Royal Embassy of Cambodia in Canberra and is a professional interpreter and translator.

In 2010 she was awarded a PhD from Monash University for a thesis entitled: The secret Nationalist Movement: a memoir of a Cambodian princess, 1880-1920.

Published resources

Book
The Royal Family of Cambodia, Corfield, Justin J. with Piphal Engly, 1990

Resource
Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Site Exhibition
From Lady Denman to Katy Gallagher: A Century of Women's Contributions to Canberra, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2013,
http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/ldkg

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