# Theology  

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## Meet Molly Yos

Brian MAHER


Molly YOS

Molly Yos was born in Prey Veng province in 1960. She was the ninth of twelve children, only two of whom were boys. Her father, an official in the Ministry of Agriculture, supervised three provinces.

The family relocated to Phnom Penh in 1967 upon his promotion to Supervisor of Provincial Agriculture in Cambodia. Molly enrolled in Phnom Penh schools where she made friends with a girl named Young Setha-whom they called "Eang"-from Arey Ksach, the village directly across the river from the Royal Palace. Eang and Molly, both young teenagers in 1973, heard about a free English class. Phnom Penh during the sixties and early seventies was the hub of Southeast Asia and in touch with the pulse of both the region and the world. Molly and Eang did not want to be Cambodian teenagers who would
be referred to as "frogs in wells" or boun cheroong (square), so they were very interested in studying English. The classes were offered at the OMF Youth Center near Olympic Stadium. Molly and Eang found the place and enrolled to study English in their spare time. From the posted schedule they could choose their study topic from teachers Don Cormack, Alice Compain, Ruth Patterson, Rose Ellen Chancey, Andrew Way and Andrew Butler. Mr. Triev Sary was the Cambodian in charge. Both Eang and Molly first studied English from the gospels with Ruth Patterson. Then, when Rose Ellen Chancey came later, they studied English from the book of Genesis. They both bought English and Khmer Bibles to ensure they understood clearly.

Meanwhile, while Molly was studying her English, Molly's older brother Antipo had come to faith in Christ--the only Christian in the family. Molly was not much interested at the time, but sure took notice when her uncle beat him up after he preached the gospel to the family. As Molly was learning English from the Bible, Antipo was leading the youth group in the Bethany church.

Molly found the book of Genesis interesting and relevant because it answered many life questions about which she had wondered since childhood. The Buddhist religion posits neither a creation epic nor a creator God. Molly found the concept of a God who created her and knew her before she was born very comforting. As Molly studied Genesis, she gradually began to believe in this creator God and his son Jesus, and sometime in early 1974 gave her life to Christ. She began to attend Bethany church, led by Chhirc Taing (an officer in the army of Lon Nol's Republic and the older brother of Rev. Taing Vek Houng of Campus Crusade) and Mien Tien Voan (at that time Country Director of World Vision). Both Chhirc and his cousin Voan were later most likely martyred.'

Molly continued her study of English and the Khmer Bible at the Youth Center with Triev Sary on weekdays, and faithfully attended Bethany church on Sundays. During 1974, Molly began to help out at

[^0]the Youth Center, organizing the place and learning how to be a Bible study cell group leader. On Sundays after church, Molly, Rose Ellen Chancey, and her friends from church went out to share the gospel and hand out gospel tracts in the Tumnop Tek area of Phnom Penh, on the southeast rim of the city. Molly remembers selling tracts and Christian literature at the Olympic stadium when Dr. Stan Mooneyham preached in a large crusade.

Molly brought her younger sisters Sokun and Sotheavy to church with her, but it wasn't so easy convincing her parents to let them tag along. The fact that Sokun and Sotheary had become sponsor children of World Vision helped ease the concerns of her Buddhist parents who knew World Vision was a Christian organization. Through Molly's bringing them to church, both Sokun and Sotheavy became Christians and learned to work with the children in the church. Their parents even began to transport them back and forth from church activities. Molly's younger sister Sokun grew up to become a schoolteacher in the eighties, and worked for FEBC radio in the nineties. She currently works for World Vision Cambodia as a community development worker and has a great Christian witness.

In late 1974, Antipo's sharing his faith with Molly's two older sisters, Yos Im Sithan and Yos Sangkany, began to show some fruit. As Khmer Rouge artillery began to pound the city, these two older sisters gave their lives to Christ.

Treiv Sary, the director and manager of the Youth Center, realized that though he had evangelized and discipled these young people, other churches were using their gifts but not appreciating what he had done for them. In addition, churches like Bethany and Bethlehem were already overcrowded as more and more refugees daily arrived in Phnom Penh. So he decided to organize church services at the Youth Center on Sundays. Molly and Antipo stayed at Bethany and helped with smaller churches like Noah's Ark Church, an abandoned house boat stuck on the western bank of the Mekong. Noah's Ark was owned by a new believer from Bethlehem church, and Takmau Bible College students preached and ran the services there.

The Khmer Rouge were getting close, and there was fighting on the outskirts of the city. Eang, whose village was directly affected
by the fighting between Lon Nol's troops ${ }^{2}$ and the Khmer Rouge, fled to the city and her family bought a house near the Olympic Market. Eang and Molly did everything together after that. Antipo, Sithan and Sangkany sold vegetables at Dam Tkeov market near the Tumnup Tek area. Sometime during 1974, Molly joined in a large baptism hosted by the Takmau Bible College. Şhe remembers being encouraged to pray for the salvation of her parents by her youth pastor, Mr. Ngeth Samawn (Setha).

When Christmas rolled around, they celebrated the holiday with Rose Ellen and Alice at their home, together with other churches around Phnom Penh. All the expatriate missionaries in House \#72 were packing their bags to leave, since it appeared to be only a matter of time before the Khmer Rouge would overrun the city. Molly's missionary friends warned her to not allow the Khmer Rouge to catch her with English books or a Khmer Bible.

On April 17, 1975, the Khmer Rouge entered Phnom Penh. They immediately began to execute Lon Nol's soldiers and others who had been a part of his government. Many soldiers buried their uniforms and joined the enforced mass exodus of the citizenry. Phnom Penh residents who were evacuated to the provinces came to be known as "new people." Many of these former city dwellers were to be systematically starved or worked to death. Others were simply taken away, never to be seen again.

In this mass exodus of over two million people, Molly and her family headed toward their home village in Prey Veng. They crossed the Mekong at Neak Loung, and made it to the town of Kompong Trabaek. Further into the countryside, they built a little house of bamboo and palm fronds. After arriving in Prey Veng province, most of the family contracted malaria. During this time of sickness, Molly's parents asked her to lead them to Christ. Molly and her mother were the sickest members of the family, and were taken to a rudimentary Khmer Rouge health clinic. The clinic had no medicine, and some patients were taken away to be killed.

[^1]After a few months Molly recovered, but her mother deteriorated. Those running the clinic were about to send Molly's mother home to die when she slipped into a three-day coma. In her coma she saw hairy demons chasing her, and soon became exhausted trying to flee from them. Two women came alongside her, each grabbing an arm, lifting it up, and supporting her. They encouraged her to keep going. In the distance loomed a white church. The two women took her past the white church and told her that it was a religious temple. She saw another church, this one was blood red and situated on the far side of a big ocean. The demons continued to chase her. They swam, but she was able to walk across on the water. As she arrived on the shore and set her foot on the steps leading into the church, the demons caught up to her. At that point, she yelled out, "Jesus, help me!" She saw Jesus coming out of the church saying; "I am Jesus Christ and this is Judgment Day." Upon hearing this, the demons fled. Molly's mother-in the real world-began moving her toe-a sign that she was still alive.

Soon after she returned from the clinic in good health. The family began to secretly read the Bible, but soon the situation became more repressive and they buried the Bible for fear of death from the Khmer Rouge. Even so, Molly's mother's faith began to blossom. But tests also came: Sotheary, the youngest in the family, suffered without medical care from dengue fever for seven days, and then died.

Molly was forced to plant rice and build paddy dikes in return for one bowl of watery gruel with a few rice kernels in the bottom. Seeing a dog run by made her mouth water as she thought about roasted dog meat. Because of lack of food and intense labor, Molly became ill. She had constant diarrhea, and quickly became dehydrated and malnourished. The authorities sent her to rest at another rudimentary clinic.

The Khmer Rouge were getting ready to conduct a mass marriage in Molly's village. Her mother insisted that Molly return from clinic and take part in this ceremony, thinking that if Molly married a villager, she might end up living close by. Molly was not thrilled with this idea at first, but eventually went along with her mother's wishes
and married Pot Sopharong in a group marriage ceremony in 1978. Her sister Yos Im Sithan was married in the same ceremony.

Ten days later, the Khmer Rouge forced the married couples to relocate to Pursat province in northwest Cambodia. Her mother, father, and sister decided to go too, and walked west all the way to Neak Luong. From there they were shipped north by truck to Phnom Penh, which was devoid of people. From Phnom Penh they took the train north to Pursat. During those difficult times under the Khmer Rouge, Molly's husband shared what food he had with her, and he carried her things when they were forced to move. She had a bad infection in her arm, and she is convinced that because of his help she remained alive and was able to survive the arduous journey

Antipo had been missing since they left Phnom Penh, as he was visiting his girlfriend when the Khmer Rouge entered the city. He had been relocated to Battambang, Cambodia's second largest urban center in the northwest, close to the border of Thailand. Molly remembers him recounting that three times the Khmer Rouge rounded him up for execution, but all three times the trucks were so filled that not even one more emaciated person could fit on the truck. After his third reprieve, Antipo fled to Thailand and joined the former Prime Minister of the sixties, Son Sanne, and the KPNLF (Free Khmer) to fight against the Khmer Rouge. He was the accountant for the KPNLF, until accused of pilfering funds and sent to the front where he was badly shot. He went to a Thai hospital to recover, then lived with a Thai family until he recuperated.

1978 was an extremely difficult year for Cambodians in terms of food security, as the Khmer Rouge exported a large percentage of rice to China and stored the rest in their mountain hideouts. Devastating floods also hit Cambodia's rice bowl that year, wiping out any rice that poor starving Cambodians might depend on.

On Christmas Day, 1978, Vietnamese forces entered Cambodia after the Khmer Rouge relentlessly attacked and massacred Vietnamese citizens living inside the Cambodian-Vietnamese border, especially in the Kampuchea Krom and Mekong Delta area. On January 7, 1979, Vietnamese troops victoriously entered Phnom Penh. From there they pushed the Khmer Rouge leadership into the
mountainous northwest along the Thai border, where they were safe in their Thai-protected border enclaves.

Vietnamese troops allowed Molly and her family to leave Pursat, but did not permit them to return to Phnom Penh. Instead they went to Prey Veng. They fortunately were able to go back to the family plot in their home village of the sixties, rather than the village where they lived during the Pol Pot regime. It was rice harvest time, but the fleeing, wounded, black-clad Khmer Rouge had torched the rice fields, poisoned wells, and destroyed roads and houses. Molly's family had little food, so were forced to beg from their neighbors. They worked out an arrangement under which Molly and her family worked long hours plowing and planting in the neighbor's rice fields, exchanging labor for rice to eat. For that whole year, they had little means for procuring food of any type. Six hundred thousand people died of starvation during the first year of the Vietnamese occupation. Under the Vietnamese K-5 program, any Cambodians suspected of not supporting the regime were sent to clear jungle and fortify areas against the $\mathrm{DK}^{3}$ in mountainous regions of Battambang.

The new government - the Peoples' Republic of Kampuchea, led by Heng Samrin, Chea Sim, and Hun.Sen (all having ties with the Vietnamese) -recalled Molly's father to his government agricultural position and to further studies. At the end of one year on the Prey Veng homestead they moved back to Phnom Penh, and Molly went to work for the Ministry of Agriculture. Her husband also went to work there, and made a lot of new friends who had a bad influence on him. He was soon squandering what little salary he earned on drinking and gambling. When their first child was born in 1981, he no longer took much interest in Molly or helping her raise the family. Molly tried her best to get him to change his ways but she could not, and resigned herself to care for her child without his help, depending on her mother and sisters for food and money to help pay the bills.

Sometime in the very early eighties Molly met up again with Eang. Eang was secretly worshipping at the underground Takmau church and invited Molly to join them, but Molly's father said "No"

[^2]because it was too dangerous. Molly had enjoyed little conscious spiritual activity since 1975. But in 1988 her father began to succumb to the effects of high blood pressure, so Molly went to find Eang. Eang brought Molly to her pastor, Seing Ang, who prayed over Molly's father and anointed him with oil. He died months after that and went to be with the Lord.

Since the whole family wanted to bury their father according to Christian tradition rather than cremating him as in the Buddhist tradition, they called Pastor Seing Ang back to lead the funeral. That was in July of 1988. They didn't even bother to get permission from the government but went ahead with the funeral. There was a huge turnout. All the government friends of her father came, as well as friends of Molly, Sithan, and the other children. The underground church came out at this funeral for the first time. They all sang and worshipped God. Many pre-1975 Christians, many of whom came to Christ at the Stan Mooneyham Crusades, came out for the funeral. Attending were Pastor Im Chhorn, Pastor Muth Bunthy, Miss Yorng Setha, Mrs. Ngeth Sambo, Miss Srey Heim, and Heim's mother, as well as Molly and her family. Molly remembers the funeral procession being miles long.

An unexpected problem arose: "Where do we bury him?" A Vietnamese-Cambodian Christian, Paul Ba, helped contact the Catholic church, which allowed Molly's father to be buried in a Catholic Vietnamese cemetery in Kean Svay District, just over the river toward the southeast, off of Route One.

Through the funeral, Molly became aware of other believers who were meeting in secret locations around town. In 1989 it was estimated that there were no more than two hundred Christians in Phnom Penh.

Molly recounts, "One day not too long after the first public baptism in the Kantoeut River, west of PhnomPenh (done surreptitiously with about fifty believers), I saw my șister Sithan hold a paper in her hand. She was asking other key Christians to sign it. She had about ten signatures on what apparently was a petition of some sort. My sister was working at that time in the Ministry of Education, and was respected by her colleagues. She submitted that petition to an important man in the government who sent it through the system; it eventually
arrived on the desk of the Minister of Cults and Religion." Fortunately, Sithan had a longtime friend who turned out to be the wife of this minister and was able to arrange an audience with him. Molly and her sister met with the man and implored him: "Under this regime we have no right to worship in the tradition of our faith, no place to bury our dead according to our tradition, no rights at all. This isn't right. What can you do for us?"

The three Yos sisters, Molly, Sithan, and Sokun, bicycled to the minister's house every afternoon for more than three months. He wanted to learn more about Christianity in order to make an informed presentation of their case to the government. Each afternoon they sang hymns, worshipped, taught from the Bible, and listened to worship songs on cassette. The minister even borrowed cassettes to listen in his car going back and forth from work. He asked many questions, which they answered.

During this time, Molly had dreamed that she and her family were running around the nearby Olympic Stadium, shouting joyfully to everyone in hearing distance: "Bravo Jesus, Bravo!" She felt God was telling her that they would be given a decisive victory that would break Satan's strong grip over her beloved land.

Meanwhile, Molly's father's funeral had spurred local Christian leaders to form a provisional church committee comprised of ten members (four of them women), and headed by Pastor Siang. ${ }^{4}$ Molly's sister Yos Im Sithan was on that council. It was June of 1989, and Christians were hoping for changes in the new state constitution showing more tolerance toward Christanity. That June, the Council of Ministers permitted Christians to express their faith in worship, but did not permit evangelism.

While Yos Sithan, Molly, Sokun, and others continued to meet with the minister, the Cambodian church was invited to attend the Lausanne II World Conference in the Philippines. They could not attend, but did send a report about their situation. This mobilized those

[^3]attending to pray fervently for official freedom of religion for the church in Cambodia.

On the last day the sisters met with the minister, he asked them if Christians got involved in politics. Molly explained from Romans 13 that God ordains leaders of a country and Christians are encouraged to submit to and pray for their leaders. She reassured him that Christians in Cambodia only wanted freedom to worship, not stir up unrest in an already unstable country. The next day he called them back, quite shaken up about something one of his superiors might have said. He asked them again to explain to him very clearly about the political part. Molly explained once again that Christianity would not intentionally cause problems for the government; they only wanted freedom to follow their religious tradition legally. The minister went back to make his second appeal to the government. The very next Sunday, April 7, 1990, ten months after Lausanne, during a worship service in Molly's house, the Cambodian Government formally announced its recognition of the Christian Church. The next week, in the presence of government representatives, 1,500 Christians-Catholic and Protestant, Cambodian and Vietnamese-celebrated their new freedom together in Phnom Penh's largest auditorium.

The government remained wary of Christians; Molly and Sithan were among those followed by spies. Since Sithan was the primary mover and shaker in obtaining freedom for Christianity, the government wanted her to keep a tight lid on things to ensure that the church did not abuse its newfound freedom. Tight restraint was impossible after Christianity began to grow rapidly and missionaries and denominations arrived from all over the world. It was a Texas-based evangelist Mike Evans who almost lost freedom for Christianity in November 1994 in his ill-conceived Olympic Stadium crusade. Many missionaries in Cambodia had advised him against coming, but he came anyway because he thought God told him to. The crusade was a disaster. The advertising promised that everyone who attended would be healed, and that did not happen. The church experienced blatant persecution for the first time since it had gained freedom.

Yos Molly, Yos Im Sithan, Yos Sokun, Young Setha (Eang) and Pastor Seang Ang played critical roles in obtaining freedom for

Christianity under Hun Sen's Cambodia. That freedom has been enjoyed by the church, Christian organizations, Christian NGOs, missionaries, and the Cambodian people to this day.

In October 1991, as Molly was applying to World Vision Cambodia, her husband continued to gamble. Molly's application was accepted, so she bore the burden of her husband's gambling and supported her three children with her own salary. On occasion, her husband would attempt to change, but such changes were short lived. He sometimes didn't come home at night, and even gambled away a motorbike or two that Molly had bought with her earnings. At World Vision she began as a receptionist and inventory clerk, but was soon promoted to assist in the Operations Support Unit, then Staff Development and Spiritual Nurture, two different entities under Human Resources. Under the Spiritual Nurture Department she helped create the World Vision Cambodia Holistic Witness Policy Paper, organized pastor fellowships, translated World Vision's core values into Khmer, led staff Bible studies, coordinated Friday chapel and Tuesday Bible forum, arranged retreats, and was responsible for the orientation of new staff. In February 1998 she was transferred to the Kompong Thom Operation. Kompong Thom is a three-hour drive north of Phnom Penh. In Kompong Thom, Molly led the Spiritual Nurture and Leadership and Staff Development programs, really two full-time jobs. One year later Molly was promoted to Operations Manager. In February 2002, for the sake of her family, she has returned to Phnom Penh to take a less demanding position as an Area Development Program capacity builder. Molly's husband did recently leave her, and she now continues to look after three children, a boy and two girls.


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[^0]:    'Helen Penfold mentions in Remember Cambodia that witnesses saw them clubbed to death by men clad.in black shortly after the Khmer Rouge invaded in the city of Neak Loung.

[^1]:    ${ }^{2}$ FANK—Forces Army National Kampuchea, the troops of Lon Nol's Republic.

[^2]:    ${ }^{3}$ DK: Democratic Kampuchea, Khmer Krahom, or Khmer Rouge.

[^3]:    ${ }^{4}$ Don Cormack, Killing Fields Living Fields: An Unfinished Portrait of the Cambodian Church-the Church that Would Not Die (Crowborough, East Sussex: OMF, 1997), 391.

[^4]:    

[^5]:    ${ }^{6}$ Don Cormack, Killing Fields Living Fields: An Unfinished Portrait of the Cambodian Church-the Church that Would Not Die (Crowborough, East Sussex: OMF, 1997), 391.

