

# From a rice paddy to the World Bank

Path Heang's life's journey has led him from forced labour in the paddy fields of Cambodia as a child under the Khmer Rouge, to the position of Program Officer with the World Bank.

The big change came in 2002, when he received a letter informing him that he had been accepted as a student at the Rotary Centre for International Studies in peace and conflict resolution at the University of Queensland in Brisbane, Australia.

At the age of six, Heang was taken from his family by the Khmer Rouge, and forced to work in the rice fields under a Communist indoctrination plan designed to eliminate all resistance. He soon learned that children who cried, or disobeyed, were beaten.

The 10 hour day was punctuated by two meals of soup and watery rice porridge, supplemented with insects when the guards were not watching. He had just one pair of pants, a shirt, and a scarf, and he usually slept on the ground.

The Khmer Rouge inculcated their young captives in mobile classrooms where letters of the Khmer alphabet were written on a basic blackboard and students had to recite statements against capitalism.

One night, young Heang awoke to find himself wrapped warm and safe in a woman's arms. He shakes his head in disbelief, "I did not know she was my mother, but I slept well that night." In the morning, the woman was gone, leaving some warm leaves, boiled with salt, wrapped in a scarf. He was finally reunited with his mother when he was 10, and together they located two of his sisters.

He successfully completed High School and a teacher training course in



Path Heang receiving his Alumnus of the Year award from the Chancellor of the University of Queensland, Sir Llew Edwards.

1987, although he was jailed twice by the Communist authority for learning English. He then gained a job with the Cambodian Office of Weapons Reduction.

In 2003, Heang arrived in Brisbane as one of The Rotary Foundation's Rotary Peace Scholars, to be met by his counsellor, Phillip Blakey of the Rotary Club of Ashgrove/The Gap, who helped him work out the local culture.

Although English was not his first language, he proved to be an excellent student, with half his subjects graded as Distinction and the other half High Distinction.

Heang now has been nominated for the Alumnus of the Year at the University

of Queensland, an award that recognises distinguished achievements that have earned international recognition for the graduate and the University of Queensland. To be eligible nominees must be an International graduate of the University of Queensland currently working outside of Australia.

Heang is eminently eligible. He sees himself as a senior member of the World Bank staff within a few years.

The journey does not end there. He would like to study for a PhD and who knows where that may lead.

In Heang's words "With Rotary, I move from nowhere to somewhere."

**Ted Latta**

**Rotary Club of Ashgrove/The Gap, Qld ■**

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Academic background is in psychology and counselling. Director of Physical Disability Council of NSW.

4. **Anne-Marie Howarth**, 34, sponsored by the Rotary Club of Epping, NSW. Bachelor of Arts, Business Analysis and Project Manager for NSW Housing Commission. Active in sport particularly

swimming, skiing and recently completed her first 5km open ocean swim race. She is a member of the Swimming NSW Elite development squad.

5. **Ainslie Whitburn**, 31. Academic background in Arts, Psychology Education and Health promotion. Employed as the disability Officer at Gosford City Council. Was named as one of the Significant

Women of the Central Coast of NSW in 2007. The team will travel to Arizona in April, after the arrival of the District 5490 team in Sydney in February.

"The logistics of such an exchange are very challenging but will create a new sense of wheelchair awareness in both Districts. The members of the team have all travelled extensively and to them it's pretty much business as usual," PDG Harold said. ■