

Duch...

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"He told me that he could not go back to the Khmer Rouge because he'd had a dispute with [former Khmer Rouge foreign minister] Ieng Sary," Muth Theng said.

Cheam Sochoeng, the high school director, said he also saw signs that Duch was hiding from his past: When the two attended an education ceremony in the provincial capital and the late education minister Tol Lah arrived, Duch fled in a panic, he said. Later that night, Duch confessed to Cheam Sochoeng that he had studied with Tol Lah in university and had invited him to join the Khmer Rouge before joining the rebel movement himself.

Duch always seemed wary of an attack on his family and often sent his four children to sleep at Ny Lath's home, the former neighbor recalled. Duch's fears were realized one night in November 1995, when robbers broke into his home, fatally stabbing his wife and wounding him.

Duch was thought to be a rich man because he owned the sole motorbike in the village, Ny Lath said. No robberies in Phkoam had occurred before or have occurred since, said Ny Lath, who along with several other villagers agreed that the robbers were likely to have been motivated by greed.

Fearful for his family's safety, months after the 1995 attack, Duch moved briefly to the Svay



Neou Vannarin/The Cambodia Daily
Standing in the now-abandoned classroom at Svay Chek High School where Duch once taught French for six months, retired school director Hun Smien recalls the former chief of S-21 as a reserved, gentle, Bible-toting man who invited colleagues to attend church.

Chek district education office and then to Svay Chek High School in Roluos commune's Stung village, where he became a French teacher, according to retired high school director Hun Smien, 60.

In an interview at the now abandoned schoolhouse where Duch taught until early 1997, Hun Smien pointed to a desk piled with a layer of dust. It was the very desk that Duch used, he said.

Duch occasionally invited other teachers to attend church with him in the provincial capital, Hun Smien said, and for awhile Duch even started a house church near the school.

"He spoke of Jesus Christ and tried to convince other teachers to believe," Hun Smien said.

Aside from talking about his growing faith, Duch was reserved and spent much of his time reading the Bible, Hun Smien said.

"He was very different from other teachers, who play around and are friendly with each other. If Duch didn't want to speak, he just read his book.... His characteristics were like a high-ranking official," Hun Smien said.

Duch left Svay Chek High School after only six months, Hun Smien said, when several teachers from a nearby school identified him from a photo at the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum in Phnom Penh.

With Duch's past catching up to him, he again moved his family, this time to Battambang province's Samlot district, where he continued to work in the education system until fighting broke out in Phnom Penh in July 1997 and he fled to Thailand.

There, he became involved with the American Refugee Committee before returning to Samlot town with Christian aid agency World Vision to work with Cambodian refugees.

The thin, Bible-toting man told his neighbors about Jesus and spoke of creating a Christian community in Samlot, said Sok Lian, who rented a home on Duch's property for several months in 1999 and now operates a restaurant in the Samlot town market.

"He told me he wanted to start a church, but he was arrested first," she added.

Oum Sroh, one of Duch's neighbors in Samlot, said he doubted the authenticity of Duch's faith. While impressed by "Hang Pin's" knowledge of literature, languages and history, he said he had also heard rumors that "Hang Pin" was actually



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Duch has never met his 10-month-old grandson, Chhin Chenghour, who sits here in the arms of his mother and Duch's eldest child, Ky Sievkim, 32. They live on the outskirts of Samlot town. "My father did not hide anything. In the commune, everyone knew his real name: Duch," Ky Sievkim said.

Duch, the head of S-21.

"Duch is fooling people [with his Christianity]," he said. "Even though he is my friend, we cannot help his guilt. He should be executed."

Leam Sarun, a friend of Duch's from his teenage years, also doubts Duch's conversion. In a 1999 interview with the Documentation Center of Cambodia, he called the conversion "a political move." He recalled Duch saying in his earlier years that "All religions destroy nations" and "Religion is a blood-sucking leech."

At least one Samlot resident believes in the sincerity of Duch's faith: his eldest child and only daughter, Ky Sievkim, 32, whom he baptized a Christian in 1996.

"I strongly believed at the time in Jesus, and I do now," she said while nursing her 10-month-old child during an interview at her small home on the outskirts of Samlot, where she and her husband run a small shop. She said she is the only Christian among Duch's children, though he tried to convert the others as well.

After Duch's conversion, Ky Sievkim said her father became a more charitable and amiable person, though he always remained an organized, strict man who commanded respect from his daughter and three sons.

"My father told me previously that he had done many wrong things, and that's why he asked

Jesus for forgiveness," said Ky Sievkim, who last saw her father during a prison visit about one year ago. "He is a much stronger believer than me."

In early May 1999, British photojournalist Nic Dunlop found "Hang Pin" and his whereabouts were soon publicized in international media. Before the government arrived in May 1999 to take Duch into custody, according to Dunlop's book "The Lost Executioner," Duch told him, "It is God's will that you are here. Now my future is in God's hands."

Dunlop, in a recent telephone interview from Bangkok, said that Duch continues to approach Christianity with the same zeal he showed at S-21, when according to his indictment, he systematically interrogated, tortured and executed prisoners. Christianity "provides a way forward for somebody like Duch," Dunlop said.

Duch has continued to practice his faith for the past decade in prison, said Dunlop, who believes that this will become evident during the trial.

"I am sure it has to," he said. "It's interesting to look at faith in extremes—it can carry people through. It's given him strength," Dunlop continued. "When you compare him to the other Khmer Rouge cadres, he alone definitely believes in telling—not the whole truth—not 100 percent, but maybe 60 to 70 percent of it."