

The Girl with Tiger's Eyes

by

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Let's begin before the beginning. One day Sopheak told me about living in heaven (taan leu) between lifetimes. She was happy there, but she looked down on earth and saw some children splashing around in a pool of water. It looked like fun to her and the next thing she remembers is living in a village in Svay Rieng province.

Well, it took two incarnations before she has memories of her youth. She died before she was two years old, but her mother got pregnant again and knew the same soul inhabited the baby's body. She wanted to give her the name she'd had before, Mao Saran, but the authorities insisted on a new name. Her new name was Ni Sopheak, but sometimes she uses her old name when the occasion calls for it.

Her village was in the middle of the rice fields within walking distance of Vietnam. We went there later and it seemed like a magical place to me. There wasn't much to it: just a collection of wooden stilt houses and a small shopping area where you could buy basic supplies or sit in the shade for a meal or cold drink. It was peaceful and beautiful, though.

I learned later that many Cambodians who move to Phnom Penh, Siem Reap and other larger towns often miss living in their home village. They may not have been able to make money, but life was easy in the villages of Cambodia and they didn't have to stress about paying rent or buying food. They grew their own food and made a little money growing rice or working for someone else. Sopheak never wanted to leave her village, but her fate took her to Sihanoukville and then to me.

Sopheak was born with "dog's eyes." Cambodians believe dogs can see spirits and any Cambodian who can see spirits has dog's eyes. Sopheak saw spirits everywhere and once warned the villagers about an old woman who carried her head in her hands. She may have been beheaded by the Khmer Rouge or lost it in some other way. The woman wasn't happy and seemed to want to harm children. Sopheak told the villagers to watch out for her at night and not allow their children to go out of the house after dark. That was when the old woman lurked around waiting to do harm to a child.

Her grandfather was a local shaman. Rumor had it that he saved the villagers from the Khmer Rouge on several occasions when he sensed them coming. On one occasion, he left the village later than the villagers, but arrived at their hideout before them. He had the power to shorten distances and used it to escape. That wasn't an easy trick. If you don't do it right, you can kill anyone who gets between you and your destination. While it may sound impossible to skeptical Westerners, I've read stories of people in Indonesia who knew how to do the same thing.

Only Sopheak and his wife were allowed in her grandfather's stilt house. He felt Sopheak had magic powers as he did and wanted to nurture them. Sopheak loved her grandfather, but he died long before her grandmother, who is still alive at the age of 90.

She lived in the village until she was seven years old. Then her mother inherited a house in Phnom Penh. The family moved to Phnom Penh and Sopheak's father went back to being a motorbike mechanic. He parked under a tree and waited for customers. Some days he made money and some days he didn't.

Sopheak didn't really like the clamor of Phnom Penh, but she didn't have to put up with it long. After about a year, her mother became gravely ill. Doctors in Cambodia took advantage of patients then. The doctor said he could cure her mother, but it was going to be expensive. The family had to sell their home to pay his bill. With only a little money to live on after the sale,

they decided they couldn't afford to live in Phnom Penh if they had to pay rent. An uncle had gotten a job at a palm oil plantation in Virh Rieng. They decided to move there in hopes her father could get a job, too.

Sopheak felt more at home in the stilt house they rented in Khmeng Wat, just outside of Virh Rieng than she had in Phnom Penh. She loved looking out over the mountains and dreaming of living in the jungle. She was just eight years old and didn't know her wish would soon come true.

The first inkling I got of her life in the jungle was in our little house (you'll hear about that later). She weaved two perfect grasshoppers out of long strands of grass she collected.

"Where did you learn to do that?" I asked her.

"Not learn. Only know. I did all time when live inside tree," she replied.

"What do you mean by inside tree?"

"When live in Khmeng Wat I go inside tree with friend."

She was lying. She didn't want to tell me the real reason she went "inside tree" was because her father threatened to kill her when she lost most of the family's savings. She was only eight and didn't know about money. One day a man saw her sitting alone on the steps of her stilt house.

"Would you like me to buy you some candy? I don't have any money, but if you have some I can go buy it for you."

She thought the man seemed kind, so she went inside and found some money. She didn't know how much it was worth, so she gave him a handful. He promised to give her the change, but he never came back. He wasn't a local and was probably looking for some money to continue on his journey to Phnom Penh or Sihanoukville. Khmeng Wat was near the road that runs between the two cities and sometimes strangers came into the village. Sopheak didn't know that. Khmeng Wat reminded her of the village she lived in as a small girl. Everyone knew each other in that village and outsiders never visited the village.

When her family returned, her father was furious and threatened her with a knife. He was like that sometimes. He could be fine, but when he was drunk or frightened, he could turn violent. Sopheak remembers one time when he threatened to burn down their stilt house with the family in it. He never carried out those more diabolical threats, but they frightened the young girl.

The talk around town was about a phnong family that had come to Virh Rieng to sell a tiger's skin. They got good money for it. Sopheak found out where they were staying and asked them if she could go into the jungle with them. She thought she might be able to kill a tiger and make money for her family. It was a risky thing to do. Phnong means "savage" in the Khmer language and phnong were rumored to be cannibals. She was more frightened of her father, though, and decided to go with the family.

She met them at the edge of the jungle and lived with them for a few weeks, but when one of their children disappeared, she worried they really were cannibals and were saving her for their next meal. One night the mother told her to bathe before bed. She was sure she was next on the list and waited until they fell asleep. Then she tiptoed into the jungle alone.

Loneliness and fear of death plagued the little girl as she wandered alone in the jungle. She kept the fear of death at bay by telling herself, "Not dead now" at night before she fell asleep and in the morning after she woke up. Loneliness was harder to deal with until she found a squirrel with a broken leg. She captured the squirrel and made a splint for its leg. She named the squirrel Yuri. Yuri became her traveling companion for the years Sopheak wandered in the jungle.

She had her first encounter with a tiger not long after she found Yuri. She scrambled up a tree with a narrow trunk because she knew a tiger couldn't dig its claws into the narrow trunk. When she was out of the tiger's reach, she started to talk to it. The tiger snarled at first, but eventually just looked at her and walked away.

On one occasion, she woke up in the morning after having a dream she was sleeping soundly in the arms of her mother. When she woke up, she felt a weight on her shoulder. A tiger had slept with her, putting its paw protectively over her shoulder. She lifted the paw off her shoulder and thanked the tiger for taking care of her. From that day on, she didn't fear tigers, but she did fear crocodiles and wild boars, who killed anything that moved.

Sopheak remembers living "inside tree" for two rainy seasons, so she must have wandered alone for over a year or perhaps two years. One time we went to Kirirom. It is one of the highest mountains in Cambodia and pine trees grow there. Sopheak remembered the pine trees from the time she wandered inside tree.

She wasn't always in the jungle. Sometimes she was in the plains, but after living with Yuri and other jungle animals, she avoided villages as they did. Once she was tempted to visit a village when she saw children splashing around on the other side of a small lake. She called out to them, but they didn't hear her. She couldn't swim, so she went on her way, crying from loneliness.

Sopheak wasn't always alone in the jungle. She came across a former Khmer Rouge soldier once. The man was close to death, but said he was sorry for killing so many fellow Cambodians. She stayed with him and tried to help him by fetching water and sharing the food she found in the jungle with him. He didn't live long. She used his bayonet to dig a hole for his body. She could have used a knife, but it was his and he might need it in the afterlife, so she buried the bayonet with his body.

She encountered ghosts and spirits in the jungle, too. Once during the rainy season, she came across an empty cave. Well, it was empty except for the skeleton that inhabited it. She covered the skeleton with rocks to give it a burial, but the ghost of the body's former inhabitant continued to walk back and forth in front of the cave. She never spoke to the ghost, but thought it must be looking for something it had lost or perhaps wanted to reclaim its body.

On another occasion, Sopheak jumped out of a tree and cut her Achilles tendon on a bomb shard. Blood was pouring out and she didn't know what to do. A spirit with a long, wispy beard appeared before her and told her to get some spider web and mix it with mud. He pointed to a long leaf and told her to tie the mixture on her Achilles tendon with the leaf. She did as instructed and the bleeding stopped. Before he vanished, he told her to stay off her foot and change the bandage every day. Thanks to the spirit, she recovered quickly.

She didn't know where she was, so the little girl just wandered. In time, she made it almost to the Laos border. It was there she met a beautiful woman. The woman was accompanying the man who would later become the King of Cambodia. Both of them were kind to her and told her she should return to her village and reunite with her family.

"But I don't know where it is," she said.

She told them the name of the village and they told her to follow the sun and she would eventually find it. She did as they instructed and decided not to fear villagers anymore. She did fear vehicles, though. She hadn't seen one in so long, she imagined they were animals. Once someone offered her a ride, but she thought she was going to be food for the smoke bellowing monster and refused. Villagers took pity on the girl and for the first time since she left the phnong family, she was able to eat rice and occasionally some meat. Throughout her time in the

jungle, she lived mostly on small potatoes that grew abundantly in the jungle. She found a few greens to eat, too, and occasionally some fruit, but the potatoes were her main diet. Her meager diet took a toll on her health, as I learned later.

When she finally got to Virh Rieng, the villagers told her the family had moved on and no one knew where they were staying. One villager knew of an orphanage in Phnom Penh. The villagers pitched in and she took a bus to the orphanage, where she stayed until a man and his wife took her under their wing. The man had a business supplying Khmers and foreigners with services the government didn't provide yet. He was fairly wealthy and advertised his business both in Cambodia and overseas.

Back in the City

So Sopheak found herself back in Phnom Penh. She felt safe in the orphanage, but still missed her family. She made the best of it, though. She attended school and even learned the basics of Apsara dancing. Later, she got a job ballroom dancing on TV, but that didn't last long. I actually saw her dancing on TV once. While it was well over ten years before, Khmer television sometimes resurrects old shows for their older audience. She looked much younger than the Sopheak I knew, but it was unmistakably her.

Her next job was as a security guard at a big market in Phnom Penh. Her boss gave her a gun and a uniform. The gun was supposed to be to deter crime, but no one told her she wasn't supposed to use it. Once, when a man robbed a stall, she chased him and shot him in the leg to stop him. That was the end of that job and the beginning of a job that would take her around the world.

Her next job was escorting dead bodies back to their homelands. She visited Australia, Europe, the U.S., Canada and India while she was working that job. Australia was a mixed bag. On her first trip there, she had to sit outside while the others went into a hotel pub. She was too young to go into the pub, so she sat outside for hours, eventually falling to sleep.

Her next trip to Australia was more interesting. She took a body from Sydney to a small coastal town where she saw waves crashing against the shore for the first time. She vividly remembered a blowhole that "shoot water far away in sky." I had seen the same blowhole near Kiama, so I knew where she had gone. She also described the ride to Kiama accurately, so I had no doubt she had been there. She had never used the internet, so it couldn't have been a made up or imaginary adventure.

In India, a kindly family took her and the others she traveled with to the Taj Mahal. The others never made it inside, but she was determined. She scurried through the crowds and made it inside. She thought it was amazing, but thought the blowhole that "shoot water far away in sky" was better. Sopheak always loves nature more than manmade things.

Reunited

One day her family turned up at the orphanage. All was forgiven and she went back to Virh Rieng with them. They didn't have enough money to live in the village, so they built a stilt house and a charcoal oven at the edge of the jungle. Between the vegetables they grew, their chickens, the fish her brother Rah and Sopheak caught, the charcoal oven and the occasional turtle they caught, they were able to survive and even thrive.

By this time, Sopheak's body had filled out and boys were beginning to notice her. Her family arranged for her to marry a wealthy boy, but she refused to have sex with him, so the marriage only lasted a week. She knew she had disappointed her family, who thought the boy's family would help them out of poverty. She didn't want to have sex, though, so she did what she always did when she didn't want to do something. She refused. Sopheak had lived alone too long to follow society's rules. She did what she felt like doing and lashed out if someone wanted her to do something she didn't want to do.

She knew she had disappointed her family and knew she would have to find a job. She didn't want to leave her home at the edge of the jungle, but her family needed money in case someone got ill and needed to go to a doctor. She had an uncle in Sihanoukville who worked at the port. He was willing to let her stay at his small house until she found a job, so she reluctantly moved to Sihanoukville. It wasn't easy at first, but Sopheak was nothing if not adaptable and found jobs.

Her first job was at a garment factory. She hated being cooped up in a factory and eventually found a job working as a nanny for a couple in Sihanoukville. She didn't make much money, but the family fed her and she was able to give most of the money she earned to her family. She wanted to earn more and got in contact with the man who had given her work in Phnom Penh. He had a mixed bag of jobs for Cambodians. Security guards and taking dead people back to their homelands were two of the jobs, but "barang" (foreigners) often asked him to do other jobs. If a visitor or expat needed help, he could arrange it for them. He needed someone to help him in Sihanoukville, but she had to learn English first.

She quit working as a nanny and found a job at Victory Beach working as a waitress. A quick learner, Sopheak started learning English from the foreigners at the restaurant she worked at. At first her English was rudimentary, but she made enough money from tips to afford to attend an English language school. Her English improved and she supplemented her income with jobs her old boss gave her.

Usually Sopheak just accompanied people to the Western Union office where they would be picking up money people sent them from overseas. Sometimes she had more unusual jobs to do, though. On one occasion, a family hadn't heard from their relative in some time. They were worried about him and asked her employer to look into his disappearance. He apparently died of a heart attack after taking too much Viagra when he picked up a prostitute. He died in her arms, with his penis still inside her.

He wasn't the only dead person Sopheak encountered. On another occasion, someone hadn't left their room in several days. She went with the police to the room and discovered a rotting corpse. Her job was to report the incident to her employer. She wrote down the details on his passport and he turned out to be the relative of another person who asked her employer to find their relative.

Foreigners ("barang") died regularly in Sihanoukville. At that time, there were few tourists. People were still afraid of the Khmer Rouge, but some came to Sihanoukville because of the cheap liquor, cheap drugs and cheap prostitutes. There weren't many police in Sihanoukville then

and many of the tourists took advantage of the fact they could do whatever they wanted to do in a town where everything was available, but law enforcement was minimal. Some of them paid with their lives.

Now that Sopheak knew English, she decided to get work on the Hill, which was where most of the backpackers and other tourists congregated at that time. She got a job at the nicest restaurant on the Hill and learned how to cook simply by watching the cooks at work. She worked there for a time as a dishwasher, but knew the tips were better in the bars. What she didn't know yet was that most of the girls who worked in the bars were prostitutes.

She didn't want to become a prostitute, so she learned how to use a calculator and write receipts. Before long, she was working behind the bar. She still wasn't completely safe from the advances of sex tourists, though. Usually she just told them she wasn't a prostitute, but some weren't too bright or were too drunk. On one occasion, a man reached over and grabbed her breast when she was serving him a beer. Instead of putting the beer on the counter, she bashed him over the head with the glass. He was covered in blood and beer, but when the man complained, the bar owner said he would kill him if he tried it again. The man left and never returned.

Sopheak acquired a veneer of normalcy, but the jungle had taught her well. She didn't take any crap from anyone and would strike out when she needed to.

Not all of Sopheak's customers were rude or tried to talk her into going to their rooms with her. One was, in her words, a "big big black man" who tipped well and bought her gifts. He was always kind to her and she thought he might be in love with her. She may have been right. Unfortunately, he died and his ghost lived in a mango tree outside the little house we lived in while we were building. I wasn't sure I believed in ghosts, but he told her something about me she couldn't possibly have known. I had to believe in him after that. Later, he told her he was angry with me because I didn't offer him a cigarette when I sat outside on a plastic chair on the only concrete our "backyard" had: the lid of our septic tank. From that day on, I lit a cigarette for him and placed it on a stone under the mango tree. Sometimes I'd even have a conversation with him as if we were sitting next to each other in a bar.

Another customer was the son of the owner of the Snake House. Sopheak was beautiful and spoke decent English. One evening, he decided it was time she changed jobs. He asked her to take something to the Snake House. When she got there, he said, "You're working for us now." It was a nice bar and he offered her good pay, so she accepted the offer. It wasn't as good a job as she hoped it would be, though. The Snake House was a little out of the way and didn't get too many customers. By the time I walked in six months later, she was ready for a change.

Love at First Sight

I've fallen in love at first sight four times in my life. The fourth time was when I saw Sopheak out of the corner of my eye and thought she was a tiger. She wasn't as keen on me as I was on her. She thought my long hair was "skoot" (crazy). In retrospect, so do I, but I'd let my hair grow because I was subconsciously reverting to my hippie days. Those days were long behind me and I hadn't yet learned that Cambodians are suspicious of people with long hair. I didn't have any tattoos, but they are often suspicious of tattoos, too. To most Cambodians, tattoos are a sign of an evil person, as I learned when I took Sopheak to Phnom Penh and we got on an elevator with a young barang with lots of tattoos. Sopheak clung to me like a frightened child. The man noticed and said, "I think she's afraid of my tattoos."

I was in love, but it took me a while to admit it. When I finally committed to the relationship, things started to go more smoothly, as if fate had brought us together. We found our land and started building. Within days, Sopheak decided to take care of my long hair.

"Come with me," she said.

"Where are we going?"

"You see when we get there," she replied.

The next thing I knew, we were in front of a barber's shop. She took me inside, said something to the owner in Khmer and the next thing I knew, I had short hair. I didn't mind. It was long past time and I knew I should try to start fitting into Cambodian society. Getting my hair cut was the first step. Trying to learn Khmer was the second step, but I only learned rudimentary Khmer. I memorized some words, but couldn't get the pronunciation right. I still don't know much Khmer, but know enough to get by when I need to.

Sopheak's belly continued to grow, but I was still in denial about the baby. I wrote cheery emails to my kids about the progress of the house, but never mentioned Sopheak's pregnancy. That's when the "big big black man," whose name was Terry (Sopheak pronounces it "Thiery") came on the scene. He had been visiting her in her sleep. He told her one night I wasn't being honest with my kids.

I was sitting on my "porch" on top of our septic tank one day.

"Thiery told me you not speak sure babies Australi," she said. "Him come back now, tell me tell you."

"I haven't told them about our baby. Is that what he means?"

"Why you not tell them?"

I was stuck for an answer, so I told her I was afraid they would be jealous. It was semi-true, but wasn't the whole story.

"Him tell me you have tell them."

I agreed, but not until I sent an email to Penny. She was another person I fell in love with at first sight, but nothing came of it. We had stayed in contact, though and since I'd met Sopheak, I'd been in contact with her much more than in the previous years. She has helped me in innumerable ways since I've come to Cambodia.

Penny agreed the children had a right to know. How they accepted the baby was up to them, but it was a big part of my life now and they should know about it. I sent them both emails telling them about Sopheak's growing belly and stopped avoiding the subject after that.

One evening Sopheak asked me to name the baby. We knew it was a girl. I was stuck for an answer until I saw the full moon in the sky. I knew Sopheak loved the full moon, so I said, "Luna. Let's name her Luna."

"I never hear that name before," Sopheak said. "What's it mean."

"It's an old name for the moon."

She loved the name and that's what we named her.

I'd like to say everything went smoothly after that, but it didn't. I didn't know Sopheak knew nothing about childbirth until she went into labor and we were on the way to the clinic.

"Does doctor make baby small small so it can come outside this one?" Sopheak asked, glancing at her vagina so I would know what "this one" meant.

"No, this one can stretch and baby come outside."

Sopheak made an effort to deliver vaginally, but it scared her too much and she passed out. Our doctor wasn't ready for that and packed her in his car to take her to another clinic for a Caesarian section.

"Meet me at the clinic" he said as he drove off. He didn't mention which clinic and I tried about half a dozen before I gave up. Sitting in drizzling rain on the side of the road at 2:00 a.m., I wondered what to do until I got a call from Sopheak's sister, Ana.

"Where you?" she asked.

"I've been to every clinic I know and Sopheak isn't in any of them."

Ana thought that was hilarious, but she told me where to go and promised to wait outside for me. I saw her on Ekareach Street outside a clinic that had a sign in Khmer. The clinic was not on the road, though, and I'd never noticed it before. It became like a second home later.

By the time I got there, the doctors had completed the C-section and brought Luna out to me. If I had been semi-committed earlier, seeing that beautiful, fragile body made me fully committed. My "three year plan" became a thing of the past. I'd do whatever I had to do to make sure she had a good life.

Learning to Let Go

I suppose it's time you learned a little about me.

My journey to Cambodia started in 2004, but I didn't know it at the time. I had just come back to Australia after looking after my Dad in the United States. He died from stomach cancer at the age of 89. I thought everything was fine until I took my wife to Bali. She decided to tell me then.

"I've fallen in love with another man," she said without further comment.

I knew who he was and didn't much like him. He said his wife spent all his money, but from what I could see, it wasn't true. She wore cheap clothes and drove an old car. He had a brand new Mercedes and wore designer clothes. I was fairly sure their love affair wasn't going to last, but I had to go with the flow.

Our divorce wasn't easy and I was angry. Why spoil 20 years of marriage with a fling when you're in your late fifties? Okay, our marriage wasn't the best, but we got along and we were getting old. Anyway, my wife moved out and left me in charge of taking care of our daughter, who still had two years of high school to complete. In the meantime, we hired lawyers and a bitter battle began.

I was in a Liminal Space. Liminal comes from a Latin word that means "threshold." My carefully constructed world had come crashing down and I was scared. I was 56 years old and had nine years of work to look forward to. After that, between my wife's pension and mine, we could easily cruise until the end of our lives. Now I was on my own. I had some money thanks to a modest inheritance, but knew it wouldn't last. My cultural conditioning got the best of me and I started planning for the future. I knew I couldn't afford to live in Australia, so I took an ESL (English as a Second Language) course and started teaching at a local ESL college. I was lucky because I didn't have a college degree, but didn't need one to teach a travel/study course to Chinese students. The plan was to find a similar job in Bali, where a degree wasn't necessary.

I had lots of plans, but no real solutions and a stack of prejudices and opinions to shake off. I was a mess until I went to Bali in 2005. I went to a café in Seminyak, away from the madness of Kuta and Legian, for a cup of coffee. Most of the customers were there for the same reason as I was. It had a nice, mellow vibe. The coffee and food were good, too, and not overpriced. When I entered the café, I noticed a woman giving a tarot card reading to someone. When she finished, I asked her if she would give me a reading. She hesitated at first, but when I told her my story of woe, she relented.

I may not have had the reading if the woman hadn't been so beautiful. Like I said, I had a lot of prejudices. One of them was that tarot card readers told people what they wanted to hear. I just wanted someone to talk to and a beautiful Italian woman suited me just fine. I sat down next to her and she told me to center myself while holding the cards in my hands. The idea was to get my vibes into the cards so the reading would be accurate.

She laid out a spread that took my life in two directions. One card was the Fool. The other card was the four of Pentacles. The four of Pentacles had a picture of a frowning man sitting on a chair hoarding his wealth.

"These are the two directions you can go in," she said to me. The Fool takes chances and lets fate be his guide. The man in the four of Pentacles thinks only about ways he can hoard his wealth. I'd received a modest inheritance from my Dad and had been thinking about ways I could make it last, so it was an appropriate card.

She laid out cards in a "V" pattern. One set of cards was the path I'd take if I followed the Fool's path. The other was the path I'd take if I followed the four of Pentacles path. She explained all the cards to me. The last card on the Fool's path was the World.

"This is the most favorable card in the deck," she told me. If you take the Fool's path, you'll meet someone soon. She will rip you off, but you'll learn from her. Later, you'll find love."

"What about the other path?" I asked her.

"The cards aren't as favorable if you take that path. Besides, do you want to be like that man? He's sitting in a chair guarding his wealth. He has no other life. Is that how you want to live the rest of your life? It's not up to me, but if you take a leap of faith and shed your prejudices, the Fool will take you to unexpected places and the outcome looks favorable."

I asked her about teaching ESL. She said it sounded like something the four of Pentacles would think. "Better to let go and see where fate takes you," she said.

After the reading, I felt renewed. I saw my prejudices and opinions in a new light. Most of them, like visiting a tarot card reader, were unfounded. Her advice rang true to me. Why not take the Fool's path and let fate be my guide? We had a cup of coffee after the reading and I left feeling like I had wings. I wasn't going to let my fear of losing money or my firmly held opinions hold me back. I was going to see the world through fresh eyes and take things as they came.

That afternoon, I took my usual route to an internet café. I passed a shop that said "Spiritual Healing" for about the tenth time. Every other time I'd passed the shop, I wrote it off as a trap for New Age suckers. This time, I questioned my prejudice and walked inside. The proprietor healed my back in three sittings. Then he recommended a spiritual healing.

He must have picked up on the anger I felt inside. He told me to lie on my back and close my eyes. He never touched me, but after a few minutes, I saw a red pulsing light through my closed eyes. At first I thought he was giving me some sort of strobe therapy, but when I opened my eyes, I just saw him standing over me with his eyes closed. His palms were over my solar plexus. I closed my eyes again and saw the same red pulsing light. It slowly faded. When it faded altogether, he told me the session was finished.

I felt like a huge weight had been lifted off me. I couldn't resurrect the anger I felt towards my wife and her former lover. I felt renewed and refreshed, ready to follow the whims of fate. My old prejudices and opinions were a thing of the past. I would do whatever I felt prompted to do in the future. If I had wings after my tarot card reading, I felt like I was flying now. I was going to embrace the world like the Fool and not let anything hold me back.

From that moment on, my life changed radically. As the tarot card reader predicted, I soon met a young woman. Putu was Balinese and she did rip me off, but that didn't matter. She showed me sides of Bali I would never have seen if I hadn't been with her. She also inadvertently gave me a lesson in the darker side of Bali. I took her and her sister to a luncheon at a guesthouse where I was attending a writer's retreat. The owner of the guesthouse noticed me with Putu. The next day, he asked me if I had fucked her yet.

"No. She doesn't want to have sex with me," I told him.

"You can fuck her. She's just a hairdresser," he replied.

She was a lower caste than him and was fair game. I had never realized the Balinese, who seemed so friendly and spiritual, had such prejudices. Apparently, Putu was just a piece of meat I could use as I liked. I didn't take his advice.

After my writing workshop, I returned to Australia and didn't give Putu too much of a thought. I knew she had been using me and sort of wished I hadn't bought her a motorbike. Then I realized a motorbike was a cheap price to pay for the amazing experiences I had with her. I

wouldn't have seen the hidden side of Bali if not for Putu. One day she took me and a group of friends to a waterfall. The climb down was fairly treacherous, but the waterfall was spectacular and there was a beautiful pool that was perfect for swimming. She took me to small villages and I saw how ordinary Balinese, who are not yet caught in the net of tourism, lived. Many of them lived as they had before Bali became a tourist trap. Some older women walked around bare breasted, just as all Balinese women did before foreigners came.

I knew Putu was behind me, but what was ahead of me? I didn't know, but I didn't care.

One day I started thinking about the healer who made my anger and resentment vanish. How did he do it? How did he even know I was harboring that anger? I looked up psychics online and discovered a psychic was giving "how to be a psychic" lessons. Better yet, he lived just ten minutes away from my house. I signed up for his one day course.

Thankfully, I wrote down everything another amateur psychic said to me. He accurately described the house I would build in Sihanoukville two years later and predicted that I would be "writing" on my computer. He was right. I never got a job as an ESL teacher, but started freelance writing. From my desk, I could see the field he saw and I even had plastic flowers on my desk, just as he said. He thought the field was a soccer field, but mentioned it "sounds like soaka." He may have been understandably a little confused. It would be easy to see a green field as a soccer field, but he knew "soaka" was important. The Sokha Resort is only about a half a kilometer from my house and we went there frequently while we were building our house.

The "miracles" didn't stop there. When I was taking my ESL course, I stopped in at a metaphysical bookshop in Sydney after my classes. I got to know their resident palm reader. She was much younger than me, but we became good friends. One day while I was having lunch with her in Hyde Park, she offered to read my palm.

"I see two more children in your life," she said. "They may not be your biological children because the lines are fainter. They will be yours, though." I doubted what she said, but her reading was accurate. I've been caring for two of Sopheak's children since 2007 and 2010. Neither of them is mine, but I love them as if they are my biological children.

Am I getting ahead of myself? I don't think so. As Penny told me, "Time is a honeycomb. The past, present and future are accessible at any time." She had seen my future almost 35 years previously and I'd had other remarkable experiences during the five years I lived with her and her family on a small commune in the lower Sierra Mountains. I've learned she was right. In our everyday minds, we are concerned with mundane things and the past seems like the past and the future is unknown. We plan and scheme to make our future brighter, but perhaps that's not the right thing to do. When I've let fate be my guide, fate has had better ideas for me than the pursuit of the American Dream.

So let's travel through the honeycomb of time and find out how fate brought me to Sihanoukville.

On the Road

Chloe finished high school in June of 2006. I waited until September to go on my adventure in Southeast Asia. We sold the house, divided the proceeds and I was free to travel. My ex-wife agreed to look after Chloe's needs while I was traveling. The affair that had torn us apart was long over and I think she wanted to reconcile with the kids. I bought a one way ticket to Ho Chi Minh City, planning on spending a few months exploring Southeast Asia and perhaps going on to India, where I had spent a magical nine months in 1972.

I had a vague itinerary in mind because my conditioning still told me I needed an itinerary. It didn't have as firm a grip on me as it had before, though. I promised myself I'd follow the promptings of fate rather than stick with an itinerary.

Ho Chi Minh City was too big for my liking. I decided to follow a route I'd written about years before, but hadn't actually taken. A friend of mine visited Vietnam in 1998. He was a professional photographer, but couldn't sell his photographs. I'd written several articles for Tracks surfing magazine and he thought if I wrote an article to go with his photographs, he might be able to sell them. Rather than write his story, I pretended we had traveled together. A magazine accepted the article. They asked me to make it a two part article. I got paid well for my efforts. Unfortunately, they used their own photographs and my friend only made a couple of hundred dollars.

I wanted to see what we had written about. I was all ready to book a bus ticket to my first destination when I heard about a cyclone that was headed towards Vietnam. It had devastated the Philippines and wasn't slowing down. I decided to save my tour of Vietnam for later and took a bus to Phnom Penh.

I hadn't planned on spending much time in Cambodia. I wanted to see Angkor Wat, but still imagined Cambodia to be a poor and dangerous country. I enjoyed Phnom Penh and then traveled by bus to Siem Reap. I was surprised when I passed several four and five star hotels on the way to Angkor Wat and even more surprised when I came to the entrance. It reminded me of Disneyland, with lines of people waiting to get in. I was a little disappointed because of all the tourists, but finally found a couple of ways to avoid them. I climbed to the top of one temple and visited smaller temples you had to walk to. When I was away from the crowds, I was able to appreciate the magic of Angkor Wat.

I stayed in Siem Reap longer than I planned to because I didn't know what to do next. My plan was to move on to northern Thailand, but Cambodia was growing on me. It wasn't nearly as poor as I expected it to be and the people were friendly. I decided to go back to Phnom Penh and travel overland to the beaches of southern Thailand.

When I got to Phnom Penh, the thought of going to the overcrowded beaches of Thailand didn't appeal to me. I was out of ideas. One morning I went down to the riverfront for coffee and breakfast and a feeling of peace washed over me. I didn't need an itinerary. I'd just go wherever I felt like going. At that moment, a man approached me with books for sale. I looked at his books, but the only one that caught my eye was a *Lonely Planet* guide. I didn't want to buy a guidebook, but something compelled me to buy this one. I opened it to a random page. It turned out to be the first page about Sihanoukville.

The writer didn't have a lot of good things to say about Sihanoukville. It wasn't developed and the ATMs didn't work. The only thing that caught my eye was that Sihanoukville was not overly developed. It was on the coast and the fact that the beaches weren't lined with expensive guesthouses appealed to me. The next day, I took a bus to Sihanoukville.

The writer was right about one thing. The Sihanoukville bus station was just a vacant lot and hordes of tuk-tuk drivers and motodops descended on me as soon as I stepped off the bus. I chose a tuk-tuk driver because I had luggage and was a little nervous about looking for a guesthouse on the back of a broken down motorbike. My driver took me to one guesthouse, but it was larger than I wanted and was surrounded by other guesthouses. We drove a bit further down the road and I found the perfect place. It was a couple of streets back from the beach and was surrounded by fields. It looked comfortable and even had a pool. I went in and asked about the room rate. It was as cheap as the hotel I stayed at in Ho Chi Minh City, but much nicer.

I settled in and went for a swim in the pool. I was tired, so I didn't leave the grounds that day. The next morning I felt refreshed and decided to walk to the beach. The only people on the beach were a group of monks. Ochheuteal Beach was long, the water was warm and I felt like I had come to the right place. There were restaurants on the beach, but they were rough wooden structures run by Cambodians. I liked the feel of Sihanoukville and wanted to explore more of the town. I didn't want to do it in a tuk-tuk, though. Fate took care of that for me. When I returned to my guesthouse, I noticed a crudely drawn sign on cardboard. "Moto for rent," it said. I called out to a woman who was hanging wash behind the fence. She turned around and called out to someone inside the house. A man in a policeman's uniform came to me and told me in fairly good English that the motorbike was mine for \$3 a day plus a copy of my passport and a guesthouse receipt.

I'd rented a motorbike in Bali. It was a nightmare until I figured out the traffic was not so bad on the side streets. I'd already noticed that the streets of Sihanoukville were virtually empty during the middle of the day, so I wasn't too worried about fighting traffic. Now it was just a question of where to go. I decided to go straight up Ekareach Street, the main road in town, and see where it took me. When I came to the top of the road, it seemed to get narrower and didn't look interesting, so I turned left and eventually came to a beach, but before I did, I noticed an expensive sign on the side of the road. The Snake House looked interesting, so I made a mental note of it and decided I might pay it a visit that evening.

I went down to Victory beach, where I saw a few restaurants not unlike the restaurants I saw at Ochheuteal Beach. There were a few "barang" (foreigners) there, but it was fairly empty. A beautiful Cambodian woman approached me and offered to sell me some baubles. I'm always a sucker for beautiful women, so I bought a bracelet from her and took her photograph. I bought a beer and a snack, but mostly I was there to enjoy the beautiful view. The water was sparkling and looked out to distant islands. I wanted to visit the islands, but didn't know how to go about it, so I imagined what it would be like on one of them.

After an hour of lounging around, I got back on my motorbike and continued down the road. It took me to Independence Beach and then past the big Sokha Resort. Then the road turned sharply up a hill and I found myself at the Golden Lions traffic circle, which was where my journey had begun. I returned to my guesthouse, had a swim and had dinner in their restaurant. As the sun was setting, I hopped on my motorbike and went back up Ekareach Street. I planned on going straight to the Snake House, but decided to see what was on the narrower road I'd skipped before. That was when I discovered Victory Hill.

At that time, Victory Hill was still a backpacker's hangout. It changed later, after it became overrun with girlie bars. There were already a few there and I stopped in at one called the Tropicana. The proprietress spoke perfect English. I sat down and spent about \$30 on drinks for the girls and me. Some of them spoke broken English, but they brought out a game and we passed the time playing the game. I asked the proprietress about the Snake House.

"You should go there. It is very nice and you might meet someone there," she told me.

Let me backtrack a little here. I'd already had six prostitutes in Southeast Asia. Actually, there were six prostitutes, but only on three occasions. I just happened to have two on all three occasions. The first time was in Ho Chi Minh City. Then there were another two in Siem Reap and two more in Phnom Penh. I didn't want make a habit of being a sex tourist, but I did enjoy talking with the girls in the bars, so I decided to give the Snake House a try.

As soon as I walked in, a beautiful girl snagged me. I bought her a drink and she made every effort to talk me into taking her to my room. She even pressed her rather ample breasts against my arm and made sure her legs were exposed almost to her underwear. She was a little late, though. I really didn't want to be a serial sex tourist. After we finished our drinks, I stood up and thanked her for her time.

The psychic workshop I attended changed me. Occasionally, I saw things that weren't there. Sometimes it was in my mind, but sometimes I actually saw things. The first time was back in Australia not long after the workshop. I saw a glowing blue pyramid on a hill as I walked up the beach with my surfboard tucked under my arm. It was gone when I looked directly at it, but seemed to be there when my eyes weren't focused on it.

The same thing happened in the Snake House. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw a tiger. When I turned, it was just a young woman. She was modestly dressed and didn't look like a prostitute, but I had to meet her. I turned around and walked up to her. She spoke decent English and invited me to play a game of pool with her. The owners were using the pool table, so she told me to pay the bar \$5 and she was free to go with me up to the Hill, where a barang friend of hers owned a bar.

I didn't learn much about Sopheak that evening, but she was so captivating, I went back to the Snake House the next evening just to talk with her. We played pool there that evening. Like the night before, she beat me every time. It didn't matter. I just wanted to spend as much time with her as I could. I felt I was right when I saw a tiger out of the corner of my eye. She dressed well enough and spoke decent English, but I sensed something more wild and free behind the facade she put on for guests. It took months for her story to come out, but I was right.

I continued to go to the Snake House and talk with Sopheak. I continued to lose every game of pool we played, but I didn't care. One evening I asked her what she was doing the next day.

"Have work evening," she told me.

"Do you want to go to an island with me?"

"Okay, but not too long."

I picked her up in the morning and she directed me to Ochheuteal Beach, where wooden longtail boats waited for customers. We found a boat that was going to Bamboo Island. It stopped along the way for snorkeling, but we were there within a couple of hours. It was surprisingly developed and even had a restaurant and some bungalows. Sopheak wasn't interested in those. She wanted to get away from the crowd and explore the island a little bit. We found a quiet spot away from the crowd. After a short time in the water, Sopheak sat down on the beach and started making a drip sandcastle. She adorned it with seaweed and a few shells and was proud of her creation. I took a photograph of her sandcastle with her grinning in the background. I felt like I was falling in love with her, but tried to force the feeling to go away.

She took me to other places in Sihanoukville and then we went on an overnight trip to Kampot. Back then, only a four-wheel drive could make it to the top of Bokor Mountain, but we wanted to see it. There was an old casino on the edge of the cliff. Sopheak wouldn't go inside because she saw ghosts lurking in the shadows. She told me they were the ghosts of people who

jumped off the cliff when they lost their money. I didn't see them, so I went inside to have a look around while she waited for me outside. Then we went to a waterfall. At that time, you had to walk to the waterfall. It was about a 15 minute walk on a narrow track, but it was worth it. We felt like we were in the middle of a jungle.

Whenever we did anything, Sopheak preferred to get away from civilization. She loved open spaces. I learned later why she loved them so much, but had no idea what she had lived through as a child. I got my first inkling when she said we should visit her family on the way home from Kampot. They lived in a tiny traditional stilt house in a village called Khmeng Wat. Her mother, father, sister and younger brother all slept in the one room house. This was the world Sopheak came from, but it was a step up from other places she had lived.

I was worried about myself. I was falling in love with her, but I was 58 and she was only 21. She was young enough to be my daughter. My old prejudices started telling me to avoid getting involved. I only semi-listened to them, but I gave leaving a shot. I decided to go to Laos and see if I could forget about Sopheak. I gave her some money and left some of my possessions at the guesthouse on the Hill I was staying in, but took most of my things with me. If I didn't return to Sihanoukville, I could live without them.

An Aborted Escape

I took a bus to Phnom Penh. After resting for a day or two, I took another bus to Kratie, where I planned on getting transportation to the Laos border. Along the way, I thought up some reasons why falling in love with Sopheak was a bad idea. I was too old for her and really couldn't afford to take care of her. I had no job and eventually would run out of money. Staying in Cambodia seemed insane. I had to go back to Australia to get a job. That was my conditioning talking to me again. Somewhere in the back of my mind, I knew I was lying to myself, but it took a little time for me to admit it.

I imagined I could get to Laos on a bus, but learned there were no buses to Laos from Kratie. Instead, I'd take a minivan to a river. I'd cross the river and a car would be waiting for me. Then I'd go to the Laos border, cross the border and another car would be waiting for me. It sounded a little dicey. What if the car wasn't waiting for me at the border? I'd be stuck at a border crossing with no guesthouses. I decided to go anyway and everything worked out perfectly. The driver took me to the boat crossing that led to Don Det island, where there were several guesthouses. The Mekong River was in full flood and the scenery in Laos was stunning. Unlike Cambodia, where deforestation had been running riot, Laos was mostly jungle. Don Det was slightly developed, but the guesthouses were all made of timber. I chose a stilt bungalow on the edge of the river.

The islands in southern Laos are idyllic. As soon as I arrived, I felt relaxed. There was no blaring music like there was in Phnom Penh. I just listened to the river lapping on the shore and quiet music was playing when I went for dinner that evening. When I woke up in the morning, I decided to rent a bicycle and explore the larger island next door. A bridge separated Don Det from the larger island, so I could easily get to it. Then I did something stupid. I decided to have a "happy shake" instead of breakfast. Anything with "happy" in the name has marijuana in it and I have no tolerance for marijuana. I become a zombie and am only good for staring at the ceiling. I didn't have that luxury, though, and my happy shake spoiled my first bike ride.

I skipped the happy shake the next morning and had a wonderful day. I went back to the rapids and fully enjoyed them. I bought a Buddha necklace from a little wooden gift shop near the parking area and after getting lunch at a restaurant near the bridge, had plenty of energy to ride around Don Det island. There was no traffic except for the occasional motorbike or bicycle and the island was just a series of small villages outside of the tourist area near the place where the boats dropped tourists off.

Don Det was a welcome relief, but after a few days, I wanted to leave. I bought a bus ticket north, planning on going to the capital, Vientiane and then on to Thailand. When I woke up the next morning, I had second thoughts. Being a sex tourist didn't interest me. Neither did being a sightseer. I wanted to see Sopheak again. I missed my bus and made arrangements to go back to Kratie. From there I'd go to Phnom Penh and back to Sihanoukville.

Fate had other plans for me, though. When I got to Phnom Penh, I discovered the annual Water Festival was in just two days. I called Sopheak and invited her and her family to come to the Water Festival. She was thrilled. She and her family had never seen it before. I went looking for a place to stay and found a cancellation at a riverside hotel. We would be able to see the boat races and fireworks from our hotel balcony.

You may not believe in fate, but I do. I have to. When I look back on my life, I see that fate took me places I'd never have gone to if I'd followed the American Dream. I moved to Australia because my wife was Australian and we couldn't find an affordable home in San Francisco. After

looking everywhere on the coast near Sydney, a guy in a café I went to suggested checking out Avoca Beach on the Central Coast. It was a beautiful village and we found a house for \$68,000, which was a thousand dollars less than the only affordable place I found in Sydney: a one bedroom apartment.

I also rediscovered surfing in Avoca Beach. It had a point break, a reef break and a long beach that often had good banks. When I didn't surf in Avoca, I had other spots on the Central Coast to choose from. One of my favorites was Forrester's Beach. It had a hollow and dangerous spot close to some rocks and a reef break that could handle any sized swell. I would never have found Avoca Beach if it hadn't been for the guy in the café. We lived there for 22 years. I loved Avoca Beach and credit fate with taking me there. If we hadn't divorced, I might be there today, but fate had other plans for me.

The Water Festival was wonderful except for one glitch. I thought Sopheak would like some female company, so I called a guy I'd met on my first trip there. I didn't like him much, but when we went on a tour of the Phnom Penh girlie bars, he fell in love with a Vietnamese prostitute. They were still together and I thought Sopheak would like to meet her. I didn't know that Cambodians don't trust the Vietnamese. They think they are sly and untrustworthy. We met at the bar where Jon met Dah and I took two prostitutes to my room. Sopheak freaked out. I took her back to our hotel room, where she promptly passed out.

I was way out of my depth, so I asked the hotel staff to help me. They recommended a nearby doctor and helped me get Sopheak down the stairs and into a tuk-tuk. The doctor gave Sopheak a shot and she had an allergic reaction to it. He was out of his depth, too, and told the tuk-tuk driver to take her to a larger hospital. I was terrified. She went limp and I was afraid she was going to die.

"Don't die," I told her. "I'll die for you." I think I realized I loved her at that moment. She later told me she heard me say those words and realized I was someone she could count on. I think that moment sealed our relationship. It certainly sealed mine.

She recovered and her family came the next day. We had a wonderful time at the Water Festival and then went back to Sihanoukville together. I knew what I wanted to do then. I wanted to return to Sihanoukville and be as close as I could to Sopheak. I rented a house for her and she invited her father and mother to live in the house with her. I would go back to Australia, put my affairs in order and return to Cambodia to live with her. I still had some money and building a house in Sihanoukville was cheap. We'd build the house, sell it and build another one. That was the plan, anyway. It didn't work out quite that way.

Stepping off the Cliff

The Fool is dancing on the edge of a cliff. When I returned to Australia and sold my belongings, I felt like I was stepping off the edge of the cliff into the unknown. I was scared, but I wasn't going to let that stop me. I had nothing to look forward to in Australia, but had a feeling I would find a life in Cambodia. Instead of hoarding my wealth, I was going to take my tarot card reader's advice and take the Fool's path. She said I would find love and the World was at the end of my journey. Taking the four of Pentacles path would have been more of the same: short term jobs and little satisfaction. Chloe was on her way to college and Justin was already in college. Neither of them needed me anymore.

Leaving wasn't easy. I loved being near Chloe and Justin and I loved Avoca Beach. That phase of my life was drawing to a close, though. It was time to move on. I'd miss surfing, but I was getting older and couldn't surf as well as I'd surfed before. I got one last epic wave at the Corner (the reef) at Avoca. That was enough. Surfing would become a happy memory and I had lots of memorable surfing moments to look back on. Now it was time to move on. I was sure of that. My kids weren't quite as sure and it became a sore point between us later on.

Things seemed to be going smoothly until one day when I called Sopheak. She told me she "had baby inside." I knew it wasn't mine. I also knew she wasn't a virgin. What I didn't know was that Sopheak had no idea sex led to babies. She seemed intelligent enough, but I hadn't learned yet that she had only gone to school for about a year or two and her mother told her nothing about sex and babies. I kind of freaked out.

After a bike ride and a cup of coffee at a beachfront café, I calmed down. No, the baby wasn't mine, but so what? Who the father was didn't matter. He obviously wasn't taking responsibility for it. I didn't want to leave Sopheak in the lurch, so I called her back and told her not to worry. I'd take care of her and the baby. It felt right and I knew fate had played a role in guiding me towards Sopheak and a new life in Cambodia. The more practical side of my brain made up a "three year plan." I would go to Cambodia and stay three years. By that time, Sopheak would have a house to live in and not face destitution. I laugh about my plan now, but at the time it helped keep me sane.

When I returned to Phnom Penh, Sopheak was there waiting for me. It was the day after my 59th birthday. She threw me a big party at the hotel we stayed in and lavished me with gifts my money enabled her to buy. Then we took the bus to Sihanoukville and we stayed in a guesthouse on the Hill while we looked for land to buy for our new house.

We must have looked at a dozen homes and empty lots. We finally agreed on a long, narrow lot near downtown. I would have liked something bigger, but I didn't like the location of the biggest lot we saw. This one had a small, nearly falling down house on it. It was big enough for us to live in while we built the first half of our home on the land in front of the house.

Our house was small, but I remember it fondly because it was there that I began putting the pieces of Sopheak's life together. She told me about her life in snippets and sometimes lied about some details because she didn't want me to think badly of her father. As her tale unfolded, I realized I was right about her when I saw a tiger out of the corner of my eye. In many ways, Sopheak was like a wild animal. Well, "wild" may not be the best way to describe animals. Even tigers have a soft side, as I would soon find out.

The breakthrough came when Terry insisted Sopheak pass on his message to me. Sopheak had not told me about having "dog's eyes" before because she knew most *barang* didn't believe in

ghosts and spirits. When I didn't laugh at her, she started sharing more information about her remarkable life.

I may never have learned about her life "inside tree" if I hadn't taken Terry's story seriously. It came out in snippets and as I mentioned before, she lied the first time she told me the story of her life "inside tree." She didn't like to talk about it much, but sometimes she couldn't help herself. TV was one of my best sources of information. We would be watching something on TV and she couldn't help but remark about the stupid things barang did in the jungle.

We were watching a documentary about filmmakers in Africa. They wanted to film elephants in the wild. An elephant didn't take kindly to their coming so close to it and chased their Land Rover. It was fast and butted it. Sopheak thought that was hilarious.

"Don't barang know elephant run fast, but can't go this way this way?" she laughed. By "this way this way" she meant elephants can't change direction.

"When I live inside tree, elephant chase me, but I go this way then this way. Cannot catch me."

She loved tigers and got angry when she saw someone kill a tiger in India.

"Why him do like this! When I stay inside tree, tiger take care me one night. Tiger only kill if hungry or scared." That was when she told me the stories of the two tigers she met in the jungle. There were other stories, too, but those were the most dramatic. When she saw tigers later, they usually didn't bother her.

I never learned how Terry died. The year after we finished the first half of our house, we tore down the old house and finished the second half. By that time, the mango tree was gone and Terry had moved on. She refused to talk about him because she wanted him to move on to a new life. Talking about him might attract him and he would continue hanging around when he should be in taan leu (heaven) or inhabiting a new body.

Spirit Possession

Speaking of our old house, I forgot to mention we had a young woman come from Phnom Penh to be our housekeeper. We didn't really need one, but she was in a bind. Sokha was Sopheak's cousin. She'd had a hard life because her whole family had died and she had lived with a succession of relatives. An uncle took her in in Phnom Penh, but his new wife didn't like the way she was filling out and catching his eye. She threatened to sell Sokha to a brothel. The man contacted us and asked if we could take her in. We agreed and Sopheak's mother (Mama) and Sopheak went to Phnom Penh to pick her up.

Sokha was a sweet girl, but she had some problems. One of them was that she was easily taken over by the spirits of her dead relatives. The first two occasions were fascinating to watch. First she was possessed by her mother and then she was possessed by her baby sister. I watched both possessions. A psychologist might call it "multiple personality disorder" or "dissociative identity disorder," but spirit possession looked more likely.

The third time Sokha was possessed, it was by her older sister. Her sister had been raped and murdered by a monk and a policeman. She was angry and showed it. She was also jealous of Sokha, who had found a good home. On one occasion, I didn't notice until I asked Sokha to make me a cup of coffee. She put salt in my coffee instead of sugar.

"Sokha!" I laughed. "You put salt in my coffee!" I didn't hear a reply, so I walked down the narrow hall in our tumbling down house to find her. I was about halfway down the hall when Sokha appeared brandishing a big knife.

"Sokha," I said, trying to calm her down.

I felt a whack across the back of my head.

"This one not Sokha. This one her sister. She want kill you!" Sopheak took me out of the hallway and called out to one of our workers. Longh was a good worker and had learned how to deal with spirit possession from his father. He came in and managed to get the knife out of the possessed Sokha's hands.

He managed to get her to leave, but that wasn't the last time her older sister possessed her. Eventually, we sent her back to Svay Rieng, where monks got rid of her sister for good. I'd like to add that they fixed her within a few days. Psychiatrists don't have as good results as Sokha had and I wonder what would have happened if she had been treated by a psychiatrist instead of priests. Like I said, she looked possessed and that's what Cambodians called it. Their methods of dealing with it were practical and humane.

Trying Times

Sokha left before Luna was born. After the excitement of the birth, I thought everything would go smoothly, but it didn't. Sopheak didn't know about raising a child any more than she knew how a child was delivered. She once told me she thought a baby was like "spike jung" (shoes). You put them on when you wanted to wear it and put them at the doorstep when you went indoors.

She found out that mothers were more like "spike jung." Babies drank from the breast whenever they felt like it, even in the dead of night. They wet their pants regularly and didn't know how to use a toilet. Luna was a lot of work. Sometimes Sopheak was ready for the work, but sometimes she wasn't.

I didn't know Sopheak as well as I do now. When she had a temper tantrum, I thought it would last. It wasn't until after a few tantrums I learned she was just getting something off her chest and she would get back to normal in a short time: sometimes within the blink of an eye.

I wasn't quite ready for it one day when we were out walking with Luna. Luna wanted to drink from Sopheak's breast. She handed her to me and said she was leaving.

"It gets easier later," I told her.

"Okay. I come back later," she said.

It was still the rainy season and the sky was turning dark. As Sopheak stormed off down the road, I tried to keep up with her, but I had Luna in my arms and she was walking fast. When we got to Ekareach Street, Sopheak stopped traffic and continued walking up CT Road. I didn't want to take a chance on getting caught in the rain with Luna, so I just stood on the road wondering what to do. At that moment, Mama and Papa drove up in the van I bought Papa in hopes he would work for a living. It was a sore point between us because the van he bought was worth far less than the amount of money I gave him for it.

The van was the most beautiful thing I'd ever seen at that moment in time. I got inside and we drove up CT Road. When we saw Sopheak, Mama hopped out and talked to her. She got in the car, pulled out her breast and started feeding Luna. The anger had vanished.

On another occasion, Sopheak simply left. After trying to call her for about four hours, she finally answered the phone.

"Where are you?" I asked.

"I go Phnom Penh. Be taxi girl. Smoke yama."

I had to laugh. I knew she was lying. She wasn't a prostitute and she hated yama, a cocktail of drugs and chemicals that makes too many Cambodians crazy. I knew she was lying, but wasn't sure where she was. I heard traffic in the background, but it wasn't the heavy traffic of Phnom Penh. Then I saw where she was. She had gone to a hairdresser's on Ekareach Street just to get out of the house.

"I come Phnom Penh smoke yama with you."

She laughed and I knew everything was going to be alright. I rode my motorbike to the hairdresser's, but Sopheak had already walked home by another route. The girls were in on the joke and were all laughing. The one who spoke the best English told me I'd find Sopheak at home. She was there when I returned, pleased with herself for having made my day so miserable.

I got used to Sopheak's outbursts. It took me longer to get used to the times she passed out. They were much like the first time, but that didn't help much. I'd never had to deal with the phenomenon before and panicked when it happened the first few times. The solution was to take her to the same doctor who delivered Luna. We would get a not-so-private room next to the

emergency room and the doctor would put her on a drip. He laughed every time, saying, "Did you have an argument?" I didn't argue with Sopheak, but her anxieties sometimes got the best of her.

Apparently, passing out is something a lot of Cambodian women do. I'm not sure why the doctor put her on a drip, but I think it was because they put people on drips for everything. She usually recovered quickly. One day, I decided to see what would happen if I let her recover at home. That didn't go so well.

The family gathered upstairs and worried. Then a neighbor came and tried to pry open Sopheak's mouth with a spoon. At that moment, I said, "Let's take her to the doctor." I was afraid she was going to break her teeth. We took her to the doctor and she was put on the drip. When she came to, she asked why her mouth was hurting. I told her about the spoon. She thought that was as stupid an idea as I did.

Gradually, Sopheak got used to being a parent and started to love being around Luna. Luna began responding to her, laughing and babbling. Sopheak still occasionally passed out. I finally learned it was because we weren't married. She had panic attacks, fearing I was just going to disappear one day as so many *barang* did when the going got tough.

"Let's get married," I told her. We set a date and she stopped passing out. The marriage was expensive and by the time it was over, I was worried about how I was going to support her. The plan to sell the house at a profit fell through when the 2008 recession hit. While we were building, someone offered us \$95,000 for the house, but we held out for more. After the recession, *barang* didn't have money to throw around anymore. The most we were offered was \$40,000: \$10,000 less than what the house cost us.

I was down to my last \$2000 and was seriously worried. Sopheak agreed to sell our car. Our car cost only \$1500 and was in better condition than Papa's, which cost over twice as much. He still harbored dreams of making a living from his van. I had my doubts because he was a terrible driver, but he was unwilling to sell it.

Fortunately, we sold our car within a few days. The extra money gave me a little breathing space and I tried to get a job teaching English. After going to every school in town, I emailed a friend who had gone back to America because he couldn't take care of his wife on a teacher's wages in Cambodia.

"How did you get your teaching job," I asked him.

"You have to go every day. If they need someone, they'll hire you on the spot. If they don't they throw your application in the bin. Teaching only pays \$3.00 an hour. Why don't you do what I do? My boss will pay you \$10 an hour and it's easy money."

He was working for a "black hat" SEO company. Well, "gray hat" might be a better way to describe it. At that time, you could get to the top of Google's list if you published enough articles on enough sites. My only job was to post articles on about 20 article sites. It was easy work when I got used to it. I started with 10 hours a week, but soon got boosted to 20 hours. \$200 a week minus internet expenses wasn't much, but it was better than teaching wages.

Eventually I got bumped up to 30 hours, but then Google cracked down on black hat and gray hat techniques. I lost my job, but asked the boss if I could write for him. I offered to write a few articles for free and if he liked them, he could pay me for them. I was fairly confident, because the articles I'd been posting weren't very well written. He agreed and for a few months I was making okay money (or so I thought) from writing for him. That didn't last long.

Suddenly I was without work, but I now had an internet connection to pay for. I looked up freelance writing jobs online and found a couple of sites I could write for. The work was easy,

but they were bidding sites and Indian writers were writing for \$5.00/500 words. I asked for \$10.00, but still had to write about 30 articles per week to keep up with expenses.

If there was a ray of light during this bleak period, it was Sopheak. The general consensus among barang is that if you run out of money, your wife leaves you. She stuck with me through those trying times, even telling me, "Don't worry. Never have loi (money) before, but never dead. Have house now. Never have house before."

After about a year, I got away from the bidding sites and began making as much in three days as I'd made in seven ten hour days before. I started getting better paying clients and things got easier. If I learned one thing from those times, it was that Sopheak wasn't going to dump me because I wasn't rich. It was a valuable lesson, but I had more lessons to learn.

Another Baby

Things seemed to be going smoothly for a couple of years. Sopheak had settled down and wasn't passing out anymore. I had work to do and to break the monotony, sometimes rode my bike to the beach and worked at a café at Independence Beach. All it cost me was a lunch and a couple of cups of coffee. While I was there, I'd take breaks and go for a swim. Between the bike rides and the swimming, I was getting the exercise I needed and I could afford the \$5.00 a day I spent at the café.

Nothing goes smoothly for long around Sopheak. She wanted to visit an aunt in Phnom Penh. It didn't cost much because her aunt was wealthy. She was a midget and made good money in China appearing on TV shows. Did I mention Mama was Chinese? It saved her during the Khmer Rouge era because she earned a living translating for them. Her aunt was Chinese, too, but stayed in China, while Sopheak's mother came to Cambodia.

Sopheak knew by then I couldn't make babies, but she wanted another one. Her aunt had a solution for her. A Chinese doctor was in town. He had a sperm bank. Sopheak could choose the father from a photograph and the doctor would do the rest. Her aunt even offered to pay for it. Sopheak didn't quite believe it could work that way, but decided to give it a try.

It may seem naive that I would believe her story. How did I know she didn't have sex with someone and make up a story about a Chinese doctor with a sperm bank? Well, for one thing, Sopheak doesn't like to sleep around. For another thing, she knows nothing about childbirth, but described the procedure perfectly to me.

She didn't tell me until about a week after she returned to Sihanoukville. One afternoon she told me to come with her. We went to a doctor's office. She went behind a curtain and when she came out, she told me she was pregnant. I acted like I was pleased, but I wanted to know how she had become pregnant. When we got home, she told me the whole story.

So now we had another baby to look forward to. I wasn't too thrilled about it. Nine months later, Kelly was born, but he had a severe breathing problem. I sent a video to my friend Penny, who shared it with one of her daughters.

"He needs a respirator," she told me. "If you can't afford one, we can send you the money."

"I can afford one," I lied. I had to dip into my VISA card to get one and we had to get it from Phnom Penh. Meanwhile, we had to wait at least three days for it to arrive. Kelly's breathing worried me, but I didn't know what to do about it until one afternoon when I told Sopheak to leave him with me while she went for a break. I planned on doing some work, but his breathing distracted me. I set my laptop aside and had a mini-revelation.

In Australia, I'd taken a course in energy healing. It worked so well, I actually healed a couple of physical disabilities. Why wouldn't it work on Kelly? The only drawback was that I couldn't do the procedure as I learned it because I couldn't talk to him. I decided to improvise and see what happened. Instead of doing muscle testing, I put my hand lightly on his chest and went through the meditation technique I learned at the psychic workshop. When my mind became quiet, I distinctly felt the words, "I only feel half-loved." I was sure that was the problem, so I did the forgiveness exercise we learned at the energy healing course. His breathing seemed to improve slightly. By the time the respirator got to us three days later, we didn't need it.

I can't prove my improvisation worked, but I believe it did. The words came out of the blue and forgiveness is an energy more than it's a word. In my opinion, I tapped into the source of his problem and the forgiveness process helped heal him. You're welcome to your opinion, but based on my experience, that's mine.

From that time on, Kelly thrived. Interestingly, Sopheak started expressing milk from both breasts. At first, only one breast expressed milk. I think both she and I only "half-loved" Kelly because he was somewhat of an accident. We both loved him completely when he recovered and he showed it by his restored breathing.

Of course, we had a new baby on our hands and I didn't know how I was going to support our growing family. Things have a way of working out when they're meant to be, though. I got a good paying client and have been working for them since 2011. Other clients have come, too, and I no longer have to work 10 hours a day, 7 days a week for a pittance. Sometimes I wonder how long it's going to last, but sometimes I don't. My job is to do the best I can to take care of my Cambodian family. I'll let fate take care of the rest.

Does that sound naive, too? It did to me until after I started meditating. By the time my summer break ended and I moved to Santa Cruz to study at UC Santa Cruz, I no longer wanted to pursue the American Dream. One of my professors was Norman O. Brown, who wrote the 1966 bestseller, *Love's Body*. He was also my advisor. I went to see him one day.

"I want to drop out of college," I told him.

He wasn't against the idea. He told me we all have different paths to follow and maybe going to college wasn't my path.

"But I'm afraid I'll get drafted"

"You won't get drafted," he told me.

"How do you know?"

"I've read your journal. Getting drafted isn't in your personal myth."

I took his word for it and dropped out. I got three notices to go for physicals, but only attended one. When it came time to give blood, I couldn't do it. I felt like if I gave blood, I'd be participating in a satanic ritual. The next time I got a physical notice, the bus I was waiting for drove straight past me. On the third occasion, I was told to go to the L.A. induction center, but I was working on Maui. I sent a letter telling the draft board I couldn't afford the flight. I got a nasty letter telling me if I didn't turn up for the next physical, I'd get arrested. My lottery number never came up again and I didn't go to jail or get drafted.

I was scared throughout the ordeal, but only once wavered. I went to a lawyer who could get anyone out of the draft. I didn't feel right about it and declined. After that, I let fate take over. It was my first lesson in the workings of fate, but not my last.

So I have fate to thank for giving me an interesting life. I like to call fate "Serendipity." She's my personal goddess and so far, has never let me down.

Cruising on the Edge

Don't get me wrong. Fate hasn't made me rich and comfortable. I've always gotten by, but have never been rich. Sometimes I still worry about money, but then I realize I'm being ridiculous. I've always had enough to get by and have made enough to take care of both my families. Well, my ex-wife's pension helped in Australia, but I don't have that to rely on in Cambodia. Freelance writing gives me enough of an income to take care of my family here.

After Kelly recovered, things started to go smoothly for a few years. Sopheak stopped passing out. After having gotten used to being a mother with Luna, she wasn't surprised by Kelly's constant demands for milk and sleeping habits. I was making enough for us to get by and it looked like we were cruising.

Nothing lasts forever. One day I went to the beach to work. I did that frequently. I'd ride my bike to the beach with my laptop over my shoulder. I'd work for a while and then go for a swim. When I went for a swim, the restaurant made sure no one stole my computer. I'd done it a hundred times before without a problem.

Nothing happened at the beach, but when I got home, I decided to walk to a nearby restaurant for dinner. I stepped on a stone and felt a terrible pain in my right knee. It was so bad; I turned around and hobbled home. A local doctor told me I had no cartilage in my right knee, but I wanted to be sure. The next time we went to Phnom Penh, I had my knee scanned. He was right. That day was the day the last of my cartilage disappeared.

For a few weeks, I could barely walk to the bathroom and back. Then Sopheak had an idea. She contacted a healer in Svay Rinh. He had a natural medicine that might help me walk better. He sent a bag and Sopheak boiled it for me. I was supposed to drink the medicine instead of water. For a couple of days, it didn't seem to work. Then I noticed the pain was diminishing. By the end of the week, I was able to take Kelly and Luna to a swimming pool. It was a fairly long walk through the grounds, but the pain was minimal.

The medicine was a bonus, but I still was unable to walk far or ride my bike. I put on some weight, but took steps to lose the weight. Instead of walking or riding my bike, I started swimming. My muscles had atrophied so much, I wasn't able to swim far at first, but I gradually improved.

I got used to feeling the pain, but one thing became undeniable. I was getting old. Aside from the pain and lack of activity, turning 67 brought the fact home to me. It also brought it home to Sopheak. She was afraid I was going to die. That may sound ridiculous, but many people die young in Cambodia. That was the world she lived in and 67 was a fairly advanced age in her culture. She started calling me "Papa" and, with my permission, started looking for a new partner. I didn't mind. I never thought our relationship would last. I was too old for her and too old to look after the children as they got older. Being like a grandfather to them was a better option.

That may sound strange. Why would I give up my wife without argument? I felt like it was the right thing to do. She and the children would outlive me and without a partner, she would have a hard time getting by in Cambodia. Sopheak is clever, but she didn't get much of an education. If she had to look for work, she might make \$150 a month. She had the children to take care of. Who would look after them when she was working? How could they get by on that small amount of money?

Too bad the family didn't think the same way. One day they got in a huge fight with Sopheak. She had been seeing another man. I knew him and he seemed like a decent guy. Unlike

many Cambodian men, he worked for a living and made fairly good money. She burst into tears and said she was leaving. I told her I'd give her a ride to the spot where cars pick up passengers to go to nearby villages. While we waited for a car that could take her to Virh Rieng, I told her I understood. I was getting old and if she found another partner, I wouldn't abandon her or the kids.

She took me at my word, but that didn't stop her from doubting I would be as good as my word. Things started getting weird when her stomach started to bulge. She told me it was fluid in her stomach caused by fibroids. I didn't quite believe her and as her stomach continued to grow, I became sure she was pregnant. She denied it, but then started staying away for long periods of time.

She told me she was in a hospital in Phnom Penh to have the fibroids removed. A few weeks went by and she turned up at home with a flat stomach. She denied having a baby, even though the rest of the family knew it. She told me it was a "friend's" baby she was caring for. That was a stretch. I knew she was lying, but I knew I'd have to wait her out.

I had to wait nine months before she finally admitted to having a baby. She called me one day and said through tears: "I have baby." Then she hung up and closed her phone. The next day, she called and asked me if I hated her.

"I don't hate you, but I'm angry with you. Why didn't you tell me before? I already said you were free to find another partner. Is he with you? Is he taking care of you and the baby?"

He was the man I had already met. She said he was taking good care of her and the baby. They were living in his apartment near where he worked at the oil palm plantation near Virh Rieng. She missed me and missed Luna and Kelly.

"I want to come home. Can I come home with my baby?"

"Of course you can. Finally I can meet your new baby. Is it a boy or a girl? What's its name?"

"Her girl name Leekol." That was the pronunciation, anyway. She spells it "Lykol."

Sopheak came home the next day with a beautiful little girl. Luna and Kelly were thrilled and as I saw their beaming faces, I was reminded of a dream Penny shared with me. "I saw a river of light shining out of her vagina," she wrote. It meant nothing to me at the time, but those three smiling faces were definitely a "river of light." If I'd had misgivings before, seeing those smiling faces settled it for me. I was going to do whatever I could to keep those smiles on their faces.

Sopheak introduced us to "Papa Lykol" slowly. First he turned up for a wedding. I decided not to go, but it was being held on our road and I watched him from my upstairs veranda. He didn't drink much and spent most of his time tending to Lykol. He and Sopheak didn't overtly act like a couple. They sat next to each other, but that was it.

He came back about a week later. Sopheak wanted to take me to a Cham (Muslim) doctor she knew of who was supposed to be very good. We went in a taxi the first day, but the doctor said I needed to come the following two days. Sopheak didn't want me to go alone, so Papa Lykol, whose name is Vana, went with me on our motorbike.

I wondered how long I would be welcome now that Vana was in Sopheak's life.

"I make ten times problem for him than for you," Sopheak told me. "If him want you go 'way, I tell him go 'way."

I believed her, too. Now that she was home, she took care of me as best she could and went out of her way to make sure I didn't feel abandoned. I still wanted to be independent, but at least

I didn't have to do things that made my leg ache. I saved my leg for swimming. Once I was in the water, I was fine, but walking across soft sand and uneven sand made it ache.

One day she told me Vana was a little jealous of me. She did make more problems for him than for me and it got to him sometimes. He didn't show it, though. Like her, he helped me when he could. We had a good relationship, in spite of the fact Sopheak joked about having two husbands. I was 30 years older than him, so the age difference probably helped.

While Vana and I got along, the family was a different matter. They resented his presence. It came to a head one night when Sopheak and Vana got into a big argument. The family decided to intervene. Papa, Sopheak's older brother Rah and her sister Ana came upstairs and while Papa and Rah held Vana's arms, Ana beat him with a long-handled dust bin so hard he had welts on his back. I could do nothing because I was tending to three crying children.

The next day, Sopheak told her family to go. I'd wanted to get rid of Papa for a long time. I never knew when he was going to get drunk and aggressive. When he did, it wasn't pretty. On two occasions, we even had to call the police to subdue him. When he wasn't drunk, he did almost nothing around the house. Mama was the rock. She was always kind and did as much work as she was able to do. I would miss her, but where Papa went, she went too.

At least our family was pared down to six people. Before we kicked them out, there were 11 living in our house and two more hanging around during the day. They didn't move far, either. Luna and Kelly like to ride their bikes to "Yeh's house" (Yeh means grandmother, I think) and visit Lita and Yehta, who also left with the rest of the family.

Sopheak and Vana got a good job working for a rich European who was renting a mansion on a hill. For a while, they were making such good money I was able to pay off some of my VISA card. The man even bought Sopheak a bar. He paid \$22,000 for the bar, which was about \$12,000 more than it was worth. He also promised to cover the rent if there was a shortfall.

Opening day just happened to fall on my birthday and the day before my tenth anniversary in Cambodia. Sopheak planned on giving me a birthday party in the evening. I woke up that morning with a slight pain in my side. By the afternoon, it was worse. I called Sopheak and she came in her boss's Lexus. She and Vana took me to the best clinic in town. The Ukrainian doctor told me I had appendicitis. He told Sopheak to take me to Sonja Kill Memorial Hospital in Kampot. "Don't go to Phnom Penh. It will take too long and you won't get better care there."

They dropped everything, including the opening night of the bar, and took me to the hospital. Sopheak spent the first night with me and was there when they took me to have the operation. When I woke up, she was still there. She had to leave, so she called her little brother Sarat and he stayed with me for the three days I stayed in the hospital. They did a brilliant job. I recovered quickly with no complications and learned a valuable lesson.

Having a party may have been more enjoyable than having my appendix taken out, but I was touched by Sopheak's genuine worry. Luna and Kelly called me, too. They were both crying. I assured them I was okay and had Sopheak take a photograph of me smiling and waving to the kids. When the taxi arrived to take me back to Sihanoukville, Kelly came in the taxi. He wanted to know I was alright and didn't want to wait until I came home to find out.

So my 69th birthday and tenth anniversary turned out better than a party would have been. I knew Sopheak and the kids still cared about me.

Not long after I returned home, a crisis came. Sopheak's boss left and said he wouldn't cover the rent shortfall after he left. It was still the dry season and all the guesthouse rooms were full. Sopheak already had regular customers, too. We knew when the rainy season came, the rooms would be empty and customers would go. I couldn't possibly cover the rent and feed the family.

Fortunately, Sopheak was able to get out of the lease agreement. The signs she bought with her benefactor's money came down a month later. I eat dinner on the Hill almost every night. As expected, I've seen few customers in the bar and I'm sure no one is renting rooms in the guesthouse. We lucked out. "Business For Sale" signs are on almost as many bars as bars that are open. One has been there for about two years. Others get luckier, but not during the rainy season. Someone comes along in the dry season, sees a few customers and thinks, "I could improve this bar." It doesn't matter what you do. There are more bars than customers on the Hill and if you don't have another source of income, you won't last long.

Serendipity Road

I published [*Serendipity Road*](#) about a month ago. As expected, it hasn't sold well. A friend of mine self-published a book about a year earlier. He had contacts in the media and promoted it on television. Even he has only financed his life in Thailand through his book for one month. I had nothing except Facebook and Twitter ads to promote my book.

This book is a shorter version of *Serendipity Road*. I haven't emphasized how much fate has played a role in my life as I did in that book. I sort of care that it hasn't sold well because the book means a lot to me. On the other hand, I'm glad I wrote it. I wrote the first version spontaneously. It was only after I'd written about ten chapters that I realized there was a theme to it. The theme was how many times fate has interceded in my life.

The first time was in college, when I decided to drop out. I've already covered that story, but that was just the first time. Fate saved my life in India. Fate found me work in San Francisco. Later, fate took me to Australia, where I was able to start surfing again. I can only credit fate with bringing me to Cambodia, too and finding steady work for me here.

When I told my Australian kids about Lykol, they were horrified. "She lied to you!" they said. They wanted me to return to Australia and leave Sopheak and the kids to their fate. I couldn't do it. If I returned to Australia, I'd worry about the children and Sopheak every day. I'd live a miserable existence in an expensive country. As long as I have work, I'm going to stay here.

Yes, my circumstances have changed, but I still feel surrounded by love. Even Lykol loves me and she shows it in the most beautiful ways. One day she saw my big toe was bleeding. She tried to scoop water into her 2 year old hands, but didn't quite know how to do it. I knew she wanted to wash the blood off, though. What would I do without my Cambodian family? Granted, I could get my leg fixed for free in Australia, because they have a good socialized medical program. So what? I'd rather hobble around here and get my exercise swimming than go back to Australia and live the life of a lonely pauper.

Fate has interceded in my life so many times, I have no doubt I'm in the right place right now. That may change in the future, but for now I'm not going to rock the boat and make plans. I'll take it a day at a time and see what happens. Fate hasn't led me astray so far. I can't say the same for the plans I've made. Thank goodness I didn't follow them. Life has been a fascinating journey and it's not over yet. I'm going to keep walking up Serendipity Road and see where my goddess, Serendipity takes me.