

LIVING

Cambodians Confront a New Age-old Problem

By Moeun Chhean Nariddh

People sometimes lie about the age to convince employers about their experience or because they want to seem younger than they really are. But in Cambodia a whole generation has been altering their dates of birth for political reasons. A Gemini News Service correspondent — who himself lopped four years off his real age — explains the confusion.



FOR 10 years the monster I created by lowering my age was in my favour. Now it has turned against me.

I went to apply for a journalism fellowship in Britain, but legally I am four years too young. By the reckoning of Nature, however, I should wait only another year.

Thousands of Cambodians face similar problems. Having had their school years disrupted by war in the early 1970s and later by the political upheavals of the Khmer Rouge period from 1975 to 1979, many Cambodians found they were too old to attend primary school in the early 1980s.

Teenage Khmers began lying about their age to ensure that they were young enough to keep attending primary school, repeat classes and avoid conscription.

Young aunts and uncles began attending school alongside their nieces and nephews.

Many of those who changed their dates of birth picked easily memorable dates — such as 7 January, the day Khmer Rouge leader Pol Pot's regime was overthrown — or 13 April, Khmer New Year.

I, too, was re-born on 1 January 1973 instead of my real birthdate of 22 April 1969. It was 1984 and I was about to take primary school examinations for which I was too old. So I gave my new birthdate instead.

I do not celebrate either birthdate, because only the rich celebrate birthdays. But if I was rich enough to do so, I would celebrate my real birthday.

For now, however, my counterfeit birthdate haunts

me. To apply for a Reuters Foundation scholarship, I have to be 27. I will in reality be 27 next year, but because of my fake birthdate I will have to wait another four years to be eligible.

Many other Khmers, whose identity cards, passports, certificates and degrees bear birthdates which are not real, face similar problems.

Chhim Dararith, from Phnom Penh's Chaktomuk

school, could not vote during the 1993 elections organised by the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia, because he was too young.

He was born in 1971 but changed the date to 1979 to allow him to repeat primary school classes.

He says it took him almost 10 years to learn the 71 Khmer consonants and vowels because of poor memory caused by chronic illness

during the Khmer Rouge years.

He has now graduated to secondary school, where he studies alongside young boys and girls. He was appointed class monitor in addition to his usual task of helping to wipe the kid's noses.

"I'm very ashamed to be called 'Uncle' by my young classmates," he laments.

Sock Seng, an electrician at a Phnom Penh power plant, says he changed his

birthdate from 1966 to 1972. He was thus able to miss military service in the 1980s "because I was still officially young."

Now he finds that his brother, who is really two years younger, is officially two years older.

"I want to change back to my real age, but it's too late," he says.

Like most Khmers, Seng no longer has any identity papers issued before the 1970s, and all his more recent ones bear his counterfeit date of birth.

"I will have to work six more years after I reach retiring age," he jokes.

Phnom Penh market trader U Borasy says many people also changed their ages during Khmer Rouge rule. The Maoist communist regime, responsible for the deaths of more than one million people during their reign of terror, overthrew the United States-backed Lon Nol regime in 1975, and were in turn toppled by a Vietnamese-installed communist government in 1979.

During that period Borasy cut three years off his age to avoid being sent to Khmer Rouge mobile youth work teams, "but it was not effective because the Khmer Rouge Angkar (organisation) would select all the big boys and girls regardless of their ages."

He changed his age again in the 1980s so that he could study at high school.

Now, he says, he has to live with the fact that he has "a young age with an old face." — Gemini News

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Towards More Confidence

by Sylvia Salim

CONFIDENCE is the quality which can give a woman more inner serenity than almost any other: it is a safeguard against nerves, conceits, ill humour — her own as well as other people's — and it helps her truly to evaluate worldly success or failure.

Armed with quiet confidence a person can ride success or survive failure with serenity and happiness in spite of any unkind blows which Fate may deal. But the woman filled with uncertainty, hesitant and fearful, dare not go forward, yet hates to stand still. "How can I gain confidence? I just don't feel sure of myself," is the plaintive comment.

The answer is really not very complicated — whether you are deeply religious or have a leaning towards the more factual psychological approach, the power of mind or spirit over matter is a significant reality.

To make a plan, to say "I will do this", to exert every ounce of mental strength to the accomplishment of that thing, so that willing merges into reality: that is the way to gain confidence. Such intensity of mental endeavour expels doubt, leaves no room for hesitancy. The person subjecting herself completely to an idea, yet simultaneously declaring that the idea can become a reality, will find the way, the means, and the manner revealed.

Dreams and Realities

Women will often do just this for their dear ones, when they will do nothing for themselves. "I'm no good at that", they say, "but my hus-

band — he's marvellous". Such is the power of thought-transference that he, probably through the confidence given him by his wife, becomes near-marvellous.

Now, you may say, why should it be a woman's role in particular to give this feeling? The answer is simple: because most women have two distinct sides to their characters — the completely idealistic and the completely practical. Visions, the stuff that dreams are made of, come easily to their imaginations, and likewise the conversion of these dreams into realities appeals to their common sense.

A man, on the other hand, tends to be practical in a different way — why what has not been attempted tends to become a dangerous uncharted sea for him, a place where his ship may founder on the rocks of ridicule, financial disaster or personal discomfort.

Women, gamblers at heart, will say, "Well, let's try it". Men, essentially conservative and tinged with laziness, will say, "I don't know, it's an awful risk".

Men, proud of their own physical power, know but won't confess its feeble limits. Women, confessing their physical weakness and taking no account of it, know by instinct that power will come for anything, they want desperately to do. And strangely, like the widow's cruse of oil, it usually does come, and so the world frequently marvels at the fortitude and endurance of the so-called "weaker vessel".

This is a wonderful thing

— a daily miracle for all to see; but the plea should be made that, as well as standing behind others, women should also stand behind themselves. We hear a lot about it still being a man's world. Women's lack of confidence is one of the reasons why this is so. Men have centuries of accomplishment and the full development of personality behind them, while women, whose emergence from a subject position is so recent, have to build and work with none of this background.

But for the woman who understands the significance of self-confidence (real confidence, not the suffragette-like aggressiveness), this is no insurmountable difficulty.

Towards Achievement

After, ability, confidence is the quality necessary to achievement. The man or woman who has a vision of some accomplishment must have the deep-rooted conviction, the faith if you wish, that the vision can become a reality.

All great achievements, and minor ones, too, spring from an idea which has been worked on with confidence. That, indeed, is the basis of all the great religions; faith — or simply confidence — is necessary to attainment, be it to a state of virtue or to a luscious pie-crust.

"I am charming — I am successful — I am..." Whatever it is, positive thinking and the confidence deriving from the inner strength which is denied to no-one, make it so. And with attainment come serenity and happiness.

Is Your Waistline Bothering You?

by Fayza Haq



Cool in the heat of Morocco

THE lively youth is often depressed due to her widening waistline her suddenly appearing pimples with adolescence or her chubby cheeks. She is dismayed and horrified to lose her childish slim figure in her teens and so rushes to diet at a frantic and hysterical rate. Yet the overweight youth need not go in for drastic changes in diet or even indulge in odd alternatives for overeating like smoking cigarettes or swallowing dieting pills which drives away sleep for nights, specially when taken without vitamins.

The cause of stuffing oneself with sweets and soft drinks is often due to emotional emptiness. High grades haunt the youth and she is in constant tension as regards catching up with the tests and tutorials to please parents and tutors. The overeating is unconsciously used as a buffer against disappointments, and the overwhelming feeling of rejection and frustrations, as well as anger and resentment when the student does not get the high marks, that she had worked for and had expected. The extra biscuit may even be the cover for sibling rivalry at home, where the youth does not enjoy the special atten-

tion as in the case of the eldest brother or the baby sister.

Often hobbies like stamp collecting, oil painting, embroidery or joining the Rangers and Boy Scouts or even the class music band or cricket team will consume the extra energy and remove the invading boredom or frustration. It will provide the feeling of fulfilment instead of the slabs of chocolate or the packets of peanuts.

The aim as regards the eating habit should not be to change the eating pattern drastically. The youth should not fall prey to the gambit of crash dieting for losing weight and maintaining a trim figure is a long term programme. She doesn't have to cram calorie charts. She should, instead, keep in mind the protein and fat content of everyday food and avoid rich food like "biryani" and "qorma" served at functions like "Eid" and "Valima". Common sense will tell her to avoid the potatoes in the "Salan" or the extra butter and jam at breakfast. She can't and mustn't aim at sudden overnight changes, as that would have adverse effects, both physical and mental.

She should try and leave behind in the plate some of

the goodies served at occasional parties or even at home, taking care not to appear wasteful, with parents watching on, by putting away the left-over in the refrigerator, if the food is not quite perishable. At picnics or at the sea beach, she can pass on the mayonnaise and potato chips to the lean and lanky class mate.

The heavy calorie content food like sweet-meats should be cut out and replaced like cheese and fresh fruit instead of the "jelapis" or "shahi tukra" after dinner. Substitutes are a must for the teenager keen on a slim figure. She should not however refuse all her favourite dishes as it will make her feel agonised and defeated too soon.

Many of our students, specially girls, evade the P. T. classes and sports, having reached high school or the college level. After the initial lessons in Biology and Health Science, she should be well aware of the fact that weight is regulated by the energy used against the calorie intake. Morning "on the spot jogging", the walk up to the nearby petrol pump or bus stand and back, skipping touching toes, ten push-ups a day or even the more casual tennis, cycling, or helping with the strenuous household

chores of dusting and sweeping keeps the waistline trim and one's weight in proportion to one's height and age.

However, exercises are not adequate on their own as walking two miles to college will consume only 220 calories and climbing the four stories of the tall college building, four times a go, will consume only the calories in a single ice-cream. Hence dieting should be a matter of habit and not a fad to be followed according to her female fancies or her childish fits and starts. Sliding back, or lazing will ruin the hard work of months.

The young one might turn around and ask: Is it worth all the trouble — the constant dieting? She would be well advised to remember that if she does not watch her figure, no one will. It is only in this way that her broadening waistline or pimples will cause no more taunts in class, and she will not have to discard the close-fitting fashionable clothes, after all. The confidence and sense of achievement in steady dieting should help her face the fresh challenge of even the extra lessons in music or dramatics, or whatever, with the new feeling of fitness.

Coping with a Child's Fears

by A S M Nurunnabi

IN the opinion of child psychologists, most childhood fears are not only real, but they are a natural part of their growing up, particularly in the area of emotional development. Hence it is their advice that children need to know that it's all right to be scared — and that it is possible to overcome frightened feelings. A youngster's fears in some respects, however, are not different from an adult's. But grown-ups have learnt how to handle their qualms and children haven't.

There are certain common fears which assail a youngster, such as the fears of falling, sudden loud noise and fear of strangers. An infant quickly learns to recognise its parents' faces and of others who exist nearby. Anyone who looks unfamiliar represents a potential threat to its security.

At a subsequent stage, the fear of being abandoned develops. At this stage a child has not learnt that a parent who is out of sight still exists and will return. Even a temporary disappearance of the persons who meet all the child's needs cause intense anxiety in a child. Hence child psychologists advise parents to avoid lengthy or abrupt separations from a child in order to build a youngster's emotional security.

Parents are sometimes found guilty of raising certain types of fears in order to keep them quiet and to remain free from trouble which might disturb them. The fears thus created are mainly related to ghosts or some fictitious terrible animal. Some parents also tend to resort to such tactics when a child creates feeding problems or refuses to go to bed in time with their insistence to remain awake to view late night shows on TV. Creation of such unfounded fears tends to undermine a child's innate self-confidence and makes him timid. A child of school-going age may develop fears about his school if any teacher treats harshly with him or any of his class mates.

Parents can help children learn to deal with their fears constructively. Some guidelines offered by experts in this connection are as follows:

(i) It is not advisable to punish or ridicule a child for being afraid. Give proper attention to his fears and try to explain in simple terms why those fears are groundless. Because of your attention and understanding, the children

are more likely to believe your reassurances. Often just giving information is effective, since children of all ages feel more secure with a rational explanation even when they do not yet fully understand it.

(ii) Encourage a youngster not to hide his fears. Talking together about the fears can allow a child to cut out his fears without shame and reassures him that the fears will diminish and eventually disappear.

Because children pattern themselves on their parents, modeling is another important technique. Youngsters respond to a parent's fear. A parent who deals confidently with experiences a child mistrusts sets a positive example. It often helps if a parent says, "I used to be afraid of that too." It teaches the child two important lessons. First, he is not alone in feeling scared at times. And since you are no longer scared,

fears can be mastered.

Parents can also help a child anticipate and prepare for a potentially upsetting experience. If your youngster is unduly anxious about starting school, take him there before the term begins so he can get used to the new environment. If a youngster is afraid of going up a lift, take any of his friends on a lift to show that it is like a joy ride as on a miniature train in an amusement park.

(iii) Look at a child's fear from his perspective, not your grown-up one. If a child is afraid of ghost or of the dark, you can look under the bed and in the closet and 'prove' there is no one there. You may also keep a low-powered lamp on in his bedroom if he is afraid of the dark. Dealing with that type of fear from the child's literal viewpoint often succeeds.

(iv) Change is part of life at any stage. In changing situations like meeting an accident or serious quarrels between parents, parents can help best by demonstrating a firm confidence that all this is a passing phase and everything will be all right in no time. However, in some cases, there may be need for seeking professional therapy when a child shows excessive fears not appropriate to his age which tend to immobilise him for normal ways of life.

Today children are exposed to many anxiety causing experiences and situations. It is the responsibility of the parents to build up in their children the basic strengths and skills they need to handle with confidence the fears arising out of such situation. If a youngster can imbibe a sense of trust, self-confidence and the feeling that they have a measure of control over what happens to him, it may be easier for him to meet the challenges of life.

Those Young French Painters



Shunning theory and driven solely by their personal demons, France's young painters give full rein to their imagination. Deliberately stripping their work of any intellectual trappings, they draw their inspiration from everyday life, opting for raw art over academicism, for the comic strip over the museum and for hard rock over classical music. Varied in its sources this counter-culture took form in France at the beginning of the 1980s, led by such trail blazers as Di Rosa, Combas, Boisrond and Blanchard. Oddly enough, the proverbial image of the rejected artist has never stuck to them. The big art galleries, hungry for new talent, immediately took them up, followed by collectors, with the paradoxical result that painters who had started by viewing themselves as standing outside society quickly became the pillars of a new cultural establishment. Their works, fetching handsome prices, are feted and hung in the leading museums. Fame has not turned their heads. They admit, however, that success is useful insofar as it allows them to continue doing the only thing that interests them — opening new vistas in an ever-changing art form.