

Cinevue

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In-Soo Radstake interviews Socheata Poeuv about NEW YEAR BABY

The wisest and most succinct description of the documentary filmmaker's plight came from Alfred Hitchcock: "In feature films the director is God; in documentary films God is the director." The six nominees for this year's Emerging Documentary Filmmaker Award underscore this idea perfectly, as they chased after tales of survival and self-discovery, hula dancers and rogue politicians, family histories and the history of freedom. We decided to let our documentary filmmakers speak for themselves by inviting them to interview each other about the motivations, challenges, and secrets of their taxing yet noble art form.



Director Socheata Poeuv with her father in her award-winning documentary NEW YEAR BABY.

In-Soo Radstake: When you started documenting your background and family's life, did you have any idea what you were about to start and where it would lead? And will lead to, in the future?

Socheata Poeuv: NEW YEAR BABY is my first film. I just wanted to start capturing my family's story. I had no idea if it would turn into a ten-minute piece or a feature-length documentary or just a collection of footage.

IR: How did you feel about emigrating to the U.S. and growing up in a non-Asian country?

I grew up in Dallas, Texas—not much of a Cambodian presence there. My parents were so grateful to have a safe and comfortable home in Texas. But I spent much of my childhood hiding my Cambodianness when we were in public. Only when I was a teenager or in college did I become really interested in my

Cambodian heritage, I began to feel a bit like a fraud. I had lost my language skills, I never learned how to cook; it was almost too late to be Cambodian.

IR: Your film unfolds a part of history that is a painful memory to the Cambodian community. How did people react to your idea of making a film about it and how did you handle those reactions?

The central conflict of the film is that my family didn't want to talk about their experience and I want to learn it for the first time. I think my parents eventually became comfortable with the camera because they saw that I was seriously invested in learning their story. Their story raised my respect for them and it brought us closer. That encouraged them to be more forthcoming.

IR: Your project has lead to a community. What is your wish for the future concerning the topic your film handles and the possible power and goals your work can generate?

What I'm working on next is Khmer Legacies, an organization whose mission is to videotape 10,000 testimonies from Cambodian survivors of the Khmer Rouge genocide by having their children interview their parents.

The mission of Khmer Legacies is to create healing for survivors by: preserving the history of the Khmer Rouge from the perspective of survivors, bridging the generational divide between Cambodian parents and their children, and transforming the culture of denial and avoidance in Cambodian communities to one of acknowledgement and honor.

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