

'New Year Baby' to premiere on PBS series

Daughter's search unearths family truths that would be better kept secret

What would you do if everything you knew about your life was turned upside down? If your sisters weren't really your sisters and your mother was married to someone else before your father? In her personal and moving film "New Year Baby," Socheata Poeuv finds that long-held secrets hide not only painful memories, but also love forged under inhuman conditions.

"New Year Baby" will have its television premiere on the Emmy Award-winning PBS series Independent Lens, hosted by Terrence Howard, on Tuesday, May 27, at 11 p.m. on KUED-Channel 7.

Born in a refugee camp on April 13 — the Cambodian New Year's Day — Socheata Poeuv has always been called "the lucky one" by her family. Her parents, Ma and Pa, survived the Khmer Rouge, one of the cruelest political regimes ever documented, eventually escaping to Thailand and then moving the entire family to Texas. Once in the United States, Ma and Pa never talked about what happened in Cambodia, focusing instead on giving the kids a "normal American life."

On Christmas Day 2002, with the entire family gathered together, Socheata's parents reveal a secret they had kept for more than 25 years: Her older sisters weren't really her sisters at all, and her brother was only her half-brother, the child of her mother's previous marriage. While reeling from this new information, Socheata wonders what other secrets her parents might have left behind in Cambodia.

She embarks on an emotional

journey with Ma and Pa to their homeland, retracing the family's path and picking up the lost pieces of her history along the way. She finds that to get to the bottom of her family's story, she must understand what happened to her former country, as well.

Using animation to illustrate family memories and the country's history, "New Year Baby" intertwines the stories of Ma and Pa with those of millions of others who suffered under the Khmer Rouge. In fewer than four years, more than 1.7 million Cambodians — about one-fourth of the population — died from starvation, disease or execution.

Taking Ma and Pa back to places filled with sadness, Socheata pleads, prods and pries,

trying to get them to answer questions they have dodged so many times before. How did her parents, a mismatched couple with little in common, come to be together? What happened to them in the Khmer Rouge labor camps? How did they survive the genocide, when so many others died? And why had they never told the truth?

To learn more about the film and the issues, visit the companion website for "New Year Baby" at Independent Lens online. The site also features a Talkback section for viewers to share their ideas and opinions. The "New Year Baby" companion website is located online at: pbs.org/independentlens/newyearbaby.



FILM STILL COURTESY OF KUED

Socheata Poeuy hugs her father, Nin Poeuv, in Cambodia. The two are the feature of the PBS documentary "New Year Baby."

