



Healing Cambodia One Child at a Time: The Story of Krousar Thmey, a New Family

Bénito Duchâteau-Arminjon

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After years of civil war, the bloody Khmer Rouge regime, and occupation by Vietnam, Cambodia finds itself decimated and divided.

Benoît Duchâteau-Arminjon, a.k.a. Bénito, discovers this world when he visits a refugee camp on the country's border with Thailand and experiences a profound emotional shock. He decides to put his promising career as a financial controller on hold and spend a year setting up a welfare center for abandoned children.

Since then, he has devoted his life to these children through the foundation he established in 1991—Krousar Thmey—or “new family.” A talented manager, Bénito set up a well-run organization and gradually turned its operation over to Cambodians. As of 2012, a staff of 400 is supporting some 4,000 children in welfare centers for street children, family shelters, and schools for blind or deaf children. In this context, Khmer Braille and Khmer Sign Language were developed, for the first time allowing children with these disabilities to get an education.

Krousar Thmey was the recipient of the Human Rights Prize granted by the French Republic in 2003 and UNESCO's Wenhui Award in 2010.

The foundation marked its 20th anniversary in 2011.

In October 2012 in New York, Bénito received the World of Children Humanitarian Award, hailed in the media as the “Nobel Prize for child advocates.”

As he tells his story, Bénito, who was granted Cambodian citizenship by King Norodom Sihanouk and Prime Minister Hun Sen in 2000, helps lift us out of cliché-ridden discourse to take a fresh look at the humanitarian world.

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