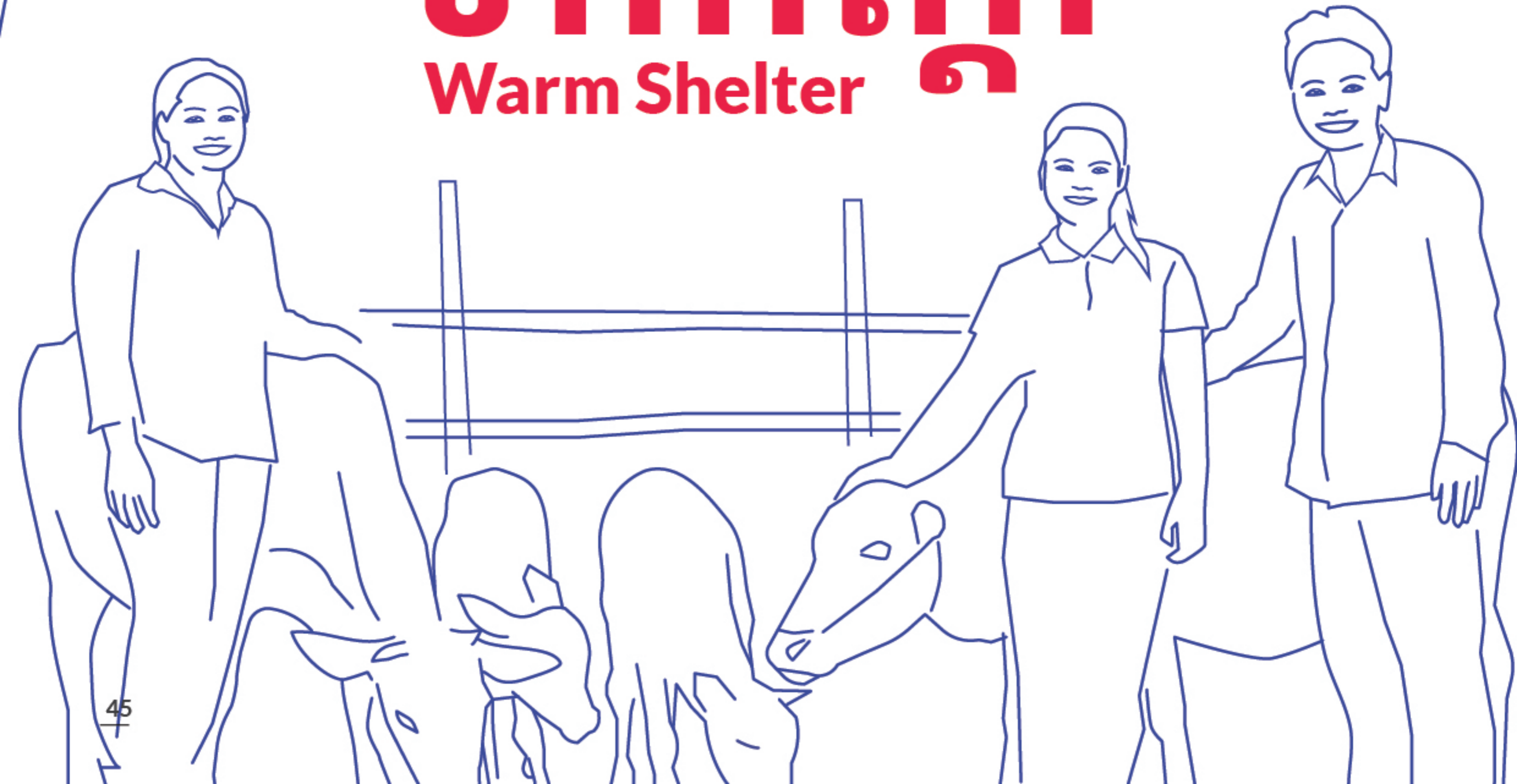


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Warm Shelter



Preface

by Vuth Lyno

Warm Shelter is a collection of photo stories depicting lived reality of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT+) families in Cambodia. Captured by documentary artist Prum Ero and text by RoCK team, this photographic series introduces us to some of the most remarkable stories of perseverance, kinship, family making, and love.

Each family presents themselves through two images, showing how multifaceted their roles are in their respective families and communities through their intimate domestic lives and a glimpse into their immediate neighborhoods. For example, in one of bong Phy and bong Vy's photographs, we see them with their daughter feeding cows in front of a mound of hay. In another picture, we see them adorned with bright traditional silk clothing and performing Khmer traditional musical instruments. Thus, they are parents, farmers, and caretakers of Cambodian culture and tradition.

The more we walk through the photographs and accompanying stories, the richer the stories of these LGBT+ families we learn. We also hear about humility, responsibility, anxiety, and the demand for legal protection. While there is no legal marriage and legal adoption yet for same-sex couples in Cambodia, many LGBT+ people still form unions, adopt children, and build families – a testament to the human need for love and care.

Warm Shelter brings to the fore some faces and stories of LGBT+ people, a creative and resourceful palette of Cambodian society. They are nurturing to their families. They are supportive to their respective communities. They carry and uphold the Cambodian traditions. They take care of the land we live on and cultivate the food we eat. They are the backbone of the economy.

Looking through their eyes and warm smiles, we see resilience, care, and essentially peaceful units of society that exist across generations. Their embrace and dignity demonstrate that love is still the core of forming and maintaining a family. For many who share their stories here, love refers to love with responsibilities and the ability to discuss and care for each other.

A true warm shelter for the Cambodian LGBT+ people is perhaps not different from that for any person. It's not about whether it's a tiled or thatched roof or how thick the house's walls are. Instead, it's the care that is born from love, the care that embraces diversity, and the care that treasures humanity, which comes from their families, communities, and societies.

Photographer's Remark

“In late 2019, RoCK team and I discussed a project for documenting photo stories of rainbow families in Cambodia, entitled ‘Warm Shelter’. I was delighted to take part in this project. Thus, we started the project in 2020 Through this process, I was able to learn more about the life stories of LGBT+ people, including how they form their love and the challenges they faced. Each set of photographs has its own family stories, but what all of these LGBT+ couples want is acceptance from their surroundings and to be able to get legally married. I think that both LGBT+ and straight people are mutually wanting genuine love from their partner, recognition from their surroundings, and

equal rights as a citizen in society. This documentation is important for learning and advocating for their equal rights.”

Prum Ero (b. 1989, Site B, Cambodian-Thai border) is a documentarian working in photography and videography. His practice centers on documentation to preserve history and memory, serving as an archive for present and future studies. In addition, he is interested in life portraits and architecture as an aesthetic form and a rich fabric of society. His photographic work often captures the essence of places, layered histories of building structures, and the interface between humans and non-humans. Ero also works with and supports a number of renowned artists and filmmakers in Cambodia and beyond in various artistic projects.

Warm Shelter (2020)
Photographs by Prum Ero
Text by RoCK team
Produced by Rainbow Community
Kampuchea (RoCK) and Document Our
History Now (DOHN)
In partnership with Sa Sa Art Projects

First Publishing as a photo storybook in 2022 as part of the “**ខ្ញុំទទួលយក** – I Accept” Campaign aiming to advance legal marriage equality for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT+) couples in Cambodia.



Love Memory of Palm Juice Harvester

“Happy family comes from contributions of the family members. It’s about love, understanding, responsibility, caring, education and building a decent livelihood.”

Love Memory Of Palm Juice Harvester



Love Memory of Palm Juice Harvester

Yun: My wife and I live in Sdok Prei village, Trapeang Sab Commune, Bati District, Takeo Province. We've been here for more than 40 years, since 1979. When we started our lives as a couple, we couldn't get married. We only had a small offering ceremony during our

housewarming, to let our elder relatives know that we decided with confidence to spend our lives together. My job was climbing up palm trees and harvesting the juice to make palm sugar. We both saved money to build a decent house like other couples.

I'm getting older and weaker now, so I can not climb palm trees anymore. We now sell groceries and raise ducks at home.

Eang: We have five members in our family. I took in and look after our children and grandchildren. We raise them and give them education so they have knowledge and good jobs to earn their livings. We don't only take care of our family but we also look after our neighbors when they are in need.

Yun: Before, we didn't dare to come out; we hid. We were afraid that people would mock us because they didn't like seeing a woman loving another woman. Now, there are still some people who don't like us, but not as many as before. I'm very happy when I see ministries and other organisations support us. What I'm not satisfied and worried about is that our relationship is only recognised as sisters not spouses in our family book. We raised our children until they are

adult and have families of their own, but the family book didn't state our true relationship. Can the love, caring, warmth and everything that we do for our children and grandchildren as parents not be acknowledged on the legal papers?

Eang: I want my family to be protected by law like other families, regardless whether there is an issue happening or not. When we're protected by law, it's easier to resolve if we have any conflict.

Love Memory Of Palm Juice Harvester





Happiness Of The Family

“Our family is not different from others. We support and love each other from the heart and contentment.”

Happiness Of The Family



Happiness Of The Family

Phy: Pen Thavy is my partner, and we've been living together as husband and wife for 26 years. We live with our adopted child in Kdom Pi village, Kork Pring commune, Svay Chrum district, Svay Rieng. We are farmers and we are also Cambodian traditional musicians.

Sometimes we have small arguments but it is not a big deal because we never focus on pointing out each other's mistakes. We forgive and find ways to solve the conflicts. We avoid using violence. Not only we have a good relationship among our family members

but also with our neighbours because of our kindness and supportiveness. To me, this is called building a happy family.

What I want is that our country will have laws protecting LGBT+ families including same-sex marriage, family book and full child adoption.

Thavy: It is truly crucial to legalise same-sex marriage because it's a legal protection for our family to be recognised fully. Therefore, it builds our confidence and trust, and it ensures our responsibilities including on our joint property. When we have same-sex marriage, the discrimination in the community will be reduced.



A Mighty Heart



"When our love succeeds and our family accepts us, it's a happiness and warm feeling unimaginable"

A Mighty Heart



A Mighty Heart

Suos Narin: I sell second-hand clothes and run a hair salon in Skun market. I have eight children and Hour is the 7th child. When I first knew that my child loves a girl, I was mad, because there was no one like him in this neighbourhood. However, I later tried to be open little by little and started to accept and believed that he could be responsible for his life. I told myself that I can only give birth to my children but I cannot rule their

hearts. Besides, it's their rights to love and be someone they choose. So, as a mother, we need to grant them their rights. If we restrict their rights, they might get depressed and it might even lead to suicide. In the end, we could only cry over the loss and it would be too little too late. On the other hands, if we accept our children as they are, they will be happy without being afraid of their parents. We should let them be

sometimes, allowing them to choose their path. Don't scold, use violence or kick them out of the house. When we give them love, they will love back and look after us. We can only look after them and teach them not to fight each other. I also want to tell the younger generation to listen to their parents. If your parents oppose you or your love, please try to convince them. Over time, they will understand and accept you.

Hour: It's really important when our love succeeds and our family accepts us. It's a happiness and warm feeling unimaginable. In addition, if the law

protects us and if people around us don't see us as stranger, we would feel more confident. Legal marriage for LGBT+ community is crucial, because we want our lives and love as meaningful as others. I also want to have a legal adoption so that the law could protect our child and our family.

Raksmey: Since we've known each other and been together for the past three years, we have gone through many obstacles emotionally and within the family. At first, I felt so down and started to feel depressed because no one accepted us. Sometimes my

dad appeared accepting us but with disappointment, so I left my family for a while. It was not my happiness. However, I always visited him first during each holiday.

Now, my dad accepted us and my parents in laws also love me as their own. This makes me so happy and I don't know how to thank them enough for the love they have for me. My hope is to be able to get married legally like other couples. It would give us security, because as spouses and family, we want to be included in the Family Book as husband and wife or as children whom have

ownership rights of our assets including land and house. Also, when a couple has a fight or decides to get a divorce, we have the law to resolve the problem. Currently, our names are listed as single in our family books which it is not true.

Suos Narin: I hope in the future, the government at all levels will understand and support LGBT+ people to have legal marriage like straight people too. Because my child also wants to get married just like others, and as parents we want to fulfill our children's wishes.

A Mighty Heart





Parents Are The Shelter For Children's Love

*" Family is shelter of life and parents are like a solid roof
to protect children. "*

Parents Are The Shelter For Children's Love



Parents Are The Shelter For Children's Love

Sreynoch: I run a small business at home, selling meatballs and boiled duck eggs. My husband works for Rainbow Community Kampuchea (RoCK). Over the last 6 years, we've been living together as husband and wife in a simple life.

Raksmei: Family is two people or a group of people living together with love, care and protection from any problems. Sreynoch and I love children, so in the future we want to adopt children and we want to have full rights

and responsibilities as parents. On the other hand, when we talk about the law, it seems there are barriers for LGBT+ families.

Sreynoch: We are happy because we truly love and respect each other, and we work hard to build a decent life with dignity. What makes our love special is that we have a strong support and courage from our parents. Our only hope

is that the law will protect our family just like straight couples including marriage, child adoption and other freedom.

Raksmey: My family, especially my mother and dad, is like a roof protecting us from wind and rain. The most meaningful and encouraging word from my dad which I remember is that: "Children is my blood who are invaluable. As parents, we cannot hate, argue and abandon them

because of their sexual orientation. Happiness and contentment of our children are more important than anything.”

Sreynoch: Our parents and guardians always explain to our relatives and neighbours about our relationship. That’s their infinite love for us, because

they don’t want people to look down on us. They said that they want all Cambodian people to live happily including families like us, communities and the whole society.

Parents Are The Shelter For Children's Love





Love In A Challenging Time

" Building love during Pol Pot regime, no matter how challenging it was, we overcame without giving up each other."

Love In A Challenging Time



Love In A Challenging Time

Grandpa Lai: We first met during the regime of 3 years 8 months 20 days (Pol Pot Regime). When the regime was over, we formed a small family in 1982. We have been spending 38 years of our lives together. We are an elder couple in our 80s and our health is frail as we age.

Grandma Siem: We do not have any big businesses. We were farmers but we no longer have any energy. We only raise some livestock and grow some food around our small cottage which was 10 centimeters raised from the ground with zinc roof, bamboo floor, and walls made of palm leaves. However, it collapsed by strong wind.

We adopted three children. Now they have grown well. One returned to their biological family, one migrated and another one went to work far from work. They left me a small grandchild to look after. As we have grown older and our livelihood wasn't so good, we worried we couldn't take care our grandchild. We worried about our grandchild and ourselves, so we decided to sell our land to build a small concrete house with zinc roof so we are safer.

Grandpa Lai: Even though our lives have been challenging, we do not give up on

our grandchild and on each other. Instead, we hold each other's hands, fight through all odds, look after each other even during sickness, day and night, whether we have food or not, we still strive together. Our hope is for our family be protected by law. We were so happy when our local authority accepted us and issued land and house titles.

Grandma Siem: Our family is no different from other families here. We are friends and we help and support each other when in need.





Our Wishes For The Next Generation

"It's very special when we can be with someone we love until we both get old. But it's not completely satisfied yet."

Our Wishes For The Next Generation



Our Wishes For The Next Generation

Grandma Thol: I have been with my spouse, Thon, since 1975, during the hardest and unforgettable time. Forty years have passed, we have one child and seven grandchildren, many have migrated to work abroad. Only two grand daughters are still staying and studying. Our houses are next to each other, so they frequently come to sleep with and accompany us, especially when

Thon is away and I'm alone. (Thol calls Thon Yeay or Grandma, which Thon feels okay with it but for other people he would prefered to be called Ta or Grandpa.)

Grandpa Thon: We both have gone through thick and thin since we were young. I'm happy to be with her, the woman I love. We've been working hard, striving, and persevering against all

odds to be together. Look back to the past, we both almost lost each other because her parents forced her to marry another man and they even threatened me using weapon. However, our pure love and determination have won them all. She and I are getting older now and it's almost too late for us to get married. We've been sharing our life experience to get support from our community and to have the law protecting LGBT+ people in the next generation. So that they have the chance and right to get married and fulfill their wishes because it is their happiness. This is my biggest wish.

Grandma Thol: We both don't have a lot to think about, as we are getting older now. We go to pagodas, do good deeds and build happiness. I want to tell the younger generation that: "Don't worry! Don't fret over having no children, because from my experience, we could raise young children and grandchildren and create a big family. It's not necessary to give birth. Happiness or sadness, it depends on us. If you put effort together, earn income, help each other, save money, get along, forgive each other, take care of each other, then our family will be happy."





Until We Get Old

" Our family is decent like other families too. We understand and take care each other no matter what "



Until We Get Old

Grandmother Chheon: My husband and I have been living together for 39 years. At first, my parents were angry with me. But because of our love, understanding, caring, persistence and showing that we are happy together, we won their hearts. They recognized and accepted our love as a true determination. They also provided us financial support to build

a stronger family. I still remember the wish from my parents to love and care each other infinitely, and that what we do. We also raised a grandchild since he was a baby. He is now working in Phnom Penh. He visits me on weekends but sometimes once in every few months.

Grandfather John: Happiness comes from two of us. That is love, guidance

and respect for each other. Our family is no different from other families.

Grandmother Chheon: Nowadays more LGBT+ persons are recognized and protected by law but LGBT+ couples cannot register marriage certificate like straight couples yet. My wish is that both LGBT+ and straight couples can register marriage certificate because we are all human. Having laws to recognize our family and joint property can protect us from anxiety or harassment and hatred from others.

Grandfather John: People in the village respect me as an elder person. There is no problem. However, there is a small group of people who shows contempt, looks down, mocks, harasses and says bad words such as there is nothing good with a woman who loves another woman because no law recognizes them. These kinds of actions happen because they don't like LGBT+ people. Therefore, I want LGBT+ families to be protected by law and to no longer subject to discrimination.



Acknowledgements

Rainbow Community Kampuchea (RoCK) would like to express acknowledgments and appreciation to the LGBT+ community members and their families who are the owners of the stories and photographs, and all the contributors who made this photo book happen, as mentioned below:

Stories' owners and their families:

Ok Lai and Khiev Siem

Horn Chheon and Pov John and grandson

Sot Yun and Sem Eang and family

Tit Man and Dul Thol and granddaughter

Sun Phy and Pen Thavy and daughter

Touch Srey Nich (Hour), Sovan Raksmeay and Sous Narin

Tuy Raksmeay and Choub Sreynoch, parents and younger brother

RoCK team who took part in story writing and editing:

Chey Sokdom

Mil Sreytoch

Tuy Raksmeay

Heng Cheyleaphy

Ly Pisey

Artist and Photographer : Prum Ero

Book layout and cover designer : Chhen Vannak

Collaborating partner : Sa Sa Art projects

Cooperation partner: Document Our History Now (DOHN)



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