

was never enough porridge to eat. Her mother tells her that she cried constantly, terrified by the sound of gunfire.

Her family was fortunate. Her mother and father, her three sisters and four brothers – all survived. By some estimates, close to 2 million people died under the Khmer Rouge, victims of execution, starvation and forced labor.

She escaped with the rest of her family. They slipped across a river into territory held by the Vietnamese, then made their way to refugee camps in Thailand, then Indonesia, then Singapore. Lim still remembers the first apple she ever had, at a camp in Singapore, and how strange it tasted after her sparse diet of porridge.

They reached Santa Ana in 1981 and found two one-bedroom apartments for all ten of them and a cousin. Lim enrolled in the third grade, even though she couldn't yet speak English. And she started going to a community center for help with her homework or dance lessons – The Cambodian Family.

She's been there ever since, first as a volunteer helping to organize holiday toy drives, later as a youth counselor and program director. The names and faces have changed – The Cambodian Family now serves many more Latinos than Cambodians – but Lim's message to them has not.

She talks about the importance of family, because it was family that got her out of the bloody Cambodia of the Khmer Rouge. And she talks about working hard to get somewhere, because she knows what it's like to start with nothing.

She works with about 60 kids at any given time, but she points to four of them as a measure of the mark her organization makes. Those four graduated from high school this year. Three have already enrolled in college, and the fourth is planning to next year.

Lim plans to invest some of her peace prize money in her son's education, and spend some on the kids at The Cambodian Family. For days after she got the call telling her that she had won, she worried that it had all been a mistake, that they had the wrong person.

"I must have done something good to deserve it," she says now. But she's quick to add: "It's not just about me. It's about the work that I did and about the people that I serve."

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