



Sara Im

Largo, Florida



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Learn about Florida Entrepreneur Sara Im:

Born and raised in Cambodia, Sara Im, Author, Motivational Speaker and Wellness Consultant, endured and survived unimaginable hardships during a four year period following the Cambodian Civil War. In the mid-1970s, she was forcefully removed from college and placed in a labor camp operated by the Khmer Rouge Regime – a communist regime responsible for the imprisonment and execution of over one million professionals, intellectuals, citizens suspected of connections with the former government and those of certain ethnic backgrounds.

Im shared the incredible story behind her journey and how, through perseverance and willpower, she escaped to the United States and created a new life for herself. Her story begins after she was removed

from her university and placed, with 1,000 other individuals, into a labor camp in the middle of the Cambodian jungle.

“The conditions were horrible,” she said. “We were forced to work long hard hours and deprived of food and sleep. I went to sleep hungry every night. There was also a lot of sickness in the beginning. I had malaria and typhoid fever and, even though I was extremely sick, I was still forced to work. I barely made it from one day to the next.”

Im continued, “I managed to stay alive because of my determination to be reunited with my family. The vision I had of seeing them again was a lifesaver for me. Towards the end of four years, they kept pushing the camp further and further into the jungle. They knew something was coming. Every few weeks, we'd move. At one point, I decided I wouldn't move again and was able to escape with three friends I made at the camp. Somehow, I made my way to the province I grew up in and, even though it was destroyed and burned to the ground, I was able to track down my family.”

“After about a year, my mom realized the situation was still too dangerous for me to stay. She convinced me to leave the country. I crossed the Thai border where I located a United Nations camp. Once there, I connected with my mom's cousin, who was already in the U.S., along with my mom's other cousin who, together, helped me get to the Unites States. In 1981, I landed in Connecticut.”

Im arrived on U.S. soil not knowing how to speak English and with only two connections. She did, however, have the support of a local church and the determination to succeed in her new home. She learned English, got her GED, landed a full-time job doing quality control in a laboratory

and enrolled in college. By 1988, Im had several reasons to celebrate.

“As a result of becoming a U.S. citizen, I was able to sponsor my own family,” she said. “They spent the previous 5 years in a Thai camp. By 1988, we were finally reunited. I also got married and moved with my husband to Fort Worth, TX. I found a great job with General Dynamics, but within a year, my husband’s job moved us to Tampa, FL.”

In Tampa, Im found it challenging to secure employment. Not being the type to give up, she took her first shot at entrepreneurship by becoming a direct sales independent consultant. After three years, they moved again – this time to Boston, MA. She found success running the office for a non-profit community development corporation that taught people how to start and grow their own businesses. In 1997, Im’s husband accepted a new opportunity in Atlanta. Over the next eight years, Im worked with a financial services company and learned the ins and outs of retirement, insurance and various investment strategies and options. She also became a caregiver for her aging mother. A final move in 2005, brought them back to the Sunshine State.

“My husband retired and we both always wanted to get back to Florida,” she said. “At the time, my mom was still living with us and I was still taking care of her. Florida was a great place to do that. I spent most of my time caring for my mom, but shortly after we moved to Florida is when I started my wellness business.”

Im continued, “My own health declined in Atlanta and, as a result, I was introduced to the wonderful world of supplements. I recovered from my health challenges with natural and holistic remedies. My own experience made me want to share what I learned with others. That was really the

beginning of my journey into health and wellness.”

Im’s mother, Sopheak, passed away in 2012. After nearly a year of grieving the loss of her mother, whom she was extremely close with, Im was more determined than ever to build her new business. As she shared, growth was organic and other opportunities came along as a result.

“I got out into the community as much as possible,” she said. “It was the best way to let people know what I was doing. I also started an annual community health fair that’s still going on today. I bring together health and wellness professionals and vendors to share their services, products and knowledge. Most of the vendors focus on natural, holistic and alternative wellness products and services.”

Im also started speaking in public and sharing her story at conferences and seminars. Others wanted to hear about her journey and how she beat the odds. That eventually led her to write a book about her experience. Her book ‘How I Survived the Killing Fields – A story of Hope, Love and Determination’ was released in 2015.

For Im, who’s passionate about educating and informing people about alternative ways to take care of themselves, her motivation comes from the ability to inspire others. Looking ahead, her goals are to continue promoting wellness, fitness, exercise and disease prevention and sharing her inspiring survival story with others.

What advice does Im have for aspiring entrepreneurs? “It’s okay to be hesitant about starting a business,” she said. “You have to make sure you have a stream of income coming in. Also, make sure you have some

money on the side to live on. Most businesses don't produce right away.

Also, if you have a purpose and a strong desire to offer a product or service, you should do it. It's important to ask yourself, 'Does this align with my purpose in life and will it bring me joy?'. The main goal of any business should be to do the right thing. Lastly, have a vision of what you want to achieve. When you face obstacles, having a vision will help you get through tough times."

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