

CAMBODIAN AMERICAN LITERARY ARTS ASSOCIATION



December 17, 2020

In regards to the Lowell Sun editorial, “*New arrivals, your job is to learn English*” published on December 5, 2020, the leadership team of the Cambodian American Literary Arts Association responds:

*My native language hangs on the tip of my tongue
The words of my ancestors sing the songs of times long gone
Within these words I learned where I came from*

*Bloody roots driven deep into the mossy bed of the humid jungle
Through the dense foliage, faint sounds of gunshots
The forgotten dead float along the Mekong River calling out my name
Reminding me of scenic countrysides that time forgot
Lost loved ones stand with arms outstretched unable to feel the warmth of touch*

*Here we stand, hand in hand in this new land
Fleeing the ugly beast of war lamenting the beauty of home with hope held close
Chasing American dreams that slip through our fingers like sifted sand*

*Assimilate and speak our language the supposed natives say
Such arrogance to think the way they speak and live is superior to others
Our mothers’ speech breaks down walls and keeps the nightmares at bay
We refuse to lose the pieces of our soul tethered to the land of our ancestors’ birth
What we lack in your linguistics we make up for in our hardy stock*

*We bear the burden of sorrows only the heart can tell through silent tears
Only we know the resiliency and strength these hardships can unlock
Mere words cannot convey the pain and tragedy endured
There is knowledge in the words we speak that does not fit your definitions.*

*Is it fear that has you shunning what you can’t comprehend?
It’s sad to think that to you human existence is some sort of competition
Humanity knows itself in the warmth of a smile, a gentle touch of the hand*

*It is not bound by words but can be freely expressed without boundaries
It is not the utterance of sounds but the vibrations of emotions
Love is the common language that makes brethren out of adversaries
Love is unspoken, clairvoyant, universal and endless
Only when we choose to communicate with love can fear and hatred come to an end*

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You try to shame us
With stats and data from an unnamed report
It sounds like you have never fled from bullets
To escape from a genocide
It sounds like you have never seen stats and data
On how many people had to escape and learn to survive in another country
Knowing that they will never see their family members again
And that they will only reunite in nightmares
Only to awaken to the sounds of their own screams and tears
How easily the struggles from past immigrants are forgotten
And how some have such a disregard for new immigrants' resilience
WE are NOT a strain on the state's economy
WE are the heartbeat of the state's vitality
The next generation from new arrivals
Take lessons of hard work to keep the community pumping
Regardless of what tongue they speak in
New arrivals will add to the success of the Lowell community
And community members who have walked similar steps before
Will provide support and a shield from ignorance
We will continue to unite
And help each other grow instead of letting insensitive tones distract us
If proof is needed on how to be a compassionate human being, you will find it in these words.
If you have enough heart to look for it

Signed,
Lena Sarunn *Executive Director*
Joan Chun *Deputy Director*
Sanary Phen *Board President*