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MY STORY

# SOPHAT DUCH

In 1979, Kuyper alumnus Sophat Duch's family, fleeing from the brutal atrocities of the Khmer Rouge regime, escaped from Cambodia to Thailand, where he was born in the Cambodian refugee camp of Meirut. In 1982, he came to the United States with his mother, father, grandparents and three aunts. Today, he serves as associate pastor of the Cambodian Fellowship CRC in Holland, Michigan. This is his story.

My coming to Christ is a testimony to God's sovereignty over my life. My father and grandfather were away from their village when it was invaded. When they returned, they found the corpses of nine of my father's siblings who had been brutally executed. Shortly thereafter, in 1979, my family fled through Alumni Profile

CLASS **2011** 

HOME **Holland, Michigan** 

CARFER

Associate Pastor Cambodian Fellowship CRC

FAMILY

Wife, Mai Tang Khang and four children–Kaleb, Josiah, Katriel and Ezra PAGE 02

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**Deaf Teen Quest** 

Deaf Teen Quest reaches deaf teenagers in West Michigan with the gospel.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION **f**KUYPER.EDU

# Who Wouldn't Want to be Part of This?

Eighty years ago, on June 1, 1939, Johanna Timmer was appointed the first faculty member and school head of Kuyper College (then, Reformed Bible Institute), and classes began in Grand Rapids, Michigan, that fall. With confidence and conviction, Timmer believed that the church and the world needed the kind of service such an institution could provide, that God would bless these efforts, and that God's people would support this endeavor through their gifts and prayers.

Eighty years later, we can say—Amen, so be it!

We celebrate our alumni who are serving God and His people in more than 50 countries, and we know our mission continues as we faithfully seek God's blessing and rely on your support.

The stories in this newsletter serve as testimonies of our mission and answer the question posed by Joe Puplis, our new senior admissions counselor and community ambassador—"Who wouldn't want to be a part of this?"

Joe, '04, values being a part of Kuyper College's admissions team as he guides prospective undergraduate and graduate students through the enrollment process. He finds this to be "a meaningful, life-giving experience." Our students need this kind of service.

Sophat Duch, '11, pours himself into the lives of Asian American youth as he equips them for ministry and service in their local churches. He was part of the Kuyper College community over a span of 11 years, and he says, "The impact Kuyper left on me is priceless!"

Ellen (Slomp) Kammeraad, '14, shares the gospel with deaf teenagers in West Michigan as part of Youth for Christ's Deaf Teen Quest. She came to Kuyper desiring the same biblical foundation her parents received, and she says, "I grew more in my short time there than I have at any other point in life."

And Madison Delano, '21, desires to serve God and others within the social work profession. She says that being at Kuyper means she can be part of "a community of



believers who actively live their lives for Christ."

Who wouldn't want to be a part of this? That's a question I want to leave with you as you ponder who you know that might become a part of our community. These stories provide some good reasons as does the article, "Why Kuyper is the Right Choice."

Johanna Timmer knew she wanted to be a part of this new institution, and I know our students, staff, faculty and board are "all in" as we seek to love and serve God and others in a vibrant, God-honoring learning community.

Grateful to serve.

Dr. Patricia R. Harris President

# **Kuyper Community Notes**

## Births

Rob (2009) and Stephanie (VanderHeide) Bergman (2010), along with big brother Parker, welcomed Gideon John into their family through adoption in January 2019.

Marcus (2012) and Jodie (Gazan) DeBoer (2009), along with siblings Evelyn, Calvin and Jane, welcomed home Millie Jo on February 16, 2019.

Trevor and Andrea (Ludwig) Farrell (2008), along with big brother Ezra, welcomed home Farley James on April 27, 2019.

#### Campus Events

August 16

Journey

August 26

Kuyper College International Golf Scramble

August 27-30

Week of Welcome

September 3

Classes Begin

September 3

**Opening Convocation** 

September 27

Faculty and Alumni Scholar Day

# Kuyper College Receives 200-Year-Old Torah Scroll

Kuyper College received a gift of a 200-year-old, non-kosher, or pasul, Torah scroll from Ken and Barb Larson, founders of God's Ancient Library, a non-profit whose mission is "to celebrate God's Word by preserving and gifting Torah scrolls to schools that prepare Bible teachers for the future." To date, the organization has given 52 Torah scrolls to seminaries, museums and other organizations for teaching, research and public engagement. Kuyper's Torah scroll is approximately 200 years old, originated in Eastern Europe, and survived the Holocaust.

After being contacted by God's Ancient Library, Kuyper President Patricia Harris and professor of biblical studies, Dr. Daniel Kroeze, flew to Minneapolis to receive the scroll. During an event to celebrate the gift to Kuyper, a presentation was shown detailing the year-long process it takes to produce a Torah scroll, the requirements to be a scribe for a Torah scroll, and the love for the Word that permeates every step of the production process.

A Torah scroll contains the first five books of the Old Testament, is handwritten on dried animal skin, and used in Jewish synagogues during Shabbat (Sabbath) and other services. To be considered kosher,

A portion of a Torah scroll



A scribe (Sofer) hand-writing a new Torah scroll using a turkey feather quill

a Torah scroll must meet rigorous standards—tears, textual errors or faded ink can all render a Torah scroll pasul and no longer suitable for use. There are dozens of rules and regulations on how a Torah scroll must be produced in order to reflect the holiness of God's Word. For example, each section of a Torah scroll must have exactly forty-two lines because, on their way to the Promised Land, the Israelites made fortytwo stops. Other rules dictate the kind of animal skins that are used to make the parchment for the scrolls, the formula for the ink that is used, and the actual writing utensil—a quill—usually from a turkey feather. No instrument containing iron or steel may be used in the creation of a Torah scroll because these metals are used to make instruments of war. Rooted in love and reverence for the Word, these rules and regulations are all in place to ensure that God's Word passes on faithfully from one generation to the next. According to Dr. Kroeze, "The Torah scroll is a symbol of the love for the Word and a symbol of how that Word has been preserved accurately."

At the event, Ken and Barb Larson made it clear that the scrolls are not only to be displayed, but to be used and studied by anyone seeking to grow deeper in their understanding of God's Word. Kuyper is doing just that. In his last class of the semester, Dr. Kroeze's students examined the Torah scroll. In addition, the faculty is formulating ideas on how they might use the scroll. One thought is to do regular readings from the Torah with translations into English. While it is not in use, the Torah scroll will be on display at Kuyper's Zondervan Library. Dr. Nicholas Kroeze, former Kuyper president and an award-winning wood sculptor, is currently building a display case for the scroll.

## Professional Development

Kevin Vander Veen (2012) became lead pastor at Duncan Christian Reformed Church in Duncan, British Colombia.

Jason Nagle (2004) assumed the role of pastor of care and community life at Corinth Reformed Church.

As alumni, we invite you to get involved and stay in touch by calling the Alumni Office at 877.229.0941 or sending us an email to alumni@kuyper.edu with your contact information or the most recent news about you.



Hundreds of colorful bracelets left by visitors at the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum in Phnom Penh, Cambodia

the landmine-filled jungles of Cambodia to Thailand. They lived in a refugee camp, where I was born in 1981. In 1982, we were sponsored by the Christian Reformed Church and came to the United States.

During my early years in Michigan, we lived in Kalamazoo. My family, who were Buddhist, were poor immigrants without any education or skills. They picked up whatever jobs they could get. My father worked at a scrap yard sorting metal until an accident left him blind in one eye. He then worked as a janitor for Bronson Hospital. My mother worked at a laundromat folding customers' laundry. Although my family was sponsored by the CRC, we didn't go to church and definitely were not believers. While living in Kalamazoo my brother and sister were born. It was just the five of us for a while, until my grandparents came to live with us. My grandparents cared for all of us while my parents were at work. Several years later, when I was 8 years old, my parents found factory jobs in Holland, Michigan. They commuted from Kalamazoo to Holland and stayed at a friend's house during the week. I saw less of my parents, and the strain on our family became great. My mother had strong differences with my father and my grandparents, and soon after they divorced.

After the divorce, my family relocated to Holland. The divorce left both my parents and us in very poor circumstances. It was then that my father reached out to the Cambodian Fellowship CRC for financial support. Out of respect for the church, my father started attending, and he would bring my siblings and me as well. During that time, while I was exposed to Christ, I didn't quite understand what faith meant. When I was in eighth grade, I began to bombard the Cambodian Sunday school teacher with many questions concerning the Bible. He couldn't answer all of them, so he said, "Sophat, if you want to know all the answers, why don't you read the Bible for yourself?" So, I started reading and studying on my own, and eventually and unexpectedly, I understood! I believed and trusted, and desired to know more.

The lack of mentors and teachers in my life motivated me to lead and teach others. In high school, I became involved with Youth for Christ, teaching Bible studies and also becoming the youth leader in the Cambodian Fellowship CRC. The senior pastor there was a graduate of Kuyper College and asked me to consider going to school there after high school, so I did.

I began my studies at Kuyper in 2000. I appreciated the smaller student body, the attention given to the students by the faculty, and the emphasis on missions and evangelism. I did not, at the time, sense a call to be a pastor, though I did want to be involved in youth ministry. While I had hoped to finish my education at Kuyper within four years, the Lord had a different plan. At Kuyper I became very close with my roommate, Teng Yang. In 2002, he died in a car accident. It hit me very hard, and I began a downward spiral. I performed poorly in my classes and then dropped out of Kuyper. My world fell apart. I left school, got fired from my job, broke up with my longtime girlfriend, and doubted if I was being called by God at all. However, over a period of time, I recovered. I became involved with the church again, got married and had two children. Then Gary Teja, a professor at Kuyper, suggested that I return to school. I enrolled again as a part-time student in 2006 and took my studies more seriously, determined to finish my pre-seminary program.

As a part-time student, I had to make up the courses I did poorly on, as well as complete the ones lacking for my degree. I was blessed to learn Greek from two masters, Dr. Bremer and the newly arrived Professor Hoogeboom. I found I had a knack for Greek and, in 2008, received the Greek award. Being at Kuyper for a span of nearly 10 years, I sat through two presidents, many old and new faculty, as well as changing seasons of students. What didn't change, and had such a great impact on me, was the care and openness of the faculty. I had so many edifying conversations with them which I will never forget. The impact Kuyper left on me is priceless! The friendships, the discipleship, the mentoring, the education and the experience have been invaluable. It has made me the man I am today. Kuyper was also instrumental in meeting my wife—Mai Tang. An American-born Hmong—an ethnic group living chiefly in China and Southeast Asia—she was visiting a friend who was a student when we met. Although it took me the better part of a decade to complete my education, I have no regrets!

As my education at Kuyper was drawing to a close in 2011, it became clear that I would pursue seminary and seek to become a pastor. However, after two years at Calvin, the load of studies, together with the responsibility of small children at home and the financial burden of large student loan debt, made it an untenable situation, so I left to pursue ordination as a commission pastor and passed my Classis Holland exams.

Today, I serve as associate pastor of the Cambodian Fellowship CRC. I lead an English ministry as well as several Bible studies, preach twice a month, and disciple second and third generation Cambodians, while also serving as diversity champion for the Classis Holland leadership team.



Sophat Duch's ordination

Over time, I found many Asian churches in the CRC were struggling with the same issues that the Cambodian Fellowship CRC had. I made a request to the denomination for a grant to launch an annual Pan-Asian youth conference—Christ-Like Asian Youth (CLAY). At the time, the grant was denied. Later, I visited a youth conference called Hmong Christian Reformed Youth (HCRY), which was hosted by three Hmong CRCs in the Midwest. After that visit I thought: "Why should I start something new when there is something like it already?" I brought the Cambodian youth to the all Hmong conference repeatedly. Then Laotian youth joined. Then Karen (Thailand/ Myanmar) youth and others. Long story short, I became the first non-Hmong on the planning staff. Our strategy was about being all inclusive, being supported by our churches, and changing the name of the conference from Hmong Christian Reformed Youth to Christ-Like Asian Youth. In 2014, after 20 years of HCRY, the name was officially changed to CLAY and continues to be supported by the churches. The conference meets for five days in the summer and

focuses on preaching the gospel and teaching a Reformed worldview through workshops. There are many games and activities, as well as fellowship gatherings to foster friendships and discipleship. In addition, after finding that many Asian youth were leaving the church after going to college, I founded a ministry called South East Ethnic Discipleship (SEED) to train young adults in the foundation of the faith—equipping them for ministry and service in their local church.

Working with the Asian community can be difficult. Many immigrants who begin life in America with nothing are coming into church heavily influenced by Eastern religions such as Buddhism and Shamanism. Many have also fallen prey to the prosperity gospel. Part of my work is to call people out of all of that into Christ's free offer of grace. However, my favorite part of the call is preaching and teaching the Word of God.

The Lord is leading me to continue to foster unity among the different ethnic churches—to unite them in the faith in the pure gospel of Jesus Christ, in a love for the Word of God, and in a fellowship of true discipleship.



From left to right, Kaleb, Josiah, Katriel, Sophat, Mai Tang and Ezra

# Why Kuyper Is the Right Choice

Often prospective students and their parents ask our admission representatives a simple but powerful question—Why Kuyper? There is not one answer, but nine.

# Ranked No. 6 Among the Top 10 Michigan Colleges

Using data from the National Center for Education Statistics, the Council for Community and Economic Research, the U.S. Department of Education, CollegeData and PayScale, WalletHub compared nearly 1,000 higher education institutions in the U.S. across 30 metrics, including, student-faculty ratio, cost and financing, graduation rates, and postattendance median salary. Their report ranks Kuyper College sixth in the state.

#### Quality Academics

At Kuyper, through the combination of a rigorous academic curriculum and a biblical worldview, the academic programs have been designed to meet the highest educational standards. One example is our social work program, ranked among the 10 best in Michigan according to a study conducted by Zippia, Inc., a leading higher education research company.

#### Biblical Integration

A major component of a Kuyper education is the integration of the Bible in our academic programs. Our distinctively Christian core curriculum is based on 36 general education/arts and science and 21 Bible and theology credits. And while several programs have a dual Bible and theology major built in, all Kuyper programs provide the option of graduating with a double major.

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## Top-Notch Faculty

With one faculty member for every 10 students, our studies are shaped by small classes that give students the benefit of nurturing, yet challenging, instruction by professors known for their subject matter expertise. As mentors, they also take a personal interest not only in student academic growth, but also in their spiritual and personal well-being—both inside and outside of the classroom.

#### Ranked No. 1 in Student Satisfaction

At Kuyper our students represent more than 25 denominations from across the country and around the world and thrive as they live in community through authentic relationships. That may explain why a report by College Consensus ranks Kuyper No.1 in student satisfaction among Midwest regional colleges.

## Affordability

At Kuyper, we are committed to helping our students and their families make a high-quality Christian education as affordable as possible. Our tuition is significantly lower than comparable Christian colleges—an average of \$5,000 less per year. In addition, our generous scholarships and financial aid opportunities offer significant savings.

## Students Graduate with a Strong Resume

Kuyper internships allow students to experience out-of-classroom learning as they work in their chosen professions applying the principles, skills and techniques learned in the classroom so they can graduate with invaluable real-world experience—and a quality resume.

## Students Graduate Career Ready

KuyperWorks is a new program that guarantees on-campus jobs for resident students and provides them with workplace and career readiness skills for post-graduation employment while also making their education more affordable.

## A Financial Safety Net

The Kuyper Loan Repayment Assistance Program (KLRAP) provides a safety net for students by helping graduates repay student loans. The program is available to all incoming freshmen at no cost to students or their families and helps to repay loans after graduation if a graduate's income does not meet a specified threshold.

# In My Words

### A PLACE OF STORIES

Returning to Kuyper College as a member of the staff has allowed me to take some time to pause and reflect. I confess that my first week back on campus felt a little strange. Perhaps the thing that I can liken it to is the feeling one gets when stepping back into a childhood home after many years away. Familiar



Joe Puplis
Senior Admissions Counselor/
Community Ambassador

and unfamiliar. Known faces and new ones. Fond memories and some painful ones, partially obscured by time.

One may ask, "Why did you decide to return?" It's a good question, and it's one that I hope to unpack a little bit.

I recently found my class photo taken during my senior year here. I wonder how well I still know that person. In the last 15 years, like everyone else, I've had many experiences. I married my lovely wife, Jen, and we became parents, now raising our four children together. We bought a 100-year-old home

which could charitably be described as a fixer-upper. I earned a master's degree. We've traveled and met people from different walks of life. We've known personal joys and hardships. Professional successes and disappointments. Friendships that endure and friendships that have run their course.

I suppose I offer all of this as an attempt to honor the ways that God had taught me as a student at Kuyper College and how He has continued to teach me through life. It can be humbling to return to the place where I once thought I had a pretty good handle on things, only to acknowledge with new perspective that there is still so much to be learned.

I am grateful to be back at Kuyper, working in this capacity. My role is to help our undergraduates, transfers and graduate students become better informed of Kuyper's mission and opportunities, as well as showing them how to navigate the enrollment process. This has been a meaningful, life-giving experience.

And when time allows, my office door opens with an abiding invitation for a friendly game of chess or ping pong. (Admittedly, as I've aged, there are some things that simply do not — and need not — change!)

I deeply value how Kuyper College continues to be a place of stories. People come here. Then they're sent out with a blessing. Sometimes they return. And sometimes they leave again. Regardless, though, of how long they may be here, each one takes part in a story. Stories of growing up and maturity. Stories of selfless service. Stories of wisdom and stories of folly. Stories of doubt and struggle. Stories of death and of new life. Stories of profound lessons learned and relearned. And through them all, a deep and powerful hope connecting past, present and future generations of Kuyper students and staff on our small campus, each of us doing our part as together we continue to seek the kingdom of God.

And who wouldn't want to be a part of that?

"In My Words" is a feature of the Kuyper College News highlighting first-person stories by Kuyper College faculty and staff.

# Deaf Teen Quest

# "My dream is that deaf teens would no longer feel isolated, but finally have a place to belong, to be loved, and to learn of the goodness of Jesus."

Kuyper alumna Ellen (Slomp) Kammeraad, class of 2014, works with Deaf Teen Quest, a ministry of Youth for Christ, to reach deaf teenagers in West Michigan with the gospel. Kammeraad grew up on a small

hobby farm in Big Rapids, Michigan. As she puts it, her joyful upbringing was "filled with horses, catching frogs, church activities and fun memories." When she was 12 years old, her family adopted a young boy from Ethiopia who was deaf and communicated through American Sign Language (ASL). Her relationship with her adopted brother sparked Kammeraad's interest in working with the deaf community. A few years after that, they adopted three girls from Ethiopia, making them a family of eleven. While adjusting to the new family brought some difficulties, it helped them grow closer to God and to each other.

When her college years approached, Kammeraad felt God's call to be a sign language interpreter. Although Kuyper does not offer a sign language program, as the daughter of two Kuyper graduates, Kammeraad had heard about the value of the biblical education her parents had received at

Kuyper and decided to attend for two years. The time was well worth it, according to Kammeraad: "I grew more in my short time there than I have at any other point in life." After graduating Kuyper in 2014 with an associate degree, Kammeraad attended Lansing Community College for three years to attain her certification in ASL teaching.

While in college, Kammeraad thought she was meant to work in international missions as an ASL translator. Over time, however, she



At Thanksgiving event teens and staff "signing" I Love You to food donors

began to realize the deep need for deaf teenagers in West Michigan to have the gospel made accessible to them. To meet this need, Kammeraad worked with Youth for Christ to start a Deaf Teen Quest

chapter in West Michigan.

Youth for Christ has been reaching teens with the gospel since the 1940s, and to broaden this mission, they started Deaf Teen Quest in 2008. Now, it has more than a dozen chapters nationwide. Deaf Teen Quest's mission is to "build Christ-centered, life-changing relationships with deaf and hard of hearing students by entering the world of deaf teenagers with fun, friendship, fellowship and faith."

Twice a month, a group of ASL-fluent adults some of whom are deaf—meet with a group of deaf and hard of hearing teenagers for Club. At Club, they have dinner together, play games, do a Bible lesson, and then engage in deeper discussion with small groups. Kammeraad explained, "Although that might not sound super special, it is life-changing for these teens because it's a place where they finally have full access to all information and communication."



Kammeraad and two students welcoming participants at a DTQ event

Kammeraad compared the day-to-day life of a deaf individual to an experience in a country where one does not speak the language. "Living with a constant language barrier can be very frustrating," she said. "But at Deaf Teen Quest, these teenagers get to interact with people who speak their language. They have the opportunity to hear the gospel in their first language—their 'heart language."

As director, Kammeraad prepares lessons, games and small group discussions. Outside of her time at Club, she seeks out the teens to spend time with them. Before Club, a group of teens comes over to play games, work on homework and eat snacks. "The absolute BEST part of working with Deaf Teen Quest is sharing who Jesus is. Like these teens," said Kammeraad, "He knows what it feels like to be misunderstood, to not 'fit in,' to be rejected by family and friends, to be different than everyone else. It's been incredible to see the transformation in teens as they learn about Jesus' love and how He wants a relationship with them!"

Kammeraad is optimistic about the future of Deaf Teen Quest. Her prayer is that the teens in the Club will become the next generation of deaf leaders. In the meantime, she wants to give deaf teens a place of Christ-centered community, explaining, "My dream is that deaf teens would no longer feel isolated, but finally have a place to belong, to be loved, and to learn of the goodness of Jesus."



#### Bringing God's Grace into Today's Culture

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#### STUDENTS TO WATCH

# Madison Delano

I grew up in a wonderful family with three younger brothers. My parents have done an amazing job of pointing my brothers and me to Christ by the way they've lived out their lives. I have sought their wise counsel many times, and they mean very much to me.

Our family is very close, and growing up with three brothers was, and is, a marvelous experience. They have taught me much about life, and I'm thankful God has blessed me with my brothers. My parents and I are also very close. They have instilled in us the importance of family and dedication to the Lord. They also taught us the importance of hard work and, on the flip side, how to rest well. We have enjoyed many family vacations together as well as hard days of yard work. My family was the foundation that provided me with a great upbringing during which I learned how to trust God with my life and walk in obedience to Him.

I grew up going to Calvary Church on Grand Rapids' East Beltline, where I was constantly poured into spiritually. From a young age I recognized the great gift of salvation and accepted Christ; however, it wasn't until middle school that I started to make my faith my own and seek God apart from just going to church and doing devotions with my family. The Lord continued to stir my heart to long for more of Him and less of me. Throughout high school I went on several mission trips where the Lord worked in remarkable ways! The Lord grew in me a heart for the nations of the world. He broke my heart for the unsaved and stirred in me a desire to make His name known to those who did not know Him by teaching me many things from His Word about His love for the world.

Before coming to Kuyper, I thought I had my life figured out. I was enrolled at another school in their teaching program. I always thought I was going to go right from high school to college and become a teacher. However, God had a different plan. After graduating from NorthPointe Christian High School, I took a year off and went to Bridge

Street Mission School. That one year was life changing. During the overseas semester portion of the school year, the Lord showed me that social work, not teaching, was what I was supposed to be studying. I also realized the college I had enrolled in after Bridge Street was not the school I was meant to attend.

I remembered that, while at Bridge Street Mission, I had learned they had a partnership with Kuyper College which would grant me credits for the year I had spent there toward my degree at Kuyper. So, one day I walked through the front doors of Kuyper to simply



CLASS 2021

HOME Belmont,
Michigan

MAJOR Social Work/
Bible & Theology

get information about the College. I was met with warm smiles by very helpful people that explained all that Kuyper had to offer. However, that day I was given much more than just information. I was able to catch a glimpse of a place where I could experience God and grow closer to Him—a school where my desire to be in a learning environment where I could continue to seek the Lord in my studies in a community of believers who actively live their lives for Christ could be fulfilled. So, I applied to Kuyper, was accepted, and started school last fall. Throughout my first year here that "glimpse" became a reality for which I am so grateful. The professors have been outstanding, and I have benefited much from their wise counsel.

Now I'm working toward my BSW and a BS in Bible and Theology—when I learned that I could get a double major at Kuyper by taking extra Bible courses, I simply could not pass up the opportunity.

My goal in the upcoming years is to continue to grow in intimacy with God as I look with eager anticipation for what the Lord is going to continue to do in and through me during my time at Kuyper College.