

Geraldine Cox AM

Founder, Sunrise Cambodia

Biography

Geraldine Cox AM was born in Adelaide, South Australia, in 1945 and is the Founder of the charity Sunrise Cambodia (formerly Sunrise Children's Villages) which provides education, housing, support and hope to vulnerable children across Cambodia.

Residing in the Kandal province of Cambodia, Geraldine acts as a mentor to the children in her care while also meeting with sponsors and donors who visit the Sunrise Learning Centres and those who offer their support from all over the world. She remains the inspiration and visionary of Sunrise Cambodia, making regular public and media appearances in Australia and elsewhere to teach people about the threats these vulnerable children face and assist with fundraising appeals. She is a passionate and stoic leader whose influence is felt in every area of the organisation, but it wasn't always this way.



When she was younger Geraldine was considered the 'wild child' of the family. In her early 20s, after learning she would never be able to conceive, she joined the Department of Foreign Affairs and embarked on a life-changing journey that led to her discovering her calling. She was posted to Phnom Penh, Cambodia in 1970 and saw a country in turmoil due to the Vietnam War. It was this first posting which significantly shaped the person she is today.

Geraldine went on to explore the world with postings in Manila, Bangkok, Tehran and Washington DC. In 1987, Geraldine left her government role and worked for Chase Manhattan Bank in Sydney, Australia for eight years, but part of her had never left Cambodia.



In 1995, at the age of 50, Geraldine could deny the call no longer and she returned and established what would become Sunrise Cambodia. Geraldine was determined to help displaced war orphans living in appalling conditions close to the Cambodian-Thai border. Pol Pot's brutal regime had claimed the lives of their parents, and Geraldine refused to turn a blind eye to their need for help.

Geraldine also worked as an Executive Assistant to the Cabinet Director of the Prime Minister of Cambodia, HRH Prince Norodom Ranariddh, son of King Norodom Sihanouk. He appointed her as Ambassador-at-Large to assist in achieving a truly independent, neutral, peaceful and cooperative Cambodia.

Her initial goal was to bring to the attention of the Australian people the plight of many Cambodians, and to raise funds and procure equipment to help improve living conditions and provide education, training and income-generation opportunities for resettled communities in Cambodia. Geraldine also assisted in the running of Princess Norodom Marie's residential care centre for orphaned children.

A military coup occurred in 1997 and Geraldine found that she was the only one left to look after the children. The royal family had fled Cambodia and Geraldine became widely known as M'Day Thom (Big Mum). It was her bravery during this time formed the basis of her prominent humanitarian reputation.

With few resources, Geraldine gave everything she could to provide care for orphans, giving them nourishing food, a safe place to call home, the opportunity for an education and the nurturing love of a mother. In the past 25 years Sunrise Cambodia has grown to support whole communities with healthcare, clean water, sanitation and education facilities so that families can prosper. With these resources, as well as the determination to rebuild their lives, Geraldine and her team empower countless children of Cambodia, both in her direct care and in the wider community, to be optimistic for a brighter future.

The children still call her Big Mum and she and her team have helped thousands of children who had nothing to know safety, love and support. Sunrise Cambodia ensures the children are fed, dressed and cared for and that they and other children in the community get to attend school and experience extracurricular activities too like music, sport, language and arts.

Over the decades Geraldine has help raise children who have attended University, won sporting and music competitions, performed at the Opera House in Sydney and spoken at the United Nations. A fan of Leonard Cohen, she can be heard to quote "there is a crack in everything, that's how the light gets in" and it is the light the children of Sunrise shine that guides them, others and their country to a better tomorrow.

Geraldine is a well-known and highly respected humanitarian figure in Australia. The Australian media also appreciate her work and love her vibrant personality, regularly requesting her appearance on television and radio programmes. Her story and work has been featured on many high-profile Australian television programmes including [Australian](#)

[Story](#), *The Sunday Programme*, *This Is Your Life*, *Four Corners*, *Today Tonight*, *The 7.30 Report*, *60 Minutes*, *Talking Heads* and *The 7pm Project*.

Geraldine has delivered several keynote speeches internationally and is a sought-after public speaker. She and is a renowned humanitarian figure whose work has been recognised for making a significant difference for children and communities in Cambodia. (A list of examples of past speaking engagements is provided at the end of this document.)

Geraldine's first book, *Home is Where the Heart Is*, a biography of her incredible life and experiences, was published by Pan Macmillan and she is currently working on her next book. She was also the subject of the documentary, *My Khmer Heart*, directed by Janine Hosking and produced by Leonie Lowe. The documentary won the Hollywood Film Festival Documentary of the Year award in 2000 and has been screened at many international film festivals (including the Montreal World Film Festival) and later by HBO and the Discovery Channel. It was also shortlisted for an Academy Award nomination.

Geraldine's achievements and her enduring commitment to the children of Cambodia has helped Sunrise Cambodia to grow from strength to strength, to weather adversity and guide generation after generation into the light. Geraldine believes strongly in Sunrise Cambodia's focus on education and more about the work of the organisation and our education initiatives can be found at www.sunrisecambodia.org.au.

More information about Geraldine Cox AM can also be found on Wikipedia:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geraldine_Cox

Appendix A: Significant Achievements

- In 1994 she was Ambassador-at-Large by the Prime Minister of Cambodia, HRH Prince Norodom Ranariddh, son of King Norodom Sihanouk
- In 1999, King Norodom Sihanouk granted Geraldine Cambodian citizenship by royal decree – a rare honour
- In 2001, Geraldine was made a *Member of the Order of Australia* for services to the welfare of children through the establishment, funding and administration of an orphanage in Cambodia
- Geraldine received a *Centenary Medal* for service to the welfare of children in Cambodia in 2001
- In 2006, the *Rotary Foundation* named her a *Paul Harris Fellow*
- Geraldine was awarded the *Circle of Courage Award* from Australian charity, *Youth Off the Streets*, in 2006
- In 2010, Geraldine was a finalist for the *South Australian of the Year* award
- In 2011, Geraldine was the recipient of the *Sir Edward 'Weary' Dunlop AsiaLink Medal*
- In 2012, Prime Minister Hun Sen awarded Geraldine the *Royal Order of Sahametrei Medal*, which is the most significant award given to foreigners
- Geraldine was a nominee for the *Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year* in the *Social Category* for South Australia
- In 2013, Geraldine became Board Director of the *International Advisory Board* of the *Oasis Africa Australia* – www.oasisafrica.net
- In 2014, Geraldine became a member of the *Humanitarian Affairs Advisory Board*, UK
- In 2016, Geraldine gave a keynote speech during the *University of South Australia Nelson Mandela Lecture Series*
- In August 2017, Geraldine presented at the [United Nations-sponsored 8th University Leadership Scholars Symposium](#) hosted by *Humanitarian Affairs UK* in Bangkok, Thailand
- In December 2017, Geraldine gave a presentation to a group of 270+ people at a [Connected Women](#) event hosted at Google

Appendix B: Previous Speaking Engagement

Australia:

- National Press Club, Canberra
- South Australian Press Club, Adelaide
- The Sydney Institute, Sydney
- Parliamentary Sub Committee on Human Rights, Canberra
- Parliamentary Sub Committee on Cambodia, Canberra
- The Asia Society, Melbourne
- University of Sydney, International School of Public Health
- Chinese Chamber of Commerce, Adelaide
- Women of the Year, Adelaide
- International Women's Day, Gold Coast
- Queen Adelaide Club, Adelaide
- Lyceum Club, Adelaide
- Women Chiefs of Enterprise, Adelaide
- Bennelong Institute
- National Conference of Certified Practising Accountants, Adelaide, Brisbane, Melbourne
- InvestorInfo's Women, Wealth and Success, Sydney
- Women in Finance, Sydney
- Global Spirited Women, Gold Coast
- Women in Superannuation, Sydney
- Victorian Chapter of Members of the Order of Australia
- Catalyst Network, Sydney
- National Civics & Citizenship Forum, Canberra
- Melbourne University's Asia Link
- Serious Women's Business Conference, Melbourne
- Halogen Foundation - National Young Leaders Day, Adelaide and Sydney
- Business Chicks, Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Brisbane
- University of Queensland, Brisbane
- Happiness Conference, Sydney
- Queensland University, International House, Brisbane
- Cairns Businesswomen's Club, Queensland
- Australian Association of Practice Managers, Adelaide
- Communicom, Queensland
- Humanitarian Affairs, UK Conventions
- National Employment Services Association, Brisbane
- Flinders University, Adelaide
- University of South Australia Distinguished Guest Speakers Association
- Smartline Real Estate
- Executive Assistant's Association, Sydney
- Family Day Care, Brisbane
- State Rotary Conventions, Australia
- Public and Private Schools throughout Australia
- Interdenominational Churches throughout Australia

- National and State Radio and Television Interviews
- Australian Corporate Boardrooms

United States of America:

- Kent State University, Ohio
- Albany University, New York
- University of San Francisco, California
- Northern Arizona University
- CNN Television News
- NBC Television News
- State Radio Interviews

Singapore, Hong Kong, South Korea and Thailand:

- Local Television Networks
- Channel News Asia, Cable Television
- Korean National MBC Network
- Radio Interviews
- ANZA
- Local and International Schools

United Arab Emirates:

- Aljazeera TV
- International Schools