

Step by Step

by Marguerite G. Bouvard

for Preah Maha Ghosananda

Hands folded, head bowed,
 he would walk the narrow paths
 through jungles, the ground
 still sown with landmines
 at the edges of trails.
 Step by step he journeyed,
 his glasses fogged, his hitched-up monk's robes
 tangled in bushes. Behind him
 trudged rows and rows of chanting
 monks and nuns. Sometimes
 shells screamed above
 and firefights exploded on either side.
 Sometimes they joined streams of refugees
 alongside ox-carts piled high with mattresses
 and caged chickens.
*We must find the courage
 to leave our temples
 and enter the suffering-filled temples
 of human experience.* How else to reach
 a man digging his fields,
 the woman bent over the river washing,
 a lone soldier hoisting his rifle?
 Step by step, to spread the Metta Sutta,
 the words of love, healing
 the martyred decades of Cambodia.