



### NEWSLETTER NO. 3: May 2009

#### **Hello Everyone!**

Here is a report of my activities in Cambodia and in Thailand from March 12 to April 15, 2009. The aim of this trip was to see what had happened with the donation of money to a girls' shelter in Cambodia for an English teacher, to meet people and to begin to try to understand what is going on, how different organizations function in order to decide how best to go ahead with projects for the Douglas A Campbell Foundation and also to find what best to suggest to Children's Hope Foundation. As you will see, I learnt a lot and came to certain conclusions...

(By the way, some of you may find this letter containing some of the information of Newsletter No. 2, sorry. First of all I want all info in one place and secondly I have managed to attach photos – HURRAY!)



#### **Arrival and the Shelter**

I arrived in Phnom Penh and was met by Lynelle, the person through whom I had sent the donation for the English teacher. It was great to arrive with sort of contact and i enjoyed being with Lynelle and seeing her work there. We dropped our bags off and headed for the shelter about half an hour from Phnom Penh. Most of the girls were there as it was a Sunday afternoon and while Lynelle gave them NSA (Neural Spinal Analysis) treatment, we sat

about and did this and that. Lynelle had brought paper and a few pens and things for an art activity and so we decided to buy more with some of the funds that I had.

The next day we brought all the pens and crayons with us and we did a big art workshop while Lynelle continued her treatments. As it was Monday, many of the girls and gone to school (there are morning and afternoon sessions) on the bikes that the center provides for them. I visited the various activities there as it is a vocational training center, and, in particular, the English class which was

being taught by a bright, pretty young teacher, Chanvoleak Ly, with almost no materials. In fact she was teaching A, B, C with a kindergarten book! (You know A is for apple etc.)



About 30 of the 60 girls are permanent residents, the others spend 6 months learning hairdressing or makeup or weaving or sewing. After that they are given a little money for basic equipment. Not all the girls are trafficked (rescued sex-workers etc.) Some are and have been rescued from sex work but the rest are either orphans, or from very violent homes; there was one girl who is physically and mentally handicapped and one with a harelip (more about her later.) They range from 6 years of age to 22 years old.

As I had received US\$1,655 from different people, mainly Korean members of Popkye-sa (my temple in Switzerland), I tried to find out how best to use the money. So I enquired from various people what the children would like. One aim was to buy something and photograph the recipient so that the children, in particular, who had donated their precious pocket-money, would have a picture with a name to hang on the wall of their room. This project was especially important to me.

So guess what the girls wanted/needed? We call them pyjamas; they call them relaxing clothes or lounge suits and towels. So off we went the next morning and bought 60 pairs of pyjamas at about US\$5 each. (Oh yes, I forgot to tell you the amazing thing about Cambodia! Everything is done in US dollars. You buy a cup of coffee and pyjamas with US dollars. The change is in the local currency so you never “change money”!) The towels were US \$1 each. This was a great learning experience. I had thought of lots of things that we could give them but never pyjamas.



In addition, I was horrified to buy ones with Mickey Mouse on them and asked a couple of times if this was right. I was assured that it was what the girls wanted. (In fact, as time went by, I began to see them all over Cambodia!)

Then we went to a large Pencil Supermarket (a new term for me for a stationary shop) and bought lots of English materials. We bought story books and DVD's (very cheap there) and text books and exercises so that the teachers have something to help them. (These things were all given by two children who, on leaving Switzerland, had sold all their books and given the total amount for Cambodia.)

During all this shopping, I learned that Chanvoleak has studied IT and so it seemed a good idea to get one computer for her to use when teaching and so also maybe teach the girls some basic computer skills. So we went and bought a computer.

Here is Chanvoleak at the shop with the “gift” of a stuffed giraffe which was offered to buyers – the girls loved it!!!!

The next day we took the pyjamas and towels to the girls and they were all so happy they actually danced in the pyjamas. It was apparently the first time that they had all received some new clothes at the same time! The towels were lovely too – bright colours.

The second day with Lynelle (March 16) we’d had lunch with Terri (Sotheary Ly) who is the Executive Director of Healthcare for Children ([www.hcc-camodia.org](http://www.hcc-camodia.org)). She told us of the wide range of activities that they are engaged in. These include a half way house for men and one for women for deported workers returning to Cambodia, campaigns all over the country against trafficking in which they teach children’s rights (more later...) and then a huge network of staff who disseminate knowledge and organize events in different parts of the country. In addition, their motto being “Prevention and Protection”, they cover healthcare training, life skill training, awareness raising and so on. They invited me to join them on a four day campaign in the south of Cambodia and I was delighted to accompany them (more later).

Lynelle left on March 17 and we went for a short visit to the shelter just before she left for the airport.

## Meeting People

Then started a long succession of meetings with all kinds of people. I met different people in different NGOs as well as people involved in environmental activities and also an amazing man who has an extensive and extremely successful training program for many of the street children who go on to work in and run his highly successful and much respected restaurants ([www.bodhitree.com](http://www.bodhitree.com)). Cheekily I asked him if he would be willing to give US\$100 for glasses for five girls in the shelter. He accepted (actually after I left he has met up with Terri and they are making plans to set up training for some of the girls.) Here



are the girls with their glasses.

An email alerted me to the idea of ringing and meeting a very long term Singaporean living in Phnom Penh. I rang and Peter invited me to dinner that very evening. What a wonderful evening we spent! We ate raclette (!!!) and talked about everything. (During all these visits to the shelter, I had noticed a girl of about 18 with a hare lip. One of the people I was to meet in Cambodia had a particular interest in bringing a team to treat hare lip and cleft palate cases and so I wrote down her name, Khong Thai.)

## Operation Smile and Khong Thai

At one point I mentioned the girl with the hare lip and immediately Peter turned to David and said, “Isn’t your friend in charge of Operation Smile here in Cambodia.” “Why yes” replied David and took out his phone and rang. “What a wonderful thing to do in life: to give someone back their smile,” said Peter.

One of those amazing flukes! The man received the call and said that though the books were closed (they have a kind of sign-up on the first two days in which the people come from all over and are screened) we could try going to the hospital the next day.

So guess what we did? Off to the hospital the next day. Peter lent us a vehicle and I picked Khong Thai up and then to the hospital accompanied by Peter. The doctor in charge immediately came forward and greeted us warmly, dressed us in surgical gowns etc. and took us on a tour. What a marvelous organization! As there are many cleft palates in Cambodia they are there again now – look up the web site ([www.operationsmile.org](http://www.operationsmile.org)) I felt a bit bad because Peter had to immediately become donor number 30!!! However he seemed comfortable with such fine work.



After five hours in the hospital with Khong Thai, I took her back to the shelter with the promise of the operation the next day! That, of course was another 5 hours and her sister came along to keep her company as she had to stay the night. So there we sat waiting for Khong Thai to come out of surgery (photo on the left).



Next day I returned them both to the shelter, the sister was ecstatic! Khong Thai herself was a little under the weather!!! Then back for the beautiful closing ceremony in which donors were recognized and Peter could go and give his offering. I did see Khong Thai one week later... (see below)

### **Continuing Research**

I hope all of you are appreciating all this! It was mostly 36 degree Centigrade and sweat ran down me from morning till night. I was trying hard all the time to get a clear idea of what Cambodia and Cambodians are all about. I visited an ex-monk who is doing a fine environmental program but he could only talk to me for a few minutes. In fact I was a little sad to find that the Buddhist aspect of Cambodia has suffered greatly from the recent history. Pol Pot disrobed and killed many of the main monks so that now it is having a hard time getting back on line. I met one delightful elderly monk who runs some meditation classes but that seemed to be all. As for ordained women, they are mostly old and work in the temples...

Anyway back to my “research.” I met Beth Goldring. Now there is one extraordinary woman. A New York Jew who has offered her life to Human Rights work... After years in Palestine, she moved to Cambodia where she works with dying AIDS patients and a few other projects. As an ordained Buddhist, she decided to take up this work and has been at it for about 10 years. We spent quite some time together.

### **The Campaign**

Then I had to get ready to go to the countryside. We were going to Koh Kong to do a campaign as one had never been done there and it is an area in which there are few NGOs. The campaign was aimed at informing people of their rights, encouraging them not to get involved in trafficking of



children and adults and so on. I wondered how they would get the message across...

Koh Kong is on the coast near a wonderful mangrove swamp reserve. And so the next day off we went. The girls were all in buses and some of the staff were with them. I travelled down with Terri and some of the staff as I felt it was a good opportunity to get to know

them better. It was a good four hours journey and we arrived to have some lunch. (Some of you may know that vegetarian food is not a high priority in many countries and this includes Cambodia.) We were all staying in a small hotel and the girls were all staying in the shelter there – it was packed. They were all so excited to have some fun and to get out. They frolicked around and we played different games. Of course communication was limited...

The next day the girls and staff got on trucks to go out to the countryside and tell people to come. As I was warned that the whole campaign would finish after midnight, I decided not to go (which I regretted later – ahhhhh hindsight...)

Then we all set off for the site where the campaign was to take place: the sports field.



First came the formal part. There was a welcoming dance (left) and some speeches. There were announcements and congratulations and all in all it was great to be sitting with a whole bunch of people who were obviously excited even if they might not have been taking in every word! Then began the games. There were competitive games and quizzes, there were all kinds of tests and, of course I asked what it was all about and why our girls were only

clapping and cheering. I was told that the girls from the shelter know their rights well and that the quiz in particular was aimed at finding out what other children knew and making sure that they are likewise instructed.

Next came various activities and in the evening there was a play. Professional actors told the story of a young woman who has no money and is enticed into prostitution. Before much can happen, some staff of the HCC (the NGO I was with) arrive and take her away. It was well done and watched by a few thousand people. Of course



there were songs and dances as well. (Sad to say, my photos came out too badly to share them here! Lack of experience in the world of photography.)

We all retired very late and the next day all the main staff left. I had chosen to return with the girls and next day we went off to visit the mangrove reserve.



And after that we all went swimming in a river with a water fall. Everyone enjoyed the water -- including me! In that heat it was a fantastic feeling to stand there dripping wet in my clothes just

drying off in the sun.



The next day we set off in the bus. I enjoyed being with all the girls and we all laughed and sang. Back in Phnom Penh I met more people and visited two more centers for girls and women. One fun event was meeting up with a very fine Catholic nun working for many years with the Maryknoll Sisters. Mary Little and I had been friends in Korea and now we met up again in Cambodia where she was working in a day care center for AIDS patients. It was lovely to see her.

### **Siem Reap = Angkor Wat**

Now I had to get to Siem Reap where I would meet up with an English friend of my brother's and his Cambodian business partner. I took the bus, as recommended and stayed in the Good Kind Guest House, a fine place to stay. It is simple and clean and all you need. Of course I raced off for the sun set on Angkor Wat. Of course I got up at 4 am and went for the sunrise. I was early, it was



hot but by the time I had been around the main monument and came back to the entrance (the place to be for the sunrise) it was incredible how many hundreds of people were there. I do not think you will find me visiting Siem Reap in the cool season! Of course I saw most of the temples and was once more amazed by the immensity of the



area,  
the  
number of  
temples...  
The  
magnificence  
of the trees  
and forest  
surrounding  
the temples  
was a joy to

behold. – in fact the vegetation was more exciting to me than the temples!!!

Anyway I collapsed by mid-afternoon and returned to the hotel.

The next day breakfast with my friends and off to visit an interesting agricultural project. During these two days, I learned a lot from the Cambodian point of view. The Cambodian friend was of the opinion that it is important to work with the system in place, with the government and to not engage in short term projects which have little lasting effect. It was an obvious way to work and I felt deeply impressed by his viewpoint especially as I had begun to realize that so many of the projects being carried out were almost band-aid in their effect. However, one of the really necessary

projects was of particular interest. This is the installation of a new filtering system so that villagers all over the country may have truly pure water. The company that will be helping with this enormous project is Hyflux ([www.hyflux.com](http://www.hyflux.com)) which is from Singapore. There may be more news of this later...

With the recession, I found that many of the NGOs were desperate for money and so many of the projects would have to simply go back to nature. I felt that my new Cambodian friend was absolutely right. He insisted that it was better to leave people in their simple lives than to lift them out for a moment and then drop them back. (The sub-prime scandal must have been a shock for many: this week the family had a house, the following week they lost it.)

## Back to Phnom Penh

I returned to Phnom Penh full of fantastic experiences but very pensive. There were many difficulties in trying to do good projects, even if they are small. It seemed important that from now on I would:

- 1) Work with people I know.
- 2) Engage in quite long term projects = easier to regulate.
- 3) Engage in manageable projects.
- 4) Try to find projects which do not duplicate projects underway.

You may have wondered what happened to Khong Thai. Well on the way to the airport I went to visit her to see how she was getting on. It was one week after the operation and her lip was still swollen and she was still afraid to smile but all that will change soon...

## Back to Singapore

Next came a short sojourn in Singapore where I met with people involved in a much recommended project taking place in Northern Thailand: School for Life ([www.school-for-life.org](http://www.school-for-life.org)) I had decided to follow the advice of a friend and go and visit this experimental school – just up my street.

In Singapore, one of the main people I met was Bradley who is an enthusiast of Dr. Juergen Zimmer's pedagogy. It was interesting to hear of this project of hands-on education offered to the poorest children in the region – many of them from the Hill Tribes. Here is the library & playground



Presenting a Donation from Singapore to Dominique, the General Manager



One of the staff in the reception area

During my visit to Chiang Mai, three of us went for two nights to Kyaing Tong (pronounced Chang Tong) a town in the north-east of Myanmar. It was wonderful to be in Myanmar again! Here are some pictures for you. I will be going there later this year to visit various projects which one of my friends from Myanmar is doing (next newsletter?) For now: ENJOY!



These are very young novice nuns in Myanmar with a picture of the Head nun. They live together in the temple and are educated by the older nuns. If, when they are older they wish to return to lay life then, like all Buddhist monks and nuns, they can do so at any time. The color of their robes dates from an earlier pre-Buddhist tradition.



So with all this information and lots and lots more I returned to Singapore. There I stayed with one family and spent time with another. Each family has a daughter of about 7 and a son of about 3 years of age. The parents are extremely worried that their children are getting spoiled and so when they heard me suggest we make a camp in Chiang Mai and have one of the children of the school take care of one of the visitors and that they learn how to make soap and live a simple life, they all jumped at the possibility. So it just may be that we will all go there next summer – with a growing list of interested families...

So here ends the third newsletter. It is a bit longer than I intended but the pictures are fun. Please let me know if you want me to add or subtract any names and

May you all be well and happy!

Mujin

PS. Here is Khong Thai after a few weeks -- notice the smile!

