

Cambodia/Myanmar

2010



Packing, Distributing, Experiencing

Hi EVERYONE! Here is newsletter No. 6. Sorry to say that most of your mailboxes refused my beautiful picture-filled last edition and so I am obliged to put most of the photos on a website and hope that you will enjoy them there – when you have a moment

Cambodia

Well, our dear little non-formal education project has been suspended while Chanvoleak gets a



degree with a full scholarship from Malaysia. Can't really blame her as, she told me, she never expected to get it. We will watch her progress with great pleasure as she is a bright and talented person...

Cambodia... Unfortunately for me, Chanvoleak had insisted that the time to come was mid-March as she was so involved with so many things that she would not be free. So I went in mid-March, the HOTTEST season. And this year it has been HOT. In spite of the heat, there were some fantastic events.

The first was spending time with **Manuel Garcia**. His project of training street children and others in restaurant and hotel work is simply marvellous -- and getting more and more recognition. Self-financing (the dream come true) the several restaurants and boutique-style little hotels all strive for excellence and attain it (www.bodhitree.com). Basic personal development and values are central to the whole program resulting in a lovely atmosphere and delicious food. There are 75 people employed and these days Manuel is run off his feet with visitors and the curious all wanting to know the secret of his success. One of the secrets is that the earlier knots have been ironed out and things run so smoothly that even Manuel was surprised when I talked with him.

The second was doing a half-day **retreat** with 7 enthusiasts (it was hot)... We were on the roof of the Nataraj Yoga center (www.yogacambodia.com -- thank you) which meant that we were in a sort of natural environment. We sat and walked in Korean style but it was hot... I felt very honored to be asked to do a retreat there.

The next was the wonderful events to which I tagged along with **Beth Goldring** (www.brahmavihara.cambodiaaidsproject.org). As Beth is also an ordained Buddhist, we had lots of points of contact. She has been running a program helping a constant average of 400 + AIDS + close to 100 prisoners in two prisons once a month each; 140 or so twice a month at the resettlement sites; another 40 or so about once a month when they come for medicines and the rest at the various hospitals, hospices, group homes, etc. for the last 12 years. Helping is hardly the right word. She visits, transports for medicine (free from the government but how do you get there when you have almost nothing!) holds hands, looks after family

members and spends a lot of time training her staff. As with Manuel, I kept hearing about how marvellous Beth is, how admired and respected by all kinds of people. It was so comforting and reassuring to see and hear that their work is being universally regarded and supported – at least verbally. In Beth’s case, of course, it cannot be self-supporting and so each year she returns to the USA to collect the next year’s budget – not easy in these days of economic turmoil. Her annual budget of roughly US\$80,000 covers everything so anyone interested in helping out, please don't feel shy!!!

Beth took me to **Wat Opot**. There **Wayne Dale Matthyse**, a nurse by training, runs a hospice and orphanage for HIV infected children and others (www.watopot.org). Actually Wayne came to Cambodia to convert the heathen but (sensibly) mended his ways and now combines all, bringing Buddhism and Christianity together into his life and work. The facility is in the grounds of a temple (hence the name, “Wat” means “temple”) and is always ready to receive hospice patients with whom, I heard, Wayne used to sleep near in order to be always at hand if needed. What a wonderful person! At present there are 65 children and almost half is HIV positive. In fact one of the main missions is information and so the children have started making **short movies** aimed at making people aware of how AIDS is transmitted. Glory be to our modern technology!

There are all kinds of projects. One that I loved there was a dynamic and talented art teacher who send the children out to teach art at the local schools!!! The results (that I saw) were spectacular. Some Taiwanese group had just built a new building for them and was without furniture and so we were lucky enough to give some money towards this. (One main necessity in these parts is cupboards in order to preserve things from marauding insects etc.) Wayne is always researching ways to be more self-sufficient. Not only are there large ponds (it’s a very dry area) full of fish to sell but also there is a new plant growing system being installed. Tomato plants and others are put in buckets of stones on a concrete ground and watered with water from the fish ponds and the water runs through and goes back into the pond = no waste.

Then Beth arranged for me to go and meet a monk in a temple where they cremate abandoned dead (forgot to say that that is another of Beth’s projects). The temple was run by a handsome 40 year-old monk who is indeed a character. In his temple there are about **50 ten-precept women**. In Cambodia, there is no proper ordination for women. They shave their heads and take 10 precepts and live in any temple that will have them. Their temple life consists of serving the monks and doing all the chores for which they receive shelter and teachings but no food. In order to sustain themselves, they must have some external source so that they can buy the necessary ingredients to cook. It was therefore a great pleasure for me to go and meet the monk and then offer **50 bags of basics**, one to each nun. The bags contained: tea, sugar, milk, soap, toothbrush, toothpaste, detergent, candles and incense and the whole cost was US\$148 + our transport with bags of US\$13. Romain, Beth’s 11 year long assistant, accompanied me and proved an excellent translator and organizer. It was a particularly lovely meeting and one I sincerely hope to repeat.