

## 2011 Newsletter No 8, Part 1: Cambodia and Myanmar: Lots of Emotions

September 2011. **Hello Everyone!** Here is the first part of this year's newsletter. We have done a lot this year and are proud of our little foundation! I have put lots of pictures for those of you who wish to skim through...

In Cambodia, I had the great good fortune of being invited to stay with Stav Zotalis who is the country director for CARE (which is doing a lot towards coordinating smaller organizations). It was such a joy to walk early morning, drink coffee and meet her friends. Maybe it is because Cambodia is so welcoming (visas not difficult, a French-influenced cuisine, beautiful culture, much poverty and many problems) that there are many foreigners in the country and many are curious/interested/involved in Buddhism. The result was that I led 3 separate mini-retreats: one with Beth's staff (left) (caring for AIDS patients mainly), one with Stav (the Sunday Meditation Group) and one with Manuel. It felt good to be useful and a joy to find so many people asking questions and thinking about life and values. If you go to Phnom Penh, please try out the new vegetarian restaurants The Vegetarian and Treez.



Anyway, I arrived and was soon off to visit Wat Opot where there are currently 56 children, a third of whom are HIV positive. I spent three days there and learnt a lot! Wayne, the founder and director, has worked hard for many years to establish a new approach to those diagnosed HIV positive and he and his staff are very proud to show that children are children, whether with HIV or not. In many homes for orphans (including extremely poor, only one parent, violent homes, rescued sex trafficked) the HIV children are segregated from the others and so sleep and eat in totally separate places. Wayne enjoys asking the many visitors to pick out the HIV children from a group; they find it impossible.



We were told that bread or buns are the one thing they love and so we arrived



are the one with

something for everyone.

That evening, after the meditation, the children dug in. It was wonderful to see how much they enjoyed the treat and how carefully, almost lovingly they ate it!

Then to our offering: the new volunteers rooms. The little building is beside a lake (actually a

pond dug out to farm fish) in one corner of the compound. I was delighted to find how well it had been built, carefully planned and executed. Almost immediately the corridor in front has become a major meeting place!!! We spent many hours connecting with each other in the sinking evening sun. Now the many, many volunteers who go to Wat Opot will have a place to stay.





(That's Wayne and Melinda on the far left. Melinda Lies is the friend we have been helping to stay and work at Wat Opot.)



(Left is a Goodbye Picture of the children with things we brought for them.)

In Phnom Penh, Beth (we supplied them with gloves and masks for the year) had organized me to help in the distribution of rice to a displaced community and then we offered necessities to 27 patients in a very poor hospital. Beth's staff arranged marvelous packages with everything they need including soap and tea and a towel, a little money and so on. The dying patients are suffering from TB and, because they are poor, they are placed in a building where hardly anyone ever goes. It was a very moving and humbling experience. I came away with so much respect for Beth's staff who go and spend hours every day doing Reiki, singing and chanting with the patients. In those circumstances, one realizes one's limitations...



And off to lovely Myanmar. I do love that country. The people are so varied and the culture so beautiful. Myanmar is on the brink of extreme change and though it is as it should be, i am sure they will feel nostalgia for the days gone by, days of simple living and simple joys. But change is natural and healthy...

The jobs envisaged were the full opening of the building at the Twantay orphanage, distribution of simple things (last year was too labor intensive with our package making and carrying) and visiting the building for old people on the Delta, if permitted.

September 23 was the preparation day. We shopped (mostly at wholesalers now by telephone but we did go and get sweets and stuff) and then Father Carolus (the head of the community where we built a place for the old men) came to meet me. We talked and then he went to ask permission for me to go to the Delta, a journey that was expected to be refused after all the chaos of Nargis in 2008. Surprise, surprise, permission was granted and we planned to leave on September 29. Unusually, this year the rainy season is late and heavy and so problems were expected. Little did i know what awaited me...

The opening at Twantay was great, the head monk as fine as ever. Actually he has acquired quite some renown as his 640 children (up from the previous 450!!) are neat, well disciplined (but not too much so) and he is very well organized. I enjoyed the discipline laced with fun and watching the kids fooling around in between periods of control.





First of all the ceremony. The certificate of offering of the building was given to the monk, a few words were spoken, the ribbon cut (above Nge-nge -- in orange and her wonderful boss, Madame Win Le-Le in red) and then the main event: the throwing of carefully folded "Lucky Money" to the children and staff. This is a Myanmar custom which they all enjoyed but i could not help but feel sorry for those that were not quick enough! However everyone received a lollipop and sweets, some compensation.



All the staff of the Grand Mee Ya Hta Hotel helped in the preparation and offering of a fine lunch including desert (grass jelly drink). (To the left: the cook, the egg curry, Nge-nge separating the rice.)



Here are the boys...



And the girls....



The head monk lives in a corner of the main hall



And then i revisited Bagan, of over 4,000 pagodas after 20 years....





The 29th was soon here and early in the morning we set off for the Delta, near Wakema, a place called Kanazogone. Missionaries established a beautiful compound in 1924 and now many of the people, mostly Karan, are Catholic. I asked Father Carolus why and if his fore fathers had His answer was very interesting. today, they lived with the people making schools and offering as they grew closer, the people Catholicism and that for many of Myanmar, Christianity has discussed many subjects and very excited that, in spite of the potholes, no more asphalt only would soon arrive, a motor cycle the next 3 kilometers were impossible and that we would have to go back.



asked Father Carolus insisted on conversion. He replied that , just like and cared for them, medical help. In this way, wanted to embrace the minorities in become their identity. We just as he was getting poor roads (= terrible stones in places) we came up and told us that



Father Carolus started to think and decided that we could take a boat as there are canals and the delta river right up to the village. The first boat was huge and someone scuttled off to find a smaller boat. And so after a long wait we set off. Can you see the man in the middle of the picture to the left? Well he is continually bailing out the boat. As i could see everyone doing that, i thought it was normal. However after a couple of hours, it was evident that the boat had some serious leaks and the motor was not working properly

and so we moved to boat No. 2 -- which had a roof -- a welcomed addition when the rain started pouring down...

Anyway the journey took 10 1/2 hours instead of 6 and the return was just 8 hours.



And we even had to pass through a lock... And so we reached the village. The project was introduced by Percy Vatsaloo, a friend from Singapore who creates beautiful silk.). Every year he does some social work. His father was nursed by a Myanmar man, Simon, who lives in the village of Kanazogone and who knew that they need a building for the old men who can no longer be



care for by their families. Percy asked us, we could help and the rest is history (except that because of



the rain the building has not been painted yet...)



And so now the dedicated and loving Mary Magdalene cares for her group of five women and four men in such a way that all i could hope for is that i finish up in similar circumstances. The picture left is of the inspiration (a woman who started visiting the elderly all on her own) on the left, Mary Magdalene and Father Carolus standing in the entrance of the Douglas A Campbell Foundation building for old men. (By the way, the new building is shadier and so the women have prevailed in insisting on moving to it. And so it is not for old men after all...)

Here is the kitchen and the happy cook.



And here is the old building = bamboo...

They hope to house about 20 people as the connecting building is going soon to be finished (foundation left .)



Father Carolus forgot extra toilets and the corrugated iron roofs are too hot and so we need ceilings and so and so on.... All in good time...