

## **2012 Newsletter No. 9 Part 1: Moanoghar 2012** (www.moanoghar.org)

Ho everyone! How are you? Thought you might like some news....

It has to be said right off that the journey to Moanoghar is no pic-nic. Flight connections are appalling, the roads (Chittagong to Rangamati being the least one has to do) is amazing for quality, the “special” Bangladeshi driving style – the motto of which is “Just pass” as the others will definitely get off the two lane highway, which they do – the mix of vehicles, and the endless traffic jams and other events. I have to admit that one arrives in Rangamati in less than top form.



Then one arrives, and there are the children and the beautiful green vegetation and the charming staff of the school and you know that this school is truly unique. Would you like some specifics? Okay. It is unique in size = 1200 children almost all indigenous Buddhists, including 600 boarders mostly orphaned or from very far away or very poor. It is unique in arrangement = the buildings are up and down hills, in fact there is nothing but hills here. It is unique in quality = the dedication of everyone from the main cook to the Ashok Kumar Chakma, the new Executive Director (News Flash: the previous Executive Director, Chanchu Chakma, felt that

Ashok could do a better job than he could and so returned to previous duties at the school. Original, no?) and everyone in between (largely ex-students) “loves” the school and feels “honored” to work there – quotes are exact words from many....!!!



The children are children are wonderful are fun are a challenge. But how can your heart stay still when you see them? How can you not feel sorry when you know that they only eat twice a day!! Three meetings were organized during my stay with first of all the admin staff, then the teachers and then the poor, stressed tutors – the people who stay in the hostels for the children’s protection and to help them.

I chose to ask them their main problems, then the thing they liked best about the school and finally their wishes (attainable) and dreams (unlikely to be attained but important as a guiding light.) Here is a very short summary.

### **Admin Staff Meeting**

10 principal members of the administration of Moanoghar were present. They run the entire compound + all the outside projects.

We introduced ourselves and then passed on to finding the worst thing about Moanoghar according to each person. The comments mostly ran along the same lines.

Poor planning, poor training, poor control.

All seem highly remediable so we all had a try:

Poor planning can be dealt with almost immediately by putting better systems into action and implementing a clear program, eg. Financial planning for the year ahead.

I proposed to go and look into simple systems for the resource management but am told there are systems which simply need implementing..

Poor training can be dealt with by looking for people who can come and put up training programs, by finding speakers etc. Most seemed to think that training was needed on many levels. eg. How to correctly account for advance money; how to function more efficiently.

Poor control and monitoring needs more skillful workers who can do more spot checking.

I felt sorry for Ashok's plea for better communication with him in writing. He said that people come and tell him important things but fail to write them down for him so he has trouble remembering everything. This can be remedied by constant reminding to write things down and ensuring everyone that simple notes will do.

The general trend of things considered the best part of Moanoghar were a unanimous agreement of the high degree of good will, togetherness, and solidarity. The joy of the diversity of Moanoghar was also mentioned.

The wishes were around the idea of general improvement of standards and a tendency to greater self-sufficiency.

The dream is for free education for all even in remote areas.

The meeting was very open and participatory. Next time no phones.

Concern was expressed about the huge amount of wastage (water = taps left on + broken pipes etc. and food = children don't like lumps in the rice or potato skins etc.) and so we made a song which the children learned and will sing maybe once a week – they loved it... (Good for English pronunciation of "w" + "cl" + "f" = all difficult for them.)

Don't waste, don't waste, don't waste food.

Don't waste, don't waste, don't waste water.

Keep the campus clean, clean, clean

Then we all will be happy!

### **Teachers' Meeting**

Present 7 Senior teachers.

The bad thing is the language problem. Some of the children arrive speaking no Chakma, no English and no Bengali. There is no time to deal with that as the curriculum has to be finished. Too many children in the classrooms which are too small for the number and no way to move around for group or other activities. One teacher was particularly bothered by this as, through the great amount of training that they receive (from the government), they cannot implement methodologies learned.

Teachers take in outside extra tuition in their spare time to supplement their low (normal) pay so no time to do extra things at school. They stay from 10 to 5pm.

The good thing was that most of the teachers expressed very strongly their pride and joy in being part of Moanoghar. Some mentioned that they could have a better job elsewhere but that they were very keen to see how the school develops and so had turned down offers.

Their wishes centered on hoping for improvement and increase of the space available so as to be able to take in more students (hundreds were turned away earlier this year because the classrooms are maxed out at 70 – 100 kids!!!! Real need for a new building.

Their heartfelt wish was for more space so they could teach more dynamically.

Their dreams concerned the hope for true academic excellence.

### **House Tutors' Meeting**

All 13 came = 4 women, 8 monks and one man.

Not very talkative. But some things came out. They feel that giving advice is very important and encouraging the children who don't study well. For the younger children (boys in particular) it is important that they learn to keep clean. For the older ones, discipline is important.

I was asked to give some advice and suggestions to them and so I shared with them the importance of not only being like a mother to the children (as one person said) but also being a good example because the children learn by example and that that is probably the single most important dimension of their lives. Also spoke of consistency in dealing with children and treating all alike. Gave some small suggestions of techniques.

Good meeting except that they didn't talk much.

We had a go at monitoring the wastage at meals and improved awareness of that...

Much time was spent monitoring the various projects. Money had taken some 8 months to arrive so everything was late. The repairing of Krishna Kishor Bhavan built in 1986 and probably never touched since, of Karuna Bhavan same state both housing well over 100 boys was fun to watch advance a good bit. Much time was taken in recycling wood and bricks (removing bad bits, removing old cement etc.) from the previous building (Krishna Kishor Bhavan had to be pulled down because it was rotten, the foundation was too shallow and the floor not level).

Then there was the digging of the new well for drinking water, the building of new toilets for girls, the fixing of the girls playground and building of two staircases (let me tell you, they need steps there because a) the hills are steep b) it rains and you cannot make it in the mud c) they preserve the soil which is



eroding fast.) These were all part of a package for money donated by Khoon Chee Vihara in Singapore.



Many things happened as the days went by. Ven. Buddhadatta, our friend who had lived with us for years in Korea, kept me ultra busy: meeting people, going to meals and chanting (6 pm in

various places = don't miss it if you go there) and so on.

The Douglas A Campbell Foundation has come to be oriented towards toilets, garbage and tooth brushes, at least as far as work done during visits. years' garbage drive (the garbage cans are fabulously campus almost clean....) a custom has grown up of meal, an event and a cultural show. So this year we after discussing with everyone (admin, teachers, other children) that the event would be the designing of new a much needed change. We felt that we required that is an identity of Moanoghar reflecting the diversity



And so, since last successful and the "having a day" = a decided staff and uniforms -- something of the



students and their Bangladeshi nationality all rolled into one. Everyone in the Hill Tracts weaves and so the cloth should be made at the school employing some of the masses of struggling widows. We calculated 8,000 yards of cloth for 1200 uniforms of various sizes = about 3 months work. Sewing about 3 months with a little overlap about 5 months work in all. It was concluded that they may each have one set by Bengal New year in April.

So it was decided that The Day would be on Thursday October 18, the day before I left. The day before that I had the pleasure of spending the day meeting totally charming people. First



of all we spent time in an isolated village one hour by boat on the lake where they offered us lunch. (We gave out sweets and tooth brushes and paste. Of course we guessed 150 but there were 300 people there and luckily it was a market day...) The first was the UNDP Hill Tracts Program Implementor, Rob Stoelman. It was so interesting to learn all about their projects in the Hill Tracts mainly those of setting up 300 schools in very remote areas and the introduction of a system to bring empowerment and cohesion back into the crumbling



communities which were once semi-nomadic and not cannot be. Then we met the Chakma king, Raja Devasish Roy. There too, the dynamic conversation was so informative.

Very cheekily I invited both to our event of the next day and..... they came! What a joy for the children to have such gifted people watching their show. But let me go back to the day so that you get the program clear.



Six hundred children + some at least 40 staff + hot, humid weather = a delightful and fun chaos. And that is what it was. The children ate chicken curry, eggs, dahl, rasagula (a sweet) and bananas until their little bellies (nearly) burst (in case you are tempted = roughly USD500), then went to draw the new uniforms -- which looked like the ones they have as they don't know anything else!!! -- followed by the Cultural Show

including a fashion show of the traditional dress of the 10 or so tribes present to heavy hip-hop music; I only wish you could have been there...

Next day was Chittagong to Dhaka to Kolkata to Bangkok to Seoul -- connections to Chittagong are not the greatest.

More later. Stay well and happy, mujin

## December 31, 2012: Newsletter 9 Part 2: India, Cambodia, Myanmar

Hello Everyone, (This time the newsletter is long but especially made for those who are tired of reading = lots of pictures.)



The dye seems to be getting cast as time goes by: toilets, toothbrushes and garbage cans (rubbish bins...) Everywhere I visit, these seem to be commodities in short supply and as many NGOs and government agencies build buildings (often without consulting the recipients = according to their own idea) the toilets don't exist or stay broken, the teeth rot and the garbage piles up.

The villagers of Ongnaezu (see below) to be only reached by motor cycle or bullock cart have clearly understood. When asked if they ever see a doctor they immediately replied, without hesitation that the earth and the sky and the wind were their doctors. There is a hospital but it is quite far away....

So I did my very best this year travelling around to see our various projects and was pleased to see that (in general) we are doing a good job.

### Delhi



Visited a major pilgrimage center in Delhi: The Laksmi Narayan Mandir. Next door is a small Buddhist temple which was built in the early 1900s and opened by Mahatma Gandhi. The temple has fallen on hard times in spite of the fact that hundreds of people pass through there every day. The new head monk,

Ven. Sumitththananda, is a young enthusiastic Sri Lankan monk who speaks good Hindi and quite good English (most of the previous monks spoke only Singhala). His toilets (see left) have been untouched for many, many years and so i was able to bring a reliable contractor and get them all renovated!

Now the monk can get down to the work of the Mahabodhi Society: helping people in many different ways.

### Kolkata



The **Mother Teresa Home** for handicapped children in Kolkata is located in a disused prison, offering lots of space and light. The children are extreme cases of physical and or mental handicap. The project of



offering wheel chairs there came through a friend from Holland, Veroniek, who volunteers at the home periodically. She had found that the wheelchairs occupied by her patients were in terrible disrepair and so, during a conversation, we offered to buy new ones from the Foundation.



We spent three days together in Kolkata visiting the home and I was pleased that we could offer help. However, it turned out that their policy is to receive donations completely freely and use them where necessary. Therefore it was very difficult to find someone who



actually knew where the wheelchairs were and that we had offered them. This policy is fine from the recipient's point of view but for us who have to be minutely accountable to the US government with their Patriot Act, it is not very funny. I presume they receive only personal donations... Also you are not normally allowed to take pictures, which I can understand but...



Anyway, the home is magnificent and I couldn't help comparing the life of those handicapped children to that of those living on the streets of dusty, smelly, dirty Kolkata....

(Some left over money allowed them to buy special mattresses for patients who stay in bed.)

### **Phenom Penh**

I arrived late in my home away from home, chez Stav. She is an early sleeper and so I expected to creep in and crash. But no, Madame Zotalis was up and chirpy and we had a lovely chat. There is something so reassuring, so human, so happy in being welcomed into someone's hearth (Cambodia is a hot climate so there is no hearth, but somehow that word is so close to one's heart that I use it anyway).

The next day we set off to visit **Cambodia Reads** in the village **Poum Me'an** near Kampong Cham. It was a 3 hour drive on fantastically bad roads. (I am fascinated that the roads are so bad in all the countries I visit. By not repairing the roads, the government spoils the economy, the vehicles and so their own and everyone else's lives. They have the wherewithal to fix the roads, it is not a question of poverty but...) After three hours we reached the little village where Thin Pou Judd has rented the upstairs of a house where children go for extra schooling; government school is only ½ day.



The room is large and there are two other little rooms, one to be used for a possible future computer center and the other is closed as it is normally a kitchen. There are benches and tables for the children, shelves with books and toys



and a charming teacher. The accent is on their mother tongue Khmer and Pou Judd hopes to increase the possibilities of learning English – now a Peace Corps volunteer gives up some of her free time to help out.

The day I visited there were children from age 5 or 6 to about 12 or 13. They were being drilled on the Khmer alphabet by the very sweet-looking teacher. The children come and go according to their duties at home and their school timetable. One little boy is there all the time because his family moves around and he





is not registered in the school, he so wants to learn... (I thought of all the children elsewhere who would give anything to be out of school...) The Foundation is helping to put in the playground and buy materials for the school.



Next back to **Wat Opot**. Many things have changed and the general atmosphere was one of health and vigor. The whole place looked marvelous with the new cleaning plan (groups of kids are assigned different areas) and the wall; finally the Wat Opot Orphanage has boundaries.....!!!!



A Taiwanese group has kindly put up the wall and it means that there is more discipline and less (possibility of) theft from outside. (That's Ben on the overloaded bike!)



Last year the children were making jewelry which was ok but this year they are



making gorgeous stuff (anyone have a means to an outlet somewhere????) I visited every nook and cranny and admired the progress. Now Wat Opot Orphanage is on the map nation-wide for HIV positive kids, the population may grow. They are doing well but the day-to-day expenses are still a problem: how to feed so many people 3 times a day???? It requires a lot of engineering.

Melinda and i talked of the present and the future, Wayne and I talked of the future and old age. In the evening the children sang, meditated and danced

and it was all very beautiful. But the main event, the event all were waiting for was the arrival of the new tuk-tuk. (For those of you not in the know, a tuk-tuk is a motorcycle drawn wagon with seats in it that often goes tuk-tuk-tuk.) The air was tense with expectation, the children were alert to any sound, and then, and then, someone heard it... A faint tuk-tuk-tuk in the distance. The entire community ran to greet the tuk-tuk: and what a tuk-tuk it is: shiny, bright, with three rows of seats!!!! Here is the proof:

The tuk-tuk was the result of our foundation finding itself with a little extra money... Wat Opotians had begun to grow







tired of carrying the groceries or hiring a tuk-tuk and someone came up with this bright idea. So now they are mobile and the legend of the arrival of the tuk-tuk may last for some time to come...

Finally, here are two pictures i love: Melinda seeing the children off to school and eating the preferred treat of bread in the evening in a novel way!



Back to **Phnom Penh** and off to visit to various hospitals with Beth Goldring's **Brahmavihara** ([www.cambodiaaidsproject.org](http://www.cambodiaaidsproject.org)) to offer poor patients with AIDS or Tuberculosis a package of tea +++.



First we went (in Nyang's tuk-tuk) to the most desperate hospital, Chetamyet. There, at the back, away from view is a building surrounded by garbage where poor patients are sometimes visited by a doctor or nurse. I always feel so sorry for the terrible metal beds and the awful condition of the toilets.



Yes, i offered, but was told that the patients mess them up and that they had just been fixed = so hard to understand... (on the right: Soeun is giving mouth wash.)



Then we visited



Russie and Kosomak Hospitals which are slightly better. Beth's staff visit the patients, give them Reiki and massage and talk with them. This the patients appreciate a lot but the highlight is the chanting which soothes them and makes them feel better. (That's Heng on the left with a patient.)

(Please note the nice masks supplied by the Foundation!!)



Next stop **Myanmar**... This time the plan was to travel. A couple of years ago we had given a tiny amount of money (not DACF) towards the making of a well in the village of Nge-nge's husband's favorite monk, Ven. U Zawana. It was planned that we should visit it and then to my friends, Nge-nge's parents in Maymyo, now called Pyin Oo Lwin (all through the nose, i spent much time trying to pronounce it properly but failed!) to visit a vast orphanage there that needs help. Anyway, that was the plan...

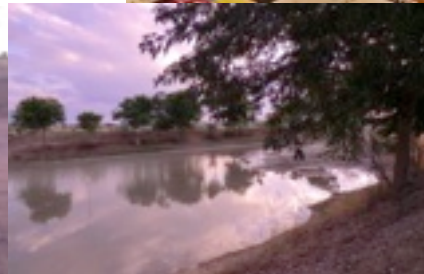
It is always fun to arrive in Yangon and then to see Nge-nge's smiling face! Here she is wearing a Wat Opot necklace.



The first big event was getting on the bus with the monks to go to the village, **Ongnaezu**, to see the well. Actually they had dug a sort of lake which collects the drinking water as most of the water is very salty and it is an extremely arid part of Myanmar. We travelled along the hand built, 400 kms long highway where (still) there is little traffic. Then, after a 7 hour journey, we got off the bus and were met by motorcycles. The terrifying trip through the sand and along paths lasted only about 40 mins.



and we arrived at the "well." It looked beautiful and i was assured that



this is the best method for getting drinking water as there seems to be no traditional system for finding where to drill for water; they have never heard of dowsing. (I re-confirmed this at the well that we did build, see below.)



Finally, on the motorcycles, we arrived in the village and all of the monk's family crowded into the room to greet us. After that we went to the temple where we were to stay the night. I was struck by the ancient stupa! (Ven. U Zawana (r.) and teacher.)



I was up very early and decided to take a look around. Next to the main building of the temple was another, smaller one. I went in and found a school. A

few children were eagerly waiting for the teacher. (Note the special "benches" for younger students!) The school had been built by the monks with money scraped together and they had never been able to finish the floor or make a ceiling (those corrugated iron roofs create an oven effect in the sun!)



After a hearty breakfast (Myanmar people eat a lot of fried food) it was off on walkabout. They told me of all



their troubles, of the lack of rain and so the rice had died in the field, of the lack of water in the dry season, of the lack of electricity and so on. I wanted to jump in but all i could think of is "How can we monitor any bigger project here?" I left the door open though...  
(Left is traditional irrigating = pumping by foot.)

As a compromise (?) and something that could be done immediately, decided to supply the money for finishing the school after long consultations with the local carpenter and mason.



In the afternoon the entire village of about 500 got together and we distributed 3-in-1 coffee mix (they love it!) sweets and, of course, toothbrushes and pens.



The meeting was filled with joy and a feeling of well-being. The five old ladies (no picture,

so sorry) were over 80 and sprightly, the children ran around and the people looked healthy and happy. Of course they want all the stuff that we are "enjoying" but they don't realize that it has to be paid for... They think (hope?) it will all fall from the sky! For the time being, their lives and their village seem idyllic in some ways (but not in all).

We left for Mandalay and Sagaing. The monks accompanied me, afraid i might diasappear into



thin air and then off to the big temple there and on to **Pyin Oo Lwin**. Staying with my dear old friends was so lovely, so happy. They are older than me and so i enjoyed the stories...

One day we went to **Doepin Parahita Orphanage**, a fantastic place of 1,200 boys directed by Ven. U Pandawa. Some are monks, most are not. Obviously feeding such a huge community is a problem (10 bags of 28.4 kilos rice a day at least) and so whenever Sayadaw (Head Monk) runs out of money and food, he rents a van and puts loud speakers on it and drives around the country-side asking for help. Usually everyone gives a little and he comes home with enough rice etc. for a little while at least.



The boys do all the cooking etc.



and seemed to enjoy it (!?) -- even if they don't look too happy here! And then they all eat in a huge hall in groups (saves washing up?)



We were able to offer rice and TVP (Texturized Vegetable Protein) and oil and our friends and the shop owner (in red) joined us in the offering.



The monk himself being an orphan is able to relate directly to the boys and he is famous for never raising his voice or resorting to any kind of punishment. This orphanage is very well known and these days, seems to be doing well as far as buildings are concerned. But just imagine the hurdles that must be overcome in order to feed and clothe so many boys? It is an on-going battle.

But Sayadaw told us that he never worries, if he did he would never sleep and would go mad! Many of the boys have done well and gone on to study at university and so on.

Left Pyin Oo Lwin in a taxi which had a scratched (by the window wipers) and misted windshield, a final remnant of the bags of bones taxis of old (they are disappearing) at 5 am. I always love the early, early morning... Back to Yangon off to visit one of this year's main projects: a tube well in **A Dut Taw** Village in Thanlyin township.

This little village is very interesting. It is some 3 kilometers from the harbour of Thilawa. As so many ships dock there and sailors will be sailors, part of the village has long been given over to prostitution with the natural consequences of many dying of AIDS. Not knowing what to do, the dying were separated from the general population and left to die. A Baptist group stepped in and they have brought a lot of good to the village, including new ways of creating income (pig farming) and education about AIDS, in particular.

Lele, Nge-nge's boss knew of the good work going on in this village and that they were unable to get the funds together to dig a well for drinking water. The engineers from the hotel offered their time to supervise and, as before, Nge-nge did a superb job of keeping track of everything and giving DACF a fabulous report with all itemized receipts attached.



The day we visited, the minister had organized a major meeting of the main people from the village. Here he is standing in the sunlight at the meeting.



After a little talk, we set off to visit the neat, compound to see the installation. The amazing thing about the project is that they had no way of knowing where the good water would be nor how deep they had to go. By a great stroke of luck, they hit good water on the third trial and only had to drill about 100 meters. But they had to spend a lot on the generator, for which they were sorry. This is due to no electricity, as yet, in the village. The water is pumped into the two towers you see on the left (that's Nge-nge standing with me!)



Thanks to our trusty investor, Craig, the Foundation has done well and so we could offer the tuk-tuk and (wait for it) boxing equipment for recovering drug addicts in **Lodwar, Northern Kenya**! Oh yes, DACF is varying its impact markedly! This was introduced by Veroniek of the wheel chairs! We are feeling rather proud of this as the coach feels that recovering addicts do welll with the kick-box training -- and there is one girl....



And so back to Delhi (where i visited the toilets -- see beginning -- which are fabulous), bought a lot of tea and on home...

Let me leave you with warm wishes for your health and happiness in 2013 and two Burmese Buddhas.

mujin

