

## NEWSLETTER 3



Hello again everyone, or as they say here “su-sa-day”,

As promised, another update on the happenings over here in Cambodia . We are well and truly into the monsoon season now which means it is hot, humid and usually rains at least once a day. Actually, the weather hasn't changed much at all since I arrived. The coolest time of the year is December, but I think it still averages at least 30 most days – just with less rain.

*(Note: This newsletter seems to have become very long again - sorry. So as not to bore you I've included a second page again but it contains mainly photos and brief descriptions of other things that, with your help, I've been up to.*

So..... just what have I been up to. Well, first of all to the story I alluded to in the previous newsletter regarding Andy. As I mentioned, Andy is a medical student from Alaska and he is spending a month in Cambodia volunteering at a hospital that does reconstructive and rehabilitative surgery for poor people. Andy is staying at the same guest house as I am and I was telling him all about the village and he expressed a desire to visit it.

A couple of days later I was back at the village and I met a little girl called Lee-a who had been burnt by boiling water as a small child. As a result she has burns on her head, forehead and upper face as well as on her right arm.

Unfortunately, no medical treatment was ever sought for her and as a result she can't straighten out her arm or three of her fingers. The remaining two fingers she can straighten, but not fully. As soon as I met her I thought “this is the exact thing Andy was telling me about”. Needless to say I was quite excited when Andy arrived and I introduced him to Lee-a and her mother. Sure enough he said they were perfect candidates to come to Phnom Penh and have surgery on Lee-a's arm if they wished. How coincidental! Well, if you know me, you know what I think – its no coincidence at all.....



Andy told Lee-a's mother about the hospital and how it was free and asked if they would like to come. She was very excited but pointed out that they had no money. ( Phnom Penh is about 400 (?) km's away from their village.) Thanks to your generous support I had no hesitation in assuring them that they would not need any money as I would take them to Phnom Penh and look after them the whole time they were there. So it was agreed that after the funeral I would return to Phnom Penh with Lee-a and her father, Boo-an (her mother was too frightened of the idea of a big city to go). It was the first time they had ever traveled further than 20 km's from their village.

On Sunday morning I traveled out to the village with Sovan and his cousin to collect Lee-a and her father so that we could catch the twelve o'clock bus to Phnom Penh . We were greeted warmly by the villagers once again and one man shimmied up a tree and knocked down some coconuts so that we could drink fresh coconut milk. I was also presented with two freshly harvested pumpkins! (I left them with Sovan and his cousin.)

Once on the bus Lee-a promptly fell asleep but her father stared out of the window the whole way. I made sure that Sovan explained to them that once we arrived in Phnom Penh things would be very hectic and not to panic but to just stick with me. You see, when the bus pulls in it is immediately “attacked” by dozens of aggressive moto and tuk tuk drivers all fighting for a fare. Fortunately, my guest house is within walking distance so we didn't have to fend them off too hard, but for the uninitiated it is quite a frightening experience. Its even worse going in the opposite direction, from Phnom Penh to Siem Reap, as this is where all the temples are and the drivers are all hoping to get a tourist who will then hire them for three days to drive around the temple. As it's the quiet season for tourism at the moment its “every man for himself”. It's got so bad at the Siem Reap bus station that they now have a policeman wielding a big stick to try and keep the moto and tuk tuk drivers behind a line. Some foolhardy drivers still try to approach the bus door and in doing so get beaten back by the policeman. It really is an amazing scene and hard to describe it in words.



Once we reached the guest house I took Boo-an and Lee-a to their room and had to show them how to lock the door, turn the lights on and off, show them how everything in the bathroom worked and then finally showed them the television. I made sure I got them a room with a TV as I thought they would get a kick out of it (which they did). Its hard to imagine in this day and age having to show someone how to use a key and light switches, but the villagers live very simple lives and don't have doors on their homes, let alone locks, and have no access to electricity. I hoped that they didn't get too claustrophobic being enclosed in their room as they are used to living in much more open spaces.

First thing the next morning (Monday) we headed off to the hospital. They had a consultation that morning and were told the surgery could be done the very next day. The hospital is funded by an American charity and supplies meals (most unusual here) for the patient and one family member. All medical costs are free and one



family member gets to stay at the hospital with the patient. The operation went well. They grafted skin from Lee-a's thigh and she had a total of 200 stitches in her hand and arm. Lee-a's father was understandably anxious waiting while Lee-a was in surgery. I tried to explain to him via Mr B, my driver, (and special friend of Angela ;-)) what was happening and that she would be very upset when she came out of recovery. The poor little thing, she was so distressed when she did come out that it even bought a tear to my eye. I really felt for her father, it was very upsetting for him.



Poor little Lee-a, I don't think she likes Andy and I much anymore. Its hard to explain to a child that in order to make her better she will have to feel worse for a little while. Unfortunately, there isn't much that can be done about he scarring on her face and head but luckily a lot of it is covered by her hair.

Thanks to your help I've been giving Boo-an money each day and have also bought them everything they need in the hospital, such as blankets, pillows, towels, soap, crockery, etc. Even though the hospital provides food, they don't provide crockery and eating utensils! I've also bought extra clothes for both of them. Boo-an had thrown on what I know would have been his best pants and shirt to come to Phnom Penh . The problem is that he would've only had one set of best clothes and hence, he came with no change of clothes. And, of course, I've bought some "comforting supplies" otherwise known as stuffed toys, books, etc for Lee-a. Today I asked Boo-an if there was anything else I could get for them and he asked me for a phone! I was a bit taken aback, but then I realized he wanted a toy phone for Lee-a, the type that plays music when you press the buttons – such simple requests. I assured him I would go straight out and look for one (which I did).

The doctors say that as long as the skin grafts take then they can leave the hospital on Sunday. Even then I'd like to keep them in Phnom Penh for a while longer. I'd hate them to go back to the village and have complications. Each day I phone through progress reports to Sovan to relay to the family. Thank you once again for your financial support, that enables me to help people like Lee-a without stressing out about costs.

Until next time, take care and love to you all,

Deborah



Heading out to the village, which, incidentally is called Prasat Char, with Sovan and his cousin. We are taking out tools and seeds to the family in the photograph on the right.



This woman is on her own and has 4 children. She is a very hardworking woman and her meagre income comes from selling mats that she makes in the market as well as collecting wood to sell for cooking. When we asked her what she needed or how we could help her, all she requested was tools and seeds, which we have provided, along with some medicine when she was sick recently.



A little boy at the village checking out a new jumper we gave him.



In this photo the same little boy was very unwell so we took him to the children's hospital. It was the very first time any of these people had been in a car. (The little boy is ok now.)



This man is a widower. His wife died in childbirth two years ago and apparently a nurse or midwife kept the baby. He has 5 children to support and is deaf as a result of an injury he suffered when he was a soldier. He also happens to be one of the happiest people I've ever met! The little girl is holding crayons and books that we gave them.



We are hoping to find ways to help him and his family to increase their income. Currently he makes baskets which he sells at the market. This is his eldest daughter, in front of their home.



"Sowana and friend" in the market. This picture also illustrates why I'm virtually a vegetarian over here. This is an open air market, it is hot and humid and the meat is simply displayed on dirty benches. Note the



flies on the pigs head.

Some of most memorably moments have happened while I've been sheltering from one of the frequent downpours.



The "big" project we are hoping to do for the village is to address their need for clean water. At the moment they only have open wells which cause ill health.



The water bottle on the left contains bottled water while the water bottle on the right contains the well water.



We are looking at the feasibility of putting in several water pumps like this one.



This little baby girl lives in Prasat Char with her parents and three siblings. I was lucky enough to meet her for the first time when she was only 9 hours old. Women here simply have their babies at home and there is a high mortality rate for both the infants and mothers.

When we arrived at their hut and discovered the mother had just given birth 9 hours earlier I asked if I could go in and see them. I was able to go in and admire the newborn. Because of their belief in spirits though, as we had walked through the bush, they believed that spirits would have come into the hut with me and if they weren't banished they would frighten the baby and cause her to become ill or die. The remedy was that I was supposed to spit on the baby 3 times to frighten away the spirits. I thought "great, that might frighten the spirits away but what about all the foreign germs I might be carrying that she would have no immunity to". I was then told that blowing three times from the babies head to her feet would suffice, which is what I did.