The Sharing Foundation Newsletter

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At Roteang Orphanage, a nanny is more than just a nanny

The 20 nannies are all smiles as they gather on the porch of the Roteang Orphanage.

by Korey Lee, TSF Board Menber

In July I was fortunate to have the opportunity to interview the nannies at Roteang Orphanage in Cambodia. Using one of our successful university graduates, Kong Maneth, as an interpreter, I was able to understand how special these nannies are. They are more than mere babysitters; they act and feel like mothers in every way.

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Maneth and I first spoke with Chhou Sokhoeun who has worked at the orphanage for 11 years, and for the last several years as Assistant Head Nanny. Before coming to Roteang, she was a farmer. Her family is from Prey Veng Province and in 1975, her husband died. Having no children, she lived with her sister.

Chhou Sokhoeun was so moved by the question "What do you do during your time off from the orphanage?", that she fought back her tears to respond. Each nanny is given four days off per month, which is generous by Cambodian standards; Sokhoeun uses that time to visit with her sister. However, she said that she never stops thinking about the children while on holiday and enjoys coming back to work. Like any other mother, she anticipates some time away, but then once it happens she misses the children.

Sokhoeun expressed her gratitude to The Sharing Foundation for making her life complete with these children, and for giving her that special feeling since she has no children of her own. Sokhoeun has also experienced the mixed emotions that come with seeing children adopted and leaving the orphanage. In one sense, she is happy that the children's lives will be more fulfilled, but yet she misses them very much.

Seang Srun has also been a nanny with the Roteang Orphanage for 11 years and before that was a farmer as well. She lived in Kampong Cham Province with no family and often stays at the orphanage during her time off. Her most rewarding moments are seeing that the children are clean and well-dressed. Having no offspring of her own, she said she experiences a special bond with the children and often feels they are her own. She enjoys the soup that is made at the orphanage and loves that the children are given proper nutrition.

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Bin Sovann, an 11-year employee, comes from Kandal Province. She is a widow and mother of two grown sons, both of whom work in construction. One son, 34, works and lives in Siem Reap, while the other, 30, works and lives in Sihanoukville. She enjoys being able to see her family, but often thinks of the orphanage children while on holiday. Taking care of the children during the day, she said, fills her heart, and she loves the food at the orphanage.

Sem Eang, employed for 10 years at

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Kong Maneth translates Korey's questions for Bin Sovann.

Notes from the President

by Sally Stokes

It is with deepest gratitude that we honor our nannies in this issue of the newsletter. Without a doubt, they perform the most vital work of the Foundation—providing the daily care for our 73 children at the Roteang Orphanage. On my last trip to Cambodia, I was struck by how fortunate we are to have such a magnificent group of caretakers, which surely results in our having such a happy, carefree group of kids.

The tone at the orphanage is set by Chhoun Sina, our head nanny, who masterfully runs the orphanage. The facilities are always immaculately clean, laundry is always done and drying on the line, the last meal is cleaned up or the next is under way. One might expect all this orderliness to be the result of a strict, military-like regimen, but instead, the atmosphere at the orphanage is always relaxed, and the employees seem calm and contented. Although I'm unable to communicate directly with Sina since she doesn't speak English and I don't speak Khmer, I have frequently observed her sense of humor and playful nature. She happily joins the children in jumping rope or dancing at our celebrations, laughing all the while. Watching Sina, words aren't necessary to understand the strong affection she has for these children and the caring way in which she leads the other nannies.

These 20 women vary in age but they have great experience among them; eight have now been with us for 11 years and the average length of employment for our nannies is over six years. This is particularly impressive when you consider the long days at the orphanage. The nannies' days start at 5 am for a workout before the children wake. Then students are bathed and dressed and everyone eats breakfast together at 6:30 am. Their days are filled with cleaning, laundry and activities with the children, including helping with homework, before they and the children eat dinner together, in two shifts, and the children head to bed. It's a long day, but any visitor can see that these nannies share a love of the children and are loved in return.

The Board spent some time this past year celebrating our orphanage staff, and we hope you will enjoy our salute to them in this newsletter.

Nearing bedtime, orphanage girls strike a pose in Mary Jane's House with head nanny Chhoun Sina.

Mutual admiration: Prak Sreyneth and her nanny Seab Channy relax on the orphanage veranda.

Dinnertime brings orphanage kids and nannies together for a nutritious feast eaten Cambodian style.

The Sharing Foundation thanks our nannies with a dinner & night out

The nannies and staff enjoy traditional Cambodian fare at Boat Noodle Restaurant with Ann Trudeau and In-Country Director Elephant.

by Ann Trudeau, TSF Board Member

The nannies at the Roteang Orphanage come from all over the countryside. Many of them leave their own families for weeks at a time to work for The Sharing Foundation. They love their work and especially love the children at the orphanage, eating, sleeping and playing with their individual charges. The board of The Sharing Foundation wanted to show the nannies how much they appreciate their hard work and their loving care so a night out was planned!

I had the opportunity to visit the orphanage in the spring. While there, we took the nannies out to dinner at Boat Noodle Restaurant in Phnom Penh and then to a shadow puppet show. Shadow puppets are a popular form of entertainment in Cambodia, so that is where we went. The show was in English, mixed with some Khmer, and the nannies seemed to understand a lot of the inside jokes that we tourists missed.

To ensure that there was sufficient coverage at the orphanage, we took half of the staff on Friday night and the other half on Saturday. The kids were surprised that the nannies were going out with the visitors and they were being left behind!

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The nannies loved the dinner. Elephant said it was a very fancy restaurant by Cambodian standards and likely the first such experience for many of the nannies. This was a small token of our appreciation for the very friendly, cooperative atmosphere the nannies create at the orphanage. These women, along with Elephant and his staff, are truly our children's families.

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Ann Trudeau is a TSF board member. This is her second trip to Cambodia and her first to oversee the projects there. On her previous trip, she and her family built the playground on the grounds of the Roteang Orphanage. Closer to home, in Concord MA, Ann oversees the sale of the crafts made at the TSF sewing school in Roteang.

Roteang Orphanage nannies

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the orphanage, was extremely shy and hesitant to speak with me. Maneth patiently told her not to worry; this was just a story for The Sharing Foundation newsletter. Her fears allayed, Sem Eang quietly explained that she had been a poor farmer with no husband and had lived with her parents in Kampong Cham before coming to the orphanage. She does visit her homeland during her holiday and often brings back treats for the children. She expressed her love for the children, saying she feels extremely close to them, as if they were her own.

When the nannies are tired or sick, it is the children who often comfort them, just like a family.

These nannies had one more thing in common: their appreciation of Dr. Hendrie and the Foundation's work to help and educate the poor children of Cambodia in the tradition of the Cambodian lifestyle. They all wanted to thank Dr Hendrie and wish her good health and a long life.

Without the generosity of our sponsors, we would not be able to take such good care of these orphans. The Roteang Orphanage has expanded to include a girls' dormitory which was named "Mary Jane's House" after another special woman, Mary Jane Gearns. It is because of the care and support of many people, especially our donors and our nannies, that the orphanage children continue to grow and flourish.

And the children are learning to give as well as to receive. At times, when the nannies are tired or sick, it is the children who often comfort them—just like a family.

Special thanks to Maneth, who was invaluable in translating my questions and interpreting the nannies' responses. Maneth studied English and graduated from the Institute for Foreign Language, which is part of the Royal University of Phnom Penh. (The Royal University is the most exclusive of the Cambodian universities and requires an entrance exam.) Maneth teaches English in the Roteang Village School, computer programs at the Roteang Computer School, and has formed an Alumni Society with other graduates, all of whom had been sponsored by the Sharing Foundation, with the intent of giving back to TSF and their village.

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Korey Lee is a TSF board member. She traveled to Cambodia in July and spent two weeks overseeing the Foundation's various projects. Korey is from New Jersey, and travels to New Hampshire regularly for TSF board meetings. She has worked on fundraisers and peddled TSF crafts all along the Eastern seaboard.

Contentment. Horn Panha nestles into the lap of his nanny, Chin Chanthorn.

Doing their share...

The Sharing Foundation donors demonstrate both inspiration and originality in the ways that they show their support.

"A number of months ago, December to be exact, my family and I went to Cambodia, where I was adopted from. We were lucky to be able to visit Roteang Orphanage, home to around 70 children. My adopted sister Zoe and I had fundraised at our schools for children's clothing and vitamins, and my sister's outreach group had created teddy bears. We were able to bring two enormous bags full of donations and every child in Roteang village was able to have a vitamin a day, for three months. We thank all the people who donated, and the Roteang Orphanage appreciates it too!" — Quinn Sinay of Norwich, CT

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Sophie Dornbaum of New York City has a very close friend who was adopted from Cambodia. Because she cherishes that friendship and because she has been inspired by the generosity of that friend's parents toward The Sharing Foundation, Sophie herself began to raise money for the Foundation.

Quinn and Zoe Sinay bring their bags of donations to Roteang Orphanage.

Sophie raised money through babysitting, pet sitting, bake sales and other initiatives. Part of this money was used to pay for 20 uniform sets in honor of the 20 friends who attended Sophie's bat mitzvah. These uniforms will enable 20 young Cambodian children who would not otherwise be able to afford them, to attend school.

In addition, Sophie is using the money raised to sponsor a high school student from TSF's English program. Sophie's sponsorship means that this student can remain in school rather than being pulled out of school to farm or work in the garment factories to help support the family. What better way to repair the world? (If you are interested in this program, email highschool@sharingfoundation.org.)

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A hearty thank you goes out to Kai Sopheak Battisto Hammond of Putney, Vermont, and Seth Daro Davison-Twomey of Boston, Massachusetts who opted to forego birthday presents and ask instead that friends and family donate to help support our Cambodian kids.

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To raise money for the Foundation, our good and generous friends at Urth Yoga in Los Angeles asked students to make a donation rather than pay the usual fee for one of their yoga sessions. A whopping $698 was donated by these students! To top it off, Urth Yoga sold our popular elephant cloth yoga bags, raising an additional $220.

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Benjamin Chan Khen Seid of Mason, Ohio attends Cambodian Heritage Camp in Colorado during the summer. Last summer while at camp, he got the idea to raise money for the Foundation. Ben collected $361 from five of his teachers, plus friends and family and from his own allowance "to help my country and my community…and I hope the kids get the resources that they need to have a proper education. About 7 million kids are in Cambodia. Many of them have no homes and no food."

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"One of the earliest decisions we made when planning our wedding was that we would ask our guests to make donations to charities that had significant meaning to us. We chose two: Caritas Baby Hospital of Bethlehem, and The Sharing Foundation. Federica is connected to Caritas through a close family friend who works for the organization in Verona, Italy. Matt's connection to TSF is through his childhood pediatrician, Dr. Hendrie, and many friends and family through the First Religious Society in Carlisle, MA. We've both been inspired by these two organizations, the work of their volunteers, and the causes they serve. We saw our marriage as an opportunity to help those in need, and to thank those who give so much." — Federica and Matt Jancek of Carlisle,MA

Federica and Matt Jancek celebrated their wedding by having donations sent to TSF.

A wonderful way to say farewell

by Korey Lee, TSF Board Member

Dancing with the Stars has nothing on our dancers!

Saying good-bye is not always easy and it's even harder when there are 73 good-byes to say in a foreign country where you don't speak the language. Add to that, those 73 people are young children who live in an orphanage. The Roteang Orphanage is an enriching place for a child to grow up, considering the circumstances. Many opportunities are afforded the children and they all participate in a healthy environment. I spent extended periods of time at the orphanage during my working stay in Cambodia. In that short time, I got to know the personalities of many of our young residents and to see the activities they enjoy.

Asked if I would like to see a performance by our dance students, I accepted without hesitation. The day of the performance was my last day in Cambodia and it was raining heavily. Upon arriving at the orphanage, I was greeted by some very eager children and then the show began immediately. Costumes, music, coconut shells and a room full of proud "brothers and sisters" entertained me beyond my expectations. The dance troupe continues to progress under the expert direction of a dance teacher who travels to the village from Phnom Penh. The dancers' movements were fluid and elegant and I saw some dancing stars with a future. Boys and girls alike poured their hearts and souls into the performance, and it showed.

After the performance, we quickly moved to the front porch of the main building where the children, nannies, and staff patiently waited for the table to be set. Earlier in the day, before we left Phnom Penh, we had made a few stops—to a market for juice and a bakery for some elephant ear pastries. Everyone was eager to share the special treats.

It didn't take long for the music to play and for everyone, young and old, to enjoy some Cambodian free-style dancing. Laughing, singing, and dancing lessons took over the entire porch. Witnessing the children helping their handicapped brothers and sisters enjoy the festivities and snacks is something I will never forget.

It was a perfect rainy afternoon and a wonderful way to say farewell.

The young and the old break out into dance at the festivities on the front porch of the orphanage.

Orphanage residents Bear and Sok Neath toast the festivities.

Vitou gets a warm farewell hug from TSF board member Korey Lee.

Helping to Care for Cambodia's Children

The Sharing Foundation

P. O. Box 600, Concord, MA 01742

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Our Mission

The Sharing Foundation's mission is to help meet the physical, emotional, educational and medical needs of orphaned and seriously disadvantaged children in Cambodia. Our goal is to help prevent some of the problems associated with poverty by developing, in consultation with Cambodian community leaders, programs to improve the health and welfare of these children and their families.

The Sharing Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

Laptops needed for TSF college students!

Four of our TSF-sponsored college students need computers for their school assignments. If you have a laptop that is less than four years old and in good working order (minor scuffs that do not affect usage are fine), these students can put it to good use. The computers must have batteries that can support at least two hours of usage. We also need the power cords and, if possible, any original installation discs and documentation.

If you have a laptop you might be willing to donate, email Jim Ganley at JGanley@CheckBoxSystems.net. We will scrub the computers clean of information before sending them, and TSF will gratefully provide a tax-deductible receipt. *Thank you!*

The Sharing Foundation

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