The Sharing Foundation Newsletter

Spring 2014 · Helping to Care for Cambodia's Children · www.sharingfoundation.org

A first-time visitor's impressions of The Sharing Foundation projects

TSF sponsors and supporters from Carlisle, MA, meet the children at Roteang Orphanage.

by Tim Hult of Carlisle, MA

Having known about the Sharing Foundation for over ten years, I finally had the opportunity to visit Roteang in January. A group of 15 folks affiliated with the First Religious Society in Carlisle, MA, travelled to Cambodia to tour, visit the projects, and meet the children.

As we drove up to the orphanage for the first time, the happy faces of the children lined the fence and gate. Dressed in their costumes for a performance of traditional Cambodian dance, they led us into a beautiful, sparkling clean building. With great pride and impressive skill they delighted us with five amazing dances. Escorted by the children and their caring and delightful nannies, we then toured

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Group has awe and admiration for the life-changing work of TSF

On January 19, twelve members of the Trinitarian Congregational Church in Concord, MA, arrived in Phnom Penh to tour and see the Sharing Foundation projects. Upon their return, we asked for their reflections.

Leslie Ackles: "We stood at the gate to the village school and watched as children arrived on foot, on bikes, and on the back of motorbikes. The sun was setting. It was the end of their day. And yet they were all smiles and waves. They were coming to the Sharing Foundation English classes and they couldn't have been happier or prouder. I taught one class and the eagerness to learn was evident and contagious. What struck me as I answered their carefully formed questions in English, was that as a result of the Sharing Foundation, these children's lives have been touched and changed forever."

For all that we have been given, here was a small chance to give back, and we loved it!

Marty and Russ Wolf: "We found this to be an enriching educational experience in many ways. The enthusiasm of the middle and high school students to grasp the English language and learn about life in another culture was a delight. The loving care of the nannies at the orphanage brought tears to our eyes. The delight on the faces of the students in receiving uniforms, pencils, and copy books, made possible by TSF, was a joy to behold. For all that we have been given, here was a small chance to give back, and we loved it!"

Isabel Bailey: "I was so impressed that each dollar is going to the children of Cambodia so they can receive the most important basics for a promising future. The smiles and faces eager for knowledge, the relationships built on trust and joy, all greeted us wherever we went: the orphanage, school, college, villages and farm. The Sharing Foundation uses each dollar to meet the needs of so many people. We saw the clean water systems and latrines at the schools, the uniforms so children can attend school, and teachers who were paid and supervised to really teach the children. What I saw was not a show of temporary benefits, but benefits to children and families for years and generations to come."

Ruth and Tom Piper: "The Sharing Foundation children and students seem to know that they will always have a loving, supportive home with devoted "nannies", educational opportunities, a large caring

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TSF supporters from Tri-Con in Concord, MA, meet the children at Roteang Orphanage.

Notes from the President

by Sally Stokes

In this issue, we are highlighting several trips to Cambodia by loyal Sharing Foundation donors. There is nothing we enjoy more than entertaining supporters who have made the long trip to Cambodia and showing them firsthand the difference their generosity has made in the lives of so many disadvantaged Cambodian children.

During these trips, the donors were also able to watch immunizations for DTaP and Hepatitis B in progress for the village of Lvea Sor, a poor community across the Mekong River from Roteang. These immunizations were made possible for all villagers under the age of 18 by the generosity of Tom and Ann Bates, who had previously funded immunizations for the sister village, Beng Krom, where all the immunizations took place.

The group from Carlisle, Massachusetts was so moved by the dangerous condition of one of the Roteang village school buildings, that they together funded over two-thirds of what was needed to rebuild it. Along with gifts from other generous donors, the new building is now fully funded and construction will begin as soon as the school year ends.

On another note, I will be stepping down as president of the foundation on May 4th at our annual meeting, when the board will elect a new president and vice-president. One of the accomplishments during my tenure as president of which I am most proud is the creation of a board structure and bylaws that enable us to systematically change the composition of the board as well as to elect new officers from time to time. This was not my personal accomplishment, but the result of hard work on the part of a determined and productive board. I plan to remain on the board in a less demanding role. It has been, and will continue to be, one of the great joys of my life to serve our dear Cambodian kids. □

The Board hails its first Foundation Coordinator

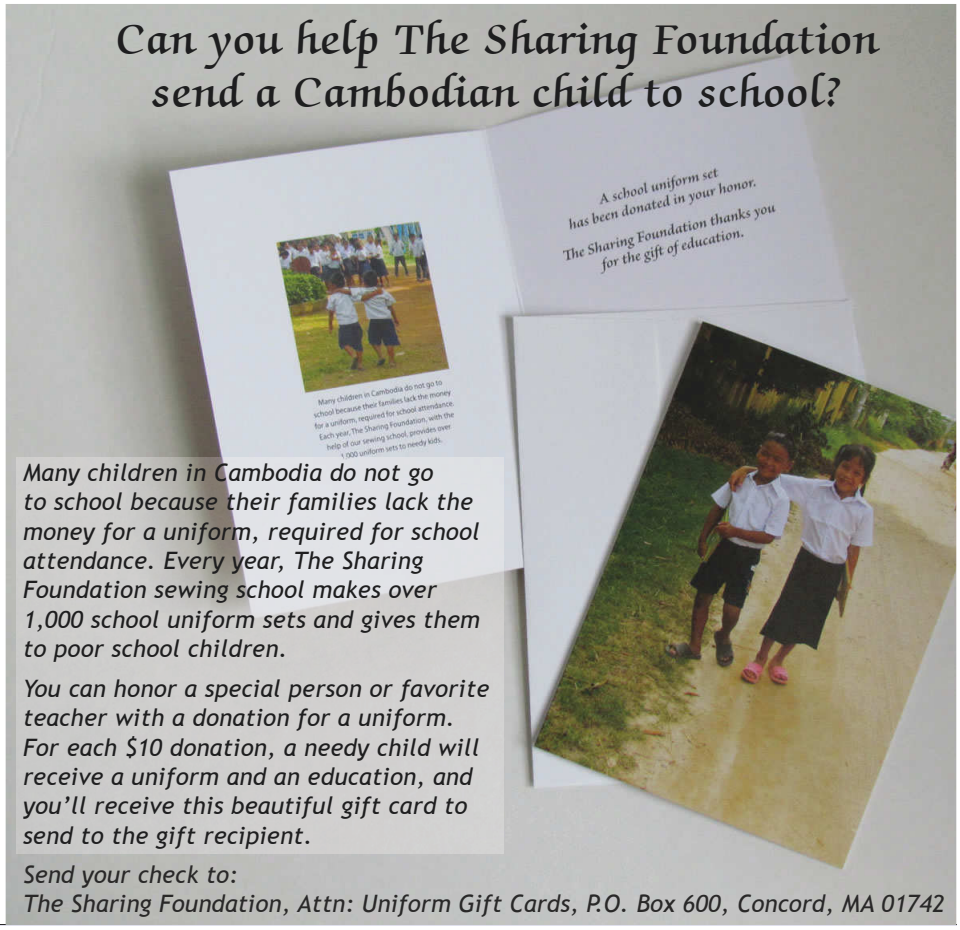
by Ann Trudeau, TSF board member

The Sharing Foundation Board of Directors is pleased to welcome Laurie Simons to the organization! Over the last 15 years, an all-volunteer board has managed a growing and increasingly complex number of programs in Cambodia. After careful study, members recognized that those programs would benefit from part-time assistance on a variety of tasks which need enhanced coordination. In November, Laurie joined TSF, filling the newly created position of Foundation Coordinator.

Laurie is a world traveler who has served on the board of directors for a non-profit employee assistance fund, and worked in a number of orphanages abroad. She has a unique sensitivity to the often difficult conditions in which children and families, lacking sufficient education and material resources, navigate their lives.

Working from her home, Laurie's first priorities were to understand the foundation's programs and policies, and assist with year-end administrative tasks. She has already proven to be a valuable member of the team with her positive energy, can-do attitude and caring manner. For Laurie, "being able to help others remains for me the real, true reward."

TSF remains steadfast in its vow to ensure that the highest percentage of its resources is dedicated to direct programming. Hiring Laurie Simons demonstrates the board's commitment to strengthen the organization and continue to make The Sharing Foundation a force for change in the lives of Cambodian young people and families. □



Group admires life-changing work

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family, and food, clothing and healthcare. All of them seem to have a positive sense of the future and are so thoughtful of each other, so self-disciplined. It was an experience that brought forth awe and admiration for the life-changing work of The Sharing Foundation."

Charles and Katherine Denault: "We were particularly impressed with not just the quality of care the nannies provided, but the heart with which they provided it. The Nannies were fully invested in their charges, caring for them as if they were caring for their own children. We saw this with impaired children, who were constantly being cuddled, and at the water park, when the nannies leapt into the water to ensure that the children were safe. Their investment in their jobs was far more than one does when 'working'.

"We speak about English being the universal language. What we found at the orphanage was that children communicate universally with laughter. While playing hacky sack with us, dancing, or racing down the water slides, the children were a symphony of joy expressed through shrieks and laughs. We did not need to speak Khmer. What they were saying went straight to our hearts, giving us unspeakable joy.

"The Sharing Foundation has altered the lives of many. We saw how each of these children benefits from the seeds of knowledge that have been planted.

"Being a tourist in Cambodia was fun, but the kids made the trip. Just being the fly on the wall, to see how they live, to experience their day, touched us in ways that I don't think any of us expected. Those days will be with us forever."

Bob Baldridge: "This picture [right] says it all for me. The young lady is a third year engineering student at Norton University and has been a member of the Sharing Foundation family for much of her life. Her smile is as bright as any of the jewels we saw in the many temples we visited in Cambodia and for me, it has as much or more meaning." □

Laden with emotion, Cambodian students and their sponsors meet for the first time

When sponsors agree to fund a TSF orphanage child or older student, the foundation works very hard to maintain some communication between them, through photos, letters and even drawings. However, this January, eight of the sponsored youth had the opportunity to meet, for the first time, the individuals who have made so much possible for them. We asked the sponsors, all with the group visiting from the First Religious Society in Carlisle, MA, to share a bit about this unique experience.

Michael Dundorf, college sponsor of Phorn Vandy: "My first contact with Phorn Vandy, my first college student, was a bit embarrassing for me. It occurred at the orphanage and I did not expect her to be there. She came up to me and introduced herself by name, but I did not recognize her nor did I hear her name clearly. I moved on to meet others that were present. Fortunately, she came back to me, indicated who she was, and a bond was instantly created."

After graduation, Vandy worked for a few years, married a fellow graduate from Norton University, and is now raising their three-month-old son.

Mary Lou McColl, sponsor of Preap Chamroeun: "I never expected to be so emotional when I was introduced to six-year-old Chamroeun, a shy little boy with a definite twinkle in his eyes. He tried so hard to understand everything that I said to him. I knew that art was important in Chamroeun's life. With large pieces of sidewalk chalk, our real communication began. He crouched down on the sidewalk and started to draw a large house. After I drew a tree next to it, he countered by drawing a better one, and we were off. Soon another little boy joined us, adding things to our picture.

"Chamroeun's ability to share was again manifested when I saw him give a large part of the frosting on his cake to a little boy who had received a smaller piece. I was struck by this spirit of kindness and sharing which seemed so prevalent at the orphanage.

"I had a chance to speak with Chamroeun's teacher and heard he was doing well in school. The children all seem so motivated to learn; they treat school as a gift which they are lucky to receive. I will enjoy watching Chamroeun's progress in his studies and art."

Linda Clark, sponsor of high school student Chheun Borey: "It was a very brief moment, but a life-changing one for me, and a memory I will hold dear to my heart. Walking into the courtyard of Roteang's village school at dusk, I met Borey, the freshman high school student I sponsor. With a bright smile and tears in her eyes, she approached me. Formalities were quickly put aside as we embraced. Her first words were, 'Thank you'.

"There was so little time, so much to say as the dark settled in and I entered her evening English class to give a short lesson. In our brief moments together, she impressed upon me a strong conviction that this educational opportunity is her chance to change her life. It was clear that she not only felt its importance, but also a sense of responsibility to meet this challenge and work hard. As a teacher in a country that so often takes education for granted, I found this incredibly profound.

"I will be Borey's biggest cheer-leader as one more ripple moves out in the pond of The Sharing Foundation."

Michael Dundorf, college student Sok Vandy: "I had the pleasure of visiting Sok Vandy, first at the dinner at the Anise Hotel in Phnom Penh, and then at her dormitory at Norton University, along with seven of her classmates and Roteang Village friends. The dorm is neat, clean and cheerful, with bright colors everywhere. We spent most of the time sharing what life was like in Cambodia for them, and in the USA for me (e.g., what is snow like?). I look forward to continued and much deeper communication with my Cambodian 'granddaughter'."

Margaret and Eric Darling, sponsors of Srey Len: "We began sponsoring Srey Len, a beautiful and intelligent disabled girl from the rural countryside, shortly after seeing her sunny smile in TSF's newsletter in 2006. During the intervening years, we have received many photos, letters written in curly Khmer, and colorful drawings bordered in flowers. Thanks to TSF's provision of food and other staples to her family, which frees her from the necessity of subsistence work, she is the first of eight siblings to receive an education.

"After traveling several hours, Srey Len met with us over lunch in Phnom Penh, with Elephant translating our conversation. Though brief, it was a powerful and emotional experience. Her warmth, gratitude and happiness touched us deeply."

Jeanne Reynolds, sponsor of Sok Chan: "I met nine-year-old Sok Chan at the Roteang Orphanage after her delightful dance performance. I was not sure if Sok Chan had any idea that I was her sponsor or even what that meant. However, it was enough for me to know that Sok Chan was happy, healthy, well cared for, and that I had a small part in making that happen."

Margaret Darling, sponsor of Ly Sopheak: "On our first visit to Roteang Orphanage, we gathered in a large immaculate room to watch a dance performance that had been prepared in our honor. The first dancer to enter made my heart leap — it was our sponsor child, Ly Sopheak, dressed stunningly in a ruffled silk costume, her graceful artistry reflecting the training in classical Cambodian dance these children receive. Afterward, while touring the girls' dorm, I introduced myself and my husband, Eric, and asked if we could take pictures. The moment when she happily snuggled up to my side and wrapped her arms around me will live in my heart forever."

Jean and Chuck Bagnaschi, sponsors of high school student Nem Chan Malen: "Our most emotional experience was meeting our sponsored student, Malen, an 18-year-old senior at Jayavarman VII High School. We knew her through her photos and letters, but meeting her proved overwhelming. As we embraced, we sobbed tears of joy. It was like a reunion with a long lost relative! While our time together was brief, our connection was intense. She is grateful for the opportunity to attend school where she excels in her studies, and we are so thankful for the opportunity to make a difference in her life a world away.

"Not long ago, we couldn't conceive of being in Cambodia, let alone having a personal connection with one special young woman in a small Cambodian village. We look forward to supporting Malen as she continues her education. Her hope is to do well on her exams and attend university. Because of her hard work and determination, we are confident that Malen will be successful and will make a difference for herself, her family and, hopefully, for Cambodia."

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Thank you *(aw koon)*

Living at the Orphanage: an insider's view of a strong community

by Houston Warren

I had the distinct opportunity of spending two months volunteering at Roteang Orphanage. My main job at the orphanage was as an English teacher, but in a place where you live, eat, sleep, and work, the job is never really over. In between the classes that I taught during the day, I attempted to keep up with the pace of the perpetually energetic children by playing, helping them with schoolwork, and observing a culture that, at times, seemed very alien to my own.

Houston Warren, from Washington state, spent part of his gap year at Roteang Orphanage before entering college.

What came out of these days spent in schoolhouses and on playgrounds was a unique view of one of the strongest communities I've ever been a part of.

I will start with the heart of the orphanage, the women who make the place run: the nannies and cooks. The head nanny, Sina, was appointed as my "mother", but that did not stop the extreme love and kindness I received from the other nannies. They devote this same attention to all the children of the orphanage. These women were awake at 4 a.m., cooking, cleaning, preparing for the day, and they were the last ones to go to bed. While I would tire out in the afternoon, they maintained the calm energy that made them such a comforting presence for the entire community.

It is not surprising that in such a loving and supportive community, the kids were happy and carefree. They were shepherded between hours of school, English, computer, and dance classes, all without complaint. And as soon as class was over, they would explode with energy back on to their well loved playground. Compared to their classroom peers, they appeared more confident, outspoken, and had a sense of maturity beyond their years. That's not to say they didn't eat dirt and play in the mud as all kids should.

The supporting cast of university students, teachers, groundskeeper, and of course, Elephant, had the same goal: being good role models working for the benefit of the children and community. □

A first-time visitor's impressions

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the several buildings that make up the orphanage complex. It is an orderly and upbeat place that is clearly a warm and loving home for these beautiful children.

We shared a big, beautiful cake and goodies with the children. There was dancing and games, and a festive time was had for all. I organized a lively soccer game and found there were some tenacious little boys who played with great cheer and impressive sportsmanship. It was a magical afternoon and none of us wanted to leave.

What I will never forget is their absolute commitment to do well to help their families and other young people like themselves.

Late afternoon, we walked to the village center. The homes were humble, but the families clearly take great pride in them. They greeted us warmly along the way. I am certain that this reflects not only their innate kindness, but their understanding of what TSF has done for their village.

Arriving at the Roteang village school, we found a riot of engaged and happy children. A special treat for me was to view the water collection system that I had received as a birthday present several years ago. The real gift is knowing that it keeps their water healthy. In class, the children seemed attentive and focused. Unfortunately, we viewed one building that was badly in need of replacement but TSF is currently raising the funds to make that happen. After seeing the children so engaged with learning, we came away hopeful for a better future for Cambodia.

At an evening meal at our quaint and comfortable hotel, we had the opportunity to dine and converse with students who are currently in college as a result of TSF programs. We talked of dreams, plans and struggles. Their appreciation of what the foundation has done for them was touching. The two young men at our table study information technology and eventually want to start their own company. Some things are universal. What I will never forget is their absolute commitment to do well to help their families and other young people like themselves. I am confident that they will succeed.

One day we had a great adventure crossing the Mekong on a rickety wooden ferry to visit Beng Krom village. On that day, several hundred children were receiving inoculations at the village school through a TSF program. We arrived to see a jumble of organization but a doctor and medical students were getting the job done. Lines of children with a number and anxious faces led into the fateful room, and happy, relieved children exited, rubbing their shoulders. All of them would now be protected from persistent diseases. The children grabbed our attention and practiced their English with wide smiles. I learned how Cambodian children shoot marbles in the dirt.

My overall impression is that TSF is making a direct and profound difference in the quality of life for hundreds of children in Cambodia. It is a vibrant, living example of what a small committed group of people can do to change the world in a respectful and caring manner. □

Roteang Orphanage boys scrimmage with former youth coach Tim Hult.

Doing their share down under...

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

Remembering those who loved her children before she did

by Denise Cooke

My family and I now live in Australia, having returned from Cambodia in 2009. Ben is now 11 and Meg is 7. In 2012, we returned to Cambodia for the first time. I wanted my children to visit the orphanages to remind them where they had come from and also to see their old friends and 'family' again.

I knew that coming from our privileged life in Australia, I couldn't possibly turn up empty handed. So I started saving money and thought some of my friends would like to donate as well. Soon we had a committee of nine for our COF, Cambodian Orphanage Fund. Over a period of six months we organized a tennis tournament, a school 'crazy hair' day, an auction, and small events, such as raffles and cake stalls. Before long, COF's efforts were being reported on the local TV, in newspapers and on the Internet. Community members were overwhelmingly supportive and I was often humbled by the generosity of both friends and strangers. I had people leaving money in my letterbox, under my door, and sending money to my place of work. One woman stopped me on the street and pushed AU$1,000 into my hand.

I was amazed to find we had amassed AU $18,000 (US $16,000). Although Ben came from Roteang Orphanage, Meg came from an unrelated community so we divided the money evenly between the two places.

Taking the children back was a bittersweet experience for us all. Elephant was very enthusiastic in expressing his gratitude and the three of us had very full hearts helping "the kids we left behind". It was beautiful, but also very sad that many of our old friends had forgotten us over the years since Ben had left his Roteang family for mine.

We continue to have fundraisers and divide the money between Ben's and Meg's orphanages. I imagine we will continue to do this all our lives. How could we possibly forget them? These are the people who loved my children before I could. □

Denise has a beautiful, narrated slide show on Vimeo about her adoption experience: vimeo.com/74382411

Volunteers from Australia raise funds and pitch in!

by Jonathan Gray, Physics Teacher

Students from the Redlands School in Sydney, continued their longstanding relationship with The Sharing Foundation during a visit in December. As part of their service commitment, students raised money and gathered donations throughout the year. They then delivered those funds to Roteang Orphanage and went to work painting the playground, gates, and some buildings at the village school. Two groups from Redlands, a total of 44 students in Year 11, took part in the project and learned more about the way of life for local students. We are grateful to TSF for allowing us the opportunity to visit and we are already looking forward to our trip in 2014! □

Helping to Care for Cambodia's Children

The Sharing Foundation

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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.

Keep up with TSF on social media!

You can follow us on Twitter:
@TSFCambodia

And like us on Facebook:
www.facebook.com/sharingfoundation

If you shop at AmazonSmile, Amazon will make a donation to The Sharing Foundation. To learn more, go to www.sharingfoundation.org, click *Support Us*, and then click *Shop AmazonSmile*.

As always, thank you for staying in touch and keeping us in mind!

The Sharing Foundation

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