The Sharing Foundation Newsletter

www.sharingfoundation.org

CARING FOR CAMBODIA'S CHILDREN

SUMMER 2020

Life for TSF Children and Staff Under the Coronavirus Threat

By Deborah Nelson

Our 65 residents at Roteang have been under quarantine since March, just like much of the rest of the world. While there have been fewer than 150 reported cases in all of Cambodia, fears of the virus have caused many changes. Perhaps some of you follow TSF on Facebook and have seen the touching photos of our children learning online, wearing masks when necessary, washing hands, and generally weathering the tough time well.

Everyone gets into the act to do their part under quarantine

Most important, we have no reported cases of the virus among our TSF youth or staff. Our consulting physician, Dr. Sandra Meyerson, has been instrumental in advising Elephant and the staff about staying safe and healthy during this time. Elephant has established a relationship with the clinic at Hope Hospital in the city for our staff to call 24/7 with any questions and/or to bring any child needing assessment/care. Peng Ron cleans the buildings surfaces and floors often with alcohol.

Elephant is in close contact with RCC, although he visits only occasionally to minimize possible spread of infection. We cancelled part time teachers (e.g., dance/music), though provided some gratuity for them to show our appreciation. We kept the rest of the teaching staff on half salary. Initially we limited nannies from venturing home to their

Flowers in their hair, smiles everywhere

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4

College Friendships and More...

By Lee Steppacher

College is an exciting time to share experiences of learning, experimenting, exploring and meeting new people. Going to college is a unique and intense experience; the bonds that are created during college can last a lifetime. For many of us, our oldest and closest friends are from our college years, and for some, our spouse is someone we met in college. And this is true in Cambodia as well.

My husband and I first traveled to Cambodia in 2008, just as the first university students were graduating and we worked with them to help them prepare to find employment. Since then, on each trip that we take to Cambodia, we host an alumni dinner to reconnect with past and current graduates. Usually about 25 university alums come to the Boat Noodle Restaurant. Their deep bonds are so apparent as they sit together around one or two large tables…they easily share stories and laugh with each other—even if they are from different years, or have different majors. They care for each other, send job announcements to each other, and offer training to each other.

Once mentors and students, now peers, celebrating friendship and success

These graduates also share the experience of being sponsored by TSF. They come from similar beginnings, and they moved to Phnom Penh to live in a dorm, studying and cooking together. They know each other well and deeply and live like family.

As I sat around the dinner table six years ago, imagine my surprise when I began to hear the first whispers of relationships and impending marriages! In all of the closeness I had seen and felt, I thought it was a shared focus on the goal of education I was seeing. I had overlooked romance! But as I listened I found out that actually there were a number of special relationships that had grown. Vuthy and Nita, Rotha and Phearom, Sophy and Sok Ren, Kosal and Thida, Vannuk and Leakhana…(Many others have special relationships, just not with another alum.)

CONTINUED ON PAGE 5

Living in 2020 Has Changed Everyone

by Ann Trudeau

Living in 2020 has changed everyone's view of the world. Every day, we observe how Americans are reacting to a medical threat lurking in our society. Personally, my lack of control over the situation is the hardest part. I have to count on others to fight this new threat and solve the many problems it has caused. This stress is new to many Americans, but not to Cambodia.

Good medical care is not something most Cambodians can count on. The average Cambodian cannot afford to go to the doctor if they get sick. As a result, many Cambodians suffer daily from ailments like infected feet from walking barefoot, tapeworms, and diarrhea from bad water, which could easily be treated in more developed countries. In desperation, some people turn to local healers that practice medicine learned from ancient times. The results can be devastating.

Cambodians can go to the hospital in an emergency but this is an ineffective safety net at best. The quality of medical care is poor, primarily because most Cambodian doctors were killed in the late 1970's by the Khmer Rouge and replacing medical schools and doctors has taken many decades. Moreover, hospital services aren't comprehensive. Patients going to a hospital must be accompanied by someone who can provide food and many nursing functions, and medicine and blood is only available if the patient has paid in advance (or a blood donor accompanies the patient to the hospital).

Not surprisingly, many people die in the hospital as a result. The Sharing Foundation was founded by a doctor, partly because she was horrified by the medical condition of the Cambodian children she saw when she first visited the country in her medical work. Dr. Hendrie taught the new staff at The Roteang Orphanage, the initial TSF project, how to prevent health issues with a picture chart of the do's and don'ts for childcare. The orphanage, now called the Roteang Children's Center, has had a regular doctor on staff for most of its twenty year history to ensure our kids get the care they need.

Even so, The Sharing Foundation has been touched directly by the inadequacies of the Cambodian health care system. In March, even after hospital care, we lost one of our young men, Chab Vichet, to complications of HIV, due to missing his medication. After five days with our staff and older children keeping him company, he died at the hospital with an oxygen tank attached. Vichet's death brought up many questions that the TSF board, with our founder, Dr. Hendrie and our medical consultant, Dr. Meyerson, have tried to address. Our biggest lesson is to provide in-depth training to our older HIV positive kids on the importance of maintaining their medication regiments even after they leave our care.

Chab Vichet

We lost another child, Samnang, in 2018, who died of a "blood disease", most likely leukemia. The frustration we all feel when one of our children is sick and we cannot get them the care that we know exists elsewhere is horrible.

Samnang

Although the health care system is not as good as in many countries, it is getting better. The improvements in medical training we've seen enable us to count on outside medical professionals more often, choosing hospitals and clinics we have sought out for their ability to heal. We took two children with Dengue fever last year to the hospital and they were on the mend within a day thanks to an IV drip. And The Sharing Foundation is playing a role in improving health care in Cambodia! Dr. Hendrie sponsored one of our own RCC kids, Tep Vuthea, through medical school and he is now a licensed doctor. In order to attend medical school, he had to learn French because the only quality Cambodian medical school teaches in French. Vuthea speaks three languages now!

Our RCC children and our staff are fortunate to have the best medical care we can find. And I am so thankful that COVID 19 has had minimal impact in Cambodia so the majority of Cambodians, who don't have access to top quality medical care, have stayed healthy and not had to suffer. At the same time, TSF remains committed to prioritizing the health and safety of our RCC children.

Half Sponsorship for University Students Available

By Lee Steppacher

Ask any sponsor and they will tell you the pleasures of supporting a young university student in their studies. Knowing that the students are learning skills that will change their lives and having the fun of getting to know them personally is so rewarding.

We have 3 students that need half sponsorships. They are all studying at Norton University and living in the TSF dormitories with other students.

They are:

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

Half Sponsorship for University Students Available

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

Heng Sreyneath, a first year female student who is studying architecture.

Heng Thida, a first year female student studying architecture

Ratanak Visal Roun, a first year male student studying information technology

Full cost of a year in university, including tuition, room and board is $1600, though a sponsorship is only $1000 (TSF covers the remainder). A half sponsorship is $500. Generally, sponsorship requires a willingness to correspond with a student 4 times a year (facilitated by TSF) but because these are half sponsorships this correspondence is optional.

If you are interested in this added level of connection, then please do opt to write letters, and if not, your financial support would be very welcome. Please be in touch with Lee Steppacher at college@sharingfoundation.org and put University Sponsorship in the subject line. Thank you.

Charitable Giving in 2020

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (the CARES Act) signed into law in March of this year, gives generous incentives for tax-efficient giving in 2020 when the need to help others has never been stronger. The Tax Cut and Jobs Act passed in 2017 raised the standard deduction, thus making the charitable deduction available to fewer donors.

A $300 Charitable Deduction for Non-Itemizers

The CARES Act temporarily provides an "above the line" income tax deduction to non-itemizers making gifts to public charities in 2020.

Taxpayers who take the standard deduction can now take an additional "above the line" universal charitable deduction of up to $300 for cash donations made in 2020.

Increased Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) Limitation

The CARES Act now makes it possible for individuals to deduct up to 100% of their adjusted gross income for cash gifts made in 2020 to any public charity other than a supporting organization, which The Sharing Foundation is not. The increased AGI limitation does not apply to donor advised funds.

Required Minimum Distributions Waived in 2020

For 2020 there will be no mandatory distribution from retirement accounts. The minimum age for making a tax-free transfer from an IRA to a charity remains at 70 ½, and the annual limit stays at $100,000. However, cash gifts are deductible in 2020, so a person could withdraw and then contribute a larger amount by using the deduction to offset the taxable withdrawal.

Even so, making a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD) this year will still allow itemizers and non-itemizers alike to direct up to $100,000 from their IRA to charities in a tax-efficient manner. Note: to qualify as a QCD, your IRA custodian must issue a check payable directly to your charity before December 31st.

The CARES ACT provides great incentives to give to your favorite causes in 2020. To determine how its options can work best for you, speak with your tax advisor and contact us if we can help you with your gift planning.

Life for TSF Children and Staff Under the Coronavirus Threat

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

villages but with the COVID count so low nationwide, Elephant has eased up on visits home. Uch Sas has managed to continue some English and computer classes at RCC, but the big English programs in the village and at Beng Krom are closed for now, as is our farm school.

We've been fortunate that technology helps us keep in touch during this troubled time. While our board trips in April and July have been cancelled (a historic first for TSF), Ann still meets face-to-face virtually with Elephant every week. With no mail coming into or out of Cambodia, we have scanned sponsor letters for our kids and received scanned letters back from some of them. A special treat has been that some of our youth have recorded video greetings to let us know how they are doing.

Both the public and private schools which the RCC children attend are closed, so daily life at RCC means most of the schooling takes place online, often via the nannie's cell phones, as Roteang village has no internet. Our 38 Beltei students take classes wearing their uniforms to emphasize that this is still a time of learning. Books at our libraries are accessible to the children but Elephant says we are running out of books they have not read! Once the worst is past, Elephant and Uch Sas plan to work actively to enhance our stock.

Elephant lets us know the kids are active and engaged with learning. While we sent him some suggestions of activities the kids could do, such as cooking, moto repair, yoga, or learning to make a social media page, he tells us that some of these "extras" are difficult to do because everyone is busy just keeping up with learning. The kids are busy with computer classes and tutoring, and they are enjoying soccer and volleyball. Of course, Cambodian TV at night is a treat. The kids enjoy a show called "Thai Story."

The time of quarantine has brought some closeness and kindnesses that touched our hearts. Elephant tells us how seriously most of our kids take their online learning and how good they are about studying together with the group. Elephant says, "Some used to fight studying but now they all come (to the group)." Ly Sopheak and Srun Sok Heng in particular are good with helping all the others study. As in America, children are blending their online learning with helping out more around the house. Many kids are helping around the RCC, cleaning their rooms, etc. Elephant is very proud of the staff who work with TSF and how they are keeping our children and older youth safe, happy and productive.

For our older youth formerly doing vocational training at Friends in the city, and now back at RCC, we've been working to keep them busy: "Cleaning fence, house, grow vegetables," says Elephant, "But not busy enough." We anticipate once training programs reopen, we will send our vocational students to Caritas. Our university students have all left our dorms in the city, as universities are also closed, and are back with their families during this time.

And here's a taste of what daily life - behind the scenes - seems to be for our children, using the words of the children and staff:

In their uniforms, Varouer, Veasna, Leasa, and Heng Sokchea are ready for their school day at home to begin

Studying

Vitou tells us *"Every evening we always play soccer and play Khmer popular game. During this time everyone difficult to go out. I can't meet my classmate Monday."*

Srum says *"Now my school is closed not only my school closed all the schools in Cambodia are closed. But we are still learning with Telegram. My teachers at school send the lesson every day during coronavirus in Cambodia and other country."*

Sok Eang says *"Everyone worry about Covid-19 so we always wash our hand all the time and we don't go out in order to protect our self. Everyone always clean their bedroom and wash their clothes every day. I heard from news is not good about virus I know everyone stay at home and work at home."*

Phyna, a vocational student, says *"Now back to the orphanage. Everyone worry about this virus. I like to play with little sisters. They are lovely."*

Chan Piseth says *"In my country is not celebrated Khmer New Year this year. But we can celebrate at our house."*

Chin Chanthorn, one of the co-head teachers, and teacher at the preschool and the English programs gives an adult perspective and says *"During the pandemic I have to find solutions for the kids. Sometimes I have to accompany them to check out their health at the hospital in Phnom Penh. Because of Covid-19 I have more responsibility to raise the awareness of self hygiene, helping the kids with their online classes, do their homework, and send it to their teachers."* During her free time, she enjoys growing flowers. Daline, co-head teacher, helps the kids *"Zoom with their teacher and classmates and help them when they don't understand."*

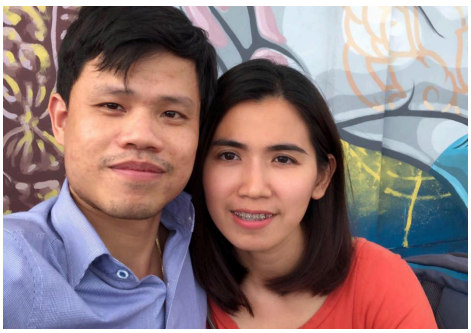
In closing, in her video message for supporters of TSF, Chanthorn says: *"Thank you for always supporting us during this situation-it's really important for the kids in Cambodia and helps them have a bright future by your supporting."* She closes her video with the traditional Cambodian bow, the sompeah, and says *"I wish you all good luck and good health and staying away from the Covid-19."* Daline echos this sentiment, wishing all TSF supporters *"long life and stay safe together."* It feels as though from a half a world away, with the help of technology and video messages, we are indeed staying safe, together. Be sure to check our website, www.sharingfoundation.org for up to date photos and information! You will see how your caring and support make such a difference in the lives of our children.

College Friendships and more...

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Each of these couples have wonderful stories of their lives together, but here is just a little detail!

Ban Kosal graduated from university in 2012 with a degree in Development Economics. He went on for a master's degree in Australia and now is working for the Cambodian Ministry of Economics. I am not sure how he had the time to even begin a relationship with all of his studies, but he did! Sovann Thida graduated in 2011 with a degree in Banking and Finance. She went to work for Australian Center for English (ACE) as an administrative officer, but has moved on from that job and is now working for the United Nations Development Program. She did travel to Australia to visit Kosal and toured around the country a bit. They



Flying under the radar: Kosal (2012) and Thida (2011)

are now happily married and living in Phnom Penh!

Vuthy attended Institute for Foreign Languages and studied English. When he graduated he worked for Friends International, teaching street children. and now is a manager at a bank. (If you want to get to know Vuthy better, there is a very moving video of him on the TSF website talking about how TSF had changed his life.) Nita, who graduated a year later, majored in Banking and Finance and went to work for ACE in the accounting office. They married and had a daughter who is now about 5 years old! On this recent visit, I learned that Nita was expecting another child (it was a boy!). Vuthy and Nita have purchased a home in Phnom Penh, and their friend Sokret (another TSF alum) and his wife Tepy, together with their son, have bought a home just next door! Now their children will be able to grow up together. I still remember my childhood neighbors vividly, and I imagine that these children will remember the experience of close friendships as well.

We all know that life is more than our job—a happy personal life is also important. Everyone pursues this in different ways—all to be celebrated. How wonderful that these young people are

The Next Generation: Sovanputhiboth & Sovantepy; parents Vuthy Sin (2008) & Nita Srey (2012)

finding personal and professional happiness.

I am not letting out secrets here; I see news of our alums and their professional and personal changes posted on the internet. I see the happy smiles of newlyweds with congratulatory comments in Khmer. I see announcements of babies. And I see the job announcements and the promotions. Life is full and rich for these young people. TSF has provided them with opportunities and experiences for a full life. And we offer a huge thanks to all of sponsors who have supported these students through their college years. TSF

Cambodia and Covid

by Colleen Gearns

By now, we are all extremely familiar with COVID-19, the disease associated with SARS-CoV-2. Over the last couple of months, it has, in some way, altered all of our lives including those of our Cambodian staff members and the children we support. They too have faced COVID-19 challenges in the form of school closures, economic difficulties, and having to adjust to new social distancing norms. For all TSF COVID-19 related updates, be sure to check out the News section of our website: sharing-foundation.org/about-us/news-updates.

The first case of COVID-19 in Cambodia was recorded on January 27th in Sihanoukville, a coastal city very popular with Chinese tourists. On February 13th, Cambodia made international headlines by allowing the Westerdam cruise ship to dock in Sihanoukville after four other countries had turned the ship away due to virus concerns. A number of subsequent cases were identified among passengers on a Viking cruise ship that had travelled through the country and by March 14th the government had announced that they were shutting down all educational institutions until further notice. As foreigners accounted for the majority of the country's cases, the government also banned entry by anyone traveling from Italy, Iran, Germany, Spain, France, or the U.S.

Cambodia has since experienced a relatively low infection rate. As of the beginning of June, the country had only seen 125 cases of COVID-19 and had miraculously experienced zero recorded fatalities. That being said, schools are still closed and some of our in- person educational programs remain on pause. Our University students were all sent home and our Roteang Children's Center children remain quarantined on our premises. This abundance of caution is comforting, as a large outbreak could overwhelm the Cambodian health care systems.

The cruise ship MS Westerdam at dock in the Cambodian port of Sihanoukville, Cambodia.

We remain in close contact with our in-country staff and are happy to report that all of our children and staff members are currently healthy. We wish health and safety for you and your families during these unprecedented times. TSF

The Sharing Foundation

CARING FOR CAMBODIA'S CHILDREN

NONPROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
CONCORD, MA 01742
PERMIT #70

P. O. Box 600, Concord, MA 01742

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Noteworthy

Recently on our FB page:

Need a hug? A smile? Remind yourself of all the good you do every day by visiting our website and seeing your good work in action. For updates on Covid-19 and TSF projects, use this link: **https://sharingfoundation.org/about-us/news-updates-3/**

On the evening of June 4th, TSF held a virtual Chat and Check In with the high school and college sponsors. Some of the students from both programs had sent in videos about how they were studying remotely and spoke about themselves and their families. Their sincerity is inspiring! Over 20 friends of TSF joined us and it was a very positive evening. Our special guest was Elephant, live from Cambodia, 6 a.m. his time! You can watch the videos on our website. More virtual get togethers coming your way. Stay tuned!

The Sharing Foundation

P. O. Box 600, Concord, MA 01742
www.sharingfoundation.org
Email: info@sharingfoundation.org

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

Board of Directors

President: Ann Trudeau, Concord, MA
Vice President: Deborah Nelson, Ipswich, MA
Secretary: Linda Clark, Carlisle, MA
Treasurer: Kat MacDonald, Lexington, MA
Asst. Treasurer: Jennifer Mendelsohn, Newton, MA
Chuck Bagnaschi, Carlisle, MA
Colleen Gearns, Garden City, NY
Korey Lee, Branchville, NJ
Lee Steppacher, Norwich, VT
Marge Stockford, Portland, ME

Founder: Nancy W. Hendrie M.D., Concord, MA

Foundation Coordinator: Laurie Simons, Beverly, MA

Newsletter Staff: Deb Nelson, Lee Steppacher, Marge Stockford, Laurie Simons & Emma Schumacher