The Sharing Foundation Newsletter

www.sharingfoundation.org

CARING FOR CAMBODIA'S CHILDREN

SUMMER 2022

Together Again!

Laurie Simons

On a breezy summer day this past June, old and new friends gathered together under a big white tent in Acton MA to celebrate The Sharing Foundation and its founder, Dr. Nancy Hendrie, on a milestone birthday. Under the tent could be found old and new friends from near and far, long-time financial supporters, adoptive family traveling groups, and adoptive Cambodian-American young adults. After an interesting and unusual past two years, it was just like old times—sharing a meal together and creating new strands of connection.

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A once in a lifetime photo: many of our Cambodian Adoptees gather on the lawn.

Behind the Scenes: Bringing Cambodia to MA

Deborah Nelson

Being part of the board planning committee working behind the scenes for over six months to make our TSF Together Again event happen was a terrific experience. One thing we decided early on was that it would be great to incorporate as many aspects of Cambodia into our event as possible. While we could not procure Cambodian-specific food, we were able to secure the Bon Me food truck which works to bring Asian-inspired food to events. The baguette sandwiches which we all enjoyed are a street food staple in Phnom Penh, where they are called "num pang." Rice bowls are of course Cambodian as well! And the iced Asian coffee was a hit too…all of it was delicious!

A Blessing Dance from the Lowell based Angkor Dance Troupe

As the event got closer, we turned to our friends at the Lowell based Angkor Dance Troupe to see if they once again could bring Cambodian dance to us. As always, they did not disappoint! We were all blessed (and mesmerized) by the exquisite dancers bringing us the Blessing Dance. This always includes an odd number of classically trained female dancers whose dance gestures and tossing of petals are designed to bring good health, happiness and prosperity to the audience. The dancers remained at our event, mingling with all of our guests, and later led us in social dancing, teaching us the circle dance Romvong. It was a delight to see the happy faces as many attendees got up to try the dance.

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Coming Together and Reconnecting

The Sharing Foundation continues to build its network of friends and supporters despite over two years of limited contact. More than 230 of us gathered at the aptly titled "Together Again" event on June 18th including Elephant, his daughter Cheng Lita (fondly known as Dollar) from Cambodia, and Dr. Nancy Hendrie, our founder.

For many people, connecting with other TSF supporters and families was the most important part of the day. For others, it was a chance to learn more about the organization and its roots.

In an on-stage interview, Elephant and Nancy talked with us about the creation of TSF and their hopes for the future. Nancy shared that her most difficult time building TSF in Cambodia came when our head nanny took her own life due to a fear she had cancer, a fear that was likely unfounded. This tragedy took days of Nancy's on-site management and care. The cultural differences made it even more challenging, such as the need for a monk's presence around the clock in order to calm the staff.

Nancy and Elephant also talked about their plans to care for the RCC children who have reached age 18, the age when orphanages in Cambodia traditionally end childcare. Nancy and Elephant both agreed—we will take care of our abandoned children until they don't need us anymore. In fact, Elephant has put this value in action by placing our kids at university and in vocational programs.

Nancy and Elephant's mutual respect was evident throughout their interview. The Sharing Foundation is profoundly lucky to have these two as our cornerstone.

Dollar presented Nancy with a birthday cake, celebrating her 9th decade, and the crowd dispersed to try out some Cambodian dancing. We all left the event, having learned a little more about TSF, and many of us were fortunate to have made some new friends and connected with old ones.

I am pleased to say that being together also means the Board can start traveling to Cambodia again. I plan to go for the first time in more than two years at the end of August, followed by a group going in November. We are back on track! TSF

A lively Q&A with Nancy & Elephant was the highlight of the day for many

Together Again!

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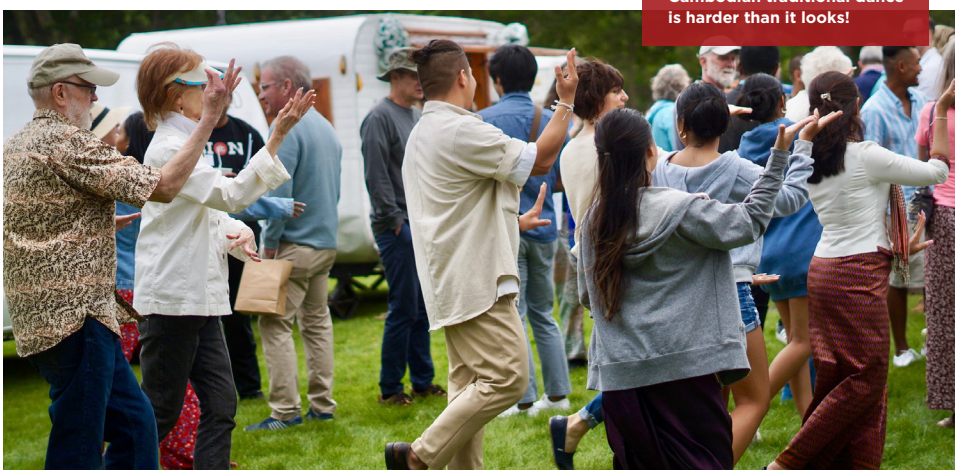
Elephant traveled for the first time since the pandemic to join the party and honor Dr. Nancy, whom he calls 'Mom'. He brought his daughter, Cheng Lita (nickname Dollar), for her first trip to the U.S. While they certainly won the prize for the most distance traveled to attend the party, others came quite a distance too…from the states of California, Colorado, Illinois, Washington, Wisconsin, and of course, from all corners of New England and the east coast. Everyone wanted to be present to honor Nancy Hendrie, who through her efforts had touched their lives.



Cambodian traditional dance is harder than it looks!

The day began with a Blessing Dance by the Angkor Dance Troupe of Lowell. Food trucks offered yummy Asian fare, beverages and ice cream, and guests enjoyed live, traditional Cambodian music. A silent auction table showcased some of the items which were available for bidding. A commemorative book on the history of TSF, was available for purchase, as were T-shirts, tote bags (all three still available via our website), and Cambodian crafts made by our own TSF Sewing center. Two books, The Elephant Walk cookbook (generously donated by Longteine Nyep De Monteiro) and Never Fall Down, an autobiography of Arn Chorn Pond, donated by CLA, were scooped up in no time at all.

The highlight of the day was a Q&A panel, moderated by TSF president, Ann Trudeau. Nancy and Elephant (who braved a 40 hour trip) exchanged stories on how they met, how TSF came to be, what they each saw as their biggest accomplishment and also their biggest worries. The audience heard several stories of their times together that had never before been shared. The crowd was absorbed, appreciating Nancy's detailed recollections and entertained by Elephant's charm! (More can be found on this in Notes from the President article). The panel finished with the presentation of the birthday cake by Elephant's daughter, Cheng Lita, and the 230 strong crowd joined in a rousing rendition of Happy Birthday to You for Nancy!

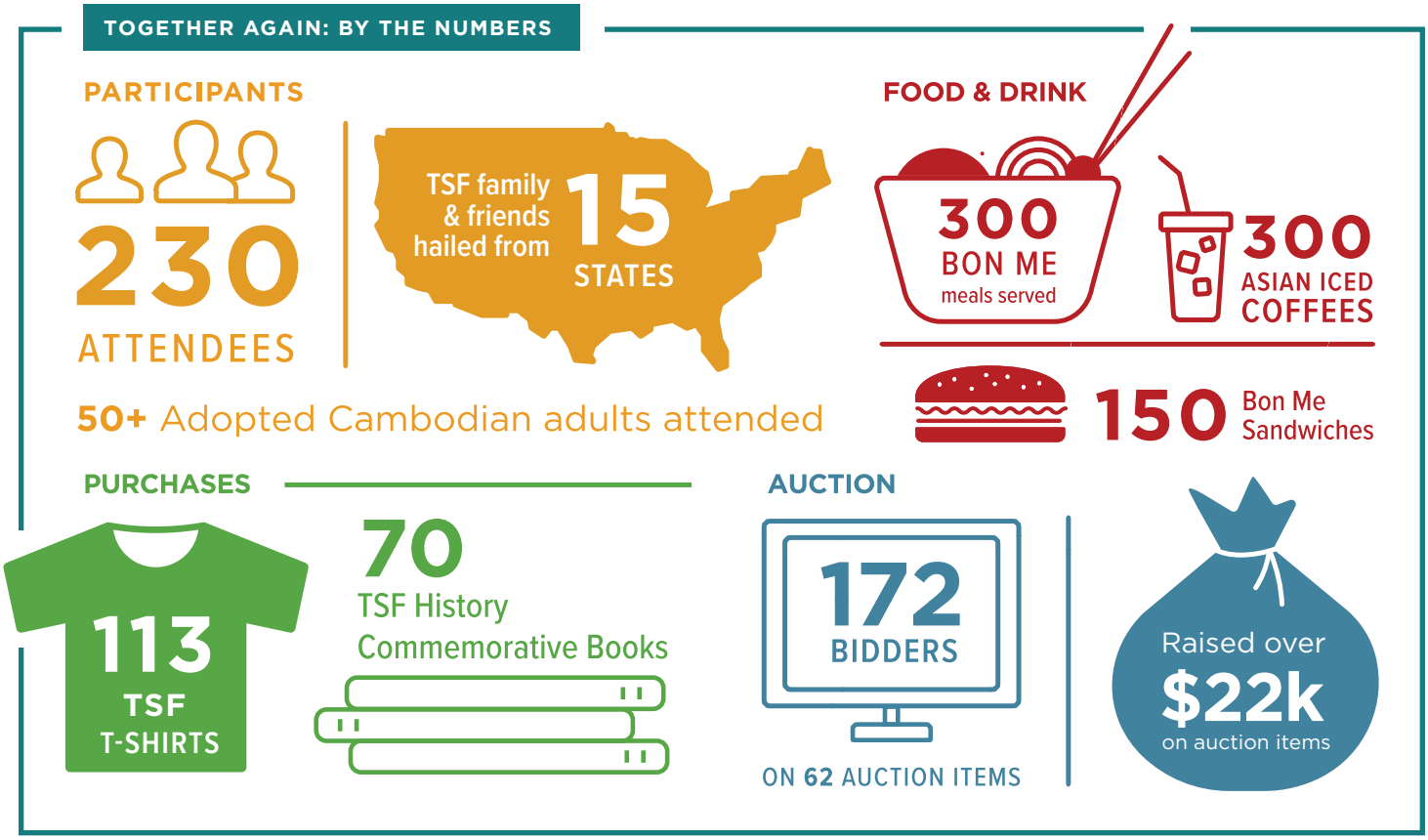
What touched many hearts was seeing 50 plus adopted Cambodian young adults mingle, meet and connect with each other. "I haven't hung out with this many Cambodians anywhere" said delighted Serei Hendrie, a Cambodian adoptee who very much enjoyed the reunion. Many in their twenties now and attending or recently finished with college, they had much to compare notes about. Initially sitting with family, by the end of the day, they were dancing, smiling, posing for pictures and exchanging numbers. They share a unique life experience. One truly memorable moment occurred when Nancy and Elephant posed for a photo with the adopted young adults—lives changed forever with the person who made that change possible—poignant for many.

There were many happy reunions during the day!

As Nancy inscribed personal dedications in the commemorative TSF book, the Angkor Dance troupe taught many guests the intricacy of Cambodian traditional dance. It is harder than it looks! Getting the steps right takes many years of practice but guests jumped right in to begin their tutorial. It was great fun, with many laughs shared as some tried their hand[s and feet] at this!

The overriding feeling of TSF Together Again was one of connection. Parents Kara O'Toole and KT Hendrie loved that their entire adoption travel group of five families came from long distances to be there. Other snapshots of the day included seeing delighted expressions when someone fell upon a long-lost friend or identified someone they had heard about for years. TSF Together Again was an opportunity to reconnect, cement and deepen bonds shared together as a group and individually. The last two years significantly changed the way we were able to interact. However, on a summer day in June 2022, all that was forgotten as hugs and winning smiles (no longer behind a mask) were back! TSF

New and old friends connected, exchanged numbers and took photos together



Behind the Scenes: Bringing Cambodia to MA

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We were also honored to have six Cambodian musicians, garbed in the traditional costumes, to provide live Cambodian music throughout our event. The lead musician told me afterwards that it was an honor for them to bring Cambodian music to the largely American audience at our event.

The founder of the Angkor Dance Troupe, long time TSF supporter Tim Thou, came through again as he donated a number of Cambodian items for our silent auction. These include the 13 bronze musicians who comprised the pinpeat traditional Cambodian orchestra, two classical dance shawls with hundreds of hand stitched sequins ("sbai"), bronze statues of Jayarvarman and a celestial dancer ("apsara").

Another long time TSF friend, Longteine Nyep De Monteiro, donated for our auction many examples of beautiful handwoven silks as well as handcrafted silk wall hangings. Her Elephant Walk cookbooks were a big hit at the event; many attendees sought them in order to bring Cambodian cooking to their homes. One lucky bidder won a collection of hard to locate Cambodian cooking ingredients in order to make at least two of the authentic recipes in Nyep's cookbook. Many hard to find Cambodian story books and folk tales were also part of the auction.

Traditional Cambodian musicians played throughout the event

Our friends at Cambodian Living Arts (CLA) donated 25 copies of the biography of Arn Chorn Pond ("Never Fall Down"), who having survived the Khmer Rouge and been adopted by a New Hampshire family, remains an ambassador of promoting Cambodian music and messages of peace and kindness. CLA also donated many traditional Cambodian scarves ("krama") which we sold at our crafts table.

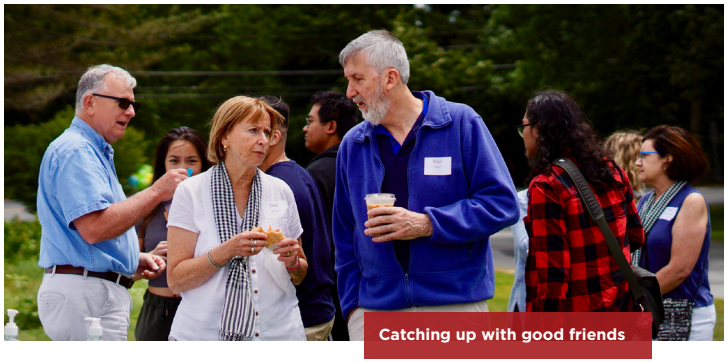
The Blessing Dance

The Angkor Dance Troupe teaches the guests the circle dance Romvong

For everyone attending, it really felt like we were able to experience a little bit of Khmer culture, here in Acton! It was great to have Cambodia be so central to our TSF Together Again event! TSF

Snapshots of the Day

Everyone gathered inside the tent



Catching up with good friends

A 90th birthday cake for Nancy!

Getting registered and enjoying an Asian iced coffee

Beautiful Cambodian crafts for sale

Nancy personally inscribes TSF History Book

Thank You

To those who joined our TSF Together Again event:
We are so glad you came!

To the sponsors who underwrote various activities and merchandise:
Your assistance means more funds go directly to our children.

To those of you who were with us in spirit:
We could feel your joy.

To the dancers and the musicians:
You helped us feel our Cambodian connection.

To Nancy Hendrie:
We are forever grateful for your vision, energy and drive.

To Elephant and Cheng Lita
We appreciate you traveling so far to join us.

To all friends of TSF:
We couldn't do this without you!

Au Kuhn Ch'ran
(Thank you)

The Sharing Foundation

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Thanks to everyone—near & far—who made Together Again a wonderful success!

The Sharing Foundation

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