The Sharing Foundation Newsletter

www.sharingfoundation.org

CARING FOR CAMBODIA'S CHILDREN

SUMMER 2023

Dormitory Living...and Cooking!

Lee Steppacher

When you went to college did you eat your meals at the dining hall? Did you walk down the cafeteria line, filling your plate and then sit with your friends to eat? What were your favorite foods?

Well, in Cambodia it is "Same, same but different!"

Norton University, where most of our university students attend, is a 'commuter school', meaning that it does not have dormitories on campus for students. Nor does it have dining halls. TSF sponsored university students (all 50 of them!) live in two dorms which are really large apartments nearby the University. Like a dormitory, the students share rooms and study together…and they also cook and eat together.

Unlike many of our college experiences, these students are responsible for their own food shopping, cooking and cleaning up. They have no refrigeration, so this is a daily activity! If they get a late-night hunger pang while studying, they cannot go see what is left over in the fridge (and maybe they are healthier for it!!)

A typical food market where our students shop daily

Continued on page 3

Chance Meetings: Changed Lives

Deborah Nelson & Laurie Simons

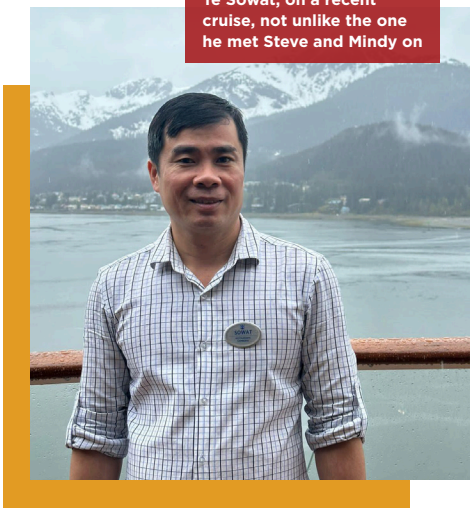
We recently had the good fortune to have a phone conversation with long-term stalwart TSF supporter, Steve Peckar. He was in his car in Colorado and happy to talk with us about his love for TSF. We asked him how he first learned about TSF. "I remember very distinctly where and when… The story begins 10 years ago with the passing of both my parents in 2013." He and his wife Mindy, having said goodbye to his parents, were on a long planned cruise in SE Asia leaving Hanoi and ultimately traveling from Siem Reap to Phnom Penh, finishing up in Saigon. He was struck with the totally unfamiliar scenery of Cambodia as they traveled past.

STEVE SAYS

"Two things happened on that trip that changed me." The first was meeting Te Sowat and the second was visiting a Cambodian orphanage.

The details of these two life changing events are compelling.

As is his custom, Steve loves to get to know people wherever he goes and he struck up a conversation with Sowat who was working on the cruise boat. Steve was not only impressed with Sowat but curious about the role TSF played in his life and he pressed him for details… Sowat's family lived near Roteang in Kien Svey. They were poor and made a living as subsistence farmers. Sowat attended the Roteang public schools and he also came to the after school TSF English program. He was always interested in learning. He applied for a TSF sponsorship to help support his high school years and Eleanor Rizzo became his sponsor. He then passed the national exam which is required in order to qualify to go to university, and was able to attend Norton University. Sowat was the first in his family to attend college and he was in the first graduating class of TSF sponsored university students, a huge accomplishment! Steve was impressed and touched by Sowat and his story—here he was making a wonderful life for himself, working on a cruise ship where he could use his considerable English and hospitality skills. They exchanged contact information and so began a long friendship that continues to this day.



Te Sowat, on a recent cruise, not unlike the one he met Steve and Mindy on

Continued on page 5

Our Children Choose a Path

The Sharing Foundation is currently the parent for more than 60 children. Each child needs a plan for their path to independence and success as they see it. What are the options available for these children? And how can an American based nonprofit organization make sure they have as many options as possible?

We have over 32 teenagers and young adults under our care at the Roteang Children's Center. According to Cambodian law, children in orphanages are to be released at age 18 and then monitored for a year. At The Sharing Foundation, we have no such rule. In fact, we have ten children living at the RCC who are over 18, seven at university living in our dorms and eight, who are 19 or older, living in a vocational program setting because they're not yet ready to support themselves.

Like children everywhere, each one of our children is different. We cannot always predict when they will be ready to part from our care. Just when we think we have one child's teenage years figured out, he or she comes of age and we have to reevaluate everything.

Even so, we do have certain paths paved that work for most of our kids:

Pathway #1: If a child does well in school and passes the National Exam at the end of High School, we encourage them to get a university degree. Two of our kids have completed even further degrees; one became a doctor and the other earned an MBA. Right now, we have three university graduates and seven more young adults currently enrolled in college and living in our university dorms.

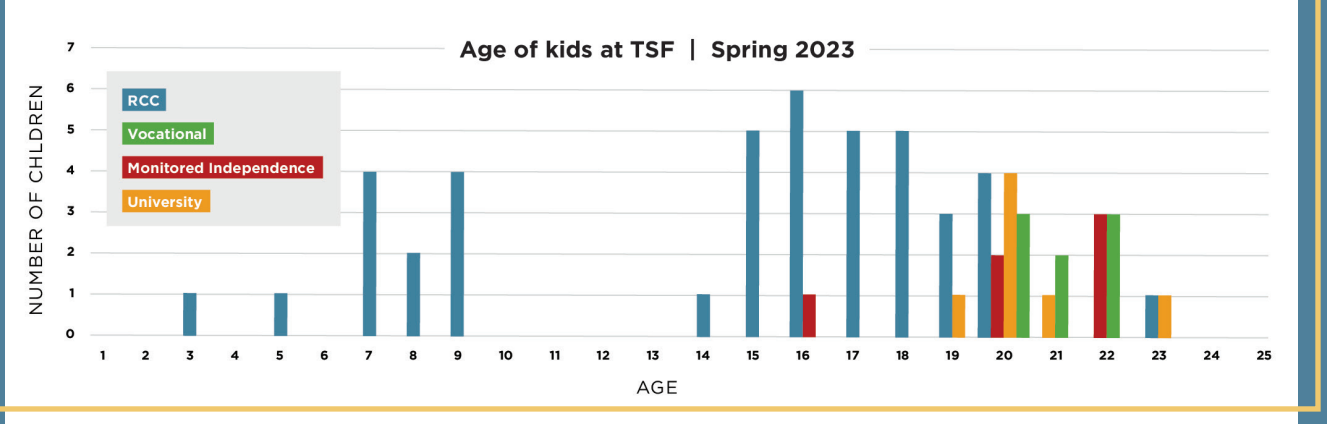
Pathway #2: If a child cannot progress further in a formal education setting, we pursue vocational training for them. We have two young men that graduated from a mechanics program and one apprenticing now. We have one child certified in AC repair and one currently apprenticing. We have one young man struggling to find a path; he is informally training with a friend of our staff who is teaching him how to fix motors. We have four children living at the Caritas Vocational School—they are learning cooking, serving, and salon work. Two are about to graduate from the restaurant services program while one is having trouble finding a job. We wonder what we will we do for her next.

Pathway #3: If a child cannot function well at a conventional school or job, then we will create a position for them at the RCC. One of our young women is now employed as a cleaner for our dorms and loves her job. There are others who may end up on our payroll as well as in our care.

Pathway #4: Some children are severely handicapped and may need to be cared for by TSF forever, and we will happily provide them that love and care.

Sadly we have a few children for whom we have been unable to find or maintain a path. Children have been derailed by drugs, pregnancy, and defiance. But we never let them go. For example, one of our children became addicted to drugs; we helped him get into a rehab program in 2018 and he is now succeeding in a mechanical workshop. One of our young university students got off track by becoming pregnant. She wants to go back to university and she will. We work hard to make each one of them successful individuals.

Some of our kids do end up going their own way. Six children who chose not to stay with us are still under our watchful eye. Two of these kids, who are HIV positive, receive an allowance from us to come back and get necessary medical care. We train them about what this means for their way of life. Sometimes when a child is ready to move on, Elephant and Pen Ron will find a relative willing to take them in. We will assist the relative with a small monthly allowance to help pay for food and shelter. But we eventually lose touch with a few. They might surprise us by calling for help with a child some day or a desire to visit. We will always help. We will always give them hope. They know the Sharing Foundation door is open to them. TSF



Luck Definitely Helped

Laurie Simons, Ann Trudeau & Nancy Hendrie

Recently Ann and I sat down to talk with Nancy Hendrie about TSF origins and growth over the early part of its first 25 years. It was a lively and thought-provoking conversation. Time and again, Nancy highlighted the unpredictable and random good luck that so often helped TSF in its formative years.

When Nancy first arrived in the 1990's, Cambodia was a different place than it is today. There was virtually no knowledge about birth control, HIV+ was rampant and poverty meant many children were dying needlessly. Foreign adoptions had recently begun and some individuals viewed this as an opportunity for profit, with no real interest in the welfare of the children. Visiting multiple orphanages on the first trip, Nancy could easily see that simple changes could make great improvements. In one orphanage, basic toilets could replace the existing design of stool and urine being pushed through cracks between floorboards into an open cesspool. Regular bathing with soap and water could control skin infections, and clean bedding and clothing could minimize scabies. Not massively overdiluting formula could save lives from malnutrition as well.

At one orphanage, Nancy witnessed a box left outside the orphanage gates that contained two babies, one alive, one not. Both had wide cleft lips and absent palates. They took in the surviving baby and fed her drop by drop with a strengthened French formula. When Nancy returned to the US, she brazenly visited the chief of Pediatric Plastic Surgery at Massachusetts General Hospital, Dr. Michael Lewis, to ask if he would operate, pro bono, if the baby was brought to the U.S. He said yes. On her next trip, Nancy and the baby sat near a group of college guys for the 33 hour flight back to Boston; the young men couldn't do enough for them, helping to feed and hold the baby, and mix baby formula. After many surgeries, bone grafts, and dental implants, this child has thrived with her forever family. Luckily again, a sympathetic judge defied an adoption ban and allowed her to become a U.S. citizen. She is now a college graduate.

Continued on page 4

Dormitory Living...and Cooking!

Continued from page 1

The students develop a schedule. They work in teams of two and each team is responsible for shopping and then cooking in the evening for the students in their dorm (about 25). For some of the students, this is the first time that they have been responsible for cooking, and they need to learn quickly a few good recipes!

There is a great video on the TSF website in which Theary and Theara describe what it takes to cook for the dorm. You can watch it on The Sharing Foundation website under News/Updates/Newsletters! They describe riding their bikes to the market to purchase vegetables, chicken or fish, sometimes pork and rice. "Always rice!" they say. About $2 covers the costs of food for the evening meal. They like to make soups because they are quite filling, and they also enjoy a stir fry.

Dinner is served around 8 pm so that most of the students will be finished with classes and school work and will be back at the dorm. They all gather in the kitchen, sit on the floor around a large mat on which all the food is placed and they eat. This is also a welcome time to socialize and relax, at least for a little while. And of course, because the students are also practicing their English, all of the conversation at dinner is in English! They are getting quite good!

Theary has shared with us her recipe for soup that she makes when it is her turn to cook.

As a dorm member, I am assigned to cook and clean one day of the week for other members.

Because Monday is my day off from school, I spend half a day on dorm responsibilities. I normally go to market at 4pm to buy vegetables and meat. Today I made a soup which is the favorite food of my dorm members. It's not hard to cook and it spends around 30 minutes to complete. I can summarize the way I do as below:

1. I heat a large soup pot over medium heat.
2. After that, I put the rib and pork in the boiling water and add the soup ingredients.
3. The last part is putting the vegetables such as carrot, potato, cabbage and waiting around 7 minutes.

A little spice adds just the right flavor!

Besides the soup, I [make lots of rice] and also buy more fruit for everyone so we can enjoy dinner together. Some of them also help me to clean the kitchen. This is what we normally do in the dorm besides school tasks.

Theary said that there are extra spices to put in the soup because some of the students like their food spicier than others! Maybe you can try to make this too! TSF

NOTEWORTHY

All new 9th grade High School students have been sponsored! Thank you for answering our call with your support—you make a significant difference in these young lives.

Letters from sponsors to their students will now be sent three times during the year rather than at the time of Board member oversight trips to Cambodia. **Beginning in 2024, Letters will be due in February, May and September.**

This will give much needed structure to the process. Peggy Swigart will now be assisting Lee Steppacher in gathering the letters for the University program.

In April, the RCC kids celebrated the Cambodian New Year with specially prepared food and many celebrations.

It was another great holiday for our kids!

Luck Definitely Helped

Continued from page 3

Another Cambodian child was brought to Boston Children's Hospital with severe undiagnosed congenital heart disease. When Nancy called Dr. Donald Fyler and asked "If I bring this child to you, will you take care of him?" The answer was a resounding yes. Great good luck, again.

Even in Cambodia, luck often helped. In getting the land where the RCC is now located, Nancy and Elephant looked at many pieces of property for sale but many were not owned by the "sellers". Eventually Roteang was found, then investigated by the Mekong Law firm that Nancy had luckily engaged, and the land was obtained. Pen Ron was living on the land at that time, in a rudimentary shack, employed by the former owner to prevent squatters. Nancy hired him too and built him a small waterproof house. He has been our excellent Facilities Manager for 30 years now.

Of course, the story of Elephant is a major piece of TSF's great good luck. An adopting family staying at the same hotel as Nancy told her that they had a moto taxi driver who was smart and nearly fluent in English. She investigated and hired him as a driver. More than 25 years later, Chan Kim Leng, "Elephant," is our invaluable In-Country Director. He oversees all functions of TSF and, most importantly, is de facto Dad to more than 60 kids living in Roteang now and many more before them.

More good luck: While on safari in Africa with one of her grandchildren, Nancy met Mary Jane Gearns, who was also traveling there with a grandchild. They became good friends and, of course, Mary Jane heard a lot about TSF. She ultimately made two trips to Cambodia from New York and contributed major gifts to TSF including funding for the Girls' dormitory. She also arranged several opportunities for Nancy to give talks about TSF, including one at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in Manhattan.

Good fortune smiled on Nancy & Elephant!

In 2006, Ann Trudeau called Nancy seeking guidance on a possible family trip to Cambodia. Shortly thereafter the Trudeau family was enroute. Before their arrival, a playground donated by St. Paul Lutheran Church and School (via Denise Gosch) was delivered from Bangkok. The installation instructions were written in Thai, but Ann's husband, Tom, a construction executive, had no problem working side-by-side with the Cambodian team to set it up, concurrently teaching them some construction techniques. Such a lucky break for the Trudeaus to show up just when the playground arrived. Ann, of course, later became the president of TSF. A successful trip all in all!

Throughout our conversation, Nancy acknowledged the hard work that she, Judy Jones, and yes, you too, put in to make TSF work. You may have your own stories about how Nancy and TSF came into your life. They most likely echo what is written here, working for good, looking in all the right places and hoping for a little bit of luck. As Nancy would say, we are lucky all these things, and more, broke our way. TSF

Chance Meetings: Changed Lives

Continued from page 1

The second pivotal event occurred on the same cruise, where Steve and his wife and fellow passengers visited an orphanage in Kampong Thom, not our RCC, but another one. "There was a 7 year old kid who would not leave my side for 90 minutes…we don't have children ourselves and we were just so moved" by the youngsters who resided there.

On their return home Steve and Mindy had an epiphany—they realized that what they experienced on this trip, coupled with the passing of his parents, was meant to change their lives. In their Jewish tradition, the greatest service that one can do is to heal the world, a practice referred to as tikkun olam. With a small inheritance from his parents and the heart and mindset to heal the world, Steve and Mindy knew they had found in TSF an organization that they wanted to support.

Sowat put Steve in touch with TSF Board president Ann Trudeau and they exchanged emails, in the course of which Ann told Steve about TSF In-Country Director, Elephant. Over time, "Elephant became my hero. He is a real human with real experiences and he is making such a difference and we wanted to be part of it." Steve told his wife he needed to go back to Cambodia, and—spoiler alert—he has gone back, 8 times in all!

That first trip was in April the next year, which Steve remembers as the hottest time of the year and in some ways "the worst time to go." Steve met and traveled with Sowat, and one of their ventures was to Mondulkiri which was "a coincidence as I did not know at first that it was where Elephant grew up" and where TSF would ultimately sponsor education programs. A fond memory of that first trip for Steve was the "one night when Sowat and I taught a class in the English School. It was SO much fun—so much, that it was a key part of what led me to go back (to Cambodia) again and again and again."

Of the eight trips to Cambodia we asked for a favorite memory. "One time in 2018 we went to Olympic Market in Phnom Penh and bought school supplies and uniforms. Then Elephant and I went across the Mekong River on the ferry and visited Prek Char and Sambour and met all the students. While giving the uniforms to the students might be a little bit staged, it still brings a tear to my eye. I get very emotional and want to do more.

Steve, Mindy, & Elephant: A selfie!

I like learning about special projects that TSF has or special needs, like the Sambour playset or the roof on the Prek Char school needing replacing. For that roof project I told a contractor I know here in Colorado about it and got him and his wife interested and [now they are helping TSF too]!"

We asked Steve what keeps him and Mindy coming back to support TSF programs—what sustains his interest?

> **"For me, it gives me an altruistic purpose. TSF is honest and pure. TSF has very little administrative costs, unlike other organizations where 50% of donations go to admin costs, so our contributions go so much farther than elsewhere. We can make a huge impact…I love that TSF is so volunteer focused—it's like TSF is run almost entirely by volunteers support and we love that!"**

Kry Leang Hong

In addition to that, "Elephant really is my hero. He keeps me coming back, along with the humility (of the in-country staff), and of course the faces of the kids…" Steve offered a concrete example of Kry Leang Hong whom he has sponsored since age 13. "We've gotten to watch him grow. [TSF realized Beltei wasn't for him] and supported him in going to Caritas for vocational training. We have been so proud to see him grow and learn HVAC skills. I intend to continue to donate and to continue to go back each year." If all goes according to plan, Steve will once again visit Roteang with his hero, Elephant. 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

91 dollars for 91 years!

Donate $91 in honor of Nancy Hendrie's 91st birthday!

sharingfoundation.org/donate

The Sharing Foundation

P. O. Box 600, Concord, MA 01742
www.sharingfoundation.org
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
Emma Schumacher, Medford, MA
Korey Lee, Branchville, NJ
Jim Ganley, Portland, ME
Lee Steppacher, Norwich, VT
Marge Stockford, New York, NY

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