

NEWSLETTER 4

UPDATED 26th AUGUST, 2005

"Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day, teach him how to fish and you feed him for life."

Hello everyone, I hope you are all happy and well.

As usual, I've been very busy here both with the village, Prasat Char, as well as doing some photography work (no point becoming a beggar myself!).

After two weeks in hospital, the doctors gave Lee-a the all clear to head home. Both she and her father were very excited as they were really missing the village and their family. I went to the hospital to collect them and bring them back to my guest house where they were to spend the night before heading back to Siem Reap the following morning. That evening I took them to a restaurant for ice-cream, it was the first time they had tried it and they both enjoyed it immensely (actually I think Lee-a's father enjoyed it the most.)

The next morning I put them on the bus and sent them on their way. As I had a photography job to do on Monday I couldn't accompany them and I was a little concerned about sending them off on their own - but fortunately, they made it back to Prasat Char without any problems.



As soon as I was free I jumped on a bus and returned to Prasat Char as well. I found them very happy and well. Lee-a's parents were very grateful for our help and Lee-a seems to have really come out of her shell. Before the operation she was very shy and reserved (around me at least), now she has turned into a cheeky little minx - which is really nice to see. You can see her in the photo on the left with a couple of friends in a rice field. Lee-a was due to go and see a doctor again a couple of weeks after arriving home to have the stitches out but for some reason her mother decided to take them out prematurely herself, most likely with some very unsterilized implement. Hence, when I arrived the wound wasn't looking too good and I immediately decided to take them to the local children's hospital the next morning. The doctors cleaned and dressed the wound and instructed them to go back in 3 days. (I had to return to Phnom Penh again for a bit more work, so I hope they went back.) From what I can gather, the doctors didn't seem too concerned.

As they had no gift to give me to show their appreciation I was told that Lee-a's mother wanted to cook us a meal. I'm a bit hesitant about eating anything in the village as the water is dirty and hygiene is basically an unknown concept! But I couldn't get out of this one as it would have been extremely rude and ungrateful. They decided to cook a chicken and I noticed them take a live chicken up into the hut so at least I knew it was fresh - even if it was very scrawny (I hope it didn't have the flu). The photo on the right shows Lee-a's mother in her kitchen preparing the meal. After some time Sovan (my driver, friend and helper) and I were called in to eat. Nobody else ate with us but they all sat around watching. Fortunately, Sovan is the only one that can speak English so I was able to plead with him to take the chicken head and feet without anyone knowing what I was saying, there was no way I could eat them. The chicken head is considered the best part. The chicken itself was actually quite tasty.



After the feast we went outside again to discover all the children had been collecting flowers and had made them into posies to give to me. It was really sweet as they are usually so shy, but now that I am becoming more familiar to them they are relaxing more.

We returned the following day, after visiting the hospital, loaded up with more seeds, watering cans and tools. Its actually not that easy to transport 8 large watering cans when you are travelling on a motorbike! We get lots of stares from both other foreigners and tourists alike - its common to see Cambodians travelling on overloaded motorbikes, but not so common to see foreigners do so. All up we've given out 12 watering cans. Without watering cans the people have to water their crops using a bucket. They drop the bucket down into the well, drag the water up and then go and tip it on the crops. Very hard work. With the watering cans its still hard work, but at least its a little more efficient. They walk along the rows of crops with a watering can in each hand.



The photo on the left shows Mr Som's family proudly showing off their new watering cans. They seem to be doing quite well and are quite happy.

The photo on the right shows a woman who we had previously given seeds, watering cans and tools to. I think it is her brother helping her. She asked for some tools so that she could clear part of her land in order to plant crops. (Her husband has been sick in hospital for a very long time.) I have a lot of respect



for this woman. Every time we go to visit she is working hard on something; such as weaving mats out of sugar palm leaves to sell, making new walls for her hut, sewing clothes for her children, or working the land. I'm hoping that we can put in a proper water pump for her so that they can have clean water. I currently have Sowana, from the village, getting quotes on the cost of the pumps.

Another person I really admire is my friend and driver, Sovan. He has been so keen to help the villagers and yet he is dirt poor himself. One day we were near his home so he asked if I'd like to visit it, which of course I did. I was astonished to see that he



only lives in a very simple and basic hut himself and is not that much better off than some of the villagers.

Despite that, on a number of occasions I have seen him quietly giving some money to the poorer families that we've visited. (It sort of humbles you to see that.) Sovan's dream was to be able to buy a tuk tuk as most tourists that come to Siem Reap want to see the temples of Angkor Wat and prefer to go in a tuk tuk (he only had a motorbike). Sovan needed \$360.00 to buy a tuk tuk but had only managed to scrape together \$260.00. I didn't hesitate for a second to offer to loan him the additional \$100 so that he could get his tuk tuk straight away. As a result, the very next day we went and collected his shiny new tuk tuk and he took his first customers out to the temples yesterday. The photo shows him proudly taking possession of his new tuk tuk - the other men in the picture are the tradesmen who made it.

Well, I have a lot more to write about, but I'll save it for the next newsletter to prevent this one from becoming too long.

Take care everyone and "somnan laor dto nayuk" which is a traditional way to part company in Cambodia and means "good luck to you"

Deborah