

## Newsletter 6

*We make a living out of what we get, but we make a life out of what we give.....*

*Sir Winston Churchill*

Susaday and soksabai to you (hello and how are you)!

I can't believe how quickly times flies. Before I know it, it will be November and I'll be heading back to Australia to visit everyone. Don't forget you can click on any of the photos in my newsletters to see a larger version of them.

### CLEAN DRINKING WATER AT LAST



Can you imagine this being the only water you had access to for drinking, cooking, washing, farming, etc? This is all that many of the villagers at Prasat Char have available to them.

But thanks to all of you who have donated money there are now eight families who have access to clean, safe drinking water. By the end of next week I hope to have at least 13 water pumps completed, one at each of the poorest and more remote homes. The water from the wells they currently use (in the above picture) is absolutely filthy - its no wonder the villagers are sick so often.



In this picture (on the left), a well is under construction. They are a very simple design and reach down under the ground to approximately 20 meters. The men are using a type of drill to bore down to the water table, then they insert piping down to the water and it is drawn up to the surface using a suction method.

Completion of the first water pump - the children took great delight in playing in the water.



This man proudly showed off his new water pump. Notice how he has tried to make it look attractive with the addition of some plants and bottles (!) around the base of it.

### THE WET SEASON KICKS IN

At last some decent rain has fallen on our little village. We are supposed to be in the wet season at the moment but up until recently there hadn't been enough rain. Its now the busiest time of the year for the villagers as they all head out into the fields to transplant the rice.

I've made many wonderful friends here and recently three of them wanted to visit the village. There was Aline and Gregory, a mother and son from France, and Gianfranco from Italy. We all headed out to the village last Saturday, but little did I know how "inaccessible" it had become due to the rain.



In this picture Sovane and his Uncle (on the oldest motorbike I've ever seen) make their way precariously over the makeshift bridge.

We then had to leave the motorbikes behind and go in on foot. Fortunately, our little



party were all up for an adventure.



Climbing over rickety bridges with my camera gear hanging from my neck is not really my thing, so you can imagine my dismay when I finally managed to reach the end of this bridge only to find it ended in water! Talk about getting out of your comfort zones.



On this particular expedition we were taken to meet a couple of families that we didn't even know existed. The plight of one family in particular really got to me (all of us actually). The family consists of a mother and five children. This family don't even have a well to get their water from. The children have to go to a nearby river in order to get water and carry it back to the house. We plan to build a water pump at their house on Friday. I believe that this woman doesn't actually have any land as such to use for farming. Apparently, in order to get money to buy rice she collects firewood and sells it to the other villagers for their cooking. The children also catch frogs to eat - here's the youngest son holding up his dinner. To her credit, the Mother, ensures that three of the children go to school. The oldest one is now in high school though and as it is far away and he has no way to get there he doesn't go. I intend to buy them a second bicycle as soon as possible so that he can continue to go to school. We will also look at other sustainable ways that we can help them to improve their standard of living.



Fortunately, to that end, I've been meeting Cambodians who are proving to be a great help. Sophan is a Cambodian lady who lived in France for some time, hence she knows Aline and Gregory, and she is very keen to get involved and help with the village. She also knows people in the government which will come in handy when we have to make things official. I've also met another man, Roert, who I will talk about later in this newsletter.

On our wanderings through the more remote parts of the village we came upon a group of four men sitting down to a meal. They only had two bowls in front of them. In one bowl there was a frog that they were sharing and in the other there was ant soup. My first thought was "oh my goodness, I hope they don't get all hospitable and offer us some". Later that day when we visited little Lea's house (the little girl who had her arm operated on) we were told that a meal was being prepared for us and I had to tell the others that we had to eat it or it would be rude as it was being especially prepared just for us. You should have seen them trying to get out of it. As it was they only nibbled on a little bit and left me to eat everything!

Everybody thoroughly enjoyed their visit to the village. I asked Aline and Gregory afterwards if it was what they had expected, and they replied that the poverty was much worse than they imagined. There are people in Cambodia suffering serious food shortages at the moment (due to drought) and its been reported in the papers here that some people are actually dying from a lack of food.

Aline and Gregory left for France this week, but they have become very keen to help with the village and they left me with an "incredibly" generous donation (and just when I thought I was going to start running low on money). We have many, many plans for the village and now we will really be able to make a difference to these people's lives. My/our main goals are education and income generation.



Here's Aline, Gregory, Mr Dean, myself and Sophan at a going away dinner for Aline and Gregory. Mr Dean is from Australia but lives at the same guest house as I do. He is here teaching English.



Growing.....



Growing.....



**Grown** (well on the way to being grown anyway.)

Its very exciting when we visit the village and see them utilising the things we have given them. In the series of three pictures above you can see the progress that has taken place over the last month. Previously this land was all overgrown and they didn't have the simple tools needed to clear it.



The day after our wet adventure Gianfranco and I went back out to the village with a Cambodian man, Rouert, who works for an NGO (non-government organisation). Unfortunately, I forgot to tell him about all the water, which had actually risen overnight, and he came out in shoes, socks and business pants. Fortunately, he took it all in his stride - he's used to visiting remote villages and its just part of the job.

Roert's NGO helps blind people, providing them with free surgery if their eyesight problems can be rectified (a huge percentage can) or helping them in other ways to have a better quality of life. There is one man in the village who is pretty well completely blind as well as a number of other people with eye problems. Unfortunately, the blind man's problems can't be cured but Roert's organisation is going to help him in other ways. Two of the other people will benefit from surgery, which will be organised down the track.



Roert has a wealth of knowledge when it comes to helping poor villages and he's more than happy to share it. I'm so glad I met him as he is really keen to help our little village. In the picture on the right we are sitting in a house discussing the problems of the village.

Here we are meeting with various villagers who had come to see Roert about their eyesight. The deaf man, who we call Mr Happy as he never stops smiling, turned up with two more deaf people in tow. He claims I told him to bring the deaf people to meet Rouert. As I can't speak Cambodian, and he's deaf, I'm quite sure I didn't tell him anything of the sort. I wouldn't have suggested bringing deaf people to see a man from an NGO that deals with blind people. Anyway, we all had a bit of a chuckle. Personally, I think he had been having a little too much rice wine on this particular day - he was even happier than normal.



Sovane and I spent the entire day today out at the village, we left at 7.00am and returned at 6.00pm - both utterly exhausted. As well as supervising the construction of another water pump we are trying to do a sort of a survey of each of the 14 or so poorest families. We are gathering information on how many people live under each roof, how the family generates income, health concerns, literacy levels (very, very low amongst the adults), if the children go to school, etc.

It is customary for the people who are getting the new well made to provide lunch for the men making it. If we are there we are also expected to join in, which Sovane does with great relish. I'm afraid today one of my fears came true and I was presented with a bowl of ant stew. Fortunately there was also rice and chicken so I was able to bypass the ant stew. (Oh, how I look forward to some rice crackers and dip!)

Just to recap, with your generous financial support, some of the ways we've been able to assist so far are:

- Helping Mr Som when he was ill, as well as supporting his family back in the village, then after he passed away helping with the funeral expenses.
- By providing exercise books, pencils, pens, paints and other stationery to the children.
- We have provided a lot of clothing, as well as blankets and other bedding.
- We have supplied approximately 20 watering cans, numerous farming tools and countless seeds.
- We have organised rehabilitative surgery for little Lee-a (who had been burnt as a baby)
- We have helped a number of other ill villagers to access medical treatment.
- We have organised the NGO that works for the blind to visit the village.
- We have put in nine wells.
- We have supplied food (bags of rice, dried fish, etc) when people were really struggling.

In the future we hope to try and address sustainable irrigation issues - despite the fact that we are in the wet season and have had to traipse through water, there is actually a rather severe shortage of water. We hope to be able to buy some water pumping machines to make it easier for the single parent families to water their crops. We hope to hold adult literacy classes. We plan to run workshops on health related issues. We want to address cleanliness and hygiene issues - i.e. get toilets made. We'd love to see every child attending school. We'd also like to provide chickens, ducks, pigs, etc (perhaps through a micro-finance scheme).

### INTRODUCING NYUT



Nyut is the nephew of Sovane, my driver and right hand man. He is seven years old and he doesn't go to school as he is from a very poor family. Nyut was born with birth defects (most likely as a result of chemicals used during the war) which have left him with only small stumps instead of fingers on one hand, deformed toes on one foot and various other abnormalities. Nyut and his parents live in a small hut which only has two walls. Nyut happens to be one of the most charming kids I have ever met and I fell in love with him as soon as I met him. Until recently Nyut's family had no well at all for water and each morning Nyut had to take a cart out with a couple of old tins and collect water from someone else's water pump. Unfortunately, the people were very mean to him though and often told him that the water pump was broken. As soon as Sovane told me about Nyut's situation I decided we had to build them a water pump as soon as possible. I told Nyut's father what we were planning to do, but that in return we would like Nyut to go to school (and we would help out with the expenses). Both Nyut and his father were very happy with this plan. I gave Nyut some paints and paper and he drew pictures of buildings that didn't look like traditional Cambodian houses. When I asked him what they were, he told me they were pictures of the school. I took this as an indication that he is very excited about going to school. School is supposed to be free here, but as the teachers only get paid around \$15.00 (yes, that's fifteen dollars) a month they have to collect more money off the children in order to get by. If they don't pay the teacher, the teacher won't teach them. We are currently at the stage of organising to get him into the school and will take him out this week to buy a school uniform. The water pump has also been installed and Nyut no longer has to go out to collect water.



For a seven year old, Nyut is a very good "hunter and gatherer". He goes fishing for little fish to make soup out of and he goes off into the forests to scavenge for fruits and insects that the family can sell at the market. Cambodians eat frogs, spiders, ants, crickets and giant beetles that look like 10cm long cockroaches, as well as other assorted creatures. Nyut takes great delight in scaring me with his wriggling bags full of big beetles. Actually, he thinks its hilarious if he can raise a scream out of me (which isn't too difficult as these beasts are BIG.)

Nyut has a great sense of humour. Recently he was with me while I was doing some art

work with other children and he reached out to pat a dog. The dog, not knowing Nyut, snapped at his hand. Quite concerned he'd been bitten I asked him if he was alright while reaching for the bitten hand, but, quick as a wink and with a big grin, Nyut raised the hand that had no fingers on it.

Well, everyone I'll sign off now, so much love to you all and I'll see some of you in the not too distant future.

*Deborah*

P.S. I've heard that the chicken flue is making big headlines back home, but its not really a big deal here. I think its just like SARS - all scare mongering, just because it MIGHT affect those of us in the West. Do you know that Cambodia never had a single case of SARS and yet because of the media attention no tourists came here that year, which obviously hurt the country. Meanwhile hundreds and hundreds of poor Cambodian children were dying (and still are) of Denghi Fever and no-one took any notice. I wonder how differently we in the West would react to the problem of starvation if it was a disease that we could catch and not something that only affected poor people. Anyway, sorry, I'll get off my high horse and sign off. *(Quite frankly though, I've not noticed any of the chooks out at the village sneezing or running about with runny noses!)*