



BUILD CAMBODIA

ស្ថាបនាស្រុកខ្មែរ

Trip Report | June 2006



BUILD CAMBODIA
ស្ថាបនាស្រុកខ្មែរ

SUNDAY | 06.18.2006

Depart United States

TUESDAY | 06.20.2006

Arrive in Siem Reap

Welcome dinner with Professor Kheang Un, Northern Illinois University

WEDNESDAY | 06.21.2006

Breakfast with David Shoemaker, medical education director at Angkor Hospital for Children

9 Angkor Hospital for Children

Roundtable discussion at hospital with staff and medical personnel

11 Seng Kheang Primary School

Discussion with teachers and principal

Lunch at Chez Sop'héa

13 Angkor Wat Temple

15 Ta Prohm Temple

Dinner at Viroth

17 Trip Reflection by Lori Jackson

THURSDAY | 06.22.2006

19 Transcultural Psychosocial Organization

Lunch with Vannary and Theara from Transcultural Psychosocial Organization

21 Village of Lvea Choum

Tour of village and wells

Dialogue with village women and older children

Arrive in Phnom Penh

Dinner at Amanjaya Hotel with Joseph Linn, student from John Marshall Law School, and Professor Kheang Un, Northern Illinois University

FRIDAY | 06.23.2006

Breakfast with Cornelia Häner, vice director/surgical director at Sihanouk Hospital Center of Hope

23 Sihanouk Hospital Center of Hope

Tour Sihanouk Hospital Center of Hope and viewing of hospital lottery

Roundtable discussion with Cornelia Häner and medical staff

Lunch at La Marmite

25 United States Embassy briefing by U.S. Ambassador Mussomeli and his staff

27 Documentation Center of Cambodia

Tour of Documentation Center of Cambodia by Youk Chhang, program director

Dinner at Malis

29 Trip Reflection: Michele Studl

SATURDAY | 06.24.2006

Breakfast with Scott Neeson, executive director of Cambodian Children's Fund, and Allie Hoffman

31 Steung Meanchey Garbage Dump

Briefing by Scott Neeson on Cambodian Children's Fund

33 New Island Clothing

Tour of garment factory by Adrian Ross, general manager of New Island Clothing

Lunch at Friends Café

35 Cambodian Children's Fund performance

Dinner at Boat Noodle with Cambodian journalists

SUNDAY | 06.25.2006

37 Village of Veal Thom

39 Choeung Ek Memorial and The Killing Fields

41 Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum and Security Prison-21

Dinner with Ellen Minotti and Chea Vannath at Luna D'Autunno

43 Trip Reflection by Susan Axelrod

MONDAY | 06.26.2006

45 Royal University of Phnom Penh

Roundtable with faculty, deans and students at Royal University

Lunch at Catholic Relief Services

47 Cambodia Trust and the Cambodian School of Prosthetics and Orthotics

Wrap-up discussion and dinner at Amanjaya Hotel

TUESDAY | 06.27.2006

49 Hagar Shelter

Shopping and cultural opportunities

Depart from Phnom Penh

51 Trip Reflection by Nancy Stevenson

WEDNESDAY | 06.28.2006

Arrive in the United States



Vientiane

LAOS

THAILAND

Da Nang

Bangkok

VIETNAM

Siem Reap

Lvea Chom

Kompong Thom

CAMBODIA

BURMA

Skun

Phnom Penh

Hô Chi Minh City

Gulf of Thailand

South China Sea

Letters



Dear Susan, Lori, Nancy, Michele, and all our friends in the U.S. and Cambodia:

From the moment Kathryn and I talked with you about traveling to Cambodia together to our hurried farewells in Phnom Penh, our June trip was characterized by courage and compassion. Not a one of you blinked or hesitated in your decision to travel halfway around the world to a land of formidable challenges and a forbidding past. And there you were: visiting villages, eating crickets and talking with children—some of whom were filled with hope and some not. Sometimes, the experience was so overwhelming that there was not enough time to process our feelings. And, at times, we were exhausted by one more meeting or tour that frustrated our desire for the personal and the meaningful.

It was an honor for me to travel with each one of you. I was not sharing my experiences, but instead found myself experiencing Cambodia anew with new friends and companions. I was heartened to see how curious and caring we were as a group and how culturally sensitive our contact was at each of our meetings. More than this, though, I was touched by how considerate we were of each other, how patient you were with our trip plan and how much we enjoyed making friends with everyone with whom we came in contact. It was a thrill for me to be with wonderful people who had the spirit, the capability, and the commitment to grab a hold of Cambodia and make it a part of their life.

Memory is a funny thing. As time goes by, our worst experiences become meaningful—the good ones become golden and those few great moments become priceless. This is how I will continue to remember June 2006 with all of you.

Awkun Charan, Ed



Dear Lori, Susan, Nancy and Michele:

One of the memories I love most from our trip together was the day we stopped in the town of Skun on the way back to Phnom Penh from Kompong Thom. It was so much fun to see! What was initial hesitation and queasiness at the thought of actually eating a cricket turned into a willingness to try the new and different and strange. I loved watching Nancy's daring draw forth the group's adventurous spirit like crickets to a florescent light at night. You truly were the "Guinea Pig Ladies," willing to be the first to experience a Build Cambodia trip and give valuable feedback that will help shape the experiences of many trips in the future and ultimately affect a positive change in the quality of life for many Cambodians.

The truth is that I was nervous before our trip, uncertain of how it would go. My fears quickly subsided as I saw the way you gelled as a group, the way your inquisitiveness led you on and the way you were game for our packed schedule. With each day of our trip, we bonded over the difficult, the emotional and the inspiring as we looked for ways to serve a country in such need. It's true these immersion trips are fact-finding missions. One fact we learned is that fried crickets actually taste kind of good.

Kathryn



Susan Axelrod

Susan Axelrod is president and founder of Citizens United for Research in Epilepsy (CURE), a nonprofit organization founded by mothers of children with severe epilepsy that works to raise public awareness of the prevalence and devastation of epilepsy. Since its inception in 1998, CURE has raised more than \$5 million to fund research into finding cures and has awarded more than 50 research grants.

Susan is married with three children and resides in Chicago, Illinois.



Lori Jackson

Lori Jackson began her professional career in the business world—first serving as an accountant, then in various roles in the garment industry including product development manager at L.L. Bean.

Mid-career, Lori decided to return to school and pursue a career in medicine. She received her M.D. from Southern Illinois University School of Medicine and is now a second-year family practice resident.

Lori resides in Decatur, Illinois.



Nancy Stevenson

As a child advocate, Nancy Stevenson has served as a member of a number of organizations committed to improving the lives of all people, especially children, in Illinois. From 1991 to 1998, Nancy served as the CEO of Voices for Illinois Children. She was also a member of the Illinois Humanities Council from 1980-1990 and the Federation of State Humanities Council from 1985-1990. Additionally, Nancy is a life trustee of the University of Chicago. Recently, Random House, Inc. purchased her children's book, titled *Capitol Code*.

Nancy is married to former United States Senator Adlai Stevenson and has four children and five grandchildren. She resides in Hanover, Illinois.



Michele Studl

Michele O'Reilly Studl is a practicing clinical psychologist with offices in Winnetka and Chicago. A member of the medical staff of Advocate Lutheran General Hospital, she is also director and past-chairman of the Winnetka Youth Organization and a member of the American Psychological Association.

Michele is the mother of two children and resides in Chicago, Illinois.



Name:
Age:
Nurse:
Doctor:
Admission:

Angkor Hospital for Children

The Angkor Hospital for Children is a pediatric teaching hospital funded by Friends Without A Border, an international nongovernmental organization. It is dedicated to improving the health and future of Cambodia's children by providing medical, nursing and paramedical education, coupled with the highest quality pediatric care possible. We were given a tour of the hospital, followed by a question-and-answer session with doctors and nurses working and volunteering at the facility.



Seng Kheang Primary School

Chenda Smead and American Assistance for Cambodia founded the Seng Kheang Primary School in Siem Reap. We visited several classrooms and talked with the students, including one who was brave enough to give us all a lesson in Khmer. Afterwards, we had a brief roundtable discussion with the school's teachers.



Angkor Wat Temple

Angkor Wat is the largest and most recognized temple in Cambodia. It is believed to be the largest religious structure in the world. Our group marveled at the detail of the continuous bas-relief that wraps along the outer gallery walls, pictorially telling stories from Hindu mythology. We walked throughout the large temple complex, admiring the Apsaras that adorn the temple walls—2,000 in all, each with unique details of hair or facial expression. The temple was dedicated to the Hindu god Vishnu by King Suryavarman II in the 12th Century. The bravest of our group climbed the steep steps of the central tower that once housed his statue.



Ta Prohm Temple

Ta Prohm is a Buddhist monastery from the Angkor era that was rediscovered in 1914. The ancient hardwood trees that had overgrown the temple were left in place to give the visitor a sense of the condition of the other temples before extensive clearing and restoration took place. Few of us could resist touching the tree roots, which seem to drip like melted wax over the temple ruins.



Trip Reflection



I have very vivid memories of April 1975. A sophomore in high school, I was in the final throes of planning for my first-ever prom. My mom and I had purchased the perfect dress and the most awesome pair of matching Capezios. As were most Americans, I was blissfully unaware of events unfolding in Cambodia. Truthfully, until I started hearing about present-day Cambodia from Ed, I doubt I had given it more than five minutes consideration in my entire life. But, through an interesting intersection of fate and desire to shed the mantle of “clueless American,” I ended up traveling to Siem Reap and Phnom Penh. Sitting in my comfortable home today, the trip seems both life-altering and remote at the same time.

Cambodia and its people seemed to me to be “stalled”; the engine that drives personal and societal progress in the country having been so horrendously insulted that it has not been repaired three decades later. The country still depends upon the “kindness of strangers”—foreign governments, as well as committed individuals—to meet its citizens’ most basic needs. And, we met some of the most remarkable “strangers”—many with the oddly similar story of having intended to stay only three months when they journeyed to Cambodia initially. Most have stayed many years, and have dedicated huge chunks of their lives to improving the day-to-day lives and future prospects of complete strangers. Their stories and the work they do are both inspiring and intimidating.

While in Cambodia, it is easy to get caught up in the euphoria of the good deeds witnessed. It is much more difficult for the average overextended and somewhat self-absorbed American to stay engaged. And, yet, thoughts of the country, its history and its people continue to invade my daily thoughts. During my first night on call back in the U.S., I admitted a patient with chest pain for the standard “rule out myocardial infarction.” I thought at the time that his one night of care in the hospital cost much more than the total cost of all the health care the average Cambodian can expect in a lifetime. As I read and learn more, I am not proud of the role my government played in strengthening and protecting the Khmer Rouge. This new knowledge informs my thoughts regarding Iraq. Most frequently, I find myself thinking about the cost of consumer goods in terms of what that amount of money would do in Cambodia—immunizations for a child scavenging the garbage dump versus a sweater, intravenous steroids for a child in respiratory distress versus a manicure and pedicure, a much-needed well or a cow for a village versus a gourmet dinner.

Today, I view myself as a reforming self-absorbed, head-in-the-sand American. I have learned a tiny bit about one country with a history almost incomprehensibly different from my own. I have contemplated why it matters to know and to care. I have seen the transformative nature of good works. And, I had the most incredible mango daiquiri...



ឧបត្ថម្ភដោយសេវា
ក្រសួងស្ថាប័នស្រុក

Transcultural Psychosocial Organization

Massive trauma from nearly three decades of upheaval has caused psychosocial and mental health problems across Cambodian communities. According to Transcultural Psychosocial Organization (TPO) data, more than 40 percent of Cambodians suffer from a stress-related mental disorder. TPO treats thousands of people who have suffered from the psychosocial consequences of mental trauma. We met with the staff of TPO while visiting the clinic compound and learned about the work of one of Cambodia's psychiatrists.



Village of Lvea Chom

Lvea Choum is a small village in the province of Kompong Thom that we traveled to on our way to Phnom Penh from Siem Reap. This village was introduced to us through contacts at the Transcultural Psychosocial Organization. While Ed met with the men of Lvea Choum, the women in our group had an eye-opening talk with the women of the village. They spoke frankly with us about their daily lives and the hardships they suffer. These meetings were followed by a tour of the village, their homes and a number of the wells that were built with funds donated following Build Cambodia's last visit.



Sihanouk Hospital Center of Hope

The Sihanouk Hospital Center of Hope delivers 24-hour, high-quality, free medical care for those who could not otherwise afford it, while also furthering the education and clinical training of Cambodian medical professionals. The hospital has treated one-half million patients free of charge since its doors opened in 1997 and employs a lottery system to determine which patients it will be able to see on a daily basis. On the day we visited, approximately 230 individuals entered the lottery but only 26 were admitted to the hospital. After witnessing this great need, we toured the hospital and met with several doctors and nurses for a question-and-answer session about their work.



United States Embassy

We had the opportunity to meet with United States Ambassador to Cambodia Joseph Mussomeli at the United States Embassy. During this meeting, we had an open dialogue with the Ambassador about the relationship between the United States and Cambodian governments, Cambodian adoption and refugee status, as well as other current issues.

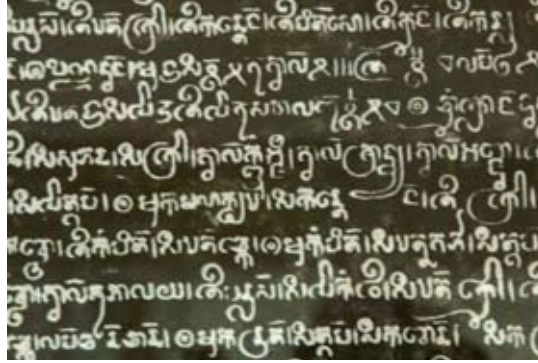


Documentation Center of Cambodia

Since its inception in 1995, the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam) has been at the forefront of documenting the crimes and atrocities of the Khmer Rouge era. Operated entirely by Cambodians with support from scholars and experts in the United States, Europe and Asia, DC-Cam is run by Program Director Youk Chhang, a survivor of the Khmer Rouge's Killing Fields. DC-Cam's main objectives are to record and preserve the history of the Khmer Rouge regime for future generations, as well as to compile and organize information that can serve as potential evidence in a legal accounting for the crimes of the Khmer Rouge. We spoke with Youk Chhang regarding his work at DC-Cam and the upcoming Khmer Rouge Tribunals.



Trip Reflection



Although I had traveled through third-world countries before, I appreciated the “insider’s view” that was afforded by traveling with Build Cambodia.

No other tour, photograph, book or lecture could have evoked the shocking emotion that we experienced at the Steung Meanchey garbage dump. Nor could it have shown us the juxtaposition of hope and desperation in the patients waiting for the lottery at Sihanouk Hospital of Hope to begin. No other tour would have allowed us to enter the homes and hold the hands of the strong women living and surviving in the small and isolated village of Lvea Choum. Build Cambodia provided us with the opportunity to be moved by the hopefulness and eagerness of students attending the Royal University in Phnom Penh.

I left Cambodia feeling that the issues and challenges facing the country are overwhelming, but surmountable. We were lucky enough to meet several people that demonstrated to us how one person can make an incredible difference in the lives of others.

As a clinical psychologist, I had given some thought before the trip about how one could adapt Western models of psychotherapy to fit Cambodian constructs of mental health. Now, I see that what Cambodians need first are relationships with caring people they can trust and to have their most basic psychological and physical needs met.

Maslow’s hierarchy was referenced frequently during the trip. If one doesn’t have food and clean water, nothing else much matters. This presents a tremendous opportunity to make a huge difference with a small effort.



Steung Meanchey Garbage Dump

Steung Meanchey is Phnom Penh's municipal garbage dump. This dump is also home to many Cambodia children and their families who come to the dump in the hopes of earning a living by reselling hard metals and plastics they scavenge from the trash. We were able to get an in-depth tour of the area by Scott Neeson, founder of the Cambodian Children's Fund, which is working to relocate many of these children into clean, livable environments.



Cambodia Children's Fund

The Cambodian Children's Fund (CCF) was established in 2003 as a safe house providing secure shelter and nutritional meals within a caring environment for children living on the Steung Meanchey garbage dump. CCF shelters now serve more than 200 children, providing a comprehensive curriculum to supplement their public school education and an in-house health care center offering the medical attention these children have long gone without. We visited the facility directly after visiting the dumpsite, and were able to see the children in their classes and tour their living quarters. That same evening, we were treated to a performance by CCF children that included the traditional music, dance and drama that they learn in their classes during the day.



New Island Clothing

UK-owned New Island Clothing employs hundreds of Cambodians, mostly women, to produce clothes for the Marks & Spencer clothing brand. The majority of factory workers in Cambodia purchase their lunch from street vendors who often prepare the food in unsanitary conditions. Aiming to exceed international standards and improve the quality and cleanliness of the food available, New Island Clothing made the choice to have Hagar vocational programs cater lunch onsite to its employees. Our tour included the catering facility as well as the factory floor where we witnessed the laborious process of shirt construction.



Village of Veal Thom

Veal Thom is a relatively new village established by an ex-Khmer Rouge veteran as a place for those who have been disabled by landmines or ordnance to live in dignity alongside a culture that shuns them. The Cambodian government provided land and the World Rehabilitation Fund helps enable some residents to establish businesses that are yielding financial support for the families of the village. We met with local leaders and toured the village until the sky opened up with afternoon showers and we took refuge under the awning of a local shop



Choeung Ek Memorial | Killing Field

The Choeung Ek Memorial is located on one of more than 380 known killing sites in Cambodia. Those determined by the Khmer Rouge to be enemies of the Communist regime were taken en masse to these sites to be executed and buried. Most of those killed at this site came from Toul Sleng prison. This Buddhist memorial houses more than 5,000 human skulls exhumed from the surrounding field of mass graves. It is estimated that 1.5 to 3 million out of a population of 8 million people died during this regime. This killing field remains pitted where bodies were exhumed. Bone and cloth visibly protrude from the dirt paths, giving a fresh reminder of how recently this tragedy took place.



Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum | Security Prison—S-21

The Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum is a former high school whose five buildings were converted into a prison and interrogation center known as Security Prison 21 (S-21). Between the Khmer Rouge evacuation of Phnom Penh in 1975 and the Vietnamese invasion of 1979 that overthrew the regime, an estimated 17,000 people were imprisoned and tortured in S-21. Many prisoners, including Khmer Rouge members and soldiers, were accused of treason. Prisoners were brought en masse to be murdered at Choeng Ek extermination center. Only seven people brought to Tuol Sleng survived.



Trip Reflection



Just days before I left on the Build Cambodia trip, I met a woman who had recently vacationed there and she was so excited for me. She and her son had a “fabulous” time and I would just “love it.” Months afterward, I am still trying to figure out whether or not she and I visited the same country.

What I experienced on my trip with Build Cambodia was clearly not what the typical American tourist experiences. It was, instead, an incredible opportunity to truly see and experience the country and its people—their hardships, their heartbreak, their challenges...and their dreams and opportunities—in a way that I’m sure very few visitors have the opportunity to do.

I am grateful for the unique perspective that touring with Build Cambodia offered me. It was not an easy trip. I would certainly never describe it as “fabulous,” but it offered me an incredible opportunity to delve into a world that otherwise I would never have known existed. Months later, the memories and experiences are still with me on almost a daily basis and I imagine (and hope) that they will be forever.

The Build Cambodia trip offered me an in-depth and complex perspective that books, videos, or written or oral descriptions just can’t do it justice. Personal interactions with the citizens, sweltering in the heat and humidity, smelling the odors, sampling the fried crickets and spiders (some of us!), visiting the villages, the schools, the homes, the hospitals and clinics—these firsthand experiences opened my eyes to the enormous complexity of the problems and challenges Cambodians face in their daily lives, and also inspired me with the strength of the human spirit.



Royal University of Phnom Penh

Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP) is the oldest and largest university in Cambodia. The University closed its doors during the Khmer Rouge era and was reopened by a small group of dedicated people in the early 1980s despite a serious lack of human resources and infrastructure. The university slowly worked its way back to its former status through the support of the Royal Government and many international partners. RUPP offers varied degree courses and draws some of the brightest students in the country. We met with a number of teachers and administrators, and had a roundtable discussion with students regarding their courses and future aspirations.



Cambodia Trust | The Cambodian School of Prosthetics & Orthotics

In Cambodia, disabled people are disadvantaged by deeply entrenched discrimination, poverty and poor infrastructure. The Cambodian School of Prosthetics and Orthotics was established in 1994 by The Cambodia Trust to combat another area of disadvantage for the disabled—Cambodia’s lack of rehabilitation services. Today, the program graduates internationally recognized prosthetist-orthotist professionals and has become a center of learning for the region. We were shown the mechanics of prosthetics construction and orthotics fitting, and toured the school where we saw students from Laos, Myanmar (Burma), Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and East Timor, as well as Cambodia, studying in their three-year, full-time diploma programs.



Hagar Shelter

Established in 1994 to meet the needs of destitute women and children living on the streets of Phnom Penh, Hagar has developed a number of creative initiatives enabling vulnerable women to overcome past traumas and gain skills to become independent and productive. After emergency support is provided, the women are able to receive counseling, skills training and employment assistance. Hagar has also developed many successful businesses to serve as employment opportunities for these women, such as Hagar Soya (soymilk production), Hagar Design (silk handicraft production) and Hagar Catering (providing staff meals at hotels and factories). We toured the shelter and had an opportunity to purchase bags Hagar Design produces from recycled material for the Western market.



Trip Reflection



Driving along a road to visit ancient monuments near Siem Reap, we see blends of the antique and the modern: water wheels turned by foot power; oxen pulling wooden plows; water buffalo lolling in ancient canals; boys racing bicycles or driving motos larger than they; women on the road to market wearing long trousers or sampats, colorful skirts wrapped like sarongs, with baskets on their heads; wooden houses on stilts decorated in October with “scarecrows” to banish demons when “the gates of the underworld are open”; and, in most every yard, miniature painted houses on platforms for offering fruit, bread and water to the spirits. Our guide said that most Cambodians believe in a religious mix: Hinduism, Buddhism and animism. He, like many, offers food to the monks every October and scatters rice and fruit in circles around temples to fend off the spirits in the afterlife.

Small children, some no larger than my seven-year-old grandson, sweep the streets and sidewalks, picking up plastic bags, containers and other treasures. The recycling system is an income stream. The sweeper, young or old, sells to the bagger, who sells to the trucker, who then carries off the produce to sell to the recycling factory. We passed several overloaded trucks with boys riding on top, whooping with laughter as they ducked overhanging branches. Men and women wear long-sleeved shirts buttoned to the wrist. They wear covers across their heads and mouths for modesty, as well as protection from the sun, mosquitoes and exhaust fumes. We tourists, in our thin clothing and short-sleeved t-shirts, must have looked ridiculous to the acclimated Cambodians.

Six a.m., the riverfront in Phnom Penh wakes up through a dense blanket of warm haze. A naked baby wails beside his street-sleeping mom. Twenty-something boys play soccer while several male and female thirty-somethings play a game like hacky-sack. Street vendors hawk birds, buns and elaborately bound lotus flowers. Monks in saffron or orange robes amble in groups. An older woman with one iron foot speed walks with determination as sweat-suited youth jog past. The Queen, smiles down on it all from a 60-by-60 foot portrait, while boatmen oar “tooks,” long wooden boats, to shore, disgorging passengers and baskets of vegetables.

Every morning at 6:30, an elephant strolled onto the scene—his “walker,” attached by a slim leash, patiently bicycling slowly behind him. At this early morning hour, the street between the esplanade and our hotel began to fill with truckloads of workers, heads wrapped in heavy scarves, standing in their “taxis,” as rickshaws pulled by men or bicycles and chic women on motos in pencil-thin high heels—often balancing a small child in front-jockey for available space. Despite the chaos, a man on a low-hanging tree branch continued to sleep, unaware of the noise or my intrusive camera.

Ed Bachrach and his daughter, Laurie, had invited four of us to Cambodia. Together, they have established Build Cambodia, a not-for-profit organization designed to seek and support nongovernmental enterprises that have found innovative ways to bring progress to people in need. We hardly knew each other and we

were ignorant of all but a few basic facts about the Country. We knew that the ruins of Angkor Wat and Angkor Thom still stood as symbols of an ancient, powerful culture in Cambodia's remote jungles. We understood that the United States supported Lon Nol's corrupt government during the Vietnam War, providing arms and supplies, some of which were sold for profit while others were used to control or exploit local residents.

The U.S. bombed villages and vast sections of the country on the pretense of killing Vietnamese soldiers. After vacating Vietnam, the U.S. has done little to restore damages to Cambodia. We knew in our heads that one-fourth to one-third of the nation's population had been murdered or died from starvation and disease in the Pol Pot/Khmer Rouge era. While in Cambodia, we learned this devastation with our hearts as we heard story after story from all we met. The Pol Pot regime had made a practice of killing all those with special training or suppositions of skills. As an example, wearing glasses indicated the ability to read and therefore inferred education—and often became a death warrant. Schoolteachers, professors, engineers, doctors, nurses, economists and outsiders of all stripes were suspect and designated for elimination. Government institutions post-Pol Pot have not filled these gaps.

In a nation that traditionally values the family unit above all other connections, we did not speak with anyone who had not lost one or both parents, multiple siblings, aunts and uncles, or all of the above. The stories of loss threaded through every encoun-

ter: memories of the daily need to hide any past schooling or sign of prosperity, the long hours of work in fields without water or food, the pain of watching a mother slowly die of boils and infections, or a father who disappeared without a trace. All of this leaving a citizenry devoid of health, education and the skills necessary for recovery.

Cambodia has endured a long history of colonialism, weak or destructive governments, and aching poverty. It is now considered one of the poorest nations in the world, with an average income of only \$300 per person per year. However, with its rich culture and beautiful people, Cambodia generates empathetic attachments and has attracted creative leaders like the Bachrach to engage in spirited, thoughtful service.

We discovered that many of the NGOs (nongovernmental organizations) had been started by someone who saw a problem, had an idea for helping and contributed relatively small amounts of money combined with large amounts of energy. The Build Cambodia team took us to visit two or three such NGOs every day. At breakfast and dinner, we spoke with NGO leaders of projects ranging from hospitals and schools to libraries and an amputee village. The creative donors and volunteers we met came from Australia, England, Switzerland, the United States, the Philippines and two from Cambodia. With the exception of the Cambodians, the volunteers we spoke with had originally planned to stay only a few weeks or months, which then extended to a year, then two, then six or more.

Details help tell the stories. The Angkor Children's Hospital in Siem Reap, started by Kenro Izu to care for 30 very sick children, now sees 350 or more children per day, free of charge. They come from all over the countryside, often traveling for days at a time. The goal of the hospital is not only to treat these children, but also to train nurses, diagnosticians and doctors to provide health care for a society in which two generations of trained and educated professionals had been eliminated. David Shoemaker, who led us through the Angkor Children's Hospital, had come from Canada for six months to volunteer as a nurse. In the past six years, he has gradually become the hospital's medical education director. With emphasis on skill development, the current executive director of the hospital is Cambodian, as is the head nurse and most of the lead personnel—all trained from menial positions.

The most common ailment they treat is aggressive diarrhea, a factor arising from the absence of all but the most rudimentary water treatment facilities throughout the country. A doctor in our group noted the clever rehydration system that she felt our U.S. hospitals could utilize to great advantage. The less serious cases are separated into a small shaded room outside the hospital where they rehydrate using salts and water, without IVs or debilitating hospital stays. At the same time, their parents are taught techniques for water boiling and food preparation. Only the acute cases are given beds and the treatments that are common in U.S. hospitals.

Trip Reflection

We looked at the daily intake roster which listed, among others: snake bite, broken bones, malaria, malnutrition, typhoid and HIV&AIDS – always listed under a euphemism to prevent unduly frightening other families. All children are accompanied by family members, often the grandmothers or grandfathers who can be spared from village and home duties back in their communities. The hospital maintains a garden and a kitchen to train relatives in general nutrition and health care.

No volunteer is turned away: cancer specialists, nurses, computer technicians, drivers. One eye surgeon uses his two-week vacation to fly from the U.S. to conduct cataract operations. The visiting surgeon who treats cleft palates has come so often the hospital is almost running out of palate disorders. A nurse wanted to do home visits to educate villagers about the complicated retrovirals that treat HIV&AIDS. This project has expanded to a home visit system that reaches families in 200 or more communities. Thus, a thriving central hospital with a yearly budget of under \$3 million a year has grown from a small initiative.

We visited a hospital in Phnom Penh that started like Angkor Children's Hospital, with a generous donation and the radical idea of treating—free of charge—all the sick who come to its door. In this case, the daily crowds are so huge that they take in the patients using a triage system that enables them to first treat the most critically ill, while all the rest are chosen by lottery. Every patient not accepted through the triage screening receives

a number printed on his or her hand with a magic marker.

Simultaneously, the number is placed on a card and dropped into a large box, much like a charity auction in our country. After all are numbered—this morning almost four hundred waited in the lottery, the box is given a good shake and a card is pulled from the box. Intense silence greets the reading as all study their hands. The number is read, a cheer goes up as the lucky card number is matched to the hand, and the patient moves from the crowd to the hospital intake registry while the next number is drawn from the box. We U.S. observers racked our brains for a less arbitrary system, recognizing that even as the hospital increases its space, beds and skilled professionals, there are limits to its ability to take in all who wait.

All volunteer doctors, nurses and donors of equipment are welcomed and utilized. The medical schools of Cambodia provide little training. Thus, after treatment, teaching is the first order of business. This hospital is also developing regional centers for diagnosis and treatment. Yet, the daily pressure and the lack of universal health care or adequate medical schools strain the energy and resources of the dedicated personnel.

We spent an afternoon in Lvea Choum, a small village south of Siem Reap. Few tourists, I suspect, have the opportunity to see this side of Cambodia. We had come to inspect a well built with a donation of \$300 from Ed Bachrach and Rick Jasculca to TPO-Cambodia, a Dutch NGO focused on

improving mental and social health in communities. Ed and Rick had visited six months earlier. The men of the village had spoken of their poverty and their heavy addiction to alcohol. One man in particular had an insurmountable debt of \$36.15. He had no access to water for his farming needs, thus no income. He would soon lose his land and his family would starve. The donation of \$300 bought the concrete liners for the well and paid the debtor hourly wages for digging his own well. He had paid off his loans, retrieved his lands, and developed water for his crops and family. He and other village men established a support group to diminish their reliance on alcohol.

While Ed met again with the men, the women of our group met with women of the village. “The people also lived in houses raised from the ground,” said a report in the Annals of the Southern Qi Dynasty (AD 479-501) and they still do. On a stifling day, we sat relatively cool on grass mats under one of these wooden houses with nursing mothers, old grannies like me and curious youth of all ages arranged along the sides. They told us something of their lives: hard work, poverty and men who—at least in this village—drink to excess. Few women had opportunities for school and many spoke of occasional rape, sometimes by their own husbands. One woman, who I thought was the village elder like me, led us with evident pride on a walk to her house, smaller than most in the village. She led us up bamboo steps into her two-roomed home. We volunteered to enter two by two, fearful that our Western size and weight might harm her home. Fiber mats stretched

across the floors and walls, letting in essential air from all sides. Hammocks held the clothes and utensils of every day life. In her 10'x10' space, she had created a spotless, tidy home that she shared with her 15-year-old son, now sick and probably dying of typhoid as she no longer had sufficient funds for medication. Even if the son was her grandson, she could not have been an old granny like me, but was instead a woman aged by hard work, ill health and poverty.

It turned out that Rick and Ed's \$300 gift had actually paid for two wells. We visited a second village and another proud man who poured buckets of clean water over the wellhead while he held his fat and happy son.

Perhaps the greatest shock to our U.S., indeed our humanitarian, sensibilities came from our trip to the Steung Meanchey Garbage Dump in Phnom Penh. Here, garbage trucks arrive steadily to disgorge human, household and hospital waste in a dump perhaps ten or more city blocks large. As the trucks arrive, streams of small children encased in boots twice the size of their feet, women shrouded in heavy face covers and muscled teens in baseball caps elbow their way to the belching innards of the city garbage truck. With a tool looking like a cross between a fisherman's gaff and a weed-ing weapon, each grabs for a prize from the mechanical monster. The smell overwhelms some observers; the fear of being crushed deters others. I still recoil from the memory of one small child, too shrouded for me to know the gender, shaking off the needle from

a hypodermic syringe and placing the, I gathered valuable, cylinder in its bag. After seeing this one hypodermic redeemer, others popped into view. Perhaps this truck came from an area with hospital waste or perhaps all trucks in this land of ready dope dealers contain ample supplies of hypodermics. Just before we moved away from the dumping trucks, I saw one triumphant young boy, perhaps five—though ages are hard to distinguish from size or shape, leave the crowd to open a retrieved bag. He gobbled the contents with eager scoops from his garbage-dirtied hands.

The Cambodian Children's Fund is another entrepreneurial NGO. An Australian photographer, Scott Neeson, traveled to Cambodia, saw the kids mining the dump and gave up his successful Hollywood film career to restore lives. Like so many, he came to visit and has stayed. Without help, the children face intense pressures. The boys have few opportunities for jobs; income from trash or crime is their alternative. The girls are valuable for sex trafficking, a lucrative field in Cambodia. Fathers, brothers and strangers have been known to sell the girls, sometimes as young as five or six, for the price of a bottle of whiskey.

Scott retrieved a few orphans and created a shelter open to all children in need. Those who come and are allowed by their parents to stay, receive health tests and the necessary medication, healthy food, clothing in the form of cheerful uniforms, schooling more lively than we saw in the public system and training for future jobs. As in the case of the hospitals, he started with a few. In one

center, he developed enough trust to create a home away from home for a few hundred children. The Cambodian Children's Fund has now expanded to a second center, housing about 60.

We trudged across the garbage heaps toward a small village of huts on the perimeter. Some families had built rudimentary shelters. The fortunate had cooking utensil and chickens—one family, even a clutch of piglets. Our guides from the Cambodian Children's Fund knew many of the children. "You didn't come to school today," Scott said to a child who leapt into his arms. "I was sick," she answered. "We miss you, come back now," he responded. He and all his workers know these kids are pressed to work the dump by parents desperate for their daily earnings of \$0.50-\$0.75 from the sales of retrieved items.

We visited the school by day, seeing eager children learning to read, write and speak both Khmer and English. One child with a Japanese sponsor was becoming fluent in Japanese. The students put on a show for us in the evening, performing traditional Cambodian dances complete with gold and red silk costumes, cardboard swords and stylized gestures. They wrote and performed a play with child trafficking as the theme, acting out the roles of the frightened girls and the abusive parents with convincing drama.

The personnel at the Cambodian Children's Fund—janitors, health workers and teachers—all firmly believe that the infusion of healthy life habits, education, art and technical skills, plus that intangible factor of

Trip Reflection

affection doled out generously and unrelentingly without personal demands, can retrieve, rehabilitate and permanently remove these children from the dumpyard tradition. It is a happy place to visit and from the comments of the children, a happy place to be.

We traveled by bus southwest of Phnom Penh to the foothills of the mountains on Cambodia's southern edge to visit Veal Thom, a village started by a Cambodian veteran. One of the nation's many amputees, Touch Soeuly, a former Pol Pot Khmer Rouge soldier, knew that his government-supplied prosthesis did not solve his problems. He traveled throughout Cambodia talking to other amputees. It is estimated that roughly 16 percent of the population have lost limbs to landmines, war and disease. He determined that they needed jobs and a community in order to gain self-respect and hope for the future. Gathering other families headed by amputees, he won a government land grant and founded a village. By pooling their skills, these amputees—many of them former enemies—discovered ways to level roads, cut trees, build bridges, and farm vegetables and animals for both food and profit. With the help of the World Rehabilitation Fund, they have learned skills for starting new businesses.

We also visited Choeung Ek Killing Fields and Toul Sleng, S-21 prison, both hideously graphic and painful proof of the merciless Pol Pot regime. No history can find any logic behind the tortures and ruthless practices. In the end, Pol Pot and a few leaders even killed their own formerly trusted lieutenants. It is necessary, I believe, to read

the stories and see the sites in an attempt to understand the control of the Khmer Rouge: the disbelief of threat that turned to fear and the fear that silenced protest. Without rebellion, survival—individual-by-individual, family-by-family—became the universal goal. From what I have read and seen, Cambodia's government has still not developed a national spirit of enterprise and efforts for change.

At dinner one evening, I sat next to a Cambodian news reporter. He spoke with passion about his village where few have the opportunity for education. With his salary and determination, he has opened a village library, the only public access to books for miles. The library is available for several hours, six days per week. He despaired, however, that he cannot rouse general support for the library in his village. Even his own family members, he said, make donations to the monks for added adornment to the local Buddhist temple, but they will give nothing, not even time, to his community effort. This story is just one anecdote, but his sorrow does illustrate the Cambodian people's resignation and disengagement after years of suffering.

We asked questions about political solutions. Cambodia is a constitutional monarchy with a bicameral legislature of both elected and appointed members. The King appoints the Prime Minister from the leadership of the majority party. We saw signs for rival political parties in many villages. Sam Rainsy, a leader of his own party, has been expelled from the country for expressing his views. Now returned, he is waging an active

campaign. I found few who would discuss these options, though some reported gradual political engagement at the local level. Long years of royal decrees, followed by several hundred years of royal collaboration with colonial rule and then leadership by home-grown dictators has not built habits of partisan activity, voting and speaking out.

Under the auspices of Build Cambodia, we saw individual enterprise at all levels—from the skilled nurses who began without knowledge of stethoscopes and thermometers to the charming self-taught photographers who traveled with us and charmed us daily with their gentle tact, humor, love of family and journalistic talents to rival the world's best.

Our six-day exploration indicates that Cambodia is a nation where relatively small amounts of money compounded by initiative and perseverance can, to use the old saying, make a difference. Countless efforts by individuals and nongovernmental organizations to rebuild Cambodia provide tangible opportunities for family health and happiness in villages and cities across the country. If you believe with Margaret Mead "...that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world," then Cambodia is filled with visions of hope.

Acknowledgements



Build Cambodia would like to thank and acknowledge photographer Heng Chivoan and videographer Lach Chantha whose work is featured in this book.



We would also like to thank Kristi Sebestyen and Erica Studl for their assistance in the planning and coordination of this trip.



Thank you for participating on this journey to Cambodia.