

Ratanak International

Ratanak was an eleven month old girl who died in 1989 because no medical supplies were available in Cambodia. In response, this charity is devoted to serving Cambodia's vulnerable and exploited.

Tears of Joy

Christmas 2012

A TRIP TO THE BEACH



The elderly ladies enjoy swimming during a recent trip to the coast. Many had never been to the beach!

The excitement was palpable. The big day had come. It was time for a trip to the beach only three hours drive from Phnom Penh city.

Unlike those of us in the west, going to the beach is a really big deal for the poor of Cambodia. Even though they are relatively close to the coast many have never even seen the ocean. To spend a day travelling to the beach is far too costly for those who subsist. A day without work is a day you don't eat.

So it is always a great day of excitement when we can plan a trip to the beach for



(Far Right) Staff member who helped organize the trip.

the kids in our programs. To drive over the last hill and catch the first glimpse of the ocean is always electrifying. Eyes pop, fingers point, grins appear and the vehicle explodes into excited chatter when kids see the ocean for the first time.

Later, the actual encounter with salt water and waves can bring tears of joy. Witnessing such childlike bliss is indescribable. Such a visit is a small thing for us, but for poor Cambodians it is an experience of a lifetime.

And so it was, recently another trip to the beach was planned. It was just like all the



Mouen (Left) and Bov (Right) wait to go swimming!

others, excitement and anticipation were building. But this trip was a little different. This was not a trip organized for the kids from a rehab centre; this trip was for the ladies of the "Elder Care Night Shelter".

The "Elder Care Night Shelter" was opened in 2007 in response to the number of elderly ladies, discarded by a post-genocide society, with no social services, who lived on the streets at night and begged in the markets during the day. In this situation they are frequently unwanted and abandoned or are sent out by families desperately in need of the income from begging. These elderly women are subjected to the same trauma as the children of Cambodia, falling victim to violence and abuse of every form, particularly at night. Their frailties prevent them from escaping those who would do them harm and so the night shelter is a vital place of safety. In the late afternoon, after a long, hot day filled with the indignities only begging can bring, you can see them tottering down the streets heading towards the shelter where

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they know they will encounter compassion, assistance, love and, that rarest of all commodities for beggars: dignity.

Since the shelter opened, many of their lives have been transformed. I have had the privilege of spending some wonderful times with these elderly ladies or 'the grannies', as we affectionately call them. These are women who have lived through the worst of Cambodian history. Civil war, starvation, genocide and tragedy are the markers of their lives. Many of them have witnessed the destruction of both their parents and their children. During one of my visits some of the grannies showed me their scars from the shelling and rocket attacks on Phnom Penh BEFORE the Khmer Rouge Revolution of the 1970's! Their capacity to absorb suffering and keep going astounds me.



Above: Brian McConaghy chatting with the 'Grannies' during a recent visit to the shelter.



Mon

Bouen

Yau

The shelter started small. At first, some of the grannies would not come, fearing it was a plot to get them into the building where they would be killed (such is the psychology after decades of trauma). Strangers wanting to be kind toward them was just too good to be true! But as their trust grew, so did their interest. Encouraged by a steady supply of compassion, tenderness and warmth, they have grown to love both the place and the staff.. and that has become mutual. As a result, many of these ladies have discovered the love of Christ and hope for the future – fine things to discover after a long life of suffering.

Despite their long suffering, when you sit and chat with them, there is much joy, resilience and humour. On my last visit they joked about which one of them I had come to see. I responded

that I had come to see them all – for “How could I resist being with the most beautiful young ladies of Cambodia?” They held my hands laughing through large toothless grins. It is a joy to be with them.

And so, in this context, it was time for a trip to the beach! Just like the kids, they had never seen the ocean. Just like the kids they were ready to burst with excitement!

Upon arrival at the beach they felt the sand under their feet, broke out their sun hats, poured each other tea and, tentatively at first, holding onto each other, they

went swimming in clumps! When it was time to go, just like children, blue and nearly frozen, they refused to come out for the longest time.

Before leaving, some collected salt water in plastic bottles to bring home to show friends or just to keep and remember.

So much of our focus at Ratanak is working with children that need our help. But our desire is to serve all Cambodians and so Ratanak continues to support many programs such as the Elder Care Night Shelter. In such programs we discover the joy of serving both young and old.

As you gather together, friends and family, both young and old, this Christmas, please do remember all those in Cambodia who suffer without family. Pray that they will know the light and hope of the gift of Jesus, the comfort of caring staff, and... fun at the beach!

NO ORDINARY GRADUATION

We had news from the NewSong rehabilitation centre recently that some of the girls have just graduated from the on site school! In their pre-NewSong lives an education was not an option. In post-genocide poverty stricken Cambodia the education system is still rebuilding after being dismantled by the Khmer Rouge and years of subsequent violence, isolation and instability. Therefore in many communities where access to education is very limited, parents see little value in, or future for, their children and sell them into sex slavery as the only means for them to contribute to family income.

With this context in mind, a graduation ceremony at NewSong is no normal graduation ceremony! Everything that this centre does to restore these precious lives was epitomized by one moving story from the day.

As part of the ceremony, all the girls receive a boxed gift and a certificate as a reward for their hard work and achievement. One girl, who not so long ago was rescued from the brothels in Svay Pak, upon receiving her award returned to her seat and burst



into tears. NewSong staff wondered what was so upsetting to her. Yet, when she was asked why she was crying she firmly said that nothing was wrong. She was simply overwhelmed that a girl such as her was receiving recognition and praise

for her schoolwork. She said that after everything she had been through she never thought she would live to experience such a happy day as this!

After hearing this, you can be sure that there were a few tears shed among the NewSong staff too! The counselors, project workers and teachers at the centre deal with the trauma, pain and tears of joy that these little ones experience on their long road to recovery. In so many ways they are the doting, encouraging, loving parents that many of these children have never had. How proud and moved they must have been to witness these tears of joy at this great moment of achievement!

At Ratanak, these wonderful stories of restoration and hope never cease to move and motivate us.

MAKING WAVES: AN UPDATE FROM THE PROYOUTH IRRIGATION DAM

We have had some great news in from the Proyouth Irrigation Dam! The Dam is now fully operational and is making the impact we hoped and prayed that it would.

Last year, before the Dam was built there had once again been the predictable grief and despair as communities lost everything to annual flooding. This year the rain has kept pouring on the north side of Siem Reap, but the communities in the drainage area of the Dam have not, thus far, been impacted even though the water volume is much greater than last year. After numerous

conversations with Reaksa Himm, who we are partnering with on this project, there were real concerns that even this Dam would not be able to hold back the waters, such was the extent of the down pours. Yet its defenses have held, and the flooding is under control!

Many local leaders, (the leaders who signed their commitment to this project in their finger prints) have been to visit the drainage dam to see how it is working.

For them, this Dam is a symbol of hope, which is generating many smiles and a sense of greater security among their communities. According to one local community leader: "No words can express how thankful we are for Ratanak International who have blessed this community."

Another piece of feedback was given to Reaksa by a local man who said upon seeing the vast amount of water that the Dam is holding at bay: "Without this we would be swimming."

This Dam is making waves, so to speak! Photos have even been taken for the Cambodian Prime Minister to view, and we also had reports of a group of Buddhist monks coming to gaze upon the effect that compassionate Christians are making in this community.

The Cambodian Government has prepared a formal document of thanks for Ratanak International as a result of this project.



Above: This picture shows the extent of the flooding that the new Dam is keeping at bay.



Right: The sign erected at the Dam reads: "The Hope Drainage system is funded by Ratanak International and built by the hard working people of Pook Commune with the Khmer Christian Center."

Such recognition is a great achievement for all involved at Ratanak, but the greatest thrill are the grins of people who had lost everything last year who, this year, are safe.

Please do pray for its continued impact!

RIDE FOR REFUGE IN SHARP FOCUS



'Ratanak's Fearless Freedom Riders' team from Oakbank, Manitoba!

Sometimes the idea of a "Ride4Refuge" seems pretty abstract. The destruction of children's lives in Cambodia just seems so far away. But something happened in the build up for this year's Ride in Richmond, BC, that crystalized why exactly we raise money to help Cambodian kids horribly abused by international pedophiles.

Enter Chris Neil. One evening this fall a flight from Asia arrives in Vancouver airport. A nondescript man, the world's most famous pedophile, gets off the plane. Fortunately he was met by the RCMP. His numerous assaults of Cambodian children are well known in Cambodia to the Police and the NGO community.

From there he was taken to the police cells in Richmond BC. The 50K Ride for Refuge route in Richmond actually went around the RCMP detachment. Those who rode this route on October 13th actually passed within a few hundred yards of the cells!

Somehow, for us, this brought into sharp focus the reality of what we do through Ride for Refuge. It is neither abstract nor distant. Evil is among us and we need to be a force for good. We need to stand up to such evil and we need to be seen doing so. Those who rode throughout Canada and the US this fall rode for children that desperately need protection from international predators – including those who live among us!

As a result of all the blood, sweat and tears that bikers across Canada and the US put into motion this fall, the fundraising target of over \$100,000 dollars was reached to help support the restoration of many of these precious lives! Thanks to all for riding with such purpose and making such a statement on behalf of the children we serve and seek to protect from the likes of Chris Neil.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Ratanak Reminder! New Mailing Address

The Ratanak International Office in Vancouver has a new mailing address that is now active! For postal correspondence with Ratanak please use the new address, which is: *Box 81038, Burnaby, BC, V5H 4K1*

This year has flown by, so much has been happening! The RAP home was visited by prospective girls in the first week of November. They enthusiastically moved in a week later. We are already over capacity by one. The demand is great. Pray the girls will adjust well to their new home. (More about this in the next newsletter.)

I am constantly reminded, particularly at Christmas, of the need to focus on what Christ wants for Ratanak and the people of Cambodia. Once again he has blessed us beyond my imagination this year. If we continue to focus on him then who knows what great things 2013 will bring. Thanks so much for all your prayers and support and I hope that you have a wonderful Christmas!

Blessings,

Brian McConaghy



Merry Christmas from staff at a partner run program, Cambodian style!

Ratanak



International

BRINGING LIFE TO THE KILLING FIELDS OF CAMBODIA

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