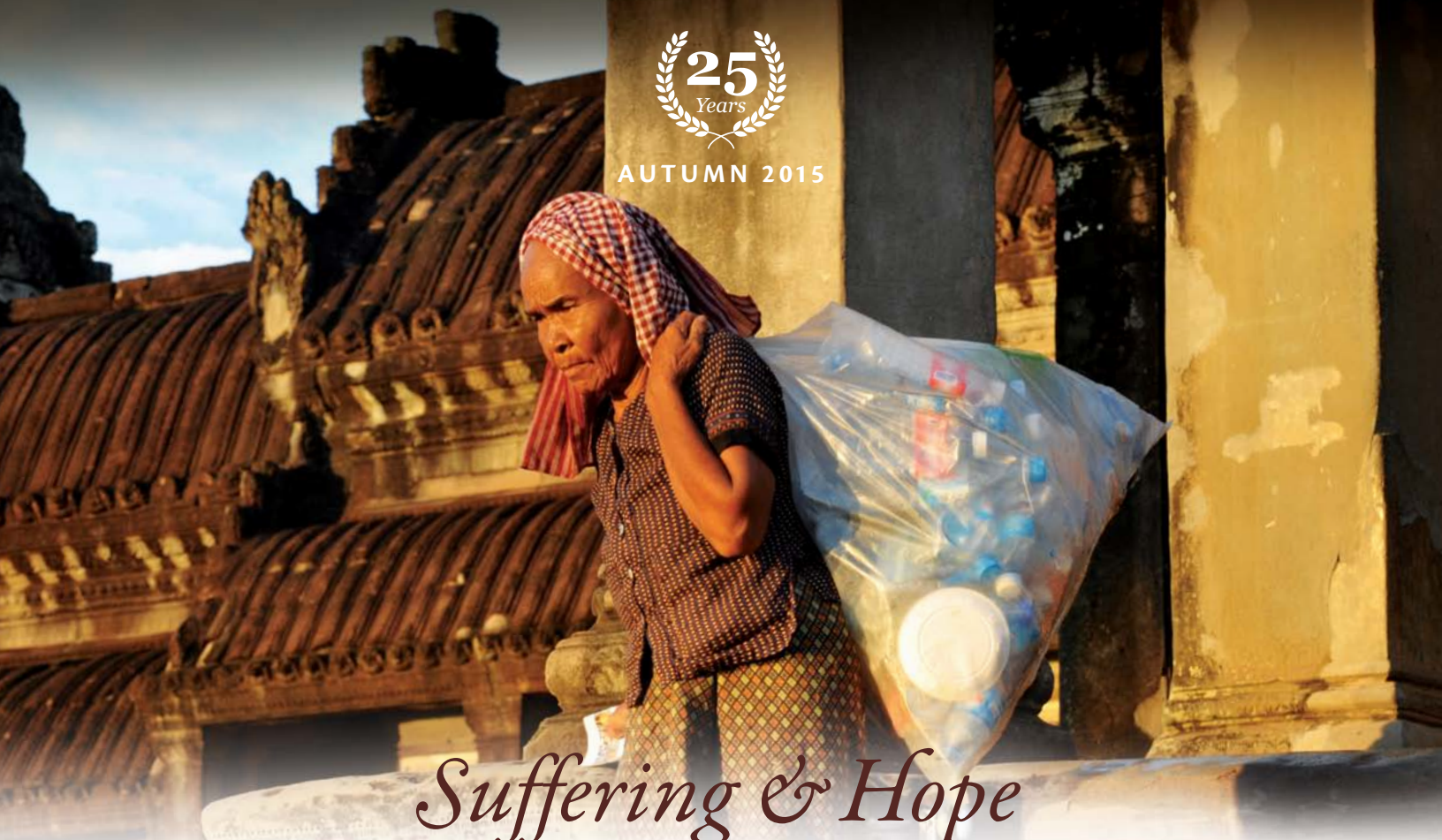




AUTUMN 2015



Suffering & Hope

PERSISTING IN LOVE – Ratanak has traditionally gravitated toward projects that do not have a great deal of flare or drama – projects that slowly but surely work to change lives over time, because that’s how true transformation happens. This article about the Ratanak Medical Care Program represents the heart of Ratanak in our day-to-day work with Cambodians. So many acts of love like this are taking place, even today, contributing to long-term transformation of lives.

The tuk-tuk bumped along through muddy puddles, jerking up and down with every new pothole along the city road. An early-afternoon thunderstorm had left the roads of Kampong Cham completely flooded, and I was feeling like a boat would’ve been a much more efficient means of transportation. The four of us in the cab – two nurses, one team leader, and one intern – bounced around in our seats, clinging tightly to bars or seat cushions, until the tuk-tuk came to a sudden stop outside a small wooden house.

Probably the smallest of all of the buildings on this street, the only thing particularly notable about this house was the large amount of plastic recyclables that spilled out from the doorway. Bottles, chairs, cartons – you name it – they had it all, and it was taking over the whole front part of the already tiny house. When I asked what it was doing there, Mony, one of the program’s nurses, explained that the woman who lived there was a recycler. The Ratanak Medical Care Program had offered her a small business loan to purchase a cart to take all of the plastic to a place where she could sell it, but a recent roadside accident had left her unable to pull the cart, so the mountain of plastic was slowly growing.

Bothra, the other nurse – being unable to reach the door – shouted up to one of the windows, hoping to get a response from someone inside. It took a few minutes before there was a small rustle at the doorway, and the sea of plastic began to part. A stooped woman appeared, cheerily greeting the Medical Care staff and pushing garbage out of the way so that she could join the five of us out on the street. She limped slowly toward us, cradling her left arm close to her thin chest. The skin on the back of her hand was bleached and spotted with dark, crusty scabs. Her right knee was also badly wounded, and there were little patches of pink, bloody flesh around the edges, evidence that she had been picking at



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Cover Photo credit: Emilio Labrador (Not actually the Ratanak Medical Care Patient)



it. She smiled and bowed to each of her visitors, revealing a few yellowed or rotting teeth popping up from soft pink gums.

The woman's daughter brought us plastic chairs to sit on, and we crowded together in a little circle at the edge of the street. They told stories, laughing and using hand gestures to re-enact neighborhood dramas. She explained that she had soaked her hand in hot water because she thought it would make it better, but it had really only caused more pain and scarring – the unfortunate results of a lack of basic medical knowledge. The nurses nodded, took notes, and interrupted with questions from time to time, but mostly they just let her tell them about her hardships. Mostly, they just listened.

When the woman finished talking, Bothra pulled out four tins of colorful pills and handed them to her: two kinds of antibiotics for the infected sores, and two kinds of painkillers for the internal damage. He repeated the instructions more than once, just to be sure that the woman knew when to take each pill. I naively asked why they didn't write the instructions out for her, so that she would be sure to remember. But, of course, written instructions are only helpful if you know how to read.

Once they were sure that she understood, Mony asked if she was keeping up with her HIV medication. She looked at the ground, and her hand moved toward her knee, where she self-consciously started picking at her scab. Shamefacedly, she admitted that she had missed a few doses. The nurses gently reminded her how important it was for her to take her medicine and asked if there was someone willing to go pick it up for her. Neighbors and friends were out of the question – people who are HIV-positive are stigmatized in Cambodian culture, and typically they are ignored or discriminated against by the people around them. Fortunately, the woman's husband, who was left undamaged by the motor accident, was able to go to the distribution center to pick up her ARVs (antiretroviral medication) for her.

They continued talking for a little while, but before long it was time for our little troupe to head on. We rose from our chairs, thanked the woman, and started moving to go. The woman stood up as we left, nodding and bowing with gratitude despite the pain in her joints. We piled back into the tuk-tuk and waved goodbye. Within a short thirty minute visit, this woman had received relief from pain, a friendly visit with people who would listen, and acceptance in a community that otherwise pushes her to the margin. She stood at the door, waving and bowing at the Ratanak Medical Care staff nurses as we bumped along down the street, on our way to another visit, another patient somewhere in another house.

Rachel Dale lives in Phnom Penh and is currently interning at Sunrise, the local agency that implements the Ratanak Medical Program. These reflections are from her first patient-visit in Kampong Cham in June.



The Ratanak Medical Care program in action with two clients in rural villages.

COPING WITH GRIEF IN THE FACE OF EVIL

On a recent vacation to New York, Brian's two worlds collided (he never stops thinking about Cambodia!). He met with Cambodian officials, went to the UN, and also visited "Ground Zero" for the first time. Walking into the 9/11 Memorial Museum, he was struck by a sense of familiarity. As a Canadian observer – an "outsider" as you will, to the events that have devastated so many Americans, he shares his personal reflections on a visit that became emotional and meaningful to him:



A memorial lists names of the victims of 9/11.
"There is a quiet powerful sense of reverence here – strange quietness even here in the bustle of New York."



Huge steel girders from the point of aircraft impact on the side of one of the towers.

Today was a sobering day as we visited "Ground Zero" and the 9/11 Memorial Museum. It was strange to be there, remembering the events of that terrible day. I first heard about it on my colleague's car radio as we drove into work at the RCMP headquarters. As if frozen in time, I remember so clearly that we were on Marine Drive turning north onto Cambie when the news referenced an aircraft hitting the World Trade Center. I remember wondering how anybody could be that stupid to drive their Cessna into such a huge structure... how little I knew. The rest of the day was spent in horror watching the torment unfold.

Today, standing among the artifacts and massive, preserved remnants of buildings torn apart was poignant but unemotional for me. It was all too big to grasp, too huge to comprehend... until I walked into a room where the photos of the 2,753 victims were on the walls. I'd been in these types of rooms before in Phnom Penh's genocide memorial! It was personal and the impact on individual lives profound.

I found myself mulling over the differences between the killing locations from the genocide in Cambodia versus 9/11 in New York. There is a quiet dignity given to those grieving in New York. Funding and resources have allowed this city to truly transform the World Trade Center location into a deeply respectful place. The understanding of the value of human life and the gravity of its loss is clearly present – a gift, I believe, given to this nation by its heritage of Christianity. This is contrasted by Cambodians, who do their best with few resources and even less understanding of the tragedy inflicted upon them.

Many years ago in Cambodia, I rescued a bunch of pre-execution interrogation photographs from being burned by men cleaning up one of the locations used for torture and killing. Perhaps these photos were the only record of lives lived and loved ones lost – how precious they are. But the photos had little or no meaning in a nation focused on day-to-day survival. This was contrasted today by the fact that we can't even take photos of the walls of victims at the 9/11 museum – so appropriately revered are the images of those who went to work that day and never returned.

It is estimated that the number of New Yorkers suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as a result of the horrific events of 9/11 is 422,000. That caused me to wonder... the Khmer Rouge slowly, meticulously and brutally isolated, tortured and starved the entire population of Cambodia over the course of the Killing Fields revolution. It lasted 1330 days (excluding the civil wars before and after this period), killing 2 million people under horrific circumstances. That is an average of about 1500 lives lost every single day for three years and eight months from a national population of 7.5 million. The equivalent per capita in the US would have been 68.8 million lives lost with no resources, doctors, treatment, counseling, social services or even supportive families. The plight of Cambodia as seen in such comparisons starts to come into focus.



Photographs of each victim of the attacks are displayed in a 9/11 memorial, very similarly to a genocide memorial in Phnom Penh.

But there is something more subtle – deeper. The US population (and much of the West) has been graced with a pride and dignity. The ability, if you will, to grasp its value. America’s robust national self esteem, while frequently mocked by those in other countries, is the glue which holds a nation together on days like 9/11 and it is vital in recovery. Cambodia has had such confidence shattered, and recovery (psychologically and otherwise) is extremely difficult. How does Cambodia possibly cope with its history? How can it move forward in the face of massive untreated PTSD? Yet they do so slowly – somehow. The US on the other hand has bounced back. Their understanding of the value of human life and the dignity afforded to the memory of victims is presented in New York with both beauty and humanity, to their credit.



A neglected rib cage and spine protrude from the ground along with the cord used to tie up the victim before the killing – Cambodia 2015.

My visit to the World Trade Center location has given me a new appreciation for the tragedy of 9/11, the dignity of the lives lost there and this nation’s ability to grieve and honour its dead. At the same time, I am once again called to patience, sympathy and prayer for the people of Cambodia.



With Thankfulness,



Brian McConaghy
Founding & Executive Director

News in Brief

UPDATES... DELIBERATELY LATE! – So often we can’t tell you about things as they happen for security reasons; it’s unfortunate but necessary. Some time ago we cared for a victim of human trafficking in an emergency situation. In an unusual twist for us, she had been trafficked into Cambodia from another part of the world. Praise God that she has now been repatriated back to her home country and is being cared for there. She cried when she left us and shared how much she appreciated the love and care of, not only the Ratanak staff, but also the other young Cambodian women we care for. Please do remember to pray for her continued recovery. We are thankful to other agencies and the UN with whom we collaborated on this case.

RECENT CHANGES – You may have noticed some changes to our quarterly newsletter! We have infused a splash of color with minimal change in cost, and we also adopted a new mailing system that is more cost-efficient. We continue to be committed to using your gifts carefully so that the maximum amount reaches those in Cambodia. We hope you enjoy our new color newsletter!

RIDE FOR REFUGE – Our annual Ride for Refuge will be on Oct 3, 2015. We are looking for team captains and riders to join us in cycling for Cambodia! We rely on people like you, who are passionate about making a difference, to create change in Cambodia. By participating, you are contributing towards better education, access to medical aid, and programs that directly confront human trafficking in Cambodia. Visit rideforrefuge.org/ratanak to join the ride today!

INVITE A SPEAKER – Do you want to engage your church, school or community on issues of justice in Cambodia? Inspire your friends and family to action and learn more about how God is transforming the nation of Cambodia. Visit ratanak.org/speaker to read our speaker biographies and invite a Ratanak speaker to your event!

Renew hope. Restore Cambodia.