

The Journey Home-Pt.1

Dear Friends,

I just want to let you know that Davik and her mother Sin's long journey officially ended on July 21, 2008 after a long tiresome trip from the U.S and a stop in Phnom Penh to have an audience with His Majesty King Norodom Sihamoni at his Royal Palace.



Our request for an audience with His Majesty was granted before our departure and both Sin, Davik, and the entire team was excited to meet the King.



We planned to spend only one night in Phnom Penh after our long trip from Long Beach. But Sin requested we stay an extra night because she was not ready to return to her poor remote village right away.

After spending two nights in the capitol, we arrived at Angkor Hospital for Children in Siem Reap where Dr. Lyda took a look to see how Davik's heart is improving. According to Dr. Lyda, a pediatric cardiologist, Davik's heart is still a little bit depressed. But he said not to worry. He also told us that two weeks after her medication runs out, Sin should bring Davik back to see him. ***I will keep you informed on the progress.***



Village - Day: 1

We brought Davik and her mother back to their poor remote village, Svay Chrom, on July 15—it was a very emotional journey for everyone involved. We arrived at their village at around 1:30pm. The weather was hot and humid. As soon as we got there, Sin's family – father, aunts, sisters, brothers, cousins and nieces ran toward the cars. In a few seconds, they swallowed us up. They screamed... touched... hugged... talked... laughed... and cried... a very noisy family reunion. Slowly, the neighbors, one by one, came to share the joy. Then, the strangers joined in. Before long, the crowd had swelled from about fifty to one hundred. While the reunion was going on, I peered through the crowd toward Sin's hut. It had no front wall. After a few more steps, I saw that there was nothing in it, only a few pillows waiting for them. A family member told me that the bamboo slats that make up the front wall had come off recently from the rainy weather.



After having witnessed the tears and the joy under the dark clouds in the rainy season, I cried. Davik led her mother to their little empty, tilted hut as thunder roared in the distance. Lakhena Chhuon's eyes (VP of Hearts Without Boundaries) filled with tears. Then, it was Chantha's (Bobby) turn to cry--while Michael Couto (my colleague from NBC News) moved in and out of the crowd, clicking his camera away to capture the best moments of the event.



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A few times Sin giggled as she placed her belongings on the raised slats that make up the family's floor and sleeping place. Occasionally she shook her head in disbelief... one hand waving at the crowd, one hand wiping her teary eyes. When I brought her last suitcase to the hut, she whispered to me, "I don't want to be here." I put my arms on her shoulders. She continued, "I feel like Davik and I have returned to the wrong place." Now, my eyes filled with tears too. "Can Davik and I travel back to Phnom Penh city to be with you for awhile?" she begged. I stared at her face for a few seconds, with sorrow. Then I reminded her that her journey to find a cure for Davik's heart for the past nine years has



ended with great success. As a mother, she should be proud and remain strong and raise her two beautiful daughters. After looking up at me, she said in a broken voice, "Thank you very much for giving my daughter a new life." Right away, I assured her, "You don't owe me anything. Just take care of your two daughters." For a brief moment, her face was touched with a little smile. Then, she turned away to greet more people.



Under the hot sun of the day, I watched Davik adjust back to her old life. It was like she never left. After changing her clothes, she disappeared into a crowd of children her own age... the center of attention. The children ran off to the small pond, laughed, played on the dusty trail... and spent a lot of time on the Ko Yuon (an open tractor) in the rice field, under the trees. Davik had a lot to tell. Clearly, she is a leader -- a strong and remarkable young girl.



Everywhere she went the kids followed. Not for a single moment did she show any sign of dismay. When I asked her, "Do you miss Long Beach?" She replied, "No." But then, a few moments later she said, "Well, Granduncle, I miss my new friends a little bit."

To be continued.