

The Journey Home-Pt.2

Village – Day: 2

As dawn broke, the morning sun shined into the village through broken dark clouds. A few dogs and a group of chickens paced around the family compound looking for their first bites. Sin and her family begins chopping vegetables and meats in preparation for the Buddhist ceremony, Sang Katean, (a blessing of a new soul) I arranged for Davik. The blessing is for a nine-year-old girl whom people in this village once believed had already lost her life to a heart defect.

The food preparation lasts all morning long. Just before the ceremony starts, the crowd swells to about one hundred. It's another huge gathering under the rented canopy.

5 Buddhist monks and an acha (priest) arrive. As they walk into the hut, an old woman asks me about Davik's open-heart surgery procedure. After telling her the whole process, she says, "Kon Nis Samnang Nas (This girl is very lucky). Right away she asks if it is possible to see the scar. I signal Davik to come over. Another woman moves in closer, then a second, and then a third. Now lots of people surround her...all waiting patiently to see the mysterious mark hidden beneath her shirt. As always, Davik is proud to reveal her trademark. She flashes her sweet smile at me and then turns to the crowd, pulling her shirt down slowly. The old woman's fingers reach out to touch her scar. As her fingers move slowly downward, I can hear whispering words float the air: "Pras Euy (Oh God) -- Yey (Grandmother) -- Ta (Grandfather) -- Meul Thney Chao (look at her scar)." A woman says, "Yey Sabbay Chet Nas (I am so happy!) Pel Klas Yey kut tha Chao Min Mok Ving Te (At one point, I thought you'd never come home)." The show and tell event lasts about five minutes under the open tent in front of Davik's hut, just in time to hear the monk's chanting.

Everybody presses their two palms and bring them close to their chest as the monks begin the ceremony. Davik makes her way through the crowd to be next to her mother who is sitting in front of the monks. The monks start to chant. The head monk blesses Davik, Sin and the crowd by splashing holy water onto them. It's a long chanting. The ceremony concludes after the monks are fed.

The afternoon is humid. An oxcart carrying a few kids passes by the village. A few minutes later, a bus rolls up the same dusty road and stops at the entrance to Davik's compound. A group of educators and students from Cal State University Long Beach and other schools, come out with suitcases. They are led by Alex Morales, a professor from CSULB, and have just spent 5 hours on the bumpy road from Siem Reap. Everybody is tired and hungry and exhausted. Even so, their visit is a big surprise to the villagers and the air is electric. This is the first time ever that a group of barangs (westerners) have come to this place.

Davik spots Alex and his group and runs to greet them. She leads them under the large canopy. Some of teachers and students begin to feel the stifling heat beneath the plastic covering. There is no breeze. The air has become hot and sticky.

Note: Alex Morales met Davik and Sin a number of times in Long Beach. He and his wife invited both daughter and mother to a fundraiser at their beautiful home in Whittier, California that they organized to support Hearts Without Boundaries.

The students and teachers open the first suitcase. It's filled with books. Then, they open a second suitcase. It's filled with *more* books. A young woman picks up a book to show the crowd, "All these books are in the Khmer language. They have been translated from the same English language books we use in America." Her words are quickly translated to the crowd. Their excitement grows.

The children wait eagerly for their gifts. Davik and Davin help pass out the books until none are left. The children compare the books amongst themselves, each looking at the others. Then come the pens and pencils. The children rush forward and grab as many as they can. Then come the pants and shirts... what a great day it has been for this village!

Through translation, the children thank and thank Alex Morales and his group. It is late in the afternoon as the group boards the bus--a 5-hour ride on a dusty, bumpy road awaiting them.

Before they leave, I hear one of the mothers say, in a soft voice, "I wish there were some rice too."

To be continued

A final note: during this last trip I visited a number of poor and sick children. Some of them may be good candidates for the medical emergency surgery in the U.S. This October I will travel with the same cardiac team from UC San Diego, sponsored by the Variety Children's Lifeline, to help repair more heart defects in Cambodian children at the Angkor Hospital for Children in Seam Reap. Last year they repaired 21 Children's hearts... and by the way, that's where we discovered Davik Teng. ***I will keep you informed.***

