



KEP GARDENS NEWSLETTER

May 2012

Hi Everyone,

Quite a time has passed since the last newsletter. I must try to send one more regularly but I get distracted and go off on a tangent when something new crops up and before I know it months have passed. "The road to hell was paved with good intentions".

A few volunteers have passed through making great contributions to the school. Lesley and Jan stayed here for a couple of weeks. Jan took some of the classes while Lesley organized water safety lessons at Kep Beach. The two younger classes participated so off we went on the trailer pulled by the tractor with the tuk tuk taking the smaller of the children down to the beach for two afternoons of swimming. The children loved it and the improvement at the end of the second day was huge. Most Cambodians cannot swim and children drown in ponds quite frequently so the emphasis was on staying afloat and acting safely around water. Lesley and Jan also planted seedlings ready for the veggie garden and Lesley helped with project management possibilities. They also covered the topic of CVs and cover letters with the Upper students. They both achieved heaps during their two week stay and we thank them very much for their input.



Marilyn and Bill didn't stay at Kep Gardens but came every day for a couple of weeks, Marilyn teaching the younger classes and Bill the Upper class at night covering interviews for jobs or study

placements. Once again, the students really benefited from listening to different speakers and the life skills that they taught. So we thank them also for their valued input into the school.



At present, Leona has been staying at Kep Gardens for a month and is planning on staying a further month. Leona has been helping with the younger classes, teaching one of our new staff the alphabet and how to write so she can join a beginner class in October in the new school year. As Leona is a teacher of English to adult immigrants in Canada she has been taking the Upper class every evening. I've learnt lots of different techniques from her and the students have benefited greatly from her expertise as well as listening to a different accent. Great for me as I get to do the admin stuff on the computer at 6.30 rather than 8.00 pm so I can have some quiet

time before I go to bed. I will miss her when she leaves. Many thanks Leona.



Our recycle man – quite often rolls up at 6.00 am Sunday morning!!!!

We had a big move recently. When we built the staff house 8 people lived in it but due to varying circumstances we ended up with only I staff member actually living here. So Andrew and I moved into the staff quarters – tiles on the floor, lots of windows to let in the breeze – bliss compared to the shed. So now we have a cleaner, cooler area which serves as a bedroom, office, school resource storage area and storage area for anything else you can think of.

Sopheak and his wife moved into Kep Gardens as live-in caretakers: Sopheak as trainee manager and his wife as trainee cook and housekeeper. They are in our old room at the moment but soon we hope to build them a house of their own on the property.

Pheara has her own room (the old tractor shed, the floor of which has been cemented and a wooden wall built on the outside and windows added for cross breeze) which she shares with female volunteers who stay at Kep Gardens.

During the rainy season we hope to tile this area too and add a couple of more windows.

Staff were reallocated jobs and Pheara and Sopheak's wife, Sothy have been taking cooking lessons, learning European style cooking from a lady who runs a restaurant in Kampot as well as myself teaching them various dishes. A Cambodian lady will also teach them restaurant standard Khmer cooking next month. As more volunteers are asking to stay we had to do something about the standard of food we offered here. Not easy though as there is not a lot of choice of European food to buy in Kampot or Kep plus it is expensive and not having a fridge adds to the difficulties. Still, it is a great improvement but not without its challenges. One advantage is that the kitchen we built to prepare the buffet for the boat is in continual use.

Choun who has been with us since our inception invited me to a ceremony at her house where the monks blessed the old people during Khmer New Year. The younger people present then poured water all over us (nice and cool!). Us oldies all got to eat first and while we were eating the younger people came and gave us money. This is so the old people have money to eat. I was a bit embarrassed about this and asked one of the monks who is an English student if it was OK to share my amount with the other old people and he said it is good to do this so I shared my \$3.50 with the others. After having our fill, the oldies all retired to sit under a tree to get stuck into our drugs – me to smoke and the other old ladies to rub their gums with tobacco and then roll the tobacco into a leaf, add lime and stick it in their cheek. The old girls and I always seem to spend our time together partaking of our various vices!! We can't converse much but sit and contemplate the past and future. Very restful and I always come away feeling accepted by the community. The younger ones call us Grandma Janine and Grandpa Andrew. Never really thought I was old until I came here!!

During Khmer New Year we had a small BBQ for the staff. We baked some fish and chicken on the rotisserie and a few other bits and pieces. Quiet but nice to all get together and have some fun instead of running around busy all the time.

Usually I have photos of all these events to show you but unfortunately the battery on the camera gave up the ghost and it took us weeks to get another one as we had to order it from Phnom Penh. So I have used some of Leona's photos this time although they don't necessarily fit in with

the text. The camera also seems to be working much better too – funny about that, never considered it was the battery dying.

Kimsey was married a couple of weeks ago. Her parents both died within the last 12 months as had many of her relatives previously from old age so she didn't have a lot of old family witnesses to her marriage (you need to have this apparently). So she asked Andrew and me to step in as surrogate parents. Her uncle and aunty did all the official type stuff needed but we were included in all the different ceremonies as witnesses. A wedding in Cambodia takes two days with many different ceremonies along the way, culminating in the party or as we know it, reception, on the last night. By the end of the two days we were exhausted but it was good to join in with her family and many other community members we have met over the years. Danced most of the night with a variety of partners with the little kids from school joining in. This was fun. This was the 3rd wedding we had been to in a 10 days so by the end of it I found myself declaring I wouldn't go to another wedding for a year!!!



This was the first ceremony where they let the spirits know that a wedding is going to take place. The spirits eat and drink while the incense is burning. Then we moved into the house for the ceremony with the monks.

Just in passing, a guy in the village recently had a party to celebrate the fact that he had finished paying off his dowry after 7 years. Big night that went on for hours.

We were worried that Kimsey and Sokhim were not using the training they had received at Siem Reap except for the few times the boat ran. Now they are both working at The Beach House in Kep which is run by an Australian lady who works at the Australian Embassy in Phnom Penh. She is very impressed with both of them and they are gaining valuable work experience.

We've been selling off some chickens that have reached an acceptable weight and still have many left to feed up before we can sell them. We have so many we have to start to thin them out. Through much research we have finally worked out how to raise them successfully with very little loss. Our next project with the chickens is to organize the egg production for eating now we have the breeding bit right. Love the geese, there are 9 running around now with a few more goslings born recently. Also had 3 kittens born yesterday to the cat that had a miscarriage when she was spat in the eye by a cobra. The kittens are all a good size and healthy so the poison has obviously passed out of her system.

A few fruit trees started to bear fruit this season, guavas, mangoes and the passionfruit. Still no oranges or limes and a couple of other types of fruit, hopefully next year will be the year for them. Quite a few of the pineapples are producing fruit this year. We have eaten two so far – a good size, 2.1 kg without the top and very sweet. We



The young boy is 6 and Kimsey's nephew, Tita. He attends school and is quite a character.



Kimsey and her husband Makara.

even have a double header! So our orchard is starting to produce at last.



Double header



Not so much luck with our vegetables. We are trying to grow them organically but it is a matter of trial and error and trying different things to get the

best results. There are so many pests here – the roots of the potatoes were all eaten from the inside and the leaves of the other veggies are continually attacked. Neem trees are supposed to have a natural repellent to insects so we will plant a few of them amongst the vegetables and fruit trees. Also the neem tree leaves soaked in water and then sprayed on the veggies or fruit trees as well as watered into the ground is supposed to work. That is our next plan of attack. So gradually through trial and error we are learning to combat the natural predators. Mr Dutch, an older villager works on the farm. He is a farmer through and through, not interested in the chickens much but loves the land and growing things. Sok, our tuk tuk driver, is also a farmer and as this is the low season for tourists he is spending most of his time working with Mr Dutch on the farm. We have just ploughed and levelled one whole paddock for rice this year so will get many more bags which will nearly see us through the year. Busy planting the seedling bed at the moment waiting for the rains to start so we can plant the big paddock when enough water. Having the odd day of rain so the rainy season is slowly starting but no big rains yet to fill up the dam and the rice fields.

We are selling the boat. It did not work out as we had hoped and instead of providing an income to Kep Gardens it was a continual headache and a drain financially. It wasn't paying for itself so had to go. Unfortunately there are a lot of boats for sale at the moment due to the lack of fish (fished out because of no regulations) and the cost of fuel. Sad to see it go.

The tuk tuk business held its own over the tourist season. Didn't make much profit but it paid its fuel and maintenance and Sok's wages. Added to the fact that we don't have to pay for transport (except fuel) when we have to move a group of people or transport goods from Kampot or Kep it is saving us some money so it is worthwhile to hang onto.

Andrew and Mr Huch handle the maintenance side of Kep Gardens as well as doing jobs around the area at guest houses. Sopheak and Sok are also learning practical skills when they are needed for bigger jobs. So the trade school side of Kep Gardens is starting slowly on a very small scale. Once our own building starts there will be opportunities for more people to be trained in various skills.

There are some special people who deserve particular thanks for their support of Kep Gardens

and their fundraising efforts for the new school house: Rebecca Tumicki (America), Ulla Lundstrom (Sweden) and the Swedish Church (Melbourne), Kate and Wayne Vandersteen (Australia) and Agnes de Groote (Germany). We can't thank you enough.

Also Reuben and his band of friends in Australia who have been working hard on editing videos of interviews and fixing up the website for us rate a special mention. Stay tuned. I will let you know when the website is complete and you can view the interviews.

Andrew and Sopheak had a moto accident a couple of months ago. A truck hit them. Luckily it occurred at a roundabout with no high speed so no-one was badly hurt although Andrew had a bad limp for a couple of weeks with pulled tendons in his leg. He's come good but not totally comfortable on the back of a moto anymore.

Three months left of the English school year. Must start preparing the exams soon and thinking about what to do for the end of year parties. Zoo last year but not a lot of options close by. We are continually getting enquiries for next year (October). The levels change every year depending on the enrolments. Already it is shaping up to be a challenge, too many different levels, not enough space and not enough teachers. Should be an interesting year!!

The Association paperwork is very close to being completed. Let's hope next newsletter we will have some good news to pass on after such a long wait.

We hope all is well with you all.

Cheers,
Janine and Andrew

A big cheerio from the staff at Kep Gardens



Back row: Sok, Mr Huch, Sopheak, Mr Duch
Front row: Nieu, Choun, Sothy