



KEP GARDENS NEWSLETTER

November 11

Hi Everyone,

Lots been happening here. Since the last newsletter I have been concentrating in the mornings on getting the signatures for the various approvals we are seeking: road signs, school, building and change of hard title classification. After 6 weeks I have achieved very little but after a meeting with the City Governor yesterday maybe things will move a bit quicker. Everything hinges on the hard title change from farming to building. Once that has been resolved he assures me the rest will be easy and everything will be signed straight away and dealt with. Hmmmm! A lot of the hold up was due to him being busy as well as during two of the weeks of waiting, there were 5 public holidays. Cambodia needs to drastically change their idea of life being one big holiday if they are to compete in the real world. The number of holidays is incredible. No wonder everything takes so long to be finalized.

The new school year started in the first week of October. I was very strict this year, keeping numbers down per class and not enrolling students with very poor attendance or who had left during the previous year and were fronting up again. So we have ended up with 110 students in 4 classes but once again many on the waiting list. One day a whole class from the high school rolled up to enrol! Couldn't take them obviously. We really need the new school house and volunteer accommodation so we can cater for many more students.



4½ days old



3 children in the family

Kep Gardens had our first baby born on 31/10/11. We have had a couple of weddings of staff but this is the first baby born to a staff member while working at Kep Gardens. Very exciting. Unfortunately when we visited he was asleep and I couldn't have a cuddle. Maybe next time. The older brother in this picture attends the elementary class. Bright little boy and I guess his sister will come too when she is older.



We also have a new puppy. There has been a spate of robberies lately in the village and one night 13 of our chickens were stolen and then 2 days later one of the geese. So this little fella is fed and sleeps in the chicken house with a staff member at present. Once he is old enough the staff member will move out and it will be his job to protect his mates during the night. Let's hope it

works. We also replaced the goose and he seems to have settled in OK. The chooks and geese wander all over the place during the day and are looking very healthy. They wander back at dusk, get counted to make sure none are AWOL, and then locked up. So Chinny has a big responsibility when he grows up.



We still have about 20 chickens left after our stocks were reduced.



The geese having a bath in the rice field.

This is our second rice planting this season. We didn't get as much as last year but Sothea planted a different way last year. Obviously nobody was impressed as they did it their own way this year but it's interesting to note that we harvested more last year. I wonder what they will do next year with the proof before them that Sothea's way produced a higher yield?

Down to two dogs again now with the new puppy's arrival. We will never have a black dog again. The first one killed some chickens and this one seemed to leave them alone but ate the eggs. The geese had laid 4 eggs and he ate them all plus a couple of chicken eggs. Not acceptable so off he went to another home too. Let's hope Fido and Chinny will be more socially

acceptable. The village people say the brown dogs won't touch the livestock so let's hope that's true. The geese laid another egg today so that makes 14. It would have been 18 if not for the dog! We are hoping for little goslings wandering around the place. We also have 21 baby chicks at the moment.



Fido, a lovely natured dog.



Chinny



One mamma goose sitting on eggs.

We have been digging up termites nests for the chicks and mother hens to eat. They love them. We break up the nests into small pieces. Its a

Khmer way of providing the chicks with protein and keeping them healthy. So far, all have survived.



Just 4 of the chicks we have at the moment.

We have started a tuk tuk service and employed one of the older students to drive. We are not going out on the road all day every day to look for business but will offer the service to people if they ring and want to visit Kep Gardens and then hopefully they will use Sok for the rest of their stay in Kep. By doing it this way, we can use the tuk tuk ourselves when we need it and don't have to pay other tuk tuks because ours is sitting in Kep waiting for work. Mr Moto, another student with a tuk tuk passes on work if he has two bookings and we will do the same for him. So the two of them are working together. When not driving the tuk tuk Sok works on the farm. It seems to be working OK.

Sok takes his job very seriously. He is a very poor farmer and came to English classes to try and get some work as a motodup. His English is not great but with practise talking to tourists this season it will improve greatly.



Sok and the tuk tuk

Sok is the one I told you about before whose father was beaten and shot in the head by the Khmer Rouge in front of the children in the late '80s. He was only 12 and his family has been very poor since then with no way to improve their circumstances. So this job is very important to him. Apparently he is terrified of me, frightened of doing the wrong thing or I'll get cross. The rest of the staff think this is a great joke and tease him.

The laws are tightening up and this year all tuk tuks have to be registered and the driver has to have a drivers licence. So we sent Sok and another staff member off to get a drivers licence. They had to attend classes for two days and then sit an exam. The first day of classes I asked what they had learnt and one of them said "you mustn't wobble, you must drive straight" and I thought OK, fair enough I guess. Anyway, they passed their test, got their licence and the tuk tuk is registered so we are all legal. Most people have been driving since they were kids without a licence but it is too expensive for them. I guess they will keep driving and pay the fine if they get caught. The fine is about .25 cents so it needs a lot of fines to pay the \$21 we paid for a licence.



The end of the rainy season seems to herald the start of the marble tournaments. The two

younger classes come really early as we have a reasonably flat bit of dirt around the buildings so we can see any snakes where we are walking. Competition is fierce and some of them are real “dead eyed dicks”.

Talking about snakes, the guys were clearing some bush today and came across two big snakes but thankfully they were a fair way away from the living area. I was hoping that the snakes had run away but they killed them and I thought they may have taken them home for dinner. But these were poisonous ones so they didn't want to eat them although they eat cobras and they are poisonous! They've cooked snakes before that they have killed but I can't quite come at it myself. Just interesting to watch the way they prepare them for cooking and eating.

While I remember, Kep Gardens has a Facebook page now and also a Trip Advisor bit about the boat where people write reviews. Still having some work done on the website to tie all these pages together with a separate page advertising the boat. Should be finished soon.

A funny thing happened the other day. A man and his daughter were grazing their cow near the classroom and the kids pointed out to me that they had a bird. It was like an ibis and it was all tied up. I am not into trying to change people's life time culture and habits although I do try and tell the students about the importance of saving the animals and trees. I was mainly interested in whether they had caught it at Kep Gardens because that is a no no. David, the Russian man who attends an afternoon class went over and freed the bird and then left to take it home in our goose basket to look after it before he set it free. It was actually the family's dinner and they stared astonished at him as he left with the bird on his moto. He had given them \$1 for the bird so they had some money to go and buy some food. Maybe they thought he was going to eat it for dinner!



Our potting shed is finished and we are about to pot the vegetable seeds now that the rainy season is all but finished. A large area in front and also to the side has been ploughed and is being prepared to plant the vegetables when the seeds have sprouted. That wooden structure on the left is for jackfruit. Funny looking things, they look like a thick cactus type leaf but that is the tree and it grows up and over the trellis and gets covered in fruit. Been planted for ages and they don't seem to have grown much yet. Maybe they don't like all the water in the rainy season and will get a new lease of life now that it is drier.



Our driveway is coming along. Every rainy season it grows a bit more and is starting to look quite lush. We need to fix the lights as it is very dark of a night when the last students leave. The light posts were eaten out by termites and the rain washed them out and they were leaning at quite an angle. This is a work in progress.

We are also going to start a small maintenance service as a prelude to our trade school. We cannot start the trade school in earnest yet as we have too many balls in the air at the moment and need to get some completed so the jigsaw pieces start fitting together. Most of the balls are relying on other people to complete but they will all start falling back to earth soon and fitting together

nically (I hope!). In the meantime, Andrew and Mr Houch (a village man who is a jack of all trades and who Andrew doesn't want to lose as we will need him for our building) will do maintenance type work around the Kep/Kampot area. They will train a couple of local youths in the work they are doing so that they can learn some skills. So, a very small start to the trade school but a couple of young lads will be given an opportunity to become apprentices.

The traumas of the staff go on and on. I told you last newsletter about Kimsy losing both her parents in a span of only 6 months. Her 17 year old brother is now working at Kep Gardens as we needed another farm worker. Their family is very, very poor with Kimsy the only stable income earner for her 8 brothers and sisters. Even though 5 of them are married they rely on her for survival as most of them have small children and no full time work. So Sopheak now has an income to add to the family's monthly earnings. He also lives here so the family doesn't have to feed him.

Nieu, who comes from the fishing village and who has lived at Kep Gardens for 3 years is having trouble with her family. The family of 9 had a very small, wooden house on stilts over the water and so across the track from their house they built a small shanty type building as a bedroom for the overflow at night. The Govt. decided to widen the track (God knows why), tore down the shanty and offered them \$12.50 in compensation. They gave them approval to build another small room next to their existing house but in order to do this they have to get a loan from the bank. In order to pay back this loan every month the young brother who is 13 has left school and gone to work on a small, local fishing boat fishing for prawns etc to sell to find the mortgage. The father can't work on the boat as he has a bad leg. I saw him the other day and it looks as if he has gangrene or something. The local clinic said they had to cut it off at the knee but he is not too keen on this because then he won't be able to work again. So, in order to get some help for him I will close the school for a couple of days and take him to Phnom Penh to that free hospital where we took Sothea's sister and see if they can do anything for him apart from cutting off his leg. He lived through Pol Pot etc. Why do bad things keep happening to people who have already had their fair share of suffering in this life? Why can't they live in peace for the remainder of their life?

What is interesting is that the child labour laws are trying to stamp out young children working full

time in the agriculture and fishing industries. The law says that they can help but must not work during school time as legally they must attend school until year 9. I mentioned this to Nieu's family but they have no intention of abiding by the law. As far as they are concerned he is the only one that is in a position and is capable of doing this work to help the family so that's what the family has decided and that's what's going to happen regardless of what the Government says. I think the powers that be have an uphill battle in enforcing this law as most of the rural families are in this position and apart from giving them money to compensate for the child's wage, there is not a lot to be done to help their circumstances. Where does this money come from for many years until the child completes year 9? and Din is only one of thousands! I often wish I was a millionaire so we could help more people.

The boat not going as well as we hoped. Probably due to the world economics at the moment the tourist numbers are way down compared to the last couple of years. Still, let's hope it improves as the season progresses. We have a few charters booked for late December and early January so maybe the tourists will arrive later this year.

I didn't realize Christmas was so close! We hope everyone has a Merry Christmas, lots of parties, good food and general happiness all round with family and friends. Haven't even thought about what we may do. Maybe lunch on the boat if we can get enough bookings for people interested.

We also hope that 2012 will be a year filled with good health and happiness for all. Enjoy the festive season having lots of fun.

Cheers, Janine and Andrew

