

CHRISTMAS, A WEDDING, A FIELD TRIP, CHINESE LUNAR NEW YEAR & BLESSING OF THE GROUND & OPENING CEREMONY FOR THE CANADIAN ORGANIZATION- CASIRA'S - ENGLISH SCHOOL. Such a busy exciting time at ODA



Well Festive season it certainly has been for all here at ODA.

Leng & the children created a beautiful Christmas tree & decorated it in fine spirit with all the kids lending a hand. The volunteers provided some presents & it was a fun filled day for everyone. Christmas may not be a part of Cambodian traditional life but they certainly love an excuse to have a party. Leng's wife Sry On is having a baby & has been ordered bed rest by the Doctor so everyone got together to do the shopping, cooking etc to make it a very special day. Of course for a Cambodian party there must be loud, loud music so the boys fitted the speakers up & it was all thumping away from early in the morning. All the decorating & food preparation or a Steam Boat lunch was done between bursts of Khmer style disco dancing - & giggles & excited squeals filled the air!!!





A surprise Christmas present emerged from under the concrete floor of the gallery – one of the female dogs chose this day to show her litter of tiny little puppies!!! Oh no!!! – not more dogs at ODA!!!! But Leng has said when they are old enough he will take them out & give them to the villagers around the ODA outlying schools - they value dogs for security & can't afford to buy them & of course the kids will kill them with kindness in the meantime!!!



After a delicious Steam Boat Yum Bai (Christmas lunch) the boys treated us to a show where they dressed up as girls & simpered along the cat walk to the hilarious amusement of all present. The girls acted as wardrobe personel & padded & pushed so they had all the bumps in the right places & could hardly stand up they were laughing so much at the boys antics. Students from some of the outlying schools bicycled in the 35kms to join in the fun & the disco dancing went on for the remainder of the day. Such a happy day for all the children under Leng & Sry On's ODA umbrella – they are truly making such a difference to so many children's lives here in a positive & happy way.

Lengs cousin Tola was married on the 31st Dec – he teaches the ODA children computers while he is studying it at Uni. On their wedding day the Bride & Groom are King & Queen for 2 days – they dress in royal clothes like those shown at the Royal Palace & have many changes of very elaborate clothing during the course of that time. It is the day of their lives & even simple villagers follow the tradition somehow. A Khmer wedding is certainly something to experience.

FIELD TRIP OF DISCOVERY IN SIEM REAP



APT owners Anne & Geoff McGeary visited ODA & the ODA English school they sponsor in partnership with Atherton Rotary Australia & the next day took the ODA children on a field trip in Siem Reap for a day. The Museum was the 1st port of call which the kids just loved – they are very much into their culture & were upset that no photos could be taken inside as there were many sculptures they wanted to record & then

paint – they spent hours there watching all the videos & closely examining the sculptures & exhibits.

After lunch they were taken to Lucky Mall which has automatic opening doors – Wow!! They couldn't quite believe it – then their first taste of escalators with some children too scared to step on them while others were already coming back down the other side before the scared ones were even on them!! Great excitement for them & quite beyond anything they had ever imagined. Next stop was the school supply shop where they purchased some paints & could choose a book each. We assumed they would chose a Khmer story book but most came out with English learning books – testament to their insatiable desire to learn !! They spent ages there - sorting thru all the books – it was like a fairy tale shop to them!

Then to the supermarket to see the trolleys & freezer cabinets & all the rows of food lined up. We purchased some of their favourite foods & proceeded to the front where they encountered the check out machines – they boys were fascinated with how they worked & added up & calculated change. A real learning experience for them with so many exciting new things to take in. Then we clogged the ice cream shop up while they all had their 1st ice cream cone (they have occasionally had village ice cream before on sticks or in between French bread but cones were new!!!) Oh - the dilemma of which flavor to choose from!!!

Then they decided they would like to visit the Old Market so down by the river where we parked they discovered a few tour guides kicking the foot shuttlecocks - but from behind their backs & over their heads!!! Quite amazing dexterity & so into the market we went in search of the shuttlecocks so they could go back to ODA & practice themselves!!!! (at last count they were starting to connect with a few but think there is a long way to go there!!!!) Kentucky Fried was bought to take home for dinner but the vote was for rice instead of chips – they are Cambodian after all!!!! So a very full but exciting discovery day for everyone & they couldn't thank Anne, Geoff & Di (their friend) enough.

CHINESE LUNAR NEW YEAR



Leng offering prayers –

The children sending prayers, cars & money to their departed loved ones –

Saanchhai & Bhub guarding the earth oven cooking the huge wok of Khmer Curry Vegetables.

As many Khmer people have Chinese blood in them this is almost as important to them as their own Khmer New Year. Trees are decked with red envelopes containing money to give luck for the new year. Food is placed in front of their Altars & prayers made for the new year - effigy's of cars & money are burnt for the departed family to enjoy & food is placed in front of their Altar. Food is shared with poorer villagers & it is very much a community time for everyone in whatever degree they are able to participate – Khmer people are so very kind & even with very little they would share it with anyone around them or the needy – such a lovely culture – this is why so many people love Cambodians – they are beautiful people.

BLESSING OF THE GROUND CEREMONY



Ground Ceremony where a Hindu Priest presents offerings to bring the ghosts in & then asks them if they intend to be troublesome & if so - he banishes them while the kind ghosts may remain. A very necessary step here for the villagers to allow their children to come to the school & for the children not to be scared of coming. So a mesmerizing chanting ceremony & sprinkling of water over all present &

Canadian organization CAIRA headed up by Pierre-Jacques Gervais & his team - have been sponsoring an ODA Free English school under a house in Tbang Keng Leck Village while they have been fund raising in Canada to build a solid masonry building complete with solar power. They have been very successful & have arrived now with a team to oversee the construction of the school with Leng. The land having been chosen & purchased - the next step was this last Sunday - to have the Blessing of the

eventually the ceremony was completed & the construction of the school is now able to be started.



shyly in the Fishing Dance when the flirting scene was enacted!!

The ODA children danced the blessing Ceremony Dance – the Fishing Dance & the Coconut Dance – much to the delight of the villagers - many of whom have never seen their cultural dances performed before & from the oldest to the youngest they enjoyed it all – giggling

Then on to share a celebration snack of French Bread dipped in sweetened condensed milk!!!

Delicious!!!! Then the customary loud disco music & everyone joined in to dance the afternoon away under the shade of the palms.



Another wonderful partnership for Leng's ODA English Schools Projects to improve the future for children in & around Siem Reap.

This will be the 4th solid masonry school under the ODA Village Free English Schools Project & CASIRA team intend to work with Leng to improve the agricultural methods of the farmers to improve their crops & explore other tourist related crafts to help the village women to earn extra income. There are over 600 children benefiting from these free English schools in these outlying villages & while work books are a challenge for Leng to keep up to for so many children - he believes he has to do it somehow as it is too important for these children.

So back to school and a more normal life again for the ODA & Village Schools children after such exciting celebrations over the festive Season.

Leng asked me to wish you all a very Healthy, Happy & Lucky New Year for 2012 from everyone at ODA & thank you all for helping them on their path to become self sustaining thru the sale of their art works. He feels the children will grow up with a more practical attitude if they see their life improving largely thru their own painting efforts rather than relying totally on hand outs & he thanks you all so much for your kind purchases & assistance in helping them to learn this valuable lesson.

Well – it's been so busy I haven't had a chance to send this so now need to add the Opening of the ODA - CASIRA School.

Sunday 26th Feb – SCHOOL OPENING



The Canadian group & everyone from ODA arrived at the new school to find a guard of honour of all the village teachers & children in their school uniforms, excitedly waiting for the Ceremonies to begin. How very impressive they looked with their fresh happy faces & sparkling eyes.

These things are quite difficult to manage as building doesn't commence until the donor group is here to watch over the construction process to ensure

their donors are comfortable that moneys are spent exactly as intended. These same people have a short time frame that they are able to stay here so the construction is pushed into a very short time frame.

As with other schools already constructed - the donor group had some ideas they wanted included which had great merit but also added a bit to the time frame – the builder said 6 weeks but the main body of donors had a departure date of just over 4 weeks so the frenzy began to try to have it completed enough so most of the Canadians could share in the Celebration Opening & Blessing ceremony. On Saturday the 25th there was no roof on & we all crossed fingers it would make it for the next day!!!

So we advanced down the long guard of honour to see the sparkling roof neatly in place – big sighs of relief – we could all relax now & enjoy the proceedings.





As the proceedings started I looked out over the Canadian Group– Cambodia dignitaries from Phnm Penh - & local Province, Commune & Village chiefs – District Education Authority - local police chief etc etc etc I couldn't help but feel very emotive at what Leng has built up & achieved in just a few short years!



His Uncle & Aunt who brought him up were there & must have felt so proud of his achievements. Such a huge commitment with absolutely no personal gain – so hard for us to understand coming from our society!! This is his & Sry On's life - & so may kids will benefit from his amazing actions!! They will have little or nothing when they are old but every kid here will

want to provide & look after them!! He is such a happy man to be around & makes every day such a pleasure (well - when I'm not catching the hand balls he throws 16 hours a day that is!!!) – one of the best delegators I've ever come across!!!



Congratulations also to Pierre who headed up the 2 years to bring the Canadian CASIRA group with negotiations, planning & fund raising to this point - again ODA is lucky to have such fine understanding partners in their school donor mix. Drop translation confusion – frustrations – delays & many more things in to the mix – all these things applying to both sides – always along with the heat factor – all needs very special people to arrive very amicably to the completion point. CASIRA are fine partners in the ODA Free Village English Schools project.





Desks waiting to go in once the school is completed. This is around 1/3 of the 260 students at this school alone!!! With over 600 children in the 6 schools it's a huge task that Leng has taken on but when asked once how he could keep everything up to so many children he replied " We find solution – we must – children need English to have future here!" That's pretty much his attitude to everything – 'Children need - we must find solution!' ***And often by the skin of his teeth – he does just that!!!!***



Lengs Uncle & Aunt (in reality really his mother & father) – were bursting with pride to think he has achieved so much for so many children & looked very emotional many times thru the ceremony. They have indeed got a lot to be very

proud of!!! He is now transferring their wise upbringing on to so many young people to smooth their way to a successful future as well! They are very lucky children under the 'ODA Umbrella'!