

## **NEWSLETTER (20) – MAY 05.... From KIM in Cambodia xxx**

Hello again, time is certainly ticking away as I sit down to write the latest installment of life here, and this is when I need to put on my thinking cap and go back a few weeks to what has been going on. This month a new midwife has started working at PFD after my good colleague and friend Kimry had to resign due to care for her ill daughter, so in welcoming Thary, I needed to do the formal stuff of introducing her at the health centers, so have been out in the field quite often lately. Life is getting easier with the occasional rain bringing the temperatures down from over 40 degrees to a much more comfortable mid 30s, so I do not dread an overnight stay away from home now.



I attended the most difficult health center to access – domrei pong, where it was a great achievement for both Sydeth and I to battle through the mud and sand with our motorbikes, arriving without incident 2 hours later (but with a numb bum!). This part of the district is just so poor and hard to access, during the rainy season, many areas are totally cut off and small boats are the only way through, so you see absolutely dire conditions – not much water, no sanitation at all, and malnutrition like you would not believe. Working with the TBAs here is vital, to organise to get the women out way before they go into labor, so they can deliver with a midwife if complications are suspected, but as much of our work here, it depends on so many factors, that we usually have to rely on the old fashioned method of crossing

ones fingers, hoping and praying!

This month it is work, work, work – trying to get as much done as possible before the rain starts, and not many people take holidays at this time, so all the staff are available. We did however have a 'post-khmer new year' party, which was a welcome back to work, but had a joint party to say goodbye to one of the staff – Chantorn, who has moved to work at one of the other PFD offices, which is great as she will be near to her husband and 3 year old daughter – instead of only seeing them once ever two months or so. The party was great fun, we had the usual offerings of far too much food – mostly meat with small bones in (not my favourite!), beer, karaoke and a large screen and PFD LCD projector so the karaoke screen was like the professional ones! This is a photo of Sydeth and I, she is one of the midwives that I work closely with, she is 26, had a very nice husband, and three beautiful kids! Sydeth is quiet, but good fun, and is learning English so likes to practice talking with me.

Sydeth is another of the staff who live away from her family, they live about 40kms away, so she sees them at the weekends, but in the week she rents a room in a house in Chhlong. The party was also a goodbye to Karina who is leaving PFD to go back to Italy (although she is from Uruguay), we all had great fun, I was on driving duties that night so stuck to the diet coke (can buy it in Kratie now!), and I drove Karina and I home. Judi chose to get a little tipsy, and lost the fight with the bottle of vodka – it certainly won, as the video showed her in a real mess, and with quite a hangover the next day! (snigger, snigger!).



This week was another party for Karina: food, drinks, games and gifts at Karina's house with most of the staff and friends, and then the next night was the wedding of the sister of one of my khmer friends – I do actually know this bride, and the fact that she was getting married to the cousin of my good friend Thy, it was great fun! Naturally, Karina & I did our best to look beautiful in a khmer way – lacy and shiny – and we joined the fun with lots of dancing, staying up as promised until after midnight!!

In Chhlong now there are two new foreigners – both French, a man called Nicholas and a woman called Iris. Karina and I were curious to know who had bought the old french house in Chhlong, and when we met them, they immediately invited us round for a meal the next night, so we went – armed with conversation and beer & wine (embarrassingly cheap wine I

may add!). Well, they are quite a pair – Nicholas is gay and Iris is employed by him to teach his 7 year old khmer daughter to speak french. So we spent an evening chatting in the building site of the former abandoned house, now nicely painted and in the process of repair – we learnt about Nicholas's obsession with Khmer artifacts, and heard lots of tales from his stay in Cambodia of over 10 years! I was very interested to find out that there is an "undiscovered" temple nearby to Chhlong, so one day we are going to go on an adventure to find it....maybe with cheese and wine, that's a french thing to do?? Nicholas already has a very posh hotel in the south of Cambodia, and seems to be quite an entrepreneur, so now he has bought the house in Chhlong – for a reported \$50k plus land, and he is doing up the house into luxury accommodation with a swimming pool. Naturally, word has spread in Chhlong, and lots of people are looking forwards to the new swimming pool – but at \$350 a night, I do not think many people will be hiring out the house so they can use the pool! Last night at a wedding, we met Nicholas's boyfriend, he is very nice, so that is a welcome attraction to Chhlong too! I am extra lucky, that next month I have a week off and I had planned to visit the south of Cambodia, so I have been invited to stay at their luxury place for a snippet of the cost! I will let you know more on that.....

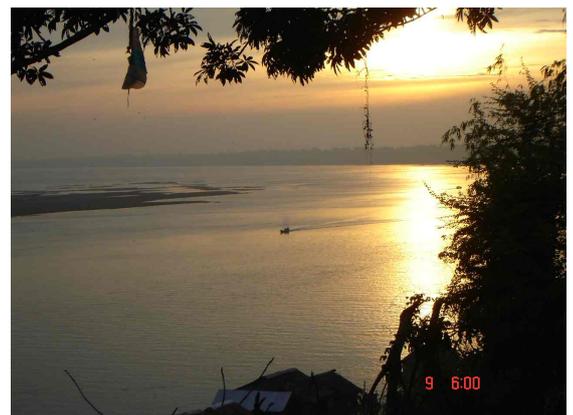


This photo is one I took when I was visiting a TBA who was tending to a woman in labor – the TBA is lovely, the woman – sok hong was doing very well (it was early labor), and it was a pleasure to be involved and see the TBA at work. I decided not to stay for the birth as the TBA actually partners with the health center midwife for the delivery, so I left them to it and took the 10kms journey home alone, making sure that I made it for the last ferry across the Mekong. The very next day we visited and all was well – a little girl was born that night time and mother and baby were doing just fine. For me, it was great to see how the whole family gather round and join in the care of the woman, although, I was sure at times there were far too many people there and I think that the fact that a blonde English woman was in the house was the reason!

This month, we took time out of schedule to join together with Nikki from VSO to travel to the coastal region of Cambodia where there are several 'maternity waiting houses', houses built near the health center or hospital to allow pregnant women to stay before and after delivery. It was great to collaborate on the trip as Nikki works in Stung Treng and they have a very nice waiting house themselves near to the hospital there, so it was good to make the comparison. Lucky for us, the waiting houses in Koh Kong, are also where PFD work, so we went to the PFD office in Sre Ambel and were made very welcome, they helped us find a guesthouse, restaurant, and allowed us to use the motorbikes to visit the 3 waiting houses in the area. We were extra lucky, as we were chaperoned all the time by the PFD guard (he was worried we may get lost!), but also took us sightseeing, to the estuary, and to the nearby waterfalls. Unfortunately, there was a lot of rain that day, so we had to don our 1000riel (\$0.25) raincoats, and travel round looking like condoms on motorbikes!

Not much else to report for this month, Karina leaving is probably the biggest thing to affect me, as my circle of friends has been drastically reduced. However, not one to let go easily, Judi, Karina and I are spending a few days together in Bangkok – doing tourist things (and going to Tesco's (YIPPEE)) So we fly out tonight to meet up with Judi who is there to have some medical stuff done – hence the reason that our luxury accommodation is in one of the main hospitals in Bangkok! So last night, we had the wedding to attend, a very late night, and in the midst of things, we had all sorts of people staying at our homes, and Karina had to pack and give away lots of her stuff! This morning was a little teary as Karina was saying goodbye, and I am now coming to dread the day that I have to say goodbye to these wonderful people that I am proud to call my friends! We have one more step to go, Chhay and Thy have accompanied us to Phnom Penh to take Karina to the airport – probably so they can get a kiss – so I think the tissues will need to be at hand then too!

So I say goodbye, as I have a plane to catch – wow, that sounds so jet-set! I leave you with a beautiful photo of the sunset over the Mekong, the view from my balcony at home this month....I am looking forwards to coming home, but there is an awful lot of things that I will miss desperately! So until next month, please be good, and drop me a line sometime!



**Take care and be happy in all that you do..... All my love, Kim x**