

NEWSLETTER (21) – JUNE 05.... From KIM in Cambodia xxx

Hello friends, Now I have to think back to what has been happening lately.... Well, as I ended my last newsletter, I was on my way to Bangkok to have a weekend break with Judi & Karina – and it was great! The night before leaving Chhlong was a wedding – so here is a photo of the 3 lovely ladies – Karina (on her last night in Cambodia!), and Vandy (my friend, and the girlfriend of Chandet from PFD). The wedding started at about 5am, so everyone was woken up, Karina and I watched a bit in the morning – the part when the groom makes a procession to the house of his bride – with gifts for her parents. Later on we went to watch the couple having photos taken at nice scenic places in Chhlong – namely the high school!! That night we went at Gish, and I tell you it is not easy task to doll yourself up whilst sweating profusely as its still pretty hot at that time of day. Karina and I left work early so we did not have to rush around, but even then were boiling hot and wiping the beads of sweat from our brows as we set off down the street to 3 houses away where the wedding was taking place! Vandy arrived about 10 mins before we were due to leave, so changed and looked beautiful in absolute record timing!!



So the next day was teary as Karina said her goodbyes in Chhlong, then at the airport too! The driver Chhay and our friend Thy were only too happy to take Karina & I to the airport, so we hung out with them for a while waiting for the flight desk to open. Its quite fitting in a way, that Chhay is one of the first people that Karina & I both met from Chhlong, so its nice that he is the last person to say goodbye to! I was on a flight 20 mins after Karina, and by then she was able to curb the tears, as we would be meeting in about 1 hour in Bangkok!

Bangkok was great, the first time I was there was when I was on a stopover to Cambodia in 2002, and was quite shocked and scared, so did not like it much, but I had been back again with Clare and we had a good time staying by the river, so this time I felt a little more comfortable in the masses of shops, traffic and people! I wanted to shop, Karina wanted to window shop (as was already up to luggage allowance!) and Judi wanted to do everything! Well we did our best, we shopped, we ate out, we visited cultural places, we went to the weekend market and we went to see a few shows – the less said about them the better!! It was great, but the day came to say goodbye to Karina and come back to Cambodia – it was sad, I am quite sure she will not come back to Cambodia, but know that she is likely to go on to bigger and better things! So with a one hour flight – and no racing to the departure gate, Judi & I came home!

Whether it was the air conditioning or the flight, since then I have not been quite right, my defenses are down and I am making up for a pretty good illness record in one

go – the very next day, a bad cold arrived which stayed for 12 days, and just when that went, I began suffering with a bad stomach, which seemed to ease when I came to Phnom Penh, luring me into a false sense of security that I was well again, so I went away for a few days, only to become even more ill – and now finally, with help of a nice doctor- I am on the road to recovery. Somewhat pale, tired and considerably lighter – It has not been a good month all in all, however, never let illness get me down too much, so the adventures continue……

On 9th June, there was a party in Kratie for Joe's bar that has now been open for 2 years – there was lovely food put on, and it was nice, especially great to see Hannah, a



previous volunteer who lived in Kratie for 6 mths (1 year ago), and has stayed on in Cambodia as she loves it so much! Lucky for Judi and I we had a 2 day meeting on the program that I work on – Health System Strengthening, so I led the maternal health part and we got lots done. So we were able to spend time in Kratie and go to the party. There was also a new volunteer there called Hannah (From

Florida, USA), who was to be with PFD for 3mths, so it was great to hang out with her too. The next night, was a small housewarming party for Sarah & Walter in Kratie – Sarah is a 23yr old who is running the reproductive health program, she is from Poole, Dorset and her boyfriend Walter is from Manchester, so lots to talk about! Hannah came back to Chhlong with Judi and I the next day (Saturday) and I was official tour guide, showing her the sights, meeting some of the friendly Chhlong-ites and taking some fab photos! On Sunday, Judi, Hannah & I were invited to attend the engagement ceremony of Vandy & Chandet at Vandy's home in Kratie – it was starting at 7am, so we put on our glad rags and set off on motorbikes to the house (about 30mins ride), needless to say, arriving with helmet hair and having to change your shoes in front of a sea of Khmer on-lookers was not the best part – but we soon got into the crowd and did our best to blend in! The engagement was an official traditional ceremony, where food and gifts were provided to the parents of the bride to be – whilst Chandet and Vandy exchanged gifts – a necklace for Vandy, and a gold ring for Chandet. The wedding is scheduled for December as that is the cool season, and it is apparently better as it's cool during the night (can't imagine why that would matter?!?!?) Chandet had asked for us to bring our cameras, and forgetting that Khmers take so many photos, both Judi's & my camera soon gave up, so Hannah was the star of the day with the working camera and she really earned her rice porridge breakfast by taking lots of lovely photos – including this one!

I felt very honoured to have been invited, it was nice to be included even if I had to scurry out into the pig pen to find a toilet as I was suffering, and this house, like most others, does not have a toilet!

The other exciting news from PFD is that they are making a promotional film, so a very talented and experienced Indian film-maker came to Chhlong to make plans on shooting the film in the next few months. We organized a few events for him to see – a HIV prevention film show, a reproductive health teaching session from one of the local volunteers, a immunization education session from a volunteer and then we planned to go out to a remote village to see the NERP (Nutrition Education Rehabilitation Program) taking place, and here we arranged to meet with the trained TBAs too who will feature in the film. It was fascinating, we all headed out on motorbikes, and the road was a little tough at times due to this being the start of the rainy season. The TBAs were great, one in particular delivers about 5 – 10 babies a month, she is a lovely and friendly lady – about 45 years old, she provided good insight into the work of the TBAs and how the PFD training has helped her! Good lady!!!

So getting back to Hannah – well all was going well, she was enjoying her time and settled in nicely in Kratie, then she went out for a walk and some burning rubbish sparked an allergic reaction where she needed to take adrenaline and kept collapsing. In the end, with several PFD staff helping her (one taking photos???), her breathing was difficult and they decided to airlift her out to Phnom Penh – so a helicopter went to Kratie and got her, plus Sarah & Walter, plus Thy (Khmer Staff) who went in the helicopter with Hannah (and their cameras!!!) and she was taken to the safety of the SOS clinic in Phnom Penh. Immediately her husband told her to get home, and basically, the fear of it happening again was enough, so Hannah returned to the USA. Best to be safe than sorry, it was great to know that in times of trouble, help is there and Hannah got real good care (including breakfast from Raffles Hotel, Phnom Penh!). So excitement all over, now PFD are updating their 'emergency' procedures, as at \$11,000 for an airlift, the decision has to be right! I felt a bit stupid with my nigling illness,



and the staff in Phnom Penh just laughed and said it was ok if I got worse, at least I would not need a helicopter, I could just get on a motorbike...they care really...honestly ?? My illness had lessened, so I stuck to my plan to visit Kampot and Kep – on the south coast of Cambodia, so I went down there for 4 days, and it was nice – more about that and a photo maybe next month though...

So to finish off for now, I send you a photo that I took at the office – when we were having a new TV aerial fitted.

This man on a bicycle rode up, took off his shirt, rolled up his trouser legs and took off up the existing antenna as if it was the easiest thing in the world. He hauled up a rope, pulled up the aerial and fixed it on with the spanner he carried in his mouth! The staff wanted to watch, as I did too, they were fascinated too, only as the aerial was quite heavy they thought he may drop it! I asked whether he may fall off, "no, he has done this all his life" well, exactly, it only takes one fall..... You don't see things like this everyday, so I thought that I would share!

well, I will say goodbye, I am booked for home now, I have been accepted to start the Masters Degree in September – so now I just wait for the countess of chester to give permission for me to have a fixed day off each week..... and I start back at work on 2nd October, and I don't think it is that far away!

Goodbye for now, All my love, Kim x