

NEWSLETTER (22) – JULY 05.... From KIM in Cambodia xxx

Hello friends, This month is not so full of excitement and adventure, mainly due to the monsoon rains that occur approximately every 2 -3 days, where life temporarily stands still and you wait for the rain to stop. After a recent lightening storm blew up one of the laptops, now we have to disconnect the computers and so often works stop altogether (good news was that the computer did get fixed!) Plans also change – for example, when



you usually leave work at 5.30, but it rains so hard that you are stuck at the office until 7.00 with the company of the staff, we have to keep ourselves amused!, and sometimes I don't quite make it to visit Judi if the rain starts, as I do have to admit fear – of my house steps – I have fallen 2 times now (when the landlord used to water the steps!?!), but now the rain makes it very slippery indeed, so I just don't chance it as don't want to be coming home in plaster after all this time

accident free!

This is a photo from onto of Bokor Mountain on the South coast of Cambodia – where I had a small holiday last month! It was amazing, high enough up to be in the clouds which makes the former casino, palace, church and various other buildings very eerie indeed (and quite chilly too!), then suddenly the clouds cleared and you could see to the ocean, the islands, and even into Vietnam!

The trip was great from the lovely town of Kampot where I met some nice people, including Becks from VSO. The only hitch in the plans was that at 3.30 when we were heading back from the top of the mountain, the wheel literally flew off the pick up truck and it took hours to repair – incidentally, there are wild tigers at Bokor, and it is advised to not stay on the mountain after dusk! At 8.30pm rescue came in the form of two men on a trail bike with spare wheel nuts and bolts, so at 10pm, we made it back to Kampot – tired, hungry, but alive! and without any tiger photographs!

When I came back from my week off, I needed to stay in Phnom Penh to attended a 2 day meeting on HIV prevention, it was good, but at that time I was not well with a nasty stomach bug that I could not quite shake off – ending up having to go to the Doctors to get myself sorted out. All is well now, and I can tell you that I very much take the wonderful NHS and GP service for granted, as I am not used to paying for medical care! Although, I am led to believe that I may be when I get back as not paying NI contributions for 2 years means that I will find it difficult to register with a GP again. Oh well, I will just have to try and stay in good health!

On 19th June, the office cat gave birth to two lovely kittens - one is white, tabby and red and the other is tabby - so we have called them 'Red & Tiger' that's 'Krahorm and Cla' in Khmer! They are very cute and live under the desks in the office, so a welcome treat each morning when you go into work to be greeted by the cute kitties! Shortly after the kittens arrived, one of the



other cats (a male) disappeared - probably got the DNA results confirming that he was not the father of the kittens, which was quite a relief as he is the brother of the mother cat!

On the pet front, my lovely guinea pig 'Sen' died, he had a huge abscess on his mouth that I did some minor surgery on (my second small animal surgery procedure!), but he was already skin and bones and died a few days later as he was unable to eat. It was all quite sad, I quite liked him and he was my way of teaching Khmer people compassion with animals. So alone again and pet free, then my loneliness was answered by my new friend 'Shouty' who is a petite white and tabby female cat who has taken to coming to visit me! She is very affectionate and is here everyday, though am yet to learn where she came from - she has had kittens before but is not very old. Anyway for me, in countdown mode, I was no way going to take on a new pet - but shouty is just a temporary visitor - so that is just great, it is a little noisy though, hence the name!

At PFD, we had important visitors from USAID (our main donor) who requested to travel out to a more remote place to see projects taking place. Judi took it literally and to the extreme and we headed out to THE MOST REMOTE PLACE - Domrei Pong for the morning. The road was really difficult in places, there were lots of puddles, mud and sand to go through - I took a motodop (100cc moped taxi!), as did the 3 USAID men and Judi rode on the back of the big 250cc trail bike with Setha driving - I knew I could drive myself but would take a long time about it! Anyhow, it took 1.5 hours to get there and it was well worth it as there was a feeding session for lots of malnourished children, and a TBA meeting where we were teaching about cleaning hands and equipment. At 11am, we set off back to Chhlong but it started to rain, we all had rain ponchos to wear, however the rain was really heavy, and at times we were driving up a hill where water was rushing down the hill - it was quite mad and dangerous, but then again, no one wanted to stay there, so we just carried on. Two of the five motorbikes had problems so the journey back was marred and much longer, but we made it back to the restaurant to meet up with the rest of the PFD staff for lunch - I was VERY happy to have made it back safely! USAID seemed to enjoy the whole experience (apart from one camera getting

wet!), and now have a much better understanding of the problems faced by people living in remote areas, so mission achieved!!!

I went to Stung Treng earlier this month to go to Rebecca's leaving party - she has worked with VSO in Stung Treng (North East Cambodia, near to Laos border) for over 2 years and is not quite ready to leave Cambodia yet, but will be working from Phnom Penh from now on. It was great to see Rebecca and Nikki again, and to get to go to yet another party. For the occasion, we decided to become beautified - so attended the local beauty salon in the market, where we had our looks dramatically altered with just a little backcoming, many clips and lots and lots of



hair fixing spray. In the end we all had lovely styles that stood up to wind, rain and riding on a motorbike, in fact the amount of stuff used on our hair, we were probably more protected than wearing a crash helmet! It was a great night with lots of food and dancing, overspilling into the next day - it is a great part of Cambodia to suffer with a hangover in, you can buy freshly squeezed orange juice and chocolate pancakes to help recovery!! In the photo - Rebecca in cream, Nikki; blue, Phillis: pattern, Marissa: pink, Chantha; red & ME!

There has been two other parties lately - it was Judi's 40th birthday and we had a small party after work at the office. Judi did not want much fuss, so we just had drinks and snacks after the usual volleyball game! I knew that it would be hard to achieve a memorable moment, but the pressure was off as Judi was going to Hong Kong to meet one of her ex-peace corp buddies, however I did arrange a small film premier for the staff - of the Macedonian film that Judi was in when she worked in Macedonia! The other party was the engagement party of my ex-housekeeper's (Sreyrot) younger sister - she was getting engaged to a chinese man who lives in Auckland, NZ. The party was in the road outside Sreyrot's house, which is next to my house, so preparations began on Monday and it was all over by Friday, the party was on Wednesday and I went for lunch there and for food and dancing in the evening. The food was cooked in the tents erected next to my house, and the workers all slept below my house, so I had lots of people watching me going up and down my stairs! It was facinating to see it all coming together, the young couple will actually marry in NZ, but for the family here, this was their equivalent to a wedding and it was a very posh affair so I had to increase my usual gift of \$10 to \$20 ,

which is basically to cover the cost of my food/drinks and give a little to the couple to start out with!

Now, it is KPC survey time - where 15 teams of 3 people (1 PFD staff and 2 volunteers) get to do research in the community to assess the effectiveness of our work at PFD, we get trained for 2 days and work for 4 days in the villages. Lucky for me I got out of running my own team this time, so I get to do 'Quality Control' again, in other words - snooping, to make sure that the proper scientific method of sample selection and interview technique is used, or otherwise the whole survey is flawed. I quite enjoy this part, and getting to be out in the villager's homes gives a far better understanding of what is happening, and just how PFD have helped! Altogether 300 married men and 300 married women will be interviewed on health matters - from maternal health, childhood immunizations, illnesses, reproductive health, Gender equality, to Malaria and Dengue - it's a real eye opener.

This week is interview time for my replacement - there are 3 suitable candidates, (and many very unsuitable!!! - an ex-military man in his 60s applied, and several young african men with IT skills???), anyhow, 2 sound great as they have both worked in Cambodia before, so time will tell - and I am on the interview panel, although I don't quite like the idea of long distance phone interviews, so I am glad that one applicant is here in Cambodia now! Then I am off on holiday - I have 9 days left and through lack of visitors (you know who you are!!!), I am setting off alone to the wonders of the Thai island of Koh Chang (Elephant Island), where I plan to try and get a tan to come home with!!

All my love, Kim x