

KIM IN CAMBODIA - NEWSLETTER (5) JANUARY 2004

“CHHLONG ROCKS” NEW YEARS EVE



HAPPY NEW YEAR EVERYONE Hope you all had a wonderful start to 2004 - because I sure did!, On New Years Eve in the morning I went by motorbike to nearby Kratie to the opening of a HIV testing center, so with a 5.30am start was a bit tired really, but well worth it. Had lunch with Judi at Joe's place in Kratie where he provided the Happy New Year headwear, and a bottle of Champagne for the party that I threw at my house for all the staff - at which everyone had a great time!! We did the usual traditions - drinking lots of beer, playing games and singing Auld Lang Signe (few puzzled expressions then!!) I baked a big chocolate cake and made a massive bucket of popcorn - which went down well, despite the tradition of providing a full meal usually - but this was an UK/USA night, so food not included!! The next day I spent sending text messages to quite a few of you!, and dealing with a hangover - then in the evening I went with my Khmer teacher to meet his two private classes of students (about 25 in one group and 15 in the other!). It was very interesting to meet them, and they had lots of questions to ask me - most about my family, my love life, my weight and whether I like Khmer food!! Some questions were quite advanced and had thinking hard how to answer! - "what are the customs in your country" and "why do you come to work here"? I think they like me, as they have asked me to go back and see them again - which I would love to!

Here is a brief summary of the differences you find here - almost everyone you meet tells you that they will miss you when you part company - girls hold hands and cuddle with other girls, and likewise with the boys, but you don't see boy and girls together - people cram onto motorbikes, often 3-4 people, I have seen 6 (but 3 were small children!) - no-one lives alone, large families all live together - husbands often go away working for months or years - many people (men and women) live away from their families for work, this is particularly the case for many PFD staff who stay in Chhlong (with a kind of rent-a-family) and return to their families only about once a month. It's very sweet as you know when they have visited home as they seem to have a spring in their step - if you know what I mean! The main difference that is obvious everywhere is just how friendly and community spirited everyone is, the children can wander round and everyone looks out for them, and everyone knows everyone else - a far cry from how I have lived in the UK!

Sad news arrived here this month, my lovely little Chinchilla Poppy died. I know it was a risk that I took on coming here that I may not see Poppy again, but I feel very bad on Steph, Nicky and the rest of the family who kindly took Poppy in when I came away. I know that Poppy was looked after well and probably had a much nicer life in her last few months than with me!, so I hope they are not too upset, as Poppy was nearly 12 years old - which is pretty good in Chinchilla years!! The onus is now on George the rabbit to become a model pet - as I want to be able to let him out to run round in the house without a big struggle to catch him, I currently use a cardboard box and chase him round until he finally runs into the box - but this is how he sustained his current broken leg!! He looks well, is not in pain, eating normally etc, so just letting it heal itself - I have given him a few shots of whiskey (cheers Helen F - useful gift!!) to make him feel better (seems to be a bit of an alcoholic rabbit really!).

Last week I was in Phnom Penh from Wed - Sun, we had quite a few meetings and I needed to do a lot of internet research (and do a bit of shopping!) On Friday night, despite being tired I went out with some of the PFD staff, A first for me - going out at 11pm! Got it all wrong, had an Indian for tea and did not drink, then went out later and did partake in a few wee tipples!! We went to two bars, then on to 'The most popular late-night haunt in Phnom Penh' according to the Lonely Planet!! The "Heart of Darkness" has a good mix of foreigners and locals, good music and not too

many prostitutes, but sadly does have several dodgy old men hanging round. I had a great time - in the company of 2 French guys, 1 Spanish girl, 1 Italian man and Phillipino Lea who I know quite well now! - so a right old international mix, universal in our tastes in music and tequila! On Saturday I went to a wedding with Nick in Kandal Province, It was one of Nick's colleagues who seemed thrilled that Nick had gone there! I felt quite underdressed in my usual clothes as the guests all looked lovely, the women wore handmade silk dresses (they said cost about \$7!!) It was a great experience, and one made enjoyable by Nick knowing the format of how much to pay, what to do etc. The bride and groom looked beautiful and I was in a photo with them, so I will get a copy of it from Nick to keep as a special reminder!

Another trip to Phnom Penh this month allows me to send this newsletter on now - as Tues and Wed are important days for all the PFD staff, as we are in a workshop to learn how to do the monitoring and evaluating properly...good for me as I will learn to do correctly from the very start! Its Judi's idea to go to Phnom Penh on Sat so we can go out at night, and do some of the tourist things the next day - as despite Judi being here since May, she has seen very little of Phnom Penh, so plan to be real tourists!

Work is good - this month I am just finalizing the training that we have planned for in March, which is okay as I go by the sooner the better principle, but here the cogs turn quite slowly, so patience is essential in the planning of anything! I have gone to a few more of the health centers as now have an agenda to check up on the midwives to make sure that I miss no one out when planning the training courses. I came upon a very sorry sight on Monday - a baby that looked as if it was dead - thin, pale and lifeless. Born weighing 1kg, now at 2 months old weighs just 2kgs and with a fever and diarrhea I really thought there was little hope - we gave her advice and went to her home a few days later and fortunately the baby was feeding more often and the fever had settled, so from now on they will take the child to be weighed every 2 weeks and keep their fingers crossed (Mine are crossed too!). I will keep you posted!

My good friend and intrepid traveller Sammy has now booked her flights here in March - so I am going to meet her in Kuala Lumpa on 8th for 2 days, it will be great, can't wait to see Sam, do tourist things in KL and also to enjoy a little luxury of a 5* hotel too!! Before I go, I am dropping a massive

hint to those of you that I am very close to - but on www.amazon.co.uk I have now got a 'wish list' of books/CDs that would go down a treat here, so if you are feeling generous - think of me!! They deliver here and it does not cost too much either!! Cheeky cow I know I am, but if you don't ask.....:

So I say goodbye for now, keep well and keep WARM!! Love from Kim x

For those of you not bored already - here are some photos of friends of mine...·



...Mr Monkey on Xmas Day...·...·Sarath & Friends at Party...Mr Sokhan feeling festive...!!!