



CAMBODIAN

Arts & Scholarship Foundation

Goose Bumps in Phnom Penh

by Fred Lipp, Founder and President

Two hours after Lisa Watkins arrived at her hotel, we drove her to see three of our students before she crashed from jet lag. The conversation drifted from idle chatter to the hell of poverty and the resilience of children. We squeezed between brick walls and walked over strewn garbage. Everything was transformed into slow motion as our heads dodged the sharp edges of tin roofs. We acted as if this walk was commonplace, but in our hearts, we wilted as we tried to keep up a brave front. From dark catacomb alleys, our students emerged with smiles and the eager desire to talk.

They spoke of normal high school concerns like passing the national exam, wanting to follow their dreams, and remembering the support of CASF from many they barely knew. After introductions and the lively conversation that comes with eagerness to share special moments, we suggested that Lisa might sing a song to our students. Without hesitation, there as bean cake was fried and children gathered at our feet, there as babies were nursed in the shadows, there as smoke and mosquitoes drifted in the thick air, THERE where never before was such a voice heard, Lisa sang a little song to each student. The words in a language no one could recite still held a wonderful meaning that touched every person gathered, as if angels visited this hidden spot on earth. Lisa sang while sweetly looking into the students' eyes. At the close of the song, we all rubbed our arms as goose bumps blossomed and tingled.

In English, the song was about the wish to give a child a mirror, so that when life is too filled with anger, as it can be, the child could look into the mirror and see our wishes for hope and courage for her.

The song was a powerful blessing, even for those who didn't understand the words.

The melody and the spirit behind a song have a language all their own. If something is beautiful, it touches us. As Lisa's song echoed down the alleyways of Phnom Penh, we felt the lump in the throat and the old goose bumps.



*Lisa Watkins, CASF Advisor
Tanglewood Festival Chorus*

Back Soon

by Harriet Tobin, CASF Advisor

I spent two weeks in Cambodia with Fred and Kitty Lipp, meeting first the university students in Phnom Penh, then traveling into the remote countryside to meet with students in their homes. Observing Fred and Kitty converse with the girls, sometimes through our interpreter, Dary, sometimes with sign language, accompanied by laughs and giggles, was a humbling lesson for me. These girls are so grateful to be given a chance to realize their dreams. Their spirit, endurance and resilience in the face of cultural and physical obstacles are absolutely amazing. I was struck by the number of students who aspire to be teachers so that they can return to their villages and pass on the CASF legacy to the next generation. What better example of the CASF success story?

Most of the girls and their families live very simply in the most rudimentary housing you can imagine. Yet even in the simplest home, artistic accents are visible in the form of colorful Cambodian sarong fabrics.



A highlight of my trip was having dinner with the university students in their flat. We had purchased the food at the market earlier in the day. The girls prepared the meal and proudly served us that evening, sitting in a big circle on the floor. After the meal, they taught us some of the traditional Cambodian dances.

My last day in Cambodia, I went with Dary and her sister, Dany, to purchase a rice cooker for the kitchen; it was a gift from Elaine Pew and me to

thank the girls for their warm hospitality. Saying good-bye was a tearful experience. I definitely want to go back and check up on these amazing young women who are determined to make something of their lives.

Heart Daughters

By Suezan Aikins, CASF Advisor

Greetings from the sweaty fascinations of Phnom Penh, Cambodia, where we landed under a full moon on New Year's Day to volunteer again with the wonderful Cambodian Arts and Scholarship Foundation for the month. This year we are fortunate to be traveling with the dedicated founders, Fred and Kitty Lipp, along with three other enthusiastic volunteers. As well as working with the university level girls living in the dorm and the few staying with family in the capital, we've been traveling to meet with the elementary and high school girls living in 15 of the poorest villages in five provinces, where deep relationships have been forged

with headmen, elders and families, whose support is essential to the girls' success.

Our reunion with last year's students in the dorm was very emotional. We were introduced to the eight bright-eyed new girls just starting their university studies and already adapting well to the massive change from scrambling to survive in their isolated villages to modern big city life in the capital. One of these girls later asked me if they were my heart daughters, too. I teared up, realizing that last year's words had stayed present enough in the older girls' hearts to be passed down to the new ones.



Mesmerized by Smiles

by Elaine Pew, CASF volunteer



Even though I've worked as a nurse in Europe and the Middle East, I didn't know what to expect in Phnom Penh. What I found was joy everywhere Fred and Kitty took me. At first, I remember sitting in the dormitory where the university students live, being mesmerized by their smiles, enthusiasm and happiness at reconnecting with the Lipps. I was delighted to be part of this adventure.

When we went to the village of Skun, we met Srey Roth, a young woman with severe scoliosis and missing one arm, but bright as a button and possessing an intense desire to become a doctor. Wow! What courage and determination! While we were there, the Educational Coordinator complained of abdominal pain. I was able to conduct a nursing interview and do a physical examination. She was grateful for the attention we were able to offer and

I was happy I could allay her fears and worries. She is a caring woman who makes sure that the girls in Skun have a place and time for their lessons.

On another visit, we met Davya (*see right*) and her aunt, who live in a well-cared-for, humble dwelling with colorful wall hangings. Davya wants to be a nurse. She really spoke to me, for at her age I was a candy striper at a Boston hospital. But she also loves to dance, which she does beautifully. If only I could move my fingers and feet as she did! Nursing arts and fine arts blend well anywhere in the world. Healing the body, the soul, and the mind is what Davya will do. Like all the young ladies we met, her smile was enchanting, and she, too, will achieve with CASF's help.



Going to Angkor Wat was a dream fulfilled for me. After studying its



wonders in college, being there with the giggly girls was magical. Going to the top of Kulen Mountain to see the Buddha and pray was very special.

There is so much more I could say about my memorable experiences, the enthusiastic and charming young women, Fred and Kitty's profound dedication to them and to CASF, and the unforgettable people, history, and panoramic beauty of Cambodia. I came home wanting very much to help CASF continue its important work.



About Our Students

CASF students come from five different provinces as well as Phnom Penh. We have an Educational Coordinator (EC) in each province who works with the girls in her area. She helps find girls eager to learn but without the financial means to stay in school.

Each girl fills out an application, which is reviewed by our Director. She interviews every girl and meets with her family, as do Fred and Kitty Lipp. CASF policy is to accept one girl per family in order to spread its resources as far as possible. The girls live at home and attend their village high school until they graduate.

Additionally, in 2010 we have 36 university students who have been part of CASF since at least grade 6. They either live with family in Phnom Penh or in the CASF rental flat, where we provide them with tuition and a monthly stipend, lodging, an academic resource library, bicycles for transport to school, five meals per week, utilities, and two sets of "city clothes", plus school supplies and computers that are available in the flat. Supervision is provided by a live-in house mother and a night-time female guard for safety. The CASF Director is also available on the grounds five days per week for support and any emergencies.

Of our 24 university graduates from the past eight years (see page 6), all but two are currently employed. Graduates range from teachers, nurses and doctors, to working in banks, as shop managers, bookkeepers, NGO workers in women's assistance programs, medical laboratory researchers and beyond. Some are married and have children; others are still single.

All CASF students are eager, determined learners who want to "give back" to their families and Cambodian society just as they have received from CASF.

Who We Are

The Cambodian Arts and Scholarship Foundation (CASF) is a 501©3 U.S. non-profit organization founded in 2001 by Fred Lipp, a retired Unitarian minister and author of the award winning children's book, *The Caged Birds of Phnom Penh*.

CASF is committed to improving the lives of children in Cambodia through education. CASF's special focus is work with poor, at-risk girls who, for a number of reasons, are often denied equal access to schooling. CASF works closely with local communities to identify potential students; provides the financial, emotional and medical support necessary for them to attend school; and sustains this support for as long as the child wants to learn. The Foundation currently serves 150 Cambodian students in schools throughout the country. Thirty women are at the university level, studying law, accounting and medicine. CASF employs a full-time, native-born Director in Cambodia; we pay no salaries in the U.S.

CASF is not affiliated with any religious institution or governmental organization. It is founded on principles of *tolerance, cultural diversity, compassion and continuing education*.



*Meet Noy,
our newest student*

This Girl is Going Places

By Lisa Watkins, CASF volunteer



Svay Rieng is action-packed as there are 15 students from this village to visit and families of six university students here. Each stop requires time to say hellos, time for Fred and Kitty to talk with the students and parents, and usually time for me to sing. A favorite aspect of these visits is seeing the pride on parents' faces as they talk with Fred, Kitty and Dary. Pride in your child is really a universal feeling-the smile, the sparkle in the eye tell you everything you need to know about whether investing with these girls is worth it.

We stop at so many places on this visit that I can't keep track of the girls' names or which pictures are of whom, but I click away with the camera, capturing as many smiles as possible. One young

woman really stands out. She greets us with a generous smile and begins to talk in excellent English. When she tells us she's in ninth grade, we all shake our heads in disbelief. Clearly, this kid has a knack for language. But her perky personality is what grabs us most strongly. She, unlike most of the other girls, wears her hair shorter than shoulder length and stands with a confidence you rarely see in Cambodia. This girl is going places!

We wind up our visit with a large, unexpected gathering at the Educational Coordinator's home. It begins with a powwow as one of the women, the grandmother of one of our university students, asks if her other granddaughter can be considered for the program. Fred gently explains that CASF's policy is to help one girl from a family so that as many families as possible in a village can get assistance. It is another difficult moment to watch the young girl in question listen to us deny her the same opportunity as her older sister. I understand



the wisdom and fairness of the policy, but I feel for the younger girl.

As the conversations at the gathering are going on, there is activity among the mothers, a mat is spread, chairs and benches are moved and I notice bowls of rice, chicken, salad and fried pork getting placed on the mat. It is time to feast.

Yes, it's a busy, busy visit to Svay Rieng, but the smiles of mothers getting hugs from Kitty on behalf of their daughters are happy moments to treasure. The delighted looks of fathers who know their daughters are well on their way to or in university linger in my memory. It is clear that without CASE, there would be no hope for these girls to get an education.



CASF Graduates - Where Are They Now?

We have selected several of our 24 university graduates to highlight below.

- * Sotheavuth graduated from the University of Medicine in 2008 and is now a doctor in Phnom Penh.
- * Sopheap graduated from the Institute Technology of Cambodia. She has been working for a food and chemical company since she graduated.
- * Samphorse graduated from Asean-European University in Accounting. First she worked for a construction company in Phnom Penh, but eventually got a job with Acleda Bank in her home province of Kampong Cham. She is still working there and was married last winter.
- * Phally graduated from Royal University of Phnom Penh in sociology. She works for the Department of Education in Banteay Meanchey Province.
- * Sangkhem (*see right*) graduated from Royal University of Law and Economics (RULE). After graduation, she worked as an intern at the Cambodian Defenders Project for 22 months. She is now working for Acleda Bank in her home province.
- * Sophakna graduated from the University of Medicine. She is now working in a laboratory.
- * Sophorn graduated from RULE. She has worked for the Ministry of Women's Affairs since she graduated.
- * Kirin graduated from Royal University of Phnom Penh in chemistry. She won a scholarship for training in Thailand and is now working as a high school teacher in her home province.
- * Vichea graduated from Royal University of Phnom Penh in chemistry. Since then she has worked for a food company in Kampong Chhnang Province.
- * Bopha finished three years at RULE as a CASF student and did the final year by herself. She is now teaching in Ratanakiri, is married and has just had a baby.
- * Sinoun (*see below*) graduated from RULE in the field of law. She worked as an intern at the Cambodian Defenders Project, but chose to work in her home province at a phone company in customer services.



When asked, "Why do you want to attend school?" Vanna, in her third year of university, said, "Knowledge is the only thing that cannot be taken from you. A higher education gives you the power to fight for what is right."

Visit our website at: www.cambodianscholarship.org

Helping Mothers and Daughters

By Sam Van Dam, CASF Board member



Front row, left to right: Srey Roth, her mom, Chantaa (in traditional Cambodian pajamas), Noy (CASF's newest student).
Back row, left to right: Rob Smith, Beth Pfeiffer, Kimhyn, Thylyn, Dary Chap (Director) and Kimhyn's mom.

I returned to Cambodia in February to meet with students who needed medical care during the last two years. The cost of medical care is paid by a CASF fund named in honor of my late father, Leroy D. Van Dam, MD. Two outstanding CASF friends joined us in several villages: Rob Smith, MD, internist and a specialist in infectious disease at Maine Medical Center and Intermed, and Beth Pfeiffer, businesswoman, graphic artist, trustee of Wellesley College, and a dedicated supporter of women's education.

Consider three mothers and their daughters.

When Srey Roth's mother was injured in a moto accident, CASF paid for her critical care. While visiting her mother in the hospital, an American surgeon noticed Srey Roth's extreme case of scoliosis, and later operated twice to successfully to relieve the condition. The surgeon took no fee and CASF paid for Srey Roth's recovery in the hospital.

Chantaa is CASF's village education coordinator and Thylyn is her daughter. Life at home last year was very challenging for them, and when Chantaa needed surgery, CASF paid the bills. Note the smile on Thylyn's face! Chantaa can now resume her duties to watch over CASF students in her village.

Kimhyn is a top student in math and science, and aspires to an education in medicine. Last year, her mother was diagnosed with TB. As the mother could not work and her father had died in an accident, Kimhyn stopped attending classes to sell cakes on the roadside to support her family. She was devastated. CASF is helping with treatment and food for the family, the mother is recovering, and Kimhyn is back in school.

CASF doesn't have the resources to solve all student medical problems. The medical fund helps primarily with critical care. But when a mother has difficulty caring for her daughter because of illness, CASF steps in to help, and follows up. On this visit, I watched the faces of the mothers and daughters as I introduced Rob and Beth, who cared enough to come all the way from the U.S. to meet them. As we talked with each girl about her classes and medical issues, I came to Srey Roth, who had experienced a lot of pain recovering from her surgery for scoliosis. "And how are you, Srey Roth?" I asked. She answered, "Oh, I am fine. I really want to know how you are."

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A donation of \$360 covers program costs, including school fees, uniforms, books, supplies and food, for a grade school student. A gift of \$1500 supports a university student's yearly scholarship, housing, food and books while studying in Phnom Penh. All financial support is from individual donors like you to:

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Despite severe physical challenges, Srey Roth is feisty and eager to be the best student she can. She writes, *"I would like to be a doctor because there are a lot of poor people in Cambodia. They are poor not just in money but also in health. I will study hard so I can become a doctor. Then I will treat the poor for free. I have seen a lot of foreigners come to help in Cambodia and that makes me want to do my part in helping Cambodians, too. Also, I would like to say thanks to all supporters of CASF for providing money to students here. I send you all wishes for good health."*