



CAMBODIAN

Arts & Scholarship Foundation

Please join us for a festive 10th Anniversary Celebration!

When: Saturday, October 1
3:00 to 5:00 PM

Where: Rines Auditorium
Portland Public Library
Portland, Maine

Come enjoy...

- *Premier of short CASF documentary film*
 - *Stories of our Cambodian students*
- *Performance by Cambodian Dance Troupe*
 - *Live music by Lisa Watkins*
- *Cambodian snacks and refreshments*



Changing Lives in Cambodia, One Girl at a Time

Balance

By Heidi Brewer, CASF Volunteer

As I rode in a tuk-tuk for the first time, the whizzing and humming of the multitude of vehicles took me off guard because I was sure that everyone was going to crash. Quite frankly, it felt dangerous. But soon, I could see that beneath the surface there was more to it. The threads of cars, trucks, motos, tuk-tuks, rickshaws and people wove together creating a system of unexpected balance. Even though at first glance it looked like chaos, the more accustomed I became to Phnom Penh, the more I realized it was indeed balance. Each vehicle found a path to take and others would yield for them-and not once did I see a crash. I was awestruck by the traffic patterns and soon felt comfortable within this chaotic system. The balance amazed me even more when I saw as many as six people riding on a single moto or goods stacked high on a truck with people atop the pile. Cambodians face this precarious balance between danger and stability every day.



This balance lingers with me as I think about Cambodia, a country that has seen horrific acts in the not so distant past that decimated its culture. It has one of the most corrupt governments in the world and a high poverty rate. But it is also a country that made me smile for it also possesses a great deal of hope. While there, I found myself thinking about the developing world versus the developed world and what we have lost here in the US. That loss includes a sense of community and a connection to the people who live closest to us. In Cambodia the reason I smiled so much was that people who were strangers on the street smiled so generously and genuinely at me that I could not help myself. Here we often pass one another on the street and don't say hello. In villages people displayed the same sort of balance that I witnessed in the traffic patterns. Individuals are woven together in a community where they take care of one another. I hope that Cambodia develops to offer children a better education, access to clean water and proper medical care, but they don't lose that sense of big smiles. And I hope that here in the US we can learn from those big smiles. It seems that



those who have little better appreciate what they have than those who have lots.

In Phnom Penh we met an elementary student named Hulee who is in school thanks to the support of CASF donors. She is a quiet little girl who lit up when we gave her a small sack of school supplies that my students in the US had donated. Hulee spent time with us reading Fred's book *Chalk* and taking pictures with my camera as we chatted. A day later, we visited the Genocide Museum. The museum documents the history of the events in the mid 70's; it was a school that became a detention and torture center under Pol Pot. We left the museum feeling overwhelmed and suffocated. The tuk-tuk ride back to the hotel took us past an elementary school which was getting out for the day. Bustling in the courtyard were the smiling faces of many children dressed in the same navy blue uniform Hulee wore when we met her. Seeing the children we felt we could breathe again. I realized that like my first reaction to riding in the tuk-tuk, danger seemed to be waiting at every turn. I was able to move beyond this precarious state, but girls in Cambodia who are denied an education live permanently on the edge of hopelessness and fear. This is why CASF's work is so important. Education is the antidote to this danger as it tips the balance toward hope and stability.

CASF is 10 Years Old

By Hope Hall, CASF Board member

It was 105 degrees on the afternoon we travelled to Kandall to visit with our CASF students. When we arrived, they were already gathered around a wooden platform on plastic chairs, their bright smiles radiating even more warmth than the unrelenting Cambodian sun. They were on a mid-afternoon break from classes. Many had biked or walked a great distance to see us and yet they looked fresh, illuminated from within by a radiance I have never seen in such abundance. Their gratitude and eager hope was contagious. The educational coordinators for the village stood off to the side beaming with pride.

After our meeting, the students walked us through their village, chatting as we strolled. The 12th graders who knew the most English held our arms as we walked down the winding dirt path. They proudly showed us how hard their families worked to make ends meet so that with help from CASF they could get an education. We laughed as we searched for words of the things their mothers sold at the village market: bundles of vibrant green morning glories, chicken eggs, rice. Many of them eat the morning glory for every meal with just a bit of rice, yet their smiles hold no complaint of their hunger or the heat.

I walked down this village path with my 16 year old daughter Lila. I saw a mother shyly hovering in doorway of a stick framed home, and it was easy to see all the girls of the village through the lens of the same crushing motherly dreams that I carry for Lila. I want her to be safe, and to believe that with hard work she can live her dreams. I want her to make the world a better place. After meeting these girls in a small Cambodian village, I want these simple dreams for them with the same passion.

Further down the path, after a quiet break filled with the calls of geccos and cicadas, one young woman summoned her courage to say "I want to go to University. Please. Please." She asks quietly, humbly, expressing the dreams of the girls on the path with us.

I cannot imagine how we can deny them this simple request for more education when they do not ask for anything else. There is not a single toy in the village, not a single car, no paved roads, and yet these girls have the wisdom to look beyond the material



towards the illusive and intangible dream of becoming educated and helping their families and village. When we asked CASF students to write their single dream for the future, not one wanted to acquire a material object. They dream of becoming doctors and teachers or working in NGOs so that they can give back to others in their villages and country. In this way we can see any donation to CASF growing exponentially.

When the Foundation began 10 years ago, it seemed hard to imagine our sweet village girls growing up to become confident women ready to attend University in Phnom Penh. In the next three years we will be faced with growing numbers of students who have worked hard and are ready to make this transition. To accommodate them all will mean adding a second dorm and providing food so that twice as many girls can enjoy a healthy meal each day as they rush from class to class. We worry that there will not be funds to support the fruits of our success, but know that we must find a way to keep the flame of hope alive and see them through on their journey as far as it will take them.

Visit our website at: www.cambodianscholarship.org

We've Got the Whole World in Our Hands

By Hope Hall, CASF Board Member



In each village, we showed students where America and Cambodia are on the globe. We reminded them that even though the countries are on opposite sides of the world, every time any of us makes a good decision to be kinder or to study hard, we make the whole world better for everyone. In this way, the distance

between us shrinks. We are connected by our shared hopes for a better future and it is really children who "have the world in their hands." They learned the song "Got the Whole World in Our Hands" and sang it as they passed the ball around. After, we asked them each their one dream for the future and wrote it in English for them to share with the other side of the world, so that we can all be reminded by their lovely faces of the importance of supporting the dreams of our most

impoverished world citizens. We will make a movie of their answers to be shared at our 10th Anniversary Celebration in Portland Maine this fall. Lots of them want to return the gift of their education by teaching others...music to our ears!



Editor's note: In April, a group of board and advisory members traveled to Cambodia to check in our students and programs. The group included: Heidi Brewer, CASF advisory board member and middle school social studies teacher at Thornton Academy; Lisa Grant, CASF advisory board member and jeweler; Hope Hall, vice president of CASF and an English teacher at Thornton Academy, and Lila Hall, the first member of our student advisory board and a junior at Greely High. Two initiatives arose out of this trip. Brewer and Hall will be developing a Cambodia in a Bag curriculum available this fall to teachers interested in using artifacts and engaging lessons to transport their class to Cambodia. More information will be available on the CASF website. Grant is developing a protected blog space where CASF graduates and university students can continue to support each other and share what they have learned about the work world and life. The majority of the articles in this issue were written following the trip. The essays are part of each student's application for university funding from CASF.



SREYMEY

I am from Prek Por and I have two younger siblings. My parents got divorced when I was a kid. My mother is a very poor local. She grows some vegetables and fruit, mostly mangoes and jack fruits. Besides this, she tries to sell little amounts of fish at a local market every morning. The income from these is very little and still not enough for all of us to go to school. But she tries to keep the three of us in school. Luckily, I became a CASF student and that makes my mother so happy for me. I'm very hopeful because I know I'll have a chance to go to university to make my dreams come true. My mother and I are very thankful to the foundation for the generous support. We hope you'll continue to help till I graduate from university in the city. I would like to go to a medical school. I want to help poor people in my country to have good health.

The Market as Metaphor

By Hope Hall
CASF Board member

Americans like to see the world as good and evil, happy and sad, light and dark, comforted by the simplicity of our either/or mentality. In Cambodia all these lines are blurred. Stand on a street corner outside a market and you will feel every emotion swimming in an inseparable swirl, like the humidity that makes it unclear where your body ends and the air begins. Cambodia insists that in order to truly understand the world, we must embrace its interconnectedness instead of hiding behind the extremes. The market is a raw metaphor for this complexity.

Walking among the market stalls, it is undeniably beautiful. Baskets filled with vegetables and crab and fruits are displayed like art, the colors so varied and vibrant it is impossible to capture them on film. Then look down to the concrete floor where your flip-flops walk



through rivers of blood and fish guts. Watch as a woman chops off the heads of frogs, as quick as dealing cards at a casino, and flips the frogs into a basket. The smell in one breath is rancid - fish guts in 105 degree heat trapped by the busy market - but in the next breath it is sweet with passion fruit and leche and mango and there is no separating the perfume. The women and girls selling food at the stalls are poor, working all day in a place many in the world would not even enter, and yet you cannot separate the despair from the quick smiles and lively banter between the stalls.

On one day we visited Toul Slang, a detention and interrogation center where over 20,000 Cambodians were killed during the Pol Pot regime from 1975-1978.

Their crime? They were educated or artists. Maybe there was no reason at all. Many of them were children. This one location was once a school. Imagine using a school as a location to destroy the future of a country. As we left, we passed an exact replica of the building, bustling with students in uniform heading home after their school day. All in a single block.

Visiting the girls in our program is similarly overwhelming. Each one is lit from within by hope and you can't help but feel good in their presence, and yet they are still so close to the lure of sex trafficking, the call of the garment industry. Many carry with them stories of losing parents to AIDS, fear of having their homes bulldozed by the government, the skeletons of the Pol Pot regime, and yet they keep moving forward with a brave smile and gentle humility. The reality is that even with an education the road will not be easy, but they are driven by their dreams and the knowledge that on the other side of the world, someone believes in them.

Who We Are

The Cambodian Arts and Scholarship Foundation (CASF) is a 501(c)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 125 Cambodian students in schools throughout the country. Thirty-seven 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*.

If Not School, Then This...

By Hope Hall
CASF Board member

The importance of educating girls was never clearer than yesterday when we visited the street outside a garment factory at lunch time. Walking inside the apartment the workers rent was like entering a prison, the air was heavy with the stench of hopelessness and the kids and families inside sat in the filthy

dark concrete hallway with only the glow of one T.V. to illuminate the gloom. Many of the girls aren't old

enough to work but they pay government workers to make them fake id's. They make only \$55 a month and pay \$40 or more to rent a room shared by 4-6 people, never seeing an opportunity to change their fortune. The factory is windowless and they work behind a prison-like gate, only coming out for lunch. When they start making enough to earn the benefits of higher wages, they are either fired or the entire factory shuts down and changes location. Of all the women living in this building, the longest one had been working for the factory down the road was four years. This is what misery looks like - a far cry from the fancy malls where the clothes end up in Abercrombie and the Gap. Here the despair is tangible and as Westerners who buy the clothes, we are a party to the horror unless we do something. I left the apartment in tears, the image of a mother watching her sleeping baby on the filthy floor of the dismal trash strewn street painted in my mind forever.



SOPHEAP

I am from Svay Rieng. When I was in grade 5 and 6, my mother made Khmer cakes, and I was the one who carried those cakes from door to door. No matter how far it had to be, I walked happily in hope of getting some money for my study at school. Not a good business because not so many people bought cakes to eat. Despite that, my mother kept trying, and I tried to carry it and sold after school because at least we got some money, if we were at home doing nothing, no money. My mother sold porridge in the village and my father grew some morning glory. My mother could make only 2000 Riel [*one dollar*] per day from selling the porridge. Despite this, I never give up my study but I tried to study within my resources. Finally, when I reached high school it got much better than in the past as I have been supported by CASF. My studies improved and my parents were so happy. We are very thankful to the foundation for this generous support and I hope my dream will come true. I dream to be a good teacher because my work would benefit Cambodia in the future.



Frequently Asked Questions about CASF

How many students have gone through the CASF program?

CASF has graduated 42 students from university and a number have gone on to graduate degrees in medicine, science, teaching and business; 98% of our graduates find jobs. Another 120 students are currently enrolled in educational programs from primary school in different villages through university (34 are at university, including two in graduate school).

In addition, there were another 200 students served by CASF when we include two remote areas where there was no school available. Villagers built schools and CASF provided funding for teachers. After several years of well-established school attendance, CASF turned these over to government support.

How many villages do you serve?

We currently serve 13 villages in 4 provinces, plus the capital city of Phnom Penh.

How is a village chosen?

All of our villages were chosen on the basis of low income, close proximity to a school, and contact with a reliable teacher who serves as an educational coordinator to oversee our local program.

How do you select students?

The educational coordinator has experience with the students in the school and has the ability to access grades as well the degree of family support and financial need. From her recommendations, there follows an application process. Then our Director screens applications, interviews students and families, and makes recommendations to the CASF Board.

Where do university students live?

We provide housing in our Women's Educational Support Center in Phnom Penh. We accommodate 28 students with an overflow accommodation for six students in a small flat nearby. We also allow students to live with family members in Phnom Penh when possible. In addition in a few cases the government has housing for students studying to be primary school teachers.

What makes CASF different from other NGOs working in Cambodia?

1) We intervene with educational opportunities for girls around 6th grade, at the very time they often drop out of or are taken out of school.

2) We provide an educational coordinator who works with students on a personal basis to support growth and development through their school experience.

3) We provide stipends for extra classes required by teachers to advance studies; funds are also provided for school uniforms, supplies and snacks.

4) Our director regularly meets with students in their homes and checks frequently with the educational coordinator addressing health issues, family matters, and/or personal concerns a student may have. CASF Board and Advisors also visit with students twice a year.

5) If a student passes the National Exam in 12th grade and is accepted into

(con't. in next column)

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Newsletter Editor: Eleanor Goldberg

a university program, oversight continues. For those needing it, housing, medical care, food, monthly stipend and tuition are provided by CASF.

Inspired to Give?

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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Visit our website at:

www.cambodianscholarship.org

SARET

I am from Kandall. I'm 20 years old and currently in grade 12. I have four brothers and two sisters and I'm the youngest in my family. My parents are farmers and do not have a good income. We are trying so hard every day just to survive; we cannot save at all. My parents believe in education. Even though we have a poor life, my family and I never thought of giving up studying. I struggled very hard to become a CASF student and that makes all of us very happy and full of hope. I wish to go to an English university in the city to be an interpreter. My whole family and I would like to ask you all to kindly help my dream come true.

