

Persistent Hope & Persevering Love

Spring 2014

SPARROWS

People often ask me how I cope with all the tragedy associated with human trafficking in Cambodia. They wonder how it is that after twenty-four years I can still function. They display a look of shock when I tell them I am more enthusiastic and motivated than when I started. So what pushes me to continue persevering in this ministry? I believe there is a huge spiritual dimension to grappling with the stories, the investigations and the trauma suffered by Cambodians. We may all manage to cope with the emotional stress for a little while. However, when the years turn into decades with the issues persisting and there is a need to continue persevering towards a goal that still seems far away, it is vital that we are grounded in the knowledge of someone greater than ourselves. We need to hold to the belief that there will be ultimate justice and freedom one day.

Those of you who have heard me speak will have undoubtedly heard me refer to the "Carpenter King" – one who considers the poor, destitute and hopeless to be of such value that they are "to die for". It is this hope and knowledge that is central to our ability to press on in the face of overwhelming odds. In Matthew 10:29 (NLT) we read, *"What is the price of two sparrows – one copper coin? But not a single sparrow can fall to the ground without your Father knowing it."* What a wonderful thing it is to serve a God of justice who cares! The point is further driven home two verses later, *"So don't be afraid; you are more valuable to God than a whole flock of sparrows."*



The power of this passage, for me, is that it is intimate and personal. So often we comprehend the huge problems of the world, such as human trafficking, through clinical theory or abstract statistical models. God is not like that – it is all very personal for Him. This brings me to another reason why both myself and other Ratanak staff members continue to persevere... it is personal. We have had the privilege of meeting and knowing those transformed from situations of slavery and hopelessness into lives of hope and dignity. Who among us would abandon those we love in times of disaster? We all have the capacity to work relentlessly for those we love, because they are neither theoretical nor statistical; they are known to us. It is no surprise then, as God allows us to get to know and love Cambodians, that we become more committed to their well-being. If we are to fully engage in being a blessing to others around us, we

need to allow our relationships to become personal, as God has made his relationship with us personal.

Due to security and privacy considerations it is virtually impossible to have you know the girls personally. This is a constant

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frustration to me. So often when I'm with them and their laughter fills the room, I think of all of you (seriously I do). I think to myself: if only those who support us could see this, could see these faces – they would know such joy. Alas, this is not possible. However, in an attempt to bridge the gap somewhat, allow me to say a few words about some of our sparrows – those God has given us to serve and to love. My hope is that you will pray for them and also be encouraged by how far they have come. The girls Ratanak has the privilege of caring for have been brutalized by life. They have undergone very significant trauma and were disadvantaged not only by human trafficking and abuse, but also by circumstances that denied them an education. Yet now, with your support, these girls have experienced love and are growing into beautiful young women with hopes and dreams. Four of them are attending university – an amazing accomplishment for young women who have been through so much. In the following paragraphs you will not find any particular drama, only normal impressions – the sort that may be associated with any young university freshman. But therein lies the joy, for these girls have come from a background that is anything but normal. So normal actually represents great bravery and great victory!

(I have changed all names to follow.) Salette is hoping to become a social worker. I think she will do well in this area as she has a very gentle presence and a warmth that makes people, especially little kids, feel safe. She is hungry for knowledge and recognizes how far she has come. She says she wants to develop from a person who doesn't know anything to a person who has a lot of skill and is full of knowledge. I trust she will achieve even beyond what she expects! In the future she wants to be a Program Manager in an organization that helps women and children who are victimized and have been trafficked far from their homes. Salette is pragmatic and responsible. She is quieter than many of the girls and less quick to smile – but when she does it lights up the room. While often serious, she also has the capacity to be a complete goof and be very funny when she feels like it.

Recently, Caera also asked for information about working in the field of Counseling and Social Work. However, in conversations with the Ratanak staff she determined that “sitting in an office listening to other people's problems” was not for her. I guess that means counseling is out! She would like to be more active and engaged, preferably out in the community. She is currently



Above: School supplies are readied by the young women at RAP who are entering university!

evaluating whether she would like to pursue teaching or social work. She is interested in working with an organization either in urban or rural Cambodia. She has a warm manner, is very quick to smile, and is a social butterfly who enjoys having people around her.

Serey is studying Information Technology. She is gifted in this area and instructs Ratanak staff when they have questions or difficulties with

various computer programs. She has taught them how to set up and navigate the whole social networking world! She wants to get her Bachelors Degree and become a Manager of Information Technology Systems, working in a large international company or organization. Serey's ability to acquire English has amazed me. She has a great sense of humor and time spent with her always involves much laughter. When I last saw her she presented me with a huge plate of chocolate chip cookies, which she had just learned to make, along with a huge grin. So much for me eating healthy while in Cambodia! After giving me some of her delicious cookies we chatted, and I agreed with her on most things (except what pizza we were to order – we have agreed to disagree on that!)

And that brings me to the final element that keeps me going in this difficult and endless work – success! The healing process can be painful. The trauma of the past is manifested in different ways, but each success contributes to transformation. Particularly in times of difficulty, I only have to think of the girls, now living with dignity, and I am once again propelled along in this journey of hope. I trust that, through these newsletters, you are able to catch a glimpse of the sparrows and the hope.

A LEGACY OF HOPE

Built on compassion, Ratanak International has always believed that love is the greatest communicator of the Gospel. Loving care for those overwhelmed by sickness and poverty provides, more than anything, a beacon of hope to another vulnerable community. Ratanak has been committed to serving patients in need of care and treatment since its very first project almost 25 years ago. Since then, we've continued to provide the resources necessary to build functional medical systems in rural communities, including hospitals, clinics, medical supplies, and more. Recently, we purchased another ambulance for the city of Poipet, a community in need that first came to our attention

in 2003. Located on the Thai-Cambodian border, traders took advantage of impoverished Cambodians living in Poipet, using them to physically carry huge loads of imported goods across the border into Cambodia to sell. Casinos brought in rich foreigners, and with them, an increase in prostitution and AIDS. Poverty was thriving. The needs were palpable.



Left & Below: The medical team tends to emergency patients.



One of the greatest needs we saw in this community was lack of access to a reliable ambulance system. Before this project started, patients suffering serious injuries or diseases made their way to the nearest provincial hospital by begging a ride from any form of transportation driving along the 70 km road. It all started when a Vancouver donor approached Ratanak, wanting to do something meaningful in memory of his mother who had passed away. His mother, Dorothy Erdman, was a keen Ratanak supporter. She was a nurse who had been committed to caring for her patients and those around her. As a result, Ratanak was able to buy two ambulances for the hospital already built with Ratanak funds. To this day, they continue to be used to save thousands of lives. What a testament to a life dedicated to serving the needs of others!

Recently, the provincial health department informed our partners at CAMA (Christian & Missionary Alliance) of two nearby medically under-served areas in great need of ambulances. The main roads were in such poor condition that existing ambulances were taking a long time to get to these outlying areas, and then up to thirty minutes to reach the hospital. To meet the need, Ratanak has recently provided a new ambulance to serve these areas.

The new ambulance is now based strategically off the national highway so that it can transport patients and respond to severe trauma more quickly, increasing the chances of healing and survival. However, the ambulance system does so much more than bring patients to hospitals swiftly. It is transforming trauma into hope as staff minister to the needs of the poor and desperate. Most importantly, this program allows ambulance staff to demonstrate compassion and care for every single patient they come into contact with: pregnant mothers, landmine and burn victims, as well as traffic accident victims. Below is a testimony about a woman, now a mother, who was brought promptly to a hospital where she could safely deliver her baby:

Mrs. Sem Chakriya is 21 years old and lives 10 kilometres south of Poipet city. Her husband works cutting bamboo.

One night at around midnight, she went into labour with her first baby. She had originally planned to deliver the baby in the village with a traditional birth attendant. As her labour progressed, however, she began to have difficulty. Her neighbour called the CAMA rural ambulance team from Poipet city to transfer her to the referral hospital one hour away. In the early morning, Mrs. Sem Chakriya delivered a beautiful baby.

Mrs. Sem Chakriya and her husband expressed their happiness and thanks to the Lord for providing an ambulance that could rapidly transfer her to a safe facility where she could deliver her baby.

In a country where so many expectant mothers die as a result of complications in childbirth, this service is a huge blessing. This is only one small story out of the thousands who are helped each year by the CAMA ambulance project in Poipet and throughout all of Banteay Meanchey Province. Addressing this visible need brings us great joy, and we're excited to continue expanding this network of ambulances to reach more communities in need.



Above: One of our ambulances in action!

A WORTHY INVESTMENT

Ratanak is constantly evaluating ways we can invest in our staff in Cambodia, both to empower them and build the capacity of our organization. Over the last few months we have jumped at a few opportunities to send some of our staff members to some valuable training programs.

A counselor from the RAP home attended a Systematic Counseling course where she learned how to use creative activities in order to learn more about a client's background, and her thoughts and feelings about her past. Over a six-month period, she received ongoing supervision and coaching as she implemented these activities. We have seen her grow from this experience in the ways she deals with client issues and thoughtfully builds bridges with them. Ratanak also recently sent two senior staff to a leadership training retreat. Not only did they learn about managing stress in their own lives, but also how to cultivate healthy habits in the midst of stressful environments.

Over this past month, two other staff members have been attending a Peace Bridges course. Its purpose is to help our staff manage conflict in creative and constructive ways. This is not easy in the Cambodian context. Too often conflict is hidden under the surface through "saving face". Cultural norms dictate withholding conflicting views to preserve the harmony of the group. Unfortunately, this can result in conflict because assumptions are made and never clarified. Moreover, the trauma of the genocide continues to impact many people in their behavior and attitudes. One just has to pick up the daily newspaper to read of how an eruption of anger within the home has developed into another instance of brutal domestic violence. Our desire is for them to implement this within our programs by training our other staff and, ultimately, training the young women who live at RAP.

Such training tools, we believe, are vital for enhancing Ratanak's capacity as we continue to invest in our most important assets – our Khmer staff. They will be the ones who will ultimately have the greatest impact in their culture and society. Pray for God to use all these training opportunities to build into each staff member His truths and His ways, so that they will be His instruments bringing light into the darkness and hope to those who feel hopeless.



Above: Staff attending the Peace Bridges training course and a leadership retreat.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Bluetree Music Video

In January, Bluetree (a UK worship band that also wrote the song *God of this City*) launched the official music video to their song *Shine*. The video is focused on the work of Ratanak and was filmed entirely on location in Cambodia during a trip with our Ratanak International (UK) team!

Visit www.bit.ly/1fuIbmt to see the video. We hope you are encouraged by the hope that radiates from it!

Church Engagement Package

Are you interested in engaging your church in the issues of justice? Does your congregation have a heart for those exploited and abused? This Spring, we're excited to be launching a new resource for churches to help congregations grasp difficult global issues and get involved. Included will be informative sermon notes, bible study guides, discussion questions, fundraising tools, and more, so that together, we can impact the lives of those suffering across Cambodia.

Annual Receipt Reminder

Please note that we have switched over to annual receipting for all donations starting January 1, 2014. Donations for the 2014 year will be sent out next year between January 15 and February 28, 2015. Thank you so much for your continued support of Ratanak and the people of Cambodia. Please do not hesitate to call or e-mail us if you have any questions.

Thank you for joining us on this journey towards restoration in Cambodia and, most importantly, in lives so precious to our Father. I hope you are encouraged by these glimpses into the lives you are helping to transform!

Blessings,

Brian McConaghy

