

Travel report on the visit of Henk van Zijtveld to the orphanage at Battambang, Cambodia from the 9th to the 13th March, 2015

After a long day of travelling I arrive in the morning in the Cambodian capital Phnom Penh (PP) where I will be picked up by our own agent Vireak and travel directly by car to Battambang. Casey, a business relation of Vireak, travelled with us (a trip of more than 5 hours) because she wanted to see the center. Two things were immediately noticeable, the main supply routes to Phnom Penh were under much needed repair and the main roads on the rest of the journey were much better than they used to be. First impressions: The country is moving forward. The whole trip to Battambang was enough for me so I just had a bite to eat and then went to bed.

The next morning we went to the orphanage accompanied by Brian as a representative of Rotary South Surrey Canada and Chip as a representative of Rotary Bangkok South Thailand. Both Rotary clubs have teamed up with Rotary Minerva Amsterdam Netherlands to give considerable support to a number of special projects that can't be financed from the normal operational budget. Here you should think of engineering and sanitation projects, a farming project, clothes and school uniforms and supplies. At this time a project is running to build a completely new kitchen, more about this later.



Agriculture project.

In 2013, we (The Float Foundation together with our agent Vireak and our resident adviser in Bangkok, Arie Bloed) had very serious discussions with the management of CPCDO in Phnom Penh.

For clarity: CPCDO is an organization that has their own orphanage in PP. "Our house" in Battambang is allied to this organization for the operational running of the center. Discussions centered on the fact that we felt that the management of our house was not functioning well enough. Eventually this led to the appointment by CPCDO of an entirely new management.

Why these explanations? Because on arrival the positive change was evident. The manager is a quiet Cambodian man (about 45 years old) with his heart in the right place for the children assisted by two amazing ladies (about 35 and 25) where the concern and warmth for the children was immediately noticeable. There are now 38, well looked after and well dressed, children in the house. You can see that they all feel at home. Happy children playing and those who come from the school around noon all look well groomed and cheerful. Furthermore, you can clearly see that the mix in the leadership of men and women having different ages has a positive impact. The younger children are drawn especially to the ladies and the older ones more to the manager and the important thing is that everything radiates balance. REALLY GREAT TO SEE!



The Rotary men had t-shirts for everyone and I brought empty footballs and a pump. The children were really glad to receive these presents. As always seems to happen, while pumping up the last football the nipple broke off. Later in the day we went to town to look for a replacement.



It is now nine years since we started the center (yes, time goes quickly !!!) and some things do need a drastic update. With the help of our additional sponsors and especially the Rotaries we have started on this.

The building of the girls has had a major facelift with the open corrugated walls replaced by stone walls with separate sections (young, medium age and older children). One of the two ladies always sleeps with the older children. Indoor showers have been built as well as better facilities provided. All in all a huge improvement!



Girls building interior.



Kitchen being built.

At this time a completely new stone building housing the kitchen facility is being built. Just as we arrived the highest point in the construction had been reached. The planning is to finish within two months before the rainy season starts. The next step is to upgrade the boys building to the present Cambodian standards. SO BIG IMPROVEMENTS HERE AS WELL!

We spent the whole day talking to everyone about all the issues involved and the things that are still needed and had a pleasant dinner with the children and management. We also played games and football with the children. All architectural matters were viewed and reviewed and we enjoyed the warmth and openness of everyone. During the day it became clear that one of the older children had been injured on a moped and had hurt his leg needing crutches. The Rotary men decided to try and provide crutches giving us two good reasons to go shopping in town (don't forget the nipple for the football). With the help of Vireak and our driver we managed to find the (special) items we needed so that we could bring them to the orphanage the following day.



Eating together.

The next day was a travel day going back from Battambang to Phnom Penh but before leaving we wanted to bring the purchased items to the orphanage. It's nice to mention that although arriving unannounced the situation wasn't any different to the day before. We can draw the conclusion that things hadn't been presented in a special way for us as visitors.

The last day of the visit I spent in Phnom Penh. In the morning I went with Vireak to the central CPCDO orphanage in Phnom Penh. Here we reviewed all present business and our conclusions with the director, Mr Yuth. Furthermore, we discussed both his and our plans for the future and how we think to achieve them. It was a very constructive discussion.

In the afternoon I had a very special event that needs an introduction.

The agreement with S.

S is a young woman of 21 years and her history is a very special story. In 2006 we started to build our center and in early 2007 it was finished. The first group of children (about 30) came into our center including S. and her brother. S. was 12 years old and her brother 9. The children's parents were separated and had each started a new life without their children. They were left with a distant relative, but this was not a good solution. A dramatic story with the children ending up as victims, both of them ended up in our orphanage. Time passes and S. and her brother have at least found a place where peace, warmth, care and training is provided. Now it is the policy of the centre that at the age of 18 children have to leave the center. They must be able to either work or study, and this

policy is implemented strictly. S. was the first child to leave the house and she indicated she would like to study to be a nurse. As the Float Foundation we don't cover these costs but we always try to help the children when we can. In this case, Hanneke (my wife) and I decided to sponsor her in a personal capacity for the 3 study years. The sponsorship covered everything including tuition fees, housing, maintenance, etc. provided that her study results were good. Our agent Vireak played an essential role helping us to arrange everything. Without her help we wouldn't have been able to get things organized. S. did her best through the years and she passed all her tests and exams and she will graduate in about 5 months.

Now finally S. and I had our first face-to-face meeting because for all these years she had just been one of the children in the orphanage. It was, as you can imagine for both of us, a very emotional moment. She was so incredibly grateful that we have assisted her at a time in her early life when everything seemed hopeless. We have given her stability and enabled her to develop beyond the center. In the not too distant future she will have a job and an income and a FUTURE.

THIS IS WHY WE ARE DOING WHAT WE ARE DOING!

After concluding discussions during a meal with our amazing agent Vireak and her husband that evening, I left on the plane the next morning, tired but satisfied.

Henk van Zijtveld

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