

# NEWS AND EVENTS

## On the Web!

Find The Chelly Foundation online at the following address:

[www.TheChellyFoundation.org](http://www.TheChellyFoundation.org)

## Donations

The Chelly Foundation welcomes your tax-deductible donations to help us provide educational services and a chance at a better future to the children of Nan's village in Cambodia, and elsewhere.

## Photo Gallery

A recent visit to Nan's Village in Cambodia gave way to plenty of photo opportunities. We'd love to share the experience with you, so make sure to visit our newest galleries on our website.

## Timeline

This page will constantly update to fill you in on the latest happenings at The Chelly Foundation. Visit our website to view the timeline and continue to check back as the year progresses.



Nan and Jason with Monov's parents

## A Trip to Cambodia

*During a week in January 2016,*

I travelled to Cambodia for the first time, for the purpose of dedicating the opening of The Chelly Library in the remote village of Snay Anh Chet. My late Mom's caretaker, Nan Nop, accompanied me on the journey, and her brother Ess acted as our in-country chauffeur and guide during our one-week stay in Cambodia. Needless to say, the trip was both heartening and eye-opening.

The trip consisted of leaving on a Saturday morning (January 9), traveling 14 hours on Korean Air to Seoul, and after a four hour layover another eight hours on to Phnom Penh – arriving on Sunday night local time. In Seoul travelers are serenaded by string quartets and treated to local dancers performing in colorful costumes. After a bumpy second leg of the ride, we arrived at the



**A Donation of...**

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\$25 pays for 100 reading books at the high school (in Khmer and English).

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\$30 pays for one month of a librarian's salary at the high school.

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\$100 pays for a year's school supplies and uniforms for a student attending the Royal University of Phnom Penh.

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\$150 pays for one month of an English teacher's salary at the high school (8 classes of 50 students).

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\$400 pays for a year's scholarship for one student to attend the Royal University of Phnom Penh.



airport. Ess and other family members of Nan's were there to greet us on arrival on a very warm, humid night, and we proceeded to make our way through the throngs of people waiting for family members to Ess' car.

It became immediately apparent that travel by automobile in and around Phnom Penh is a different sort of experience all by itself. Hundreds of scooters and motorized bikes of all kinds continuously swarm around cars, in a fashion that would make any first-time North American driver in Cambodia nervous. And there doesn't seem to be much rhyme or reason to the way drivers respect intersections, or even lanes of traffic – its as likely as not that one encounters a car coming “the wrong way” in your lane on a 2 way street, or seemingly turning into your lane at the last possible moment. I was happy that Ess drove us everywhere.

I confess to staying at a very nice hotel during my time in Phnom Penh – at the Raffles Hotel Le Royal. It is a kind of sanctuary in the city, off a busy street in the center of things. One enters the lobby and is instantly greeted by staff providing drinks and paying special attention to one's every request. The floor I was on reminded me of something out of Casablanca (although I realize that's in a different part of the world). Servants in suits, large fans overhead, lovely wood furnishings, and a general elegance, including in the large room I had reserved. Please believe me that I felt quite guilty during my entire time at the Hotel le Royal. (Nan stayed elsewhere in the city with friends.)

The center of Phnom Penh is a bustling place with open-air markets, lovely large temples, and, wherever one ventures, drivers offering to chauffeur you around in a tuk-tuk (a motorized three wheel vehicle), for about \$4 a ride. Due to jet lag I didn't venture widely the first full day in Phnom Penh, but Nan and Ess arranged for me to visit Nan's family in the city, including their sister Nean, who takes care of Nan's elderly father, Nop Neang. He is lovingly taken care of 24/7 by family members. It was nice to see him aware of Nan's return, as she hadn't been back since last January 2015 when she travelled to Cambodia to hand out schoolbooks to 600 school elementary school children (our initial project together).

On the second full day I was treated to seeing more of the city. We paid a visit to Mol Sao Monov, the first recipient of a Chelly

Foundation scholarship, who is in the middle of her first year at the Royal University of Phnom Penh. Monov is a very poised, very conscientious young lady, and I am hoping she will go on to complete her studies over the next few years. The Foundation will continue to support her as long as she passes her exams! Later that day, we took time to make a sobering stop at the infamous prison known as S-21, where during the regime of Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge political prisoners were subject to harsh conditions and torture. The bare cells and the photographs exhibits provide a harrowing reminder of what life was like for some when Nan was a small child in the mid to late 1970s.

On Wednesday, my third full day in country, it was finally time to venture to Nan's village of Snay Anh Chet, for the pre-arranged dedication ceremony. The village sits in Kampot Province, which is southwest of Phnom Penh, bordering on the Gulf of Thailand. Until a few years ago, the drive from Phnom Penh would have been completely on unpaved roads once you left the city center, and would have taken double the time. Our trip of 100 miles or so was mostly on a paved two-lane road, and took somewhere around 2 and ½ hours. The sights from the road included sporadic factories, farms, skinny cattle, and the occasional ornate entrance to a Buddhist temple. I was warned by Ess and Nan before hand that there were no public bathrooms en route, nor any in their village.



With Monov at the University

Turning off from the main road, on a dirt road leading past farms and clusters of two-story houses made of bamboo, we made it to the Hun Sen Chum Kiri High School by around 1030 a.m. The day was hot, in the 90s (Fahrenheit), which was unusually warm by January standards in Cambodia. I didn't know what exactly to expect, and candidly, really wasn't fully prepared for what happened next. For as we exited the car, we were immediately greeted by children lining the schoolyard area, not just in the dozens but in the many, many hundreds. I am informed that approximately 1300 students go to this upper school, which spans from the equivalent of 7th to 12th grades. Men Bun Yeourn, the principal of the school, had arranged for this huge gathering of students to hear our dedication remarks, and I can tell you that the emotions we all experienced were kind of overwhelming, for all of us to see first-hand the level of interest in our Foundation's work.

The principal spoke first, followed by Khem Samorn, the teacher of English we have hired – and then Ess and Nan and myself. In my remarks, I said that my Mom would have very much wished to be here today, that she would have loved the idea of travelling to this village as an adventure and to be of help to so many young people. I told everyone that my parents had instilled in me at an early age a love of reading, and that with hard work and a little bit of luck some of the students gathered would perhaps be able to learn English while in school here and go on to study at a university in Phnom Penh.

We then proceeded to walk to The Chelly Library, surrounding by kids, and took a tour of what Ess had accomplished in building the library and stocking it with books and computers. I met the several gentlemen who with Ess did the physical labor in constructing the library during the Fall of 2015, and the three part-time librarians who will consist of the paid staff.

The visit did not last all that long, compared with the travel time to get there, but I can assure the interested reader that the moments when I was in the midst of near a thousand children will last a lifetime in my memory. So many bright white and black uniforms, so many eager faces who listened intently to what their principal and teacher had to say (as well as my remarks in translation by Ess.) My visit was everything that I had hoped it would be, marking the beginning of the Foundation's work and my own journey in making a small difference in helping a village of people I had not met before.

After visiting the school, Nan took me to visit her Mom, Chan Nam, and other members of her family, who live in a hamlet of houses nearby. Nan had paid for a water pump several years ago which sits in front of her Mom's house. That's an unusual luxury in the area. We also walked along a pond and narrow path to pay a visit to the house of Monov's Dad, Sok Simet, and Mom, Sous Sinoun, and their family. One of their sons climbed a coconut tree for us, and as the pictures show, we all enjoyed the fruits of his labor.

The party that had come to Snay Anh Chet (including Ess, Nan, Nan's friend Luke, her niece Saony, and myself) proceeded to lodge that evening on top of a remote mountainside hotel, Thansur Bokor Mountain Resort, which doubles as a casino on the weekend but was largely empty on the Wednesday evening we were present. It was all kind of spooky but the air was cooler and the views from the mountain, looking out at the island of Phu Kuoc, now owned by Vietnam, were beautiful. We took time out to visit a very large Buddhist statue, Lok Yeay Mao, on Bokor Mountain on the way back the next morning.

On the way, Ess and Nan brought me to a second school, the Meas Sophea Banov High School, a kind of magnet school for the district, where some English was already taught and where a good percentage of



students do have the privilege of going on to study at university. A gathering of the leaders of the school, including the principal, Men Reng, and the teacher of English, Houy Sith, talked to us about the Foundation's future plans to help. For the time being, we agreed that the Foundation would donate money for buying three computers for students at this second school, something which has now been accomplished through Ess' good efforts.

There was something else noticeable about the second school: three primitive toilet facilities for the students, consisting of pretty much a hole in the ground in private stalls. I made a note that if The Chelly Foundation was to build a library, donate computers, and provide English lessons for students, we could also fund the building of a modern bathroom at the Hun Sen Chum Kiri High School. This will be on the agenda for 2016.

Back in Phnom Penh, I spent time travelling by tuk-tuk around the downtown area, and sampled local food and shopped in open markets by the Tonle Sap River.

On Friday, our last day in country, we all spent time walking near various parks and temples in the downtown area, sampling the sights. In early evening, on a whim I suggested that we all pay a visit to the one local synagogue that advertised a Shabbat dinner. The Chabad congregation, led by Rabbi Butman, serves as a kind of United Nations in Phnom Penh, where I found it easy to meet fellow travelers from far away places, including Australia, Gibraltar, Israel, Kazakhstan, and the exotic city of Baltimore! Remarkably, Nan said she recognized some of the prayer songs from services back at the home in Potomac Maryland where Nan assisted my Mom in her last years.

I didn't realize it beforehand, but there seems to be a spiritual connection between the sufferings of the Jewish people during the Holocaust, and what a generation of Cambodians went through under Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge in the 1970s. Nan understands the connection, even if the burgeoning population of children in her village might not.



Nan's entire family came out for a send-off at the airport before Nan, Luke and I departed on the 1130 flight from Phnom Penh to Seoul, and then on to D.C.

Endnotes: After I returned from Cambodia, I received a beautiful certificate from the provincial authorities in Kampot Province, thanking The Chelly Foundation for its good works. One month after our visit, some 700 students signed a list asking for free English lessons. Given logistical and resource constraints, we have budgeted for

Samorn to teach eight classes of 50 students in the two upper-most grades. We will see how things go and file further reports later this year on how students fared on their national exams.

Meanwhile, our plans are for Monov to be joined at the Royal University of Phnom Penh this fall by at least two additional students from the village, on a four-year scholarship (at around \$500 a year per student). Ess and Samorn will be administering an essay and an English exam to pick from among the many dozens of candidate students for receipt of the scholarships.

A library dedicated, three part-time librarians, three computers in one school and two in another, the funding of an English teacher providing free lessons to 400 students, books supplied to those students, and three scholarships available come the Fall of 2016. I think we have made some real progress in just the first year of our operation, and I am so grateful to everyone who has contributed to the efforts to date. Hopefully, our work will continue for a long time to come.

### **Jason R. Baron**

*The Chelly Foundation*

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#### **Cambodia is a developing country with a population of 15 million.**

"There is a severe scarcity of schools and classrooms, particularly in the rural areas, which limit the number of children who have access to education. Most Cambodian villages have a primary school, but they are not complete and do not offer a full 1-6 grade curriculum. Cambodian children face greater difficulty in the pursuit of a higher level of education because secondary schools are in less than 10% of the villages. Only 5.4% of Cambodian villages have a lower secondary school and only 2% of them have an upper secondary school. . . . Students can only pursue higher education if they can afford the fees. Therefore, further education becomes inaccessible to the bulk of potential pupils.

Reference: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education\\_in\\_Cambodia#Resources](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education_in_Cambodia#Resources)

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### **Nan's dream for the children in her village in Kampot Province**

Speaking English is a pathway to increased opportunity and success for the children in the underdeveloped area of Kampot in Cambodia where I was born. I grew up while the Khmer Rouge were in power – a regime which caused widespread starvation and deprivation across the country with more than one and a half million people dying.

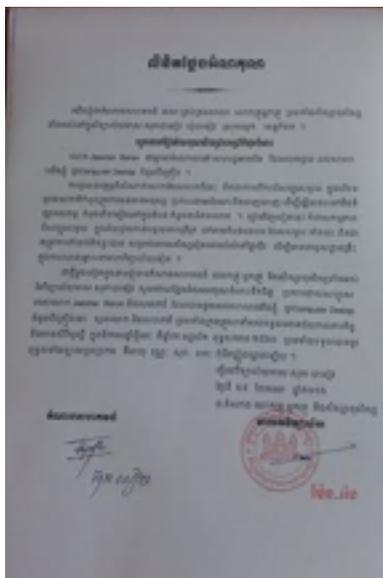
When I returned to my village in January 2016, I looked at hundreds and hundreds of school children's faces that were full of hope and excitement at the idea that they may have a chance to continue their dreams to learn English, and maybe even go on to college one day.

My dream is to help more children and to provide them with more opportunities to receive the education they need to have a better life in the future. Working with Jason and the Foundation he has set up, my brother Ess and I plan to:

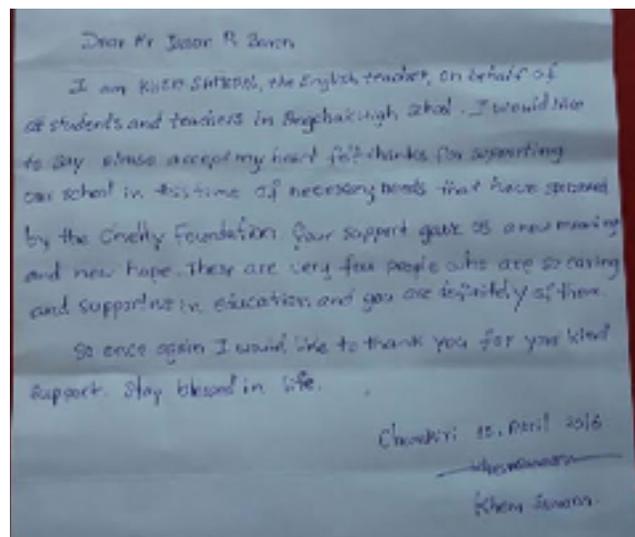
- (1) continue to survey the needs of my village and surrounding villages in the Kampot area, to build out our support for one or more additional libraries in nearby secondary schools; to provide additional English language teachers at both primary and secondary schools; to equip schools with school supplies, books, and computers; and to install water pumps and toilet facilities at one or more schools.
- (2) expand the number of scholarships available to students in my village to go to the Royal University of Phnom Penh.

Coming to the United States has been a dream for me. I love my work in helping and providing care and assistance to older people where I work in Maryland. I want The Chelly Foundation to continue to be a success because I would love to continue to remember and honor a remarkable woman – Miss Chelly.

**Nan Nop**



*“Thank You” letter from school principal*



*“Thank you” letter from school English teacher*