



The Chelly Foundation

www.thechellyfoundation.org

7807 Stratford Road
Bethesda MD 20814
E-Mail: info@thechellyfoundation.org
E-mail: jrbaron3@gmail.com

Letter from Cambodia *March 2018*

There is a heightened sense of reality one experiences almost every moment of the day here. and it stays with you and changes you. I think this is not only because one constantly is seeing things one would never encounter back in the US, but because even everyday occurrences are just a bit “off” in some new and unique fashion. Like in Marukami’s *IQ84*, your reality is just a little bit different after you “climb down the ladder” and experience the way things really are in Cambodia.

.... Getting in to a motorized tuk-tuk with the driver holding his naked 2 year old son at the steering wheel. Thousands of scooters everywhere going in every direction at intersections. An elevator working only intermittently. Passengers in every vehicle stopping to pray at a Buddhist roadside area to ensure safe travels on a highway through the mountains. A small boy leading a giant skinny cow to water. Young women with a job pumping gas. Bathrooms without tissue paper provided. Flowers that go to sleep at the touch. Stray dogs and chickens everywhere. Cotton trees. Ants in the bed. The most gorgeous sunset in Kep

A second visit to Cambodia was filled with just such a kaleidoscope of experiences. It was heartening beyond measure that over 1000 high school students came out to participate in a morning ceremony dedicating the expansion of The Chelly Library to include an outdoor seating area wrapped around the outside of the building. It was a privilege to sit with the Chumkuri District Principal of Schools, and other local principals and schoolteachers. Nan Nop told the crowd about her life growing up, how things have changed, and how lucky they all were including in not having to worry about landmines on their walk or ride to school. She emphasized the value of learning, and what The Chelly Foundation is doing to provide scholarships to local students. So many girls came up to Nan Nop saying that she was their “idol.”

On another day we were able to sponsor a bread day with soup for 600+ elementary school students. (Nan’s Mom and Sister Nin stayed up practically all night with other assistants to make the soup!). Many students do not eat breakfast and cannot afford good meals during the school day. (Once our mango and coconut farms are in

operation, we hope to change that.) One of our Chelly Scholars read a speech to the students describing how getting a university scholarship has changed her life. We also gave out ten bicycles to students who walk long distances to school. One young girl (and three of her friends) came up to me and asked me in English if she could get a picture of us together. After talking to her and her friends, I told Ess to order four more bicycles, as these girls walked just as far to and from school as anyone else in the crowd. There is always something more one can do. (Bicycles cost around \$40.)

On other days we aimed at helping smaller groups of children. Nan handed out to girls 75 kits made in the US by the Days for Girls organization, giving the girls greater confidence in being able to attend school when their bodies are changing. So far as we are aware, this is the first time kits have been given out anywhere in rural Cambodia. Nan wishes to continue to be an Ambassador for Days for Girls in distributing kits throughout Chumkuri District and Kampot Province as part of her future visits.

We also hired a van to take 14 middle school aged children to a dentist in Phnom Penh. Working with Peace Corps volunteer Matthew Thielker, The Chelly Foundation has been participating in a local dental health clinic set up in Chumkuri. We also intend to provide for a local dentist periodically visiting Snay Anh Chet in the future.

We also were able to persuade our very dedicated Chelly Scholars to take some time off to go on a mini-holiday overnight trip to Sihanoukville – a beach “resort” destination of sorts. After an afternoon at the beach, we went to a local club, where the students got up and danced, and where they drank only sodas! The next day we all went to a mango farm managed by Nop Ess that The Chelly Foundation is sponsoring. We also had occasion to go to a waterslide park outside Phnom Penh with some of our Chelly Scholars – their first time doing anything like that!

Many of the above moments and more have been captured on our Facebook site, www.facebook.com/thechellyfoundation. Please follow us there and “like” what we are doing!

My second visit had its more sober moments as well. I took time out while in Phnom Penh to have Ess take me to the Killing Fields. (I had seen the notorious prison S21 on my first visit.) Ess also drove me to a man-made lake, constructed under the harsh rule of the Khmer Rouge, where workers who didn't work hard enough in dredging up dirt to make the lake were summarily killed at the end of each working day. Nan related to me that her Mom was a particularly hard worker, who managed to save many lives by insisting that everyone in her “squad” work hard enough to save themselves. Many of those workers fared less well under a new squad leader. Nan’s Mom is loved to this day in her village.

One afternoon we visited with the family of one of our Chelly Scholars, Phorn Channary. Channary’s Mom and younger sister Dola greeted us in the front of their bamboo house. I learned that Dola bicycles two hours each way to the Chumkuri High School where our

library is situated. And I learned that Channary did that as well, coming home to take care of her younger sister when both parents were away from home for two years making money at a construction project in Thailand. The hardships that children experience in Chumkuri District are unimaginable to those of us who grew up in Lexington Massachusetts and now live in Bethesda Maryland – places where yellow school busses pick children up at the nearest corner of their street.

On the last Friday night during my time in Cambodia, as I did on my first trip I visited with Rabbi Butman at Chabad Cambodia in Phnom Penh, for a Shabbat dinner. Although I have never been religiously observant, I find there to be a deep, spiritual connection between the sufferings of the Jewish and Cambodian peoples. Once again, I made the acquaintance of an amazing variety of individuals who have found themselves passing through Phnom Penh, either for a week or a decade or more. And the Rabbi gave me the privilege of talking about the work of our Foundation, for which I am very grateful.

It doesn't take much to improve the lives of children in rural Cambodia. It just takes a certain focus in finding out from local people what is really needed, and having the energy and force of will to ensure that good thoughts are followed through with concrete actions. I am proud of the work we have been engaged in at The Chelly Foundation over the last three years. Nan and her brother Ess, joined by our English teacher Samorn and most recently by our Peace Corps volunteer Matthew, have all been playing an enormous part in changing lives. We will continue to partner with other NGOs and international organizations to continue to make a difference in improving the health and educational resources available to the children of Chumkuri.

Please join us by following our activities on Facebook and by considering making a tax deductible donation to The Chelly Foundation (www.thechellyfoundation.org).

With every best wish,

Jason

Jason R. Baron

Founder & President, The Chelly Foundation

(EIN #81-0785392)

