



# SOK SABAY



Newsletter

July - October 2010



## **LETTER FROM MARIE**

### **An Achievement 10 Years Later...**

During her time in Cambodia, Marie has rescued and saved the lives of many, many children, though Sok Leang and Makara's stories are two of the her biggest achievements. Their lives at Sok Sabay started almost ten years ago now, on 15<sup>th</sup> September 2001, when Marie was called by Madame Buna to the Cambodian Women Crisis Centre (CWCC) NGO and asked to rescue them.

Sok Leang came to Sok Sabay as a 13 year old after experiencing severely difficult and complicated family issues. Indeed, as a child she had been deprived of all her basic needs – food, clothes, love and other things most of us take for granted. As a result, Sok Leang was suffering from extreme mental and emotional traumatism and she had virtually no self-esteem, nor any self-confidence. Marie immediately went to great effort to help the child and set about giving her the care and love that she needed.



In her first few years at Sok Sabay there was little improvement in Sok Leang's sense of self-worth and self-confidence. She had sessions with psychotherapists and counselors but it took time for her to open up and talk about her traumatic past. However, things did gradually begin to change. Like all the other children, she was kept busy at Sok Sabay by attending school, studying and drawing in the afternoons, playing with the other children, helping with odd jobs around the centre and generally being involved with everyday life. All this activity had a positive effect on her.

However, it was in her schoolwork where Sok Leang really blossomed. She worked extremely hard, giving as much time and effort to her studies as she possibly could and she took refuge in her

learning. As Marie says, “Since 2001, she hasn’t stopped studying!” This hard work was soon rewarded though as she performed well in her exams. This success, in turn, gave Sok Leang the confidence she so desperately needed. Slowly but surely, Sok Leang was beginning to rebuild her life.

So where is Sok Leang now? Ten years after first coming to Sok Sabay, Sok Leang is in her third year of her Pharmacy degree at university and in the summer of 2011, she will go to France for a three month scholarship at St Malo. As Marie says, Sok Leang is now “a stable, successful and happy young lady”.

The transformation in Sok Leang over the past 10 years really is nothing short of remarkable. The journey has not been easy and Marie thanks Sok Leang’s godparents for all their support through the years. When asked about Sok Leang, Marie kindly says she “hopes for the best in her career and in life. She deserves a happy life with a happy ending”. It is a heart-warming story.

Makara was rescued at the same time as Sok Leang at the age of 15 and she too had come from an extremely poor background. Soon after arriving, she was joined by her younger brother, Kevin (who is now studying Art, Humanities and Languages at university) and later by her youngest brother Harry (given his name due to his likeness to Harry Potter!) who was rescued from a village near the Thai-Cambodian border.

So how has life changed over the years for Makara? At first, she went to school with all the other children, but having had such little schooling in her early life, Makara found academic education extremely difficult. So within a year, Marie decided she should leave school and learn valuable skills for trade instead. Initially Makara did a sewing and handicrafts course though this did not work out as had been hoped.

One day, however, Marie asked Makara to cook lunch for the Sok Sabay centre. Makara’s reaction to the request, however, was one of shock and confusion. ‘I can’t do that’ she thought. But, with a little encouragement from Marie, Makara was able to help produce a meal

for 50 people. It turned out to be a defining moment in her time here at Sok Sabay.

Since that day in 2002, Makara's confidence in the kitchen has grown from strength to strength. She has been a full time, paid member of staff for eight years now and in that time she has learnt to cook a wide variety of dishes. As Marie says, "Makara is very hard working and will always be successful. In her time at Sok Sabay she has helped a lot and she is now an important member of the staff".

So what is daily life like now for Makara? A typical day will start with her and Marie deciding what will be the menu for the day and following this, she will head to the market to buy all the necessary ingredients. As Marie says, "she has become very responsible and mature".

When asked about her own thoughts on Sok Sabay, a big smile appears across Makara's face. "I'm really happy" she says. "Sok Sabay has helped me and I'm really happy because I have learnt a lot. And it has helped my two brothers too. My brother [Kevin] now goes to university. I am so very happy. Thank you Marie!"

It is fair to say, there is no doubt that the journeys in Sok Sabay for both Sok Leang and Makara have been a true success.



Above: Marie with Sok Leang and Makara 10 years ago (left) and today (right).

# LATEST NEWS

## New Children at Sok Sabay!

Over the past few months we have welcomed more new children here at Sok Sabay! On 5<sup>th</sup> June Srei Pech (6 years old) and her older sister Srei Mom (9 years old) arrived and two days later, Srei Pech's twin sister, Srei Neth, also came here. All three girls have settled quickly and they are happy in their new surroundings.



On 29<sup>th</sup> September, Chanel (in the red shirt in the picture, left) was rescued from the village of Koh Teom. She is 12 years old and has already started going to school. Chanel is a very smiley and happy girl and we are delighted to welcome her.

On 18<sup>th</sup> October, Mark also came to Sok Sabay. He has adapted well to his new life and he is always eager to help in whatever way he can. He has been working hard to learn Khmer and he hopes to go to school in the near future. Interestingly, Mark is also the nephew of one of our current children, Lara!



## **Update from KK Hospital, Singapore**

On 4<sup>th</sup> August David had his right tympanoplasty (ENT) surgery at the KK Hospital in Singapore. Dr Abhilash Balakrishnan (MBBS, Singapore) from the Department of Otolaryngology and his team performed the surgery which was a success. We thank Dr. Balakrishnan and his team for their kind, caring and professional work.

We also thank David's sponsors Vicki and Leo Nagtegaal for generously covering the fees for the surgery.

## **Marie and Srei Neth visit Singapore!**



The InterContinental Hotels Group arranged a fundraising dinner in Singapore which was held on 27<sup>th</sup> August at part of 'Project Hammer'. Project Hammer is a charitable initiative organised by InterContinental Hotels Group which focuses on helping a selection of non-profit, sustainable, education-based progressive organisations which work in Cambodia and improve of the lives of Cambodian children.

Marie was delighted to be able to attend the event which was fulfilled with great entertainment and live auctions. We thank Jos Weesjes for inviting Sok Sabay and we thank all those who have worked for Project Hammer for kindly sharing part of the proceeds of the dinner with us.



Also in Singapore, on the 28<sup>th</sup> August, Marie and Srei Neth, one of our university students, attended the wedding of the third daughter of Dr. Oliver Hennedige in the new casino complex in Singapore. The event was a wonderful occasion and was well attended. We thank Dr. Oliver for his kind invitation and we thank him for his generosity in sponsoring Srei Neth for her ongoing university studies in Phnom Penh.

### **Sok Sabay's Audit**



Between 18<sup>th</sup> June and 2<sup>nd</sup> July, Sok Sabay was audited by PricewaterhouseCoopers and we are pleased to report that we received positive feedback on 26<sup>th</sup> August.

### **Birthdays!**



Since July, we have celebrated the birthdays of many of our children, as well as our volunteer Frédéric! The children loved their cakes and candles and everyone was very happy!



## **VISITORS AND VOLUNTEERS**

Over the past few months, we have had many visitors at Sok Sabay. We thank all of them for their time and all their efforts!

### **Ellen**



Ellen comes to Cambodia two or three times each year as a volunteer to assist Sok Sabay by teaching French to the children. She is a nurse by profession and has previously lived in Cambodia, working in Takeo for 1 year.

Ellen, a friend of Phillipe Berest, came from September 4<sup>th</sup> until October 24<sup>th</sup> and we are lucky that she will be returning to Sok Sabay in January!

### **Anne and Aurelien de Tornac**

On 8<sup>th</sup> July, our sponsor Anne came to Sok Sabay to meet Kagna and her brother and sister. Kagna was thrilled to meet Anne and had a wonderful day!

### **'The Compagnon' – Scouts group from France**

'The Compagnon' group visited us for three weeks this summer, from the 19<sup>th</sup> July until the 17<sup>th</sup> August. During their stay here the group encouraged the children to get involved with a wide range of activities. They spent time playing with the children, taking them for outings in and around Phnom Penh and also hosting our very own Sok Sabay Olympic Games! All the children were involved in the activities and everyone had a lot of fun.

The highlight of their visit for some of our children was the cultural exchange trip to Kompong Thom and Siem Reap. Jim, Ratha, Ratana, Anne, La and Si enjoyed their few days away and they took the opportunity to learn more about French culture as well as teach

the Compagnon more about the Cambodian and Khmer culture, language and traditions.

### **Susan and Kiran Ridley**



We thank Susan and Kiran for the time they spent at Sok Sabay in August. Kiran has visited us previously when she came with her parents! During their time here, Kiran spent a lot of time with the children and also taught them how to paint as well as other art skills. The children have been putting their new artistic techniques to good use ever since!

### **Philippe Berest and his children, Camille and Maxim**



Philippe visited Sok Sabay in the summer of 2009 and this summer, from 19<sup>th</sup> July until the 17<sup>th</sup> August, he came back with his 15 year old twin children – Camille and Maxim! Whilst here, the family taught French to the children and also spent time doing a wide range of activities with the children. We thank Philippe and his family very much for their continued support.

## Alice (Marie's cousin)



Alice came to stay with us at the same time as Philippe and his children. She is Marie's cousin's 17 year old daughter and so she is familiar with the work of Sok Sabay. Alice wanted to help out in everyday life and in doing so she brought a lot of joy and happiness to the children! She will be coming back with her father and a friend over Christmas to help the children paint and decorate!

## Taiga and Taiei Harimoto

We were very pleased that Taiga, a university student from Japan, and his brother, Taiei, came to visit us for a few days in August (9<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> August). Taiga attended the American School in Japan and it was whilst studying there that he first came to hear about the work of Sok Sabay. The School has supported Sok Sabay for many years by organising fundraising social events and then donating the proceeds of these occasions to Sok Sabay. **We especially thank** Trisha Pand who first organised the fundraising at the school and also Kyoko Inahara for continuing this support over the past few years.

Whilst here, Taiga and his brother played with the children as well as taking them for various outings. They also shared some of their Japanese culture with some of our older children. Ratha especially enjoyed having Japanese language lessons and we hope that he will get a scholarship to study in Japan after finishing his studies in Cambodia.

Describing his time at Sok Sabay, Taiga said "Sok Sabay is a very heartwarming place and I could see hope in all the children's eyes. All the laughter and smiles from the children made me feel good".

## Kimberley Dittrich and Alena Guess

From the 24<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> September we were delighted that Kimberley and Alena visited us. Kimberley was a teacher of Community Social Services at the Abu Dhabi Community School while Alena used to be a student at the school. Before moving to Abu Dhabi, Alena had studied at the German School in Singapore, a school which has supported Sok Sabay for many years. Since moving to Abu Dhabi, Alena has helped to raise funds for Sok Sabay and has continued to promote our work.



Kimberley and Alena spent a week here spending time with the children and taking them for various outings. We thank them both for their time here.

We also thank Kimberley and her husband Kenneth for kindly sponsoring our twin children Srei Neth and Srei Pech!



## Ravi Vedant



Ravi visited Sok Sabay for a weekend from the 14<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> August. Ravi is from Singapore and is a musician and film director. Whilst he was here, Ravi gave the children music lessons and he also very generously provided us with a new American drum set and set of African drums!

[In the pictures above: Ravi teaching Antoine (left) and Jean playing on the new American drum set (right)]

## Frédéric Guenant



Frédéric visited us from the 10<sup>th</sup> – 31<sup>st</sup> October. During his time with us, Frédéric spent a considerable amount of time in the kitchen helping to prepare the food and also teaching Makara and Chivoane Katherine new cooking skills.

[Picture above: from left to right – Chivoane, Anna, Chanterelle, Sophie and Frédéric]

Frédéric also spent time teaching French to some of our children and he also helped with the two cultural exchange trips in August. The children were able to learn more about French traditions and also



took the time themselves to teach Frédéric more about Cambodian culture.

[Picture left: Frédéric teaching Jim]

## Ana Perez

Ana came to Sok Sabay from 11<sup>th</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup> August. During her time with us, Ana helped us with a wide range of projects including teaching yoga to the younger children, treating the older girls to a Natural Beauty Spa day, making curtains and helping in everyday life here at Sok Sabay.



The children thoroughly enjoyed the time Ana spent with them and we hope that Ana will one day be able to come back to Sok Sabay!



## Andrew Collins



Andrew arrived at Sok Sabay on October 17<sup>th</sup> and will be staying with us for 8 months. Andrew will be helping our both our school children and our university students to learn and improve their English and he also hopes to help out general day to day activities during his time with us.

# ONGOING ACTIVITIES

## Aikido



The children here at Sok Sabay have been learning Aikido on Saturdays and Sundays. Aikido is a Japanese Martial Art which encourages harmony of Mind, Body & Spirit and the avoidance of confrontation. When learning Aikido, our children learn how to improve their self-awareness and also develop their self-confidence.

Aikido at Sok Sabay has been very successful. On the 5<sup>th</sup> September, 20 of our children succeeded in the Japanese Aikido Master exam arranged by Kaneko Shinichi from the CAA Aikkai Foundation. Many thanks must go to Nang Ravuth for teaching our children each week!



## Dance

Every Sunday morning the girls at Sok Sabay have the opportunity to learn dance. The older girls learn contemporary dance whilst the younger girls learn traditional Khmer dance. The girls are enjoying learning new routines and hope to be able to perform them.

## Yoga



During her stay with us, our volunteer Ana taught the younger children how to practice yoga. Yoga involves the performance of poses and postures as well as stretching exercises which are designed to improve flexibility,

strength and balance. Ana also taught our teachers how to teach yoga as well. The children loved learning this new activity and they now have a yoga session every morning!



# EDUCATION NEWS

## Graduation Day!



On 27<sup>th</sup> September, we were very proud to celebrate the graduation of six of our grade 12 students. Alice, Srei Neth, Srei Da, Thyda, Devi, Roath Thi and Anne all sat their end of High School National Exams in July and we were delighted that all their hard work paid off and they were able to have a memorable day.



Following their success, many of them have decided to pursue further education at university this year! Anne has chosen to study Law at the Science and Law University in Phnom Penh; Srei Da is studying Law at Norton Law University; Thyda will study Veterinary at the University of Agriculture; Roathi Thi, Srei Neth and Devi will both study Hotel and

Tourism at the Norton Tourist and Hotel Faculty. Meanwhile Alice has decided to learn and improve her English in Singapore.

On the same day, we were delighted to recognise the achievements of some of our grade 9 students especially Tiphaine, Si, Pauline and Jim who were all highly successful in their exams! We hope they can continue with their success this year.



### **News from our current university students:**

We are delighted to announce that all of our current university students have passed their exams! Rosanna has finished her second year of Pharmacy and succeeded in her entrance exams for third year. Nancy and Lillie are both studying Law at the Science and Law University of Phnom Penh. They have both passed their first year exams and so they are now starting their second year. Vishna, Kevin and Phalleap are all studying Art, Humanities and Languages at the Cambodian Mekong University in Phnom Penh. Each of them passed their second year exams and will shortly commence their third year studies.

There was also further good news for Nancy as she has been awarded a scholarship to have English lessons throughout her four years at university by the Asia Sachah.

We wish all our university students the very best of luck this year!

## School Children



At Sok Sabay we believe that a good education is essential for the children to succeed and progress in life. This year, again, children from grades 1 to 12 have been studying at the Singapore International School of Phnom Penh. The children have been working hard all year and this has been reflected in some excellent recent academic results. The following provide an example of these results:

Ratha: 1<sup>st</sup> out of the 22 students in his grade 12 class.

La: 7<sup>th</sup> out of 24 in her grade 11 class.

Si: 9<sup>th</sup> out of 30 in her grade 10 class.

Nary: 5<sup>th</sup> out of 30 in her grade 9 class.

Amandine: 5<sup>th</sup> out of 28 in her grade 9 class.

Sarai: 3<sup>rd</sup> out of 23 for his grade 6 class.

Reksmey: 5<sup>th</sup> out of 19 in his grade 2 class.

Srei Mom: 1<sup>st</sup> out of 28 in her grade 1 class.

Congratulations to all our students. We hope they keep up the hard work and continue to succeed with their studies!

**We and the children are sincerely grateful to all of our sponsors for your exceptional and kind support!**

## CULTURAL EXCHANGE TRIPS

As part of her Community Action Service certificate at the International School of Phnom Penh, Sophany is required to complete 50 hours community work. She therefore decided to take the children of Sok Sabay for weekend cultural exchange trips. So far she has taken children for two trips; the first trip to Koh Kong, and the second trip to Kampong Thom and Siem Reap.

### Trip to Koh Kong – 22<sup>nd</sup> – 24<sup>th</sup> October 2010



On Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> October Marie, Frédéric and Sophany took three of our girls – Chanel, Vanna and Katy – for a cultural and educational trip to Koh Kong.

Whilst on the trip, the girls had a chance to see and appreciate the beautiful countryside which Cambodia has to offer.

Sophany and Frédéric used this time to teach the girls about the importance of protecting and preserving this natural environment by pointing out the large amount of rubbish – plastic bottles, bags and other general waste – which unfortunately had been thrown in the river. In addition, the girls heard how plastic waste is currently being burned at night.



Sophany and Frédéric explained to the girls how burning plastic has a detrimental effect on the environment and therefore every effort should be made where possible to recycle rubbish and dispose of it properly.



The children were also taken on a boat trip to see the dolphins and birds in their natural surroundings. The girls appreciated that care must be taken to protect the environment not only for themselves and future generations but also for the animals and wildlife.

About her trip, Vanna said, “On Friday last week I went to visit Koh Kong with my director and my friends. When I was there I was so happy because I had never been there before. It was beautiful. I saw wonderful trees and mountains. We had lunch together we went on a boat. We saw lots of fish and dolphins and there were big birds.”

### **Trip to Kampong Thom and Siem Reap – 28<sup>th</sup> - 30<sup>th</sup> October 2010**

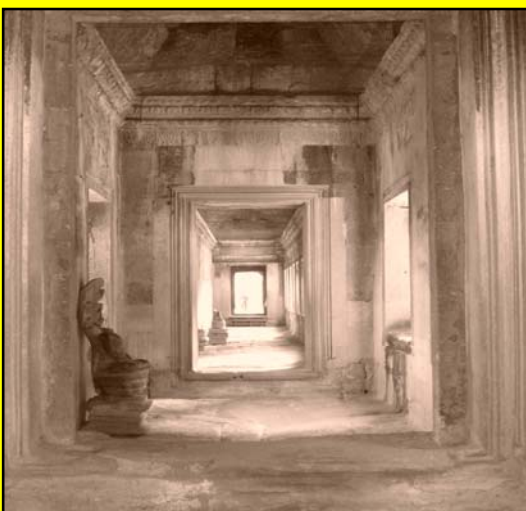


On Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> October Marie, Frédéric, and Sophany went to Kampong Thom and Siem Reap for a weekend trip with Mark, Jim and Ratana. The boys had a chance to see the temples at Kampong Thom and Siem Reap and learn more about the history of Cambodia. The boys also took the opportunity to learn more about French culture and traditions from Marie and Frédéric.

After returning to Phnom Penh on Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> October, Jim wrote the following reflection:

'On Thursday I went on a trip to Kampong Thom and Siem Reap. I was so happy to be there because I had a good hotel and ate at a good restaurant. I wanted to see the temples and I was happy because I saw many temples.

On the Trip I did many things. I taught Khmer to Marie and Frédéric and I learnt many things from them. I'm very happy because I had a good trip and I want to say thank you very much to Marie, Frédéric and Sophany.'



We are preparing our special December Newsletter which will have an update on all our facilities, some festive pictures and paintings drawn by the children and much more!

From all the children of Sok Sabay:

**THANK YOU!**