

Sopeak is a girl we met three years ago when we went to her village to deliver some clothing and food as we had heard that many children there were without clothes and in need. While we were handing out clothing and dressing small naked children a woman came forward and asked us to talk with her daughter.

Out of the crowd came Sopeak, a girl about 14 years old, the minute she spoke English we were impressed with her pronunciation and clarity. Apparently there had been an NGO that offered some English lessons to a few of the children in the area however the NGO was now gone and Sopeak was unable to study any further, much to her disappointment. We decided that since she was so committed to learning we would sponsor her to take English lessons near the town of Siem Reap and enroll her in Cambodian high school as the family had no resources to pay for her school fees, she was very happy. So three years ago we made arrangements with our friend here to make the monthly payments, attend to her school supply needs and keep receipts.

Yesterday we were off to visit Sopeak again in her village. We travelled along the bumpy, dusty, rutted road maneuvering around enormous potholes for over twenty kilometers. When we arrived, we were greeted warmly by Sopeak and her family. The family pulled out a grass mat and we were invited to sit on a small wooden platform. The father quickly got us a couple of green coconuts, put straws in them and offered us this refreshing drink, Sopeak quietly apologized that this was all they had to offer us. We found out that the father had travelled all the way from Phnom Penh (six hours by bus) to meet us. He has worked in the capital city for over a year and is only able to return home occasionally. Sopeak's father works as a furniture maker and lives in the shop warehouse, he sends all his money home to help raise his six children. The mother and children work a small rice field and have four cows however they are still very poor. The father apologizes for their house, which is basically one room and 150 square feet and is made of palm leaf with only three walls, no electricity, no toilet and their well is now filled with sand and too expensive for them to fix. He tells us that he feels badly that he makes beautiful furniture for the rich but cannot afford to provide a decent house for his family. We all sit and talk in Cambodian and English and we hear that Sopeak's English has really progressed. We meet her Grandmother who is very nice and is very old and not well, she too has travelled a long way to meet us and she is happy for Sopeak.

Sopak's commitment and tenacity to learn is impressive she rides her bicycle over twenty kilometres to get to school leaving at 6:00 am attends school all day then pedals the return trip over these terrible roads, rain or shine, arriving home at 7:00 pm in the dark, she eats and then studies by oil lamp. Out of 57 children in her English class Sopeak is number 3 and she humbly shows us her report cards and certificates with mostly all A's. We also discover that on top of all the other challenges this girl faces she is partly deaf and has never been able to afford to go to a doctor. We then ask about her bicycle and she tells us that it is fine, but we can see it is old and has no brakes. We tell the family about our friends and how they donate funds to support children and families here in Cambodia and they ask us to send on their appreciation. Her dream is to get a job in a hotel so she can help support her family and this can only happen if she speaks English well as Siem Reap is a tourist town, she

is the eldest child and could enhance her families' future.

The next day we take Sopeak into Siem Reap with us to register for her new more in depth English classes and to buy her a new bike. This was an adventure for her. Though she studies on the edge of town she had never been into the city, had a ride in a tuk tuk or eaten at a restaurant, her eyes were constantly darting as we moved about the town. On our trip in we discovered that her family had no mosquito nets and minimal blankets. We bought these items as well a new outfit and some running shoes for her at the main central market...another first for her. We took her to the edge of town where she got on her new red bicycle and rode



off on her long journey back home as she left she sweetly said, many, many thanks. We are also looking at having her hearing problems diagnosed and hopefully find a solution.

This is a small story of one girl who we are all able to help and although it may not seem like a lot compared to a new school or clinic Sopeak's story represents life for so many children in Cambodia. Thanks to one chance meeting her life has changed and thanks to your support she now has hope, purpose and the opportunity for a brighter future.

Thanks to you all,

Love,

Adrianne and Rick