

In Siem Reap we moved back and forth from our \*\*\*\*star hotel to the temples of Angkor on well paved streets, passing modern hotels and the modern Kantha Bopha Hospital so our shock was great when we visited the fishing village of Kampong Kleang with over 1000 poor, shaggy houses on the Tonle Sap. We had heard from our guide that she could not stand fish anymore because, during the flood this year, people had fished in the fields and moats and eaten fish every day. Two months after the flood we still saw men fishing in the pools with their bare hands so we knew that the fishermen's business was poor and that they were worse off than usual. This poverty upset us very much. Not even the funny story of pupils paddling to and from school in their wooden boats could change our mood. One time, the children were getting in their boats so I was waved at them. A boy was waving back and in the same moment, he disappeared into the water. He rapidly pulled himself into the boat again and hit the girl whom he thought to have shaken the boat....

A tourist in Luang Prabang had told me that Siem Reap was a modern town. This modernity changed the moment Yem drove the off-road car from our hotel to the next quarter which has unpaved roads... (Tuk-tuk drivers only drive on the paved streets, making detours so tourists never see the other side of local life.) Later we drove on a nice straight road towards the village of Pong Ro Chas. The first road after the paved one was wide, but unpaved. After the next turn, there was only a small road with ditches on both sides. On the way a school official who spoke a little English joined us.

Yem carried along a big box with school books, sponsored by Room To Read, which the teachers unpacked immediately. He also brought along a metal saw to cut a piece of playground equipment which was not safe for playing any more. During the break the kids played with all the play ground equipment which was a gift from employees of Credit Suisse.

The school in Pong Ro Chas is built exactly like all the schools in Laos and Cambodia: a single storey building with school rooms one after another. Three school rooms are for teaching, one is the library and one the reserve room. Beside the school there is a kitchen with a store room for the rice from the World Food Programme and a roof on stilts without side walls with tables and benches for eating meals. The children attend school either in the morning or afternoon. The students in the morning get a breakfast of rice and beans. They change attendance every month.

The school has two toilets, but one was closed for cleaning. There is also a big water tank containing water from the school roof, sponsored by Goutte d'eau Foundation and a solar station for recharging large batteries. The people of the village bring them along in the morning and fetch them in the evening. They pay for recharging and the money goes to the school.

We were impressed how it is possible for Child's Dream to furnish the village and the children with the necessary equipment. When Child's Dream finds that the kitchen for the World Food Programme is no longer suitable for the rainy season, they look for a sponsor. When during the dry season there is only water from moats and pools available, they find a sponsor like Goutte d'eau Foundation to provide a water tank. The battery recharging station has introduced even more progress to the village. All these measures mean that the children of illiterate villagers now have a chance for a better life than their parents'.

A woman teacher teaches the little ones. As she moves from one side of the room to the other, all children change their positions on their benches too. In a class room with two grades being taught, the children of one grade look in the opposite direction to the other one!

Back in our \*\*\*\*\*star Switzerland we still find it difficult to accept the poverty of this country in the far-east, although the visit to the school was an exciting highlight.

Margrit und Bruno Gasser



