

St.Sometimes

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THE LIFE OF AN INTERNATIONAL TEACHER

VOLUME 88



AFTER
A small group of 15 teachers built 12 homes in less than two days.

15 teachers + Tabitha = 12 New Homes

About Janne Ritskes

Tabitha



Your help will last a lifetime

Imagine trying to teach families how to save money. Now imagine those families are the survivors from the genocide of the Khmer Rouge. Go further and try to imagine running a grassroots cottage industry where battered

women are given shelter and work. Then find some time to run a well building program to provide communities with water. Finally, while organizing all of that, start up a program that builds homes for those families that learned how to trust Tabitha and save \$30US (which takes these families two years to save), and finally to organize the volunteers to build the homes. STOP. You just imagined what it is like to be Janne

Ritskes. We were about to step into her world.

Introducing the Building

Team: Craig Snell, Angela Snell, Anne Taylor, Claire Bossingham, Claire Webster, Michael Warford, Melissa Cooper, Sarah Sharp, Jennie Buechner, Mallie Hardie, Marion Harris, Rebecca Cameron, Jeane Serge, Craig Strangman, and yours truly. We were also helped by a small team of interpreters, drivers, and construction workers from Tabitha.

Hammers, Nails and Ladders were the only tools we really used. Some of you out there may say, "Hey Greg, that's not building houses!" And to those people I say, "tell that to the poor Cambodians who spent 2 years

saving 30US dollars so they could move out of their huts made of palm leaves and wood!"

"This is not about 'us' this weekend. This is about 'them'. My instructions are for their well being and safety." - Janne from Tabitha

The houses we built were not just houses when we left. They were symbols of hope, trust, love, and community. They were HOMES five minutes after they were finished!



The Family has to save 30\$ - sometimes this means 2 full years time.



Floors? Protection in the Rainy Season? Stilts?

These new homes will provide a dry platform and protection from the torrential rains as well as a shaded area beneath.

Rules for us:

Don't Pick up any Babies!

50% of babies die before age 3 in the provinces. If you pick one up, you show favoritism and bring bad luck on the child.

If You Start a House, Finish it!

The families will wait until you leave at the end of the day, but will then immediately move in. Therefore, it must be finished before the end of the day.

Do Not Give out Food



If you share your Cheeetos or a Ham sandwich with the locals, they will probably get sick.

The same goes for foreigners. when eating local dishes. Different cultures have different immune systems.

Throw all Empties into the House

These people are the poorest of the poor. Empty water bottles go a long way in a community that does not have much in the way of storage. Leaving the empties in the homes helps to distribute these prizes.

No TOUCHY - TOUCHY

According to provincial customs, a man only touches a woman that is carrying his child. Women touch women and men are more touchy with men (in fact you are considered "gay" if you hesitate to openly hug other men. According to Jan, these villagers have considered Westerners as traveling sex parties because the men and women all openly touch each other (perspective - don't forget it is difficult to understand from each side of a cultural divide!).

Don't Expect a Toilet

A hole was dug. A small privacy "tent" was erected. All to the snickering and laughter of the locals. Human needs are common and therefore very "open" out here. Where did we go wrong? Something so natural and Western civilization has made it so "personal". Don't get me wrong, I enjoy my privacy when "nature calls". LOL

Improved Homes Affect a Community



The entire group, consisting of all the workers and the twelve families getting new homes, posed together for this photo.

House to House

This was not a rocket science. All it really entailed was using a hammer and a nail, sometimes perched on a ladder. But add in a jungle heat, inexperience with construction of any sort, and a large group of people watching your every move and the complications start adding up.

We broke into small groups and just started hammering away. It worked best with one person (taller) on a ladder, one down below, and one inside to help hold the metal or to guide the nails into position. Some of the locals would hold ladders, keep the metal siding in place or (unfortunately) tell you what to do.

Chinese quality nails, old hard wood, and few support beams created further headaches. Most of the nails wouldn't even go in without bending completely. The worst part was the lack of support beams. Even if you hit a nail straight on, it might go through the siding but the wood would bounce inwards and back out again. This resulted in no

penetration and finally in bent nails. The nail heads would come right off with one good swing and leave a target the size of a finishing nail. Ugh.

What do you do when the nail bends? Hit it in farther and say "%%@*%! I would say about 40 percent of the nails from the more experienced workers actually went straight in. We just didn't have the time or materials to send them home straight. Do your best. Move on!



Poorest of the Poor



It is not easy to describe the poverty. You have to witness it. There is no power, no running water, nothing. Most of the people live in huts made from palm leaves and wood.

These are the remnants of the Khmer Rouge times. People that fled the cities or former slaves of the agrarian work camps of the late 1970's. These are the survivors of a genocide that we only know from the movies.

We took mini-vans from the main highway onto dirt roads. Rice paddies lined the dirt roads. Stray palm trees form markers among the far reaches of rice fields, which become impassable during rainy season. You see few cars, but many bicycles and walking mothers carrying plastic bags or balancing large baskets on their heads. This is hell and far gone from what most of us call civilization. It is no wonder Janne spelled out so many rules for us as visitors to this forgotten land.



Most of the photos in this issue were taken by Angela and Craig. Craig was the charmer. Kids just flocked to his camera in hopes of seeing their "digital soul" after a quick 1,2,3,cheese.

Cameras Take Your Soul!

One of the golden rules that was preached to us by Janne prior to the trip centered on taking pictures. Many of the parents in the provinces still tell their children that a picture steals your soul. If we wanted to take individual pictures, we had to "ask"- which meant body language.

Digital Cameras were a total charm for many of the children. Craig and Angela brought along a nice DSLR camera and Craig worked his magic. With a smile, he would round up a group of children, take their pictures, and immediately show them the shot. The important point is: these children are not

used to smiling. Many of them are just lucky to have survived malaria, malnutrition, and lack of water.

Bring out the cameras! The second day brought on a familiarity with the situation. Many of us took out our cameras and started taking photos of the people. At the very end, when we had finished all 12 houses, it was like a photo studio during high school graduation time! All of the families took group photos in front of their homes with the workers. The children laughed at their individual shots. Most of the teachers started talking about the best way to get printed photos back to the village.



Craig & Angela Snell

This is the first, yes, the first time teachers have gone out with Tabitha to build houses in the provinces. Craig and Angela came to ISPP from Singapore. They came up to Cambodia a few times with their school from Singapore, so it was only natural for them to question why ISPP wasn't house building. A lot of people made this happen, but a big THANK YOU goes out to the Snells for their organization skills.

The Art of Fund Raising is not something I have ever had a hand in before. Angela and Craig got the ball rolling and the other teachers at ISPP jumped right in. There was a festive silent

auction. The teacher band and the Khmer band from School played live music. Websites were put together to gather donations from overseas. Meetings were held over several different months. The funds were given over to Tabitha. The dates were set. And finally, the fifteen teachers went out for a weekend; giving their time and sweat to sweeten a few lives.

Faucibus semper id vivamus. Egestas curabitur sit justo, placent elit risus velit orci vitae velit, orci curabitur amet recusandae ullamcorper. Quam nascetur fringilla quisque adipiscing porta, in nullam pharetra suspendisse, tincidunt dictumst varius. Quisque vitae lorem, tristique proin ut



Craig and Jeane (above) made the issue. I have to take this opportunity to apologize for not including individual shots of each member of the team. Every one worked as a team and made this happen. I plan on showing a music-accompanied slide show for the building team and give it to Tabitha for future recruiting. There just isn't enough space to put all the pictures into this short newsletter. This would end up being 30 pages in final format.

Nuff said. Sorry.



Srey (above) was our interpreter and site boss that went with us from Tabitha. I am sorry for any misspelling of your name Srey. We would have been lost without you. Thank you.

Last Thoughts



“Just think, for the first time, 12 mothers can now lock a door to their home and protect their children.” I remember one of my colleagues saying this as we were packing up on Sunday. Compared to the palm hut with a string in the doorway, a door is a significant change in terms of safety.

Empty bottles go into the house. Next time you drink a bottle of water, think about how that bottle is prized as a clean container in the provinces of Cambodia.

Two days can make a significant difference What did you do last weekend? I was part of a team that changed some lives. A lot more than two days went into the planning and fund raising, but it all came down to two days I would have spent on the computer, sleeping, or eating at a restaurant. The same amount of money that I spent on dinner (while finalizing this writing) took a family two years to save for a house.

Tabitha is not about giving, but about EMPOWERING Janne told us some families don't believe in saving money (and trusting the bank) because it takes two years to save the \$30US. But Tabitha requires their commitment before the family is rewarded with a new home. This is a big step towards empowerment and ownership.