



The James Alan Salon Foundation

The Justice and Soul Project

May 2009

And Now the World

In September 2008, I had very little knowledge about Cambodia and even less awareness of human trafficking and the sex slave trade. That changed with a cup of coffee and an hour with Carol Korpi.

Carol is a client of James Alan Salon and has been involved with several organizations giving aid to Cambodia rescue projects. Girls as young as 3 and 4 years old are taken, some sold by their parents willingly, others taken because their parents are “duped” into thinking they are sending their daughters off to get an education. Either way, these girls are then sent to the Cambodian brothels where they are sold for sex. Many humanitarian organizations are working to rescue these young girls and women and re-integrating them into society. Unfortunately, most of these victims are without skills and know only one thing – prostitution.

After listening to Carol, I asked, “How can we help?” Of course, my mind was already racing. I found out that one of Carol’s friends has had a dream to build and run a cosmetology program and dorm in order for these rescued women to learn a new trade. What she needs is expertise from “American” stylists. Before the day was done, the James Alan Salon Foundation vision was born.

For years, the team at James Alan Salon has been giving back to our community. We now plan to take that same community support to a global level. The JAS Foundation has three initiatives:

First, continue to provide funding and volunteer hours for the local charities and organizations we have served in the past.

Second, establish a scholarship program for aspiring stylists who can’t afford the tuition of local cosmetology schools (to include a pay-it-forward aspect for our third initiative).

Third, coordinate a nationwide collection of stylists to provide on-going inspiration and education to Cambodian women rescued from human trafficking along with the young women at risk.

James Alan Salon Foundation is just one more way that we live the salon mission of “changing our world, one life at a time.”

By the end of the summer 2009 we intend to have our non-profit status. At that time, we will welcome your financial contributions. For stylists interested in getting involved and providing support, please contact Lauren Ebright (Lauren@JamesAlanSalon.com).

Cambodia – Day 1

What an amazing thing. In 12 hours, I had gone from Seattle to Taipei – halfway around the world. A short layover, another three hour flight and we landed in Phnom Penh. While flying from Taipei I sat next to a gentleman from Olympia who was flying to Phnom Penh to see his fiancé. Talk about your long distance romance. This was about his tenth trip over and provided Lauren and me with a lot of help

getting through the whole Visa process. It is amazing how many surgical masks we have seen throughout the region. The fear of swine flu, coupled with memories of the past Asiatic flu, is keeping many from taking chances. As we collected our luggage and passed through the exit, a Cambodian traveler ahead of us handed one of the military guards cash (not so subtle, I might add) and was allowed to pass through unchecked. Less than 30 minutes into our visit and the corruption is demonstrated right before our eyes.

As we approached the crowd of those waiting to collect their friends and family from the airport, we spotted our sign – Matthew and Lauren – being held by an American whom we deduced was Jeremy. Lauren has been corresponding with him for the past month and he has been one of the many angels along the way that has made this trip possible. Standing next to him was Chenda, our Cambodian guide arranged by Brian Maher (no relation that I'm aware of to my mother's family). The two warmly greeted us and while we waited for Chenda's father to bring the car around we ordered a beer. While I realize it was noon, it was fiercely hot and according to our bodies, it was 10:00 p.m. – perfect time for a cool refreshing beer. <grin>

The ride from the airport to our hotel was a bit overwhelming. The poverty, unfinished buildings and the Cambodian drivers were a bit of an overload after spending the past 18 hours on planes and in airports. I found myself very emotional. I chose to stay engaged in conversation with Chenda for most of the half-hour ride. She supplied us with a cell phone and made arrangements for us to meet Lynn for dinner that night.

The hotel is comfortable and the rooms are air-conditioned. It is both a blessing and a curse. While in the room, the cool air feels good, but makes the brutal reality of the heat outside even more brutal when I walk out the door. I'm resigned to the fact that I will be sticky and stinky for the next ten days – choosing to mix it with double spritzes of Givenchy cologne and the delightful scent of Deet insect repellent.

We unpacked, showered and then ventured out into the street. Every 20 feet or so we were offered a Tuk Tuk ride (oversized moped 'taxi' with a rickshaw type seat). We declined the offers and continued to walk. The city is rich with sights, sounds and smells, many of which are not necessarily pleasant. I am reminded of NYC on a hot August day, only with about 80% more humidity. We stepped into a nice little courtyard restaurant, enjoyed a spring roll and then headed back to the hotel. In order to try to reset our body clocks, we were fighting the urge to nap , but by 4:00 pm we gave in. I managed to sleep two hours and Lauren an hour.

At 6:00 pm we wandered to the lobby to meet Lynn and found Mark waiting. Mark and Sopektra were part of the reason this whole journey had begun. Sopektra has the dream of building the cosmetology school and dorm for the trafficked women, and Mark is her husband. Lynn arrived and the four of us walked down the street for dinner. It was an incredible conversation which helped me to understand a bit more about the government, the work that Lynn and Mark are doing with Cambodian youth and the overwhelming need in this country. While we dined, geckos made hay with the bugs around the light. By 9:00 pm, the heat still stifling, we wandered back to the hotel. By 9:30 I could not force my lids to

remain open a minute longer. Sleep came fast and hard. I awoke one time and then managed to go back to sleep until 4:00 am. By tomorrow, I hope to be on schedule. Today, we are touring with Chenda. Tonight I will share more.

Cambodia – Day 2

Sleep comes in two-hour intervals for me. I'm not sure if it is the bed or the anticipation of what the next day's adventure will bring. Maybe a combination of both. Nonetheless, I was up at five and out the door by six. Breakfast was a bit disappointing as they have Americanized it here at the hotel. I did get some top ramen type noodles with a bit of a spicy kick to them and some very strong coffee that woke me up nicely. Around 7:30 I knocked on Lauren's door as we agreed to get coffee and a baguette at the little French restaurant around the corner. Lauren was still sound asleep – some 10 ½ hours later!

Chenda, our Cambodian friend who picked us up at the airport, arrived at 9:00 sharp and within minutes we had our choice of Tuk Tuk drivers – all bidding for the lowest rate. We started at \$25 a day and settled on \$12. One thing I was to learn over the next eight hours was how skilled Chenda is at negotiating the price!

We started the tour at Toul Sieng Genocide Museum. This was a former school which was converted to a prison and interrogation facility during the Khmer Rouge. Over 17,000 people were “processed” through this facility and less than a dozen survived. It was a sad start to the day but one that had to be experienced. The pain and suffering bestowed upon the Cambodian people through the likes of Pol Pot is history of which so many of us have very little awareness. In my opinion, he and others were as menacing as Hitler and yet it took nearly three decades to bring many of these murderers to justice. Pol Pot managed to avoid any punishment for his crimes.

After such a depressing start to the day, we were back in the Tuk Tuk heading down the street in what seemed to be a free-for-all event. No one stops at intersections here, everyone honks, and driving on the right or left side of the street seems arbitrary. <grin> Somehow this system seems to work. We toured Pagodas, including Wat Phnom (where the monkeys were as abundant as squirrels in a Seattle park), which sits atop a small hill, rode by the US Embassy (I had visions of the movie “The Killing Fields” – though this is a new embassy), the Royal Palace which is huge, and toured the National Museum. In the midst of all the touring, we stopped at the “mall” where we saw every knock-off known to man and then dined on pizza and beer!

Throughout the day we managed to stop at several salons which are just crazy. They shampoo the hair in the chair, lather it up, massage the scalp and then take the customer back to a facial type bed that slants backwards so they can rinse their hair in the sink. There are small shops found all over the city, charging \$1 for hair cut, \$2 for a formal up-do and \$5 for up-do and make-up. They sell Pantene and use box hair colors which are knock-offs of L'Oreal and Clairol.

The final stop on our tour was the “Russian Market”. Why it is called the “Russian market” I have no idea, but the place is like a gigantic corrugated steel garage crammed full of tourist trinkets, silk scarves, pirated software and jewelry. Chenda would not allow us to over pay for anything and haggled with the vendors until they paid *her* to go away. It is such a strange affair and both Lauren and I were feeling bad. I was fine paying \$10 but Chenda wouldn’t hear of it. As we walked away, the vendor agreed to Chenda’s price - \$8. We left there drenched in sweat, carrying our spoils and ready to return to our hotel.

We ended the day with a nice dinner and a lightening show that was spectacular! As I sat on the pool deck watching the storm, bats flew all around my head. The rain came and went and the lightening continued as I drifted off to sleep – curtains wide open to the natural light show outside.

I am struck by the resigned determination of the Cambodian people. They have seen such heartache and challenge, there is extreme poverty and wealth, and they continue to live with a government that is corrupt, albeit nothing like the former regime. I’m not sure whether or not they are happy. Some look very happy, others seem to be stuck in survival mode. In America, we still use money to try to buy happiness. Here, it seems that the majority is seeking money to buy survival. I only hope we can make a difference.

Cambodia – Day 3

Today was one of the most powerful experiences in my life. It started out like the first two days here in Cambodia. Lauren and I walk to the café around the corner to eat breakfast and take advantage of their free internet. I had half expected the streets to be clean and debris free after the downpour the night before. That was not the case. They seemed the same or in some cases worse. None the less, the stroll was pleasant. The internet was challenging at breakfast since the power kept going off. It is a common occurrence here to have the power go off without reason. From time to time they have rolling black-outs to conserve energy, other times storms or construction will impact the flow of electricity. I imagine it was the latter that affected us today. The café had to switch to generator power (many businesses have them).

After breakfast, we returned to the hotel where we met Abraham, our transportation to Andong. First, I wasn’t quite sure what Andong was, but was told it might be good for us to see this “village”. It turns out that it is a community of nearly 4000 displaced homeowners that the government resettled on this plot of land. The land that they were living on in Phnom Penh was too valuable. Many of them were poor and had no means to prove that the land truly was their land. Some owned the land before the Khmer Rouge but during that regime, nothing was as it was before. It didn’t matter; the land was valuable and could be sold, so these people were moved.

On the ride up, Abraham explained that he was the director of the school at Andong. Not only was he the director, he built the school. After working in the government for years, observing all the

corruption, he decided that his life work was to be more than all that. Instead, he took \$5000 of his own money and built the school and the church at Andong.

We arrived after about a 50 minute ride through the city and out into the neighboring communities. Again I was struck by the drastic difference of wealth and poverty – many right next to each other. Abraham believes that there is very little philanthropic help from Cambodia’s wealthy. Most of the support is from outside the country. I can’t help but wonder if there is not some former “caste” influence on the Cambodia society that keeps them from helping the poor.

As we pulled up to the school, both Lauren and I regretted drinking so much coffee, and had to make a mad dash to the facilities. Abraham apologized for the facilities in advanced and by the look on Lauren’s face when she came out, I could tell this was no ordinary situation. I entered to find a big pool of water to the left with a pan to scoop the water out. Then next to it was what looked like a toilet that was flat on the floor and didn’t have a seat. Clearly, it was not meant to sit on, rather to squat over (which Lauren later recounted she had no idea if she was “aiming” correctly or not – I on the other hand, have had a bit of practice – bull’s-eye!). I assumed the water was to “flush” the toilet, but I decided to touch as little as possible. Where was the hand sanitizer when I needed it?

We sat down with Abraham and a couple of the volunteer teachers and found out that the school had grades 1 – 4 and I believe nearly 500 students. Not all the students were from Andong, but a majority of them were. Looking out the window, I observed a number of kids and a few adults gathered around the well, bathing and washing clothes. Abraham explained that they were trying to raise funds to build new “homes” for those in Andong. Each home costs \$150 and so far they had built 75, but there were many more to go. Both Lauren and I calculated how many times we had eaten out in the past year and how many homes we could have bought. So Abraham invited us to go see the homes. As we began our walk over there, looking at the shanty town ahead, I could see why they needed new homes. Beyond in the distance I could see what I thought were the new homes and was amazed they could be built for \$150. Imagine my shock when the shanty town we walked into was the “new homes”. I had stepped right into the “feed the children” commercials that I so quickly change the channel when they come on. The community was working together to build one of these new homes. With round poles and corrugated steel, they were replacing the thatched roof huts that have all started leaking and collapsing. \$150 only buys the roof and the wood. Abraham believes it is best the family earn the additional \$50 for the sides if they choose, or they use tarps.

The new homes I had seen in the distance were not part of this village – again those with the means right next to those living with nothing. Interestingly enough, these people seemed happy. They were excited that we were there and smiled constantly. The children played like any other child would play and I was mixed with shame and compassion when one of the little boys reached up and grabbed my hand as we walked through the village. Shame because I thought, how many germs are on that hand. That thought passed quickly when he looked up and smiled the sweetest smile I’d ever seen. At that point it didn’t matter, this was a precious child that Abraham built a school for so he could learn and that one day could go to the university.

We took pictures, sat in the middle of this sweltering camp and just talked for nearly an hour. Friendly faces smiling and nodding to us, little kids running by trying their new English they were learning, (“hello”) and being offered a soft drink. I reflected on last night’s thunderstorm that I had so enjoyed and realized that I enjoyed it because I knew I’d be sleeping inside – not having it leak though my thatched roof, not having to walk through the mud it created on my floor and not having to worry about when it would stop.

By 1:00 we were on our way back to Phnom Penh. After saying farewell to Pastor Abraham and making arrangements to see him when he visits Seattle in August, I headed for the shower. As I stood in the shower I couldn’t help but think about the “pond” that many of the villagers used to bath and the field which was used for their toilet. I know I can’t change the world, but I can change that little boy’s life, I can build one new “tin house” and give that child an opportunity to build his own house someday.

We ended the day with a traditional and extremely delicious Cambodian meal with Mark and Sopheaktra. These two were really the beginning of the dream – Sopheaktra wishing to open the cosmetology school. We talked about different ways she could approach it, different ways we could assist, about the government, the villages and about their darling 13 month old Davey Wills. We made plans to tour supply houses the next day and bid them farewell.

Carol Korpi said my life would be changed and that I would fall in love with these people. I couldn’t understand it then, I get it now. We still have five more days of planning – over a dozen more people to meet with and a lifetime to implement.

Cambodia – Day 4

Today was another day of adventure. While Lauren went with Mark and Sopheaktra to check out a Cambodian Church, I set out on foot to explore our neighborhood. My first sight to see was Wat Lanka, a Buddhist pagoda just a few short blocks from the hotel. The pagoda was being prepared for a wedding (photos to follow) which is no small ordeal in Cambodia. The bride and groom change garments 8 or 9 times throughout the day, the decorations are colorful and very elaborate. Every day we have seen at least one wedding, often times blocking entire streets.

After touring the outside of the pagoda, I decided to walk in the opposite direction and make a loop around the hotel. Thirty minutes later I was hopelessly turned around and resigned to hiring a “moto” to take me back to the hotel. Motos are the little motorcycles that fill the streets of Phnom Penh, darting in and out, going through intersections without looking and, frankly, scaring the crap out of me. On the other hand, it did seem like a part of Cambodia I should experience. I negotiated a price of one dollar, he nodded that he knew the Goldiana Hotel, I hopped on the back of the bike and off we went – immediately cutting across four lanes of traffic. Oh gawd, what have I gotten myself into?

Shortly after we headed south on the road I realized the driver did not know where he was going. Then the thought occurred to me that maybe he was taking me to some remote place where he and his

buddies would rob me and leave me stranded in the jungle. Ok, I didn't take it that far, but I had a moment of panic. I motioned for him to pull over, pulled out a map and tried to explain to him "Goldiana Hotel." He headed in the opposite direction, but clearly not knowing. We pulled into a gas station and he spoke with the attendant and another customer, asking for directions. They too seemed at a loss and I was warned that no one understands maps. I tried to point out Independence Monument and they gave me blank stares. Finally, I said Wat Lanka – and bingo, they knew exactly where to go. Ten minutes later we were turning into the hotel. Once off the bike, my cute driver friend said "four dollars." I smiled and said, "No, one dollar." I then gave him two just for the adventure. Of course, I then went into the dad mode and thought, dang it, I shouldn't be rewarding that behavior!

The afternoon was spent going to salon distribution centers. My friends Syd and George would love these. We went to a market not unlike the Russian Market the day before. This market though was all items that Cambodians would buy – not tourists. They were jammed packed with supplies. Flat ironshanging from the ceiling, rows and rows of Pantene shampoo and boxed colors from Korea filled these cubicles. Very little of the product was professional. Everything is negotiable. I can see we have our work cut out for us.

We left to go to one of the upscale Korean salons near the fancy mall. The salon was much nicer than all the little ones we had seen and we managed to sneak a tour. They had higher-end products from Korea and were using L'Oreal professional color. Although, looking at the supervisor's hair, we could see that they weren't using it very well! We then crossed the street and wandered through the mall which was very similar to malls in the states except they still are small "booth" type stores. I spotted a pair of jeans I liked, climbed into a tiny closet to try them on and then proceeded to negotiate the price from \$25 down to \$19 with Sopheaktra's help. That was kind of fun and I've decided next time I am in Nordstrom, I'm going to try that!

As we prepared to leave, having planned to visit the shops and restaurants on the riverfront, we were suddenly caught in a downpour. As the four of us climbed into our Tuk Tuk, the lightning and thunder crashed right above our heads. The rain flooded the streets in a matter of minutes and our poor Tuk Tuk driver was drenched! At times, we had water flowing into the Tuk Tuk and the moto nearly half submerged. Kids were running through the downspouts like American kids might run through a sprinkler in the summer. We arrived back at the hotel, where we overpaid our Tuk Tuk driver because we felt so sorry for him and then proceed to the pool to watch the downpour. 45 minutes later it was over. By the time we went to dinner at 6:00 or so, we would never have known it had rained. Both Lauren and I still could not help but think of our friends in Andong. Rain will never be the same for us again.

Cambodia – Day 5

We are halfway through our trip. In some ways it feels as though I've been here for months, and in other ways it feels as if I just walked off the plane. I'm already feeling sad that in a few short days I will

be leaving this country and these great people behind. After today, though, I am even more convinced that I will be returning.

Our day began as usual, breakfast at a little restaurant with free wireless internet. We then met Mark, I negotiated a Tuk Tuk for the day (\$13 – almost as good as Chenda), and off we went to meet with our first contact – Open Arms Salon. We were met by Sandra and Graham at the front of a very beautiful salon. Sandra and Graham are from Australia and felt called to support Cambodia over seven years ago. They came over and started an orphanage and over the years have had up to 30 children in their care. They consider seven of them “their kids.” About two years ago Sandra and Graham got the idea of opening a school/salon for orphaned kids and rescued girls. The whole salon cost \$10,000 to create. It has six styling chairs, plus nail, waxing and shampoo stations. We spent nearly two hours with the two of them and talked about all the possibilities. Last year, Graham and Sandra sold their home in Australia and made the commitment to build up this salon so the girls could run it on their own. The oldest is now 19 and doing a phenomenal job. They are not yet self-sustaining but I believe they will be. It is exactly the model I had envisioned working with. Sandra confided in Lauren and me that a few weeks ago she questioned whether they were supposed to have the salon. She had prayed about it, talked about it and let go. The next day Helen called to tell her that Lauren and I were coming to Phnom Pehn from the States and that she thought Sandra should meet with us. Sandra had received her answer!

After visiting the salon it was time for lunch with Seila, who heads up a leadership program for the Cambodian youth through Evangelical Fellowship of Cambodia. We talked about ways they might be able to provide “pay it forward” opportunities for those completing the leadership program by volunteering to teach what they have learned to the young women in the cosmetology programs. We also talked about the need for the support from the James Alan Salon Foundation as 53 factories have closed over the past six months - over 30 in the past two months alone. That means that 50,000 women are no longer employed, putting them in a high risk category for trafficking and prostitution.

Our last visit of the day was with White Lotus, whose work is only with trafficked women. They teach the women many skills, including sewing, card making, and providing manicures/pedicures, facials, make-up and hair (excluding color). They have a small demi-spa called Tropical Oasis right across from the Russian Market which they opened a couple years ago. They were also interested in partnering opportunities, especially in training their educator. It was another two and half hours of great discussion and possibilities.

Both Lauren and I are struck by the network of people all working to support the Cambodian people. Mark, Sopheaktra, Jeremy, Ray, Lynn, Brian – all people whom I knew nothing about last year but this year have made this journey so fruitful! I have a feeling by Friday my brain will be on overload!

We ended the day by catching the last 15 minutes or so of meditation at the Wat Lanka Pagoda -a truly peaceful experience which I’m sure I will enjoy again on Thursday night, just before we leave.

Cambodia – Day 6

Today we hit our emotional capacity and both Lauren and I cried. It started out like most of our days here: Breakfast at the café, hiring a Tuk Tuk driver (although today the two of them got in a fight over who was going to be our driver), picking up Mark and off to our first meeting.

Our meeting was with Helen Sworn, Director of Chab Dai. Chab Dai is a non-governmental organization (NGO) that works with other organizations helping rescued and abused women. Helen is a straight-shooting Brit with a lovely accent, so of course I liked her right off the bat. We shared our story, she shared a bit of hers and then she went right to work. She said it all sounds good but you've got to have a sound business plan, understand your target market, create systems and establish a socially responsible, sustainable model. Ah, music to my ears. We spent an hour with her and then it was off to AFESIP, the organization founded by Somaly Mam for rescued girls.

Before heading to AFESIP, we had to stop for lunch. Since we were short on time, we did the American thing – dashed into Lucky Burger, swallowed down a burger and fries, and got back on the road in the Tuk Tuk.

We arrived at the office of AFESIP and were taken by van to a little village which is home to the Tom Dy Center (named after the first rescued girl Somaly Mam found in the streets - beaten, HIV positive and near death). AFESIP has three locations and over 150 rescued girls. The girls' ages vary but some were as young as 12 years old. At Tom Dy, vocational skills are learned as well as life skills. The two vocational skills taught are sewing and cosmetology. About 20 of the 60 girls have chosen to learn to do hair.

We were taken on a tour through the village by a writer from, of all places, Tacoma! Joleen is writing a book on trafficked women and had decided to immerse herself into the culture over here. She has interviewed rescued girls as well as the "Johns" and was a wealth of knowledge. As we were touring I realized that not just anyone gets to tour AFESIP. They only give tours to organizations and people they truly believe can help. Lauren's countless e-mails and Jeremy's personal visit finally convinced them that we were serious and that we truly could make a difference.

The grounds were beautiful and kept up by the rescued girls, all of whom have to give their consent to be there. One of the biggest challenges is the pressure and influence the families put on these girls to return to their villages. One 12-year-old was sold twice by her mother and finally ended up at Tom Dy - unfortunately after she had already contracted AIDS. There is a wall in the dining area set up as a memorial to the many girls that have died of AIDS, including Tom Dy herself.

After touring the girls' home and where they learn sewing, we walked down the road to a cute little salon that has been created for the young women to learn the cosmetology trade. When we arrived, they were working on formal hair (as I said before, weddings are a big deal and hair and make-up are an important part of that). We talked with the educator and the director of the school. The students practice doing hair mainly on each other, but from time to time they will do hair for the weddings in the neighboring communities. They seemed excited about the idea of having American stylists come teach them. Jolene told Lauren that just the fact that she and I were there made the girls feel important and built their self esteem. As I looked around I couldn't help but think that my granddaughter is the age of

some of these girls. I can't even imagine the rage I would feel if she were to be sold or forced into a brothel. This is where we started hitting our emotional wall. As we walked back to Tom Dy, I could see that Lauren was on the edge. When I asked how she was doing, the tears started flowing. We walked together down the dirt road and just let the emotions come out. Before we had left, Jolene introduced us to another little girl - sweetest thing you can imagine. She had one eye terribly scarred over from the brothel owner gouging it out with a pipe because she said she was too sick to work that night. Shortly after, the owner then administered an electric shock to the young girl- internally. This is when it started to really get to me.

By the time we got back to the hotel, we had about an hour before meeting up with everyone for dinner. Lauren and I decided to debrief before heading down. It was good, as I needed to have my emotional moment. The work that we are embarking on is much bigger than I could even comprehend. I can see how one could get easily overwhelmed and not be able to do anything. But we are determined to put together a plan that is both effective and doable.

We ended the evening having a fabulous dinner with many of the players who helped put this trip together. Ray arrived from Seattle and joined Mark, Sopheaktra, Lynn, Jeremy, Maria (Jeremy's wife), Lauren and me for a thank you dinner. We also had Jeremy and Maria's two kids, along with Mark and Sopheaktra's son. The conversation was good, the food great and the perfect way to end the evening. Well almost. After returning to the hotel, Ray and I headed around the corner to Ray's favorite French restaurant to enjoy one nightcap before bed – a yogurt shake for Ray and cognac for me.

Cambodia – Day 7

We are nearing the end of our visits. Today after breakfast in our usual café with the free WIFI, we set out to meet with Hagar. We met Ray at his hotel, grabbed a Tuk Tuk and set out to pick up Mark. I'm feeling pretty proud of myself as I was able to get us from the hotel to Mark's place without getting lost. This is no small feat in Phnom Penh given the streets are not clearly marked (most aren't marked) and everything kind of looks the same! Directions are given using landmarks and monuments. I have picked up a few key phrases in Khmer, the language of Cambodia. I know how to say thank you, how are you, hello (formally), good bye and stop (very handy when directing the Tuk Tuk driver <grin>).

Next up, Hagar, an NGO whose mission is to reach out to the trafficked, marginalized, homeless and at-risk girls and boys. Hagar is very large and well respected in Cambodia and we were thrilled to have this appointment. We were especially interested in meeting with them as they had ventured into the cosmetology world, but decided to end that program. After arriving at the wrong location, (Hagar has multiple locations) we were redirected to the correct one and arrived a few minutes late. We were seated in a large conference room where we were joined by Myriam Geach and Graham, another Brit and a Kiwi (New Zealander). I could just sit and listen to the accents all day! But I digress. We gathered information, exchanged ideas and learned a lot about the organization. It was clear that we were a good match and that joint effort with the many organizations would be viable. Hagar was very interested in helping us coordinate this effort! They also liked Ray's idea of creating dorms for the

women to stay in while they are learning, as housing is a major challenge for these women, especially if they live out in the villages.

We then toured the huge facility which was donated by Nestle, observing the sewing center and the center where they process and create pasteurized soy milk for street markets and mini-marts. They have been given equipment to take this operation large scale which will teach skills and provide working opportunity for hundreds of Cambodians.

Once the tour was completed, we then dined at the Hagar restaurant. They have a restaurant and catering enterprise that teaches restaurant skills to the women (and men) and employs over 130 with an average monthly salary of \$103, nearly double what many jobs pay. The food was delicious and the time flew by. They had encouraged us to look at a couple salons, one run by a Vietnamese woman and one run by a gentleman from Singapore. The first salon was small, but very well respected. We had been told by several people that this was the only place they would get their hair cut. It reminded me of many of the salons back home – small (only three or four chairs) but functional. There were no customers so we could not observe.

The Singapore Hair Salon in the Parkway Mall was much busier and very informative. Jerry, the owner, has been working with Hagar for the past year or two by taking in women who have an interest in hair and apprenticing them. He shared the many challenges he has had and that his success rate wasn't very high. As we continued the conversation, it was clear that Jerry had very high standards which we had a feeling were probably a bit too high for these women to reach. He trained under some great people in London, including Trevor Sorbie (he knew my friend Ruth Roche) and Vidal Sassoon. He gave us a lot of information that will help us in formulating our plan. His salon was busy and he had several employees working. He clearly has a strong business model that is working well for him. One little tidbit I found interesting was, most Cambodian men will not choose cosmetology as a profession because of the fear of being labeled "a girl boy" as he wiggled his hands in the air, reminded me of the Native American saying of "walks in both worlds". Hopefully, with enough time and attention brought to the profession, we will be able to overcome that stereotype.

We ended our day with dinner on the Riverfront. It is an area by the river that is a mixture of Pikes Street Market, Belltown, and Tijuana. The food was good at the time (Lauren got sick in the middle of the night and is pretty sure it was the fish she ate) and the bars were plentiful. This is a tourist area for sure and the begging was tenfold of what we had experienced any place else in the city. All the literature we read said not to purchase from the little kids, as the money would be going to either their parents or some other adult person forcing them to do it. My heart ached as I watched these kids pandering wondering why aren't they at home playing with the neighbor kids, doing home work, and having someone read them a bed time story as they get tucked in. I know I'm not the first to experience this, but I hope enough people get to so that we can do something about it. This country has experienced so much pain, I only hope that we can bring a little hope, one life at a time.

Cambodia – Day 8

It is so hard to believe that we are leaving Cambodia tomorrow morning. It seems like only yesterday that we landed in Phnom Penh, strangers to this new land.

We purposefully kept a lighter day today, with only a few salon visits left to go. Lauren and I took our time over breakfast, answering e-mails and visiting with Ray. We managed to find a little gift store nearby, so we spent some time supporting the locals. By 1:30, we met up with Ray and Mark for one final tour of salons. We were trying to find the top salons in Phnom Penh, so we thought we'd be successful starting with the five star hotels. Unfortunately, that was not to be the case. Both hotels had very small salons with only a couple of chairs. There were no customers in either salon and from talking with the employees I gathered that the majority of the customers are hotel guests.

At the Phnom Penh Hotel, we asked where the government officials' wives might get their hair done, as we assumed that would be a prestigious salon. They gave us one name (which started with an F though there is no way I would remember what it was, let alone be able to spell it!) so we set off to the Central Market area in search of the salon. There were a large number of salons in the area and finding it was a bit of a challenge. While the streets have names, the numbering system is random – so you could have an address of 121 and your neighbor next store can be 232. Finally, the keen eye of our Tuk Tuk driver spotted the salon. It was an awkward experience from the moment we entered. There were several clients and employees working in a very small salon. Immediately, I felt as I do in some of the snooty salons back home. I introduced myself and, as I handed her my card, explained that I was from the United States and was hoping I could see her salon. She looked at me and said, "No." I was taken aback, so I paused and then repeated her "no" with a question in my voice. She repeated emphatically, "NO." Ok, apparently we found the place where the government officials' wives get their hair done.

As we drove away in the Tuk Tuk, Mark was not surprised at our treatment. For the salon owner, there was probably some fear involved, as well as a sense of superiority. As I said before, the caste system still has an influence in this country. So out of all our visits, we only got turned down one time - not too bad - and certainly better than my dating life! <grin>

We arrived back at the hotel and then realized it was time to say good-bye to Mark. This is always the hard part, leaving new friends behind. We said our good-byes and then headed back to the hotel for an hour at the pool before dinner. After 45 minutes or so, the skies looked as though they were ready for another great storm, but alas, it was just a tease.

Our final meal was at the Indian restaurant down the street, Annam, recommended by our new friend Joleen. Ray, Lynn, Lauren and I shared a last night of food, fun and conversation. We talked some business but then started sharing stories from the past: Me recounting stories from my childhood and my siblings, Ray with his sleep walking/talking stories, Lauren with her dancing and time capsules, and Lynn lying about her age! It also seems that the world just gets smaller and smaller. It turns out that Lynn worked at ICOS with my friend Ellen Stone! Six degrees of separation is truly more like three degrees for me, even halfway across the world!

We finished dinner and then stopped by the bar to meet up with James, our new friend from England. James is working for Epcat, another organization whose mission it is to end trafficking and sexual abuse.

We met him in our travels and had some great conversation. After a beer, a promise to keep in touch (Facebook is a wonderful medium) and a good-bye hug, we were off to bed. Tomorrow we board a plane and 19 hours later we'll be back in Seattle. It's bittersweet thinking about it. I'll enjoy not dripping sweat, but will miss the warmth – from not only the weather, but also the kindness of the wonderful Cambodian people we have met!