

## **Sophomores in Cambodia**

By Ed Bachrach  
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The Bachrachs, Laurie and Ed, returned to Cambodia in June of 2003 for five days. This was their third trip in little over a year. For background on their previous trips please refer to the two other trip reports, "Cambodia 2002" and "Innocents in Cambodia."

Sophomore comes from the Greek words for wise and foolish. It implies that one is overly confident of his knowledge but poorly informed. As we left Cambodia this time we were feeling more like sophomores and that we were getting a pretty good grasp of what is going on and how we might help.

### **Summary Observations**

Cambodia is quietly and imperceptibly becoming a peaceful and free country in relation to its background and low stage of development. It is a sign of progress that Cambodia is struggling with the same issues of economic development that every area of the world faces, including some cities in the U. S.

As world events elsewhere command more attention, notably Afghanistan and Iraq, NGOs and governmental aid is declining.

Among the many areas that need help, health care, rule of law, and social programs including psychological assistance and HIV/AIDS prevention continue to be our focus. As with our previous trips, we met some interesting people.

### **Cambodia Today**

Our impressions of Cambodia are compiled from conversations with the people mentioned later in this report. Being a compilation, we must necessarily edit and emphasize impressions in order to make a coherent case and unfortunately, editorial convenience crowds out complexity. Nevertheless, the sophomore in me is confident in the accuracy and integrity of this report.

While we were in Cambodia, the 30-day re-election campaign for the new government began. It was refreshing to be in a country where the campaign period was so short. Previous campaigns have been marked by violence and corruption and there have been coups in-between elections. Many experts were apprehensive about these elections, but upon our return to the U.S. we read that they were concluded with minimal violence. While there are charges of corruption and results are being contested, efforts to steal the election failed: the ruling party didn't receive a majority of votes and will have to form a coalition with one of the challenging parties.

This sounds like the normal peaceful functioning of a parliamentary system. We heard from more than one source that many of the donor countries that the ruling party depends upon had pressured the Prime Minister, Hun Sen, to keep the elections peaceful.

Amid the momentary passion of the election, we sensed a larger pattern developing which we can only be described as something between freedom and anarchy. Having come from perhaps the most totalitarian nation in history during the Khmer Rouge era, the government, though still quite corrupt, lacks the resources to control much of society. Most commerce, both legal and illicit, is not controlled; all humanitarian efforts are private or administered by foreigners; there is relative freedom of the press; and people feel free to talk privately or assemble publicly to talk about the government and society. Gone is the time when roving bands of armed ruling-party thugs roamed the streets, daily suppressing dissent and assassinating rivals. The people we talked to felt freer, more secure, and safer than they had in more than a generation.

Other than the elections, two of the most talked about topics of the day were concerns about the economy and healthcare. Tourism, the country's largest legal business, was hurt by the SARS outbreak even though no cases were reported in Cambodia. The garment industry continues to lose business to more prosperous and dominant competitors, notably China. Access to health care is very limited, quality is poor and the cost is beyond the reach of most Cambodians. While these issues represent real and pressing problems, the good news is that they are the same problems being wrestled with all over the world including our hometown of Decatur, Illinois. The measure of progress lies in the nature of problems. In our opinion, there is not much that Cambodia can do about competition in the garment industry. In the long run Cambodia will have to find its own distinct and defensible competitive advantage and in the short run there is no option but policies based upon self-reliance.

The need for self-reliance will grow as the amount of foreign aid flowing into Cambodia levels off and begins to decline. We heard that in organization after organization, programs are being abandoned or cut as a result of decreases in funding from foreign governments and parent NGOs. The International Committee of the Red Cross is focusing on the Afghanistan, Iraq and other hot spots. USAID has reduced funding to many programs, especially in the area of building democratic institutions now that elections are more peaceful. We were told that the French government has significantly reduced funding for the Calmette Hospital, the high-end private hospital in Phnom Penh.

From the few conversations we had it appears that the foreign aid community thinks that Cambodia is getting on its feet and it is time to start reducing aid.

### **The Outline of Our Trip**

The objectives of this trip were to make follow-up visits to the organizations we had already provided with support, and to investigate new organizations we had heard about and wanted to check out. We arrived in Phnom Penh on a Monday morning and spent the rest of Monday, Tuesday and Friday there. On Wednesday we flew to Battambang, the country's third largest city, in western Cambodia, visited some organizations, and spent the night. Thursday morning we drive from Battambang to

Siem Reap, home of Angkor Wat, visited two hospitals, and flew back to Phnom Penh in the late afternoon. Our investigation concentrated on three areas of interest: health care, rule of law, and other social problems. In addition, we met with a few interesting players and these meetings are worth describing.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health Care</li> <li>• Angkor Wat Children's Hospital</li> <li>• Sihanouk Hospital Center of Hope</li> <li>• Kantha Bopha Hospitals</li> <li>• Calmette Hospital</li> <li>• Hospital Preah Norodom Sihanouk</li> </ul>               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Rule of Law</li> <li>• Phnom Penh Municipal Court</li> <li>• The Center for Social Development</li> </ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General Social Programs</li> <li>• Returnee Assistance Program</li> <li>• Catholic Relief Services</li> <li>• Buddhism for Development</li> <li>• Transcultural Psycho-social Organization</li> <li>• The Asia Foundation</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Other Encounters</li> <li>• Newspapers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ The Cambodia Daily</li> <li>◦ The Phnom Penh Post</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Bernard Krisher</li> <li>• U.S. Ambassador Charles Ray</li> </ul> |

## Health Care

**Angkor Hospital for Children** - The Angkor Hospital for Children in Siem Reap was the first charitable organization we visited on our first trip to Cambodia. It was founded by the Japanese photographer, Kenro Izu, and is managed by his organization, Friends Without A Border in New York. As the name implies, the hospital is a pediatric hospital. We were told that 50% of the population in Cambodia is fifteen years of age or younger and hence more than half the hospitals are pediatric hospitals. This hospital is well run, offers services to the poor for free, and focuses as much on developing the capacity of Cambodian health care workers, doctors and nurses, as it does on providing care. The patients come from astounding distances for care including Battambang, four hours away, and towns on the Thai border that are as much as eight hours away. While the hospital is well run and what equipment they have is modern and functioning, they are overwhelmed with patients and are running an operating deficit. Statistics on their cost per patient visit are described in "Innocents in Cambodia." We are providing cash support to this hospital and are trying to arrange a steady supply of in-kind donations from various sources in the U.S. health care and medical supply industries.

**Sihanouk Hospital Center of Hope** - The Sihanouk Hospital Center of Hope is a modest but industrious hospital and clinic in Phnom Penh. The Center of Hope is sometimes confused with the government referral hospital, which is called simply the Sihanouk Hospital. Founded by Bernard Krisher, a retired American journalist who lives in Japan, the Center of Hope has been operating for ten years and serves Cambodians of all ages. Operation of the hospital is overseen by Hope Worldwide,

worldwide healthcare NGO based in the U. S. The hospital is run by Dr. Gary Jacques who recently taught at Vanderbilt Medical Center. He is assisted by his wife, Karen, who is the public relations director.

We visited the Center of Hope on a Friday morning and found it busy, orderly, and well attended. Demand for the free medical services that the Center provides exceeds capacity and so every morning there is a lottery outside the hospital gates for the hundreds who wait every day hoping for a chance to be treated. Though means are modest, treatment appears to be competent and like the Angkor Wat Children's Hospital there is an emphasis on teaching and developing the capacity of Cambodians to delivery quality health care. While the hospital treats all ages there is an emphasis on adults as there are several pediatric-only hospitals in Phnom Penh.

**Kantha Bopha Hospitals** - The Kantha Bopha Foundation operates three children's hospitals in Cambodia, two in Phnom Penh and one in Siem Reap. We visited the Kantha Bopha hospital in Siem Reap and while the hospital was closed to tours we were allowed access to the public information room. We learned that the hospitals are supported with large donations from the Swiss government and was founded by a dedicated Swiss doctor, Dr. Beat Richner. Dr. Richner directs all the hospitals, treats patients, and performs Bach cello pieces in concert every Saturday night in Siem Reap to raise funds. While we didn't meet him he has a reputation for commitment, compassion and quality care. We plan to visit these facilities on our next visit.

**Calmette Hospital** - We stopped by the Phnom Penh's Calmette Hospital in our previous trip to Cambodia but were not given a tour. It was our impression at the time that this was the high end, private pay hospital for wealthy Cambodians and government officials and was funded by the French government. During this trip to Phnom Penh we were given a tour of the hospital, met the director and were given a professional presentation describing the operation and finances of the hospital. We learned that Calmette now receives little if any support from the French government, supports itself with patient fee revenue and donations, and has a ward for delivering free healthcare. The facilities of this hospital were as good as any we have seen in Cambodia but the ward for the "free" patients is notably inferior to that for the paying patients. As we toured this facility we observed more severe illnesses than in other hospitals. We saw a woman in the final stages of cancer with tumorous masses visible on the outside of her body, several amputees, a young boy suffering from hydrocephalus and many other horrifying or terminal illnesses.

**Hospital Preah Norodom Sihanouk** - The Sihanouk Hospital, also known as the Russian Hospital because it was built by the Russians, the Government Hospital, or the Referral Hospital, is the hulking ruins of a hospital we visited and described in our previous trip report. During this trip we were given an extensive tour of the facility. The hospital was in worse shape than before: the driveway to back half was flooded and impassable, there was rat hiding under the x-ray machine, and the pathology lab was filled with antiquated equipment and broken furniture. Only the dentistry area seemed reasonably well equipped and in operation.

Although this is Cambodia's biggest hospital it is hard to understand why it exists. Patients come to the Sihanouk hospital to receive free care but are turned away and referred to individual doctors' private pay clinics for treatment. If the patient cannot pay he may be admitted to this crude facility and neglected or turned away. We got

the impression that the doctors are more concerned with building their private practices than providing meaningful care in the hospital. We asked several people we talked to whether hospitals like this are corrupt or whether this is merely the unfortunate structure of a health care industry that is so woefully inadequate in meeting the needs of the population. The answer lies somewhere in between.

While we were touring we saw one family lacking any form of transport other than a father's arms, carry a sick child away from the hospital. Later on we saw a bicycle-driven rickshaw bring the wasted body of a man who was transferred to a stretcher and admitted to the HIV/AIDS/Tuberculosis ward.

## **The Rule of Law**

**Phnom Penh Municipal Court** - During our previous trip to Cambodia we visited the Law School where the Dean told us about two University of Michigan law professors who were involved with exchange programs between Cambodian and U. S. law students. Subsequently Laurie and I met Peter Hammer and Nick Rine in Ann Arbor to discuss their efforts to aid in establishing rule of law in Cambodia. While the programs they were involved with or created are now dormant for lack of funding, they continue to travel to Cambodia and work on special projects. They were both in Phnom Penh at the time of our visit and we asked them if we could visit a courtroom to observe the administration of justice. They graciously arranged for us to spend a morning in a courthouse, meet with a judge, observe a trial, and then hosted us to a delicious dinner that evening.

Our day in court began with a private meeting with Judge Tan Senarong in his office. Senarong is a young man in his 30s who studied law at the University of Michigan as part of one of the programs operated by Nick and Peter. He is a personable, bright professional who believes passionately in improving the quality of justice in Cambodia. As Laurie and I listened, Nick asked Senarong to describe the judicial system and translated his responses.

We learned that Cambodia has a Code system of justice, in contrast to the Common Law system used in the U. S. and England. With a Code system, less of the activity of a case takes place in a trial or a courtroom and the case develops mostly through private proceedings. In this system the judge is more of an actor and the lawyers are more passive, whereas in Common Law system the judge is passive and the trial lawyers are active. In criminal cases there is an investigating judge and a trial judge. In civil cases there is an inquiring judge and a trial judge. Nick went to lengths to explain the differences between the Code and Common Law Systems and we couldn't tell whether his distinction was academic or whether he was suggesting that with the Code system justice is more opaque and susceptible to corruption. Senarong told us that his court is under the jurisdiction of the Minister of Justice and there is tremendous pressure from the Minister as well as the police to influence judgments. Judges in Phnom Penh are afraid of the police and it is commonplace for the police to beat confessions out of those arrested and to plant evidence.

Judges are underpaid and intimidated. Senarong makes \$300 a month but until recently he was making just \$ 30 a month. Rent for his home is \$ 150 a month and his family has many other living expenses. We learned that many judges want to make around \$ 50,000 a year. The difference between official pay and what the judges want to earn is made up with bribes. The privilege of continuing in office is at

the pleasure of the Minister of Justice. Senarong showed us a Strategic Plan for the justice system that seems to address all of the shortcomings I have mentioned and more. But, Senarong told us that the plan was developed by the World Bank and there is no will within the government to implement it.

We ended our visit with Senarong and walked through the crowded, stuffy hallway and up the stairs of the dilapidated courthouse. The courtroom was on the third floor and consisted of a U-shaped table from which the judges presided, a podium for testimony facing the judge and wooden pews for the observers. Behind the presiding judge at the head of the table a large square of red fabric had been hung to keep out light and act as a dramatic backdrop. We observed two cases. In the first, no defendant was present but the in absentia trial concerned the theft of a large amount of money in a shareholder suit. In the second case a man was charged with assaulting the wife of a neighbor by twisting her arm to the point of breaking it. While he testified in his defense, it appeared that the outcome would depend more on a bribe than on the testimony.

The rule of law in Cambodia is as crude as our firsthand experience confirmed. Anyone who has read Franz Kafka's *The Trial*, will recall a legal system with unspecified charges, secret case proceedings, no way to defend oneself, and judgments handed down impersonally. Visiting the court in Cambodia brought back vivid memories of this unsettling story.

**The Center for Social Development** - We visited CSD on our last trip, were impressed by their work, and have given them support. CSD is a policy advocacy organization dedicated to the development of democratic institutions, political transparency, and fighting corruption. CSD is affiliated with Transparency International, which is based in Germany. Our visit to CSD was on the day before official campaigning began for the national elections and all effort was being directed towards hosting candidate forums. We discussed CSD's plans and prospects for funding after the election. CSD fears that it will lose some of the important funding it is receiving from USAID, which had recently pledged \$16 million for the planned war crimes tribunals. While approval and commencement of the tribunals will be a slow process taking several years, CSD still sees a reduction in funding from the U. S. Planned projects in need of funding include a conference of the Coalition for Transparency, a field study documenting corruption in everyday life, and field trips to Hong Kong and Singapore to learn about anti-corruption efforts.

We continue to feel that CSD is an effective organization and its continued activity is an essential check and balance for the government that has a natural tendency to drift further into corruption. We will continue to support this worthy effort.

### **General Social Programs**

**Returnee Assistance Program** - Our first meeting of the trip was a return to the Returnee Assistance Program where we had an informative chat with Bill Herod, founder and program director. Bill is always a wealth of general information about what is going on in Cambodia and we always benefit by a meeting with him early in our trip.

The RAP program helps Cambodian nationals who have lived most of their life in the U.S., been convicted of a felony, served their time in a U. S. prison, and have now

been deported for life to Cambodia according to U.S. law and a recent agreement with the Cambodian government. Most of the returnees do not speak Khmer and are not assimilated Cambodians. RAP helps with adjustment and hopes to keep these returnees from slipping back into a life of crime.

Bill has learned a lot in the past year about helping returnees. He has found that the first three months the returnees are in shock and so it is not a good time for lessons in language and culture. After three months a period of depression sets in and intensive counseling and socialization is required. Once returnees recover from depression, Bill has had pretty good luck helping them find jobs. We also learned that the Minister of the Interior has been extorting the U.S. families of the returnees by illegally detaining them in a jail when they arrive in Cambodia until the relatives pay a \$200 bribe to have them released. Bill has successfully fought this practice upon occasion but it has not disappeared. This is another example of the widespread corruption that CSD and all other social service organizations are fighting.

**Catholic Relief Services** - We visited extensively with CRS on our previous trip and so just stopped by for an update from Richard Baldamier, the director in Phnom Penh. The work of CRS was described extensively in our previous trip report. The work of CRS on the projects described in that report has continued with no new projects being undertaken. The only news is that the large micro-finance organization received its charter from the government and is now an independent financial institution not affiliated with CRS. Michael Spingler, who single-handedly built this micro-finance effort, is now assisting other countries in this area from a regional CRS development office in the Philippines.

We have supported a health care and HIV/AIDS project in Battambang Province based upon needs expressed by Richard in our previous trip. A goal of ours for this trip was to travel to Battambang and visit the project we were funding. On the third day of our trip we flew to Battambang and visited the CRS office there. The staff in the office had prepared a report of the activity of the HIV/AIDS project but could not easily communicate with us and was not prepared to take us to see any field demonstrations. We found it difficult to do any due diligence regarding this project.

**Buddhism for Development** - BFD is community educational project run by Buddhist monks. BFD was founded in 1990 in a refugee camp on the Cambodian-Thai border and is dedicated to social improvement in northwest Cambodia. We were referred to this organization by the Phnom Penh staff of the Asia Foundation and were told that this was a particularly effective effort. We visited BFD's office in Battambang, found it to be well organized, and the public affairs information we were given was concise and well written.

Even though our trip was unannounced we asked to be shown any field activity that might be taking place. We were immediately driven about ten miles down a dirt road to a small village where a monk was scheduled to give lectures and answer questions about HIV/AIDS and governmental decentralization. When we arrived at the village, we were taken to the village chief's house with a small covered pavilion about the size of a large American bedroom that served as a community center. As we were seated on stools next to the lecturer, a rainy season downpour began that lasted for an hour and a half. We heard the lecturer give an elementary and graphic description of HIV and how it is transmitted. He used storyboards with cartoons and, while we couldn't understand what was being said, it appeared to be fairly informative and

both the women and the men were interested and engaged. The next lecture about decentralization was intended to be a lesson on democratic institutions and acted as a civic lecture. Again, even though we couldn't understand what was being said, the villagers seemed to lose interest and disengage. This topic would be arcane even in the U.S. and the message seemed to be going over all our heads.

The lectures were over and it was still pouring outside our pavilion, and so through our guide we told the villagers a little bit about ourselves and engaged in question and answer. I explained that we were Americans, Laurie is my daughter, and that she is studying medicine. The villagers started asking Laurie questions about HIV, wondering where it originated. When she told them it came from monkeys in Africa they wondered whether they would get HIV from the monkeys in Cambodia and wondered whether it was transmitted by sexual contact with a monkey. The enthusiastic nature of this conversation told us that the villagers, mostly women and young men, were interested in the topic and comfortable talking about it in mixed company. One of the young men asked us why we didn't have a king in America. After we explained that our country was founded in order to do away with kings, we asked how he liked his king. There was general sentiment among the villagers that they loved their king.

When the rain stopped we left the village with fond memories and the opinion that this Buddhist effort is genuine, humble and effective. We were impressed.

**Transcultural Psycho-social Organization (TPO)** - TPO is another Cambodian branch of a world wide humanitarian organization based in the Netherlands devoted to culturally appropriate mental health assistance.

Mental health needs are acute and chronic in all developing countries and being invisible they do not attract sufficient resources. This need is particularly serious and extensive in Cambodia. After three decades of continuous and severe social upheaval without any social institutions or mental health professionals, mental illness is widespread and untreated. We heard from many sources about the mental health problems of so many Cambodians.

TPO operates four regional offices in Cambodia and trains non-professionals to visit the villages, provide mental health education and counseling and on occasion to provide psychotropic drugs in extreme cases. TPO has also provided much assistance to returnees in the Returnee Assistance Program. We visited TPO's offices in Phnom Penh and found them well organized and the director knowledgeable and energetic. We reviewed the informational materials the field workers use in the village mental health education efforts, and found them simple but graphic and seemingly effective. We plan to continue to follow the efforts of TPO Cambodia.

**The Asia Foundation** - As described in our previous trip report the Asia Foundation is a multinational NGO based in San Francisco that specializes in channeling public and private funds to worthwhile projects, organizations and efforts in Asia. The Asia Foundation through its "give2Asia," program performs due diligence, grant monitoring and affords a U.S. tax deduction for donations to Cambodian organizations. We have used the give2Asia program for some of our projects and made a visit to the Asia Foundations offices in Phnom Penh this trip. Nancy Hopkins is the new head of the Phnom Penh office and during our visit we reviewed the grants that her office had helped us with and learned about additional organizations

we might investigate. We planned to visit the hospitals described above later in the week and asked Nancy if an Asia Foundation staffer could accompany us to provide a contact as we developed an in-kind support program. She assigned this task to a woman named Muol Samneang.

**Muol Samneang** - In the Cambodian tradition Muol is the family name and Samneang is the given or first name. Samneang accompanied us on our day of hospital visits on Friday. She is a tall, thin, graceful, woman. She spoke good English, took careful notes and provided good translation when needed. Otherwise she was quiet and unassuming. During our lunch break we got a chance to talk with her and learned of a life that while commonplace in Cambodia is astonishing to the average American.

While she looked like she was in her early twenties we learned that Samneang is 39. Anytime you hear someone's age in Cambodia you immediately calculate how old they were in what is known as year zero, 1975, the beginning of the Khmer Rouge era. Samneang was eleven and lived in Phnom Penh with her parents and seven brothers and sisters. Over the next four years they were separated and moved from one labor camp to the next. By 1979 there were only three members of the family left, Samneang, her mother, and her brother. They were reunited in a refugee camp on the Cambodia-Thai border. For the next fourteen years they lived on various refugee camps as civil war raged between the ousted Khmer Rouge forces and the Vietnamese-backed government. Finally in 1993 with some measure of peace and U.N. intervention Phnom Penh was safe enough to return. The Muol family returned home after an absence of eighteen years. They knew no one and recognized very little of the town. From this dangerous and scary return they have rebuilt their lives. Samneang and her brother learned English and while she works for the Asia Foundation he works for the U.N. and lives in New York. Their mother is 75 now and has diabetes.

These bare facts cannot begin to convey the horrors Samneang has endured. Yet, she shared with us her feelings about coping and her way of maintaining a hopeful outlook while not forgetting the past.

Our lunch ended and we left for our afternoon appointments. The last hospital we visited was the Sihanouk Hospital Center of Hope, and Samneang's whole countenance lit up when she told us that this hospital treated her mother for diabetes when, near death, she couldn't get help any other place.

### **Other Encounters**

During our trips we sometimes encounter people outside of the aid community who are both informative and colorful.

**Newspapers** - We visited the two English language Cambodian newspapers: [The Cambodia Daily](#) and [The Phnom Penh Post](#), published every 10 days. We had previously visited Michael Hayes at the Post and this return visit was a brief courtesy call. We made our first visit to the Daily having learned of them from our new friend in Chicago and a former Daily reporter, Bill Myers. We unfortunately visited the Daily's offices near deadline time and all the journalists and editors were busy closing the paper so they couldn't spare time to talk with us. The Daily is owned by Bernard Krisher.

**Bernard Krisher** - During our December 2002 trip, when we were just beginning to learn about recent developments in aid to Cambodia, the name of Bernard Krisher came up repeatedly, but the references were remote and like so many other names his did not register with us. Upon our return we met Bill Myers in Chicago and learned how central Bernie has been to development in Cambodia.

Bernie is a German-born contemporary of Henry Kissinger and both came to the U. S. on the same boat to make a new life in the 1930s. Bernie became a journalist and after covering Cambodia in 1963 and 1964 went on to be the bureau chief for Newsweek in Asia. Decades later, after he had retired, Bernie got an opportunity to interview Cambodian King Norodom Sihanouk while he was in exile in China. From this contact a friendship between the two developed. As peace slowly returned to Cambodia in the early nineties, Bernie was establishing the Cambodian Daily when the king asked him to help develop a medical clinic. That modest clinic has become the Sihanouk Hospital Center of Hope. From that effort Bernie has gone on to establish a network of privately funded schools, telemedicine capabilities, and Internet services, and he raises funds for several orphanages. The school program's website, [Cambodia Schools](#), and [Village Leap](#) are good introductions to some of his efforts. Bernie's second career as a philanthropist and dealmaker has brought him to the center of much that is developing throughout Cambodia.

We ran into Bernie in a hotel lobby early in our trip and then had a delightful evening with him later in the week. Ever the journalist, he was as interested and knowledgeable about us as we were him. We were charmed by Bernie and stories of his colorful life and work. We ended the evening inspired to bring the same level of hard work, insight and commitment to our aid work that Bernie has for more than a decade.

**U.S. Ambassador Charles Ray** - Thursday afternoon we finished our visits in Siem Reap, home to Angkor Wat, and arrived at the airport for a short flight back to Phnom Penh. As we waited we noticed a distinguished American dressed in a Navy blazer, white shirt and tie, all very much out of place among the tourists in the waiting room. Our guide, Tha, told us this man was the new U.S. Ambassador to Cambodia. After a brief trip to the newsstand to make sure I got his name right, I approached him and struck up a conversation.

Charles Ray has been the Ambassador to Cambodia since December of 2002. He is a career diplomat and has worked overseas for forty-one years starting with a military tour in Viet Nam. Hailing from farm beginnings in Texas, he looks like and is both friend and contemporary of Colin Powell. He has had many postings including Korea, Viet Nam and Thailand. Having learned about his background I asked about his job: What does he do? What is important? What is success?

The Ambassador's job is to make good decisions that won't hurt anyone in the short and long term. From this simple premise Ray told me that he develops opinions and options for consideration as the State Department and the U.S. government then formulates foreign, military and economic policies that affect Cambodia and the region. He administers the USAID expenditures and represents the U.S. to the Cambodian government. The week prior to our trip he had coordinated Cambodia's hosting of the ASEAN Conference that was held in Phnom Penh. Since his appointment he has traveled to every corner of Cambodia to learn and see what is happening. This afternoon he was at a conference at Angkor Wat announcing U.S.

support for UNESCO efforts to protect the treasured temple complex. The U.S. suspended support for UNESCO years earlier and now that that support had been restored, this was the first public announcement in the world renewing U. S. support.

Ambassador Ray impressed me as a humble, hard working, seasoned professional working diligently to represent the U.S. in its important work in Cambodia. Meeting him went a long way to persuade me that an ambassador's job is not just representing the U.S. in social settings but has important responsibilities in connecting with the assigned country, formulating policy and dispensing aid. Ray exceeded my expectations of an ambassador.