

December 2021

Called to Cambodia

Stories of the adventures of Jeff Henneforth as he responds to God's call to live among, serve, and love the people of Cambodia.



An Unusual Year

Sometimes it is difficult to know what to share in a newsletter, because the main thing I do is prepare for and teach at church every week and then do things to try to help the congregation and people in the area. And this year has been a little crazy for us, even more so than last year. Last year, Cambodia closed most travel into the country, and that protected us from most of the pandemic. All last year, there were very few cases. But around March this year, it began to spread rapidly. Once it did, a lot of things within the country that had been open were shut down. It became very difficult to travel outside of Poipet, the city I live in. The roads were often completely closed, but even when they were open, it was difficult for me. Because I'm not Cambodian I would first need to go to the hospital, get a Covid test and show the results at police checkpoints, which was not required for the local people. But even that seemed a little sketchy because anyone who is a foreigner in Cambodia was considered to be a much higher risk – it's always easier to blame someone else. So until a couple of weeks ago, I have not travelled outside of Poipet at all this year. Our church services have been online for most of the year because of government mandated prohibitions, but we have been able to get together with the people of the church outside of the services. In November, we were finally able to start meeting together again in person. Because so much was shut down, it hasn't really felt like there has been a lot to share. Looking back, there are a few stories you might find interesting.

An Unknown Sickness

One day in September, I woke up with a very mild sore throat. It faded a bit over the course of the morning, but by the evening it had come back. The next morning, I still had it, but now it was accompanied by a light fever. At this time, Cambodia was in the midst of a full blown Covid outbreak and reports were that many people in our city had come down with it. For several weeks prior, I had been getting together with the Happy Home staff and teachers from the MMF school to teach through the book of Philippians with a focus on overcoming conflict. And we had just found out that one of the teachers had tested positive for Covid. So even though my own symptoms were really minor, I was wondering if it was just a mild cold or if there was something more to it. By the end of the second day, the sore throat had gone away and I thought that the fever was just due to post-nasal drip and would be gone the next day as well.

The next day, I woke up feeling pretty good, thought I was well, and went out to meet a friend for coffee – all the stores and restaurants in the main part of Poipet were not admitting customers – only open for take-away or to buy stuff at the front door. But there is a section of land along the border with Thailand where there are casinos, small stores, and a variety of restaurants. And although all the casinos have been closed all through the pandemic, the restaurants in that area have largely remained open and that's where my one Western friend and I meet for coffee and a long conversation once a week. After our meeting, I headed over to Big C, which is like a Thai version of Target that is also on the Cambodian side of the border in that border zone. Even though my temperature had been back to normal earlier that morning, it had come back up just barely enough to trigger the warning when I was entering the store. I felt fine, but went home, took my temperature again, and sure enough the fever was back, but just barely.



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An Unknown Sickness (cont.)

The fever held steady for the rest of the week. Overall I felt pretty good, but was being careful because of the potential for it to be viral. I was actually hoping that it was the coronavirus because my symptoms were so minor. The following week, the fever held steady, but was still really low-grade. My Cambodian staff are a husband and wife that lead worship and children's ministry. They have three children with the newest being a baby girl added to the family at the end of September. They live with me (in a different room of course) here at the church. That same week, a couple of them also had slight fevers, but only for a couple of days. At the end of the week, they were able to go to a local pharmacy and pick up a Covid home test kit for me. I really did not want to go to the local hospital to get tested. First, it's not set up for non-Cambodians at all. And second, if I did test positive, I would have been stuck in a ward with a whole bunch of sick people. And third, the Cambodian doctors are not gentle at all. I've seen a video of them in action – screaming patients and all – no joke. Reports from Westerners in other parts of the country also include descriptions of people screaming as the medical staff administering the tests forcefully jammed the sample collector up into people's nasal cavities. Yeah – so I wanted to avoid that. The home test kit sounded much better. When they brought it back, the kit came in a preprinted box and was very professional looking. There was even video instructions available online demonstrating step-by-step how to administer the test. So I took the test, and was mildly disappointed when the results came back negative. But also a little glad. I still did not know why I had a fever. The road to Siem Reap, which is a big city about two and a half hour away with a good international hospital, was closed and I could not go to the hospital there find out what was going on with me. But the symptoms were still so minor that I really wasn't worried. Then, the next day, I was talking with Rose Martinez, who has lived in Asia for over 35 years, and told her about the test I took. She laughed and said, over here there's a really good chance the test kit might be fake. They make tons of fake stuff here, and even though everything looked legit, it might not be. She suggested if I was still under the weather in a few days, to get a second test kit from a different store and a different maker and try again. Either one of the kits or both might be real, or possibly fake. There is no good way of knowing. I waited a few days, and still the fever was hanging on. The family picked up another kit from a different store, and I tried again. Same result – negative.

That crazy fever lasted for almost five weeks. There were a few days when I got really fatigued and just rested in bed. But other than that, I felt mostly OK. To this day, I really don't know what I had. But that's what it can be like when you get sick during a pandemic in a place that's really different than where you are from. I am so thankful for the church and my Cambodian family who were so thoughtful during that time. I avoided going to the market because if I did have something contagious, I did not want to expose anyone else. The family cooked for me everyday, and I received some special deliveries from the Happy Home. It's nice having people nearby that really care when you're a bit under the weather.

An Unexpected Flood

About half of the year here is the rainy season. And during the last part of the rainy season when the ground is already saturated, the rains get really heavy and are basically monsoons – usually in September and October. That's when things start flooding. It happens every year, but some years more than others. Last year was particularly bad. But this year was more average. When we rented the church building, we picked a location that was high enough that the flooding does not reach it. But things in Poipet have changed. When I first moved here, most of the roads were dirt. But over the last few years, many of those dirt roads have been replaced with concrete. And that is really nice. While the city has done a really good job of improving the drainage and sewage lines, the neighborhood we are in has had one negative side-effect of the road improvements. It has changed



the way the flood water builds up and moves in such a way that the water levels during the flood season are higher near the church building now. And this year, for the first time, the church building was flooded. It wasn't bad. But the whole ground floor of the church was under about three inches of water. When it rained heavily all night and all through the next day, we watched the water level rise getting closer and closer to our main entrance. Soon



there were a few different spots inside the building where the water began to seep through the mortar between our tiles creating larger and larger puddles. And through that evening more and more water came in until finally the next day it rose to the highest point. We had plenty of time to move everything up off the ground that could be damaged by the water, and it never got high enough to reach our electrical outlets. It was interesting when I started seeing a few small fish swimming around near the bottom of our stairs and in the kitchen.

This happened a few weeks after my fever had gone away and I was back to normal. But it was also right when my Cambodian family was ready to welcome the newest member to their family. And it was during the flood that the baby decided it was time to come. So they headed out to go to the hospital for about a week for that special and amazing event because it required a C-section. So I was home alone with the flood. I'm really glad it wasn't any deeper, and that everything on the ground floor is covered in tile. It was a few days of walking very carefully, because wet tile can get slippery, especially when covered with a fine layer of silt.



Within a couple of days, the water drained away, and the floors were covered with a decent layer of dirt. I had no idea how I was going to clean it all, or even if I should try to clean it because the forecast was for a lot more rain which meant more flooding. But then I got a call from the Happy Home telling me the kids wanted to come over and help clean up their church. So the next day, a bunch of kids from the home came with mops and towels and in about two hours had the



place spotless. And they were so happy and having fun. We had some water fights during the clean up and lots of laughing. We found a little fish lying on the floor that was still alive, and so put it in water. It was still alive the next day, so I released it back into part of the street that was still flooded. I was going to take the kids out for pizza afterward as a thank you, but it was getting late and they were wet and tired. They asked if we could do a BBQ that weekend instead, and we did. The forecast turned out to be wrong. It barely rained at all for the rest of the week, and it did not flood again. Then the family came back with a new, healthy, cute, little



baby girl. Crazy times, but good times –and I am so thankful for the way God provides and blesses us.



An Undiscovered Talent

In Cambodia, if you attend a wedding, a Christmas party, or a conference, you will almost always see letters cut out of Styrofoam and pasted to the wall at the front telling you who is getting married, the name of the conference, or Merry Christmas. It's so common that it's become part of the culture. A while back I saw a picture of someone using a special work table set up with an electric wire for cutting foam. It looked interesting and not too complicated and thought it would be cool to get one for the church and then train the kids the come how to use it. I thought it might even be a skill some of them could use later to make some money. Turns out that the normal price to pay someone else to make the Styrofoam letters can get quite high at \$4 to \$5 per letter. And the sheets of foam the letters are cut from are only a couple dollars each, and quite a few letters can be made from each sheet. We looked around and couldn't find anyone who sold that kind of electric wire bench in Poipet, but my staff asked around and found a guy who could make one in another town. We contacted him and had him build us one. He taught Vuthea, my assistant, how to set it up and use it. Thankfully, we have stores in Poipet that sell sheets of Styrofoam. I had Vuthea practice with the hot wire table so that he could begin training some of the kids how to use it. It does take a little skill and can only be used by one person at a time, so we've had two to three kids coming over on Saturdays to learn how to use it and practice. We were able to make some small letters with our church name to put on the wall behind us while we were still doing our online only services through much of the year. Now that we are back to in person services, we've been able to make a nice, big Merry Christmas display for the front of the church.



The words in Khmer say:
Celebrating the birth of Jesus
Merry Christmas
MERRY CHRISTMAS (in English)
Calvary Chapel

An Untold Story

Thought I'd also share with you, a story about how the pandemic and the shutdowns are affecting the poor in our area.

A Christian girl who had worked at the café belonging to the Cambodian Hope Organization where I was helping out during my first few years living in Cambodia recently contacted me asking for help. I had gotten to know her a little back then, and knew she had come from a poor family. But I had not seen nor heard from her for a long time. She has had a difficult time during the pandemic because she left to work in Thailand almost two years ago just before Covid hit. Went to sell purses and clothes in the tourist markets, but the shut-downs and travel restrictions resulted in a complete lack of tourism, which meant she wasn't able to sell very much. On top of that, she has been unable to return to be with her mom and her now four year old daughter who both still live in Poipet because the border has been closed most of last year and all of this year. It's so sad to think that she hasn't been able to hold her little girl who was only two when she left for almost two years. Because the work has been so scarce for her, she had not been able to send much money back for her mom and her daughter. Her mom has no education and isn't able to work much here. My friend was really depressed and worried for her family. She said the flooding really hit them hard and sent me pictures of the flooding at her mom's house. By this time, the flooding in our neighborhood had been gone for a few weeks, and I hadn't seen any significant flooding in the city. So I was surprised to see that there were still areas with some flooding remaining. One of the things that we've been doing during over the last two years is helping some of the poor families by providing them with a bag of rice, eggs, dry noodles, oil, salt, and other cooking supplies. And I told my friend that we would be happy to bring some groceries to her mom and daughter. And so we made arrangements to bring the rice and the rest of the food to her mom's house. Her mom lives in one of the poorest parts of town. And that area was still under several inches of some pretty



disgusting water when we went. Vuthea and I walked through it carrying the food, and it was pretty dirty. At one point, I walked by a used baby diaper floating in the flooded street. When we got to the mom's house, my heart broke. It was one of those houses made



from corrugated aluminum and tar paper. These houses are usually

up on stilts to avoid the flooding because it happens every year. And that's the way this house was. Except my friend's mom and daughter live in the area under the house because it's somebody else's house. It's basically one small room with a couple of walls but otherwise has a big open entrance at the front and is open in the back with no doors. The top of their wooden bed was the only part of their living area that was not under that really dirty water. Even after living here for eleven years, it still blows my mind to see the conditions some people have to live in. But my friend's mom and daughter were so thankful for the food, and I was glad to see their smiling faces as they welcomed us into their little room. We stayed and visited with them for a while, before heading home.

We were able to bring more food again the following month and the water was all gone and plan on helping some more. But we hearing that the border will open up again later this month. And I'm hoping that my friend will finally be able to rejoin her daughter and her mom.



Prayer Requests

- Pray for the poor who have it pretty rough right now, especially as the cold season has just begun.
- Pray that my friend would be able to come back and be with her daughter and mom again – her name is Saovary (it almost sounds like Calvary but with an s instead of a c at the beginning).
- That my teaching would be empowered by the Holy Spirit to connect with people in a meaningful way that helps them grow closer to the Lord and follow Him more faithfully.
- To make wise choices for the church as we move through these interesting last days.
- To share God's gracious love with those nearby that they might come to know Him also.
- I regained a little weight, but working to get it back off. Need to make wise food choices and be consistent in exercise, but now that the gym is open again, I'm excited to be going back. Pray for consistency!
- I'm planning on visiting the US in the Spring. Pray that travel both to and from the US would go smoothly.

Financial Support: [donations are tax deductible]

Missionary financial support for Jeff can be made as a one-time contribution or as monthly support.

Please make checks payable to: Calvary Chapel Pacific Hills with "Cambodia-Henneforth" in the memo.

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