

## The MSA Global Connection: A Spark of Hope and Healing in Cambodia



Out of the ruins of a tiny Cambodian village, one among countless still suffering from the deep wounds inflicted by the Khmer Rouge regime, Patricia and Ned Gagic help build a library, a school and a home for orphans.

Thirty years later, Cambodia still cries out for justice and for healing from the brutal genocide, commonly known as the 'Killing Fields' or the Cambodian holocaust, and from the ravages of years of civil war. Today, the estimated number of victims continues to rise to over 2 million as newly discovered mass graves are added to the already documented 20,000. The countless land mines that remain in the ground continue to maim and kill, and the United Nations struggles, as funding dwindles, to finalize the trials of the remaining, now octogenarian leaders of the regime. These unhealed wounds and ongoing political disparity contribute to Cambodia's slow economic growth, and the resultant disease and poverty that appears almost endemic, continues to belie an ancient culture rich in art and architecture, history and religious tradition.



Orphans' Living Quarters

In 2006, Patricia and Ned were urged by a friend "to get involved" after her visit to Angkor Wat left her overwhelmed by what she saw as she detoured off the tourist path. The needs of the 'forgotten people' of Cambodia hit a raw nerve. The following year, while traveling in China, Patricia and Ned re-routed their travels to Siem Reap, Cambodia.



Original school sign at Pagoda Thmey

Upon their arrival, they reported being "totally awestruck by the beauty and strangeness that greeted us, beckoning us into a world we could not have imagined. The incredible architecture of the sacred temples at Angkor Wat was breathtaking; yet we were saddened by the shocking contrast between the magnificence of the ancient structures and the abject poverty of the villagers



The cost to support the monks, nuns and Children with food and supplies is 200.00 per month. In their appreciation they stand by the food supply and sent us the photo.

living in its shadow. But our spirits were soon lifted again by the playful chatter of barefoot orphans nearby and the warm welcome of a Buddhist monk, Master Keo Ann."

As head of the only active Pagoda Temple in Angkor Wat where he resides and teaches local monks and nuns, Master Keo Ann also oversees the care and education of approximately 45 village children including many orphans who had been found suffering from malnutrition and living in extreme isolation in the dense jungle where they had taken refuge in the wake of their parents' demise. Patricia recalls, "As Master Keo Ann walked us through the 'Killing Fields', the ruins of the village temple and their impoverished living quarters, we felt deeply the unspoken language of past pain and suffering that lives on, even now, beyond words. We knew in that moment that we had to be part of the resurrection of this deplorable, yet enchanting sacred space."



Master Keo Ann and the monks had already begun construction of a library on the grounds of Angkor Wat but the project had been halted as funds had dried up. Recognizing the importance of the project, Patricia and Ned decided to work with the monks and finish the construction. Their contributions to complete the library provided the vital step of honouring the ancient Cambodian culture by preserving the history, folklore, and the religious traditions of the past. In keeping with tradition, the library was designed to compliment the classical Khmer architecture of the temple. They recount their delight in the process. "The photos of the construction of the library were staggering, and we were deeply gratified in knowing that our contribution was aiding the preservation and sustainability of a culture that was considered 'last on the pecking scale'".

gent, hard work of the villagers and monks", reports Patricia.



Master Keo Ann and Patricia inside the finished Library



The New Library was constructed by monks and villagers in keeping with the Khmer architecture of Angkor Wat.

But the Gagics were not content to stop there. With help from friends and the Colours of Freedom Foundation, they moved on to the next project; a home for the monks, nuns and the village orphans, followed by a school for the monks built to replicate the school of the mid 1800's.



Left. Construction of new school for monks. Lower left. Village children setting up desks. Lower right. First bathrooms ever built in Pagoda Thmey

During the construction process, the Gagics were kept well-informed with forensic details of their costs and expenses. They were amazed to receive an itemized bill showing that 1119 nails and 1200 bricks had been salvaged from the ruins for use in the reconstruction. "They are brilliant at recycling, everything to save money. The greatest savings was in the actual labor costs... almost nil. There was no engineer or architect, only the vision of Master Keo Ann and the dili-



## A Spark of Hope and Healing in Cambodia Celebrating the rebirth of a village.....

The Grand Opening was a gala celebration attended by villagers and over 300 monks and nuns from seventeen nearby districts.



Left: Three images from the Grand Opening.  
Top right: Celebrating the "official" new school for village children.  
Above: A procession of monks, nuns, villagers and children in celebration of the rebirth of their village, Pagoda Thmey .

After completion and dedication ceremonies, the local government, who had originally wanted the orphanage removed from the grounds due to its poor condition, responded by appointing Master Keo Ann as the District Governor of the 17 Pagodas in the area of Siem. Remarkably, while the far-reaching effects of the Gagics' work in Cambodia can only be measured with time; the rebuilding of this one village not only transformed the lives of the villagers, but, has favourably influenced and encouraged the participation of local government.

For Patricia and Ned, the monks and the villagers, this was a pivotal moment, the long-awaited spark of hope that opened a gateway to renewed optimism for the future, one that is launched auspiciously with the building of an official school with a paid teacher for the children.

The Gagics' devotion and personal funding of this project over the past 6 years has miraculously transformed one small village in Cambodia, and at the same time, has opened new possibilities for other villages that, a generation later, still suffer the crippling effects of civil war and mass genocide. It is the Gagics' fervent wish that the work continue; "The project is now growing and we are hoping that the other 17 villages that need schools, water, and housing can be completed. It is our intention to continue working with Master Keo Ann to improve these isolated and desperate villages. Sustainability of culture is vital and what started as a small commitment has spiraled into a beautiful working partnership that will have long term effects for the children of Cambodia".

In 2012, Ned and Patricia began working in Kandor Potiprek Pagoda and this is where their energy will be focused next year. Patricia writes, "The immediate need is to build the children's living quarters and school. Going forward our intention will be to share the story, perhaps write a book about our journey and the amazing gift of how their compassion and humility changed our lives as much as we have changed theirs." Master Keo Ann has written several letters to the Gagics and thru the interpreter shares, "This relationship between Mrs. Patricia Gagic and Dr. Ned Gagic has changed the South Angkor Wat pagoda from almost nothing to a better standard of Buddhist teaching and life".

Since the project now has a proven track record, the Gagics will be sourcing out other partners to help them with their work. The medical needs are also staggering and this will become an area of interest in the future. The future plans are to continue repairing

the Temples and houses with help from the villagers in each district. If anyone is interested in further information please contact Patricia Gagic directly at 905 387 6460. A facebook page is being created and some of the library history can be found at [www.labyrinthina.com/angkor.htm](http://www.labyrinthina.com/angkor.htm)



### Dr. Ned Gagic

**Surgeon & humanitarian, supports work in the Hamilton community, nationally & abroad.**

Dr. Gagic, recent recipient of the MSA President's Award for Distinguished Service, has been a financial supporter of the Henderson Hospital and assisted in raising funds for the Juravinski Cancer Centre.

He was also the catalyst in the creation of the first Surgical Scholarship through McMaster University. His generous support locally and nationally has extended globally to include the building of a school in Kenya in 2004 through the Free the Children Foundation.



### Patricia Gagic

**International artist, author & humanitarian.**

This past spring, the Oprah Winfrey Network (Canada) selected Patricia to be part of a unique, new documentary TV series called "The Truth Project". Filmed in Toronto, the show should be aired sometime this fall. Her first book and tele-seminar "INSPIRED To Be

REWired"... gaining expedient wisdom by re-humanizing your attitude through mastering the Five Radical Degrees, will be launched in Los Angeles this fall.



