

*The Brick Factory – Cambodia May 08'*

*Sorry for taking so long to post this blog. As usual I have the craziest travel schedule which I can't seem to get a grip on. I have so many more stories to share with you from my experiences in Cambodia and will post them as I continue to finish them. THANK YOU for taking the time to read this because it truly means the world to me to educate people on what unbearable things are happening everyday, in countries like Cambodia and other countries around the world. This blog is from the heart, it's the truth from my perspective, its real, and it's happening right now.*

*The TV special I filmed in Cambodia for World Vision will be airing this October on all major networks in Canada. At that time you'll also be able to go to [www.worldvision.ca](http://www.worldvision.ca) to see behind the scenes footage of some of my experiences and the stories we focused on. Check it out in October and let me know your thoughts. But until then I can write about it.*



*This story is about the severity and reality of Child Labor in Cambodia. We paid particular attention to a child by the name of Pharady and her family. My experience in Cambodia changed my life in so many ways. I dove right into the everyday life in Cambodia. I interviewed everyone I came across even when I wasn't shooting for World Vision. I learned about their culture, their history and why they are so deeply tormented by the problems of their past. We're truly blessed to live in North America. Every time I hear someone upset because their Mocha Frappachino isn't hot enough or they had to wait too long in the Starbucks line.....I say, go to a third world country, live with them for a few days and you'll see what real problems are. Spending time with some of the people of Cambodia and listening to the stories of their past has given me a whole new outlook on immigrants in my country, what they have been through and what they had to give up for "hopefully" a better life in my country. If you were born in a country like Cambodia under the same circumstances, you would do the same thing.*

*This is what I wrote:*

*The Brick Factory: Cambodia – May 08'*

*Wake up! Its 6:00 am and breakfast is at 7:15 am! WOW do I ever feel the time difference! I'm on the other side of the world! As excited as I am to start my adventure I am so overwhelmed with the sluggishness of time zone hell!! Jim (From World Vision) trails in a little sleepy eyed because his wake up call didn't go off, miraculously the rest of the crew seem just fine I suppose. I feel more like Jim. At 8:15am sharp we pile into the white World Vision van. Today is the first shooting day, and we're focusing on a Child Labor story. I'm becoming more and more nervous as the seriousness of this devastating subject starts to sink in. I think seeing it in real life isn't going to be easy, but I somewhat find comfort in knowing I'm here to help.*

*We drive for about 40 min outside of Phnom Penh. The hustle and bustle of the highway, ( or what they know as a highway, although to us is more like a service road) is in the air. It is exactly what you would expect for a third world bustling city. Dilapidated buildings and homes mixed in with beautiful ones,*

*piles of trash, brick walls with faded advertisements pasted all over, muddy side streets, puddles of dirty water with garbage, and a million people moving in every direction, all mixed in with a few beautiful trees here and there. Tall homes behind enormous fancy gates located right beside barely standing store fronts, rotting tin homes, kids and people with ripped filthy clothes, some kids in school uniforms, (some dressed modestly to our standards) old concession stands selling the same fruit, hot dogs and coke bottles filled with petrol for the mopeds. It smells different here. Not good not bad, just different. Ever notice how every city has its own smell?*

*There are a million mopeds whizzing by with sometimes 6 people piled on! People of all ages are driving these things, and it's not out of the ordinary to see mom, dad, two teenagers and a baby all on ONE motor bike. LOOK!! There goes one right now! There seems to be some sort of basic driving structure, but generally you have to fend for yourself! THIS IS CRAZY! Our driver is taking turns without even looking or caring about what's coming towards us! AAUGH it's a sea of motorcycles, tuck tucks (taxi's that look more like a mini carriage pulled by a man on a motorized bicycle) and the odd vehicle (the few wealthy families drive SUV's or cars) are all coming right at us!! It's a MAN EAT MAN DRIVING WORLD! I'm totally stressed out already!! Then it hits me.....where is all the road rage? Where is all of the profanity toward fellow drivers? They seem to be in some sort of a dream like state of mind amongst all this chaos! Most of them look happy and smile as they pass each other. They smile as they look in our van window and pass me! I can kind of tell the difference between the "have nots" and the "have a little bit".*

*There is a dismal cloud that hovers over the environment. It's dirty, underdeveloped, and unbelievably poor, but the people of Phnom Penh are wondrous beings. They seem somewhat happy and very social, I see groups of people chatting, telling stories and laughing, I see the odd young couple romantically snuggled on their motor bikes, young kids drawing with sticks on the dirt side walks, and somehow it looks like they know how to make the best of their day...everyday.*

*After driving a while the city fades and the concrete road turns into a dirt trail, the vegetation becomes sparse, and the houses and people seem to wear more tragedy on their faces, and their bodies. We make a left turn down an old muddy road, with tin houses barely standing raised above contaminated pools of thick black sewage, water and rotting garbage on either side of the road. People pulling blue make shift wheel barrels of whatever they gathered for the day, women balancing jugs of water, food or clothes on their heads, families draping out of their front doorways wondering who is in the white van. They look exhausted from the heat and its not even 9:00am. I feel so strange sitting in this air conditioned vehicle with plenty of food and water, cameras, video equipment, our name brand back packs and first aid kits if we need it.*

*Dry dust clouds trail behind. I see goats on the road ahead. They look skinny. As we drive up a little further I see a million fluffy beautiful DUCKS, swimming in the most disgusting pond of water and field of mud. There is no grass here and not much vegetation. Duck eggs are very expensive. I'm told it's a local farmer's means of making a few dollars. The ducks lay eggs all over the place to be picked up immediately by their owners, but to the village right across the street so many people long to have just one egg....not just rice.....but a highly treasured egg. The gift of an egg to them is like a diamond necklace or a "ROLEX WATCH" to most of us in North America. One of the things we dream of having but only the lucky few actually have. To us it's just another egg, but to them it's food for another day of survival.*

*Finally we approach the Brick Factory. I'm wondering where all of the children are? I thought there would be swarms of kids all over us the second we stepped out of the van. The van door swings open and WOW is it ever hot outside!! I can smell the rancid scent of putrid garbage every once and a while. I'm sweating immediately, but so fascinated by the environment that I can care less. We park on the side of the dirt path way. On the left is a rickety old fence that opens up to the Brick Factory. There are about 7 tin houses barely standing on the Factory property where the workers and their families live. They work for room, board, and very little pay, barely enough for food. It is very quiet, dismal, dirty, and hot and I can feel the weight of their slaving lives in the air. It smells really bad, but they don't notice....its all a part of how they live. I can see the ripples of heat waves in the distance.*



*This is a photo taken by me of the workers at the brick Factory. Most of the children had the day off because the owner of the Brick Factory knew we were coming today.*



*This a side view of the factory just after a rain fall. The blue barrel is used to gather water that flows off of the rusty roof during a rainfall. It is used for drinking, bathing, and any way in which water is used.*

*On the right side of the road there is a little school room and I can hear the chanting of little voices reciting the Khmer alphabet. The school is a very small single wooden room barely standing. There is one entrance and one little window, basically to big holes in the wall. I can't believe the putrid wet mess of decomposing garbage in the alley way to the left of the school entrance. I take a pause because there is so much to take in. I can't wait to meet all of the little beings inside! I slowly walk up the to the crooked wooden hut..... and it hits me .....right now, right at this moment, my life as I know it, will be changed forever.*



*(This is two of the children standing to the left of their tiny school room outside after class. They are looking over the rotting wet mass of debris that floats beneath their school and their homes. (You can see in the photo above where they were standing outside the school. These photos were taken at different times during the day of course)*

*I'm a little nervous but curious to see what is on the other side. Then, three little heads pop into view as I approach! The sun lets in just enough light for me to see! They seem curious and happy to see me! I quietly peek my head into the door to say "HI" and immediately all at once they say "HI TANYA!!!!!" I can't believe it! About 40 little strangers from the ages 3-10 yrs old all sitting cross legged on the floor saying HI.....TO ME!! They know my name? Within a millisecond my mind takes in the fact that there are no chairs, tables or desks..... it's a wooden shack with holes in the floor and in the walls between the planks. They only have a marker board that erases marker hanging on the wall, a few pieces of paper lying on the only stool, and a pencil.....yup, that's it. This modest over crowded room with very few tools to learn with.*

*All of us become more curious and excited as I stepped in further (which is only about one foot into the door). I see a few of them look at what I'm wearing examining every inch of me. "Please take off your shoes I hear," so without hesitation I take off my shoes and socks place them just outside the door by the 40 other pairs of tiny dirty sandals or make shift shoes, and I walk in! I'm excited, shocked and sad all at the same time. The teacher who can barely speak English asks if I want to sit with the children in the middle of the floor and participate in the class. "Of course!" I say! I sit down next to Pharady.*



*Pharady is the little girl World*

*Vision decided to focus on. They want to share her story with the world. Although her story isn't much different than any of the other children sitting in this room, she just seemed to be the most able to share. Pharady isn't usually in school because she has to work at the Brick Factory across the street, but the owner of the Factory gave her and her little sister the day off because he knew we were coming. As excited as they are to see their new visitor, I can see the heaviness of "life" in their eyes, posture, dirty calloused feet and tiny stained hands and fingernails. I can't comprehend her past or her future. Some children look more affected than others, some look tired and others look excited to be learning. A few of them are staring at me with big brown eyes of wonder. They are SO CUTE!!! I feel little tugs on my pants and warm hands on my arms. They should be paying attention to their teacher and the lesson being taught, but they're so fascinated by their new friend. Some just wanted to be close to me and be near. It is as if I instantly became an older sister or mom that they never had or haven't had in a long time. I realize there are many other children in this Village, but only the lucky ones get to go to school.*

*It's Pharady's turn to walk up to the board and recite what they've been learning! She walks up with confidence and without a pause she brilliantly and perfectly recites what letter each of the Khmer symbols mean. I was so happy for her.....she did it perfectly! She LOVES LEARNING and noticeably soaks everything up like a sponge. I wonder if she realizes what being a kid should really be like. With the weight of survival on her tiny little shoulders, she's an 11 year old living as an adult forced to work..... laborious, hard, monotonous, hot work all day..... every day.*



*(This is Pharady, wearing the school uniform that World Vision bought her. She wears it almost everyday even though she can't go to school regularly.)*

*As soon as the lesson is over I hop up and tell the class I have some gifts for them! The excitement bounces off the walls! Myself and the World Vision staff give out Disney pens, pencils, erasers, paper, coloring books, crayons, bubbles, Spiderman stickers...all kinds of school tools brought from Los Angeles. It was complete CHAOS for a few minutes until all the gifts were gone. They seem so appreciative!!! They were so thankful for a PEN! I couldn't help but think how sometimes even Disney World doesn't satisfy kids from North America anymore.*

*After all the fun calmed down, it was time for Pharady to take me to her house across the way to meet her family and introduce me to her "LIFE" at the Brick Factory. I walked outside, put my shoes back on and crossed the muddy street.*

*Through the rickety old fence we walked into the Brick Factory property where Pharady and 12 other families live.*

*Right inside the rusty old fence to the left is her house (if you can call it a house). It's about 20 meters from the school right across the street. It is made of rusty sheets of tin, scraps of rubber, weathered bamboo and bits and pieces of whatever else they can find. Most of the houses outside Phnom Penh are raised up off of the ground about three feet or so on wooden stilts to keep them away from the damp mess underneath. The floors are made of branches of flattened bamboo strung together with palm leaf twine. There are so many holes, big holes in between the slates of bamboo. You can see and smell the contaminated water, garbage, moldy plantation and sometimes sewage below through the floor inside.*



*Aside from the rotting mess underneath, from the outside it looks like the kind of house I might have built for fun when I was a kid, in the forest outside of my house in Canada. It could be a very cool tree house in a "kids" world. But not when it is your home.....your only home.*

*Pharady gets up at 6:00am everyday to sweep the floor, cook scraps of fish and rice for breakfast, she helps to get her sister up, and do the various chores her mom can't do because she's already started her day at the Brick Factory. I can see the Brick Factory about 25 meters or so from Pharady's front door. Pharady looks tired. She is small for her age because of malnutrition and most likely malaria.*

*I can't help but think....."Is there anything I can do to give her a chance at a proper childhood?" This isn't right!! It's not fair!! Her clothes are too big, dirty and worn too long. World Vision bought her a school uniform, but since it's the best thing she owns she wears it all the time.*

*The Interview:*

*Pharady, my translator and I sit on the floor in her house and I begin the interview:*

*Tanya:*

*Pharady, I want you to know that I care and I am here to help. I want to tell people from North America that they can help create a better life for you and other children here like you.*

*Pharady:*

*Thank you..... (With a smile, wiping the beads of sweat on her forehead).*

*Tanya:*

*Tell me a little bit about your everyday life?*

*Pharady:*

*Well, I get up at 6:00am. My mom is already at the Brick Factory so I do the household chores in the morning. I light up the log fire to cook what food we have for the day....I sweep, scrub the pots and pans, help get my sister up, and ready to go to work. Straighten up, whatever needs to be done.*



*Tanya:*

*What time do you go to the Factory everyday?*

*Pharady:*

*7:00am*

*Tanya:*

*What is the hardest thing you have to do in your everyday life?*

*Pharady: (She pauses.....)*

*Picking up the Bricks in the kiln. They are hot and sometimes I burn my hands and arms. (I notice she has burns and scars on her hands and arms)*

*This is a photo of me and Pharady's mom. Her moms hands against mine tell two very different stories. She's not much older than I am.*

*Cont...*

*Tanya:*

*What do you do if you get cut or hurt yourself?*

*Pharady: (she shrugs her shoulders)*

*Nothing, just leave it alone and keep working.*

*(Its about 110 degrees in the house right now, Parody and I are sweating but it seems like she's used to it)*

*Tanya:*

*How many meals do you eat a day?*

*Pharady:*

*Usually just one. Rice and sometimes fish. I love fish, but we only have it sometimes.*

*The interview went on for about an hour.....her tender soft words bring tears to my eyes. I want to SCREAM!!! WHY IS THIS HAPPENING IN THE WORLD!!! WHY DO SOME PEOPLE HAVE SO MUCH AND OTHERS HAVE SO LITTLE!!!! All the GREED money brings out in some people.....all this little girl wants to do is go to school, have three meals a day and drink clean water!!!! I keep my cool and ask.....*

*Tanya:*

*Pharady, what is your childhood dream? What do you wish you could be when you get older.*

*Pharady:*

*Sitting there lifeless.....her eyes heavy.....no words come out.....still.....sitting motionless.....no words.....carrying the weight of the world in her eyes.....she says nothing.....because she can't!*

*As tears puddle in my eyes.....silence between us is long, heavy, and so deeply sad. I realize that Pharady can't possibly even think of dreaming, because dreaming would give her HOPE.....hope to a little girl who has NO CHOICES for a life beyond the Brick Factory. She knows her mom has worked here for 20 years, and she is being bread to follow in her footsteps.*

*HOPE IS TOO PAINFUL FOR THESE KIDS! They're NOT kids.....they are adults with adult problems in a little child's body.*

*I offer Pharady a bottle of clean water, but she says "no thanks, I don't like the way THAT water tastes". I realize she likes the dirty contaminated water she's used to.....*

*Her mom tells me that Pharady wants to grow up to be a teacher. Pharady's family makes \$2.50 per month! They have a quota of bricks to stack a day or they don't get paid. Parody and her sister have to work instead of going to school or her family literally won't make the quota and therefore won't eat. The quota.....10,000 bricks a day!!! And they get \$2.50 a month.*



*I take Pharady's hand in mine. I look at her dirty stained fingernails, and hands, with calluses on four fingers. Each hand tells a story of a lifetime. They have seen a life not meant for a child.....any child. There is dust and dirt in the air mixed in with sweat, heat and intense humidity. I get to take a shower in an air conditioned hotel tonight. Parody has a shower in the dirty brown rain in the afternoon, and tonight she'll sleep on the old hard bamboo floor with holes overlooking the wet contamination and grime below. No pillows, no mattresses, just curled in a ball against the rusty tin wall, only to get up and do it all over again. Day after day after day, no weekend breaks, no playing at a friends house, no baking cookies with mom, or decorating a Christmas tree with her family. Day after Day, she and her friends work in the mundane Brick Factory in humid temperatures over 100 degrees.....this is no life for a child.*

**\*\*USA TODAY states that this year there are 600,000 "NEW" millionaires in the world today.**



*If you want to help Pharady directly, please contact Jim Vanderberg at [Jim.Vanderberg@worldvision.ca](mailto:Jim.Vanderberg@worldvision.ca) Or if you want to sponsor children in Cambodia give more of them the ability to go to school and not end up like Parody, please go to [www.worldvision.ca](http://www.worldvision.ca)*

*I just sponsored a child and I'm going to sponsor another child from Cambodia.*

*Together we can make a difference. One person at a time...*

*Truly,  
Tanya Memme*