

# Letters from Cambodia

“this is the way, walk in it”



*Watching the sun rise at the Angkor Wat*

## Weddings, Travels, and YAGM fun!

November & December have flown by!

November and December were extremely busy months here at Life with Dignity in Phnom Kravanh. We hosted many trainings & workshops & I would often find my coworkers still hard at work at 8 or 9pm! I continue to be amazed and inspired by their work ethic, dedication, and the way they

serve others. When I return to the U.S. and begin my career, I hope that I will embody these principles too.

My work with Life with Dignity can take many forms but in November and December, I was able to go on many field visits with my coworkers, including 3 tree planting events. I was also given a special assignment, which I hope to share with all of you soon! I have also begun teaching at a local school. I teach English on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays to almost 200 kids in grades 7, 8, and 9 with my co-teacher Pho. The school is a little over 1 mile away and I ride my bike to school and back every day, which is great exercise! Teaching is definitely hard work but seeing my students' smiling faces makes it all worth it!

In November, Cambodia celebrated the Water Festival (*in Khmer: Bon Om Touk*)! This festival marks the end of the rainy season and the reversal of the flow of the Tonle Sap River. I was lucky enough to spend this time in Phnom Penh, where the major boat races take place and people from all over the country come to join in the festivities. I was also able to spend time with a few of the other YAGM and our country coordinators, which was so nice! After the Water Festival, Rachel, a YAGM who is also working with Life with Dignity, and I were able to spend a few days sightseeing in Bangkok, Thailand! We spent our time there eating delicious Thai food, visiting the major pagodas, seeing a floating market, and taking almost every form of transportation in the city. We headed straight from Bangkok to meet up with the rest of our YAGM cohort in Siem Reap for our fall retreat. You might know the name Siem Reap because it is the city closest to the Temples of Angkor, which includes the world's largest religious building. We had a wonderful week learning about the history of Angkor, exploring the temples, sharing stories from our sites, and worshipping together. Not even a bout of food sickness could stop us from having fun! But, after a full 2 weeks of traveling, I was glad to return to my site!

On December 11, I was lucky enough to go to my first Khmer wedding! My supervisor, Rachna, invited me to go with her to her brother's wedding. I had a traditional Khmer shirt and skirt (*in Khmer: sambut*) made for the wedding and for any other important events in the future. We traveled 2 hours by motorbike, which was quite an adventure! It was so wonderful to take part in new-to-me traditions, meet Rachna's family, and to visit her homeland. It meant so much that she included me and it was such a fun weekend. Since then, I have been invited to 2 more weddings! Wedding season in Cambodia has certainly begun!

Later that week, the YAGM CamFam (our nickname!) gathered again for Worship Weekend. We celebrated Christmas by decorating for the season, baking (and eating!) cookies, giving gifts, and of course, worshipping together. It was wonderful to be together to celebrate Christmas!

As 2016 came to a close, I was lucky to be able to spend some quality with my parents, sister, and aunt & uncle who all came to visit me and see the beauty of Cambodia. I was very glad to be able to show them pieces of the country that has become my home over the past 4 months. Our trip helped me to realize how thankful I am to be in Cambodia & have such a wonderful host community. November and December went by so fast, which is just a reminder to enjoy every moment I have here!



*With Rachna (4th from the left) and her family at her brother Veasna's (3rd from the left) wedding!*



*Merry Christmas and Happy New Year from YAGM Cambodia 2016-2017!*

## PRAYERS & THANKSGIVING

Please pray for everyone in Cambodia and particularly the farmers here, who are dealing with an extended rainy season. The rain makes it challenging to dry rice and everyone is unsure how this will affect the rainy season next year. Keep me in your thoughts and prayers as well, as I grow closer to my friends and coworkers here, continue teaching, and as always, trying to learn more Khmer!

Thanks to everyone who sent cards & greetings with my family when they came to visit! It was such a joy to read all of your kind words. Thank you for keeping me in your thoughts and prayers during this holiday season! I wish all of you a wonderful 2017!