

Rockin' 4 Tabitha



Rockin4Tabitha 2011 Build Team

Back row l to r: Dan Spence, Chloe Wolverton, Anitra Steinberg, Colin Eades, Mark Laflamme, Wendy Cunning, Carrie Harambasic, Paula Piilonen, Allan Ashton and Rosie Schinners

Front row l to r: Luanne Doner, Karen Wolverton, Peter Finnegan, Bob Carver, Nicole Flaxman, Teresa Flaxman, Tash Kalbfleisch

ROCKIN4TABITHA EVENT

It's our 5th Anniversary!! Rockin4Tabitha's event took place Thursday, September 16th, 2010 at the Lone Star Bar and Grill (St. Laurent Blvd). Since this was our 5th anniversary, we wanted to raise the bar. We had a great line-up of local musicians including Christine McCann, and our own R4T build team leader Bob Carver and his band, Texas Flood.

This year Bob carried a bit more of the night's music with his friends performing two sets. First up was a classic rock set featuring Johnny B Goode, Back in the USSR, China Grove among others which were covered with the help of some of Ottawa's best musicians. Brad Campbell and Dave Poulin. Brad and Dave have played together since the 60's. Their band, "The 5-D", was one of this cities most popular groups. Fantastic keyboard player Ray Lemaire and drummer Jack MacGregor rounded out the house band. Bob helped out on guitar and judging by the reaction of the crowd started the night off right.

MC Chris McCann kept the evening rolling with her high energy really working the crowd. From the Ottawa Valley McCann family, Chris also kicked out a couple of tunes.

Texas Flood, Bob's blues band once again featured Steve Hollingworth, Wayne Wahab and Brad Campbell, with some great guitar work thrown in by Brian Sim. The Stevie Ray Vaughan tribute set came off without a hitch and left the crowd wanting more music.

For the fifth year in a row Ottawa music legend Les Emerson and the Hitmen rocked the house with their classic rock covers and several of Les's original hits including the timeless tune 'Signs'.

The 5th annual Rockin4Tabitha was a blast, and in spite of the bad weather a hardy group of supporters rocked the night away, dancing and singing along with the bands. A fun time was had by all.



SPECIAL THANK YOU - WE WON AN AWARD

Former CJOH Anchor Max Keeping had asked to be able to say a few words and gave me (totally unexpectedly by the way) a United Way Community Builder award.

This award truly belongs to everyone who has supported our work. Since I tend to get a little emotional when asked to speak about things that touch my heart, a quick 'thank you' and immediate exit stage left was all I could manage. I immediately realized that I had neglected to give others involved a well deserved 'this is yours too' speech. So with apologies for tardiness...



*Rockin4Tabitha exists due to the efforts of many people.
First and foremost my lovely wife (and trusty sidekick) Wendy Cunning
R4T organizer and build team leader.
Dr. Paula Piilonen organizer, co-team leader and repeat builder.
Everyone who has traveled to Cambodia to build with us over the past
years and especially those who have joined us to build from other
countries!*

The musicians who give their time and talent for free for our cause; Brad Campbell and Wayne Wahab - for all 5 years!. Dave Poulin, Jack MacGregor and Ray Lemaire.

*The Hitmen, Steve Hollingworth, Les Emerson, Ted Gerow, Brian Sim, Paul Faubert.
Our Volunteers who helped us on event night; Melanie Duquette, Jesssica Landsell, Cindy Gollogly and special thanks to our MC - Chris McCann.
Our Graphic Design Geniuses - Andree Crowe and Stanley Berneche*

*Thanks to Janne Ritskes - who started Tabitha who with her Khmer staff are truly 'doing it right' and Tabitha Foundation Canada board members past and present
'Corporate sponsors' who continue to support us year after year - Jonathan Browne - Greg Richards
Our friends from Diamond Way Buddhism in Germany- Ania, Stephenie - and Hartmut for their generous donations
LUSH Fresh Handmade Cosmetics
DAWG FM - Canada's only Blues radio station for their public service announcements*

*...and especially our friends and colleagues who attend year after year to support this great cause. Thank you all; and let's keep rockin'
Bob*

The GOAL

When we set our goal of 25 houses for this year's build, we thought it might remain at just that, however, we not only met our goal, but surpassed it setting two records in the process; our biggest build team at 17 members, and the greatest number of houses built. We have raised a total of \$35,600.00! Like last year, we will have some extra dollars left over which will be put towards field wells, partnerships or wherever Janne feels the funds are needed most.

It is always a bit of a crap shoot. We need a certain number of builders to be able to complete x number of houses, and we need x number of dollars. Each year we are getting a bit bigger and, so far, all our builds have come off without a hitch.

This is of course due to the fact that we have developed a dedicated core of return builders that is small (Wendy, Paula and yours truly) but always seem to share their enthusiasm and passion. It is also due to our friends and supporters who over the years, have donated to the cause, attended our events and told their friends thus, slowly widening the circle of 'friends of Tabitha'.

LUSH SPONSORSHIP

Earlier this year we dropped by the Lush store in the Byward Market. Believe it or not Wendy and I travel for our 4 week total time in Asia with carry-on baggage! - and not one of these jam up the overhead bin monsters either. Due to the new airline security regulations packed liquids are a bit of an issue, so we went down to the Lush store to pick up some solid shampoos, etc.

Not only did we get some very funky items for the trip, we also saw that Lush is a company that 'gives back'. Their charity pot program has supported a variety of projects around the World. Wendy thought we should send in an application to see if we qualified for this initiative. Paula took the lead on getting the online application in and, in early September, we learned that Lush had donated \$10,100 USD to this year's build! Needless to say we were ecstatic, but the good news didn't stop there. The CEO of North American operations, Mark Wolverton, and his wife Karen, also decided to send employees on the build with us, again courtesy of Lush.

Thanks doesn't quite cut it.

Karen and her daughter Chloe from Vancouver headquarters, Carrie from Lush Chicago, Rose Marie from Lush Toronto, and Anitra from Lush Ottawa will provide very welcome additions to this year's build.

We now have a Charity Pot dedicated to Rockin4Tabitha with our very own logo, so please drop by your local Lush Outlet and support the cause!



PRE FLIGHT RAMBLINGS II

It is January 23rd, 2011 here in Ottawa and -23 degrees celcius. As now seems to be the norm, this year's build team is scattered around the World. Quite a change from our first stab at house-building where 7 team members, all from the Ottawa area, met up in Phnom Penh.

Four years, 50 houses, and nearly 300 happy Cambodians later, seventeen of us will rally in Phnom Penh on Friday, January 25th, 2011. Dr. Paula Piilonen and Allan Ashton are back to build with us again this year - this will be Paula's 4th build and Allan's 2nd. They are already soaking up the warmth in Southeast Asia. Once again Dr. Paula has attracted students and grads of the UofO Geology program; Tash, Nicole and Teresa are currently somewhere in Vietnam or Cambodia.

After the build, which goes by too quickly, our new friends, and now seasoned builders, will head their separate ways. This year, Mark, Wendy, Paula and I are going to cycle from Battambang to the Thai border, overnighing in Pailin, the town that became the last stronghold of the Khmer Rouge. We are going to be true guinea pigs to see if this sort of bike trip (if all goes well) may be of interest to our future teams.

Those of us who have built before are excited to get back to Asia; the sights, sounds, smells, people. We are especially excited about seeing our friends who run the operations in Cambodia; Janne and her daughters Miriam and Tuit. The staff who have come with us on our previous builds; Srei, Vonn and Vatai. And the villagers who have earned their house. Their smiling faces provide memories that last a life-time.

Wendy, Paula and Bob (the builder)

WE'RE OFF

Some of our friends have been in Asia for a while. Paula has been happily training with one of the great Muay Thai fighters from the 90's – Sangtiennoi who is famous for his knees. Mark, an RCMP work colleague, is currently exploring Angkor Wat and other builders will be headed to sunnier climes over the next couple of days. Colin has also beaten us to Asia by a few days and will probably have a little less jet-lag to deal with than we will. Our team orientation with Janne is in PP on Saturday Jan. 29th, 2011.

Our flight plan this year was tempered by 'the frozen crapper incident' of two years ago where our whole flight over to Thailand was thrown out of whack due a frozen toilet on the Ottawa -Toronto leg.

Eliminating the risk meant flying into Toronto on Tuesday night; bonus, we were able to have dinner in Ottawa at our favorite Chinese restaurant, but we had to overnight in Toronto for our next leg to Narita which left at noon the next day.

I won't belabour the fact that we were able to fly business class this year due to the accumulation of aeroplane miles. Let's just say that the pod and the accompanying service in 'J class' is quite a bit different than 'cattle class'. We are currently trying to figure out what household items we can sell in order to secure business seats again next year.

We got into Bangkok quite late, but had found a really nice little place 5 minutes from the airport to stay overnight as our last leg to Phnom Penh didn't leave until 3:00PM the next day, we got to explore the neighborhood a bit. We also had time to treat ourselves to the 'jet-lag massage', which actually seemed to help.

Then it started: We checked our emails when we got back to the hotel and had been advised that two team members had not arrived - oh dear! A short while later, we received an email from another team member - message short and sweet said "I'm sick, I have a fever and I'm blind" – Oh, oh! Well, nothing to be done about it - will have to see what's what when we arrive in PP.

The short flight to Phnom Penh and ease of entry into the country were due to our acquisition of e-visa's online and it was well worth it. Instead of the scrum for getting a visa on arrival, we were able to go straight to the e-visa line, and were through in less than five minutes.

The Billabong is now our familiar home away from home in Phnom Penh and we were anxious to get there. We were elated to find that all the ALL team members had arrived (the MIA's and the ill are now healthy and present). Everyone was enjoying drinks poolside and getting acquainted with one another.



ORIENTATION IN PHNOM PENH

Orientation was held on Saturday, Jan. 29/11 at Tabitha's office. The orientation this year was a bit different than in previous years. Nary told her own personal story, putting a real face and person to the reality of Cambodia's history under the Khmer Rouge. Afterwards, Janne outlined the "do's and don'ts" required by the team while building in the village. Janne's rules are always a bit intimidating, but it is important that everyone understands that we are usually building in a village that has not had any interaction with foreigners.



Team members who had not been to Tuol Sleng or the Chuongng Ekk (Killing Fields) were obligated to visit these sites as part of their orientation. The sobering visits to these places are never pleasant, but are again a necessary part of the education process for team members.

Those of us who had already completed these visits in previous years, spent the day scrambling for shorts, hats, T-shirts, etc. for the build. Clothing items are extremely inexpensive in Cambodia and most of what we wear becomes ruined or so incredibly dirty that it's not worth hauling back to Canada. We also had to stock up on food items like energy bars & drinks and sandwich fillers. The market and grocery store are within walking distance to the Billabong so this was accomplished pretty easily. Stocking up is necessary as we know from past builds that most of the areas we build in do not have ANY of these items – stores of any kind can be hard, if not impossible, to find.

On Saturday evening, the Team went out to dinner together at a Khmer restaurant. Getting better acquainted is always key at these dinners and, as usual, the food and company were great. Everyone will probably turn in early and try to get a full night's sleep before vanning it north tomorrow to Pursat town. Even if people take in some of the late night sights, the vans will roll the next day at the appointed hour.

Wendy's Musings

Every year that we house build, there's an incident with a team member that stands out in my mind and I usually include it in our trip report. This year, I would honestly have to say that Narry had a huge impact on me. Each year, Janne has given the orientation for the build team. The orientation is essential to understand what happened in Cambodia during the Khmer occupation and what the people are still coming to grips with. Orientation is necessary to provide a successful interaction with everyone we meet, especially with people in the village where we will be building.

Janne has shared some stories of Tabitha staff that accompany us on each build so we can understand what they have gone through. But never have any of them told us their story directly. The staff, nor any people we have met in Cambodia talk about the Khmer Rouge. I am sure most try not to think about it, as the memories are too painful. Narry is a survivor of that brutal period – she has no living family members – no parents, brothers, sisters, aunts or uncles. The KR killed all of them – she is the sole survivor. Narry has worked for Tabitha for years securing our transportation to the build site so



most of our contact with her has been brief. To see Narry sit in front of a crowd and tell her story hit home hard. For her to be able to share her experience with anyone, let alone strangers was huge; to give voice to some of the things that happened to her and be able to tell us in our language was astounding to me. As Bob said, "this orientation put a real face and person to the tragic KR years". I am sure she was extremely nervous and I could hardly look at her the whole time she told her story. When she finished I gave her hand a light squeeze and told her she did

really well – she returned a small smile and said thank you very quietly. The strength of this woman is amazing. I cannot fathom how much courage it took to survive those years.

After the build, we were in Battambang for a bit of relaxation and we saw Nary at a table across the room. She was there to visit one of Tabitha's schools. We were so happy to see her and gave her a big hug. After a few minutes of catching up on things, I again told her how well she had done in telling everyone her story. She thanked me once more and told me that if it had not been for Janne, this would not have been possible. She is thankful to be able to work with Tabitha, thankful for learning to speak English. She says Janne has given her the strength to tell her story. She kept saying, "if it wasn't for Janne, I could NOT do this!" She told us how, in the beginning, nobody wanted to help Cambodia. Nobody would help us, nobody wanted to be part of us. Now, she is amazed by the people who help fund Tabitha building schools, houses and so much more. She says she is lucky, she is thankful, she is happy. Unexpectedly, she started to cry a bit and, of course, so did we. I wonder if we would be thankful like Nary, I wonder if we would have had the strength to survive. Thank you, Nary for sharing your story.

This will forever be in my memory. It helps to keep my world in perspective. These people want no more than anyone else: they want to be self-sufficient, they want to provide for the families, they want to live with dignity. We are already planning our next trip.

Travelling to Pursat - January 31st, 2011)

By early morning everyone is up and either having breakfast or running errands for last minute supplies - sun screen and nutella are high on the list as well as granola bars. The bags are piling up at the reception area as we wait for our



vans to arrive. Everyone is anxious to get under way and Colin tells everyone in his van to use the barf bags provided and give the driver enough warning to pull over". This, of course, was due to the fact that a team member was ill last year and did not accomplish said goal. Seventeen of us, 2 Tabitha staff, our luggage and the drivers pile into 2 large vans and we are on

our way. The journey itself is never boring as each turn provides a photo opportunity or laughter and "did you see that!" People that have never travelled in Asia previously are always amazed at how many passengers, baskets, pigs or chickens can be on one motorcycle. Even after this many trips it still makes me do a double take. The highway to Pursat is a good one and we wound up in our hotel by early afternoon.



The art of checking into a hotel in Cambodia, especially out in the boondocks, is a treat in itself. We all arrive at the desk at the same time, the manager collects 17 keys and holds them out to us for our personal choice – absolutely no record of who is in which room - Everyone is asking - "Is there no registration?? Don't they want a copy of our passport?" Nope, it doesn't matter - just take a key and find your way to your room.

It is Chinese New Year's here, and everyone is traveling back to their home towns or to celebrations in other towns. Pursat is a very small town and there is not much going on here. It is a stop over point for anyone travelling further afield. But there are lots of firecrackers and a few parties going on.

One odd sight is the large freighter resting in the middle of the river. Somehow or another, it was grounded a long time ago and has since been turned into a 'park-temple-aerobics center'; how these activities all work together is a mystery; how the freighter even got there is a bigger mystery. One thing is for sure; it's staying where it is. There is a short bridge connecting it to the mainland so you can have quick access to the goings-on. A few of the team members decided to go and check it out further. From what I hear, they got hauled into some Khmer

line dancing of some sort which, I am sorry to say I missed. I believe they even managed to check out the slides at the playground. Like I said, there was not much going on in Pursat.

There was a restaurant attached to the hotel and most of us ate here on the first night but English was non-existent. The menu was mostly limited to noodle soup or rice dishes and I think we all fared quite well with most of the orders being correct. In the morning, we tried several times to order some scrambled eggs - you know, make the egg breaking action, make the mixing action. No understand. Repeat the egg breaking and mixing action. No understand. Was going for a third repeat of the actions when the waiter looks at us and says "omelet?" Uh,..... yes please.

BUILD: Day 1: January 31, 2011

Our village is about 40 minutes from town, 10 of it on paved road and the last 30 typical off road dusty potholes. This is good news for us as many of our builds have taken us 1 – 1 ½ hrs each way. We had to make a steep off the side of the road and down the ditch detour around a questionable bridge that wouldn't have been possible in the rainy season. The steep left incline of the van caused everyone, of course, to lean to the right to help out as best we could. The second more frightening bridge consists of pieces of wood of varying lengths unsecured, with several very large spaces between the planks. This causes the driver to get out of the van and look more closely at the boards. A slight re-arrangement of some of the planks and Van 1 heads slowly across. Van 1 is successful, but has most of the occupants of Van 2 think about getting out and walking across. Thankfully the bridge is quite short and in a few more minutes Van 2 has crossed. The road now has more dust and more potholes and some very tight turns. There is even the need for a bit of machete work on the local shrubbery in one particularly tight spot before the vans can finally get into the village.



Faithful reader's will know that our arrival in a village is a special event. Everyone gathers with hands up in a wai and we emerge from the vans returning the gesture with 'chuum reap suur', a greeting that contains respect and blessing. The villagers are so happy to have us there - they have waited a very long time for their homes and, finally, the day has arrived. It is a good time.



We organized the groups the previous evening and have broken into 3 teams, putting experienced builders together with those who are building for the first time. Soon 3 houses are being floored and walled, and our 'hammer time' is underway.

It is 36 celcius, so frequent water breaks are mandatory to surviving the day. A couple of hours into the build and we have minor cuts and scrapes and one cut that needs to be tended to (no stitches required but heavy taping is necessary). Then it's back to hammering again. Everyone picks up on their role very quickly and the houses start coming together. The idea is to hammer hard the first day - get as many houses done as you can as we know that on day 2 everyone will start to slow down.

By lunch time, we have completed 9 houses and have set a good pace to maintain. Baguettes filled with a wide variety of substances constitutes lunch. Safe players go for peanut butter while more adventurous ones have 'tuna in a bag', and boar spread. Everyone is feeling good. There are, of course, all kinds of critters around and everyone is amused. Hens with their chicks which one can easily catch, calves, puppies, piglets - all allow for great photo opportunities.



A few much, much younger team members even started a game of frisbee. The villagers all gathered to see what we were up to and it took several minutes of this thing being tossed about but, eventually, one brave boy ventured to the circle of frisbee players and it was game on. He succeeded in catching it and managed a decent throw. Within a few minutes, some of the other children joined in while the adults had a great time watching the show.

By the afternoon, the sun is brutal and the pace has slowed slightly but we keep it steady and by day's end this amazing team has completed 15 houses. It has been a good Day 1. The villagers have huge smiles and a presentation ceremony officially hands over their new homes to them along with a quilt that has been woven by Tabitha Cottage Industry. We are dirty, sweaty, tired and have blistered hands, but we're all smiling as we climb into the vans and head home.

TEAM DINNER – DAY 1

I have to tell you about last night's dinner at the Magic Fish. As I already mentioned, there isn't much to Pursat. This is not really a place to stop unless you are going to the Tonle to see the floating village which is a couple of miles from shore. BTW if anyone can solve the riddle of the freighter in the river I will give them a prize!

When checking the Cambodia guide about Pursat, only one restaurant comes up! The Magic Fish....so, we have Ponn, our Cambodian Tabitha staffer on this year's build make us a reservation; for 20 people! We know from past builds and

from travelling in Cambodia that dinner can be a stretch but, dinner for 20 was going to be something else. In Cambodia, food outside of Phnom Penh and other major towns is dodgy, but we are hoping for the best. When we arrive, they have set us up to sit around 5 tables. This only leaves one lonely table by the back for any other customers.

We all sit down and get drinks ordered which was relatively painless as long as you ordered beer or coke. We then discover that there are only 2 menus which have to make it around the entire table. Ordering is definitely going to take a while, but we aren't in a rush. Thinking tactically I manage to get the waitresses attention and get my order in first; Allan is a close second. Roughly half an hour later everyone's order is in and food starts slowly - very slowly - trickling out of the kitchen at least 45 minutes after we enter.

Now, you have to understand that it has been a long day. So the waitress would come out and announce "fish with ginger" (Cambodian/English cross accent) and no one would answer. Ponn would then stand beside the waitress and again repeat "fish with ginger" - again no response. Everyone is too busy talking, enjoying their beer and have, probably by now even forgotten what they ordered. Time to take the bull by the horns so to speak - Wendy to the rescue - stands and yells quite loudly - "Listen up - fish with ginger!" It takes another minute - either due to food deprivation or the very loud chatter that is going on - but eventually someone claims the dish. And on it goes.

After a long day I am a little tired, and the old blood sugar is probably dipping to dangerously low levels. My mouth begins to water as other people's food arrives. Forty five minutes later and most everyone has food; except for Me, Allan, Karen and Chloe. Wendy is kind enough to throw me a bone from her plate, and Paula kindly offers up a piece of fish, so things aren't too desperate but I'm getting close.

Unfortunately (for them) two foreign girls wandered in just as we were beginning to order and sit at the lone remaining table. Problem. We are monopolizing the menus. When I glance over my shoulder half an hour later, they have waved the white flag and have decided to find dinner elsewhere. I hope they found something.

Finally, the last of us have gotten our food after a good hour and a half, but at least we were entertained. The staff appear to have taken a dinner break, and are watching soap opera's; too funny. We are anticipating the havoc of trying to sort out the bill when Karen tells us that the party is on Lush.....Thanks Karen! Total bill for 20 people, food and drinks - around a hundred and ten bucks. We ask everyone to throw in a buck for the tip. We thank the girls for the dinner, get into the vans and then have a great deal of fun watching the girls from the restaurant start to count the windfall. Smiles, laughter, incredulous looks along with some jumping up and down continues until after our vans have left. It was a pleasure to see them so happy with probably the biggest tip in the restaurant's history.

BUILD: Day 2 February 1st, 2011

The morning wakeup at 5:40AM sees people moving a little slower than yesterday as we head to the restaurant for breakfast. Yesterday a large BBQ pig had arrived in celebration of Chinese New Years. The pig is placed along with other foods like rice and fruit, as well as flowers as a New Year offering. The whole scene deserves a picture, although I am not sure as to why there is a knife stuck in the pig's back.



As everyone is a bit more tired, the drive to the village is somewhat quieter. We know that if we can keep yesterday's tempo, we will definitely finish today. In order to allow different interactions, new teams are formed up, and the sound of hammering is soon filling the air at a somewhat slower pace than yesterday. No one is under the weather, but yesterday's efforts are certainly apparent.

Yesterday there was not only a bit of breeze but this area of the village had several trees which provided some protection from the sun. One learns quickly to build the house while avoiding the sun's path if at all possible. On this day, however, there is no wind - it is hot, hot, hot and there are very few trees. Some people have moved from flooring to ladders in order to provide some relief for the people who are constantly working on installing the walls. This is not a job for those with a fear of heights. It is the most difficult job - balancing on a ladder about 16 feet in the air, no safety gear and trying to hammer into some of the hardest wood on the planet. The constant hammering above your head quickly takes its toll on your arms and especially your shoulders. The sun is relentless, and shins take a beating from the ladder. Kudos to all of them.

At each house it is easy to pick out the future inhabitants; they are always hanging out close by, handing us the tin cladding for the walls, holding our ladders, sometimes getting us water, or just keeping a keen eye on our efforts. We push through with the now second nature water breaks keeping us hydrated until we hammer the last nail at 12:45. I have to say though, everyone looked very pleased to be done. The number of houses to be built at the beginning is always quite daunting – can I do it? Will I crash and burn? Will I get injured? Will I get sick? – all very real worries. We know after Day 1 that we're pretty much in the home stretch for Day 2 but, that sigh of relief only happens after the very last nail has hit home. The houses from yesterday and the ones we are building today are separated by a couple of



hundred meters of dry rice fields. The final two houses are close to the point where we first entered the village yesterday. Ponn gathers the families from Day 2 and we hand over the houses officially along with a brand new quilt. Yesterday's ceremony was as usual, quite emotional with some tears (ours) being wiped discreetly away. Today is the same. We help change lives here, but our lives are changed as well. We give our thanks to the villagers - everyone is smiling as we head back to the vans.

We keep our fingers crossed as the vans attempt to make their way across the rickety bridge. We are, once more, happy, dirty and tired, but some of us are already thinking about next year!



We arrived back at the hotel early in the afternoon which allowed for a bit of free time although, again, there is not much to do in Pursat. On each side of the parking lot are 2 seating areas somewhat like the swing sets that are sometimes found in back yards in Canada. Only these ones are cemented in place – we have no idea why – they just are. We took over both these areas for afternoon cocktails before dinner. Everyone is now totally relaxed and having a

great time. The thought of building 25 houses is a daunting one and now that we have succeeded, everyone is celebrating a bit. We have one more night together as a team, so we all headed to a restaurant right next door and, actually, fared quite well. I understand that after dinner, there was somewhat of a late night party but, I am sorry to say, I turned in early and did not see the karaoke contest that ensued.

Wednesday morning we all got up for our last breakfast together and to take last minute team pictures. It's always bittersweet to say farewell to the team. The arrival, orientation and build are always a whirlwind - we're so happy and honoured to tackle the task, happy to have completed it, but sad that the time has passed so quickly and we now need to say our good-byes.

The first van sets off to Phnom Penh: Karen, Chloe, 'Lush Girls' Rosie, Carrie, and Anitra as well as Colin, Dan and Allan are all headed back down to PP, while the rest of us head north to Battambang.

25 houses were built giving 99 people safe, dry accommodation in Chreng Village, Pursat Province Cambodia. Congratulations to the 2011 R4T Team - thank you! This would not be possible without everyone's help!



Wendy's Musings Part II

This year's build was, as in the past, a very rewarding experience.. I had a melt down a couple of weeks before Bob and I were due to leave, when Bob tweaked his knee and couldn't weight bear properly. OMG what if you can't go!! I thought he might not be able to make the trip but he was pretty easy about it and said "worse case scenario, I wear my knee brace". I was still not convinced and did not rest easy for another week or so until he could manage to walk properly. Another bullet dodged.

2011 was our biggest team to date (17 builders) and it is always a great experience to meet everyone, some for the first time, in Cambodia. I used to wonder and hope that everyone would get along, as travelling and building in tight quarters could present some problems. After this many builds, I can say that this is not a problem. Everyone is pretty much in the same head space as these people want to give of themselves and their time, not to mention their pocket books, to help others less fortunate. You make some darn good friends along the way. Every time I look at photos of previous builds, it makes me smile.

I have never walked away from a build without some life meaning message stuck in my memory bank. This year, I was amazed by the women that worked the ladders. This is the hardest job during the build. Working at the top is damn difficult, especially with no real safety devices in effect other than someone leaning out the side of the building and holding onto your belt if extra support is needed. I, myself, have tried it in year's past and due to a fear of heights and a not so good sense of balance, I did not fare very well. I did succeed this time in doing ladder work from the middle point to the bottom of the house. So, I am progressing but still think that is as high as I will get.

Paula, I knew could do this as she has been our tower of power on the high ladder for 4 years in a row. Each year she has the option of starting on flooring but, she always opts for the high ladder. Could be a bit of insanity involved there. Joining her this year were Tash and Anitra. These women had absolutely no fear. Sixteen feet up, balanced, no safety gear, no hard hats - with hammer and nails in hand and sheer determination, they hammered hour after hour, for 2 days. Again, I think there must be some sort of insanity here. Try holding a well weighted hammer above your head and drive in a nail or two - will find out the true nature of this job in about 5 minutes. It not only exhausts your hand and wrist but your shoulders take a severe beating. My hat is off to them – it gives credence to what we already know – that women are great forces of nature.

On the other end of the spectrum we have the men who are supposed to be the stronger of the two species. Everyone knows that! It goes without fail, at the end of each build, I find it very emotional when the houses are completed and quilts are handed over to the families to signify possession of their new home. Every time, it causes me to shed more than one tear and this build was no exception. This year, one of the men beside me was at that same point of shedding a tear or two and this took me slightly over the edge. I had to walk away quickly or I would have totally lost it. The team depends on the men for their hammering strength every single year. Yes, they are strong – no argument there, but sometimes we forget how soft their hearts can be. Sometimes, we need to be reminded.

2011 TEAM TESTIMONIALS

Colin Eades (Canada)

Participating in the 2011 Housebuild for the Tabitha foundation can only be described as a truly remarkable experience. Meeting and working with 16 other volunteer builders with big hearts in an extremely poor region of Cambodia can only be described as rewarding. The villagers, both adults and children, were always smiling and happy even though by our western standards they had "nothing". It should perhaps teach us a little about work ethic, family and hope. Our team was fantastic – everyone got along – no matter how hot, tired, dirty or sore one got after two days of intense building. Lots of laughs and stories. New friendships built on sharing of a great experience will last a lifetime. And as if the daily smiles from the villagers was not enough, the blanket presentation ceremony would melt the coldest heart. It was an honour and privilege to be a member of this team.

Allan Ashton (Canada)

You can feel the expectation in the air.
We met in Phnom Penh and introduced ourselves.
Orientation behind us now.
The brutal history of the country seen first hand at the Killing Field.
We've been transported to our jump off point, Pursat, Cambodia.
A few are finishing breakfast, the early birds are hovering around the vans.
After loading up the teams we travel to our site.
Chatter is inconsequential to cover the nervousness.
Dirt roads with monster pot holes, rickety bridges and unfamiliar countryside.
We travel to the village.
The minute we step out of the vans all insecurity is forgotten.
The local villagers have turned out en masse for our arrival.
The expectant faces, big smiles and curious children have quelled any butterflies we may have had.
None of us are professional builders, most have never built anything.
But these people accept us without question.
Teams are at the site and starting to disperse.
After the first 15 minutes we all become experts.
We are "home builders" now, masters of our trade.
"butter boards" are lauded and "iron wood" is cursed.
Within minutes, so many nails have been bent we quit counting.
A quick peek out the window and you see the nervous looks.
Villagers are anticipating that first new home.
The children cannot contain themselves.
Tonight some will sleep under a solid roof for the first time.
It is terribly humbling to see people excited and thankful for a new home.
A place that many of us might describe as a glorified garden shed.
The handover is accomplished with a quilt produced by the ladies of Tabitha.
Team members hand a village family a quilt which symbolizes their ownership of a new home.
If you can keep a dry eye after handing that quilt over, you are a better man than me.
Those happy eyes, those smiling children, the elegant elders.
Those are the images burned into my heart.
Those images make me return.

Further adventures in Cambodia

A short hour and a half drive from Pursat brings Van 2 (Bob, Wendy, Paula, Marc, Luanne, Peter, Tash, Teresa and Nicole) to Battambang to the hotel we stayed at two years ago when we built near Battambang. I actually recognized the turn-off to that village. The Khemera is nearly the same as our last stay with the very welcome addition of a second building that contains a steam: awesome. Rooms are still \$20/night with breakfast included and there is an great outdoor pool area. A few days to chill is exactly what we need. Tash, Nicole and Teresa are loving this hotel and may decide to stay another day or two. Everyone is taking advantage of the massages, steam room and pool. It is Chinese New Years and a lot of things are closed, but we find the Gecko cafe is still in business and is the best place in town for coffee and 'food from home'.

One of the things listed on the “to do List” in Pursat is riding the bamboo railway. Paula and I really wanted to do this when we were in Pursat 2 years ago but time constraints did not allow us the opportunity. So, this year Paula headed out to take a ride and Wendy decided to relax. When Paula returned and said how much fun it was I was immediately disappointed that I had not gone with her. Much to my surprise, Paula said “I’ll go again with you!” – and off we went. This was probably one of the most insane rides ever. It is actually a flat bamboo platform, set on 2 separate steel wheels and the whole contraption is run by a small motor and pulley system. If you meet another train coming towards you, the one with the largest load wins and you have to disembark your train, take it apart, put it to the side of the track and let the other vehicle pass. I admit, when we took off I was more than frightened. I mean, honestly, would you take a ride on this vehicle??



To see actual video clip of this insane mad-hatter’s ride check out:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T3MPfKkVQU>

Guinea Pig Bike Tour:

So someone who shall remain nameless (Bob) decides it’s a great idea to take a bicycle ride in Cambodia to see if it might be of interest to future build teams. The route was chosen to bike from Battambang to the Thai border and onto Chanthaburi Thailand - about 135km. Keep in mind that some of us are not cyclists and Wendy is actually fearful of biking due to ‘the broken collarbone incident of 1996’. But, as guinea pigs, we must do our duty and stay the course.





Friday morning Feb. 4th, our guide and the chase van arrive on time at 7am. We tweak our seats and start the pedal to the border. We have to travel through town a bit and within 10 minutes Wendy is already sweating and starting to get a headache. She can't handle the traffic which is not huge but there are neither lines nor lights at intersections - it is literally a free for all. Buffers, she needs buffers - so Marc and I

position her in between us for safety and manage to travel the 5 or 6km through town. Outside of town is quiet and we are now on a paved road that leads to Pailin. Pailin and the surrounding area was the last stronghold of the Khmer Rouge and the place where Pol Pot died in 1998. Ironically, because the area was very heavily mined, that area of the Cardamom mountains has not been deforested. The area is also known for its gemstones but we have agreed to wait until we get to Chantaburi (gem trading capital of Thailand) to take advantage of Dr. Paula's phd brain (and eyes) to possibly pick up a few stones.

The first hour is really pleasant; flat, good road and interesting scenery. We have a couple of short stops to take in some fuel, and everyone feels good. As Paula is the only cyclist among us, we (okay - Wendy and I) are not sure about doing the full 90km set for today. But the van is right there should we need it. Now, I'm starting to relax and enjoy the ride and the countryside. A few hours later and a few more pit stops and it's getting hotter.

By 11:30 it is **REALLY HOT**. It is usually 3-5 degrees warmer in Cambodia than it is in Thailand, and I am guessing today is hovering around 37 celsius. Constant hydration is mandatory.

Marie, our guide, gives us those hospital masks to wear - why??? we ask - "oh, bit of dust on some of the road". We're not afraid of dust!!! Then we hit the first snag - Our first bit of unpaved road that lasts around 10km. The ride has lost a couple of points off of the fun scale, and has now become work. Masks are on making it more difficult to breathe, the damn red-coloured dust is everywhere; even covers your sun glasses - not that you can see 3 feet in front of you anyway. Dusty and bumpy and we are having to work harder. A respite of paved road is very welcome and we take the opportunity to clean our glasses



and hydrate. We also get some water from the van and pour it over our heads. Forget about the dust on our bodies; that is there to stay until we hit a shower.

More water, more energy bars and it's back on the road. Yet again, we run into more unpaved sections, and, now we are getting some inclines.

At around 55k, I am covered in dust/sweat mixture and my bike is starting to weave a bit. Time to seek the shade of the van. Everyone else decides to keep pedaling, and I must admit I am feeling a little ego bruised to have bailed, but the ride is supposed to be fun, and heatstroke doesn't qualify in Bob's World as fun. Finally, there is a lunch break but I remain in the van where it's nice and cool. All the better for it as I am informed that there were duck embryos on the menu. Lunch I was told (omit the embryos) was really refreshing: fresh bagettes, tomatoes, lettuce, tuna, peanut butter - a real western feast. But, of course, after the dining, it was pedal time again. The heat factor is now brutal but everyone still appears to be having a good time.

It's about 12km more to Pailin and our overnight bungalows when we start hitting some serious incline and, I mean serious. Wendy makes a rational decision at this point and decides to join me in the van. It is up to Paula and Marc to uphold the honor of the Canadian Cycling Team. They hang tough and roll into town at around 3:30 if my overheated brain remembers correctly.

Shower and beer are a priority – Sorry, first beer, then shower, then a good meal with our guide who has happily rode along with us and I don't think she broke a serious sweat.



Saturday morning has us up early and at this point Wendy and I are not sure if we have had a mild coronary or what - we can feel nothing from the neck down. I don't mean literally nothing but absolutely no excruciatingly sore legs or bums - knees are fine, everything is pain free – amazing if not a downright miracle as everyone had told us to prepare for the worst! We are on the road by 7:00AM again, and much to our surprise we all feel good. The 17k to the

border is rolling hills, but good road and we are at the border by 9:30.

Day 2: Just outside Pailin heading to the border



Unbeknownst to us the Thai's and Cambodians have been trading small arms, rpg, and reportedly artillery rounds that day. Luckily that particular border crossing is about 90k north of us and we don't get any feel of tension at our crossing point.

Grasshopper Adventures has outfitted us and we take our bikes across the border. (First time I have ever crossed a border by bike). Mr. Tam, our Thai guide, is there waiting and, after the mandatory paperwork we are back on our bikes for 30k towards our final destination of Chantaburi town. Rolling hills, good road and everyone's legs (and bellies) still feeling good as we roll into our stopping point. We are rewarded with ice coffee for all, as well as some well earned high fives.

Interestingly, while the terrain from Pailin on either side of the border and beyond is the same, once we cross the border into Thailand we IMMEDIATELY see that it is greener, and much more developed. Mr. Tam explains that it is due to the water catchment systems that have been developed.

We arrive at the Maneechan resort, which we found last year, and at dinner, order a feast big enough to feed six people; including a whole baby bbq pig. Tomorrow we will try to find Mr. Keak's gem shop and see if we can get some chantaburi yellow sapphires.



Would we do a bike ride again? Hell, yes! It was great experience, it was fun, it was phenomenal way to enjoy the rural country - we all enjoyed it and are now in the planning stages for next year's bike-a-thon.