

# WITNESS & WONDER

THE BIMONTHLY MUSINGS OF A YAGM IN CAMBODIA



ELCA Young Adults  
in Global Mission

September  
Edition

Average temp:  
32 C / 90 F  
Hot and Sweaty,  
Rainy afternoons



Cambodia Cohort at Wat Phnom, Buddhist Temple



## Who am I?

I am an energetic, curious, oldest of three, recent Valpo grad, singer, hymn player, mover, Virginian, Lutheran, YAGM in Cambodia!

Last fall, moved by trips abroad to the Holy Land & UK; YAGM alumni; and the Holy Spirit, I applied to YAGM.

Oh! and as of today I'm 22!

## What have I been up to?

This is the orientation edition! I am not at my site yet. We will move in next week. I've been living and learning with my cohort (Espen, Katie, Ashlyn, and Tim) and Hannah our country coordinator. Since we arrived, we have visited Phnom Penh landmarks, started language class and gotten to know our way around the city. Our routine is school in the morning and then coffee shops, running at Olympic Stadium, or general learning/getting things done in the afternoon.

Moving to Cambodia has been a physical (we are biking; it's hot!), mental (new language and culture), & emotional (~12 hr time difference) challenge. I'm *wondering* what are we, Christian volunteers, doing in this primarily Buddhist country? Why do these people care about Jesus? I am looking forward to *witnessing* the response of the residents of Rainbow Hostel's. Each Sunday I talk to a few more students with a little bit more Khmer. They are around my age, pursuing degrees like finance and accounting. They seem excited about sharing music and practicing English. I look forward to moving in and learning from them!



**Worship at City Church/Rainbow Hostel where I will be living and working this year.**

Services are all in Khmer. Communion is once a month. There's been a different pastor in the pulpit each Sunday. One Sunday we were joined by a high school service group from Australia.

01/03



The Killing Fields with memorial stupa in the distance

## The Khmer Rouge

- Did you know around 500,000 tons of US bombs were dropped on Cambodia in the early 70s?
- Did you know that 2 years later a Communist regime took over and killed almost **1/4 of the Cambodian population?**

To be honest, I didn't before orientation. Over the course of three days we watched *The Killing Fields* movie, visited **Tuol Sleng** a high school turned torture prison that is now a museum, and **Choeng Ek Genocidal Center** or the Killing Fields, mass graves holding people of all ages. I had never been in places like these before. The feeling there is so heavy; I would rather never know the brutality of authoritarian systems. Nevertheless, they are a reality that must be confronted. As the narrators of the audio guides said, **genocides from around the world must be remembered** so we know to **resist** them.



## Language Class

Dear everyone I talked to before I left, The Cambodian language, **Khmer**, is NOT pronounced like "Come-here". It's much closer to "Come-eye".

See, I am learning so much! After the first day, it felt like my brain got run over by a tuk tuk. I was so tired! Now, a month in, with a few phrases under my belt I've managed a few fun exchanges in Khmer. The teachers at school are so nice! (thoughtful pedagogy, too) My classmates are from France, Korea, China, and Holland and have been in Cambodia anywhere from 8 years to one month. We help each other understand culture and try to catch every new bit of vocab we can. Our final assessment is (10/8-9) after a week long Pchum Ben holiday. We've gone on two field trips. One to a local market to barter in Khmer (see my "karot", pg.1) The other to learn more about the Pchum Ben holiday (see the attached video!)

## Croix's Scavenger Hunt

Before I left, Croix, my younger brother gave me a list of things to find in Cambodia. Here's some of what I've found so far...

Some American food items

- Hershey's Bars
- Kraft Mac & Cheese
- Peanut Butter (we are going through a jar a day as a cohort)

• Coconut Waffles at the Russian Market  
(They looked really good in a tourist's YouTube food review we watched)

- Tuk Tuks! We have been riding these motorbike taxis everywhere!
- Palm Trees? Check!
- A Cambodian Convenience Store
- Two classic Khmer dishes
  - Khmer Noodles (left)
  - Fish Amok (right) coconut fish curry



# Quotes I've sat with

"[Tuol Sleng Memorial Stupa] reminds us to beware of people and regimes which ignore human dignity. No political goal or ideology, however promising, important, or desirable or may appear, can ever justify a political system in which the dignity of the individual is not respected."

— German ambassador, Baron von Marschall at the dedication of this stupa (traditional mausoleum) at Tuol Sleng in 2014.



"You keep asking why your work is not enough, and I don't know how to answer that, because it is enough to exist in the world and marvel at it. You don't need to justify that, or earn it. You are allowed to just live."

— Becky Chambers, A Psalm for the Wild-Built, a book rec. from Courtney, 10/10

## Music in my head



**Mama Mia Soundtrack**-one of the first movies we watched when we got here + **Take Him Earth for Cherishing/ Song for Athene**- Chorale pieces that helped me process Khmer Rouge sites + **I Just Died by FIZZ** - a recommendation from Henry DeBruin + **Yellow** by Coldplay- it's good + **Lord of All Hopefulness** is the hymn living rent free in my head + **Crowded Table** by The High Women is still in there from orientation



The 2024-25 YAGMs! @ orientation in Chicago

^^^ This is a really cool group of young adults serving and learning in seven different countries.



## Thank You

for supporting this program financially and with your curiosity, prayers.

Feel free to respond to this email!  
I'd love to hear from you

*If you are feeling adventurous, here's my address. Yes, it's this long. Add the tel. #, but its not mine. :)*

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Tel. +855 96 614 3753

### Lutheran Moment!

I am so grateful to have a connection through family to the LCMS missionaries here in Cambodia. The Cima's host a young adult group most Saturdays. I've been twice, learned a popular Cambodian card game, made spring rolls, sang songs, and dug into Bible study on John's "I am" statements.



A Khmer hymn we sang at church >

Based on a tune popular after the defeat of the Khmer Rouge.

Looking forward to getting to know this hymnal!

