



Monks on their annual peace march bless the Nayland group with holy water.

# Cambodia inspires

By Maria Williams

They may be poor, but the people of Cambodia are very warm and giving, as a group of Nayland seniors on a recent social studies trip found out. The year 12 and 13 students were astounded at the human spirit in the third world country. One man climbed his coconut tree to retrieve drinks for the group to show appreciation. "He apologised that he had nothing else to give us. All they had were coconuts," teacher Mary Greenland explained.

The social studies head of department started thinking about the summer trip in June last year, so finding help from tour company Gecko Trails made her job a lot easier. "I just said 'these are the things I'd like to be in it', not knowing if any of it could be done," she said.

The students paid their own \$3500, (on which they saved \$300 thanks to the exchange rate) for the trip, but fundraised to contribute towards items for the people in Cambodia.

The groups visited three schools on the 12-day trip. They read to the children at Kla Krohim, a Takeo primary school, where they also donated books that were bought with the money raised outside the canteen at lunch times last year. Mrs Greenland said the children were scared, but very interested in them. "They were standing ten metres away from us, and when we stepped forward they all collectively stepped back," she said.

The kids soon became comfortable with the students. Mrs Greenland found that the children loved having their photos taken, and that being able to see the photos on the digital camera was an exciting

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**Ashleigh Geddes**

experience. "By the time I'd set up the camera there'd be thirty kids around who all wanted to get in the photo," she said.

The older kids enjoyed listening to fluent English speech which is something they don't hear often. "I don't think they understood what we said but they enjoyed listening to it," Mrs Greenland said.

On a visit to Moy Sophea High school, boys got taught touch rugby and were highly entertained when Nayland formed a volleyball team to challenge them. Year 13 student Ashleigh Geddes got a lot of attention during the game, not only for her blonde hair. "Every time I jumped my shirt would come up," Ashleigh explained. Girls in Cambodia never reveal much skin, and don't play sports. The boys thought that was brilliant," she laughed.

The school kids were also surprised at the sight of the Nayland girls painting a mural at the school of their host mother, Sipehn. Females in Cambodia also don't participate in any sort of labour, so Sipehn appreciated having them there to show them women can be independent and don't have to rely on their husbands for everything. "We were like, 'Why are these kids watching us?' They said, 'They've never seen girls work before,' We were surprised!" Ashleigh laughed.

The most significant contribution the group made was to make water filters for a non-profit foundation called Trail Blazers. The organisation's aim is to build self-sustaining projects that enhance community development. They also hire Cambodian people, and pay them really well.

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The village children were delightful.

## Cambodia

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The Nayland group was happy to get the opportunity to help build some water filters for locals, in what is still one of the poorest countries in the world, and the college contributed money towards a concrete mixer for them to make the bricks for the filters.

The group split into two teams who each delivered a water filter to a needy village. The family Mrs Greenland's group went to was in an ugly state. "There was a lot of rubbish, maybe 100 ducks (in the pond). This is the water they use to drink and wash in," she said.

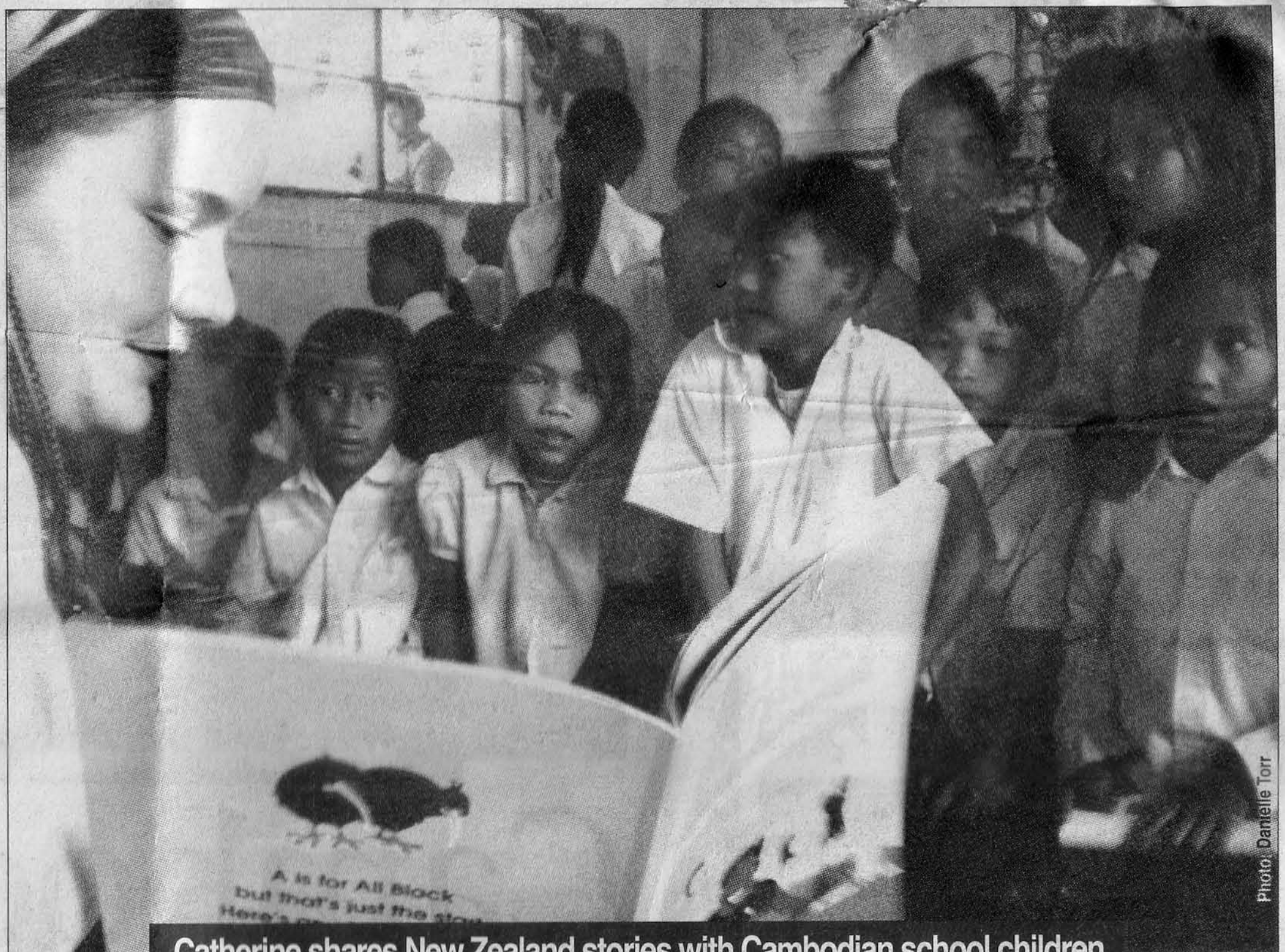
Ashleigh was in the other group, who went to another poor village to deliver the gift. She is proud of their contribution. "Those water filters keep the water 99.9% pure, which is better than their pumps which were rusty and quite old," she explained.

Most of the accommodation was provided by locals who opened up their homes. For Ashleigh, the opportunity to live with some Cambodians proved scary at first, but she now can't think of a better way to really see the country. "We were thinking, 'What are they going to feed us? There's not going to be any hot water.' Then we got there and had the most amazing time."

A visit to an orphanage struck their sensitive sides. Ashleigh found it particularly sad. "I just wanted to pull an Angelina (Jolie), take them all home. Give them a good kiwi life," she said.

Mrs Greenland also thought it was hard to comprehend. "They've got one cupboard. All their belongings are in that one cupboard," she said.

They also had the opportunity to donate blood, which is not something that is done in most Asian countries. Blood is desperately needed in Cambodia where dengue fever and haemorrhagic fever cause many people, including children, to need transfusions.



Catherine shares New Zealand stories with Cambodian school children.

The blood centre was modern and spotless. "We wouldn't have let them do it if it wasn't," Mrs Greenland said.

The group met a woman from the United Nations who informed them about problems with landmines and human trafficking. They also visited the head of the Volunteer Service Abroad who was pleased that the Nayland students knew about the work they do.

Although the change in food and dodgy water caused most of the 15 students to fall ill at some time during the trip, it was expected. "When you're in a different country- you're going to get kids getting sick," Mrs Greenland said.

Ashleigh thought the group worked well and was quite surprised they all became good friends. "When I first met everyone I thought- 'Oh yeah, they're okay. I suppose I can get along with them,' but once we were there we were so incredibly close," she said.

Mrs Greenland is already thinking of future trips but she wouldn't change a thing. "What we got from it was so fantastic that we've got to take more kids there. Everything we did was so valuable," she said.

Ashleigh agreed. "It was just a surreal experience. It didn't feel like reality until I got home and then I wanted to go back. I think I made a difference and I really liked it."