

IMAGINE WITH ME...

April 19, 2013

In Cambodia, students living in poverty cannot afford to pay the fees to go to school. This is why ***less than 5% of the rural population graduates.***



There are 66 million girls around the world who are not enrolled in primary or secondary school.

Dear friends and family,

I recently traveled to Washington, D.C. to attend the CARE Organization's International Women's Day Celebration, and to lobby my members of Congress on behalf of the millions of women and girls in the world who have no political voice or influence. When CARE shared with us the statistic listed above, I was completely shocked. And facts like this were soon followed by explanations: in over 50 countries on earth, school isn't free; a girl has a 1 in 4 chance of being born into poverty; and every day

38,000 girls under the age of 18 are married off, ending their dreams of pursuing further education. Up until that point, hearing disconcerting facts like these didn't really hit me perhaps as much as they should have. I felt the impact of numbers, but they were merely hard facts, unreachable, unfathomable, and distant. Yet for some reason, as I sat in that hotel conference room in our nation's capitol, images conjured from that new information struck me. The thought of losing my education due to the circumstances into which I

was born made me think about how lucky I was to be receiving the education that I have and love, and made me realize that I have to do something to help those whose education is out of their reach. I write to you today to ask you to join me in this effort.

The Ponheary Ly Foundation

My family will spend a month this summer in Thailand and Cambodia. While in Cambodia, we are staying at the home of a woman in Siem Reap who runs a world-renowned charity of her name, the Ponheary Ly Foundation. In December 2005, after being moved by the poverty of the children in her country without education, she created her foundation which helps 2000 children in four schools across Cambodia which had been previously shut down due to lack of finances, go back to school and get a life-changing education. In 2010, she was named one of CNN's Heroes for her efforts championing children.

This ensuing personal connection to someone making such a difference has allowed me an opportunity to connect my interest in international relations - in particular the empowerment of girls and women in the developing world - to a practical and effective purpose. Between now and August (when we leave for Cambodia) I am fundraising on behalf of the Ponheary Ly Foundation, with the goal of raising enough money to send a Cambodian girl to school who would otherwise be unable to. For example, just \$500 sponsors a young girl to attend secondary school for a year. I think this is a realistic goal and am hoping you will join me in my efforts. I will personally deliver our donation from our US friends and family to Ponheary, and hope to have the chance to visit the school and meet the young girl whose life our donation will impact.

I know money is tight for everyone right now. The good news is that even the smallest amount - \$5 or \$10 - can make a big difference for a young Cambodian girl trying to attend school. Whatever you can do will be useful and greatly appreciated, and will help me reach my goal. We have such privileges in our lives, and I feel this compels us to work on behalf of those who don't have such privileges.

How I became involved

I am 15 years old and a freshman at Riverdale High School in Portland, Oregon. Since I was little, my family has traveled. As of this summer, I will have visited 15 foreign countries, most of them in the developing world. I have seen first-hand the impact poverty has on people: I have visited the slums of Lima and Cairo, the poorest of villages in Ecuador and Mexico, and Bedouin shanties in the deserts of Jordan. I would come back from my family's trips affected by what I had seen, but unsure what I could do to make a difference. My life would go back to normal, and I would be left feeling once again disconnected from those whose lives are devastated by extreme poverty.

This past winter, Oregon Representative Earl Blumenauer visited my school. After speaking to my Global Issues class, he asked if there were any questions. I asked, "I am only 15. I can't vote. I feel like I don't have much power in the world or the political process. What do you suggest young people like me can do?" He challenged me by saying "I disagree. I think young people have a huge role to play in making a difference. Find something you believe in and get involved." One month later, I was lobbying Rep. Blumenauer in his offices on Capitol Hill on behalf of CARE. And I realized he was right. My passion for international issues can be translated into making a difference for the people I have met around the world who don't have the luxury of fundraising, protesting or lobbying to help themselves.

We can change a life

Other facts from the CARE conference also stuck with me, and they are facts of hope: Girls with eight years of education are 4 times less likely to be married as children; a child born to a literate mother is fifty percent more likely to live past the age of five; a girl with an extra year of

Please visit the Ponheary Ly Foundation website to learn more about this worthy cause:
www.theplf.org



education can earn twenty percent more as an adult.

And if you can look past the instinct to view those numbers as distant statistics, you can feel the promise of a better life for millions of people contained in them. It won't be easy to make that happen, but it's simple enough. Please help me make a difference in the life of a young Cambodian girl and take that simple step toward making the world a better place.

Thank you all,

Sarah Gordon



I have enclosed a stamped donation envelope for your convenience. If you have any questions or would like further information, please contact me:
503-928-2008
sigpdx@gmail.com