

Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters



Module 2

Activity 3: Stories of encounter

She sold me a bracelet

I was backpacking in Cambodia in early May, 2011. I met Raksa in the streets of Bok Kou - she sold me a bracelet. Raksa was a funny woman and laughed all the time. We started talking and she invited me to her home. When I stepped into Raksa's house I saw poverty and total neglect in the eye. The injustice of it all made me really sad because they were such a loving family. I met Nary – a shy girl in a dirty dress, Keo - a real tiger, Yoki – the cute baby, Raksa's husband – a friendly man, her mother-in-law, and her father-in-law who coughed a lot.

I was happy because of the spirit of this loving family but I wondered how a government could neglect such a great community of people and force them into poverty. I asked about Raksa's situation and her life. I also asked how they got their electricity in their bamboo hut.

I think this was a novel experience for the family and at the same time a happy one. They must have felt surprised because not many tourists visit the homes of local people. I think they felt happy because 'tourists' means money and they had so little. For me it was an adventure which I was really grateful for. I feel that it was a great experience, albeit shattering at times, that will stick with me for a long time.

I could not speak with no one else but Raksa because she was the only one who spoke English. But I saw smiles and gratefulness in the adults' faces and curiosity among the children when they dared approach me. With them I used body language, sang with them or took pictures of them that we looked at and laughed. I have worked at a pre-school, so I think that helped me communicate with the children.

I came across a difference that I haven't experienced in my own society. These were the signs of alienation from their society that this family felt. What can be done to change this family's situation? The experience made me think about exclusion and people living in poverty, because now they have a face – Raksa's.