

Child's eyes call UNL graduate to Cambodia

Teaching English, spreading faith give her insight

By Adeana Leftin
Special to the Daily Nebraskan

It was the empty eyes of a child that propelled UNL graduate Susan Berke into the Killing Fields of Cambodia.

Berke, a 26-year-old native of Eustis, returned to Lincoln this spring from a year of teaching English as a second language to medical students in Phnom Penh and doing missionary work.

The college student, who grew up surrounded by a homogenous German and Lutheran culture, was touched by photos of children at a concert benefit for Compassion International.

"It wasn't that the eyes were sad; they were just so empty," Berke said. "I thought if I could do something in the world so children never had to look like that, I would."

Berke, who majors in human development and the family, graduated from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in 1989 and forgot about the child's eyes until she began considering graduate schools.

Then, she was reminded.

After receiving her teaching certificate in December 1991, Berke sought employment overseas. Most international schools required more experience than she had, so Berke began looking into volunteer programs.

She didn't have to go far.

Missions Abroad Placement Service is a service through Berke's church denomination, Assemblies of God, that places people with skills in areas of need.

Cambodia allows missionary groups into the nation only if the organization also performs some sort of social work. Besides English teachers, MAPS sent translators, nurses and orphanage workers with Berke.

MAPS offered Berke placement in Cambodia and Brussels, Belgium.

"If I only had one experience overseas," she said, "I wanted it to be something very different."

So she chose Cambodia.

Berke arrived in Cambodia during the spring of 1993, just as the nation's first free elections were being conducted.

From 1975 to 1979 Cambodia was ruled by the Khmer Rouge. While many people were moved to rural areas to bring about a green revolution — one to boost agriculture — anyone with any sort of education, even as little as elementary level, was killed.

Official reports have said 2 to 3 million people were killed, but Berke said the Cambodian people believed it was closer to 4 to 5 million.

"I didn't meet anybody who hadn't lost most of their family in the war," Berke said, "and they weren't just murdered, but tortured."

Often, Berke said, Cambodians would be tortured and then taken to a certain field to dig their own grave. Then, their throats would be slit.

Those fields became what generally are known as the Killing Fields.

In 1989, the United Nations moved into Cambodia and began to promote free and fair elections. In May 1993, soon after Berke arrived, those elections took place.

"I saw the change that many Western soldiers can make in a country," Berke said.

Some changes were good; others were not.

Close to 25,000 Western soldiers brought a lot of money into the country and stimulated the economy by their demand for Western food and restaurants. However, the soldiers also brought a demand for prostitution and caused an increase in the spread of AIDS.

Berke said there were fewer than 100 cars in Cambodia before the United Nations brought in 17,000, disrupting the country's transportation system.

"It helped the economy and increased corruption with a lot of money and the opportunity for that," she said.

Besides teaching beginning-level English classes to medical students, Berke spent much of her time in Cambodia working in area churches as a worship leader and Sunday School teacher.

"I still can't believe what I've done," Berke said. "I get invited to places to speak as 'the missionary to Cambodia.' One thing I've learned is I'm just me, and I'm just very human."

"I disappointed myself a lot over there with my pride and selfishness."

It is Berke's commitment to the people and the children she worked with that will take her back to Cambodia in July.

— "If I only had one experience overseas. I wanted it to be something very different."

— Berke
UNL Graduate

"Before I went, it was the fact that I made a decision and I wouldn't go back on it," she said. "Now, the relationships that I made with some of the Cambodian people, the need in their life and the need of the country — and that I know that believing in Jesus Christ can make a difference in their life."

Berke will teach international children, children of missionaries and diplomats, at the International School of Phnom Penh for one year.

After next year, she's not sure where she'll end up.

"Part of me wished ... I could move out to the provinces and let the people really see my life."

Berke said the country was predominately Buddhist and often treated the message she told of Jesus Christ as just another story.

"There's no impact until they see your life," Berke said. "When they see something to what you say."

"Before I went, it was the knowledge that believing in Christ could change their life, but now it's that I've seen it can happen."

Residency

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out-of-state tuition scholarships designed to offset tuition costs for exceptional and minority students.

A 20 percent limit on the number of out-of-state students that could receive scholarships was proposed by Blank, but later withdrawn.

NU President Dennis Smith said he was skeptical of the administration

setting limits on admissions — the cap was not needed.

Smith said if the NU system lost students, it lost money.

Regent Nancy Hoch of Nebraska City said competition in the graduate colleges was fierce. Even with the new residency requirements, she said, no admissions would be lost.

Regents considered, and later rejected, moving the admissions date up to the fall of the 1994 school year.

Regent Rosemary Skrupa of Omaha said the University of Nebraska Medi-

cal Center already had sent its acceptance letters. Implementing the change now could pose some problems with the out-of-state students and their parents, she said.

NU General Counsel Richard Wood said NU would have bigger worries than angry parents if it moved the implementation date up.

The NU system could face a breach of contract suit if regents implemented the change this fall, he said.

The NU system could put up some legal arguments for implementing the

change, Wood said, but he couldn't guarantee they would work.

Jones said the regents had a basic interest in increasing the requirements and providing scholarships to recruit out-of-state students.

"Part of our interest is to continue our ability to recruit from out of state," he said.

Jones said if the change backfired on the regents and fewer out-of-state students came to Nebraska, it could take several years to correct the deficiency.

Proposal

Continued from Page 1

or individual administrations for the increases.

The fees may be smaller than Nebraska's peer universities across America, Loudon said, but that didn't diminish the issue's importance.

"I think it's very appropriate for you (the regents) to approve or at least

be aware of what it really costs," he said.

Smith said the original proposal got into micromanagement — something central administration and the regents did not want to do.

"At some point, if the university is going to function effectively ... there has to be some authority delegated to the chancellors," he said.

Regents Don Blank of McCook and Nancy Hoch of Nebraska City

said the president should report the increases, but the regents should not micromanage.

University of Nebraska at Omaha student regent Matt Schulz amended the bill to remove a March 1 deadline for notification of the increases.

Schulz also amended the proposal to remove the requirement for regents' approval.

Loudon said the watered-down version was not what he wanted. How-

ever, if it meant getting part of the proposal passed, he said he would support the amendment.

Regent Robert Allen of Hastings said problems with fees arose because there was usually little warning.

"When you tell people it has to come out of their pocketbooks, it's tough," he said.

The proposal passed with only Regent John Payne of Kearney voting against it.

POLICE REPORT

Beginning midnight Wednesday

8:58 a.m. — Television and video-cassette recorder stolen, Ruth Leverton Hall, \$700 loss.

10:32 a.m. — Bike stolen, Schramm Residence Hall courtyard, \$235 loss.

2:39 p.m. — Bookbag stolen, Nebraska Union, \$86 loss.

5:15 p.m. — Violation of protection order, 8th and P streets.

6:05 p.m. — Larceny, Cornerstone, purse and contents taken, \$120 loss.

9:39 p.m. — Vandalism/criminal mischief, broken windshield, NETV parking lot, \$250 damage.

10:29 p.m. — Stolen checkbook, Selleck Residence Hall.

Beginning midnight Thursday

12:47 a.m. — Outside police assistance, party arrested on warrants, 26th Street from Y to W streets.

9:05 a.m. — Larceny, computer taken, Henzlik Hall, \$2,260 loss.

11:16 a.m. — Miscellaneous call, Nebraska Union.

2:16 p.m. — Vandalism/criminal mischief, window broken, 19th Street from U to T streets, \$75 damage.

5:21 p.m. — Accident, School of Dentistry parking lot, no injuries, \$600 damage.

8:57 p.m. — Larceny, radar detector taken, Hewitt Athletic Academic Center, \$148 loss.

11:28 p.m. — Phone calls, Sandoz Residence Hall.

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