



## Fount of Wisdom Teaches God's Ways

By Mary Westergren

*Mary Westergren serves as a missionary in Cambodia together with her husband, Stephen, and their four children. They have been involved in a variety of ministries, including community development, work with women and children, and church planting.*

If a boy steals mangoes from the neighbor's tree, is his action wrong? One Cambodian reading primer for children teaches this: if the boy was caught, yes, his action was wrong. However, if he was clever enough to not be caught, his cleverness matters more than his stealing from his neighbor. The virtue of being "*chalaat*" (clever) is considered of far greater value than honesty.

In the days when that children's primer was written, the Church in Cambodia was still underground after the "Killing Fields" years of the 70s and the Vietnamese communist occupation of the 80s. The Church, though mighty of faith and courageous in spirit, was extremely small, numbering perhaps a few hundred believers in the entire nation.

Today the Church has grown to an estimated 200,000 believers in Cambodia. The Word of God is transforming the minds of these Christians who have the potential to reshape Cambodian society. For followers of Christ, the virtue of being "*chalaat*" (clever) collides with Jesus' teaching to treat your neighbor as you would like to be treated, and to not steal another's possessions.

Recently, [Fount of Wisdom Publishing House](#) in Cambodia released its first book for children, written and illustrated by an 18-year-old Cambodian author, Lina Pao.

[Miknia's Doll](#) is an eye-catching, full-color,

36-page story that tells of Miknia, a little girl who desperately wants a lovely little doll she saw in a shop window. Though she works hard to secretly earn the money to purchase the doll, she just cannot reach the needed amount.

One day, spying her father's pants hanging by a hook on the wall, Miknia seizes the moment and steals the remaining money from his pants pocket. Miknia rushes to the store to make her long awaited purchase, only to find her little doll is nowhere in sight.

She sadly returns home, where her father is searching for the missing money. Through tears, Miknia confesses her wrongdoing, and her father lovingly forgives her. She tells her Heavenly Father that she is sorry as well.

Unbeknownst to Miknia, the longed-for little doll has not been sold. The shop owner had simply tucked the doll underneath the counter to protect it from the city's dirt and grime.

In time Miknia's father purchases the little doll for his daughter's birthday. Honesty is taught as a virtue of highest regard.

"We must read our children good literature that teaches them about God's ways," says Dith Savy, Fount of Wisdom's chief editor. "This is the only hope for change in our society."

Savy, who produced an eight-volume curriculum for Sunday school teachers in the early 90s, knows first hand the importance of communicating God's Word in a way that children understand and can apply to their own lives.

### *History*

Fount of Wisdom Publishing House opened its doors in March 2004. Its vision is to assist the Church in Cambodia to grow in faith, knowledge and transformation of character, and its mandate is to provide quality and affordable literature for leadership training and discipleship.

Fount of Wisdom's first project was a thorough study of the book of Ephesians written by a highly esteemed Cambodian-American leader, Rev. Pen Dara. Though he passed away just one month before seeing his book published, his legacy lives on.

Immediately on the heels of that first release, Fount of Wisdom's Khmer staff of three undertook the daunting task of producing Don Fleming's *Bridgeway Bible Commentary* in the Cambodian language. This 25-month, 8-volume project provided the Khmer Church with its first full Bible commentary series in Cambodian.

Today, three and a half years after Fount of Wisdom was birthed, the company employs a staff of five, who have produced numerous titles including stewardship resources and discipleship books. In the near future, Fount of Wisdom staff will tackle a Bible dictionary, a study Bible, and more titles for children.

However, Fount of Wisdom does not just produce books, but also is committed to encouraging Cambodian authors. From the start, Fount of Wisdom has offered seminars for authors, illustrators, translators, editors and graphic designers. Through the generous support of [Cook International](#), [Tyndale House](#), [Media Associates International](#), [OMF Literature Inc.](#), and others, local

seminars and internships have been made possible.

To date Fount of Wisdom has been led by Stephen Westergren, an American with a long history of living and working in Southeast Asia. Though Westergren is personally supported through The Christian and Missionary Alliance (USA), he and the Fount of Wisdom board of directors have specified that the ministry be interdenominational from the beginning. As 2007 draws to a close, they are actively looking for a Cambodian director-in-training.

### *Challenges*

The level of income for most Cambodians is well below anything Americans understand as a poverty line. Most Cambodian Christians live by Jesus' principle of "asking for today's needs today." There simply is no leftover income at the end of the month for purchasing books. The average Cambodian family has expendable income of about U.S.\$1.50 each month.

The low income of its target market is a challenge for Fount of Wisdom. Even though its entire 8-volume Bible commentary sells for only \$20, and its children's book is available for a mere \$1.25, many Christians find this beyond their reach.

Fount of Wisdom is eager to employ other staff in order to develop the many valuable projects ready to be produced. However, without the generation of income from book sales, this is an impossible task.

Another challenge is marketing literature in a culture where reading is not a high social value. After the Killing Fields era when formal education was brought to a complete halt, and in the 20+ years of rebuilding a nation all but destroyed by that horrific time, reading is not something most Cambodians do for pleasure. Libraries do

not exist; there are very few books available for sale in the markets; television and movies are the primary sources of entertainment; and for many older Cambodians, literacy is minimal.

God has given Fount of Wisdom a strong start. Pray that its future will be bright, making a fruitful impact on

Cambodian society and helping to make the Church stronger and healthier.

*Fount of Wisdom is Cambodia's only non-denominational Christian publishing company.*

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