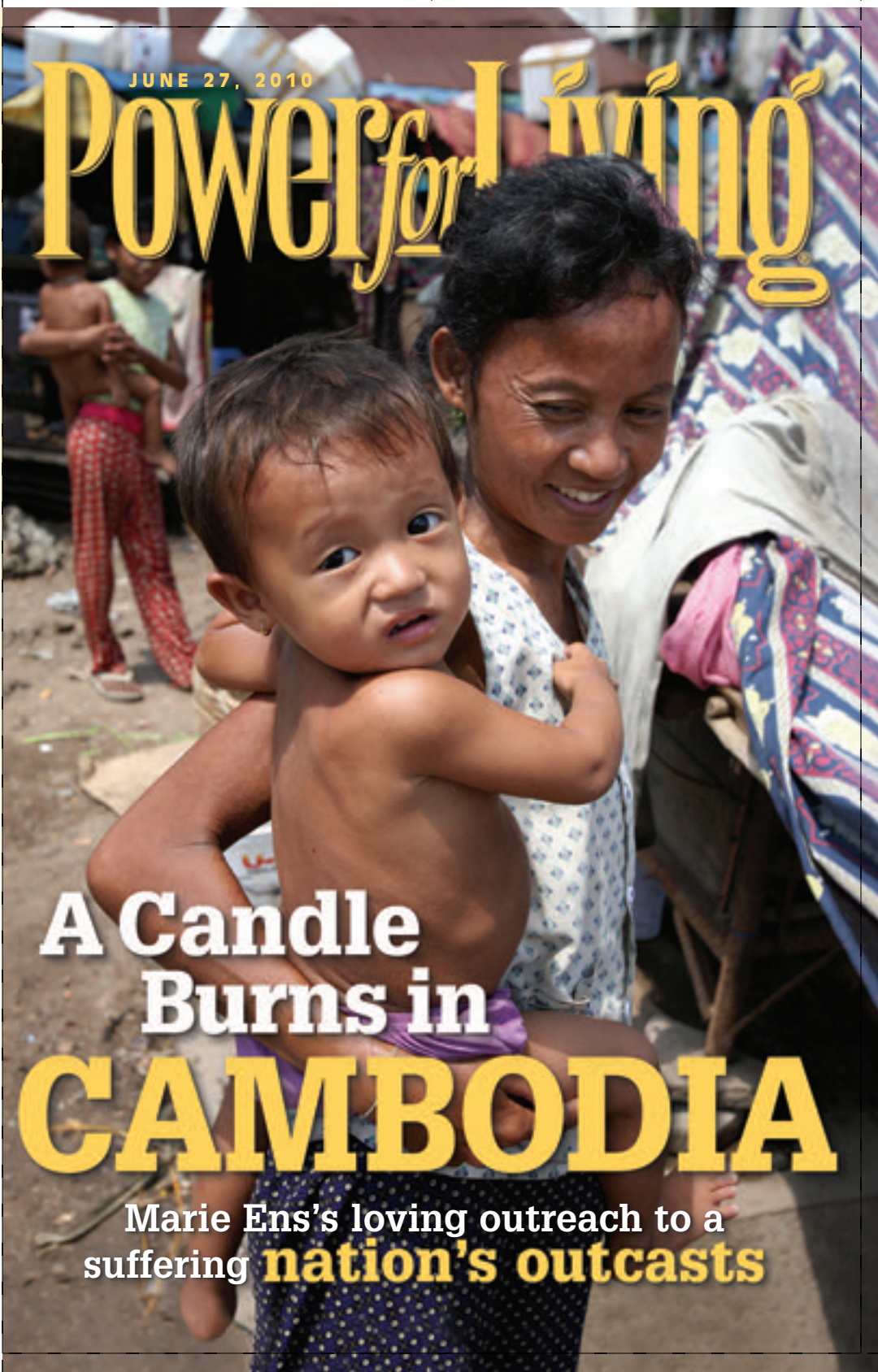


JUNE 27, 2010

# Power for Living



**A Candle  
Burns in**

# **CAMBODIA**

Marie Ens's loving outreach to a suffering **nation's outcasts**

COVER PHOTO © GETTYIMAGES

BY GRACE FOX

# A Place of Rescue

**Marie Ens** and friends bring hope and healing to hurting Cambodians.

**F**IVE YOUNG children witness their drunken father beat their mother to death with a stone pestle used to grind spices.

A woman contracts AIDS from her promiscuous husband. He dies, leaving her pregnant and too ill to care for the child she'll deliver soon.

Another woman loses most of her family members under the rule of a bloodthirsty regime. Those who survive the massacre later succumb to AIDS. Now she's a senior with nowhere to live and no one to care for her.

**These true stories**, and countless others like them, originate in the southeast Asian nation of Cambodia and share a common theme—a depth of human suffering that defies the comprehension of many Westerners. Amid the despair, however, broken Cambodians are finding refuge through a ministry called Place of Rescue.

Canadian missionary Marie Ens, 76, and several of her Cambodian friends founded “Place of Rescue” in 2003 after



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visiting AIDS patients in a Phnom Penh military hospital. Moved by the desperation of the patients' plight and wanting to help those in desperate need, they located an existing facility on approximately seven acres—ideal to provide refuge for families living with the disease—and asked God to provide the necessary \$35,000 to buy it. He heard.

Soon afterward, the leader of a small Christian organization in the United States phoned Marie and asked, "Do you need a lot of money right now? We have a surplus." That group donated \$15,000 to the outreach. Two other organizations loaned or donated funds, and the property was purchased. The facility's mostly brick and thatch buildings could accommodate as many as 16 families.

During the next six years, Place of Rescue transformed, step-by-step, into a house that could accommodate more than 19 families, 180 orphans, 20 senior women, and several unwed women and their newborns. Its facilities expanded to include organic vegetable gardens, fruit trees—papaya, mango, and banana—a school with government-certified teachers for grades one through six, three playgrounds, a wading pool, a soccer field, a volleyball court, and a library and computer center. About 45 paid Cambodian staff had joined Ens, and a Canadian volunteer had begun teaching English classes to the children. The ministry's monthly budget presently exceeds \$30,000 and is



Marie Ens (left) in Cambodia

COURTESY OF PLACE OF RESCUE FOUNDATION

funded by private donations and child sponsorships.

When she contemplates the ministry's birth and exponential growth, Ens says, "It's so miraculous, so far beyond anything we could have done on our own that we simply can't take credit. It's so over-the-top that even non-Christians see it and say, 'The Lord is here.'"

Prior to launching Place of Rescue, Ens had ministered to Cambodians in other ways for nearly 40 years. Others had encouraged her to retire several years after her husband died, but she couldn't ignore the tug on her heart to help this nation, which lost 2 million citizens to communist genocide during the late 1970s.

Ens thanks the Lord for allowing her and the staff to be His hands and heart, especially to the children at the center. "They've all suffered so much by the time they come to us," she says. "Some come from villages some from cities.

Most have not had enough to eat. They've watched their fathers beat up their mothers. They've seen their dads get sick and die from AIDS and their moms follow the same route. Some of them have been sold into child labor and been beaten for not working hard enough. They need healing from their horrendous backgrounds."

Ens tells of six siblings, ages three to fifteen, who came to live at "Place of Rescue." Their father had developed mental illness and their mother, unable to cope with caring for him and their children, had run off with another man. Their grandmother assumed responsibility for their well-being. She climbed trees to pick fruit to process and sell for a dollar or two per day. Her ability to care for the children ended when she fell from a tree and suffered multiple injuries including a broken arm.

"These kids weren't truly orphans, but they needed help," says Ens. "They came to the center looking scared and unsure, but within short order they were smiley and would run to the staff for hugs. Their lives turned from despair to joy."

On one occasion, a coworker read a newspaper story about a drunken man who took several buddies to his home and demanded that his wife give them food. She explained that there was no food—she and their five kids had eaten it because they didn't think he'd be coming home that day. The man had beaten his wife into unconsciousness several times in the past as their children watched, hugging each other and suffering

in silence. This time, he clubbed her to death.

Ens and her coworkers felt they must do something to rescue these children. With the assistance of the journalist who'd written the story, they found the siblings and brought them to the "Place of Rescue."

"You can imagine how traumatized they were when they first came, but now they're friendly and well-adjusted," says Ens. "They're in a secure place and they know it.

"It amazes me how quickly the newcomers' personalities change when they come here. The other kids encircle them and pull them into friendship. It isn't long before they realize they're in a safe environment and they start to smile. It's quite wonderful to see the transformation."

"Place of Rescue" cares for the whole person, striving to ensure physical, mental, and emotional health. It also focuses on the children's spiritual well-being. Everyone attends children's church, and the youth enjoy a worship service of their own on Sunday afternoons. About 30 teens aged 15 and older gather in Ens' home to sing and study the Bible on Monday evenings. The 13 and 14-year-olds meet on Tuesday evenings. Everyone gathers on Wednesday evenings for a time of praise and prayer. These meetings are led by a Cambodian pastor.

"He does a wonderful job teaching those kids," says Ens. "He knows exactly what their needs are because he lives right there at the orphanage. His lessons are

really timely for them.”

Showing godly love in practical ways and teaching biblical truth brings results. The eldest orphan at the center is 20 years old. She came as a 16-year-old with her AIDS-infected mother and two younger brothers. Because of her age, she'd been forced to quit school to work in a noodle shop and was in danger of being sold into the sex trafficking industry. Shortly after the family's arrival at "Place of Rescue," the mother abandoned her children and committed a crime that resulted in imprisonment.

"Who knows where this young woman would have ended up if she hadn't come here?" says Ens. "Today she's a vibrant Christian woman, outstanding in her faith and leading other young people in worship."

Ens believes the Gospel is fundamental to bringing change and hope to these children from painful pasts, but she sees it at work in the lives of all the residents—especially those with AIDS. She explains that

Cambodia's national religion, Buddhism, stresses sin and merit. If people do good things, they stockpile merit. If they do bad things, they pay the consequences. It also teaches that sin follows people from one incarnation to the next, and there is no forgiveness. As a result, an individual carries the weight of sins committed in previous lives as well as in the present.

"The people carry a huge sin burden," says Ens. "Those dying from AIDS consider themselves



PHOTOS COURTESY OF PLACE OF RESCUE FOUNDATION

**Top:** Marie with the children. They all call her *makyeay*, which means 'Grandma' in Cambodian. **Bottom:** Marie distributing to those in need.

poor, sick, ugly, and the bottom rungs of society's ladder as a result of being terrible sinners in the previous incarnation. According to their understanding, they're doomed to die and repeat the next life in hopelessness because they're now too sick to earn good merit. The wonderful message of the Gospel teaches forgiveness for our sins, and that's an amazing message for anyone dying of AIDS."

Many find hope at the "Place of Rescue," but hearing Ens speak makes one think she considers herself most blessed. When asked what her greatest joy is, she replies, "The love of the children. They all call me *makyeay*, which means 'Grandma' in Cambodian. I see their smiles and the look of love in their eyes. They hug me around my knees, and they crawl into my lap. On one occasion we

intercepted the sale of a five-year-old girl into the child sex trade. The day she came uninvited and uncoaxed into my lap . . ."

Ens pauses for a moment.

"That display of trust gave me a feeling you can't buy with money. Even the teenage boys hug me and say, 'Grandma, I love you so much.' It's incredibly satisfying. I think everything that's happened in my life until now has led to this. I could never have imagined concluding my ministry in such a wonderful, tender atmosphere that's so full of love."

At one time in their past, Cambodians couldn't have imagined such a bright and warm atmosphere, either. But, thanks to God and His faithful servant Marie and her colleagues, they're finding it as Marie and her colleagues shine their candle amid their nation's darkness. 🍃



#### FOR MORE INFORMATION

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## DAILY BIBLE READINGS

- Sunday, June 27** • Read: Job 10–12
- Monday, June 28** • Read: Job 13–15
- Tuesday, June 29** • Read: Job 16–18
- Wednesday, June 30** • Read: Job 19–20
- Thursday, July 1** • Read: Job 21–22
- Friday, July 2** • Read: Job 23–25
- Saturday, July 3** • Read: Job 26–28