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Brooklyn Charity Names Calf in Cambodia in Obama's Honor



Mother and Baby Obama are Doing Fine

BROOKLYN, NEW YORK, January 28, 2009 - Brooklyn Bridge to Cambodia (BB2C) is proud to announce the birth of the calf Obama, named in honor of the new president. Obama was born to Sylvia, the cow, of Phum Thom, Cambodia. The breed of the animals is Italian, hence the variation on the name.

Obama is the second son of Sylvia, who was purchased by BB2C in 2006 for the birth family of Rudi Shirk, the adopted son of Paula Shirk of Brooklyn Heights. Paula founded BB2C to help Rudi's birth family and other Cambodians who were in desperate circumstances.

Sylvia was named after Sylvia Poggioli, Rome correspondent for National Public Radio. Obama's big brother is Fabio, a name indicating his stud status.

Brooklyn Bridge to Cambodia, in its own name, recognizes the connections between people all over the world, a truth embodied by President Obama. Most recently it launched a micro loan program that will enable poor farmers to buy lightweight, inexpensive pumps that BB2C is introducing to Cambodia, and which will greatly cut their costs for water.

The board of BB2C also reflects the new multiracial world. Two of its members have children adopted from Asia. A third, who was raised in Hawaii, is himself, biracial, and the uncle to children with a father from Africa.

As President Obama reached out to the Muslim world, so has BB2C in its own way. The charity works with an NGO in Cambodia which focuses on projects to improve the lives of the Cham people, as they are known. The Cham minority was singled out for extinction under Pol Pot. A representative from the NGO, speaking at a conference in Indonesia, cited BB2C as an example of how the Muslim and Western worlds can cooperate.

As for Rudi's family, with a jumpstart from BB2C, Chak and Srun, the birth parents, are on their way to becoming self-sufficient. They have started a small business and moved out of a flooded lean-to into an apartment. Rudi's three birth siblings attend school for the first time, their tuition paid for by BB2C. BB2C also helped the family purchase land in Chey Seina, a remote village southwest of Phnom Penh.

Sadly, their land, and that of the other villagers, was stolen last June in an illegal land grab engineered by a corrupt general of the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces. BB2C was the only aid group that succeeded in getting emergency supplies through to the stranded villagers, whose homes had been destroyed. Although, thanks to intervention by Sen. Charles Schumer and the State Department, the people were told they were getting their land back, the situation is as yet unresolved.

Crises such as the land grab have shown BB2C that its work will not be easy. But the group, bolstered by the birth of little Obama and the sense of renewal shared by millions of people around the globe, will continue to do what it can to help its Cambodian brothers and sisters.

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