

# Wild Heaven

P R E S S



**Amanda Maly Prom**, with her husband Andy Ben, established the China Garden Restaurant in Lander, Wyoming in 1993. With little money or business management experience, they worked 7 days a week for 2 years to pay off their debts while baby daughter, Alisa, slept in the fortune cookie box in the kitchen. Amanda credits the acceptance and neighborly warmth she found in this small Wyoming town with helping her believe in herself and her opportunity to grow.

“My parents are proud of the love we receive from this community. They feel so appreciated being here,” Amanda says.

Her dreams of success have always included giving to others. Offering a free Thanksgiving Dinner at the China Garden is her personal expression of gratitude to her community, and a smorgasbord potluck each Christmas is a gift to friends in the Cambodian tradition.

On her first trip back to Cambodia in September of 2000, Amanda was reminded of the fear she felt during the war as she was being questioned by airport guards. Meeting long lost relatives, she felt like a foreigner in her homeland, unable to take a shower from a cistern and use the squat toilet. Seeing the poverty and despair that continue to plague Cambodia, Amanda was inspired by her devoutly Buddhist father to help Cambodians help themselves. She set up her uncle and cousins with well-drilling equipment and began walking into rural villages, unannounced, to dig clean water wells.

“I remember as a child I was always thirsty, and people would never share their water,” she says, “everybody needs water, so I figure water is the best way I can give back.”

A glass jar sits near the register of the China Garden Restaurant labeled Fremont County Cambodia Fund. Over the past seven years, with donations from this jar, 93 water wells have been dug in rural villages of Cambodia.

Amanda opened a second restaurant, Asian Cuisine, in 2005 to great reviews by her world-traveler clientele. The menu infused her own American creativity into a Cambodian and Southeast Asian culinary repertoire. Yet the pressures of family, particularly raising teenagers in America, forced her to sell the establishment in August 2006.

Like many first generation immigrants, Amanda feels caught between two worlds. She feels gratitude to her parents and respect for Cambodian cultural, and is often frustrated and even embarrassed by the lack of respect from her children. Respect for older relatives is the foundation of Cambodian language and culture but she doesn't want to enforce it the way her own parents did, with physical punishment.

“I feel like I have one foot here and one foot there,” she says.

Once the children are raised and off to college or marriage, Amanda hopes to create a company that supports the dreams of rural Cambodian children with little access to education. “I want them to know they are not alone, they can dream too,” she says.