

UPDATE FROM THAILAND

Volume 7 issue 5

June-July 2008

VENTURING INTO MAE SOT, TAK PROVINCE

Eight-year-old Soeky-ootoo, a Karen boy has spent most of his life playing in the open fields near the farm of his home in Myanmar. With years of hardship and their farm produce continually confiscated by government soldiers, Soe's parents & grandmother decided to make the arduous journey by foot to Thailand, to the closest border town of Mae Sot. At least, they would then be able to make more than 20 baht a day & most of all, their little boy will be able to get an education. Never mind if they will be apart from him and each other for months on end as they seek work in this foreign land. They set up a makeshift home for Granny and little Soe at the edge of a cornfield. Coming here, they realize they have no rights or privileges. He cannot attend any school. However, as of last year, a kind couple opened the doors of

their home to accommodate and provide schooling for many children like Soe.

Seeing so many displaced children around the streets & villages, this couple decided to take on the challenge of helping the children of the many poverty-stricken Karen/ethnic tribes people who have flooded into Mae Sot to seek a decent life and perhaps, their greatest hope, an education for their children – something they do not expect to have in Myanmar.

Now Soe goes to school with about 120 other children, ages from toddlers to kids about 11 years old.. While the toddlers are in the nursery, the other children are on first grade as the 11 year old is starting his first year of school along with the 5 or 6 year old.

The children spend most of their day in the school,

having their one major meal of the day there too. Though called the United Christian School by the Christian owner-couple, the majority of children attending are all mainly from Myanmar's traditional Buddhist base, Muslims or just from secular



Soe – happy to be at school.

families.

The 'school' comes under the umbrella of a Thai government school in the province. At present they can only afford four teachers who receive a meager 2,500 baht a month. But the love & dedication of these plus kids happy to learn makes an



Twenty toddlers take a nap in one room

Unbeatable combination!

Every day, their pickup truck makes its rounds within an eight-km radius to pick up all the kids who come to school. This makes a total of 8 trips a day including the return trips, which today costs about 400 baht a day.

To help support themselves, this family has opened a little restaurant run by one of their daughters. They also receive contributions from friends and sponsors — often coming in just at the right time, when they need it.

Thanks to our generous help from friends in Bangkok, we were able to bring up a contribution of about 40 kg of rice, 20 kg of chicken, children's backpacks, 2 cartons of peanut snacks, flour, sugar, children's clothes, clothes for the staff and miscellaneous household needs.



◀ Thank you sponsors for donated goods ▶

Sunny takes on 100 responsive students for an action song in English!



MEETING MYANMAR'S MOTHER TERESA

Our trip to Mae Sot included a stop to see Dr Cynthia Maung, a lady who is considered the 'Mother Theresa' of Mae Sot for her tireless efforts to provide medical treatment for the poor who have no where to go. Awarded the Ramon Magsaysay award for her humanitarian work, Dr Cynthia has served as the main doctor for 19 years at the Mae Tao Clinic which for many is the only avenue for help or treatment. Initially set up as an emergency health care center, operated from an old barn in Mae Sot, it has grown to a 120-bed hospital. The main driving force behind this clinic, Dr Cynthia, who is an ethnic Karen physician, lived in a refugee camp herself after she was forced to flee Burma when she fled. She is assisted by many other volunteers who together handle the daily volume of about 400 patients, including at least five birth deliveries a day. Upon visit-



Peter with a truckload of goods for Dr. Cynthia

ing one of the wards, we were appalled to see the spartan conditions – 60 old & young patients all together in one big ward, lying on makeshift beds – a basic model is a picnic mat lain across a wooden plank, on a table.

Thanks to Esso, we were able to bring up cartons of shirts and pants which will possibly outfit all the staff volunteers there. Besides that, we had cartons of clothes for men and women to be given to those who've trudged miles out of the jungles with nothing more than the clothes they have on.

There were also kitchen ware, bedding, cups, dishes, food that we passed on for the clinic and the refugee camp (of course, a drop in the bucket in one camp of 40,000 refugees)

MIRACLES DO HAPPEN!

We met Kato-san, a kind Japanese man, a few months after the tsunami of 2004. He was there in Phangnga to see how he could help children displaced or orphaned by the tsunami. Not long after he helped with the set up of a kindergarten in Ban Nam Khem, one of the most severely devastated villages in the province. We kept in touch via email and recently, he took up a long-standing invitation to visit the school in Mae Sot (see page 1). When he saw the need for more rooms for the children, he offered to build an extension which will house nursery and kindergarten facilities. Wow! This has come about like a miracle and we're all thankful and happy that the children will now have proper school, sleeping and eating areas. *Domo Arigato-gozaimasu, Kato-san!*



We'd like to thank the many friends who helped our work in the last quarter — especially with the installation of an LPG tank and supplies for this Mae Sot project.

CONTACT INFO:

Email: centhai@gmail.com

Cell Phone: 081-697-1409

Postal: Box 40, Minburi Post Office, Bkk 10510

D. Morales

Esso Thailand

Fujitsu Thailand

Grampian Foods

H.Chew

J. Largent

Khun Roongsima & friends

Khun Chatchawarn

Khun Tossapol S.

Khun Surachet & family

L. Roth

M. Takigawa

Orchid Diamond

Patum Rice Mill Granary

P Z Cussons

Tong Garden