

January 5th, 2003

Dear friends

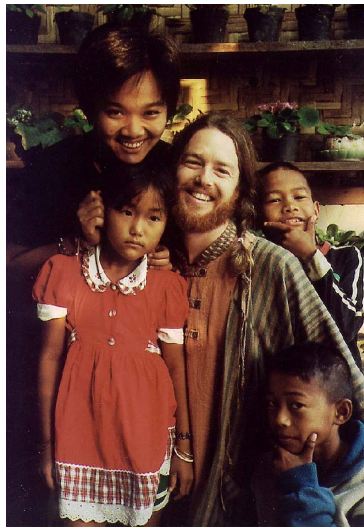
Just wanted to let you know where nao and I are with the Whispering Seed plans and what we have been up to in Thailand for the past month and a half.

“Happiness depends

on what you give

not what you get”

-Mohandas K. Gandhi



**wanna, ka, ton, nao & jim
at Ban Thor Phan
Make Dreams Come True**

I just returned to the states and nao is still in Thailand. The dream of starting a children's home in Thailand is becoming a reality!!

Currently, I am making plans to travel to Brazil because I have been invited to speak at the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre. This is a week long gathering to address social issues and concerns and to create new models and possibilities of living together in this world. I have been asked to speak on a

panel within a group of workshops titled, Life After Capitalism. Noam Chomsky and Vandana Shiva, a famous eco-feminist from India who works with the Chipko Movement (Women Tree Huggers) will also be speaking in these panels, it is a huge honor to be invited. During the same time, they will be having the World Education Forum which also seems like an interesting discussion.

As part of the WSF, they have a youth camp set up in the city park and they are expecting over 30,000 youth from around the world to set up tents and participate in the activities. The website for the forum is: www.forumsocialmundial.org.br Some of the other hosting sites are: www.zmag.org/lac.htm, www.portoalegre2003.org

Nao and I are trying to figure out how to get Nao down there also from Thailand. We have been wanting to meet with Helena Singer who has helped to start the democratic school in Sao Paulo for street children. Nao is wanting to meet with her to learn about the project which she received funding from UNICEF to do called “The school I want”. We want to take this model back to Thailand and use it to create a community around the Whispering Seed. This will be a wonderful time to meet with her and finally after 2 years have the chance to visit the school in Sao Paulo.

Then we return to Thailand to help host the 3rd Global Community Gathering at Moo Baan Dek and Ban Thor Phan, and possibly some work with natural building and the Whispering Seed from January 31st to Feb 11th. We have a large group coming from Korea and and from Japan. The Korean group will do a wall painting project at one of the children's homes and I would like to try and build a mud brick oven. Following the gathering we will be traveling to India to meet with Amukta Mahapatra who I am working with to host the IDEC International Democratic Education Conference in January 2004 in Southern India. WE will meet and have a planning session for the conference which will happen next year. A group of 2 students from the US, Rachel and Kristen, and possibly one from Colorado will join us in India along with Nao's sister Rin and a good friend named P'Kung who is non-violence trainer in Thailand. Our hope is that we will spend about a month in India traveling to visit the Barefoot College in Rajasthan to learn more about the Children's Panchayat (parliament), and the solar technology college. Then to Mitraniketan in the south to see all the work they do with appropriate technology, weaving,

farming and education. We are also thinking of participating in a conference in Rajasthan about Children and Peace and Non-violence. There are several other places that we hope to visit, Buddha Smiles, Auroville, Butterflies but we will see how time is.

Then back to Thailand to work on The Whispering Seed and travel to visit some other projects.

Over the past month, we have been participating in several natural building projects in Thailand. We just joined a natural building project to help build 25 mud adobe houses and a community center for a group of villagers displaced by the building of a huge dam on the Pak Mun River. This group, the Assembly of the Poor has been struggling to get reimbursed their land from the govt, with no success. This small group has decided to take this into their own hands and create a completely self-reliant community, Mun Yuen. They will grow their own rice and food, build natural houses of cob and adobe brick, share all land and all income, and create an alternative school within the community that will use local villagers as their teachers and they will use the community as the local resources for learning. They are also using solar panels as their main source of energy on the land. This is the first community like this in Thailand and they are hoping to be a model for sustainable living community.

We also joined a natural building project at the University in Chiang Mai where they are building a baan din, mud house to be used as an art gallery. We spent most of our time learning from our friend P'Jo who has an organic farm in Thailand and is very knowledgeable about baan din, and also with our friends Janell and Michele from Kleiwerks, which is a natural building company here in the states which has been helping with the mud houses in Thailand. WE have learned all the steps in building with mud and even learned how to make thatched roof.

The other big project in Thailand was visiting several pieces of land which have been offered to as a donation to start the Whispering Seed. So, we were looking at land and trying to decide where we want the Home to be. We currently have 7 choices of land which are available to us. Most exciting are really 3 pieces of land. The land in Pittsanulok is still a possibility because Nao feels very much at home there and would like to work with that community. We also have been offered an island, about 25 acres about an hour drive outside of Sukhothai, the first Buddhist capital of Thailand. A monk owns the land and is willing to give the island to us. He also has offered to put 350,000baht into the bank for us, about \$8,000 which we need to be able to start and file to be a non-profit organization within Thailand. The island is only accessible by 20 minute boat ride by long tail boat. The monk has also offered to help us find a building in the local village to use as an office. IT will be lots of work, but it is a magnificent place with lots of water.

The third choice came as a surprise. We traveled west towards the border of Burma to visit our dear friend P'Nart and his family and fell in love with that area. It is beautiful with majestic waterfalls, steep mountains in all directions, river valleys. Most of the area is Burmese refugees, Hmong and Karen and the way of life in that area is still very traditional. We looked at 3 pieces of land and really liked one of them.

We met a monk who lives alone in a mountain forest temple. He has invited us to share the temple and the surrounding land with him. It is an incredible piece of land nestled high up in the mountains with an incredible view. He is very excited about our work and wants very much to share this land with us.

We have lots to think about and when we are back in Thailand, we will travel some more and continue to look at land until we decide where we feel at home. We have been invited to go and stay at a farm out in this area to learn how to make organic tofu, and natural shampoos and soaps, something I have been wanting to do for a while. They also have invited us to meet with some doctors and herbalists who know the local plants and their healing properties and they know I am interested in this. We also hope to travel back up to visit a barefoot community called Santi Ashoke, and learn about solar technology from them and how to work with the local herbs.

We also are continuing to run trips for students to travel with us to Thailand and India over the next year. We are working with a man and hoping to get a group to bring about 12 African –American youth from an inner city in Pa. to Thailand for a month long exchange in the Fall. We are also thinking about offering a practicum about 2 months long for people to travel to Thailand and India to visit schools

and sustainable living communities. We are working with our friend from Kleiwerks to put together a curriculum.

During the past month, we also looked at land in the high mountains of the Northwest of Thailand and stayed in Karen Hilltribe village and youth center. We made wonderful connections with these kids and really were able to understand much deeper the problem faced by Hilltribe groups in Thailand who have been living there, but are not Thai and cannot gain citizenship. We harvested rice with the kids, learned how to roofs of leaves and they taught us how to do traditional weaving on backstrap looms. We also spend time with our friend who is from the Shan State in Burma and learned much more about the struggles of the Burmese refugees in Thailand. He is working to create a 6 month training in civil society and human rights for a group of Burmese refugees and we are hoping to be able to assist him with some of this work.

A recent email from Nao just informed me that she continues to look at land in Western Thailand and has met with another monk who has helped us to locate another 10 pieces of land in an area they say looks like Switzerland due to the mountains. Nao has been meeting with a wonderful monk and head of the village and they have invited us back to stay there for a while to make sure that we want to live there. The temple where the monk lives uses solar power, they grow their own veggies and make their own clothing, dyed with natural dyes. He also know a lot about working on cars to make them more efficient and he is doing some work on the 1960's Land Rover which we recently acquired, it will be great once we have the children, it seat 12 people!!. The amount of support from within Thailand to start this work has been incredible!!

We are still working to get the Whispering Seed filed as a nonprofit, 501 C3 organization here in the US and also to register in Thailand. This is quite a huge task, due to funding for the forms and to find legal assistance to help us with this process and to deal with the IRS. We are trying to keep on moving forward with this work, but it takes time.

Things are busy and very exciting. We hope you all are well and wish you the very best for a peaceful and productive new year!!!