

# Sai Lom Ruduraun

*A Warm Summer Breeze from Thailand*

The Whispering Seed's newsletter issue 3, Beginning of May 2003

Besides looking for land, we have been traveling around Thailand for the past few months visiting several educational and sustainable living communities.

## **“Visiting several educational and sustainable living communities “**

### **Exchange student from Lamborn Valley Community School, USA**

For the past three months, we have had Michael Bailey, a student from the Visions Program in the states with us here in Thailand. His plan was to come and help with the development of the Whispering Seed and to experience Thai culture. We hope he will share about his experiences in Thailand in the next issue of Sai Lom Ruduraun. During his time here he has been working to bridge the cultural gap and begin to adjust to a completely different rhythm of life and customs in a Southeast Asian culture. He has stepped out of his comfort zone and has had many unique learning opportunities.

Michael arrived for the end of the Global Gathering and joined us for a wonderful day in the ancient Buddhist capital of Ayuthaya. He then joined us in Pittsanulok to help clear the land which was to be the home of Whispering Seed. Here he had chance to teach English, dance and cultural games at the local elementary and secondary schools in the village for few weeks.

One of Michael's goals was to study dance and we were able to help him make connections with the famous Patravati Dance School in Bangkok. There he studied classical Thai dance, the Khon dance for a few weeks. He was then invited to perform what he had learned at a big show at the theatre about a month ago, with two evenings of performances. This was a wonderful experience for him and has opened up opportunities for other students from abroad to come and study dance at the center.

Michael then traveled with us to Isan and along the Mekong in the remote province of Loei, visiting projects with us and learning more about Thai sustainable communities and homes for orphaned children. He is currently in the south on a ten day meditation walk for peace called a Dhammayatra. Each day they stop in rural villages to meet and share meals with the local people and to sleep in the local temples. They have meetings and workshops planned each day focusing on things like; Thai culture, peace, Buddhism and non-violence, environmental and human rights the local villagers may be facing. His stories should be coming during the next few weeks.

### **Mekong Valley in Northeastern Isan**

Over the past two weeks, we have been traveling in our 1960's Land Rover into a unique region of Thailand called Isan, located in Northeastern Thailand, bordering Laos along the Mekong (River). We spent several days traveling along a magnificent stretch of road winding along the Mekong. The heat was almost unbearable, so we stopped to swim with a family in the Mekong which was just like being at a sandy beach. Because it is the dry season and just before the monsoons, we were able to walk far out into the river towards Laos. While on this trip we visited several wonderful projects.

### **Inpang Community: Life-Learning University for Everyone**

The first project we visited in the remote province of Loei was the Inpang community. This community was started 10 years ago by a Thai college student who went into this remote village in Isan and began asking questions about sustainable living and traditional life. In what used to be a very sustainable and traditional area, the villagers were now growing chemically treated taro (potato) and were not able to grow their own vegetables. From discussions about previous times, this project was started, to help villagers become self-sufficient once again and live a more healthy and sustainable life.

Currently they are working with several villages, empowering youth and adults in areas of traditional weaving and natural dye, natural farming, ecoforestry programs, traditional Thai edible forests, wild food harvesting, herb growing and collecting and they sell the products they make. One of the things that makes this project unique is that they stress the importance of living and learning in the moment and in one's own community. They have a training center where they bring villagers and students to learn and study but then they all go back to work in their own villages and communities.

Although the children in these remote villages still attend conventional government schools, although very rural, the Inpang project works to empower villagers of all ages to become self-sufficient and receive their education from all traditional activities of the village and traditional Thai culture.

### **Sikkha Asia Foundation**

We were able to meet the Sikkha Asia group at a remote elementary school located just along the Mekong. There was a wonderful dance performance put on in a sala looking out over the river with lightning lighting up the mountains of Laos on the other side of the river.

### **Bethany Children's Orphanage in Wang-sapung**

This is a children's orphanage for over 80 children coming from all over Thailand. The Project was started over \_\_years ago by a Finnish couple. We met with the current director who was raised as a child at the home. She was a wonderful woman and extremely supportive of the work we are trying to create here in Thailand. She is ready to work with us and support us however she can and has said that she has more requests for children than they can handle and is excited another project is beginning in Thailand.

### **The Nature School**

Last month, Nao and I took a short trip for 4 days to the south to take a break from the land and to visit a children's project. It is called the Nature School and is a home and alternative school for 33 sweet smiling kids, all of whom are Karen Hilltribe children who all live at the school.

On the evening that we arrived, we drove for an endless time along the star filled sky, pineapple fields and the thick jungle lingering at the edge of the darkness. On our pass through the mountain, we saw our first wild elephant in Thailand, eating along the side of the road. We were told that just beyond the enormous shadow at the edge of the jungle, were several more elephants all of the same family.

The kids live in two small and very simple bamboo houses, girls in one and boys in the other. The kids collect most of their vegetables from the local fields and jungles and catch the fish from the local river with spears. The kids all do their own cooking over an open fire and there is no electricity at the project. Aup Aap (the sound a frog makes) started the Nature School just 4 years ago with only 5 baht, (about 12 cents US). None of the teachers make a salary and the kids do not have to pay to go to the school.

Unfortunately, malaria is rampant in this area and medical services are very limited. The founder of the project, Aup Ap is 28 years old and has had malaria 13 times and his assistant has had it 9 times. It was truly an inspiration to visit this project and yet another incredible project working with children.

We are hoping that these two groups, In pang community and The Nature school will be able to join us to go to IDEC in America this summer.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Global Community Gathering in February 2003**

We had a very successful 3<sup>rd</sup> Global Community Gathering and have already started plans for next year. This year we had a group of over 40 people (and a dog) from Japan and the kids from Korea did a beautiful community wall painting at Ban Thor Phan in response to promoting projects that did not use language which was discussed the previous year. We also were joined this year by two incredible musicians from Okinawa in the south of Japan, who played traditional Okinawan music for the International Children's Festival.

### **“Homeschool Laws in Thailand”**

We also have been busy working with a man who is pushing to change the homeschooling laws here in Thailand and we are working with him to help create a curriculum and new ways of assessing homeschoolers here in Thailand.

As you can see, it has been a very busy and challenging time here in Thailand, with lots of growing and learning. We are happy to share this warm breeze of news from Thailand and thank you for sharing in our lives. We wish you all much happiness over the next few months. We will be stopping over in Japan for a short trip on our way back to the states at the end of the month and look forward to seeing many of you back in the states!!

nao & jim