



**SAI LOM
RUDURAUN
A Warm Breeze
from Thailand**

Issue 8
January 25th, 2007



Greetings to all!!!

We hope this issue of Sai Lom reaches you in good health and happiness as we make our way into a new year. We have been meaning to get this out for a while, but as happens here, daily life keeps us more than busy and finding computer is difficult. I still have not adjusted to the changes in season, from hot, to rainy and hot, to really hot but am learning to enjoy the little subtleties that mark the passing of seasons over here.

The past few months of brought many new changes to the Whispering Seed and we are in the mist of planning many projects which will start over the next few months. The land has also undergone much new growth, as we are close to finishing several new buildings on the land, the new kitchen, the playhouse and the first mud brick house that we built on the land. Here are some reflections from the past few months.

AUGUST

IDEC in Australia

Jim, Nao and our friend Harn from Burma traveled to Sydney, Australia for the International Democratic Education Conference. This was a wonderful opportunity for networking and discussing around issues of democratic education and sustainability in education. There are several groups working on teacher training programs and it was very helpful to meet with them and discuss the development of Whispering Seed's Barefoot Teacher Training Program. Our friend Harn was able to share about the current political situation in Burma and in particular how this is impacting education and how his organization AESE is working to promote new ideas and opportunities for new learning.



View towards farm from the school



New buildings at local school falling into the river



View from land to school, wooden bridge already washed away

Flooding on the land

We returned to Thailand to the heavy rains!! When we got back out to our farm, the quiet river that runs through our land was completely swollen and impassible. We have never seen it this big. The rains stayed and the area flooded for several weeks. We lost some of our land, including the largest and oldest tree on the land and much of what we had just planted including; cotton, sugarcane, corn,

rice, durian trees, pumpkins, potatoes and cucumbers. The local school lost their bridge and one brand new building was washed into the river along with many large trees. Everyone was safe, but the flooding caused major damage. Unfortunately, this was a very difficult year for flooding not just in our area, but all over Thailand as well.

Pukhamue Ceremony

While the river was flooding, our village held the annual Pukhamue Ceremony. A traditional Karen ceremony in which the young people in the village have a chance to prepare and perform Karen singing, dancing and music. Several months prior to the ceremony, the young folks in the village gather each evening at the temple to rehearse. This provides a unique time for these young people coming of age to meet each other, laugh, play and learn while having the opportunity to meet each other and perhaps develop relationships.



During the all day ceremony, the kids all dress in traditional clothing and sing, dance and play music. All of the young people then tie white string around each others wrists. It is a blessing for each person and a time to wish them well for the upcoming year.

Sea Gypsy Cultural Center and Museum

At the end of the month, we traveled with a small group of Karen children from our village to the South to work with the Development for Children and Youth Foundation on building a Cultural Center and Museum for the Moken people, traditional sea gypsies that were displaced by the tsunami and are now struggling with land rights. While there the kids worked with local Moken adults and children on building one of the mud brick walls of the museum and learned about Moken culture. We worked with locals on preparing the content for the museum.

SEPTEMBER

In September, Nao organized a Land Rover Club from Bangkok to bring donations and supplies to our farm and to the local border school across the river from us. They brought about 10 Land Rovers filled with books, shoes, cooking supplies, plates, snacks, fans and lots of other supplies for the 200 children at the school.

They also brought us similar supplies but also managed to bring us two treadle sewing machines and sewing supplies and wood carving tools. We are starting to train local women to sew, so when the weaving is finished, they will also be able to sew the fabric and design clothing.

OCTOBER

After the Rains Camp:

After Jim returned from the US, we met with the kids in the village and asked them what they wanted to do, as they still had a week left in their school break. They all said they wanted to have a camp with us and to learn how to weave.

Together we planned a week long camp for about 40 children in the village. The main activities were that 20 young girls between the ages of 9-14years old learned how to weave on traditional

backstrap looms and the entire group made 3 films with Nao and Oat (a Thai man who is volunteering with us for the year to work on film making with Nao and helping out with the mud houses and anywhere else that it is needed).



Kids from camp on Mon wooden bridge on our field trip day out.



Karen children learning to backstrap weave & reading books from the new library collection.



Some of the kids from camp at new kitchen.

It was a wonderful time and the kids have continued coming every weekend to work on the weaving. Most of the kids have already finished their first traditional Karen shirt. We are now planning to start Women's Weaving Cooperative that will work with hand spinning, natural dye and weaving products to sell. We will work with several women in the village to train them to weave.

The local kids have still been studying lamtong, traditional Karen singing and dancing and have been performing locally. We told the kids originally that we would buy them new Karen shirts and dresses to dance in. After the camp, we talked with them and decided that we would buy them all new cotton and they would weave their own shirts and dresses for their performances. Some of them have already finished their shirts. Now when they dance, they will be wearing traditional shirts that each of them wove, they are all quite proud!

Opening of Moken Cultural Center

We returned again to the south, just north of Phuket Island at the end of October for the opening of the Moken Cultural Center and Museum. The opening day was a huge success and roughly 300 people attended the opening as part of their conference on the effects of natural disasters and how to rebuild community after natural disasters. There were people from over 30 different countries including, Sri Lanka, India, Japan, China, and people from the US effected by hurricane Katrina.



Outside mud brick wall of museum with mud relief.



Elder placing hand print on mud brick wall



One wall of museum painted with coffee

NOVEMBER

Bunpen and Pupha arrive



At the beginning of November, Bunpen and her wonderful son Pupha arrived to live with us for one year. Bunpen is a young mother from the north of Thailand who was living at the Wildflower Home in Chiang Mai, a home for young single mothers and their infants. Bunpen and Pupha have moved to live with Whispering Seed for this coming year. It is wonderful to have them around and such a joy to have a little one around.

We are planning to build several mud brick houses in a cluster at the farm so that we can accommodate more young, single mothers and their babies.

We have started a mud brick house for Bunpen and Pupha and they will move in shortly!!

Harvesting the Rice Ceremony

We are as we had hoped for, but we learned a lot and had our first meal the other day with our own rice! We also grew potatoes, sugarcane, corn, cotton for weaving, and other veggies that we lost most of due to the flooding. proud to let everyone know that we grew our own rice this year!!! We did not get as much

Once we harvested the rice, we held a traditional Karen ceremony on the land to get the rice off the stalk. It was a fun afternoon with many children in the village coming to participate in the ceremony. Once a large pile of rice was gathered on the ground, they began playing wrestling games which is common after the harvesting.

We are now eating our own rice with each meal!!!



Separating rice from stalk

DECEMBER

World Challenge students from Australia

Back in August we had our first high school groups from the UK through the organization called World Challenge. During the first two weeks of December we had another two high school groups, but this time both groups were from Australia. Both groups did an amazing job working on the mud houses, the gardens and working on shadow puppets with the local kids.

The second group almost finished the main part of the playhouse which has stage and seating for the stage.

We are currently hosting two high school groups from Australia through the World Challenge program. The first group was 16 staff and students from the Melbourne area. We had a great time and worked on the gardens, finishing the plaster in one of the mud brick houses, and working on building the stage in the playhouse. The second groups.....

A trip to the beach

We took a wonderful trip to the beach, an ancient city and waterfalls at the end of the month with a group of youth from our village who have been learning to weave along with our friends from the USA and their children. Our friends raised all the money for all the children to go on this trip and it is was a wonderful experience for all!!! We will have more photos and more about the trip in the next newsletter.



Na Li Ni in Karen dress



Enjoying the beach!



Dabur, the weaving & dance teacher on backstrap loom.

UPCOMING PROJECTS

Barefoot Teacher Training Program-In January, we will start a 3 month teacher training program for teachers from inside Burma and teachers working along the Thai-Burmese border with ethnic minority groups. We will have 3 teachers from Shan State in northern Burma and three teachers from a Karen village in Tung Yai Narasuan Wildlife Sanctuary, a remote region outside of Sangklaburi.

As part of the training, we will also receive our first AJWS (American Jewish World Service) volunteers for 2 months to help with grant writing, teaching English and helping with the teacher training program.

Educational & Cultural work with Karen villagers in Tung Yai Wildlife Sanctuary:We are working with two Thai foundations and the Thai local government over the next year doing several projects. We will include more about this in the next issue of the newsletter.

1. Karen Cultural Museum
2. Developing a new curriculum for Grades 1-6, to better reflect the local Karen culture and traditions
3. Developing an alternative curriculum for grades 7-12
4. Training Karen teachers
5. Building a mud-brick dormitory for students in grades 7-12 attending a government school.

Support Needed for Shan, Burmese, Karen and Mon teachers!!!

Our teacher training starts this February and the funding we had hoped for did not come through. We will go ahead with the training, as some of the funds for travel for participants from Burma and visa and passport costs have already been raised. However, to make the program run as we hope, including the very important study tour around Thailand, we need more funding. If you are able to support us in any way or have any suggestion of places that may be able to assist us, we would greatly appreciate hearing from you.

A HUGE THANK YOU TO ALL WHO HAVE SUPPORTED WHISPERING SEED!!!!

Thank you to everyone that supported us by sending supplies and materials that we requested through our website and newsletter. It has been a wonderful response and now we have many of the supplies that we desperately needed. THANK YOU!!

We also want to thank everyone that contributed by helping us to sell our crafts and by donating through the website, your support is needed and greatly appreciated!!

THANK YOU!!

Wishing you all a safe and prosperous year!!

All of us at Whispering Seed!!