

Tales From Joy #9, 2022

Heading south to SDS II, known as Bodhisattva Valley, we began to feel lighter and lighter. Nawng Joy, Aey and I have a way of sparking each other into silly happiness. Here we are at a lunch stop along the way. Yes, rice paddies are really that green.



I packed pillows and extra towels and bedding into my luggage, in order to survive a week of sleeping directly on the cement floor like I did two years ago. And ear plugs, to drown out the snoring nuns in the next room, and barking dogs. And sheets of seaweed, cashews and supplements, cause there wasn't much I could eat, either: The nuns returned from their alms rounds with very spicy food, which was what we ate. Or in my case, couldn't eat.

So it was quite a shock to arrive this year and enter into an entirely different reality here at B.V., as we refer to Bodhisattva Valley.

I was taken to a delightful cabin of my own, with a deck overlooking a pond and the mountains. These cabins (nine, in all) were donated by one of the nuns last year, after she disrobed.

They were delivered on a gigantic truck, donated by another devotee.



My current lodging is elegant, lined in teak wood.

Where am I?

The memories of B.V. from two years ago are fading ... it has changed so much.

My buddy Chom the



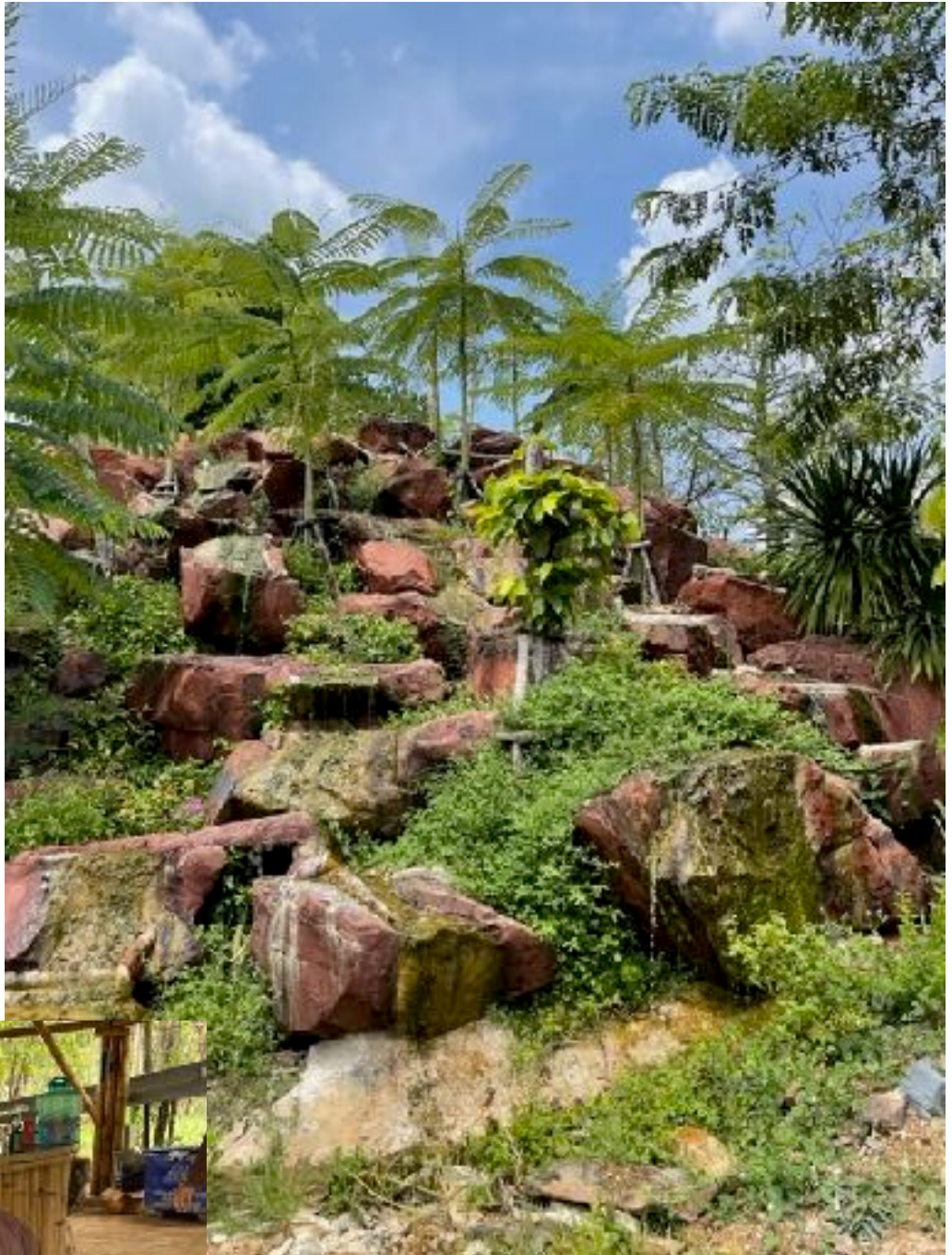
gardener is living here now, and pouring his genius into SDS II, in every corner of the land. I was so happy to see the old crew as well.



So now I show up for lunch before noon, custom-served by my old dear friend, Maechee Mem, who is now the chef!

We share twenty years of amazing memories, including touring hospices all over Thailand with Khun Mae and Nawng Joy and the team.

I've chosen to skip breakfast and eat only lunch, since monastics fast from noon until the following morning. But friendly folks continue to bring fruit to my cabin in the morning and evening.



One of Chom's latest creations...a waterfall next to my dining area

Yesterday, I ate the flower on my plate, which was decoration, and Nawng Joy was alarmed, saying that this type of flower isn't edible. My boo-boo.



The next day, I found this under the basket:
An incredible flower salad, with a vinaigrette dressing made especially for me, and egg drop shrimp soup.

Maechee Mem is asking me to share my western recipes with her. I have deluged her with ideas and possible food combinations.

The basket is significant:

On the first day, I asked her to begin thinking about alternatives to cellophane and aluminum foil wrappings...and to the fancy plastic cups with bubble lids and plastic straws. Nawng Joy was there to translate, fortunately.

I described myself as

Mei Torani's Inspector



(Mei Torani is Thai for “Earth Mother”.)

...and that there isn't really much time left to stop dumping plastic into the oceans and bio-sphere. BV is making wonderful strides, since all the veggies grown here are organic...but we need to think of every possible green innovation, every day... to be exemplary.

Maechee Mem nodded and agreed, her eyes wide. Later, we did a little ceremony and I passed her the Green Baton, to continue being “Mei Torani’s Inspector” after I leave next week.

My first evening at BV, all the nuns gathered on my deck after



chanting. Nawang Joy asked me to speak about my experiences with Khun Mae, whom most of these women had never met.

I told stories, as Nawng Joy translated, about Khun Mae's brand of

soft feminism

though she shied away from that word, and how I watched her courage grow over the years. Khun Mae was never oppositional, yet she found many imaginative ways to give women more opportunities and to grow their self-esteem. She didn't object to walking behind the youngest monk, as the patriarchy demanded, yet her charisma and power were indisputable all over the world.

I talked about how I watched Khun Mae's passion develop, in embracing the Divine Feminine, over our twenty years. Now the Green Tara has finally manifested into this Valley of the Bodhisattva, a World Heritage Site.

The Green Tara herself "en-couraged" Khun Mae. You nuns, I concluded are the bearers of this soft feminism, of providing a new brand of Asian monasticism that the world needs right now, if the planet is going to survive.

Nawng Joy asked me to demonstrate some yoga postures, to "sell" the classes I would be offering every day.



So my daily tasks down here in B.V. are:

*helping harvest the roses at dawn, with the team of local Karin teenagers who have left their tribal village and volunteered to live here.



*offering a two-hour class to these exquisite kids every afternoon, sharing yoga, pranayama, pilates, dance, clapping games. It has been a dream-come-true for me. These kids are the strongest and most flexible teenagers

I've ever encountered. They grew up working hard all their lives.

One of my objectives with the dance, especially, is sharing improvisation and



leadership. So we spend a lot of time taking turns with leading the group exercises.

There's so much more to tell, dear readers...but it would be easier to send out this Tale before I get overwhelmed, and then add more with the final Tale, next week, before I fly home.



Here are the kids waving goodbye to me as I left the rose gardens this morning. The love is palpable, and mutual!

