

Hello again dear readers... or, more properly around here:

*Dhamma sawadhi kha* 🙏.

*(Greetings, in the spirit of Dhamma)*

Tales From Joy #4, 2024



My braincells are starting to seep back in ....and it's such a relief!  
Someone please remind me if/when you hear me denigrating the  
mind...which is fairly fashionable in Buddhist circles.

I slept well, and awoke to the sound of the nuns chanting next door,  
as they do every morning around 5:15. Such a charming wakeup bell!  
I did not join them, however, since I do suffer from **CFS\*\***



But I did arise (well, by 6 a.m., anyhow) and meditate, with my  
Childish Drink by my side. (That is the spices I religiously carry with  
me: ginger, garam masala, cardamon, cinnamon, cacao powder  
added to coffee or tea and soy milk. I ascribe certain mystical powers  
of health and vitality to it. Belief might be the foremost ingredient.

**\*\*CFS** - A condition I first identified decades ago, and called it  
“Chanting Fatigue Syndrome.” It sets in after about fifteen or  
twenty minutes.. Everyone I’ve ever dared to mention it to has  
nodded and said:

*Yes, I suffer from that as well*

Then because the nuns were finishing up around dawn, I turned on my own Spotify soundtrack, and began my regime of physical therapy, yoga and Joyful (very simple) pilates, same as in the Baja.

Thus, I've returned to a recognizable body as well as mind today.  
Hallelujah!

I rearranged my little cottage/kuti in a way that works for me, returning the plastic bottles of water and the "hot" fruits in the basket (melons, bananas, papayas, and ripe mangos have more sugar than my body can handle, sadly).

Since the death of Maichee Sansanee two years ago, her sister Pa Tum is now the *defacto* leader of SDS. She was having a community meeting in the main hall. Very luckily for me, my friend Bam was there to translate. Not a lot of English is spoken at SDS.



I learned that this coming Saturday is Children's Day, always a major event at our center, and across Thailand. I'll probably lead a little flute parade with the kids... as in past years.

Yesterday I tried to go out shopping. But in my brain-free condition I forgot to weigh my green mango. So the poor cashier kindly ran to the produce section to do that for me. Then when I went to pay, we discovered that nearly all my money was from Cambodia, not Thailand...and I had to

put most of my purchases back. This was cause for a minor “stupid attack”. They are not fatal, however, and pass quickly.

I’ve decided to wear a face mask out on the street here in Bangkok, to filter the pollution that consistently hangs in the air. Ten million people are packed into a small river valley. But I’ve come to love the pure pulsating circus-like energy of Bangkok, and the way that everyone makes it work. Like an intricate symphonic movement...

Driving in Bangkok is a permanent Buddhist Opportunity. I watch my dear dharma sisters Aey and Nawng Joy make an art form out of gridlock. They have an Ipad or cellphone ready, to resume their work when the traffic locks up and they don’t appear to expend any tension about it. Gridlock; it just is.

Walking down the city streets requires one’s full attention and a bit of semi-acrobatic skill. Below, our local street-sweeper is replenishing her worn-out broom. When our nuns go out on alms-rounds in the morning, they always offer her some nice food.





Perhaps the reason I feel so charitable about Bangkok city life is that I live in a thirteen acre paradise, once I enter through these portals. I will soon see my dear friends Maichee Gift and Nawng Oo tenderly watering the trees and gently coaxing

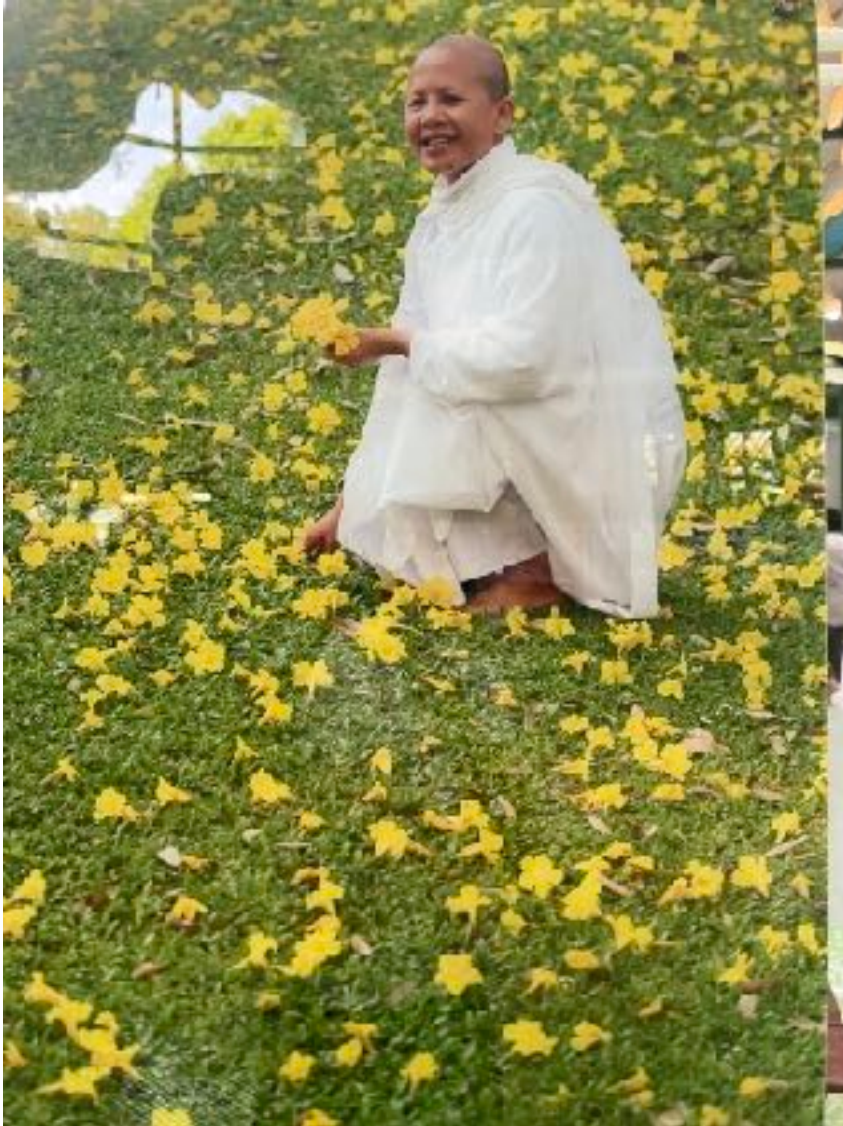
the delicate moss to thrive

Oo told me this morning



that her gardening practice is devoted to Maichee Sansanee, the center's founder who died of cancer two years ago.

The future of S.D.S. (Sathien Dhamma Sathan) seems uncertain, without the creative spirit and the intense charisma of her leadership. I haven't been here long enough this year to see if the weekend crowds still show up, or if the legions of school children still come on spiritual retreat.



But my chief focus this winter is on being with my best friend in Thailand: Nawng Joy. She spent twenty-two years traveling the globe with Maichee Sansanee as her social secretary, translator, events coordinator and director of media. "Twelve in one" was the commonly used description for Nawng Joy's role.

I was extremely fortunate (or whatever that word is..) to meet them both twenty-one years ago, at the first cobbing (mud-building) workshop held in Southeast Asia, at another ashram in suburban Bangkok. We all "clicked" immediately and I was invited to become a part of their traveling team all over Thailand, at least, and given a beautiful little home, which is saved for me every year: Ban Pa Joy (Auntie Joy's house).

My official title has been "International Volunteer". I greeted foreign visitors, gave them the official tour, and worked wherever I

chose over the years: in the kitchen, the gardens, the recycling center. Evenings, I often shared flute, singing, dance and yoga with the many retreatants.... On holidays, as many as ten thousand retreatants would show up, and I watched the center grow exponentially for many years.



Khun Mae (an affectionate respectful term meaning “grandma”), as Maichee Sansanee came to be known, grew in courage as well. I watched her as she dared to bring the divine feminine to Thailand, in the form of the Green Tara.

This was no small feat, since Thai Buddhism has traditionally been locked down into the patriarchy.

Khun Mae’s sangha/following was made up of the more sophisticated urban dwellers, however, who seemed to welcome the shift in consciousness, towards a bejewelled, half-naked goddess from the Mongolian/Tibetan tradition (!). To the right she is offering me a bronze casted statue of the Tara which lives in my Fayetteville home.



Last year, Nawang Joy begged me to come to Thailand, although it was locked down amidst the pandemic and extremely difficult to

gain entry. But I would do anything for this beloved friend. She wanted me to cheer up the community following Maichee's passage.



I did my best.

Nawng Joy (which means “younger sister Joy”) has been co-leading the community along with Pa Tum.

We went on so many adventures that I slipped in my job as journalist and reporter of the Tales, dear readers. I'll try not to let that happen again....

About six months ago, I got a call from Nawng Joy. She reported that the doctors had found a tumor in her brain, and it needed to be removed as soon as possible.

Everyone, including me, had come to assume that this eternally young-looking woman with the seemingly limitless source of energy was beyond fatigue or ill health, much less a life-threatening tumor.

The surgery was a success, but she lost the hearing in her right ear and has been dealing with Bells-Palsy, a form of paralysis on that side of her face ever since. Her surgeon had assured her that she would slowly regain her control of the cheek, eye and mouth, with time. But the progress has been much slower than anyone imagined, after five months.

Nawng Joy has been meditating on healing for the past five months, and is being tenderly cared for by her loving Chinese Thai family, in the middle of Chinatown. I went on adventures with all of them last winter.

But now that her energy is returning, she's begun to imagine the adventures we could go on.... And yes, she's made plans accordingly!





So the next few Tales will be my stories about these adventures, dear readers.

Stand by.

