



Tales from Joy, #5 2024

Hello again, dear readers.

Many of you are experiencing sub-zero temperatures up north, with blizzards. I wonder whether it is a form of cruelty to send these photos to your side of the world...

although some of you are delighted with the snow, the quiet, the



mysterious frost etchings on your window panes. I spent many wonderful winters in Montana and Wisconsin. I remember the gifts of splitting wood, stoking the stove, snow-shoeing in the woods at dusk, rainbow patterns in the sunny drifts...

It was a little harder to unwrap the “gift,” though, while my vehicle was sliding sideways on sheer ice, into a snowbank or on a mountainside.

Only this.

I had my “only this” opportunity yesterday on the two-hour speedboat ride between islands. I was grateful to find a barf bag, and I clung to it religiously, watching the minutes creep slowly past. *V e r y s l o w l y.*



When we finally waded ashore, I was rewarded with the sight of three little hornbills hopping around nearby. A woman from the national park here told us it is rare to see them outside the jungle. Sorry the photo is so blurry; my hands were still shaking.

But I need to back up a little bit, chronologically, dear readers.. to relate a few events that are meaningful to me, while I was still in Bangkok:

* The day before we left on this island adventure, (which I have dubbed

FAHN DEE

sweet dreams

because we are all living out Nawng-Joy's daydream while she was lying on her bed recuperating, for months.),

we went to the hospital where her physical therapy clinic is located. It was a two-hour journey; our friend Aey was the chauffeuse, as usual.

I was glad to witness the ultrasound, stim, massage treatment, and especially the manual arm-stretch regime. Unlike the U.S., Thailand has a national insurance program, so all this is nearly free.

I had imagined that I could help Nawng Joy by facilitating the arm stretching exercises....except that she's been so busy snorkeling, playing in the water, climbing in and out of the boats by herself, that there hasn't been time.



In fact, not even her teenage nephews can keep up with her.

* That same day in Bangkok (January 13), I was invited to bring my flute after lunch to help serenade the 75 women on weekend retreat, alongside the crystal singing bowls played by the maichee/nun.



Here's a secret, dear readers... 🤫.

My inner critic can be extremely harsh about my flute-playing (and any other morsel it can latch onto, like the eight pounds I have gained..) 😈 🙄



So it was an incredible opportunity to really release those fears and just make music from my heart. I received the most from that nap time, especially because I had been imprisoned by

HOLIDAY RIPTIDE,

as I call it.

This refers to the suffering that I often experience around holidays: It's a sensation of something mysteriously pulling me away from self, from the fascination of being in the present.

My friend and student Oscar came to visit me in Mexico for a few days, to study meditation. His birthday falls on January 1st.



He was wondering why he felt so dark and down. In response, I looked within and excavated this phrase *Holiday Riptide,* to describe the weirdness of feeling “all wrong”, and neither Merry nor Happy. The psyche holds so many memories: the earliest ones, especially, can emerge as invisible tattoos that can ink sadness and grief.

Oscar was able to deal with it, after we named it.

*The evening before I left (still the 13th!), young Peuen came to My Ban Pa joy/home and asked me to follow her.....



which I did, of course.

While we waited for “something”, someone suggested dancing....

Because my community knows how I love to dance... So about ten of us (staff, kids, baby) moved around like lunatics to Jason Mraz and whatever else was on my Spotify dance list...

Finally Peuen showed up with this amazing sugar-free cake

which she'd spent the day making, she explained. Everyone sang the Buddhist birthday song:

Happy Birthday to you.

Happy birthday to me.

Every day we are born.

Every day we are free!

which is my trademark here at SDS.

The nap-time flute music, the dancing and the special cake rescued me from my own Holiday Riptide.

Thank you, Green Tara 🙏.



By 6 a.m. the next morning, Nawng-Joy's *Fahn Dee* of six lucky recipients began at the local airport, with the flight to Trang, a southeastern port town.

From Trang, a van took us to a



magical wooden boat, which gently delivered us to our first dream island. I've been blissed out for five days.



On some previous islands, I have experienced heartache, because the “nagual” (the spirit of the land) had been grievously exploited by commercialism and drunken tourists.

But Nawng Joy and I are soul sisters...and she'd spent months researching places, from her bed.

Kradan is part of the national park system. Although several resorts dotted the shoreline, the soul of this island has remain-ed intact.

I took off hiking as soon as possible, initiating my love affair.



At sunset, we met back and hiked to the south side of the island.

By then, we'd all become carefree children:



Thus ended our first day of Nawng Joy's *Fahn Dee* (*sweet dream*), which fell on my 76th birthday, not coincidentally.



