

# Tales of Joy

#3, 2023

Sawadhi kha, 🙏  
dear readers.

My first day in Thailand felt quite significant, for myself and for the entire community.

Some of you may recall from last year's Tales:

I reported a sense of physical and energetic deterioration in the S.D.S. (Bangkok) center's vitality level.

For one thing, Ajahn Chom's work crew was spending all their time in the southern center, creating fantastic new water features and landscaping miracles every day.

Meanwhile, the monsoons, pollution and extreme heat up in Bangkok take a rapid and unrelenting toll on everything metal, wood and bamboo.

And no one seemed assured of a return to equanimity with the passing of our charismatic leader, Maechee Sansanee (a.k.a. KhunMae/Grandma) a few months before.



So I was secretly hoping that I'd be spending most of my time down south, in Bodhissatva Valley. Luckily, I'm not in charge of most decisions; my best friend Nawng Joy is.

So I picked up an Asian hoe, that first day, and started working alongside Chom's crew, who had magically returned north. As a woman and an elder falang (foreigner), I have to be pretty bossy and assertive, not laying down my work tool...cause a man or boy will immediately commandeer it.

Within an hour, something radical happened:

the nuns, the kitchen staff, then the office staff, the graphics staff, the



front shop and public relations people all began to show up and take part in this huge clearing, landscaping and hauling brush project!

Even Nawng Joy showed up to sweep, which is unheard of!

About eighty of us were working at the speed of light!

Later that evening at dusk, everyone was asked to speak, at the community meeting:

Ajahn Chom started:

*I've been afraid to come back here... seeing all the wreckage. It felt like we just couldn't salvage this place. But with the entire community pitching in, now I believe we can...if this group comes together like this once a month.*

Next, my son Somchai spoke:

*After I renovated Pa Joy's house, I looked beyond Ban Pa Joy and I was surprised to see that it was a real mess everywhere! I began to wonder if we could rehabilitate the entire area. So I collected the guys and we began clearing tree branches to let the sun in, reclaiming the walkways from the weeds, clearing away the garbage and finishing up long-abandoned projects.*

One of the teenage residents who'd spent most of her life here, said shyly:

*It felt like the old days, suddenly, when Khunmae wanted to finish a really big project, and everyone would work all night! It seems like she's back.*

When it was my turn (using Nawng Joy as my translator):

*I see that each group - the workmen from Issan, the busy office staff, the kitchen crew, the nuns... We each have a slightly different vibration, and rhythm, and vocabulary. It's like the U.N. assembly of nations. But a thin layer of separation begins to grow a little*

*thicker every day. When we all come together like today: we laugh and make mistakes and help each other. We all get bit by the same red ants! There's something very precious about it.*

## Somchai

He met Khunmae decades ago, when he was a homeless teenager, living on the streets of Bangkok. She was a novice nun who felt called to open a retreat center where abused, unwed and abandoned women could bring their infants, feel safe and learn to witness peace within. Meanwhile, Somchai was learning the ropes of landscaping and building by watching and soaking up every detail, like a sponge. For twenty years now, he's been the general manager for the many and varied projects at the center.



mother.

More than a decade ago, Somchai stood up during a community meeting, and requested that Pa Joy be his heart We hugged... and everyone has referred to us that way ever since.

Last year, a couple weeks before I arrived at S.D.S., a volunteer crew entirely renovated the roof of my kuti (Ban Pa Joy), which was falling in and leaking water.



This year Somchai rebuilt the decking on all sides and painted the building and all the walls surrounding it, to spectacular effect!



So, now I feel very happy to remain in the northern S.D.S. center, doing whatever I can to restore the vitality up here....until Nawng Joy whisks me away!

For my contribution since then, I have chosen to sift garden soil several hours a day.



I feel blissfully content to start at seven a.m. and work for a few hours or more, if I don't have other chores calling. I've noticed that my a.d.d. brain and body are greatly comforted by the repetition and sorting of hulls, plastic and debris, rocks, millipedes and especially rescuing my dear friends the worms! I get a bit stronger every day... and another part of my brain becomes free to "fly."

So I've been able to unlock more profound topics while playing with the worms and creating beautiful garden soil. I was able to formulate the synopsis of a program I'll be presenting at the Women's Festival in early March, and a stress reduction seminar for young adults that happened last week.

Thank you, Mother! Thank you, readers!

