

# Tales From Thailand, #4, 2023



Hello again, dear readers.

I don't know if I can describe the way that I am greeted here, all day long...like a beloved auntie who has finally returned...

I am the oldest member of this community and therefore Pa Joy\*\*, which means Auntie Joy, to all. Some of these relationships go back decades. We traveled Thailand together with Khun Mae and shared some challenges, too



It was my birthday last week...and I tend to be a curmudgeon about holidays So I wanted it to be low-key. I consider every day as a holy day... and sense a subtle suffering woven into the formal holidays..There is some longing for more, something, uuuuh, structurally unstable...

Simultaneously, some child part of me **did** want to be celebrated. (Yes, it confuses me, too!) In any case, the latter part was rewarded with three birthday celebrations!



I was first greeted by the community with a very special non-sugar birthday cake (fruit, almond flour, pecans, a bit of honey), made by the young woman in the middle wearing glasses - Sasha. It seemed to be the most delicious cake in the world.

It was accompanied, of course, by my signature song around here:

*Happy birthday to you  
Happy birthday to me  
Every day we are born  
And every day we are free!*

Later in the afternoon, I was invited to tea by my delightful buddies Arm and Num. They moved into S.D.S. last year, and are helping Pa Tum with administrative tasks. Num runs the family



business from his home here, with his partner Arm. I've spent many afternoons with them in past years, teaching them my favorite songs.

I doubt if Queen Victoria ever experienced a more elaborate High Tea!

And the day's celebrations ended with my besties, Nawng Joy and Aey, at a restaurant.



When I arrived the first day at S.D.S., and saw Pa Tum, she immediately asked if I wanted to go visit with Khun Mae? I nodded,



and was ceremoniously led into a secret V.I.P. zone behind Maechee Sansanee's casket. We sat quietly for about five minutes, while Pa Tum wept for her sister. Pa Tum's eyes seemed to be generally hollow, devoid of life and vitality.

Finally, I whispered, while pantomiming...

*For me, Khunmae is not in there. She's in my heart now.  
And I hear her laughing.*

It was necessary to speak my truth; no Thai person would dare say that. She vacantly nodded.

But later that evening, she repeated it to the entire community, Nawng Joy told me.

The casket has been sitting there in the Dharma Hall since last December, 2021. Yes, you read that right, dear reader:

## Thirteen months

There is a precedent for this (in my opinion pathological) behavior: When Maechee Sansanee's former lover and original patron to the center, died in his nineties...

she arranged for him to also lay in state in the main hall for about fifteen months. That was three years ago. I assume the refrigeration unit/casket is and was turned up to the highest setting: deep-freeze.

That first afternoon, Spirit told me that it is time to share *Heart*

*Yoga* with Pa Tum. I asked Nawng Joy to transmit that invitation.



At the time, I had no idea what “Heart Yoga” meant. I just follow instructions as I am given them. Yes, dear readers, I do feel a bit nervous/foolish until further details arrive! And they always do....

Enter the blessings of my soil-sifting sadhana: As I sifted soil in the garden the next day, it all came clear.

My early morning meditation further grounds the course of action.

The next afternoon, Nawng Joy, Pa Tum and I found a private and quiet spot for our Heart Yoga session.

I explained that we would work our way up from the lowest chakra:

We began with my signature

*BLEAH!!* sound,

which is simultaneously relaxing, humorous and grounding...

Then: belly dance isolations to music, pranayama (breath of fire and velomas, to lengthen the breath)...and finally, anapanasati/ witnessing the breath, to sharpen our focus...

At this point, Pa Tum appeared to have re-entered her own body.

So I asked her to imagine that Khunmae was here with us, and suggested that she ask her for advice and we all sat quietly.

After fifteen minutes, Pa Tum returned with the information:

*She says that she is right here with me.*

I responded:

*Great! Cause we need for you to be HERE too.*

Pa Tum seemed to be very happy and present, and told Nawng Joy that she wanted to share this process with the entire community.

The catharsis had a short half-life, however....No further mention has been made about a community meeting... Pa Tum seems semi-despondent again...with no apparent closure in sight for the deep-freeze scene.

And I have learned an even more precious lesson, as I sift through more piles of soil:

There is nothing here to fix.

Every grief process takes exactly as long as it needs to. Pa Tum and Maechee Sansanee were raised by an unwed mother, who died in her fifties. Class and status are incredibly important in Thailand, even more than the U.S.

So Pa Tum's entire identity is wrapped into her sister's celebrity status. To cremate Khun Mae would ostensibly bring an end to that chapter.

It would be like me expecting hypnotized Q-Anon adherents to suddenly "wake up" from their collectively satisfying identity trance.

Isn't life fascinating?

When I have released my own deep-seated ego attachments (to sugar, to being fit and youthful, to having an opinion about everything), perhaps I might then be qualified to judge anyone else.

Indeed, which of us is not a multi-faceted rotating disco ball of tiny swirling mirrors, lighting up our own dance hall?



Meanwhile,

Happy Chinese New Year, darlings!



This is Nawang Joy's home in Chinatown. Most of the family lives together above their hardware store.

Each of the twenty dishes, which are first offered to the ancestors, symbolizes something. The family spent days cooking.

Eldest son first lights many sticks of incense, to send the blessings upward. When the incense finished burning, in about an hour, we started the feast.

Meanwhile, Nawng Joy's younger generation and I took off for the Chinese market, which was all around us:



I bought some ginseng oolong tea from a popular tea shop..it's sold in bulk.



Next, we went to a 300- year old temple nearby and sought our fortunes for the Year of the Rabbit.

One shakes the can of wooden sticks until the first one falls out. It has a number on it, and the fortune is posted on the wall.

Mine was quite auspicious, according to Nawng Joy. She says that some of the fortunes can be ominous.

Whew!

When we returned home, Mama and I ritually offered each dish to the ancestors..whereupon we enjoyed a lovely feast.



Finally every traditional Chinese family burns some symbolic ritual paper

so that the smoke will reach the ancestors.

The prayers seem to typically be seeking good health, long life and, especially, prosperity.

I wish this for you as well, dear readers, and even more:

to maintain our balance and equanimity amidst these quixotic shifting sands.

