

# Tales From Thailand, 2019, #1

Greetings, dear  
readers.

I'm home, again, here  
with my heart family in  
a heart-centered  
community, doing what  
I love. Not that my life  
is any less wonderful in  
Fayetteville or out at  
Wattle Hollow.  
It's just another flavor.

My dear friend Nawng  
Joy met me at the  
entrance to S.D.S. and  
unveiled the latest  
miracles here at the  
center, too many to recount in just one Tale. But for openers:

There are now a couple of caves that are constructed entirely out of pink Himalayan salt blocks (!), and heated with light bulbs. I've never heard of or imagined such a healing modality. But as I sat inside meditating, the first day, it stimulated a memory of some long-past or future experience, almost out of time...



And right outside of the Pink Cave is a large curving set of pools with fountains, filled with mineral waters...

These features lie between the new Dharma Healing Center and the children's playground, so that the ailing and elderly can interact with and observe gleeful children climbing on nets woven by volunteers and jumping on the rope trampoline, made by local fishermen.

These dreamscapes-come-true emanate from the mind/heart of Khun Mae Sansanee, the

founder and inspiration behind this place: Satthien Dhamma Sathan, here in Bangkok.

We caught up with Khun Mae in the Green Tara Cave, between her many diplomatic functions. Though she had cancer last year, she is now in full remission and as shiny as ever.

My journey to Thailand from the U.S. was unusually pleasant this year, mainly because I was called



up to the airline desk right before boarding, and informed that I was being awarded a free upgrade to Business Class for the thirteen hour flight to Seoul, Korea. I literally danced a little jig! So I spent that night tucked into a sleeping pod, fully stretched out and comfy. Wow...that was Christmas Day, by the way.

Most of my mornings since my arrival here in Thailand have begun with an early-morning alms-walk. I'm always last in line, behind the nuns and retreatants. I carry the food. We're all barefoot.



I am touched to see the continued vitality of this 2,500-year-old tradition: alms-giving. Buddha described the cultivation of generosity as the first virtue on the Noble Path to enlightenment. Generosity is the very heartbeat of Thai culture, in my experience.

Some practitioners arrive on motor cycle, or by automobile.

Many sit outside their homes, with trays of food every morning. Vendors wait for us in the marketplace. The nuns chant a blessing, after each offering.

We return home with heavy bags which are then sorted and offered for breakfast to everyone.

The nuns also give away a fair amount of the food they've received.. One elderly woman lives on the sidewalk and is a regular and grateful recipient. Another street-sweeper knows she can count on breakfast.

It feels like we are much better received now, than during my earliest experiences of alms-walks, from 18 years ago.

Female monastics are still second class citizens in Buddhist cultures. Even MC Sansanee is required to walk behind the youngest monk. Full ordination is not available to women at all, except in Sri Lanka and Taiwan. The Maha Sangha of Thailand, the official Buddhist governing body, is not interested in releasing any power.

But, *lek, lek*, slowly, slowly...society seems to be catching on that it is the women who are the caregivers, offering perhaps more creative and immediate responses to suffering, since they have much less to lose by moving forward and addressing imbalances. Lek, lek, slowly slowly, the world turns and perhaps the long arc of history does eventually turn toward justice....I choose to believe that.

Dear readers, before I close this Tale, I have to relate a Coyote Trickster story. Trickster, after all, is my greatest teacher and is never far away from me. Trickster brings me absolutely unique gifts.

Soon after I arrived at S.D.S, my friend Amm, who is a beautiful young dancer on the staff, asked for my help with a New Year's eve program. Her usual dance partner has been a bit unreliable this year, having had a nervous breakdown..and she didn't know if he would even show up. So Amm and I worked on a dance duet, while we waited to see if the young man would contact us. After three days and a few rehearsals, I became enthusiastic and, encouraged by compliments from spectators, I began to feel pretty "ching-ching" (Thai slang for "cool"). We had creative choreography props, music and a great drummer behind us.

In other words, my splat factor rating was: high. Splat factor is the height that one can fall, from an expectation.

Fifteen minutes before the performance, with hundreds of retreatants already sitting in the audience, the Amm's original partner appeared.

With ten minutes to spare, the drummer was dismissed, the music changed, and I was re-assigned to a role as wallpaper. The young man took center stage, of course. MC had advised Amm that the dance was unimportant; we were to restore his confidence, above all.

It took me a few minutes to lower my eyebrows, unclench my jaw and allow my vocal chords to soften so that my words would not emit a kazoo-like property.

Best Coyote nip: I still had to be in the show, he insisted, but not do any interesting movement...just float around in a subtle, unobtrusive way. This new dress rehearsal took place in front of the 400 folks already there for the performance.

I laughed afterwards, but came to my bungalow and ate two sicks of Juicy Fruit gum, which I'd bought to clear my ears on the airplane.

Please don't ever be indignant on my behalf, dear readers. I always get exactly what I need. No one has a more blessed life than I. (And didn't I mention something about wanting an ego-ectomy in my prologue?)

New Year's Day brought me wonderful gifts.



You older readers may recall that I've spent years trying to get a clear shot of my closest neighbor, who used to see me coming and splash-dash into the water.

She didn't even bother to move an inch as I stood nearby this year: such a lovely gift. She's about six and a half feet long., with gorgeous markings.

Not all the Thai retreatants are not as enamored as I. Lizards are considered evil spirits and/or ghosts, in tribal lore. And superstition still runs pretty deep here, even among sophisticated city dwellers.

Happy New Year, dear friends. Thanks for all your wonderful responses to the Prologue.