

Tales From Thailand, 2020 #3

Greetings, dear readers.

Hats. We all wear so many in these complicated times, huh?

As the relentless dust and heat bore down, over six days of pick-axing holes in the dry rocky ground at SDS 2... I grew to love my Issan farmer's hat. It became incredibly familiar and comforting as well. This is a strange disclosure for a "nudist Buddhist," as I've often described myself.



My sweet friend Maechee Wontawon is on the left. She's been here at SDS 2 since its beginning eighteen months ago, and is the sole remaining founding resident. She was formerly a shop-owner and hat designer. She has found her future here at SDS/2, she says.

Conditions here are slightly difficult:

- *Not a lot of nurturing food is yielded from alms' rounds in the closest Karen village - mostly white rice.
- * Temperatures are chilly at night and broiling by day
- * Most maichees come from urban settings in the business world. As it turns out, putting a farm implement in their

hands does not necessarily make them strong and happy farmers.



Maechee Sansanee/Khunmae visits every week for a day, bringing her special light, and enthusiasm, happily making plans with architects and artists to develop this Valley of the Bodhissatva, as she calls it. She has plans to install a huge Green Tara on the hilltop, an extension bridge, a ferro-cement waterfall...

Honestly, I've been discouraged to see the amount of clear-cutting taking place all around me, as guys with big dozers forever plow up the mountainsides, in their search for water or more croplands. The original flora is being lost, its animals confused and wandering.

No one seems to grasp the necessity of regenerating the soil before trying to plant hundreds of trees. Alas, we don't

have Ajahn Chom down here to patiently create an arable soil structure that could support all these gardening projects.

This is my own perspective, dear readers, and it may be narrow or warped or just plain wrong. I try to not equate being sure with being correct.

I'm lobbying, via Nawng-Joy, to import a mountain of compostable materials from SDS 1, and perhaps a bio-char oven to enrich the soil.

I actually had a great time bonding with my fellow residents,



working very hard and sharing yoga after lunch every day. Disclosure: I'd also packed carrots and cucumbers and almonds in my luggage to eat every evening, at Nawng Joy's suggestion. (The nuns don't eat after lunch.) Below, I am with the newest SDS/2 residents, Nang-eh and Pat-eh. They were homeless Myanmar refugees who've now been given a tent to live in, daily sustenance and a job at SDS/2. A friend of

Khunmae's asked her to give them a future. The kids started being goofy with me after a couple of days: dancing, singing and doing yoga with me and all the nuns after lunch. None of us speak much Thai.



Gahlee , a Laotian maechee was being teased alot, cause she couldn't do some of the postures. I assure everyone during and before each class that we are already perfect, already beautiful.

Three things determine our ability to do yoga:
Our karma, our trauma

and
inflammation
from our diet.

I was therefore delighted to discover that Gahlee was the only one able to do a full uttanasana (standing forward bend).... I made a big fuss and took photos, as we applauded.



Love it!

After a week at the southern SDS, I left for an incredible place which I wrote about two years ago, dear readers:

Pa Deng.

Nawng Joy took another busload of her ISV kids (International Spiritual Volunteers) down to witness this wonderland of alternative energy being practiced in a National Park in the southern province of Pechaburi. The five Karen villages, about 2,000 people within the park, use methane gas (provided from their household anaerobic waste composters) and rocket stoves for cooking,

They power their lights and refrigerators with used industrial solar batteries...grow their organic crops with compost and bio-char that is made in their intensive ovens.



The kids get certification for this weekend field trip.

Ajahn Gosun, the mastermind behind this internationally prize-winning development, is here teaching us how to make paper from banana leaves.

At suppertime, the ISV kids broke into five teams, and competed to make the most delicious and loveliest

meals, using the rocket stoves and methane cookers.



As one of the judges, I penalized the teams who didn't ask beforehand if there were any vegetarian and/or Muslim folks among the diners.. and those who added pork to every dish. The winning group's prize, as it turned out, was to be in the front row at my yoga class the next morning.

The last time I tried to do yoga with these kids, the class fizzled after about eight minutes: They had neither the strength nor the

attention span to stay with it.. So, forewarned by that experience, this time it was more of an inter-active dance class, fueled by my happy African music. Bingo!

We're all learning.

The next day, we made bowls from banana and lotus leaves, reinforced with a botanical leaf-goo to be able to hold liquids.

Having over-cooked my first bowl, I re-classified it as a hat.



Above, goofing with one of my favorite SDS buddies, named Jat-eh, who described his own hat creation as “the unicorn”.

On the long bus-ride home, I had another chance to describe Greta Thunberg, who was appearing at the Davos convention that day... and to talk about the Green New Deal and its proponents in America, the Sunrise Movement.

Several of my ISV interpreters for the Pa Deng trip, like Apicha here, asked me why the U.S. is intent on making ever more weapons of destruction, when it is the impending climate change disaster we should all be focusing on.

What could I say?

Blessings to you all, dear readers, as we join the Third World in wondering the same things, and what can be done about it.

Meanwhile, breathe, dear ones.

But we did discover the cure for Bangkok gridlock traffic. Our bus was held up an extra couple of hours.

We erupted into a spontaneous karaoke dance party.
And had a great time.





