



Tales From Thailand, #3

Hello again, dear readers.

Here I am again, at the climax of my perennial Hit Parade song:

*Happy birthday to you-ou-ou...
Happy birthday to me-e-e-e...
Every day we are born,
And every day we are free-e-e-e..*

Except, it was my actual birthday that evening, having completed seventy-one revolutions around the sun, counting the first year.

And I have added a little component this year:

after *Every day we are born*, I now tuck in the line,

And every day we die....

before the finale:

Every day we are free-ee-ee-ee.

(sung with gusto, and accompanying movements).

How can we be re-born unless there is newly created space?

Speaking of the Circles of life, I've been encouraging Nawng-Joy to focus on the methods by which our master gardener (remember the unsung hero?) Chom has created this paradise. A wider audience around the world could reap the benefits of his decades of research. As I told Chom, via a translator, years ago:

I'm planning to ruin your life, by making you famous. You've been having this happy quiet life in the background here for too long now.

So Nawng Joy spent a couple hours interviewing Chom with me, translating it, and we're going to publish the story somewhere, at least on the SDS website.

And I will also offer you extra-curricular reading material, friends, in the form of an attachment, when we have finished it.



Yesterday completed yet another circle of life. After years of attempting to photograph my neighbor, she finally posed for an entire forty-five seconds. This is taken thirty yards from my house. She's about six and a half feet long.



In fact, I hear her gallumphing around every day, but she's always seen me before I see her, and zooms into the water. I also saw a baby lizard fall out of a tree last week, but it too wriggled away before I could catch a photo. Yesterday, Nawng Joy sent me this series, however, of yet another



SDS resident, a boa constrictor, (whom I've been hearing about for years) devouring baby lizard for breakfast. The lizard was about a foot and a half long, so I'll leave it to you to estimate the boa's length.

S.D.S. exists, miraculously, in the midst of a congested urban neighborhood, but we harbor an entire eco-system within. Some of the Thai retreatants are not thrilled to share their space, but I am.

I know I'm way too big to be contemplated as breakfast.

I just returned from a weekend with the ISV club (International Spiritual Volunteers), an institution that Nawng Joy conceived and manifested last year. These are local kids, between 8 and 18 years old, who are being trained to serve society. The International Climate Change Youth Conference is happening in two weeks here at the center, and Nawng Joy wanted our kids to be more savvy about alternative energy. She certainly chose the right avenue: Pa Deng.



During our four-hour bus-ride to the National Park, Nawng Joy asked me to discuss two things with the thirty children:

**Chom's Worm World at S.D.S. I created a little LOVE SONG TO WORMS, and we practiced it quite a bit.

**my winter experience at the the sanctuary for children of albinism, in a small town in Tanzania, three years ago. I had time to go into graphic detail, with Nawng Joy translating, and they loved it.

Pa Deng amazed me:



The two thousand residents there, comprising five villages, live inside the national park. They are prohibited from running public utility lines. In the last twenty years of ingenious adaptations, however, they have attracted many awards and acclaim for their modes of alternative energy.

The methane digester produces gas that is free of color and odor. Wow - no toxic fumes!

The villages refrigerate and cook food, light homes and grow enough organic crops to export, using:
solar panels, recycled used solar batteries, rocket stoves, methane composting digesters, ovens to bake “char”.



The major driver behind the development is Ajahn Kozol (in photo above), who is a friend and devotee of Khun Mae’s.

The communities are equally devoted to sharing resources and community stewardship toward all its members.

I told Ajahn Kozol, with tears in my eyes, as we were leaving:

We Americans are starved for hope.

We know that our president is insane.

We know that our big corporations are devouring the world.

And you are growing more than organic crops here.

You have created sprouts of hope for the future.

He wanted Nawng Joy to write this out in Thai so he could post it on Facebook. I hope to spend a couple weeks there as a volunteer next winter.



Pa Deng has devised a way to create perfectly clean charcoal, in a heat controlled oven. Here, a woman named Apple is demonstrating the technique. With toxin-free coal, there could be no more cataracts and/or lung disease for the cooks, who are generally third-world women.

The residents eat bits of this coal as a gastro-intestinal cleanser.

I requested two little bags, one for me to scatter the powder around the roots of my garden, and one for Chom.

On the bus-ride home, our kids decided to start making things to sell (home-made organic soaps, crafts and baked goods) to send school supplies to my albino kids in Tanzania. And they want to become pen-pals and send letters of encouragement. This puts a big smile on my face. Except I was already smiling.

Here, kids are practicing a song that Sister Helena wrote, about wanting to feel safe.



And life at SDS continues to be exquisite.
I'm always happy to return home.

I've gone out on alms-walk, just before dawn, with the nuns several times. I hold the bag...though the young mae chees are reticent to share the weight. But they're slowly learning that I'm strong enough.



There are so many mae chees these days that some of them pile into taxis in the morning, and visit the larger market across town, cause they have saturated our local neighborhood. These are the only women I have ever seen in Thailand, doing alms' walks. It's generally monks. I'm humbled to witness this ancient form of reverence, and the people's adherence to generosity as a path to enlightenment.



The mae chees are always either working or chanting, from 4;30 a.m. until 9:30 or 10 at night....either administrating, sweeping, or watering the gardens.

