

# Tales From Thailand

#5, 2018

As promised, dear readers,

I'll begin this Tale with my six days at a rural orphanage outside of Kanchanaburi, in western Thailand.

I've been away for four years, and I was quite pleasantly surprised to see the changes:

Some of you may remember my concerns about the martial punishment which was practiced daily, especially as meted out by a couple whom I called "Mr and Mrs. Meany." I even asked my Thai friend to translate a letter to the director, Maechee Jutipak, about the well-documented negative

consequences of martial punishment:

The children simply learn that harshness is the most efficient means of communication.

For whatever reason, Mr. and Mrs Meanie are gone. Wonderful.

And the nuns in charge now seem to be firm but gentle task-masters.



This is not an easy role. Some of the children have known abuse and trauma before they arrived at Dhammanurak. The little boys, especially, were prone to violence and out-of-control behavior.

One of their mid-morning “therapies,” I saw, is to take little plastic cups of water out of the cooler and smash them on the ground. It seemed senseless and wasteful at first glance. Yet it’s a relatively simple and harmless way to release raw tension, upon retrospection.

This year I could “see” the little symbolic re-runs of the violence they had been subjected to, and its terrible ongoing consequences.

Any and everything became a “weapon” in their little hands. This is how they arrived for our evening yoga class....





It seems to me that the luckiest children are those that started the orphanage at a very young age...Some have been raised here almost from their first day or week on earth. These babies are universally adored and tended.



I saw nothing but kindness from the people in charge this year - the maechees/nuns and other adults on staff.



The older children are assigned a younger child to attend to. What could be more meaningful to an orphan?

And their diets were clearly improved, I'm thrilled to report. The kids were shining with good health. They often ate vegetables and tofu or TVP with mushrooms and veggies and eggs. I was given a milder version, without the hot peppers, and enjoyed every meal. This has never happened before, in my many years of visits.

My vast and secret stash of nuts and seeds and seaweed became irrelevant. Also, life is so much simpler since I released the need for coffee or caffeine tea in the mornings...no more desperate dawn safaris to get the necessary caffeination into my bloodstream. Ahhhh, it's like taking off a leash and collar.

All but the youngest (and a dozen of the slowest) children are driven to local schools for their education. The high school kids start sweeping up, then cleaning up and preparing for school long before dawn. I shared yoga and dance with the younger kids and the maechees after their 5:30 a.m. prayers and chanting, and again in the evenings.

Slowly, slowly, I'm learning the yin and yang of teaching children, especially the small ones. I now take responsibility for when they are over-excited and can't concentrate. We slow way down every few minutes and do something "soft."





I used to believe it was their fault, when this happened, which was every time I taught. I also asked a few of the nuns or teachers to be present, instead of taking a break while I'm teaching.

I hope to become skillful at teaching, by the time I'm 100 years old.

In the afternoons, the kids do some kind of chores...they most love to create their own tasks, I notice.

At right, a child is cleaning up an abandoned fountain, with a plastic bottle and a temple ornament that she found.





And they seemed to delight in carrying buckets of manure to enrich a new garden bed, even in the scorching heat of early afternoon.

These kids and adults are much hardier and stronger than city folks, who generally abhor direct sunlight. They were shocked when I wanted to join them, until one child whispered, (in Thai) to another:

*she does yoga.*

*Ohhhh...they nodded.*

Great propaganda, huh?

And my favorite activity of all: the clapping games.

From Africa to Asia, this is the most effective way I know to truly enter into a shared universe with a child, without any need for shared language. We can share a long sustained gaze.

We learn to laugh at our mistakes and start over, endlessly. The less confident children learn that there is plenty of time to learn this. Even the “naughty” little boys are lured into it. And eventually, the adults are interested, when they see how powerful a technique it is. But only the most expansive adults will try it out, I notice. Most adults anywhere are too afraid of looking foolish.



And with the smartest right-brained kids who may or may not excel in school, we can go really fast, and start talking while we are clapping. It's truly a hilarious exercise.

By the way, our ISV kids here (Nawng Joy's group of young International Volunteers-in-training) have been trying out products to sell for their upcoming benefit to raise money for the children with albinism in Tanzania. In photo below, they are playing a clap-games.



Before I close this Tales, dear readers, (and again, thanks for your delightful comments in response to the Tales. Sorry I haven't had time to respond to you individually)... I want to offer you some auxiliary reading material:

The Greening of Sathien Dhamma Sathan, and Chom's thirty years of experimentation here.

I shared this information with forty youth delegates, from all around the world, who came for the “Inner Dimensions of Climate Change” conference last week. It will be the subject of my next Tales....

## Chom’s Green Garden Techniques here at S.D.S.

### Worm World

Without worms to digest the potentially harmful bacteria of all rotting organisms, disease would be rampant everywhere and probably make life on earth unsustainable for humans and other animals.

Worms take Nature’s “compost” (the leaves and flowers and grasses) as it

falls back to the earth, and transpose it into worm castings, or, (you could say), worm poop; This is a powerful growth stimulant which we then offer to each tree and bush, (about a double-handful each). It makes our gardens shine with vigor.



Here at S.D.S., we offer

### **Easy-living, Full Amenities Condo facilities**

Chom says, “When I started worm-farming, I had trouble, for a couple of years, even though I’d read all the books. The worms were depressed, so they wouldn’t eat, or poop, or move at all. Except when they tried to escape, every night. After a lot of experimentation, we discovered that they did not like the chemical composition of the cement blocks in their home.... And the food wasn’t balanced quite right.

\*\*Now we buy the appropriate species from the right sellers....

\*\*We don’t use concrete blocks that have chemicals which burn their bodies...Now they don’t want to escape anymore, especially the Thai worms. Sometimes the African ones do, though, the first few days.

\*\*Since the nuns go on alms walks (where one can not control the quality of the offerings) and we feed them some of those scraps, part of their food was



not organic and those chemicals were also harming the worms. Now, we hose down the scraps and soak them for a day or two first.

\*\* it takes 15 days to acculturate to their home. They eat dirt first, in order to break down/digest the compost ingredients. We usually spray enzyme material on the dirt in the beginning. [kind of like Alka-Seltzer, to relieve the initial stress.] They especially love the

mushroom fungus medium for breakfast, lunch or dinner!

\*\*too much protein might make them sick: milk products or bean mash.

\*\*We start with the right combination of fruit and veggie peels, and soil content. After awhile, they eat almost everything, once they're accommodated...even paper.

\*\*worms love moisture, especially the Thai worms.. we keep it about 70% gooey.

There are two African worm condos (the upper two left) and two Thai worm condos, and now an experimental new African condo, on the lower level..I want to see if they can live successfully without the soil amendment.

Professional worm industries tend to disturb the worms often, to harvest the castings, but we only harvest the casting material once a year. We have worms who have lived here very happily for over twenty years. The professionals start over every five years, with a new population.

Our elderly residents live lower down in the condo, on the "first floor."

When we want to move the casting/worm poop out , we put their favorite food in one corner of the condo living area... Everyone moves over there for feeding, and then we scoop out the rest of the uninhabited area, cover it with a layer of new dirt, and scatter food everywhere.

These residents are important members of the SDS team, and we appreciate that!

## Chom's Green Kingdom, Part II

### Water Filtration

How does one create a paradise in the middle of a gigantic city? It appears to be so spontaneous, but the solutions are the result of decades of hard work, love and experimentation:

For instance, the Bangkok city water that flows in the canals through S.D.S., was and is severely polluted with chemicals, and the water run-off from millions of local inhabitants.

Chom has spent many many years trying to unlock the code to balance the pH in this water, so it could be used on the gardens.

“In the beginning, people thought I was crazy,” he grinned.

He rapidly discovered that the use of sand filters, the usual method, was not nearly stringent enough. He went through a series of other attempts, like special algae to ingest the toxins.... again, not enough.

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Now, we have a three-part treatment:



**\*\*Worm pee!** The liquid that the residents of our Worm Condo release in their digestion process is piped directly into the water treatment reservoir. Pipes (near the first floor) simply slope downward, from each condominium. This dark liquid “worm pee” is a precious by-product: its intensely alkalizing and purifying liquid is a natural insecticide and bacterial repellent for the plants, as well as purifying the city canal water. So while we water the trees and bushes, we are also fortifying them.

There are 4,000 types of good/useful bacteria and fungi in the worm pee!

**\*\*all fruit parings are saved, soaked, and ultimately fermented in a dozen large vats nearby the condominiums and reservoir. This vinegar is also added to the reservoir, to further stabilize and cleanse the canal water. There are 500 types of “good/necessary” bacteria in the vinegar.**

**\*\*aeration, aeration and more aeration - we kept adding more and more aeration devices to keep the water moving... This has been tremendously important to our efforts, over the decades.**

“I borrowed several ideas from the king’s research in the north of Thailand, studying his books and movies,” Chom said.

**\*We now have hoses of water with vacuum valves attached, that naturally suck oxygen out of the air and add it to the water.**

\*we have a large air pump at the bottom, with eight outlets that create

fountains at the surface. This pushes the bacterial sediment from the bottom upwards, where the worm pee can sterilize it. And also, of course,



it oxygenates the water.

\* the king also discovered thirty years ago, after a huge flood which left bacterial standing water everywhere in Thailand that adding 25% clean water to the impure water had an amazing cleansing effect. And we are benefitting from that discovery here, by adding 10% clean water to the canal water.

This clean water is pumped into the soil at the bottom of the reservoir.

This bottom water is then pumped into the many waterfalls that drop down from the reservoir. They run over many large pebbles to further force their aeration process, and finally through the gridlock of pipes that supply our staff with the water everywhere in Sathien Dhamma Sathan.



Many dozens of nuns and retreatants and community staff lovingly and consciously water the plants a couple times a day. More recently, fine spray mists have been installed which gives us our omnipresent magical moss, with its emerald green enchantment.

So, if you're discouraged because you've failed and don't know what to do with your garden, friends, take a page from Chom's study book: he had the faith and patience to keep trying for years until he succeeded. He observed the Mother's rules and finally has made peace with the canal water. . The gardens look like spontaneous magic to uninitiated visitors. And to me, too.



