

Tales From Thailand, #6, 2018



Hello again, dear readers.

I have a tricky topic to entertain this time:

Saints.

They seem to come in all shapes and sizes. I probably miss quite a few of them, because of my busy, “windy” mind. But still, I can describe a few that I met last week, at the “Inner Dimensions of Climate Change” Global Youth Conference at S.D.S.

Forty young eco-activists came from all over Asia and the Pacific islands to support each other and examine the internal process of “cooling” our own minds, within the fiery blasts of environmental decline/disasters we face today.

Top left is Bob Maat. He has been walking in Cambodia for forty years, to restore sanity to the traumatized Cambodian survivors of U.S. bombings, and then the catastrophic “killing fields” of Pol Pot. He has, literally, followed in the footsteps of Maha Gosananda. Bob is light and easy, never promotes himself, has little to say, doesn’t do email. Yet when I asked I asked him, “How’s your mind?”, his simple response:

*Quiet. ***

The woman in red is Laila, from Palestine. Laila



doesn't see racial or caste distinctions: she is, literally, blind. We bonded from the minute we started talking. Laila has been a part of the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations for many decades, and travels the world to various hot-spots. She is a Trickster stereotype, with a very loud and wicked laugh that is a cross between a snort and a chortle. She pulled out her wooden recorder and started playing it in the UN General Assembly Hall (a very formal and patriarchal setting), to lighten things up.

Laila can penetrate and integrate her way into angry hearts, with her patience and/or bizarre behavior...She loves to hang out with street people, anywhere and hear their stories. Her heart/instincts seem to guide her every gesture. I may have to visit her in Palestine some day.

Zhilong, a young man from China, arrived several days before the conference, so Nawng Joy and I were blessed to spend a lot of extra time with him. A former Walmart executive (yes, he's been to Bentonville!), and California college graduate, he has now spent years riding his bicycle across the Third World, stopping at random houses at the end of the day to ask for shelter. He summed it up:



It really didn't matter how many doors I knocked on, because however many people answered, it was always an opportunity to love them, whatever they responded.

His favorite thing to do while at SDS was to go out on alms-walks at dawn every morning, with the nuns. We often went together.

Zhulong described his parents as ultra-busy corporate executives. He returned home this year for a visit, and started doing the dishes after their meal...very quietly. His parents were so touched by Zhulong's essence that they dropped out of corporate China, enrolled in a 10-day Vipassana course, and are now starting an alternative ecological community, in their middle age.

Zhulong concluded his story:

I never said a word about their lifestyle. I just washed the dishes.

Zhulong and I agreed that the young woman below, Su Ni, is perhaps a saint. I need to find a better word; I have no idea how the Catholic Church defines this word, besides:

An exceptional degree of holiness or likeness to God

Su Ni is thirteen years old now, and has been at S.D.S. for eleven months.

She was abandoned at birth by her mother, and raised by her grandmother, in a rural Thai village. Last year, the grandmother realized that their neighborhood was too dangerous for Su Ni to walk to school. A neighbor had heard of Maechee Sansanee..In desperation, they arrived at S.D.S., seeking refuge for Su Ni. The residing nuns told them that they didn't have accommodations for young novices. Su Ni and her grandma were leaving, feeling hopeless, and "happened" to run into MC Sansanee at the entrance. She asked who they were, heard the story, and immediately assured Su Ni that she could live here forever.



What do I mean by “saints”? It’s not that they are nicer or better or kinder on some spectral scale. It’s that Su Ni and the other three seem to have stepped outside of time altogether. When Su Ni stops to smile and say

Sawadhi kha, Pa Joy

there is another dimension added, where we have more than time. Her smile extends indefinitely. It sets different neurons ablaze, for me.

Am I saying something that can’t be told, friends?
Please forgive me, if so.

The conference delegates loved Sathien Dhammasathan!



My friend Nina and I planned an eco-tour for the group. Afterwards, the ISV kids (Nawng-Joy's group of volunteers-in-training) served herbal tea and offered everyone homemade eco-soaps with heart-shaped notes that said,

We want to be like you some day, and serve society and the planet. Thank you for teaching us.

We all practiced deep listening, and witnessed our ability or inability to climb out of desperately non-productive thought modes like anger, depression, anxiety and fear.

I got to share some of my favorite vehicles for finding “the re-set button” in our psyche: yoga, clapping games, song and dance



....and also I learned several of those from others, especially Chemaket, from Kenya and Rhiddi, from India.

Meanwhile, the ISV kids, our young group of Thai volunteers at S.D.S., is still quite fired up about supporting my albino children



from the little village sanctuary in Tanzania where I spent the winter three years ago. They've been testing cookie recipes, practicing concert programs, making all kinds of crafts and posters with my pictures of the Mary Mother of God Perpetual Help Center photos. Many of those who speak some English read all ten "Tales From Tanzania" to be better informed about the situation. I was quite surprised



to find that it was easily accessible on the internet, under Joy Fox and Tales....

Nawng Joy just informed me that the kids have now raised \$600., so far, and have a lot more events planned. That's a lot of money in Thailand, not to mention Tanzania!

And the world seems to be getting smaller and smaller, more linked into the one web.

Before I close this Tales, dear readers:

**** a bit more information about Bob Maat**



A former Jesuit priest, Bob came to Cambodia to work as a nurse in refugee camps four decades ago and has worked for peace in Cambodia ever since. He collaborated with Maha Ghosananda in organizing the first peace walk in May 1991, and has continued Ghosananda's work throughout the years by helping to plot the walk for each May. Mr. Maat heads the Coalition for Peace and Reconciliation (CPR), a non-profit local NGO, and receives small donations from generous individuals to conduct a series of active non-violent training of Cambodian youth by using the work and philosophy of the world famous peacemakers including Martin Luther King and Mahatma Gandhi.

And, I think I'll add another supplementary, optional piece of reading material....my observations and tips for being a volunteer in Thailand.

[Pa Joy's thoughts on being an International Volunteer in Thailand](#)

1. Don't wait to be asked, necessarily... If you feel out of place and everyone else is working, ask if you can join in. Pay attention to opportunities....to help.

2. Be prepared to feel **foolish**, dears. It's wonderful for your soul! You probably won't completely understand even the simplest task. This makes everyone feel wonderful, and gives them the opportunity to correct you. Folks then develop new appreciation for themselves and their work.

3. Falang/foreigners are a **comedy channel**! This REALLY works, especially in Thailand. You will probably say everything wrong, dress wrong, do almost everything wrong....

How wonderful! Learn to take yourself very lightly....like angels. If you are proud or have a big investment in your dignity, you will suffer a lot, unnecessarily. Cringe, if you must...and then laugh and start over.

4. There is immense and untapped beauty and happiness in joining the most diverse members of the community, in loosening up the caste, and gender divisions. Everyone learns, exponentially.

5. Be sure that your attire is minimally appropriate to the culture.

Be alert. Ask advice, if need be, though you may not always receive the truth. Thai are extremely polite, and not likely to criticize. But observe their eyes and their posture instead.

6. Practice pantomime...be ridiculous... use the ten words you know...this makes folks happy and they know that you care.

7. Play with the children, if you can. They will "get" you, and love you, and be a bridge to the community....



