



ASIA – SOUTH EAST

Courage to believe

D and Z, learning language and enhancing people's lives in South East Asia

Eve is a very poor wife and mother who lives in a house that to us looks like a good cubby house. We must bend down to enter through the doorway. She is ashamed as we sit down, and apologises that she can only offer her guests a glass of water. We went to pray for her, as she has suffered for two months from what we think may be gout. Her legs and feet were so swollen that she could only walk about 50 metres from her home. Some days the pain was so bad she could not leave her little house at all. Sue placed her hands on Eve's legs and we prayed in Jesus' name. Eve said she felt something like an electric current, and her husband watched on with interest.

The following day, apart from a little swelling in one foot, Eve felt fine. She was even able to walk her husband to work – about four kilometres each way. Although our beliefs don't quite fit with the teaching they have grown up with, they both acknowledge that God is with us. Eve has been invited to a cell group and is currently wrestling with what to do. We are praying that she will have the courage to go, and that Eve and her husband will both find healing for the soul as well as the body.





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Birthday surprise

Margaret, teaching English and enhancing people's lives in South East Asia

“My teaching colleague, Miss N, invited me to address some of our English students; I was to give tips on being a tour guide for foreigners in this city. The students came in one by one, but then left the room one by one!

“Miss N seemed quite angry with them, and went to fetch them back. In they came, carrying a huge birthday cake for me! My Aussie colleagues were also part of the celebration. There were delicious goodies, some singing and these kind words: ‘We respect you, Miss Margaret, and wanted to make this a big surprise for you.’

“In a culture where birthdays are not special occasions, this was a gesture that I will always treasure.”

Respecting others and gaining their respect is “first base” if we want people to hear what we have to say to them about Jesus.





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Housekeeping

Margaret, teaching English and enhancing people's lives in South East Asia

A young girl, nearly seventeen years old, helps me in my home twice a week. She cleans inside and keeps the yard immaculate. There is only a small amount of grass, and yesterday she used my shears to painstakingly cut it all! She did a wonderful job, and then said, "Miss, I'll take the shears home to sharpen them for you, and bring them back tomorrow."

Because her parents were poor, she did not attend school beyond primary level. As she works in my home earning money to help her family, I pray that she will meet Jesus and learn to know of his love for her and for her family.





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Kelly's life in south-east Asia – a typical day

Kelly, teaching the children of Global Interaction staff members

It is 4am and the sun is rising. Already people are going about their business and the bustle of the day has begun. I am still sleeping soundly. My day begins an hour and a half later than everyone else's with an alarm at 5:30am. Reluctantly I get up, shower, dress and get ready. I open my bedroom door to find a cup of tea, black with sugar, waiting for me. Everyone drinks their tea black with sugar here. I think the sugar is to disguise how bad the tea tastes without it, so I have adapted. My flat-mate is getting ready for work but she always has time to make me a cup of tea and sometimes breakfast as well.

Breakfast here is the same as any other meal of the day – a hot meal with rice in some form. I have adapted to that too. I often wonder whether I will be satisfied with cereal and toast for breakfast when I go back to Australia. I try to appreciate the few precious moments of tranquillity over my sweet tea and rice breakfast, but today I am running late so tranquillity will have to wait. I brush my teeth, grab my stuff and head out the door.

Outside the door, the full force of the day's humidity hits. It is only 7am but already it is warming up. I say good morning to my neighbour's chickens, busily eating the greenery in my garden, and close the gate. It is a two-minute stroll to transport. All my favourite kids are out playing in the street and greet me with "Hello Mrs". They are much less coy now, and know I am Mrs (technically Miss, but these kids are five-year-olds) rather than Mister.

When I get to the main road there are vehicles waiting. They are light blue vans with bench seats in the rear. Comfortably they seat eight people in the back, but you'd be surprised how many can fit. They run on a set route and no matter how far you go they cost 15 cents. The van sets out when it is, in the driver's opinion, "full". I get on and sit next to a window. Most locals don't open the windows, so if you want airflow you position yourself next to a window and make sure your body blocks others from closing it. The first leg of the trip takes anywhere from five to fifteen minutes, depending on how many times the driver spots people walking down a lane toward the main road; they may or may not want a lift, but he waits for them anyway. If the driver is super keen, he will precariously back down the lane-way. This is not the kind of drive you want when you are running late.

We arrive at the interchange and I am hustled by an escort across the street to a waiting vehicle. The drivers give these escorts a small cut of the profits for scouting passengers for them. If I am lucky I am one of the last passengers to get on, even if it means squashing between a man who has





just bought fish from the market and a lady nursing a toddler, because then the car heads off very soon. Today I am unlucky; there is only one passenger and he is smoking. This means that I will have to wait for at least seven more passengers before we leave. When I arrive at work I will reek of smoke. Eventually ten passengers are in the back of the car and we head off.

Ten minutes later I get out of the vehicle and walk to where my students live. The school day begins at 8am with one of three national anthems and a geography lesson. This is good for me, as I now know a whole lot more about countries I had never even heard of before I started working here. We then get into the nitty gritty of the day – maths, literacy, music, sport, art, etc.

I eat lunch with the family, prepared by their helper who is a great cook. When contrasted with the two-minute noodles I often eat if I have to cook, this is by far the healthiest meal I will eat on a typical day. Today we have chicken soup with rice, various vegies and chicken pieces – one of her best dishes.

Then it is back to school. By 3pm I have well and truly resolved not to have kids. It is easier, however, when you know you will leave them with their parents at the end of the day. Not that my students are naughty; they just demand a lot of attention. Being boys, they become increasingly smelly each time they go out for a break. I have had to introduce a “wash your face and hands” rule when they come back inside; this is particularly necessary before story time. After school I prepare for the next day before heading for home.

Most days I am home by 4:30pm, which gives me just enough time to have a shower, sit in front of the fan drinking tea for a bit, and then get ready for the night’s activities. Tonight some friends and I are heading for the harbour. The sun sets at around 6pm and the outside lights come on in every house in the street. My friends arrive by 7pm and we walk to the harbour where there are many food stalls. I would have no idea which one to pick, which is why I only go with friends. If we want flattened fried bananas in palm sugar syrup (I never want that) we go to one place, but if we want fried rice we go to a different place. Tonight I win and we go to the fried rice place.

We finish our meal and dinner conversation, and head back to my place. I say goodbye to my friends, change into my PJs and settle onto my bed with my flat-mate for a good long chat. Despite the fact that I know I will be exhausted tomorrow, this is my favourite part of the day, just talking with my friend. At midnight she heads off to bed and I do too.

As I fall asleep I thank God for another day in this place. I love every “hello mister”, every cup of sweet tea, every smiling kid in my street, every plate of fried rice, every midnight chat, every unpredictable ride to work, every friend I have been blessed with, and every day I am allowed to live here. I can’t wait to see what tomorrow holds.





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My brush with the police

Allan and Meryll, enhancing people's lives in South East Asia

Until about six years ago, the fourth arm of the defence forces in our south-east Asian country was the police force. They are now independent of the armed services, but strong bonds remain. Two weeks ago, a close friend (a gifted evangelist) called in at our house. He is a serving soldier and was wearing his uniform, complete with a modest, but impressive, set of service decorations. As he was leaving, I asked if he would mind giving me a lift downtown on the back of his motor bike. Being the law-abiding soul that I am, I grabbed a bike helmet. Knowing that I would have to carry this home on public transport later, he said I might as well leave it behind, which I did.

We headed off together but were only a few minutes into our journey when my friend saw a police blitz in the distance. I always try to avoid the police in our country because locals dislike them for very effectively exploiting their position of power. I was horrified by our predicament. My friend pulled off the road and told me to meet him up ahead.

In our city, we regularly have daytime police road blitzes involving several dozen traffic police. Their purpose is to catch, in a large but effective dragnet, any drivers and motorcyclists who have incomplete paperwork or who are committing other violations. Riding a motorbike without a helmet is one of the most glaring and common violations (though even a mixing bowl on your head would suffice.)

So I headed off, jogging towards the police, hoping that none of them saw me get off the bike. I noticed that my friend had slowed down somewhat. I took a shortcut as he turned a corner. Having covered about 140 metres I was feeling some relief, mixed with the fatigue of someone approaching 50. To my considerable consternation, my friend none too subtly indicated that there were more police further up the road. I start running again. After another 80 metres, just out of the range of the police, I reached my friend and got back on his bike.

The whole thing was a laughable charade. The police must have known what was happening because a number of them smiled at my friend. But they didn't pull him over or fine me because he was in full military uniform.

