



## ASIA SOUTH – THAILAND

### Meet my neighbours

*Lyndal, preventative education about HIV/AIDS, and care of those affected by AIDS in Thailand*

Tdaa Phaath (Grandfather Phaath) and Yaay Theap (Grandmother Theap) are my next door neighbours. They have lived in this area for a long time, and seem to have relatives all over the place! They live in an extended family compound, with a son and daughter and their respective families.

Phaath rides his *samlor*, a bicycle-powered transport, to take people to the local market, or provide a courier service in our neighbourhood. He is also a volunteer community guard for funerals, celebrations or functions in our village area or at the local temple. He also likes to fish in the river, and especially enjoys the wet season when the canal at the back of our houses becomes an overflow river and the fish come to him!

Grandmother Theap usually spends her time preparing food and carrying out household chores like washing clothes, chatting with neighbours or going to the local temple.

Phaath and Theap are Buddhists. For them, their religion is their way of life. They don't see Buddhism so much as a religion, or what they do, but as who they are. They may not have a lot of money or space, but their simple spirit house in their small yard is treated with respect and is a part of their life. They value extended family relationships, attend functions at our local temple, take part in all the community activities, and participate in Thai celebrations such as *Songkran* and *Loy Krathong* and the King's special celebrations.

Please pray for Grandfather Phaath and Grandmother Theap, and the many millions of Thai Buddhists like them. Pray that we will have the wisdom to know how to share with them the love of a Creator God who wants to be involved in their lives, and who cherishes them for who they are – people made in his own image.





## ASIA SOUTH – THAILAND

### Teaching Thanee – and others

*Jen, a primary teacher, has set up school for three of the children of Global Interaction team members in Thailand – Thanee, Brianna and Yindii. Vicki tells the story.*

When Jen heard about Gi6pro (Generation Isaiah 6 Professionals) in 2005, she thought it was great for young people to have an opportunity to participate in mission at this level. She wasn't thinking of personally doing it herself at that time, but the seed had been planted in her heart!

In 2004 she had participated in the GDT (Global Discipleship Training) course in Townsville and spent two months in Thailand working with Jan and Larry. We met Jen during this time and noticed how naturally she seemed to fit into life in rural Thailand – also the rapport she had with Thanee, our son.

The Gi6pro seed began to germinate when Jen was back in Melbourne, gearing up to start her teaching degree. When Global Interaction advertised for a teacher to do home schooling in Thailand, Jen was keen to find out who needed a teacher – “Is it Thanee?” she asked. Susan Campbell gave her the answer, -“Yes, it's Thanee!”

The news reached Thailand that Jen had applied for the job – and we were delighted!

Check out the web sites for Gi6Pro and GDT – [www.gi6pro.net.au](http://www.gi6pro.net.au) and [www.gdt.net.au](http://www.gdt.net.au)





## ASIA SOUTH – THAILAND

### Home schooling

*Jen, a primary teacher, has set up school for three of the children of Global Interaction team members in Thailand – Thanee, Brianna and Yindii. Vicki writes about the community's reaction.*

Home schooling is a new concept for people in our area. When we took Thanee and Brianna out of the local public school and talked about distance education there was an “air of disapproval” and many questions were asked.

Thai people love children and are keen for them to get a good education. Vicki decided to address their queries by taking a group of concerned women to visit the schoolroom. The sight of eight women descending on the schoolroom sent Jen's head into a spin. “How do I hold the class together and, at the same time, give the impression that something meaningful is happening?”

The women saw three pupils sitting at real desks, in what looked like a real classroom. They interacted with them, asked questions, looked at their work, and saw their response to the *khruu* (teacher). We organised a short tour of the school and explained the need for each child to be prepared for future study in an English-based curriculum.

The eight women left with smiles on their faces – they had seen the schoolroom and *Khruu* Jen, and didn't have any more questions!





## ASIA SOUTH – THAILAND

### **Meet Som, my local hairdresser**

*Lyndal, preventative education about HIV/AIDS, and care of those affected by AIDS in Thailand*

For several years, my daughter Lukgade and I have been having our hair cut by the local hairdresser, just near our house. The salon is owned and run by Som, who also employs two other girls full time. Each time we visit, we have interesting conversations – about the weather, local events, the work I do here and the people it helps. Som often asks what Christians think about a certain topic, or how it is different from what Thai Buddhists believe. She is always interested in how Lukgade is going, and arranges time for her daughters to have English conversation with her.

Recently, Som had an accident on her motorbike. She was in the Christian hospital for a couple of weeks, and then spent a few more weeks recuperating at home, not able to work. I visited her a few times, and gave her some books to read while she was resting. During one visit, Som said, “I don’t think I want to be a Buddhist anymore.” I asked her why and she gave varying reasons, but mainly that Buddhism was not able to supply her with the fulfilment she wanted out of life.

So now, Som and I spend time chatting about these things when we get the chance. She is working through many issues, and is actively questioning how all these things fit together in her life. She is also sharing her thoughts with the two girls she employs. Som is on a journey, and I am privileged to be a small part of the process. Please pray that I will have wisdom when speaking with her, and that Som’s journey will lead her and others closer towards a vibrant relationship with the Creator God.





## ASIA SOUTH – THAILAND

### Going to the dogs for a lesson

*Paul and Cathy, developing ways of communicating the message of hope to ethnic Thai people*

This week I had the unfortunate experience of watching a dog die in front of my home. It was a long, miserable death with much suffering involved. I asked my house helper and some neighbours what we could do to help the dog. No, we don't know the dog or the owner. No, there is no animal organisation that we can call for help. No, don't try and give it food or water – it might bite you and you could catch rabies. No, we can't help it to die – we are Buddhists. No, it's not your responsibility – just ignore it. These were just some of the responses I received.

For hours I watched neighbours and traffic pass by the suffering animal, seemingly unaffected. I could not help thinking of the story of the Good Samaritan. I was tormented by the animal's plight and my own inability (or unwillingness) to get involved. I was just as bad as the priest and the Levite who passed by the injured man on the other side.

I am not an animal lover, in fact quite the opposite. You may therefore understand my amazement at my own reaction of tears when the inevitable death of the dog took place. The dog's life had come to an end, but it was just the beginning of my need to ask myself some uncomfortable questions.

It was Jesus' love and compassion for the lost which were the driving force in his ministry. I would like to think that it is the driving force behind my own ministry. Jesus wept for the lost. When was the last time that I wept for the lost? Why can I cry for a dog, but not for people dying in their sins all around me? Is it only the physical experience of death that causes me to cry?

“Lord Jesus, move me. Move my emotions and my actions with the compassion of Christ. Help me to reach out to the lost, the undesirable and the suffering whom you have placed on my front door step – those who are dying a long, slow, miserable death because of sin. Please take away my fears and excuses for not being involved, and help me to be as Jesus was to the world, so that the lost may be found. In Jesus' name. Amen.”





## ASIA SOUTH – THAILAND

### Lights on the water

*Lyndal, preventative education about HIV/AIDS, and care of those affected by AIDS in Thailand*

On the full moon of the twelfth month of the Thai calendar (usually in November), *Loy Gratong* is celebrated. “*Loy*” means “to float” and the “*Gratong*” is a float traditionally made from cut banana stalks and decorated with flowers, joss sticks and a candle.

This traditional Thai event sees thousands of Thais head to bodies of water – rivers, canals, lakes, etc, to place their decorated *gratong* on the water, after offering up a “prayer” asking for forgiveness for having mistreated the natural water sources. Some people ask for forgiveness for other things as well, while some ask for a blessing too. Some place tokens, such as locks of hair, coins, or other sentimental items on their *gratong* also. If the *gratong* floats away with its candle shining brightly, a sense of being “forgiven” occurs. If the *gratong* sinks, then forgiveness is not assured, and some will begin the process all over again.

Apart from floating *gratongs*, a “*Khom Loy*” or “*Khom Fai*” is also released. The Thais use *Khom Loys* for various celebrations and ceremonies, symbolic of the releasing or floating away of bad things such as sickness, oppression etc, or to release the spirits of the deceased. They can also be used in celebrations for the sending of a blessing as well as giving thanks to a higher power.

*Khom Loy* is used during the day, trapping hot air over a fire, and the *Khom Fai* is used at night when the fire is attached to the base of the *khom*. The releasing of the *khom fai* really is a spectacular sight when done en masse. (Unfortunately, they all have to return to earth somewhere.)

In addition to all the lights and sounds happening near waterways, most towns or communities hold a parade, with lit floats and traditional dress and music. In the bigger towns, it really is quite an elaborate affair. As part of Global Interaction’s work here in Thailand, our team members are looking for ways to help the Thais with their desire for forgiveness and need for spiritual wellbeing, while wanting to help them retain their uniqueness as Thais. Please pray for wisdom, in all things and for God’s blessing to fall on Thailand.





## ASIA SOUTH – THAILAND

### **To be a mother in Thailand**

*Cathy, developing ways of communicating the message of hope to ethnic Thai people.*

To be a mother in Thailand is like being a mother anywhere else in the world – wonderful, rewarding, fulfilling, demanding, challenging and heartbreaking all at the same time.

It is frustrating to be a mother in Thailand where you can't provide a safe physical environment for your children. There are electrical lines everywhere, crazy traffic, non-existent footpaths and there is no such thing as occupational health and safety. Anything goes, anything can and does happen.

It is painful to be a mother in Thailand when your children are at the receiving end of racial discrimination. It hurts. It hurts a lot.

There is some loss associated with being a mother in Thailand. In an attempt to identify more closely with the Thai people whom we have come to serve, we must forego some of the autonomy that we take for granted as Australian parents. In so doing we make room for the Thai community to have input into the raising of our children. This can be difficult, especially when you believe your ways are better. Are they better or just different?

It is difficult to be a mother in Thailand, where one has no family or support networks to lean on. When Dad or the kids get sick, there is always Mum to take care of them. When you are a mother in Thailand, who will take care of you when you get sick or simply need a mental health day?

It is difficult to be a mother of children who must move frequently between Australia and Thailand. Such a mother must always be a step ahead of her children, anticipating, addressing and hopefully dealing with problems before they arise. This is the real “cost” for me as a missionary mother – watching my children struggle in moving between countries, cultures, languages and friends. It's tough!

It's wonderful to be a mother in Thailand, because my children are growing up as part of a real community. Neighbours talk, play and assist one another in all things. It is a wonderful blessing to be fully engaged in the lives of your neighbours.

It is wonderful to be a mother in Thailand, because my children have advantages that other children do not: travel, a second language and culture,





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friends from across the world, and above all, exposure to God's almighty, wondrous, creative work in another culture and their family's own role in that.

It is wonderful to be a mother in Thailand, because Thailand is where God wants me to be. Nothing compares to the deep satisfaction that I have in serving God here. I am happy and fulfilled here, and therefore my children are too. Thailand – there is no place I'd rather be a mother.





## ASIA SOUTH – THAILAND

### Special days

*Lynda, preventative education about HIV/AIDS, and care of those affected by AIDS in Thailand*

August 12th is Mother's Day here in Thailand, as it is the Queen of Thailand's birthday. Children in schools take part in special presentations of songs to show respect for the Queen, and also in ceremonies to honour their own mothers.

Children will give a garland of flowers or some other token to their mother, after greeting them, two hands together in typical Thai style, and community celebrations are held to show respect to the Queen.

Father's Day is held in December, on the King's Birthday. As with most Thai birthdays, the person having the birthday is the one who does good things for others, without the "expecting to receive" that goes along with birthday celebrations in the west. I think there is something in this that we can learn from our Thai neighbours!





## ASIA SOUTH – THAILAND

### **A dream fulfilled**

*John and Vicki, developing ways of communicating the message of hope to ethnic Thai people*

One day, John was teaching a small group of new believers from the story of Jesus turning the water into wine at the wedding of Cana. He pointed out that the disciples believed in Jesus after seeing the miracle.

Then John asked the question, “When did you start to believe in Jesus?” John writes, “It was good to listen to all their responses, especially Mae’s. She said it was the fulfilment of a dream she’d had 30 years earlier, and then hearing the story from John and Vicki recently, that convinced her that Jesus Christ really is the Lord of all.





## ASIA SOUTH – THAILAND

### **Joys of the wet season**

*Lyndal, preventative education about HIV/AIDS, and care of those affected by AIDS in Thailand*

The wet seasons each year tend to be changing, with blame being placed on anything from deforestation, urban sprawl, bad karma, global warming, or the Prime Minister!

Parts of Nan province, where Larry and Jan live, have just had the worst flooding in 300 years. Here in Chiang Rai we've been pretty lucky this year so far, with just isolated flash flooding around town, and not too much flooding in the rural areas. But the season is not over yet!

Usually along with the rain come the wet season bugs, such as dengue fever, typhoid, and numerous other stomach bugs and fevers. It is also a time when the farmers get concerned as to whether they'll have a harvest in November, as one bad round of rain or flooding can wipe out their whole year's income and food source. Please pray for protection from wet season "nasties", and for the farmers who rely on the rain, but in the right amounts and in the right places.





## ASIA SOUTH – THAILAND

### **New life; new direction**

*John and Vicki, developing ways of communicating the message of hope to ethnic Thai people*

It is encouraging to see the handful of new believers in our area growing in their faith in Jesus. Kun chuckles as he looks back on what his life once was and what it has now become. "If you had told me a year ago how my life would change, I wouldn't have believed you!"

We thank God for the spiritual understanding the Holy Spirit has given them and that others in the community have seen the change and want to know more.

We joined the new believers for a special ceremony at the start of the New Year and were surprised, even delighted, to see it move in a direction we had neither planned nor expected, with the new believers spontaneously blessing each other in northern Thai style.

What a delight, to see these people being empowered to develop their own distinctive ways of following Jesus.





## ASIA SOUTH – THAILAND

### Helping others to help themselves

*Lyndal, preventative education about HIV/AIDS, and care of those affected by AIDS in Thailand*

Orphaned children or children in difficult situations are introduced to us by school staff who know their circumstances. The staff of the Chiang Rai Christian Service Centre (CRCSC, which was established by Lyndal) visit these children and their families in the local community, and work with them to see how we can best help to meet their needs. We firmly believe that the best place for these orphans to grow up is in a family, in a local community, and attending school with friends. Most extended families can take in orphaned relatives, as cultural and community situations are geared towards the extended family. What is difficult for relatives is finding the extra cash needed to help offset some of the needs of these children, the main one being school expenses.

After meeting with these families and discussing their needs, sometimes it is appropriate to help them with an income-generating project. These projects are aimed at being “do-able”, sustainable, and “sell-able” in their local community. The idea of the projects is not to make these families rich, but to help them earn a little extra income to meet some of their extra expenses, and the schooling expenses of the children. The project may also help them supplement their dietary needs.

The primary care-givers work with CRCSC staff to determine a project that is most suitable for them, and some basic book-keeping, budgeting and financial skills are given. The project is followed up by CRCSC staff on a regular basis, and the children are encouraged to become involved as well, eventually taking major responsibility for the project when old enough.

Chickens were a popular project until bird flu hit Thailand, so now most animal projects involve pigs and fish. Other projects such as candle-making, vegetable gardens, making thatching panels, or small micro-enterprises can also be done. Our goal is to help orphaned children become more self-sufficient, functioning as productive and integrated members of their own community rather than being removed from it.





## ASIA SOUTH – THAILAND

### Ready to listen

*Anna, learning the Thai language and building friendships*

One day, my friend Pat was very upset after work. She rang me and said that one customer had refused to allow her to follow up on a project because of her poor English. She has found that on many occasions she has the ability and knowledge to do the work at hand, but her boss doesn't understand her English, and this makes it very difficult for her. She felt that the customer had undermined her value and identity, and she struggled with the associated feelings that raised in her.

Having listened to her story, I shared with her that in the past my emotions were also easily affected by the comments of others, but not now. Jesus has already given me value and identity. Pat was attracted by what I said and wanted to hear more.

Previous to this, Pat had said that she was very busy finishing her graduate paper and would not be able to see me for a few weeks. After our conversation, she asked me out for dinner a few days later. Although she had to cancel the dinner appointment because she was unwell, I felt that she is getting more and more open to Jesus. Please continue to pray for her salvation.





## ASIA SOUTH – THAILAND

### **The King's mother**

*Lyndal, preventative education about HIV/AIDS, and care of those affected by AIDS in Thailand*

July 18th was the 11th memorial year of the death of the King of Thailand's mother, the Som Det Ya. She lived most to the later years of her life up here in Chiang Rai Province on Doi Tung mountain, and did many wonderful development projects for the hilltribes in the area. All the Thais in Chiang Rai had great respect for her, and considered it a great honour to have her living here in the north.

To celebrate her life and achievements, especially this year as it is the 60th Coronation Year celebration of the King, as the longest current reigning monarch in the world, there were activities around town. Students and government officials did processions to take a statue of her to Mae Fah Luang University (her name sake university here), and there were posters of her everywhere. She is remembered as the much loved mother of the benevolent King of Thailand.





## ASIA SOUTH – THAILAND

### **No extra merit needed**

*John and Vicki, developing ways of communicating the message of hope to ethnic Thai people*

Our neighbours love to “*tam boon*” (make merit). They go to temples, give food to monks, and do voluntary good works. They believe that the accumulated merit secures future wellbeing and happiness. Suitable merit making activities include giving candles (promotes enlightenment), medicine (health), food (provision), flowers (beauty) and money (wealth). They also believe that surplus merit can be transferred to the king, family members, and others in need. It’s not actually something which Buddhism teaches – but they believe it nonetheless!

The concept of making merit is so ingrained in Thai thinking that when we tell the new believers that Christ saves fully and completely – forgiving all our sins and giving us new lives – it is too wonderful for them to believe! They are so used to making merit that it’s hard for them to receive the gift of God. The new believers often talk about how their lives have changed since meeting Jesus, but they also seem to feel a need to be proactive in earning further blessings and eternal life.

Long started believing in Jesus over a year ago, and has since soaked up Bible stories and grown in his understanding of the Gospel. Recently in our Saturday meeting he asked a question, “If we don’t continue to make merit, can we still hope to go to heaven?” We pray that their eyes will be opened to the wonderful gift of God.





## ASIA SOUTH – THAILAND

### **Buddhist lent**

*Lyndal, preventative education about HIV/AIDS, and care of those affected by AIDS in Thailand*

Buddhist Lent or “Khao Phansa” is the tradition of the annual three month Rains Retreat that dates back to ancient India when holy men spent three months of the annual rainy season in permanent dwellings. They avoided unnecessary travel so as not to tread on new crops, or other small creatures out during the rains. The Buddha decreed that his followers should do the same.

Buddhist monks who have been travelling take up shelter in one place and teach the young boys wanting to be ordained, and preach to lay followers. Lay followers are meant to give up “bad actions” during lent, and sit and listen to sermons and meditate in temples.

The beginning of Lent is celebrated with the presentation of candles to monks. Candle processions are held by schools, government offices and private organizations to take candles and offerings to temples

As you can tell, Thais LOVE celebrations and processions, and no event is too small to warrant a colourful display of respect, culture or religion.





## ASIA SOUTH – THAILAND

### **A modern day Thai miracle**

*Lee and Lyn, handicrafts programs in Thailand*

Bor was an only child. She never met her father and when she was still little, her mother remarried. When Bor was 17, she married a factory worker and had two children. Bor's husband died, and Bor was unaware that he had been HIV positive. With her mother and stepfather, Bor moved to another province, leaving her children in Chiang Mai with their other grandmother.

Several years later she became very ill, and tests revealed that she was HIV positive. But only Bor's mother was told the bad news, while Bor herself remained unaware. Her stepfather took good care of her until he and Bor's mother were divorced. At that point Bor's mother told her that she was HIV positive and the two of them returned to Chiang Mai. While attending an HIV clinic there, Bor met and married one of the workers at the clinic, a man who was also HIV positive.

A friend invited Bor to join an AIDS ministry. At that time she was very ill and in need of an income for her support and to pay for her HIV medication. She was introduced to Baan Handicrafts, and met Global Interaction workers, Lyn and Lee, who had established the program. Bor began training and now works full-time with Baan Handicrafts.

Bor heard about Jesus for the first time and she vowed that if she were to get better, she would believe in him. Soon her health began to improve and she has now become a Christian. Lee and Lyn see her faith growing daily as she remains fairly healthy and continues working. She is a real encouragement to others, telling them all that Jesus is the answer!





## ASIA SOUTH – THAILAND

### Thai funerals

*Muana and Villy, developing ways of communicating the message of hope to ethnic Thai people*

“Some people from our village went to attend a Christian funeral in a neighbouring district. They seemed surprised and disappointed at the way it was conducted, compared with their own grand funeral celebrations following Buddhist tradition.”

Christian groups in Thailand often follow the western tradition of throwing handfuls of dirt into the grave. This confuses Buddhist attendees, who think that Christians must have to eat dirt in the after-life.

Buddhists have a special occasion each year when they take food to the temple for the deceased people in their family. They believe that Christians fail to take care of their loved ones who have passed away. They do not understand our belief of life in heaven with Jesus.

However, recently, one new member of our fellowship said to her niece, “Come along with me. The teachings are very good and they are useful.” Both have been attending worship and Bible studies for two months.

One of the aims of Global Interaction teams in Thailand, as in other parts of the world, is to avoid transferring to new believers any practices that belong to a culture which is different to that of the hearers. We see from this incident the confusion such transference brings. Rather, we want to see Thai believers expressing their faith in truly Thai forms.





## ASIA SOUTH – THAILAND

### Eavesdropping

*Muana and Villy, developing ways of communicating the message of hope to ethnic Thai people*

Villy, who works with Global Interaction, held an interesting conversation with a monk friend from the local temple. He often visited Muana and Villy, and on this occasion he came to bring a Christmas gift.

Monk: Have you ever offered alms to a monk?

Villy: No.

Monk: Would you ever offer?

Villy: Maybe I would, if I knew the monk. I would offer you food if you came past our house. That is because I know you and consider you as a friend and respect you for who you are, and not because I believe in Buddhism.

Monk: Yes, I do agree with you. It is very good of you that you have this attitude. We don't have to believe in the same religion but we can still be friends and respect each other's faith. After all, both Jesus and Buddha taught good things.

Villy: That is true. My husband and I respect your religion and we do want to show our love by being friends with you and cooperating wherever possible.

Villy has learned by experience that amazing transformation can result from conversations such as this!





## ASIA SOUTH – THAILAND

### **More eavesdropping**

*Muana and Villy, developing ways of communicating the message of hope to ethnic Thai people*

This conversation took place during a Bible studies while the group, including Muana and Villy who work with Global Interaction, were talking about sin.

Muana and Villy: Do you think babies are sinners?

Long, a Thai believer: Not until they start crawling.

Muana and Villy: Why do you think so?

Long: They begin to kill ants and other insects as they start to crawl.

Sin to a Thai Buddhist is all about **killing** – physical actions of the hands or the body, rather than sins of the heart. Jesus taught that whoever hated in his heart was guilty of murder.

Muana and Villy, along with other members of the Global Interaction team in Thailand, are exploring and experimenting with ways of communicating the heart of the gospel with people whose understanding of life is vastly different to their own.





## ASIA SOUTH – THAILAND

### How God gives

*Muana and Villy, developing ways of communicating the message of hope to ethnic Thai people*

As Villy was on her way to the market, her two young children, Yindii and Zoe, asked for some sweet corn. Villy writes, “I happily agreed to buy some for them as it was corn season. Unfortunately, there was no corn that day. The girls were so upset and cried so much that for a brief moment I felt that I had failed them as a mother by not being able to provide for them what they really missed. Anyway, that was just for a short while and soon everything was back to normal.

“However, that evening a teacher dropped by with two bags of corn, and also sent another bag later. As I stood there amazed at the corn we had received, God whispered in my heart, “What made you think that I could not provide?” I was so touched. When God gives, he gives you more than you ask for. We ended up sharing the corn with three of our neighbours who happened to be dining with us that night.”

