

Sticky Rice



Halloween 2017

Sticky Rice
The Peace Corps Thailand newsletter
Halloween 2011

Introduction

by Jeff Jackson

Most of us haven't checked under our beds for monsters since we were children. However, in the last of scorpions, snakes and other things we'd rather not have in our homes, we may find ourselves doing it again. Life in Thailand can be scary – not *Saw* or *Rosemary's Baby* scary, but it's own kind of scary.

If you'd like to contribute to the next issue of *Sticky Rice* please send submissions to stickyrice.newsletter@gmail.com.

In this Halloween edition of *Sticky Rice* we did our best to throw some scary at you as well as the usual items that have nothing to do with Halloween or scary. We hope you enjoy it.

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Editor's Note

Halloween, Thai style

A few photos of Halloween celebrations with PCVs around Thailand.





Sticky Rice Halloween 2011

Demands by Spider Frost

“That’s a black and yellow snake,” Spider Frost said, turning to watch the thing slither across the driveway of his house. “In the daytime.”

“That’s so,” said Tammy Toom, with the equanimity of a guest at a snake-infested BBQ. She sat back, and looked concerned.

“Unlucky?” said Spider, sipping at his beer. “Almost everything is, I’ve found.”

Tammy flipped the sizzling chicken steak. “Almost finished.”

“Don’t evade. You know how I hate evasions.”

“You’ll be visited by a ghost.”

“Oh, is that all? I like ghosts.”

“Not this ghost. This ghost will make...” she trailed off, then said something in Thai. “What’s the word?”

“Demand,” said Spider, popping open another beer. “Demands?”

“Yes.”

“Oh,” said Spider. “What should I do?”

“Have some food.”

###

“Ghosts,” nodded Oi. “They can be tricky.” The forest monk had been a successful Bangkok businessman before he’d left it all for the run-down temple. Tammy Toom nodded in agreement. Spider just looked morose. There was a long pause, birds whistling through the forest.

“I’m morose,” Spider said, breaking the silence.

“I’m sure,” said Oi, nodding. Sagely. Spider glared at him. Oi remained sage.

“What should he do?” asked Tammy, interceding.

“Can he meet the ghost’s demands?”

“I don’t know the ghost’s demands,” said Spider.

“That could present a problem,” said Oi.

“Well, you’ve been a lot of help.”

“Yes,” said Oi.

###

Spider Frost sat up on the balcony that night, his annoying clock ticking in the background, ice crackling in the glass of the jack and coke he'd made for himself. He cradled the bottle of Jack Daniel's, which he'd acquired at considerable expense and set aside for just such an occasion as this, an occasion where he had to not think on deep questions of life goals and moral philosophy. A light rain began to fall, and Spider drained his glass and built another. Then he set the bottle aside. "My last night on Earth," he sighed, clearly farther along than he would have admitted.

"BoooOOoo," a disembodied voice chanted from the darkness. "ooo," it finished.

"Who's there?" said Spider, taking another sip of his drink and nodding. Sagely.

"I'm heeere to maaake deMANDS," continued the ghost, waving her arms about her head.

"What do you want, Tammy?"

"Can...can I have some Coke?"

"Sure," said Spider. "Come in out of the rain."



I Ain't Scared of Nothin'!

by Denise Silfee

You live in Thailand, for which you can rejoice! You eat amazing food all day, every day! You never have to wear a jacket! You, my good friend, are a celebrity—everyone knows *your* name! You can also count on leaving here a better person. Sure I mean that in the “You spent two years volunteering your skills and passions abroad, good for you” kind of way, but also in the way that just says, “Dude, I ain't scared of nothin'!”

You will become comfortable living with wildlife. Ok, so you won't be the Grizzly Man over here, but when it comes to small mammals, reptiles, amphibians and creatures of a segmented joint type of nature, you will be king. Rats, cats, geckos, frogs, scorpions, cockroaches, centipedes, millipedes, spiders bigger than your hand—you will be able to commune with them in peace. You will now know how to hide your tomatoes from the nightly marauding rat populations that inhabit your walls, and you will never turn your back on a pile of freshly peeled shrimp when there is the possibility of a gang of feral cats hiding out in your yard, watching your every move. And as long as the spiders and scorpions and centipedes adhere to the boundary laws you have laid down, you can coexist in peace. And if they can't, you aren't afraid to annihilate them.

When you leave Thailand, you will have the confidence to use any public restroom anywhere. The infamous truck stop bathroom? No sweat. The port-a-potty that has been sitting in an open field for 14 hours at an overcrowded event in the heat of summer? Got it. After you've stared down the barrel of the squat toilet, covered in water or... worse... with herds of mosquitoes making themselves at home on your rump, no toilet paper in sight, the only water in the bucket in the corner a disconcerting shade of brown, yeah, that's right—after that you are a public bathroom warrior. You don't even have to use one of those sissy toilet seat covers. You are a balancing wonder of nature, able to do business anywhere, anytime. (But preferably still not in public...)

You will be comfortable riding into battle every morning and every afternoon. Maybe you have weapons now; maybe you have developed a knack for super speed. Either way, street dogs are no longer cause for a quicker heart beat. Unless that's the adrenaline of excitement and challenge you now have. You now know which yards and corners and hammock stations house your canine friends and foes and they know that you are serious with that dog beating stick. Sure they may show you their teeth and give a little growl, but they have tried to catch you before and lost so now they eye you as a worthy opponent and you have the guts to show your teeth right back.



When you wake from your nap to see your bus hurtling into on-coming traffic on a two-lane major highway, swerving across the dotted lines and narrowly missing that truck that pulled out in front of you without even a second glance, you will simply yawn and resume your restful state. It is safe to say that you will have learned the art of letting go, because honestly, what else are you going to do? Maybe you once tried to tap that nice bus driver on the shoulder to say, “Excuse me sir,

I think that tanker truck up ahead is not planning to slow down around this curve you are trying to pass that bicyclist on,” but you’ve since learned that you, in fact, do not understand the laws of the road. Maybe that is because there are none, but you have become one with your fate and have decided you might as well rest up for your arrival at some faraway and exotic destination. Cheers to you.

You will never fear social awkwardness again. Remember when you were that weird guy in the corner at a party, eating Bugles from your fingers one by one like you were eating your own claws, no one within 10 feet of you even giving you a second glance? You might go home and still be that guy, but you won’t care anymore. The fear of social awkwardness will be long gone for you, my friend, after you spend your days being pointed out, shouted out, made fun of for what you eat or how you eat it, being poked and prodded and petted and laughed at for things you can’t distinguish. You will now be able to stride confidently into any conversation and ask whether the conversers have eaten their rice yet or not, or share your latest intestinal troubles without breaking into a sweat. You can stand around smiling goofily at other people for hours on end without anyone saying a thing and you will feel right at home. So the next time you ask a woman if she’s pregnant and she says no, remember, her anger just goes to show what you’ve gained and what she’s jealous of: the ability to never feel awkward again.

Due to Flooding: A Light-Hearted Adventure

by Kari Greenswag

Alas, instead of those staff interviews I know you all love, you’re going to have to read this article as to why this issue doesn’t have one.

It started a month ago, trying to find a time to interview Khun Patcharapan and Khun Chadchaya and working around their busy schedules. Happily, we found a time! October 13th, a Thursday, at 1pm. I was excited, and along with Denise we were going to have an enjoyable interview time all around. I was even going to pick up a bagel sandwich for lunch.

I was fairly confident that I could make the interview time, seeing as even on some of the worst days I can get into Bangkok and to the office within three hours of leaving my site. Further, I had recently returned from a bit of travel and the roads as of that Sunday had

been clear of water and good for driving. I could not have been more wrong.

It all started to go sideways when Denise texted me that her van out of site had been canceled because of the flooding. I remained undaunted because I was much closer than Denise, and I could wait it out. I had been here for over a year, and while my patience may not be Zen-like, it at least has improved somewhat. I started to realize that I was horribly wrong when I saw that the other side of the road was completely under water, save for one lane. Then traffic on my side of the highway came to a complete stop as we encountered the mother of all traffic jams.

After going perhaps three kilometers in an hour (I’m fairly certain of this being accurate and not hyperbole at all), I decided to get off at a place called Wang Noi. People who travel

out of Issan, the north and some parts of central might recognize it. It's a major amphur about 65 kilometers north of Bangkok, and only 40 kilometers south of my bus stop. I didn't think it would be so bad, only 40 kilometers to get back home and get some bananas from the stand next to my office.

It was more difficult than I realized. First I got off the bus and went over the foot bridge to the other side of the highway where I knew the local bus stop was. It was jam packed with people and nary a bus in sight. The road going back north was flooded save for one lane and I had no idea when anything resembling public transit would come my way.

I resolved to walk until I could find something. This choice turned out to lead me through knee-high (keep in mind I am fairly short) water, and a thirty-minute walk until a kindly *tuk-tuk* driver found me and said the sweetest words I ever did hear, "Hey you! Where you go?" But let's back up a bit. The walk itself wasn't too bad, the sun wasn't fully out and neither did it rain. I was even lucky enough to have been wearing my good sports sandals and those pants that zip apart to become shorts. (I know, they're super dorky, but very handy when dealing with rising water levels.) People even stopped to check up on me and make sure I wasn't dying, crazy or some combination thereof. And being an overly safety conscious person, I did not ask strangers for rides. It probably would have ended up okay and saved me some baht, but then I could never have told this story to my mother. Ever. And I quite like talking to my mother, so walking until I could find public or payable transit it was.

Eventually the nice driver pulled up and took me to Nongkae, my amphur. He asked me many questions along the way, mostly having to do with what the hell I was doing out here and if America had floods. It cost me 200 baht, but I wasn't in a mood to walk away from motorized transit seventeen kilometers

from my goal and with nary a bus or van having passed me by or visible for the past half hour.

'This choice turned out to lead me through knee-high water, and a thirty-minute walk until a kindly tuk-tuk driver found me and said the sweetest words I ever did hear, "Hey you! Where you go?"'

Then, my luck returning, there was a van! It was waiting to take me along the next stage of my journey, to Hin Kong, a *tesseban* that is on either side of Highway 1 and where I pick up a van to take me back to my site, which is a bit to the west of the highway. Dutifully, I texted Peace Corps to let them know I'm safe and waiting for the last van on my less-than-epic journey back home, as the southbound road is backed up as far as I can see. Grabbing a bit of food and waiting, I called a friend, related my story and realize that all in all it was a fun little adventure and proves that I can really get around Thailand. Flooding, terrible traffic and unfamiliar places can't stop me.

The other lesson was that before you set out during the rainy season and when everything is more like a lake than anything else, ask the people at your office if there are traffic jams. They know. They also might just hit you upside the head when you tell them things like this when you didn't ask them about road conditions first.

I'm still kind of upset about not getting a bagel, though.

Reflections of Four Days in Laos

by Josh Coblenz

At 6:30 on a still dim Monday morning the alarm on my phone buzzed until it began to interrupt and eventually tear apart my sleep. I got out of bed and walked quickly across the room to turn it off. Joe, who was in the other bed, either slept through or ignored it. Our bus was scheduled to leave at 7:45, so I took a shower and by the time I was out Joe was just getting up and about to replace me in the bathroom. We both agreed many times that it was really early, but still managed to pack our luggage and begin the journey from Khon Kaen to the Mekong River that separates Nong Khai, Thailand from Vientiane, Laos.

Of course, before traveling we would have to deal with the bus station. The day before we had tried to reserve tickets, but they told us to return the next morning at 7:00, which we did, and all we found were a bunch of people sitting in seats and no attendants at the ticket windows, so we went to get something to eat. When we returned there was a long line, about 25 people deep, at the front of which was a lady taking a ludicrous amount of time for God knows what. After too long we got on the bus and departed, and in no time we passed the Friendship Bridge and were at the border.

We didn't have our visas ready before the trip and the bus didn't want to wait for us, so they took off without us. At least they came and told us they were doing so and we were able to get our luggage. After about a half an hour of angry Greeks cutting lines and yelling at attendants and 1500 baht later, we crossed the



border. As we crossed a young German woman came up to us and asked if we were going to Vientiane and I said yes and I asked if she wanted to split a cab. Almost immediately Laotians were shuffling us into a van and taking us to the bus station in Vientiane.

When we got out, looking like most confused tourists probably do, trying to situate ourselves correctly in our own minds before geographically placing our whereabouts, we saw the immediate differences between Thai and Lao cities in broad scale, not yet able to pinpoint specifically what fully separates the two cultures. In the first few seconds we noticed that school uniforms were different. Two Lao women, dressed in the uniforms, were walking toward us and Joe attempted to stop them and ask for directions. It seemed like they just ignored him: perhaps another stark difference in cultures. We walked through a market, bought some *lom-yai*, and eventually exchanged our currency.



down" and pushing menus in front of our faces in an attempt to make decisions for us. I'm not sure if a majority of tourists actually go along with this tactic, but for Joe and I the aggressive salesmanship is such a turn off that we'd much rather inconvenience ourselves than allow the practitioner to continue thinking that this methodology works. So we passed by either saying "baw on" or giving no response at all.

The currency confused us for the rest of the day, but eventually we found a correct transfer rate online, at the hotel we stopped at, and discovered that 10,000 kip equaled a little less than 40 baht, and we used this as our standard for the remainder of the trip. We got something to eat all the way across town, taking about 40 minutes to walk there and then headed back to the hotel. Although halfway back Joe halted in shock, saying, "We have to go back. I forgot my bag." So we walked back and eventually got back to the hotel with tired feet where we had a long rest.

We weren't quite sure what we were going to do for the rest of the evening, but Joe had looked on couchsurfing.org for people in town. He found one person who owned a bar/restaurant called Kongkhao the opposite direction we had walked earlier in the day. He, I, and the German girl, named Gina, all decided to venture out.

It was a little after 6:00 p.m., almost 12 hours since Joe and I originally began the day, and like Thailand there were night markets surrounding the streets. We passed many stands and walked through sidewalk restaurants whose hosts kept saying "sit

The area we passed through was quite obviously the *farang* area. Bars with names like Bor Pennyang (a bad transliteration of *baw bpen yang* - the Lao or Issan way of saying *mai bpen rai*) and bright streetlights lined the walkway. To our left was the Mekong River, where on the cement boardwalk people were walking or leaning on the railings, staring at the river or across toward Nong Khai. Eventually we found the place we were looking for down some side streets.

The three of us walked into a dim and empty dining room and bar, accompanied by a very short Lao woman wearing blue jeans and sneakers who met us at the door. In the corner, on her laptop was the owner of the bar, named Darinka. Briefly taking in the room we saw photographs of various sizes placed all over the walls. She got up from her seat and welcomed us. Joe explained how he found her on couchsurfing.org and how we decided to just stop by. We sat at the bar while she explained how she was trying to bring an artistic venue to the area. In two days there would be a show by an American artist, who she was hosting for the week and on Saturday a concert would be taking place.

Shortly after we arrived, her housemate and co-owner of Kongkhao, named Fransesco, arrived with a guest. We all moved to the outside patio and began to introduce ourselves. The person Fransesco brought with him was a young French woman who had been volunteering in Luangprabang for a long time and had just finished her service. Fransesco himself is French, as soon became quite obvious from his mannerisms and his

side conversations in his native language with the young woman. Darinka is Croatian, but was brought up in Italy. She explained to me how she and Fransesco were traveling in Laos and how they loved it and wanted to live there. They were running out of money and they gave themselves a time frame to find a job in order to sustain living in Vientiane and within that time frame both found work. In no time they started up Kongkhao and continue to host events centered on art.

After we sat and talked about various topics over drinks, more people came to join the party. There was a Bolivian musician, named Jaime who came in playing with Darinka's dog and eventually sat at the table, a young Laotian man who could speak French with the young French woman, but didn't have quite enough practice in English to say anything besides a polite introduction, the American painter who Darinka and Fransesco were housing for the week, and two extremely large and muscular African-Scottish men accompanied by a middle-aged Australian woman. All the while small parties comprised of four or five native Laotians came to eat at the restaurant as well.



At this point, with our expanded table, the conversations began to fraction off into smaller groups. Gina and I talked with the American artist, whose name is Jason, originally from California, most recently San Francisco, but now resides in Ayutthaya, teaching English. He and I talked about everything from Thailand's quirks to late 80s and early 90s Manchester rock. Joe was talking with the Scottish guys and the Australian, but I can't say about what. We all ordered some food and before some of us got our meals it began to rain, so we moved inside.

Joe and I both ordered the stuffed eggplant, but before ordering I asked Darinka if it was the small, green, Thai eggplants or the big purple ones that I'm sure most are used to in the states. They were the purple ones, and Joe and I agreed that this was probably the best meal we'd had since arriving in Thailand. The food at the restaurant has a mixture of authentic Laotian food, which if you've had Issan food, resembles it greatly, with a tint of European quirks. Their chef is a native from Laos, who they interviewed and at first were unimpressed with because she made very greasy Chinese dishes. But Darinka and Fransesco were persistent with her and took



her out to dinner at various places to show her what they wanted, and eventually she quit trying to make the food she thought *farangs* wanted, and began making some of the best food in Vientiane.

Joe, Gina, and I left close to midnight after a great evening with truly great people. As we walked back to the main road we could hear music blaring from Nong Khai across the river. Another great difference between Thailand and Laos - Laos doesn't blare music at all hours of the day or night. Walking along the river seemed like the natural thing to do, and for a long while we were uninterrupted. Then close to our turn at the road taking us to the hotel, a man in army fatigues came running alongside us, telling us to stop. As he explained to us that no one was allowed on the walkway after 9 o'clock about 10-15 other soldiers surrounded us, some with large guns, and said they saw us smoking something. We knew at this point that they were lying and wanted some excuse to hassle foreigners in an attempt to hopefully find something on us that could either throw us in jail or warrant a bribe. We all emptied our pockets and after

they found nothing, we went back to our hotel, unsure of what we would do the next day.

The original plan was to go to Luangprabang, but everyone we talked to said that it would take roughly 10 hours on bumpy roads to get there, so we settled for Vang Vieng, with the intention of returning to Vientiane to attend Jason's art show.

On the way to Vang Vieng we met another American, named Sam, from San Francisco. He had just flown into Vientiane after living in India for about 3 months. Our van circled Vientiane a few times and picked up some more people. One of them was yet another person named Sam from Seattle. He had been taking diving courses in the south of Thailand and was coming up to Vang Vieng to meet up with a friend. After an extremely bumpy four-hour ride, which on a map doesn't look like it should take that long, we were dropped off in a cul-de-sac of cheap but decent guesthouses. Joe and I split a room and the Sams split one next to us.

'Another great difference between Thailand and Laos - Laos doesn't blare music at all hours of the day or night.'

When we first met the first Sam, I looked at his Lonely Planet Laos book to see what it said about Vang Vieng. I thought that it was exaggerating on the partying there, but it was dead on. We probably saw more Europeans, Australians, and Americans there than people from Laos. Most of the natives run restaurants or shops specifically catered to Western travelers, most of who are probably in their early 20s. The nightlife felt like some sort of deranged continuation of college parties, uninhibited to the point of either

madness or an apathy so strong it turned dangerous and permeated the air. Some of the tourists coming through stay in the town for weeks on end, and wind up working at the bars, promoting them to all the new faces in town. Two such people, one dressed up like a pirate with mascara smeared around his eyes approached us with a bucket of whiskey and told us to come to a specific bar at the end of the road. But, of course not all of the people going through the town are seasoned partiers with steel livers and bloodshot wandering eyes. The group that we wound up with, who were friends and fellow travelers of the second Sam, were a great group to be around. One of them was even an RPCV from Benin.

The next morning Joe and I decided to see what else this town had to offer. The natural scenery of the area looked amazing. Bright green grass and oddly shaped mountains were what we saw coming into the town, and all that we were offered so far was an even more depressing version of a bar scene we could get back home. So after breakfast we, along with the first Sam, walked through a rice field following signs that pointed to a cave. We spent a long time getting dirty, climbing through the cave, slipping in the mud, and climbing up and down wooden ladders, but it was well worth it for the experience.

After that Joe and I cleaned up and caught a bus back to Vientiane to return to the restaurant. When we got there it soon became apparent that this was more than just an art show. We paid the entrance fee of 80,000 kip, which included a buffet of great food, liquor, and raffle tickets for prizes (that neither of us won). Not only was Jason exhibiting his paintings, but another French artist had her work on the second floor. All or most of the sales were getting donated to an organization



centered on pet control called Paws 4 Pets. They focus on giving rabies shots and spaying and neutering animals. Darinka and Francesco contributed many of the raffle prizes and gave all their food out at cost for the event.

The next morning Joe and I met up with Jason to check out the Buddha Garden in Vientiane, or Xian Kuam, as they call it. It had one of the more interesting reclining Buddha statues I've seen, and is a great place to check out if you're into a giant collection of Hindu and Buddhist statues. There's also a similar park in Nong Khai, which I checked out the following day, made by the same Buddhist mystic that created the Buddha Garden. Both are different enough make it worth going to both.

Joe and I got off at the border and crossed back into Nong Khai. While walking down the street toward the hotel it was quite obvious that we were back in Thailand. All the advertisements everywhere in Thai script as opposed to the very similar but a little squigglier Laos script, as well as the trucks with giant signs and speakers blaring whatever it is they're blaring, cemented the fact that just across that river there was something distinctly different.

Volunteer profile: Meaghan Murphy

Thai nickname: Mali

Hometown: North Conway, NH

Age: 23

Site location: Kamphaengphet, bottom of the northern region of Thailand

Are you living alone or with a host family?

How's that going?

I am living with a host family and am so happy! During PST all I could think about was moving into my own place. I had the same feelings during our first month at site when we were obliged to live with a family. I stayed with them until reconnect, and when I got home from reconnect I realized how much I loved them and loved living with them; I decided I could never leave. I fear silence and loneliness, and it is the Thai way to stay with your family forever.

What is your favorite Peace Corps moment so far?

I have two moments. Moment one: I had finished teaching a lesson for the B5 kids. They played several rounds of hangman at the end, and I was fried. Done. Ready to leave, and happy that they were having fun. I told them that we were out of time and that I was leaving, and they said, “Can we play more games about these new words?! We still have more time!” I was thrilled because this meant that they were indeed having fun and learning too.

Moment two: At another school, I finished up a lesson in the morning and was heading out. One girl asked, “Is Pi Mali going to come back and teach in the afternoon?” I wasn’t planning on it, but I felt inspired by this girl’s desire to keep learning, and again thrilled that my lesson was fun for them. I answered, “absolutely.” And then the whole class yelled, “YAY!!” A unanimous cheer. It made me feel really, really good.

What have you been up to at site?

I stay pretty busy; I can’t agree with the volunteers who have talked to us about not having enough to do, which I’m grateful for. During the week I spend time hanging out with the silk group, one of several mat-weaving groups, and the hammock-weaving group when they meet. I also visit the anamai, and I have spent a lot of time at four out of the five schools here. When I’m at the SAO I read my Thai –English dictionary like it’s a romance novel, with the intention of building my vocabulary. (I should start reading an English dictionary for the same reason.) Right now I’m desperately trying to read, as illiteracy has proven to be wicked annoying. I enjoy talking to people, at the SAO and at home. During the evenings I sit with my family and we talk about a lot of things and



we laugh a lot. It's wonderful. I have also really come to appreciate what I understand of Buddhism because of how I feel when I am at the temple or in the presence of the monks. My host mom is very involved with the goings-on at the temple, and during every holiday she is there helping and so am I. I have come to love *tam-bun* during the *wan-phra*, when we prepare food and flowers early in the morning and go to the temple around 6:30 a.m. First we *wai* the giant golden Buddha in front of the temple and lay the flowers and incense. I always give thanks for my family and my life as I am kneeling before the Buddha. Then we *sai-baat-phra* inside the temple, and listen to the monks pray for about an hour. It's a beautiful, melodious sound. I feel refreshed, calm, and at peace with everything while we are sitting there, *wai-ing*. Then we go home and have a feast of a breakfast, like any other Thai meal. *Wan-phra* have come to be my favorite days, and I look forward to them every week; I love being up so early and then feeling peaceful and secure when it's over.

What do you do in your free time?

I spend a lot of time on my bike. I run in the mornings if my shins aren't hurting. I tried to get my host brother into Frisbee but that didn't fly because he's always exhausted from being a rice farmer. I'm a market-whore: I love markets. Even if I have nothing to buy I frequent the markets whenever I can and walk around, look around and talk to people. I read at night. I like to walk into my family's rice field and watch the sun set, too.

What are your plans for the next six months both with your neighbors and on your own?

I would love to start a project, even just a small one: Something concrete to demonstrate that I am living here productively. I am writing a proposal with my counterpart to build and open a shop that will sell locally made, hand-made, and OTOP products. I've been trying to start projects, *any* projects, at four different schools, about many different things, so maybe one of those will come to fruition. I've been trying to talk to the anamai about sex and drug education in the schools, and maybe having a health fair, and I've been trying to talk to my SAO about an English camp or any other sort of camp.

My mom and brother are coming in January. I like visiting other volunteers so I'll probably hit up Liz in Pichit again, which is close to me, and I told Nico I would come to Isan but I'm waiting for the floods to recede because there is currently a limited number routes exiting my province as a result of watery roads.

What kind of traveling have you done/ plan to do?

I've visited volunteers in neighboring provinces in the north and central regions of Thailand. When my family comes we'll probably go to the south to see the ocean and to the north to see some mountains. I would love to travel internationally within Asia but that might have to wait until my service is complete. I have family in Australia so I will definitely be staying with them for a while and possibly working after we are done in Thailand.



What do you miss most about home (besides friends and family)?

I don't miss my friends and family.

JUST KIDDING! I miss them terribly, every day, and I miss spending time my family and friends the most of all.

I miss fresh air and the White Mountains of New Hampshire. I miss feeling cold. I really miss being able to spend time in the mountains with my favorite people, either hiking or skiing. And I miss chocolate chip cookies - *real* ones.

What do you love most about Thailand?

The loving Thai people who have brought me into their homes and village and who care about me, help me, and make me feel loved and at home every day.

Thai people's inherent desire to help each other, their genuine feeling of concern for others, their amazing output of patience, and their ability to not be heavily bothered by other people's actions or statements.

The feeling I get when I'm at the temple.

Food.

What do you dislike about Thailand?

Mosquitoes. Processed sugar. Parents feeding their kids processed sugar all the time. The lack of sex education which gives rise to tons of unwanted pregnancies and the spread of STDs and STIs.

Thai people's perception and absolute priority of beauty. They have no creativity on the topic of beauty, as in their perspective is entirely narrow, and they have no appreciation for people (like volunteers) who look differently than them. I feel like beauty is all they strive for sometimes, as if beauty or hotness is the equivalent of acceptance and success, especially because it's the first thing they talk about with me, and this conversation usually results in me having hurt feelings. I wish Thai people could open their minds and appreciate many types of beauty, and more importantly, comment on the talents and abilities of people rather than on how they look.

What foods do you like most in Thailand?

Naam prik balaa, naam prik bpla, any other kind of naam prik.

Geng nang-waan

Grilled fish

Dragon fruit, durian, bananas and papaya. Fruit is orgasmic here!!!

Do you have any funny or interesting stories?

One time we were chilling at my house, it was evening. My host mom was sitting in a hammock and she farted. I heard it but wasn't sure what it was and I looked at her. She burst out laughing and asked if I had ever farted. I was like, oh yeah; this *farang* farts all the time.

One girl in B2 asked me if I was wearing fake eyes.

Favorite question I've been asked by the locals here: "Why do you speak Thai?" Gee.

Sticky Rice Halloween 2011

My Hometown Hero: Pi Iith of Si Thep

by Denise Silfee

“If I eat this I will be sick,” I say, immediately trying to mentally locate a bathroom that is clean and private... or just private... or who cares after the havoc that will be wreaked in my stomach if I keep eating.

She sits across from me in her usual pink shirt and matching shorts. Over this she wears a blue apron with yellow piping that she only removes for photographs. She wears it every day, even though she isn't so big on cooking. She would prefer to heat something up in her microwave or open a bag than slave over the stove, so I think the apron must make her feel safe, like a security blanket.

Right now I am not safe. Not safe at all from the plates of food that cover the entire surface of the table and are meant for me, all for me.

“Eat it all!” Pi Iith demands as she pushes three dishes of food ever closer to my already full plate. It is only she and I at this little *som-tom* restaurant off of the highway, 18 kilometers from the safety of my village. I have already consumed enough *som tom* and *som-tom Thai* to feel full, and out of obligation I have eaten an entire plate of grilled chicken, drank two Pepsi's, and eaten half a plate of seafood salad, that most ambiguous of dishes. And now Pi Iith is telling me to finish the rest.

“Pi Iith!” I plead, “American's do not eat this much for breakfast!” (This, by the way, is second breakfast. Taco Bell thought they had something there with Fourth Meal, well, Pi Iith has Double Every Meal.) “If I eat more I will get sick! *Jing jing!*”

“EAT!” Pi Iith demands. I eat a little more and then dismay takes over.

“Please...” it comes out as a whimper. Pi Iith sighs and says okay in that way that lets me know she is truly disappointed in me and my failure to consume gross amounts of food.

We pay and get back in the truck to drive to the market in the town. Before we can go marketing, however, we must go to 7-Eleven, where Pi Iith promptly buys me a Big Gulp Coke and a bottle of water. No straw. She likes to keep me hydrated.

*‘I need a
toilet: now.’*

We descend on the market. I try my best to look wonderingly (and without a hint of the apparent animal abuse I think this is) at the baby chicks that are dyed incredibly bright neon colors, and the baby bunnies wearing tiny dresses, and even the puppies with barrettes in their ears and little crowns plastered to their heads. Adorable. *Jing jing.* I try to look amazed, but really all I can think about is the rumbling in my guts.

Soon enough Pi Iith notices the look of pain in my eyes. “Do you need to go to the bathroom?” She asks.

I nod. “My stomach hurts. I ate too much.” And then the gurgle that makes things real. “I need a toilet: now.”

Pi Iith wastes no time. She throws the hand holding her own Big Gulp cup over her head, pulls my sleeve towards her, and starts to announce loudly, “Excuse me, excuse me, my American sister is going to crap her pants. We need a bathroom!”

Pi Iith is not a small lady. She trundles when she walks. In short, she is able to make a nice path for me to follow along through the crowd, and the announcing of my bowel

conditions to everyone at the market ensures that people are prepared to make such a path. Periodically she looks over her shoulder at me, “Are you going to make it?” she shouts.

Yes, Pi Iith, I think, out of the sheer will not to draw any more attention to myself, I will make it.

Hands down, when she is not force-feeding me, Pi Iith has been the most helpful person I have met in my village. She is the first person I referred to as a friend: My friend Pi Iith: The middle-aged gas station attendant. She has helped me buy funnels to collect rain water, containers to keep ants out of the rice, and cinnamon so I can make French toast on the weekends. Whatever I want, Pi Iith does her best to help me find it.

I met Pi Iith the second week I was in my village. The school staff had all left town for the summer break but I continued to go there for at least part of the day because I had nothing better to do, and each morning I walked by Pi Iith’s house, next to the som-tom stand. She knew my name before I ever knew hers, and the first time I became brave enough to sit at her house and eat *som tom*, she told me she had been “waiting for me.” Even now, this strikes me as the most wonderful thing I have ever heard in Thailand.

‘She likes her pig fried, raw, grilled, baked, stir-fried, left-over and fatty.’

For a solid month after meeting her, whenever I walked home from school Pi Iith would have a giant bowl of chicken nuggets (nicely microwaved) and a can of soda waiting for me as my pre-dinner snack. Eventually I had to end this practice by explaining that if I eat before I run, I will throw up. Pi Iith does not appreciate laziness and takes my exercise



schedule seriously. She has respected my wishes and now gives me frozen chicken nuggets to be heated up at my leisure, usually for breakfasts on Sundays. Many things are all about food with Pi Iith. When I asked her what her favorite food was, she said, “Pig.” Not pork, but pig, any part of the pig, in English. She likes her pig fried, raw, grilled, baked, stir-fried, left-over and fatty. She also likes French fries and ice cream and kanoms of all shapes and sizes. When Pi Iith travels to the magical land of Tesco Lotus, she brings us back entire pizzas to be heated in her microwave, or boxes of Krispy Kreme donuts that can feed us for a whole weekend.

Pi Iith is the only person who seems to understand me when I speak Thai. For weeks I thought Pi Iith spoke English better than she actually does. Then one day it suddenly dawned on me that Pi Iith knows about 11 words in English and that in reality she understands my strange mixture of Thai and English and hand gestures and facial expressions enough for us to have whole conversations about how she is trying to make me fat or how to improve education in

Thailand. When I realize I have been misusing a word for months, thinking it means something that it doesn't, Pi Iith laughs and says it doesn't matter because she always understands me when I speak. To be understood, I have learned, is perhaps the most necessary feeling in the world.

Pi Iith tells it how it is. *Mai dong greng jai*. In a lot of ways this is entertaining for me, like watching Pi Iith verbally attack (with a smile) a woman in town for not selling me my kitchen supplies at the Thai price ("This is my Thai sister, she works in Si Thep! Works!"). Or when I told her one day, "Pi Iith, there are about 14 cats living upstairs in my house. They jump in up there," I said as I pointed to a small opening on the second floor. "Is this a problem?" Pi Iith sized up the situation in 30 seconds. "They're strong cats," she replied. Issue dropped.

In short I don't know what I would do without Pi Iith. Sure, I talk to all kinds of people every day in my village, but no one else has taken the time and interest in really getting to know me, to forgive me my limited Thai and to make sure I feel welcome in my community. A wise 122 Volunteer told me back in PST that everyone finds someone who takes them under their wing, who goes out of their way to help them out, that it is this person who gets you through the difficult times. I was worried I wouldn't find mine quickly enough. I shouldn't have been concerned. Pi Iith already knew we would be great friends; she just had to wait until I was brave enough to stop in for some *som tom*.

On a particularly difficult day, when the virus-laden computers at my school once again deleted all of my files, I walked gloomily across town to my other school. Pi Iith called me on the phone. "Where are you?" she asked. I told her I was walking through the village. She must have told me to stand still and wait, but I didn't understand and kept walking. It wasn't until I was walking up the entrance to the high school that I heard a motorcycle come roaring up behind me, Pi Iith calling my name. I turned around and there she was, carrying a giant melting ice cream sundae with fudge and sprinkles and coco puffs.

"I couldn't find you!" she said. "I thought you would like this."

'They're strong cats.' – *Pi Iith*

I apologized for misunderstanding, and then Pi Iith handed me the unexpected sundae and told me she would see me later. I had wanted to cry all morning in frustration, but now, with a sundae in hand and waving goodbye, I felt a little warm behind the eyes because I could get through another day thanks to my friend.

Stuffing Your Face
Banana Parfait
by Kari Greenswag

Sometimes, it's not just enough to know how to make some food, sometimes you need to dress it up a bit, take you both out for a good time and attempt to re-ignite whatever romance is left. None of us are getting any younger, after all, and it's not like it wouldn't kill breakfast to at least make a little effort now and again, would it?

Sorry, I think I got personal there for a second. Anyway. Parfait.

Parfaits are easy to throw together when you're feeling like mixing normal breakfast ingredients together and calling it by a French name to feel classy. Also, you can likely impress people (and later disappoint them) by claiming to know how to make a French dish.

What do you need? Why, my friends, things that can be found easily at hand.

Ingredients:

1 cup of yogurt

1 - 2 bananas

1 handful of cereal, muesli or even oatmeal

Your mileage on various flavor combinations may vary, but I find that plain yogurt is best because it doesn't get in the way of any wonderful banana flavor. I also like Cheerios or Corn Flakes in terms of the cereal component. Both are crunchy and neither are overly sweet. Even better, both can be found at any Big C or Tesco Lotus. If you can't get to the super store, sometimes I can find little five-baht bags of cereal at my local village shop. They're often chocolate flavored, but that might add a little something extra to this tarted-up breakfast dish.

Also, because my parfaits are never pretty, I have a picture of a nice looking one I found on the Internet.



Do you have simple ideas to help relieve the culinary boredom? E-mail your fabulous creations to stickyrice.newsletter@gmail.com.

Horoscopes

by Laurie Hacklander

Note: Just to be clear, the following horoscopes are not astrological. I don't know how to do that. But, they are readings and I wanted to share.

Scorpio (23 Oct – 21 Nov)

Take a chill pill. Jai-yen-yen. Good things come to those who wait. Where's the fire? Got the message, dear Scorpios? Also, tend to financial matters this coming month. (Sigh, I didn't want to have to write that.)

Sagittarius (22 Nov – 21 Dec)

You'll know when it's time to do what you've been pondering for awhile. Note that it isn't about whether or not, but when. If you are being pushed, step aside for a moment. This, for once, is really about you. So honor yourself so you can see how far this takes you.

Capricorn (22 Dec – 19 Jan)

Do you know how, when you wear your sunglasses on top of your head then remove them, it feels like they are still on top of your head? And if, while dreaming, you've ever experienced the sensation of falling from a great height, you feel panic in your chest? Although neither of these are "real", the tapping on your shoulder, the pit in your stomach or the hitch in your giddy-up is, so do something about it. Stop procrastinating, stop ignoring and take action.

Aquarius (20 Jan – 18 Feb)

Health matters. Be thankful for working parts, flowing fluids, and that marvelous brain. Be attentive to any aches or pains or discomfort – physical or mental – that aren't ordinary for you. On another note, read a good book. *Jing jing*, like you probably haven't read in the last few months! Your gleanings from it may be just what's needed to, who knows - inspire you, re-affirm your beliefs, strengthen your resolve? Dunno. Then, consider sharing your experience.

Pisces (19 Feb – 20 March)

Family matters. You are keeping in touch, at the very least, but get the card or package in the mail. There's still time. In fact, with proper intention, the recipient will feel especially moved and you will benefit, too. Also, all living beings and entities are your concern now. Your efforts produce immediate and evident results and in other unseen ways.

Aries (21 March – 19 April)

Enjoy nature more – take a long bike ride through the rice fields, help your neighbors harvest the rice or explore the closest park. Or enjoy the natural world that comes to you in your home (snakes, *too-kays*, crabs, baby kitty-cats, etc.)! Whatever you do, do so with appreciation. Plus, you have great ideas. Continue the research and relationship building. It's just a matter of that opportune time for presentation, then implementation.

Taurus (20 April – 20 May)

Hey! Got any cleaning that needs doing - literally and figuratively? Just a suggestion to do more than just think about it. There could be a little financial benefit to it. Or at least, you'll have less *nam-nak* around your neck.

Gemini (21 May – 20 June)

You'll soon have much of which to be proud! You had your doubters, detractors, and distractions, perhaps some of which was even yourself! Just when you thought you couldn't possibly wait one more day, handle another delay or rejection, your opportunity opens up. Your nose-to-the-grindstone, buckle-up attitude will soon show signs of support and success in your latest endeavors.

Cancer (21 June – 22 July)

Break out of your mold, let your creative sides flourish! Not only will you benefit, but those nearest and dearest will benefit as well. If you

need some assistance or encouragement, ask!
Come on – get a move-on!

Leo (23 July – 22 August)

Your attempts at being seen or being heard may be misdirected or misguided. Knowledge is power, but remember that it means more than book-smarts or internet-search savviness. Also, if you have visitors arriving soon, be sure to provide them with something unique for them from home.

Virgo (23 Aug – 22 Sept)

Hey! Do you have some repairs that need tending? Say, a computer, a ladder, a fish bowl or a relationship? Sooner rather than later...

Libra (23 Sept – 22 Oct)

Do what makes you feel good. Perhaps you like to cook for 19 people, scale ladders or orate non-sensically? Or maybe you relish something more mundane but equally satisfying. Do what you gotta do!



Love in the Time of Malaria

by Gay Laroche

The Peace Corps volunteer slept through the rain,
But the morning announcements battered his brain.

He went to the bathroom to unload a squat,
And stepped on a scorpion. It hurt. A lot.

He looked for someone to give him a ride
To the hospital - quick! - before he died.
But they all went to Tesco to eat at MK;
He knew what that meant - they'd be gone the whole day.

So he got on his bike and pedaled with care;
He mused about life, how things weren't fair.
He collapsed in the lobby, they took him upstairs;
Khun Phanuthat called him and said, "Hang in there!"

Nurses, nurses, everywhere, all of them were fly;
Nurses, nurses, everywhere, if only he spoke Thai.

The story of my toenails: a Thai psychological experiment

by Jeff Jackson

It began on the Fourth of July. It still hasn't ended.

It was on America's Independence Day when group 123 – in Suphan Buri for reconnect training – put on a Fourth of July parade outside the hotel. Everyone was supposed to dress patriotic. Not having anything flashy to wear, I agreed to let Erin Lubeck paint my toenails blue. I was complimented by numerous volunteers and staff members. I remember Patcharapan seeing them and telling me, "Jeff, I never knew this side of you, but I'm happy you're comfortable with yourself."

I was so comfortable, I declined any nail-polish removal to see how my friends in Surin would react. This is the story of that psychological experiment.

There's a simple way to explain the reactions – women love it, men don't. The women-filled office I work in was also laughter-filled when they saw Erin's artistry. I asked them if they liked it and they said yes. When I asked the men if they liked it, they said no.



Walking into classrooms, I feel like a big-breasted woman showing plenty of cleavage only with all eyes going to my toes instead of my chest. I see the Thai kids looking at my toes and can almost read their minds – *Why? Is that something all Americans do? Is this why he doesn't want a Thai girlfriend?*

A week after reconnect I met a number of friends in Khon Kaen for a four-day weekend. They were surprised to see I still was sporting the experimental look. I'd let a girlfriend do the same once in the states, but there's a big difference – I didn't wear sandals every day.

I enjoy watching the Thais minds work when I tell them the painted toenails are in honor of the independence of America. They say, "Oohhh," and stop laughing. *Hub. That must be some cultural ritual done in America I don't know about. Do ALL the men paint their toenails to celebrate the country's independence?*

When Thai men notice it, they seem to be afraid of me. It's as if I'm a new kind of man they have yet to encounter – a man not afraid to have his toenails painted. Why is it so feminine anyway? If they were painted a more "manly" color, would they be as offensive? What if I painted them black? When did painting ones toenails become something just for women?

As I write this, the polish is creeping up to the ends of the nails and a lot of it has chipped off, but it's still noticeable. I'm still getting double takes, but I get double takes being a tall white guy anyway, so what's the difference?

I encourage all Peace Corps Thailand volunteers – men and women – to paint their toenails. Guys, this is a nation that accepts lady boys. A little nail polish isn't going to break face.



Editor's note

October is gone. School is starting again in November, December has two three-day weekends and before we know it January and the 124 volunteers are here. When our time is through in Peace Corps Thailand, we will look back on it and smile. We will miss it. Our experiences will not compare to anything the rest of our lives. Sometimes we find ourselves counting down the days and months – much like high school and college. Why? When we were done we reminisced every day.

Enjoy this time – especially the 122 volunteers whose days are dwindling. Sure, we have our bad days when our co-teacher or counterpart are irritating us, but we're still Peace Corps volunteers and we still have one of the most unique occupations in the entire world. Life is good. Remember that.

Chook-dii.