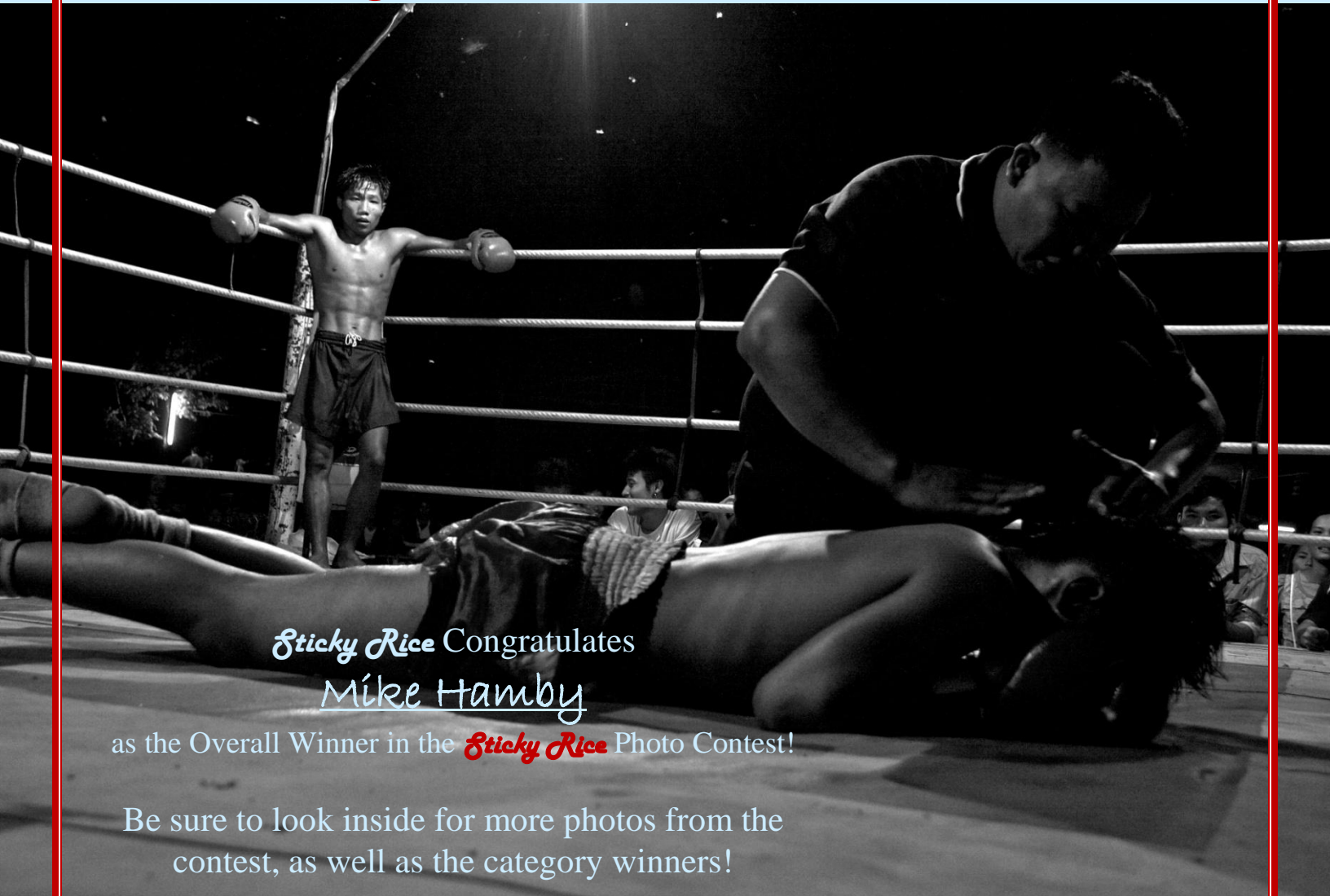


Check inside for notes from our new editors from Group 124,  
*Shellie Branco and Sarah Lingo!*

# *Sticky Rice*

*August 2012*



*Sticky Rice* Congratulates

Mike Hamby

as the Overall Winner in the *Sticky Rice* Photo Contest!

Be sure to look inside for more photos from the  
contest, as well as the category winners!

*Inside this issue....*

negotiating culture, purse snatching...maybe,  
GAD GIG, Sri Lanka, iPads for students, ukuleles,  
sweet treats, island paradises, and  
the *Sticky Rice* Photo Contest!

## *Sticky Rice*

Peace Corps Thailand Volunteer Newsletter  
August 2012

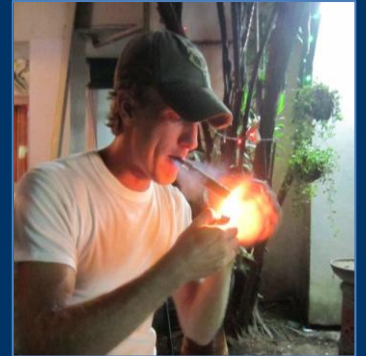
*Notes from the editors*



We are pleased to introduce you to our new editors from Group 124! Not only are they both eating in their editor photos (we think this is a good sign), but we think they will take Sticky Rice to new and glorious heights! In this issue we also bring you the Sticky Rice Photo Contest, as well as more articles documenting your thoughts, adventures and advice while you journey through Thailand!

Happy and enjoy, my friends!

*-Denise and Jeff*



I am serving as a CBOD volunteer in Amphur Phichai, Uttaradit, where I work to increase recycling, reduce trash burning, and obviously, teach English. In my past American life, I served as Communications Director for the Tennessee Department of Mental Health and have spent the past 7 years working on democratic campaigns across Tennessee. I am very excited to read about all of Thailand's PCV adventures published in Sticky Rice.

*-Lingo... aka Sarah*



I am a former multimedia journalist and brand new TCCO volunteer serving in super cool Amphur Muang, Chanthaburi. (Super cool Amphur Muang = a Robinson, Tesco Lotus, Big C, two big cineplexes, beaches, mountains and farang food. Jealous? 555!) As a graduate of University of Southern California and a CA native, I worked for newspapers in Los Angeles and the Central Valley, as well as a National Public Radio affiliate that reached listeners throughout half the state. I am a rabid Trekkie (though I have yet to attend a convention), love absurd/asinine humor, and delight in working with my little *bpratom* students. I am excited to guide you through the bizarre and wondrous kingdom of Thailand as an editor of *Sticky Rice*! *-Shellie*

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Essay:

## Cyclical

By Julia Schulkers

I didn't run from America. Though, at times, I wanted to. A long time ago I wanted it because I wanted to run away from myself. We all do, want to run, that is. Every week that passed I prayed some blip of maturity



would augment that thought. I wanted to want it for something more. For something good. For all the good we think will come of our time away from home. Our time in the homes of others. The countries of others. A gentle rap at my door. The augmented thought arrived. I wanted nothing more.

You leave, then arrive in the twilight zone. Your world mimics the rotations of a Ferris wheel, strung out on happiness but scared shitless when you get to the top and realize what happens if you fall...All. The. Way. Down. You awake in a world that often isn't real. You can't grab a fat, plump chunk of arm skin and pinch your way out of the unfamiliarity. Laughter feeds you the thrilling hiccups to get through the rough spots. There isn't another choice. You're offered smiles in the absence of the throaty chuckles.

Bathroom trips make for new adventures. Bicycle rides. Crawling water lizards. Bucket showers. Conversation. Conversation. Conversation. They throw you bones hoping you'll eventually catch on. Your sanity gets so many chances. Your friends offer refills. Inside those urine-soaked cement walls, pitless holes in the floor laugh at you. Then, the first day you miss that hole is the day your friendship begins. Food stares at you as the eyeballs from once-living animals remain. After a week-long staring competition, your belly wins. The next day, when you miss that hole, the food reclaims its victory. It's cyclical. Round and round and round and round and round. Up then down then up then down.

Your silent tears of shock are dried by strangers. The throaty laughs. The stunt smiles. Props to make one day gently flow into the wave of the next. You wake up. Smile. Eat. Smile. Devote some time to thinking "Am I really here?" Your emotions creep to the surface but culture pushes them back down again, into the back of your throat. For another day. A rainy day. A lonely day. An exhausted day. An American day. A day when not even your throat muscles can keep it all down. Then you cry again, silently. Alone. But when it's done, when the small blobs of water have soaked your cheek, a glimpse of adaption comes from within. You smile. Then, a throaty laugh follows. You realize you've made it past the top of the Ferris wheel. Your stomach flips. The wheel spins forward, faster, faster, faster. You swallow hard, exhale in relief. Then cry out in hysterical laughter. Your muscles tense for the exhilaration. All. Over. Again.



# My Sticky Rice Story... Literally

by Charles Brands

A little less than a month ago, my village was in the midst of planting their annual rice crop, right after the torrential downpour that signals the beginning of the rainy season here in *Isaan*. I figured that by helping my community *plook* some *khao*, I would be able to further integrate myself into my village, which is made up almost entirely of farmers and their children. I also told my host family that I wanted to help them plant their annual crop as a way to gain merit in their household.

I slept in until about 7 am and by roughly 8 am I was planting rice alongside 30 other Thai farmers in my family's fields. The morning was brisk and comfortable enough to make doing continuous manual labor somewhat enjoyable, but by 10 am the sun was out full throttle and after only two hours of work, the day was already beginning to wear on me.

The Thais I was working with were astonished and in disbelief that a *farang* was out in the fields planting rice alongside them. They chided me for how slow I was working and gave me pointers on how to plant the stalks properly. Sometimes I planted too many stalks of rice, other times too little, and in the end, I was always doing it too slow. I let them chide me freely and I tried to follow all of their advice, for every time I planted one stalk of rice in the ground, they had planted about four more ahead of me. It felt like I was working next to 30 well-oiled machines – and mind you – planting rice is not easy work at all.

I soon began to feel like the ice between me and the farmers was beginning to melt, coincidentally, just as the sun was beginning to grow hotter and hotter. My plan was working; the community was giving me that chance I needed to get to know them better.

By lunch time, all 30 of the farmers and I were feeling pretty famished. Before eating lunch, without question, I knew I had to go and wash my hands. After all, our hands, to be frank, smelled a lot like *khi* ... and without a doubt probably had *khi* all over them too. The fact that our hands were filthy and needed to be washed seemed obvious to me, so I asked one of the farmers in my broken Thai, "Where do we go to wash our hands?" to which I received a grunt reply, "Over there," as she pointed to another inundated rice field that hadn't been churned up by tractors just yet.

It was an empty rice field, full to the brim with stagnant, tepid, unclean water. By unclean, I mean I saw an empty red paint can in one end of it, as well as some of what I assumed were frog eggs, attached to stalks of grass not far from the side of the embankment. In the very beginning of the morning I also witnessed a farmer urinate into that exact same stagnant pool of water. I thought to myself, "There is no way she is being serious; she must be pulling my leg," but it soon enough dawned on me that she wasn't joking at all.

What about soap? No, sorry guys, there was no soap to be found anywhere near that cesspool. To wash off, the farmers simply dunked their hands into the water, swashed them around for a few seconds, and then wiped them off on their already mud-sodden trousers. Then, without a second thought, they all trotted off to the farmhouse to devour some sticky rice. These guys weren't using utensils of any kind. No, no, no, they were obviously tearing into their baskets of sticky rice with their filthy bare hands.

My stomach churned, my jaw dropped a little, and my eyes probably dilated slightly from the shock of it all. I'm not sure if my body reacted this way from the nauseating thoughts that assaulted my sense of reason, or maybe it was just that sense of panic you feel when you think that every single one of your newly made acquaintances is about to end up dying from *tong sia* in the not so distant future. I wanted to run around yelling "Stop! Stop! You need to wash your hands first! YOU ARE ALL GOING TO DIE!!!"

And then suddenly, I was struck by the impossible dilemma put before me: How on earth was I going to get out of eating sticky rice with them, without breaking my face, or even worse – breaking theirs? After all, we were all pulling chunks of sticky rice from the same communal rice baskets. A not so subtle sense of panic ensued shortly thereafter.

Was I to tell them that I wasn't hungry? I think everybody knew I was famished, because they were in the exact same shoes as I was. Maybe I could have said "I don't like eating sticky rice." But there is no way that that would have worked either; my entire host family was there, and they already knew how much I loved eating sticky rice. I sighed deeply, knowing that I was left with only one final option, and that was to tell them the truth. Eventually, I decided it was best to just get it over with and say it, so I told the man sitting on the floor next to me as courteously as I could muster, "Sorry friend, but I cannot eat sticky rice with you right now, because nobody here has washed their hands properly."

In that second, everything I had gained that morning amongst the farmers was lost. Any chance of being accepted that day had been blown away by my remark. One person mumbled to the next person about what I had said, who then told the next person, who then whispered to the next person, until I realized that I had set off a chain reaction; everyone in the farmhouse was busy gossiping about what that young *farang* in the corner had just said. My biggest fear of what could have happened had just taken place, and now instead of feeling further integrated into the community, I felt more isolated than ever.

I began to feel like a snob, and I began to wonder if maybe I should have just eaten the sticky rice. All my work at integration that day was left in vain, solely because I couldn't bring myself to overlook what I saw as being foolish behavior on their part. I later found out that every single farmer I had been planting rice with that day had already been taught in school about the importance of washing their hands before eating, so it wasn't ignorance to blame for their actions. It was the fact that finding and going to a place to wash their hands properly was seen as too much of an inconvenience, more so than anything else.

While we finished off the remaining fields, I bore the brunt of some seriously heated remarks from my host mother. Earlier that morning she had introduced me to all of the farmers as her son, so the fact that (in her mind) her son was now pointing fingers at everybody and calling them "too dirty to eat with," made her lose some serious face. To save her own face, she saw it fit to berate me for what I had said for the remainder of the day, which she did so with relish until we finally finished the last field, a little past 4 pm.

To this day, I feel as though in many ways, she still remains a little bit hurt by what I had said. Now, whenever we eat sticky rice at my home, I get a small basket of sticky rice all to myself. The humor in all this is kind of hard to describe, because at times I feel like laughing at the entire situation, but I can't really, for fear of breaking someone's face again. Even so, sometimes I cannot help but let out a small chuckle when I get my very own small basket of sticky rice for dinner.

So, I'd like to finish this story with a simple question for volunteers to think about: What should I have done? Should I have put my health ahead of community integration, like I did that day, or should I have made both integration and maintaining my face a higher priority? Should I have eaten the sticky rice and pretended like everything was fine, and in doing so, betray what my basic instincts were telling me, or should I have been assertive about my basic hygienic beliefs, and in doing so, make my mother lose her face? Should integration into your community take precedence over your health, or does your health take precedence over cultural sensitivities?

## Like It's 1992

by Debi Ou-Yang

*Editor's note: Peace Corps Thailand's ICT GIG came up with an experiment to test the resolve of brave volunteers. They asked volunteers to spend a week "Volunteering like it's 1992", meaning they would only use the technology available to a volunteer 20 years ago. That meant no Internet, laptops, cell phones, iPods, Kindles or anything that didn't exist in 1992.*

*Debi Ou-Yang, a TCCO volunteer from group 123, was brave enough for the retro experiment.*

I made it through no technology week! It wasn't too bad, probably because I knew it was only for a week when this is what I expected for my entire Peace Corps service. I asked my landlady what my village had in 1992. She told me: electricity that went out quite often and running water that still goes out every so often. I didn't go so far as to purposely stage frequent power outages, but I put my laptop away – no internet, no movies, no music – turned off my water heater, and left my cell phone at home, only using it when I was at my house (my attempt to make it like a landline). I cheated a little and did my laundry using the washer before the day before we turned back the clock.

On the first day, which was over a weekend, I got bored and I took a nap to kill time. Otherwise I kept busy hanging out with other teachers or students at school, helping out at a teacher training, tutoring after school or spending time with my host family after dinner. The four day weekend helped too. I met up with some other volunteers in Soppong, an hour and a half away from me. The hardest part maybe was turning off my water heater, but I went for a run beforehand (also something productive to kill time on long afternoons) and the cold shower felt refreshing afterwards. At the bungalow we stayed at in Soppong, they used firewood to heat the water tank at night. I figured that's something that was possible in 1992 so I took advantage of it.

Ironically, my internet stopped working the night I turned my computer back on.

## Funeral for a Small Boy

by Barbara Harm

This morning when I got to school, Kru Nok told me that one of our students in the sixth grade had been hit by a car the day before and had died. She said that school would dismiss early today, and that everyone at the school would go to the nearby *wat*. She agitatedly gathered the day's teaching materials and shoved them into place on her desk while she announced with some bitterness that the *rong paw aw* had told her she was to conduct the proceedings at the *wat* this afternoon.

We worked with both our sixth grade classes, although this was only the third time I had taught these classes with Kru Nok, and I still did not know faces or names. Nothing seemed different to me, neither the number of students nor their demeanor. Then at two o'clock, before our second class was over, school closed. Kru Nok insisted that I ride with her and Kru Nan. Walking to the car, watching several hundred students file off the school grounds and out onto the verge of the highway, I thought yes, a memorial service to offer blessings for the boy and to give closure to the kids.

Kru Nok led us out of the *wat* parking lot, into what appeared to be a courtyard area between two, long one-storied structures, both open on the long side that faced the courtyard, both teeming with people, with a tiny, decorated building in between. It looked as if the entire *tambon* were there at the *wat*. I had a quick glimpse of masses of flowers on the high porch of the little building with a huge photograph nestled among them as Kru Nok briskly wove Kru Nan and I through clusters of attendees crowding the courtyard. We entered the

long building to the left and sat among the packed assemblage in chairs on the dirt floor arranged to face the enclosed back. There, on a raised dais that spanned the length of the building, sat 14 monks.

We were just in time. Almost immediately, the lead monk gave a short speech that ended with all the monks chanting together, after which all the attendees, including myself, stood, swiveled their chairs 180 degrees and settled back down facing the courtyard and the small building. It was a tiny building, square, with a little porch accessed by a flight of stairs on each side. Today, a pair of white lace curtains graced each entryway, making three pretty portals onto the flower-filled portico.

Kru Nok stood and began to speak, standing under the eave of our long building, the cord from her microphone trailing behind her in the dirt. As she went on, my mind strayed from the long spate of Thai, of which I understood almost nothing, and I started to look around. Directly across from me, on the other side of the tiny, bedecked building, the opposing long structure mirrored ours, people, both seated and standing, filled it to the brim. The students from the school stood in rows arrayed mostly to the rear of the tiny building, where there was also a small pavilion that housed refreshments, while more community members sat or stood all around the open space in front of the tiny building. Men lounged on the beds of pick-up trucks that had been backed in among the crowd for the occasion. Kru Nok continued to speak while little kids sucking



Funeral photos by Denise Silfee.

orangeade through straws strolled across the courtyard and students left their lines briefly to come in pairs or small groups to a table near the stairs to each get a pretty paper flower bound together with a stick of incense. Most people seated already had the flowers, I noticed. Most people wore black, and I was immensely glad that by chance that morning I had put on my one black skirt and a navy blue top.

I wondered where the boy was. What did Thai people do with the body during a memorial service? I hadn't seen anything that looked like a funeral home anywhere I had been in Thailand.

And there was that little building, right in the center of everything. It looked freshly painted and had that cute little porch. I looked up at the mass of flowers there and tried to get a good look at the picture. It was

the boy, of course. He had been in my class only twice, and I did not remember him. This morning, Kru Nok had wanted very much for me to remember him. "A little tiny boy," she kept saying before the students came in. "He bent to pick up something he had dropped on the road as he and his sister walked home. He tried to run when he saw the car. He pushed his sister out of the way." Her eyes implored me. "Can you remember? He sat in the back: a tiny boy." I wanted to remember, but I just couldn't. I was frustrated that the picture was turned away too much, and I could not see.



Then my heart took a jolt: The ‘stand’ that I thought the flowers were on was a box on a table. The flowers weren’t set on top; they were set in front. From this vantage, I could see. My god, a long box. Oh, my god, that is a casket. Lord, he’s here, I thought. This is where the boy is. He’s right here in that box. A simple wooden box painted a greenish aqua. My God, I thought, this is a funeral.

Finally, Kru Nok finished. An old monk went onto the porch, spoke briefly, and then accepted offerings of monks’ clothing from the family and from the *paw aw* of our school. The family hoped that the good done by that offering would help the boy find the place where he could be happiest, Kru Nan explained. Afterward, the family gathered in the courtyard near the front stairs. Two girls, classmates of the boy, stood and read an obituary (Kru Nan explained again) of the boy. The mother wept. A sister wept. The girls giving the speech wept.

People started filing up onto the porch and placing the paper flowers, I thought, on the casket. There were many little flowers. I told Kru Nan that I would like to place a flower, and she acquired two and placed one on a chair for me to pick up. She could not hand it to me, she said. That was tradition.

While I waited my turn to go up the stairs, I wondered why the flowers were not falling off the casket at this point, there had been so many piled on. But they didn’t, even though person after person left flower after flower.



And then suddenly I was at the top of the steps, right there at the head of the casket. The person in front of me stepped away, and I saw the boy, down in the box, his body covered with paper flowers. I was standing just at the boy’s head. I had a little moment of shock, but with many people still behind me waiting to come up, I reached into the casket and placed my flower on the pillow just above his head, a head swathed in white bandages, a large gauze pad tied just above his left eye. I turned quickly and followed the crowd down the front steps and bowed to the honor guard of family members lining both sides of the exit. “*Kop khun khrap*,” a man said with true gratitude in his eyes as he bowed his head, returning my *wai*. I have no doubt it was the boy’s father.

Then abruptly, it seemed that everything was all over. Everyone was back in their seats. The small refreshment pavilion was speedily dismantled. The table with the remaining paper flowers was spirited away. Down came the flower arrangements from the porch, the picture handed to the mother of the boy. Oh, my god! With the flowers gone, I could see that the back of the porch, just behind the casket, had a door in it: a big, metal Dutch kind of door. Oh, my god, I thought. That pretty little building is a crematorium, and that boy is going in there right now.

And that is what happened. First, six boy monk novices about the same age as the dead boy crowded around the casket, jostling each other a bit, just looking in. Then they left and the table with the casket was turned sideways, the metal door was opened and a low, smoke-black metal bench on wheels was pulled out. It seemed to be already covered with paper flowers. A man poured what looked like gasoline from a plastic gas can on the flowers and on the bench. The casket was set upon the bench, and the table that had held the boy was taken away. The bench and casket were pushed into the little room behind the porch and the door was closed.

An older man climbed the stairs to the porch. A monk handed him a long taper and lit the end. The grandfather, I am certain it was he, thrust the lighted taper through a hole in the door. The hole was closed, and the grandfather came into the long building where I was sitting. Everyone turned their chairs back 180 degrees to listen to the grandfather talk to the few monks that were still sitting on the long bench along the back of the building. He spoke briefly, subdued, his lips wearing a ghost of a smile. Then people started to get up to leave. Kru Nok said a curt, "Let's go," and almost flew toward the car with Kru Nan in tow. I followed more slowly, walking past the front of the little house, taking in the steps and the empty porch and the metal door. My eyes trailed up and up where a very tall chimney spired into the sky and spewed out black smoke.

I declined Nok's offer of a ride, choosing to walk home instead. Just off the *wat* grounds, I felt the first drops of rain.

## Tug of War & What's Next

by Lynn Tchida

I applied to Peace Corps in the fall of 2009 as a possible employment option. I knew the application process was rigorous and competitive and that it could take a year or longer to know whether an invitation would be given. I had also been travelling and volunteering for the English Development School, Lao Sericulture Silk Farm, and Give Children a Choice in Lao P.D.R. (Laos) off and on since the spring of 2007.



I received my "Invitation to Serve" in Thailand the day after I returned to the U.S. for my dad's second open heart surgery in October, 2010. I accepted this invitation and after two weeks of helping with my dad's aftercare recovery at home, I returned to Laos until mid-December, 2010. I flew back to the U.S. from Phonsavanh, Laos, eagerly anticipating the start of my Peace Corps service. I had spent the last six months in Laos helping to keep the English Development School (EDS) open and travelling with the school's soccer team to their first international youth soccer competition in Gothenburg, Sweden. My dear friend, Mr. Manophet, who ran EDS and the recreational soccer program each evening after his full-time day job as UXO translator in the bomb littered province of Xieng Khuoung, had died suddenly in May. This

was just two weeks after I returned to Minnesota after having taught English at his school in April, attended his oldest son's wedding, and enjoyed the many Songkran festivities within the Lao and Hmong villages.

I was hoping to spend the Christmas and New Year holidays with my two adult children. This didn't happen. Neither my son nor daughter was at a good place in their lives to spend any quality time with me. So, I enjoyed time with friends up in northern Minnesota and had important reflection time to prepare my head and heart for being away from family, friends and my country of origin for the next 27 months.

In early January, 2011, I began packing for the Peace Corps. Yes, I had accepted my invitation to serve as a volunteer in Thailand. I was excited to fly to Philadelphia and begin "staging". This was also a time of mixed thoughts, emotions and questioning my decision. I even contemplated postponing my service. The emotional tug of war that I felt over a year ago and continue to cope with on a daily basis has to do with pressing (and often urgent) family matters back in America.



Not a day goes by that I haven't wondered whether I'll be able to complete my full service. However, every day that I wake up in my bed here in this rural Thai village and enjoy another day of co-teaching English with my Thai counterparts at Nakung Wittayaserm and Khao Pranon Wittayakhom schools, I know that I had made the right decision.

Last September after months of on-going concern and long distance family conversations, the urgent health issues of my mother and son called me back to the U.S. My "Family Emergency Leave (FEL)" was filled with intense and emotional stress. It was definitely NOT the fun, relaxing *bit term* vacation that I was hoping for. When I landed on U.S. soil, I wasn't sure how long my mother had to live. She had undergone open heart surgery and was still in the hospital in critical condition after four weeks. Her full recovery from the significant complications that resulted was questionable. I also had no idea what condition I'd find my 26-year-old son. He had been unresponsive to my email and phone call attempts for over four months. I suspected that he was in a severe depression trying to cope with life after discontinuing his daily use of alcohol.

My one-month leave was spent visiting my mom at the heart center, helping my dad with her care upon discharge, taking her to endless medical appointments, setting up and revising her daily medication plan with the nurse, and helping with cooking, cleaning, grocery shopping, bill paying, etc.

As if this wasn't enough! I also held my son's hand (figuratively) and provided him with much needed emotional support before and after he had admitted himself into a chemical dependency treatment program.

I returned to Nakung, Thailand, hoping (but being very uncertain) that the health of my mom and

son would continue to improve. This hasn't been the case. The current situation is "same, same, but different".

## Affirmative

By Sara Kline

Not repetitive,  
Or a simple sedative,  
Or the easy alternative,  
But Affirmative.  
Act against the fear,  
Fight through every tear  
As the end is not near  
And our youth is still here.  
So don't just deny it,  
Don't stay quiet,  
But pull on through  
Since we want you  
Hand in hand  
To take this stand.  
Despite the fear  
That the end is near,  
Still burns the flame  
That makes our claim  
For a brand new day  
When we have our say.  
I'm here to stay  
Affirmative.

Last weekend the intensity of this tug of war surfaced again. It's been over two months since my son has responded to any e-mails or phone calls. No doubt his depression has returned and his CD issues have prevented him from staying in contact with me. I also had a long phone conversation with my parents and sister about the continual decline of my mom's health and dad's recent "dementia" diagnosis. Dad is Mom's primary caregiver. Her physical health declines more and more each day and Dad's memory issues are exacerbated under the stress of caring for his ailing wife of 53 years. They just celebrated their anniversary on May 31<sup>st</sup>.

These issues have thrown me into an immediate evaluation of my "WHAT'S NEXT" after Peace Corps options. It's become clear that I'm a "sandwich generation" PCV. Future decisions or desires about "what's next" in life, no matter when my service ends, will be based upon what's best for my parents and adult children. After living and working in Southeast Asia during the past few years and seeing how families support one another, I believe it's my duty to be there for my family.

On June 20 I embarked on yet another unanticipated "pause" from my Peace Corps Volunteer service in Thailand. Sometimes I've wondered whether I should just hang it up and early terminate. The decision to leave Southeast Asia is also complicated because my 24-year-old daughter is working in southern Laos as the Project Coordinator of Sai

Nyai Eco School. My decision to leave will significantly impact her. She, too, stopped her substance abuse in May 2011 and has been working hard to move her life forward in a positive direction. I'm not sure how well she'll cope with living and working in Lao if I'm 10,000 miles away.

Dealing with stateside family situations and trying to cope with this tug of war hasn't been easy. It has actually been my biggest challenge while serving as a PCV...oh yeah, except for the Thai and *Issan* language learning curve! However, I realize how privileged I am to have the option of ending my service and returning to my HOME country if I need to care for my family in the short and/or long term. Not all people in this world have such an opportunity. At this moment, I feel blessed to be sitting in my kitchen watching two children from Nakung village making shell mobiles on the floor while I type this essay. I'm thankful that I've been provided with another gift, one more day to serve as a Peace Corps volunteer. I appreciate that Peace Corps Thailand allowed me to travel back to America and that my job was still here when I returned!



# Big C, Big Problem

By El Langland

A good friend told me this story. It's pretty funny and if you knew "my friend" you'd think to yourself, "Of course that happened to her."

Yesterday "my friend" took a *song taeo* to an unnamed *amphur muang* to stock up on Ramen noodles and canned goods for her fridge-less apartment. After filling her cart with carbs, "my friend" stopped to look at rechargeable bug zappers. She stepped away from her shopping cart to price out different models and ponder the moral implications of wanton fly-zapping. After deciding on a model endorsed by a presumably famous Japanese ping-pong player, "my friend," grabbed the cart and moved on to shampoos and conditioners.

It should be noted at this point in the story that "my friend" had set her small, touristy, elephant-patterned purse- which held her debit card, cell phone, Peace Corps passport, and about four thousand baht- in the shopping cart. But Thailand is a safe place, no problem.

Pantene conditioner was on sale so I was...I mean "my friend" was stocking up when she realized her purse was gone. Panic ensued.

Obviously some punk *yao wa chon* nabbed it from the shopping cart while her mind was on zapping. "Dammit, I'm just too nice, too trusting," she was probably thinking. She felt betrayed by a country that lulls you into a false sense of security. In that moment of desperation - with no money, no passport, and no cell phone - she might have even contemplated getting on the next plane metaphorically headed west and never looking back.

Big C's security guards tried to help her look for the missing bag but she knew in her heart it was too late, "they've taken my bag and there's nothing here for me now." A *jao na-ti* from "my friend's" office, who also happened to be shopping offered to join the hunt; she suggested they call the missing cell phone.

When someone who was not a punk *yao wa chon* answered the call, "my friend" tried to explain that the thief could keep the four thousand baht if they would just return her passport. Confused, the person on the other end of the call said, "I think you have the wrong number." Calling would have been a really good idea if the stress hadn't wiped her memory of her phone number and any Thai she knew.

From as far away as produce they came to watch the frantic *farang* act out the verb, 'to steal.' A crowd of no less than thirty Thai gawkers had gathered when someone mentioned that they had seen an abandoned shopping cart with a purse in it over by the- you guessed it- bug zappers. "Did the purse have elephants on it?" the *jao na-ti* asked helpfully.

As a wave of relief took hold, the Thai words came back to her. "My friend" told me that she just kept repeating, "*sabai jai*" over and over again. That and "*kup kuhn kha*" to the people who'd helped her locate the missing articles. The Thailand where an idiot can leave their unzipped, conspicuous elephant purse in an unaccompanied shopping cart at a busy retail center and know that nothing will happen to it was alive and well. "My friend" is lucky to be serving in such a place. Thailand, no problem.

Special Feature:

## The *Sticky Rice* Photo Competition

And now... the moment you've all been waiting for! Here are the winners of this year's *Sticky Rice* Photo Competition! First we'd like to thank all who sent photos. The response was fantastic and so were your photos. Your photos were judged in three categories: Landscape, Animals/Creatures, and People. We also chose one Best Overall Photo, which you can see gracing the cover of this issue. We will present some of those photos here and you can see them all on Facebook, under editor Jeff's profile, which will be made available to all volunteers. We'd also like to thank guest judges El Langland and Rissa Walters for helping us sort through the tough competition! Thanks again to all who contributed, and enjoy these photos from your fellow volunteers!



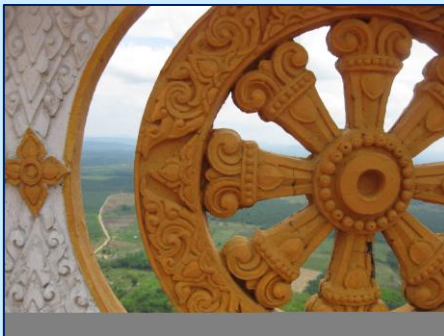
Andy Fine



Leslie Jarvenpaa



Sima Pirooz



Julia Schulties



Debi Ou-Yang



Lynn Tchida



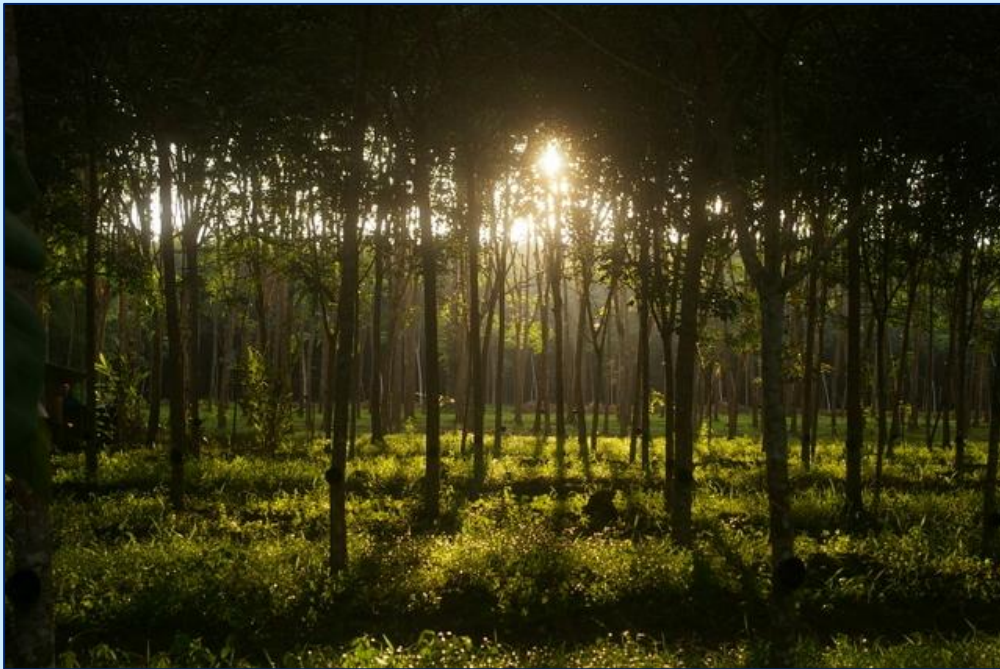
Greg Patterson



Joan Bancroft



Category: *Landscape*



**Winner:** Morgan Sprinkle



**Runner-up:**  
Kyle Livingston

Category: *Animals/Creatures*



**Winner:** Karissa Warner



**Winner:** Charles Brands

Category: *People*



**Winner:** Morgan Sprinkle

Congratulations to all of our winners:

**Best Overall:** Mike Hamby

**Landscape Winner:** Morgan Sprinkle

**Landscape Runner-up:** Kyle Livingston

**Creature Winner:** Charles Brands

**Creature Runner-up:** Karissa Warner

**People Winner:** Morgan Sprinkle

**People Runner-up:** Nora Shuman-Moore

Your prizes are national fame and fortune amongst the PC Thailand community, as well as a free beer from anyone you can convince to buy you one!



**Runner-up:** Nora Shuman-Moore

*Thank you to everyone  
who participated!*





Chris Miranda



Jeannine O'Brien



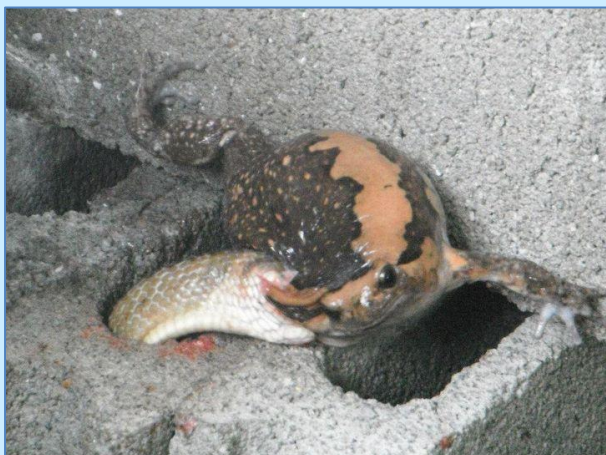
Erin Lubeck



Carla Arnold



Tess Montenarello



Jay White



Tess McLoud

*Don't forget to check out all of the contestant photos through Jeff's Facebook page!*

Out and About:  
**PVC Hangouts**

Advice from those who know for those who want to go.

South of Bangkok  
**Koh Nang Yuan,  
Chomphon  
Province**  
by Theresa Montenarello

Are you interested in receiving your scuba license? Or do you just need to get away from your village for a bit? Three islands, off the coast of Koh Tao, offer more than just a taste of paradise.



Paradise is just an overnight bus ride away.

The three islands, connected by natural sand barriers, have one resort- Nang Yuan Island Dive Resort. The resort is made of bungalows placed all around the two mountains on the islands. The resort itself is very expensive [at least as a volunteer] but there are outrageous scuba diving deals offered.

Easy Divers, the company located on Koh Nang Yuan, offers a variety of scuba diving courses for you to become PADI Certified. Recently, I completed the PADI Certified Open Water course. I am able to scuba dive anywhere in the world up to 18 meters. I do not know how much scuba diving I will be doing in the future, but the deal was too good to turn away.

The PADI Open Water Scuba Diving course costs 9,000 baht. After enrolling in the course, the resort will offer three free nights in a standard fan bungalow, with an absolutely gorgeous view you can admire from your own porch (about a 4,500 baht value). If you bring a friend, you will receive an extra night [I am always willing to tag along ☺]. Additionally, a delicious, mouthwatering breakfast buffet is included. Omelets, banana bread, yoghurt, ham, and bell peppers- basically, anything one could crave as a Peace Corps Volunteer. For lunch and dinner, I suggest bringing PB&J or some other snacks. The room has a refrigerator and the food at the restaurant, although delicious, can be a bit pricey.

**Are you in the know?  
Tell us where to go!**

We want some new and exciting ideas about places to stay and things to do around **Bangkok**.

We all go there at one time or another, and we need some inspiration that goes beyond the free food samples at Siam Paragon and hanging out on the steps of the 7/11.

We hear there are things to do and places to see in **Issan**. Prove it. Tell us where to go, where to stay, and what we're missing!



When you are not learning the ins and outs of scuba diving, you can grab a lounge chair on the beach for free or hang out at the dive shop with the most personable people you could ever meet. If you feel up for some exercise, you could hike to View Point, the top of one of the mountains on Koh Nang Yuan, and watch the picturesque sunset.

The surrounding waters of the islands are considered some of the best places to scuba dive in the world. The views, the weather, and the people make for a memorable experience and a chance for a Peace Corps Volunteer to have some R&R.



Group 124 volunteers Tess Montenarello and Charles Brands get their SCUBA on.

### **Koh Nang Yuan in a nutshell:**

**Who:** YOU and if you enjoy my company, I'll come along as well!

**What:** PADI Scuba Diving Certification courses  
[Information about the courses can be found here:  
<http://www.nangyuan.com/en/course.html>]

**When:** Call for the courses about one or two months in advance. Rory, from South Africa, deals with all reservations and is extremely personable! [082-806-5597]

**Why:** Because the deal is too good to pass, we all need a break sometimes and you get to visit me.

**How:** Take an afternoon bus from Bangkok to Chumphon [374 baht]. In Chumphon, ask the locals to help you locate Fame Restaurant [077-571077]. At Fame Restaurant, reserve a boat ticket [600 baht/way] for the next morning. Spend the night in Chumphon at Suriwong Hotel [250 baht/night], down the road from Fame Restaurant. Maybe take a walk to Farang Bar to feel more at home. Rest up, then you will be on your way to paradise!

**Hey you savvy traveler (or should I say, *Saveler*?). . . .**

Planning a trip? Recently returned from one? Be sure to tell us about it in *Sticky Rice* so your fellow volunteers can share in your stories of terrible bus rides, cross-cultural mishaps, and amazing discoveries. Whether abroad or around our shared home of Thailand, tell us where you've been, what you found there, and if we should venture forth on a visit of our own!

# Travel Notes: Serendipity and Sri Lanka

by JP Abon



In the strangest of ways this story actually begins with two J.P.s. Yes, t-w-o as in “more than *uno* and less than *tres*” J.P.s. Back in January, I was in a Skype video session with one of my best friends back home in Louisiana: a Thai-American fellow by the name of, you guessed it, J.P. As he updated me on declining quality of American pop culture (Carly Rae Jepsen) and the bounty scandal that our hometown New Orleans Saints, is currently embroiled in, I nonchalantly and quite apathetically mentioned:

J.P. Abon: “*So I randomly bumped into an Air Asia promotion and booked a flight to Sri Lanka in June.*”

J.P. Oswald: “*Isn’t that country just like India man? All you’re gonna do is stay in Bombay.*”

Oswald’s questionable geography aside (I always prided myself as being the more geographically-savvy J.P.); his response did get me thinking. For someone who has never been to either country, how can he deduce that “*Sri Lanka is just like India*”? I might as well say the same thing for Thailand and Indonesia or even for the United States and Canada... I know, how sacrilegious. I did understand where J.P. was coming from though. Both countries do share the same geographical region and there are certain aspects of both cultures that intersect with one

another. Yet, much like the Philippines from my previous travel piece, Sri Lanka is chronically overshadowed by the much larger and more touristy India. That said, it’s easy to see how the tiny island loses its identity and simply becomes an afterthought when compared to the Jewel in the Crown of the British Empire. Sri Lanka is Sri Lanka... not India. If you enter with this mindset, then you just might find yourself surprised in a good way.

When the Portuguese first arrived in Sri Lanka in 1505 they thought that they had discovered the Garden of Eden. Conversely, when I first arrived in Sri Lanka in 2012, I thought that I had discovered another circle of Dante’s Inferno. Due to the country’s close proximity to the equator, its heat becomes a whole different animal that makes the Thai hot season look like a cool afternoon breeze. Whereas Thai heat slowly wears you down, Sri Lankan heat continuously beats on you like a drum. Fortunately, before I could fry to a crisp, I was whisked away by my NBA-sized tourguide named Lalith and his retro Volkswagen van, which I affectionately dubbed “the Mystery Machine” (a not-so-subtle reference to Scooby Doo).



Our first stop was the Sacred City of Kandy. A UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of the most visited cities in Sri Lanka, Kandy served as the last capital of the ancient Sinhalese kings prior to Portuguese colonization. With its mountainous topography, central lake, and ancient gates, the city is very evocative of Chiang Mai.

The city itself is a structural melting pot; Sinhalese (Sri Lanka's ethnic majority), Portuguese, and British architecture all compromise Kandy's distinctive visage. Its most iconic structure is the Sri Dalada Maligawa, the Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic. Legend has it that whoever possesses the tooth holds governance over the country, which would explain the temple's close proximity to the Royal Palace. The tooth itself is housed inside a magnificent golden shrine called the Vadahitina Maligava, which is located in the center of the temple. Decorated with gold, ivory carvings, and precious gemstones, the shrine provides a contrasting splendor to the rather plain tooth relic inside it. Outside the Vadahitina Maligava worshippers can be seen literally breaking down into tears. I have to confess that even for a practicing Catholic such as myself, the sight of people getting extremely emotional just for a tooth attested to the mystique and lore that this temple had for all Buddhists.

Upon leaving the Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic, I was treated to an excellent performance that featured ancient Kandyan music and dance. In a nutshell, I can best describe the dancers as reminiscent to the bad guys from *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* who performed various flips and spins that I think are the earliest precursors to modern day break-dancing. The heavily-percussioned music primarily comes from the Yak Bera, which is a hanging cylindrical drum made from monkey skin and cow stomach that is played on both sides. The real show-stopper however was the fire-walking, which was thankfully performed during the cooler evening climates.

The former capital city of Colombo is the closest thing that Sri Lanka has to a booming metropolis. With only a few skyscrapers gracing its skyline, the city is still very much in its infancy before it grows into a conurbation like New York or Tokyo. Similar to these cities,



JP enjoys the markets, sights and monuments of Sri Lanka.

however, Colombo is hectic and congested. The few pockets of quiet tranquility serve as home to the idle rich, notably, the Dutch Burghers who are perceived to be as Sri Lanka's cultural elite. The first thing I noticed was the crows; shrieking opportunistic rats with wings that give Colombo an Alfred Hitchcock horror movie vibe. Despite their sinister appearance, the crows are nothing more but contributors to the city's acoustics: automobiles, ocean breeze, and a constant wave of "Ka-kaaw! Ka-kaaw!"



Reasons to travel to Sri Lanka: Great food and shiny VW buses to hold you up when you need a break.

The Beira Lake is the 160-acre lake that lies in the heart of Colombo. During colonial times, this was an important landmark that Dutch colonists used to defend the city. Today, it is one of Colombo's most popular attractions; hosting regattas and theatrical events. At the center of the lake are two islands that can be described as being each other's polar opposite. The first island, which is connected to the Beira's shores by a simple yet elegant wooden walkway, houses the Seema Malakaya Temple, which is the site of many auspicious religious events as well as a day-to-day worship in the city. The antithesis of the Seema Malakaya is located just adjacent to it: Gallery Island. Connected to the Beira by a suspension bridge, which I've nicknamed the "Love Connection", Gallery Island is a recreational area popular with Sri Lankan couples for picnics, hangouts, and to engage in PDA marathons and make-out sessions. Word of caution: only unease awaits you if you dare to venture Gallery Island alone. Conservative god-fearing island on one end; Sodom and Gomorrah on the other. That's the Beira Lake for you - gotta love it.

Similar to the Beira Lake, the Fort District had an essential purpose during Colombo's colonial era. The site of the first landings of the Portuguese in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, it was first established as a trading post before it was equipped with military fortifications and turned into a fortress. Later invaded by the Dutch and the British, the Fort was demilitarized in 1870 and subsequently became the center of modern day commerce and urban development, which it remains today. Aside from being the financial center of Colombo, the Fort is also unofficially the city's historical core. Every culture and ethnicity that played a role in Sri Lanka's history have all left their mark here. Among the famous structures located within its confines are: the Portuguese-style St. Paul's Church, the Dutch-style Presidential Palace, the British-style Old Parliament Building, the Jami Ul Alfar Mosque, the iconic Colombo lighthouse, and the twin towers that comprise the Sri Lankan World Trade Center: a symbol of the country's bright future. Immediately outside the Fort are the Pettah Market: a tourist walking street in the same mold as Bangkok's Khao Sarn Road, and the Galle Face Green. Lined with palm trees and facing the Indian Ocean, the Galle Face is the city's largest and most elegant



esplanade as well as a popular site for locals who want to get their feet wet, play a game of cricket, or simply catch the ocean breeze.

Walking through Colombo's crowded streets, the aroma of cardamom, cinnamon, nutmeg, and cloves surround you and Sri Lanka's history as the crown jewel of the Portuguese spice trade becomes visibly clear. Despite the pervasiveness of the spices, finding a good Sri Lankan restaurant can be a quite a chore since the culinary culture here celebrates homemade food rather than mass-produced restaurant concoctions. Much like the endemic heat in the air, the spiciness of the Sri Lankan cuisine never seems to let up. The basic structure of the food involves coconut milk-based curries that are eaten with a starchy extender often being rice, roti, or the native hoppers. Hoppers are bowl-shaped rice cakes that diners fill with either curry or spicy meats and vegetables. Rolled up and eaten in a manner similar as a burrito, poached eggs are often added in order to help extinguish the heat from the "condiments." As good as the hoppers and condiments were, they pale in comparison to the beloved Kotu Roti. The dish is made by pulverizing roti dough with 2 meat cleavers while it is still sizzling in a griddle. Once it resembles noodles, curry, meat, and vegetables are added. The result is an immensely flavorful starch-fest that hits you like a ton of bricks. The quintessential Sri Lankan drunk food, Kotu Roti is best enjoyed in a state of inebriation. Wash it down with a glass of your favorite arrack (a distilled alcoholic drink made from coconut) and you're good to go. Last but certainly not the least, you must have the tea. No amount of written words can do justice to the excellence of this product. Authentic Ceylonese tea is the best in the world.



Good beer and fire walking. Always a great combination.

My last stop on the Mystery Machine tour of Sri Lanka was the city of Negombo. Once a quiet fishing village, Negombo has experienced a tourism renaissance of sorts due to its thriving seafood industry, nice sandy beaches, and a beautiful coral reef that developed from the 50-year old shipwreck of the Kudapaduwa. Despite, the recent emergence of foreign tourists and modern day hotels, Negombo's beaches are, for now, largely untouched and they maintain the same facade that they did during the colonial era when the city was a Dutch military outpost. Additionally, due to Roman Catholicism being the city's major religion as well as the highly ornate Portuguese-era churches that are located throughout the city, Negombo has been given the name "Little Rome" by locals and tourists alike. After a quick prayer at the St. Sebastian's Church, I said my goodbyes to Sri Lanka and I was soon onboard a plane back to Thailand. When the ancient Persians first discovered the existence of this tiny teardrop-shaped island below the Indian subcontinent, they named it Serendib. From it, we derive the word Serendipity,

which means luck, fate, or chance. Come to think of it, I can't find better words to describe how I found myself in this country that I otherwise had no intention of ever visiting. It's amazing what boredom and a random Air Asia e-mail can do for you. When I came to this country, a part of me wanted to see the Sri Lanka from Portuguese lore: the Garden of Eden.

Did I find it?

Honestly, not really. And how can I? Such notions of paradise, rapture, Garden of Eden; they are all relative and are at the mercy of our prejudices. In other words, I'm not as easily amazed by new countries as colonial explorers. However, what I did find was an experience. I experienced a beautiful place, lovely people, and a distinctive cuisine that I can best describe as a revelation. I may not have found Eden but I discovered a country that I would definitely come back to. When will I get that chance again?

Well, like many things in life, I'll leave that to serendipity.

### Buzz-Worthy

A couple places we've been hearing about lately:

- **Cave Lodge at Thom Lot, near the small town of Soppong, in Mae Hong Son Province.**  
*Stay in wooden bungalows in the mountains, spend your days hiking countless trails and exploring caves both large and small. Visit [www.cavelodge.com](http://www.cavelodge.com) for more info.*
- **P Guesthouse in Sangklaburi, Kanchanaburi Province.**  
*250 baht rooms on the lake, a short walk to a famous wooden bridge, cheeseburgers, sampling Burmese food. Bamboo rafts, mountain walks, yen-sa-bai weather. Go to Sankla, ask for P's.*
- **Khao Yai National Park, Nakhon Ratchasima Province.**  
*Visit the largest national park in the country: hike in search of wild elephants, visit the bat caves at night, and relax in peace and quiet. Check out Lonely Planet.*

### PlayList: A Song for Every Occasion

Created by Paul Humes

- Riding your bike  
"Hey Pocky A-way," The Meters
- Showering  
"Apple Scruffs," George Harrison
- Cooking tortillas  
"Freedom Sounds," Skatalites
- For forgetting you exist  
"Essaywhman!!!," The Roots
- Locking yourself in the house  
"Late Night Evening Prostitute," Tom Waits
- Dancing away your sorrows  
"Fresh Green Freedom," Xavier Rudd
- Singing in class... a song that doesn't suck  
"Megna's," Tim O'Brien
- Taking a good poop  
"Quarter Chicken Dark", Goat Radio Sessions
- Letting your mind wander at the *wat* unnoticed  
"Like a Buddha," Railroad Earth
- Getting students excited in class  
"Bombs Over Baghdad," Outkast
- Falling asleep  
"Fearless", Pink Floyd
- Feeling flabbergasted  
"Once in a Lifetime," Talking Heads
- Pulling yourself out of a funk  
"Good Things," Aloe Blacc



On the Job:

## Ukuleles as Community Project

by Linda Prinsen

*Editor's note: Group 124 recently talked about community projects for TCCO volunteers at Reconnect. Current 123 volunteers offered examples of their own community projects, including ways to turn personal hobbies into opportunities for projects and sharing. Kristina Torpy turned her passion for cooking into a cooking club at her school, and Luke Fries included interested students in his running and exercise routine. Linda shares another idea:*

My community project is teaching music—namely playing the ukulele. I brought a total of 8 instruments with me to Thailand and plan to leave them all. My idea of what 'the uke community project' would be has changed. At first I was teaching students who came to my home in small groups or individuals. At times I have taught students at both schools thinking it would grow into a regular band at each. Recently we have added new instruments (the melodica) and tried to combine it with the 'pin' and drums.

My original vision and the reality have become different and that's ok. After all, I'm in Thailand and my goal is not to MAKE things happen my way. Lately, I have decided to focus on two or three adults (teachers) to teach so they can use it in their classes teaching English. The idea is sustainability, which would likely happen more with an enthusiastic teacher who has a uke and some skills.

I have goals, I make plans, I take action and then see what happens and how I can help music evolve. I believe so strongly in music as a road to learning and enjoyment and empowerment. Time will tell.



*Do you have a project idea you want to share?*

Send us your idea with some pictures to share in the next *Sticky Rice*.

## Health ~~Camp~~ Day

by Erica Christie

Ever since coming to Thailand and learning of the concept of a “camp”, I vehemently avoided it. It’s not that camps are bad, it’s mainly because camps seem to lack that wonderful word we all love – sustainability. So when my SAO gave me a few bucks to do something health related with the youth in my community, I tried my best not to host a camp. Yet, due to the desires of my SAO, it seemed that a one or two-day event was the most feasible.



Students work on their murals.

For your calendar:

*Encourage Choice, Empower Gender*

*What:* Training Camp

*Who:* PCVs, Thai counterparts, and Thai youth

*When:* October 18-21, 2012,

*Where:* Lopburi

I began calling this event “Health Day”, yet every PCV couldn’t seem to help themselves and I’d have many conversations that began as follows “Hey Erica, when is your camp? What’s your camp about? How’d the camp go?” I genuinely appreciate the support of my fellow PCVs, but a little part of me died inside every time I heard Health Day (as it was so creatively titled) being called a camp. At the end of the day, I think I just need to get over the label and realize it for what it was, but for the sake of my comfort, I continue to

call it Health Day.

So, what did Health Day consist of, you ask? Well, I figured it would be best to address the issues of sexual health and substance use, since these were two issues my community had been expressing great concern over since my arrival. One of my biggest issues with a camp and/or a



Students practice safe sex techniques.

one-day shindig is that although education is power and it’s an essential component to making change, it doesn’t mean that people will begin making fabulous choices just because they have all the information. I think we as human beings can relate to this on some level. The only thing that can aid in said change is consistent, long-term work with youth regarding life skills and other related topics. Although this concept is ideal, it’s not what was asked of me. So, I did the best I could and decided to add a component that addressed making healthy choices and peer pressure as well.

I created a few lesson plans, translated them and collaborated with my local health station, *amphur*-level hospital and People Living with HIV/AIDS Group (PHA Group) to have Thai health professionals come to the school to teach the lesson plans. The second day, the students completed small canvas murals based on what

they learned the day before which are currently being sewn together to make four large quilts. Each of the four quilts will be given to the school, SAO, hospital and PHA group as an expression of gratitude for their help, but also to be used as a form of community-level education.

Let me reiterate that Health Day did not have the typical fancy camp amenities that cost a lot of money. My SAO provided 12,000 baht mainly for food and mural materials. So these lessons can be used at NO COST! In most communities, there are health professionals who are very capable of facilitating youth health-related lessons. Some communities may even do this already. It's most ideal to teach these topics regularly or as a part of a long-term educational series to have the most effect. Yet, if that is not feasible, then the information can be provided during a short-term period and well, that is better than no information at all.

Don't be afraid to be the liaison that connects health professionals with the schools or an organized youth group. Use the many lesson plans created and piloted by current Gender and Development Global Initiative Group (GAD GIG) members, either as a teaching resource or to encourage your counterpart.



Students display their finished pieces of the mural.

Erica's Health Day lesson plans will soon be posted on the Peace Corps Thailand wiki. Until then, feel free to email Erica if you would like her to send them to you:

[echristie15@yahoo.com](mailto:echristie15@yahoo.com)

Also, contact a member of the GAD GIG at the following email address for more information and ideas about health related activities for your community, or about participating in the upcoming **Encourage Choice, Empower Gender** training camp:

[pcth.gadgig@gmail.com](mailto:pcth.gadgig@gmail.com)

or

GAD GIG Facebook page

We all know that many people are not comfortable implementing GAD-related lesson plans as they entail sensitive topics. Also, in Thai culture, these topics are not openly discussed. The GAD GIG recognizes this and will therefore be hosting a training camp titled "Encourage Choice, Empower Gender" that will teach PCVs, Thai counterparts and Thai youth health information and how they can bring the information back to their own communities. The two-and-a-half-day training will be held on October 18 to October 21, 2012, in Lopburi. Please see the following website for more information and donation details: .

<https://donate.peacecorps.gov/index.cfm?shell=donate.contribute.projDetail&projdesc=493-173>

Please also feel free to reach out to the GAD GIG members, Joe Nix, Kyle Livingston, Patrick Crane, Kirstie Boyette or Erica Christie, for assistance on any and all GAD related issues.



Goings On:

## Peace Corps Thailand Celebrates 50 Years

by Jeff Jackson



PC Thailand director Jon Darrah says a few words at one of the PC Thailand 50th Anniversary events.

July 12 and 13 marked the celebration of Peace Corps Thailand's 50th anniversary. It was not only a celebration of Peace Corps, but of Thailand. Everyone in attendance had been touched by Thailand and every Volunteer loves the great country in some way. There was even one Volunteer who couldn't tear herself away from it after she closed her Peace Corps service.

"I love Bangkok because RPCVs (Returned Peace Corps Volunteers) are always circling back through here," said Group 118 Volunteer Julia Chinnock who has lived in Thailand since her close-of-service date in 2008. "During the 50th celebrations I had the chance to reconnect with

several people I hadn't been in touch with for years. That was great!"

"The celebration enabled Peace Corps Thailand to tell its story across 50 years," Country Director Jon Darrah said. "The fact that the Peace Corps Thailand part of the celebration covered three areas – the U.S. Embassy, the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs along with the audience of the Princess and the open house – further confirmed for me that Peace Corps Volunteers and the host country both benefit from the program in equal measure.

"The Peace Corps way of emphasizing language and culture as a way towards effecting change is as effective today and the day Peace Corps came into being."

Carolyn Nickels, who served Peace Corps

Thailand in Group 34 from 1971 to 1975, was in attendance. "The Princess, who is admired by so many of us, and who honored us with her presence and kind words, made it very special," Nickels said.

Current and Returned Volunteers were able to communicate their stories, thoughts and ideas during the celebration. Volunteers spanning the entire 50 years were in attendance from Group 1 to currently serving groups 123 and 124.

Group 51 (1975-1978) member Nancie McDermott looks back on her service with immense fondness.



PCV 123 Kyle Livingston joins Narison Doungaodorn, Suthanya Sukphaisal, Supaporn Boonraksasatya of Peace Corps Thailand at the event at the ambassador's house. Photo courtesy Kyle Livingston.

“Before my 50th Anniversary Visit, my experience in Thailand was a precious jewel box on a shelf,” McDermott said. “One that I cherished and valued, but seldom brought down to be enjoyed.”

Although Nickels has returned to Thailand on many occasions as a representative of Friends of Thailand, this return was different.

“Some of my good friends from volunteer days were here for the first time since they had left Thailand,” Nickels said. “To finally meet them in person and learn more about their lives since leaving Peace Corps was truly an amazing and humbling experience. Not a one I know has become monetarily rich in the process, but they have become rich in many more important ways and they have continued to be Peace Corps Volunteers every day of their lives.”

Returned Volunteers couldn’t help but see the changes Thailand has gone through, but also the ways it has stayed the same, after hearing from current volunteers.

“Several of the Returned Volunteers told me that they enjoyed the talks the current Volunteers gave at the open house,” Country Director Darrah said. “They noted that there have been numerous changes in the country in the past 50 years. The talks that were given by the current Volunteers brought home the fact that the culture and people of Thailand continue patterns that go back to Day One for Peace Corps Thailand.”

Group 51 Volunteer McDermott had similar thoughts.

“[Thailand] is exactly the same and it is completely different.”

McDermott was impressed with the currently serving volunteers she spoke with and had a few parting words of advice.

“Returning to Thailand took me back in a time machine to the place where I spent three of the most powerful, defining years of my life,”



PCV 124 volunteers Amy Williams and Megan McLeod (far left and far right), snap a picture with PCVs from Group 123 Carol Thornell and Eliot Brannen. *Photo courtesy Kyle Livingston.*



Julia Chinnock speaks at the Peace Corps office open house.



Group 122 RPCV Rebekah Guillory chats with Ambassador Kristie Kenney at the ambassador's home in Bangkok. *Photo courtesy Kyle Livingston.*

McDermott said, “and reunited me with people and places that moved me, taught me, and made me who I am today. Start where you are. Use what you have. Do what you can.”

Nickels also spoke with many 123 and 124 volunteers over the two days. “I think you are a beautiful and talented group of delightful people who are doing a splendid job of carrying on the work of making the world a better place,” Nickels said. “Each day, I know, is a challenge, but it is a worthy one that grows easier with each passing moment. I am sure 10, 20 and 30 years from now [current volunteers] will have long-since discovered what we RPCVs discovered over the years following our service: You are being given a precious gift by your Thai counterparts and community members. You are forming friendships that will make your lives richer and the world more connected and peaceful and that is a beautiful thing.”

## The Tablets are Coming! The Tablets are Coming!

by Erin Cooper

As most Peace Corps volunteers are aware, the Pheu Thai party made what seemed like an unattainable campaign pledge to supply one computerized iPad-like tablet per child. I did not think that group 123 would see this come to fruition, but tablets are being passed out, some by the Prime Minister herself.



Yingluck shows off a tablet.  
*Photo from namnewsnetwork.org.*

One could argue that by bringing in these tablets, things could change and help introduce technology to places that rarely see it used in daily life. I agree with most of the critics of the project, this is a good start to show the public Thai students are on their way to furthering their computer efficiency as well as government's dedication to improving the quality of education in public schools.

The dilemma that caused such a drastic idea is that test scores are falling in nearly every core subject, even as more money than ever is allotted to schools. Nearly twenty percent of the national budget is spent on education, a fantastic feat for any country and one the United States should take note of. But money management in Thailand—especially in schools and government offices—is often a conundrum that leaves PCVs scratching their head (or just shaking it in general) in confusion.

There are many ways to improve the quality of education in Thailand and make better use of the budget afforded to it. Imagine the change if teachers duties were focused in the classroom instead of having to leave to complete school documents or going to the store or bank. Or each school having a secretary to do those things for the teachers and be able to cover lessons for a day when someone is absent. Maybe change meetings to before or after school instead of the middle of the school day. Assessment of teachers happening in the classroom rather than judging PowerPoint projects supplied with staged photos.



As any Peace Corps Volunteer will say (because they have to tell themselves over and over and over again), substantial change does not happen quickly. I fear this current agenda isn't helping the development of future generations, as we need radical modification of attitudes and practical implementation of new approaches, not computerized tablets, if we want Thailand to grow, intellectually and otherwise. And that is all we as Volunteers hope, try, and dream for.



*Statistics were borrowed from the following website. You can check them out for more about the tablet for every student program.*

<http://www.economist.com/node/21556940>

<http://thaiwomantalks.com/2012/02/26/the-sorry-state-of-thai-education-part-1-ridiculous-o-net-questions/>

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## Attention Group 123!

COS Conference is just around the corner! An idea from Linda Prinsen has sparked interest in putting together a Year Book of sorts: photos, quotes, brief summaries of your thoughts on your time here in Thailand.

If anyone would like to be on the officially un-official committee for putting together such a promising work of literary achievement, please contact Denise Silfee with ideas about what to collect and how to put it together. She undeniably has no idea where to start, since she was not chosen for the Yearbook Committee in high school, but will gladly take any excuse to require more people to contact her on a weekly or (holding her breath, hopeful, so hopeful...) daily basis.

Look for more info in the next *Sticky Rice*, or an email inbox near you.

Regulars:

## Rice Cooker Tales: From Sima's Kitchen

by Sima Pirouz

Check out more recipes from  
Sima at  
[www.simacafe.com](http://www.simacafe.com)

Here are two simple recipes that you can do with common Thai fruits.

### Star Fruit Preserve/Jam

Star fruit is in season now. It has many health benefits such as lowering your cholesterol level and it is famous for being a cure for hangovers.

You can make two different kind of preserve, one with slices of fruit and another that is a puree.

You make syrup by adding two and 1/4 cups of sugar to one cup water. Heat it till the sugar is completely dissolved and let it cool. Slice star fruits and put them in a glass container and add a pinch of salt. Pour cold syrup over them to the top of the container and let it stay in the refrigerator. You can start using them the second day. I love these crunchy sweet and sour stars as a snack in the hot afternoons.



For fruit puree jam, you slice the fruit, take the seeds out, and when the syrup is still on the stove and the sugar is dissolved, add the fruit and let them cook a little bit. Cool them and make a puree in the blender. Add a pinch of salt and pour it into a glass container in the refrigerator. You can serve it over your bread. You can also add some gelatin after blending it and cook it a little bit more and then cool and put it in the refrigerator. That makes it more like jam rather than a preserve. Here it is best to save the nutritional value and fresh taste by making preserves a little at a time, so you don't have to keep them in the refrigerator for long.

### Persimmon Preserve

Persimmons are in season now, too. They are full of vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, and anti-cancer acids.

You slice the fruits and put them in a glass jar. Between the slices you put some orange blossoms and pour honey over them and keep them in the refrigerator. They are beautiful and delicious and crunchy.



### We want your recipes!

Send us a step-by-step of your favorite self-made treats and eats!

Can you bake in a rice cooker? Have you mastered Thai curries? Are you the king of finding random ingredients at the local market and putting them together in deliciously creative ways?

Tell us about it!

# Horoscopes

Eerily accurate future predictions delivered in dream form to our very own Laurie Hacklander



## *Leo*

July 23 - August 22

Dung. Dam. Vines. Insect bites. Onion. What do these five things have in common? My five senses. At the moment I'm writing this, I'm getting a whiff of dung, hearing the dam, seeing some massive vines, feeling itchy bites while still tasting the sandwich with raw onions I had for lunch. So? Not only be aware of all the information around you, but zero in on the less obvious to determine the answer to a riddle.

## *Virgo*

August 23 - September 22

Teamwork, baby! You don't have to go it alone. In fact, delegate! Your worries diminish and your confidence increases because of the experience gained. The reward is in the effort, not the end product.



## *Libra*

September 23 - October 22

If the going gets tough, you are just that much closer to your goal. Like your fellow Virgos, you aren't alone, it just may seem like it. Perhaps without your even knowing it, someone's pulling for you. Embrace the additional challenge(s); victory is just that much sweeter.

## *Scorpio*

October 23 - November 21

You know, if you could just wait one more minute, one more moment, day - whatever - your circumstances will change. That bus you've been waiting for shows up; the break in the rain happens; the power comes back on; the person with the exact piece of information you need appears. Anxiety is normal but at the moment, it doesn't become you.



## *Sagittarius*

November 22 - December 21

Do you have a thorn in your side? Maybe you are sitting too close to the rosebushes. We really do have much more control of our situations than we sometimes realize. And it's right before us! Indulge a bit. You're worth it.

## *Capricorn*

December 22 - January 19

Pay attention to a particular relationship, whether it's a co-worker, relative, lover, neighbor or friend. Are you ignoring it, snubbing it, using it, dismissive of it, afraid of it or distracted by it? Whatever it is, deal with it and get back on track. Your actions (or inactions) are draining energy - energy much better spent on creativity and production.







### *Aquarius*

January 20 - February 18

It's time to get your ducks in a row even though you may not know why. When the time comes, you'll be glad for those orderly ducks. Also, be aware of those times when you occupy a room, when you should just occupy the chair.

### *Pisces*

February 19 - March 20

If you are being pulled in several directions, gather yourself together and point to your true north. Everything else will fall into line. Speaking of lines, drop a friend a line. They'll appreciate it.



### *Aries*

March 21 - April 19

You are coming into your own now - feeling confident, validated and encouraged by your progress. Even the big things aren't getting you down. Enjoy this time as you see and understand circumstances and events more clearly now.

### *Taurus*

April 20 - May 20

Stimulating conversation motivates you to try a little harder, take another tact, or give it the one last "ol' college try." You're inspired and heartened by almost anything you try, as long as it's done in good faith. Look in the mirror and give yourself a good pep talk if needed. (No one will hear you.)



### *Gemini*

May 21 - June 20

Does it really matter what others think? You have to care about yourself and for yourself. And when you like being with your self, so will others. Give your self some much needed attention.

### *Cancer*

June 21 - July 22

Things may seem to be in limbo right now, but a bit of good news is coming your way. You might miss it though, if you don't stay aware or if you're dismissive of it. Even though time's a-tickin', enjoy every ticktock. You are in an enviable position.



Thanks for reading another edition of *Sticky Rice!*

Please send your photographs, articles, recipes, thoughts, adventures, cultural mishaps to  
[stickyrice.newsletter@gmail.com](mailto:stickyrice.newsletter@gmail.com)