

The Friendly Word is BACK..... in Bangkok!



My year living in Klong Toey

ISSUE: 1 - *Thailand so far!*

Finally after 2 months of being here I have gotten around to writing my first email. I know many people have been so supportive and interested to know what we are up to - so this is for you.

The first two months in Thailand has had its highs and lows. I will admit that for the first 3 weeks living here all I wanted to do was get in a taxi and head straight to the airport and jump on the next plane headed for Australia. I think it was my pride that kept me here in the end as I



The outside of our house!

didn't want to come back after not giving it a good enough go. I am very thankful that I did stick at it because after 2 months now I am starting to feel settled and really beginning to enjoy my time here.

A week after we arrived we found a house to rent on the border of Rom Gow in the Klong Toey slum. It is a 2 storey little house with pink tiles and a pretty good view over the local community from the second floor. We get cable TV for basically nothing (its attached illegally) and we get an Australian channel which shows AFL. I was so excited about that and really pumped that I will be

able to watch Melbourne play this year - I was able to watch them get thumped the other week against Fremantle while my family were having to settle for the radio as it was only being shown on Foxtel in Melbourne - pretty amazing. We also can keep up to date with national news from Melbourne too which is great.

We have completed our first module of Language school and I am picking up the language okay. It's good to be able to talk to people now even if it is only a little bit. I am really enjoying language school and the challenge to learn another language.

What we are up to in a week!

Now that we are settled and participating in a wide variety of activities I feel more settled and am enjoying getting involved in all the different projects around the place. So many people have been asking "what are you actually doing over there?" So I have decided to write up the things I usually do in a week so far. If there are no dramas or anything my week generally looks like this:

Monday: Day off - or my Sabbath as some people call it.

Tuesday: Submerge classes in the morning - in the afternoon we open our house up for children or whoever to use. We will also begin to run some structured activities with the kids once we develop some re-

sources for that (e.g. craft activities, trips to swimming pools etc)

Wednesday: Assist with Bike Education at the local school and computer education. The afternoon is spent helping out the handicraft project. We use this night to take either kids out to the movies or something in small groups just to get to know some of them etc. Last week we took 3 12 year old girls out to the movies - wasn't what I expected as they just ran around all over the cinema when the movie was on and talked so much throughout the whole movie. I was really embarrassed and found it really hard not

get too angry at them but I need to remember that these kids are from a very rough neighbourhood and



Rom Gow kids at Kids Club.

politeness and consideration of others is not something they are taught, so that made me a little forgiving. I think next time we will take them somewhere where they can go crazy and I don't need to worry that they are annoying other people - its going to be an experiment over the next few weeks.

Thursday: I take kids to the hospital to get their teeth fixed. Because UNOH was on Sunrise (Channel 7) last year the Sunrise Team has

What we are up to in a week cont.

donated a certain amount of money to go towards fixing up some children's teeth –so we take them to a private hospital (as the public hospitals here are very bad) and use that money for that. In the evening we open up our home again to local kids. At night we hang out with a single mum called Pui (she's the same age as me and has 4 daughters under 9). We get on so well together but she is very poor and is struggling a bit. She speaks limited English but with that and my limited Thai we manage. Her kids are so cute and are hungry for attention. Ash and I try to take them out somewhere or just help Pui out with the kids etc. She is just a lonely mum who basically works 6 days a week and her spare time is spent looking after her kids. I feel very passionate about helping her out where I can. So I am going to put a lot of effort into that relationship.

Friday: In the morning we teach the local kids swimming at the local pool. This is always a challenge with limited Thai and the kids having absolutely no idea how to swim and holding onto me to the point where



Boon having a nice day at the pool

I almost drown – its nice to cool down though. At night we run Sunday school at a new house church that has been started up with neighbours from the Klom Toey slum who are interested or are Christians. This is heaps of fun – particularly being able to teach the kids stories from the Bible without having to feel awkward about it as their parents choose to bring their kids along to attend the Sunday School.

Saturday: Rom Gow kids club – usually we take the kids out of the slum and do activities somewhere different – swimming pool, zoo, movies, park, bike riding, etc. I then help Pui with English and she helps me with Thai – its basically an excuse to hang out and help her with the kids etc.

Sunday: I go to the markets in the morning to buy things for the handicrafts project and in the afternoon I help Bu (a local lady in the slum) who has started up a Rom Gow girls club. We have been doing cooking but as we have no oven we have started to run out of ideas for things to make that are different to what they would be making at home. So at the moment we are teaching the girls a sport called "Chornboon" which is like



Me with three of Pui's girls: Bam, Bim & Boon

netball but you have a kid on a chair with a basket that you shoot at to get a goal. Its so much fun and right up my alley. We are training for a competition that will be held on May 2. So Bu and I are coaching them so that we will be ready for that – this is maybe the highlight of my week and I'm really enjoying getting to know the girls and building relationships with them and Bu.

Each day from Tuesday to Friday we begin the day with communion with the UNOH Team at 8:30am to begin our day centred on God and remind ourselves of the reasons as to why we are here. It is also good because it helps me try to keep God, the focus of my day.

So that is basically what our week looks like.

We begin language school again next week so that will be added in there somehow – really enjoy language school so looking forward to that happening again next week.

How can you help us?

Other than continuing to pray for us and email us etc., there are a few things that it would be great if you could consider helping us out with.

Lots of the activities that I am involved in require significant funding which I didn't take into account when saving up for this year last year. It's all very well to budget for yourself personally but I have discovered so many

needs that need some extra financial support. Right now resources for the various projects that I am involved in come out of my own pocket – which I love supporting but it is not sustainable as I can't sustain this for a year. So – here are some

examples of ways you might be able to consider helping:



Playing Lego with some of the kids that visit our house

I would love to have some extra financial assistance to go towards things such as: meals for kids that visit or families that are struggling (like Pui and her girls), our new kids club that we are starting up in our new area (so we can take them on trips out of the slum

How you can help us, cont!

or do some craft activities etc), bathers for the kids (can't swim in the pool unless you are wearing proper bathers), runners for my girls Chornboon team (who are currently wearing thongs), English study books for some of our neighbours who are learning English – and the list could go on. There is a lot needed once we add them all up and its too much for Ash and I to fund on our own, as our own savings are looking rather grim. So I guess what I am asking is that if anyone feels they have the resources to give some sort of support financially it will be such a big help to us and the ministry that we are involved in. Attached is a letter from Ash Barker

(founder of UNOH) that is sort of asking for the same thing, but I wanted to ask personally too and to give you some idea of where the funding would be going.

To donate go to: www.unoh.org/donate-now/donate-to-unoh-workers or use the last page of the attach letter that Ash Barker has written.

I am also wondering if anybody has any craft resources (colouring books (very desperate for

these as they are very expensive here and the kids love colouring), pencils, chalk, paints, textas, puzzles, anything that the kids can do at our house to keep them occupied really.) If you have any of this stuff to spare could you please pass it on to Penny Galbraith (0410648189). She is happy to bring some items over when she comes on March 25 so just give it to her. That would be such a big help too and be greatly appreciated by Ash and I and the kids.



Making Crafts in Rom Gow.

The Plight of Burma!

The Plight of Burma (extra reading if interested in this topic)

Last month we had all 9 submerge students (who are doing the same course as Ashleigh and I) come over to Bangkok to stay and do the first bit of the Submerge course together. They are doing the same sort of thing but in Sydney and Melbourne. My highlight of those two weeks was going up to Mae Sot on the Thai/Burma border. Mae Sot is a town with a substantial amount of Burmese migrant workers and refugees. The exact number of Burmese in Mae Sot is estimated to be around 100,000 people, in addition to the 106,000 already recorded in the official census. Since 1988 people have been fleeing Burma because of fear of persecution and it isn't getting any better. We met a few Burmese on our time away and all of them were hoping to one day be able to return to Burma to live again. We met one man who hasn't seen his family since 1988. I am struggling not seeing my family for 2 months and this guy hasn't been able to see his for 22 years –

makes me feel a little stupid for getting homesick. Anyway, this man is an illegal librarian (according to the military in Burma) and he has set up a little library in his home in Mae Sot to protect old Burmese books and documents that are being destroyed and are illegal in Burma. It gives Burmese people in Mae Sot an opportunity to access Burmese books etc. He was very passionate about his collection of books. We donated some money for him to buy some more – he was so excited that he rushed down to the book store straight away.

My highlight of the trip was to spend a night in the local refugee camp near Mae Sot. We stayed on the Thai side in a bible school set up especially for the Burmese but is open to people of all nationalities. People in the Burmese refugee camp would come over to this school to study or participate

in the daily prayer meetings and church services. We were lucky enough to go to a service and they sang with no instruments – just their voices and it was amazing. I remember the Chin Burmese people at Ringwood Church of Christ did an item once and it was like that but had 200 people singing – it was so beautiful. Our little group were then asked to do an item too and it was like singing to a crowd of Pavarotti's – very embarrassed. The Burmese sang with smiles and at the top of their lungs. It was so inspiring to see that after everything these people have been through they still brought so much joy and passion to their worship and day to day living. I don't think I will ever have a valid excuse to be upset or grumpy about anything after seeing the resilience and happiness that these people have despite the injustices they have faced and are still facing.



The bible school in the Refugee Camp that we stayed at.

Big thankyou for all the letters and emails that people have sent and everyone's commitment to pray for us. It would be so much harder to do this if we weren't getting everyone's encouragement, prayers and support from back home – you are all a big blessing to us and the ministry that we are involved in.

Thankyou!



We're on the web

www.unoh.org/donate-now/donate-to-unoh-workers

Prayer Points!

- That we can raise enough support to continue our work here in Klong Toey and that the money raised will be spent wisely.
- That Ash and I can do the work that God wants us to do and have the energy to do them well.
- That as the weather warms up we won't get too drained and can maintain our energy.
- That we continue to focus our time and energy on Klong Toey and not get too caught up in homesickness or wanting to be at home.
- For the upcoming holiday program in Rom Gow and the Team from Ringwood Church of Christ that are coming. Pray that it is a fun and exciting time for the kids but also that they can connect with God in some way or form through the leaders etc. Pray that the Team coming will remain safe and find it a fulfilling time too.
- For Pui and her kids. That she can find joy and hope in her day to day life and not feel too overwhelmed with her kids. Also pray that she will be able to get involved with the new handicrafts project and be able to get enough money to sustain her family.
- That we can continue to meet more people within our neighbourhood and build healthy relationships—particularly with the parents of the kids we are involved with.

Burma cont.

The whole experience was really fun but I wondered what the actual purpose was of the 3 night trip. I did feel like a bit of a tourist there and felt guilty that we were using up these people precious time to talk to us or show us around. However, I now understand a lot more about the situation in Burma and the devastation that the country and its people are having to endure and feel very inspired to help these people in anyway possible. I think that it shouldn't have taken a trip to the border to learn about this – I should've known about the situation before coming here. Maybe I just haven't researched it enough at

home but I encourage anyone who doesn't know much about the situation in Burma to watch this DVD called VJ Burma (nominated for an academy award this year actually) that was made by illegal journalists who risk their lives in Burma to bring news and footage to the world about what is actually happening in Burma. I have a copy of it and would be happy to burn you a copy. The dvd has been made to bring awareness to the rest of the world but the dvd did cost \$10 which goes to supporting the journalists so if you want a copy I would just ask that you donate \$10 to the website via the following link

www.burmavjmovie.com. This website also has more info about what is happening in Burma and what you can do to help.

