

March 26 to April 18



Chiang Mai, Thailand

May 16, 2011

I want to share the wonderful experience that Sherry and I have enjoyed. We have recently returned from Chiang Mai, Thailand. Our Hard Hat assignment was to tile the floors of an elementary school. The building is less than a year old, containing a library, 7 classrooms, and offices all built around a hallway that stretched 170' from end to end. The floors were smooth concrete equivalent to a garage floor. Bill Wood, the missionary that helped build the school, had a vision to beautify the school by installing floor tile. Bill contacted Hard Hats for Christ and requested assistance to set 6,000 square feet of 16" x 16" ceramic tile. Tile is very common in Thailand as wood is in short supply.

Sherry and I set out for Thailand on March 25th for a 3 week assignment. We were accompanied by a good friend, Gerald Starnes, from Winlock Christian

Fellowship. Since Thailand has 220 volts for power, we could not take any of our power tools with us. Upon arriving, we went to several home improvement stores looking for tools to mix mud, cut, set, and grout tile. We were forced to improvise a tile saw using available materials. God generously provided every need. The caretaker of the adjacent children's home, Pong, worked with us along with 6 Thai teenagers. They were essential for mixing mud and grout, back-buttering tiles, applying grout and cleaning. Pong learned how to set tile and was an indispensable help. It was challenging to communicate as the Thai's knew very little English and we knew no Thai. On our knees for three weeks, we worked 8 hour days, 6 days a week. God gave to us the strength and endurance to complete the project we finished the very day before we left Thailand. The new floors are beautiful and brighten the building. The Thai

custom is to remove shoes upon entering a home or school. As a result the floors will remain beautiful for many years.

Tiling the school was only half of the picture. Tour-



ing a foreign land was an awesome adventure for us. Several things stood out to us as visitors. Christians comprise only 1 or 2% of the population. We passed many ornate and beautiful Wat's or Buddhist temples. Monks in saffron robes roamed the streets carrying their "beggar bowls". Little "spirit houses" were scattered around. These are miniature houses set up for the 'spirits' to live in that were displaced when a building was built. The larger the property the larger the spirit house. Offerings of cigarettes, drinks and food are set before the spirit houses with incense burning. I thought it odd that there were little ladders in front because the spirit houses were set up on pedestals 3' high. Some of the spirit houses were lit with tiny lights so



the spirits could see at night! God touched my heart concerning the millions of Thais who bow before the wooden idols of Buddha and pray to a god who can neither hear nor answer. Missionaries brought the Gospel to Asia in the 1800's and began churches, but largely, the gospel message was rejected or unheard by the masses. One of the purposes of the school we filed is to reach Buddhist children with the message of Christ. Because this school teaches English as part of its curriculum, Buddhist families will enroll their children even though it is known that the teachers are Christian. Knowing English is a valuable skill. Children are exposed to Bible truth while they attend and some have come to faith in Jesus Christ.



While touring, we visited the Massa Elephant Village. Elephants were used for logging years ago when the teak trade was booming. Young elephants were matched to young Karen tribe men for a lifetime working relationship. The elephants are highly trained and performed for us. They would hold paint brushes in

their trunks and paint amazingly beautiful pictures for the audience. They also played soccer, kicking big soccer balls into a net. They shot basketballs through a hoop, danced for the audience, threw darts at balloons as well as dragging and stacking logs. We also visited the umbrella factory where wood and cloth umbrellas are made by hand and painted with exquisite flowers or nature scenes. We toured the wood-carvers market and were awed by the intricate and beautiful workmanship of furniture and sculptures. In the silk factory we watched how silk is harvested from cocoons, wound onto spools and woven into fabric on wooden looms. These particular looms were loaded with 4,000 threads to weave a colorful silk



cloth 4' wide. We visited an orchid farm and saw thousands of orchids in full bloom. The colors and intricate designs were infinite. The night markets were a swirl of thousands of booths, shoppers, musicians and beggars. The sights, sounds and smells put me on sensory overload. The Thai food was incredible! While there, we were over-

whelmed by the hospitality of our hosts. This trip was truly life changing.



Thank you for praying for us and thank you for the financial assistance which made this trip possible. Our heart's desire is to carry the spirit of Isaiah when he said, "Here am I, send me." We are committed to serving God in any way that He pleases. Serving as Hard Hat missionaries has been an incredible adventure and these have been the best years of our lives. A special thanks to Louie and Louise Ulrich who cared for our motor home and our cat in our absence. God is good! All the time!

Yours in Christ,

Joe & Sherry

Newton

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