

# Mae Sot Education Project

Winter 2013



## E IS DEFINITELY FOR EDUCATION

By Meaghan Moniz, 2012 Volunteer

For the past two months I have been working on a project with my Grade 8 Parami students and my Grade 9 BHSOH students, under the direction of Dr. Sunny Lau, our TESL instructor. The project is called a “ABC Book”, and the idea is to have the students express their lives and how they view their surroundings through assigning a word to each letter of the alphabet. When I introduced this project idea to my students, it was a stretch for their English skills at first, but with extreme devotion and energy, they produced an astounding final product. Through this project, my students exercised their critical thinking skills and stretched their English as far as it could go, surprising me as well as themselves. In the book they share what makes them happy, sad and hopeful, what is important to them and of course, their Burmese culture. Dr. Lau hopes to share this book with a group of Canadian students to help them learn about Burmese culture and migrant life, and in response the Canadian students will make a book of their own. We hope that this exchange will give both groups of students insight into the similarities and differences in their lives. I would like to share with you two excerpts from the book that were exceptionally written and extremely illustrative, both from Grade 9 students at BHSOH.

BHSOH GRADE 9

### B is for Belief



Everyone has the right to have religion. It is no matter to be Christian, Buddhist, Muslim, and others. The most important thing is to understand each other. If people understand one another, they can work together in the community and they can avoid from the discrimination. To understand the freedom of religion is very important because it is the first step to overcome to discrimination  
By: Elizabeth

## APRIL 20: THAI DINNER

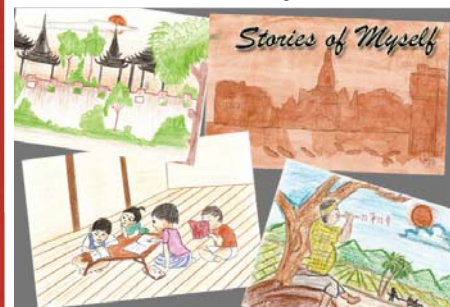


The above painting will be sold during the dinner in a live auction.

YES! The Thai Dinner, one of our most popular fundraisers, is back for a fourth year. On Saturday, April 20th, chef Veronica Kaczmarowski, will treat our donor community to more of her amazing culinary creations. As in the past, the dinner costs \$50 per person of which \$30 is a donation to the project for which a tax receipt will be given. Tickets will be available from Project Committee members and volunteers. If you wish to reserve a table for a group of six or eight, that is possible. In any event, purchase your tickets as soon as possible. We look forward to seeing many of you there.

## FROM BURMA TO MAE SOT: STORIES OF MYSELF

A unique art project by Burmese children...  
...reaching out to Canadians



Many of you will remember the launching of our book of children's art and commentaries at last year's Thai Dinner. If you would like a copy of this book, please let us know.



## E IS FOR EDUCATION

By Swe Soe

Education is very important. It is necessary to need for everybody. It is a very valuable thing than everything. Some people are graduates with education in the world. Now, the world is improve and develop because the educated person are present.

It is not the same value as other things. Many thief are presence in the world. They can steal many objects but can't steal education. For example, you will have a lot of money and these can buy many things but not existence thing. Moreover, you will have gold-ring, diamond, jade, and other value things. They are very expensive but thief can steal those from you. So these are not existence things. Education is existence thing.

If you will be educated, the work are not rare for you. These are ever welcome for you. The educated persons are never live poorly. They can do work in the cool with shade place easily, such as office company, etc. You will get a lot of money but uneducated persons are hard find work for them. Although they get work, they will do work under the sunlight tiredly and they will get fewer money than educated persons. Moreover, education is useful for everybody.

If I will graduate with education, I can do a school teacher. I can give to the children that knowledge, guides students to the right path to be successful in life. I will always show them way to brighter future. So, many educated are many presence in the world. They will be valuable person for their country. Therefore, education is very important.

Now, I am trying hard in my lessons to pass final examination with good scores. I want to be a graduate with education. After graduation, I will try to be a valuable person for my country.



## F IS FOR FRIENDS (LIVING WITH FRIENDS)

By Ei Myat Mon

I am from poor family and I don't have father when I was 13 years old. So, my mother can't provide for my brother and sister and me. She wants me to be a good teacher. Therefore, she sent me to the boarder in BHSOH school. Now, I live in boarder house. I have many friends in boarder. There live many ethnic groups. They come from refugee camps, poor family, and everywhere. Some people are orphans. They are Kachin, Burman, Karen, Araken, Shan, Chin, Mon, and Kayer. They have many moral behaviours. Some people are good discipline, clever, good moral, patient, and honest. Some people are bad discipline, not clever, bad morals, and foolish. I get many experience and knowledge from them. I am very enjoy to live together with them in boarder. We play the various kinds of games and we play the guitar and sing many songs. I have breakfast, lunch, and dinner together with my friend. We make daily duty and follow our discipline in boarder every day. Sometimes, we visit the many famous waterfalls and parks and we watch TV on holidays. The girl boarder is near the boy boarder in our school. We don't discriminate each other. We are very helpful on one another. As for me, I will never forget and remember in my life this period.

That's all.





## TWO BHSOH STUDENTS OFFER REFLECTIONS ON THEIR LIVES

Submitted to the newsletter by their teacher, Meaghan Moniz, 2012 Volunteer

### THAW ZIN, 19, BHSOH

*I am Thaw Zin. I was born in 1994 at the Mandalay division in Myanmar country. I am nineteen years old, and I am post-ten class. Now, I live in Mae Pa village, Mae Sot district. I transferred in 2004, to the Thailand country. I don't have brother and sister and my parents dead in my childhood. So, I don't have enough for my life. But, I never down in the mind, I always try hard for tomorrow.*

*My dream for the future is to be a teacher and I want to stay in my country. I want to teach Burmese students in my country and I want to share english skill and critical thinking. So, I can change their future and their dreams. I want to do this because, the education of Myanmar is not good and their system is not the same as other country. They can't provide understanding for a student. For example, a lesson is to understand a subject. So, it is bad for a student to learn by memorization. So, I want to really teach only to understand for Burmese students. This is my dream for the future in my country.*

*But, I have a little worry about my country. If the system in my country does not change, I will stay in the Thailand country and then I don't have Burmese and Thailand passport. I have only one school card. If I go back to my country, they can't acknowledge my citizenship. So, I am afraid of the army. That is my worry.*



### AUNG KYAW LWIN, 17, BHSOH

*There are many Burmese nationalities in Mae Sot in Thailand. Most of them are illegal migrants, so they often face challenges and problems. I am a migrant too. The Burmese migrants are working difficult, dirty and dangerous jobs now, and some children are also working with their parents. Our government have ignore us for many years. Although the government are reforming, the migrant workers' situations don't change anything. Their situations are still bad.*

*There are over seventy learning centres in Mae Sot. Some volunteers from western countries come to teach us patiently and kindly. So we are happy when they teach us. We don't have chances to go to university or colleges direct. If we want to go to universities, we must join with a high education programme.*

*I think the Canadian are luckier than us because you have a good political system, and Canada is a rich country. Our lives look hell, and your lives are heaven. I want to visit to Canada because I want learn your country's traditions. The Canadian and our lives are very different.*

## Mae Sot Education Project says Thank You!

*We at MSEP know that we cannot say often enough how deeply we appreciate the many individuals and the organizations that have provided the financial support needed to carry us through the last year. We want to express our heartfelt thanks to all who have made donations, large or small, who have provided in-kind assistance, and/or who have given their time and labour to make our project a success. We remember each and every one of you and hope that you know how much a part of MSEP you are. Working together, we express our community's commitment to advancing the rights and wellbeing of a group of marginalized youth who, though far away, have come to feel a bit like family to us.*



## VOLUNTEERING: NOT JUST ABOUT BEING IN THE CLASSROOM!

By Gabriella Breault-Fortier and Meaghan Moniz, 2012 Volunteers as they head for home Late February 2013

It is late February. As we prepare for the last leg of our travels, we realize that our conversations always end up being about our time in Mae Sot. We've left Mae Sot with new best-friends and have been humbled beyond words; we've formed relationships that have taught us to be grateful for our family and friends, to laugh even when we're sick, and especially to be patient when things don't work out the way we thought they might. Most of all, we've come to realize how our role in Mae Sot goes way beyond helping our students improve their English.

Thinking back, we remember that it didn't take long upon our arrival at the schools to realize that not only students, but teachers and even headmasters were searching for more than just a person to fill the role of an ESL instructor.



### GABRIELLA

I remember when we visited Hsa Mu Thaw on our second day in Mae Sot. As we passed through the gate and were welcomed by kids yelling "Hello!", there was Daw Htet Htet Aung, the headmistress, running towards Alexandra and me with open arms exclaiming "My daughters!" She gave us a huge hug and explained that as we were now teachers at her school, we were to be considered as her daughters. The other staff members were our brothers and sisters. By treating/thinking/regarding/us as members of their family, they invited us to be not only a teacher but a friend, a confidante, a role model and someone they sought advice from. Thus, our job title was sometimes a bit hard to describe in one sentence.

We noticed early on that our students showed a comfort level towards us which was different than that shown to the other teachers. Oftentimes as volunteers we came home looking for a solution to the problem of students being TOO comfortable with us. We realized that the line between being a friend and a teacher was a blurry one which sometimes led to students acting out. On the other hand, we were more than grateful that they were comfortable enough with us to be themselves.

The migrant school "system" does not always allow much room for students to be themselves. At schools like Hsa Mu Htaw and BHSOH which have had volunteers since the beginning of our project, students have come to realize that with us comes a different way of learning and interacting as well as special opportunities only we seem to offer them... like when, a few weeks ago, we organized a trip to the waterfall for all of our students.

We had arranged to go to the waterfall with only the GED class at BHSOH; the following week would be Moe Ma Kha's turn. The students were to arrive at 11:00, and until then, we were getting ready to go. However, at 10:30 we heard little yelps of excitement. We turned to each other, confused, and agreed that it couldn't be the BHSOH students. Stepping outside, we saw eight of Moe Ma Kha's students on bicycles staring at us with big smiles on their faces and exclaiming with open arms, "We're here!" Confusion turned to happiness to worry really fast. We worried that there wouldn't be enough space for them in





the bus because there was no way we were telling them to go home. Everything worked out when the BHSOH students treated them like their own little brothers and sisters, making room for them, even letting some sit on their laps. It turned out to be one of our most beautiful and memorable days in Mae Sot. Most interesting about this day was the self-assurance those students felt about showing up unannounced, knowing that we would be happy to see them. Throughout the day, one student kept asking me, “Teacher, happy?” Our students saw in us big sisters to talk to when they had heavy hearts because they missed their family, their country, their friends, or when they wanted simply to hang out.

MEAGHAN

I can recall many instances when my students shared their secrets with me, or sought me out for advice. Being close in age to my students, I feel that we were able to relate on a deeper level with each other. My students shared their past, their feelings, their hopes and their dreams with me. I will never forget the day when after a week of being sad and moping in class, one student came to me and said, “Teacher, today I am SO sad.” Naturally I was very concerned. When I asked what was wrong, he replied, “Well teacher, my heart is broken.” He then continued to explain how a girl was the love of his life, and then asked me, “So teacher, tell me what should I do?” I was flattered that he came to me with this problem, but also surprised that this was what had been making him feel sad all week. As westerners we often have a preconceived notion about how students in developing countries live their lives and the things that worry them. My teenage students worried about the exact same things that teenagers in Canada do! They were constantly obsessing over their current crush, their upcoming exam, or food that will “make them fat.” I feel blessed that I have been given the opportunity to fill this role in my students’ lives and hope that the relationships I have formed with them will last a long time, that they will continue to see me as a confidante and a friend who can offer them good advice.



Volunteer Meagan Moniz with one of her students.

Looking back on our experiences in Mae Sot, one thing that we never expected was that we would be fulfilling so many roles for our students. We went into the classroom as role models and became someone they looked up to. Once a bond was formed and a comfort level was established with our students, it was a natural next step for them to confide in us and ask our advice. Our students let us into their lives and shared more than we asked for. As a result we have learnt more from them than they could ever know. Although it is painful to leave them now, it eases our worry to know that in a few months the new volunteers will be arriving to pick up where we left off and build new relationships with them.

MSEP SAYS FAREWELL TO RON BISHOP AND WELCOMES AN OLD FRIEND, BONNIE KAY



After two years of keeping our accounts, managing bank transfers for donations to schools and monthly transactions with our volunteers in Mae Sot, and preparing our annual financial statements and budgets, Ron Bishop is retiring from our Project Committee with plans to travel—and then travel some more—in the coming year. Ron has been a supremely steady, thoughtful and generous contributor to our work, not only in the guiding our finances but in guiding our decisions regarding support to our volunteers and to schools. We will miss his quiet presence and are deeply grateful for all that he has done. We want him to know that if or when he wishes to rejoin us, there will be a place for him on our committee.

The need to replace Ron as our treasurer led us to issue an appeal to newsletter recipients, as many of you know, and the result was a very happy surprise. Bonnie Kay, one of the “original four”



in our very first volunteer team in 2004-2005, responded to our call and has agreed to take over Ron's post on our project committee. Since graduating from Bishop's University in 2007 with a degree in Liberal Arts and a Minor in International Relations, Bonnie has continued to pursue her love of travel. She worked for Free the Children until 2010 and is currently working for Concordia University within their Office of Advancement and Alumni Relations. This spring, Bonnie will be completing a certificate in Public Relations, and she continues to work on mastering French in her adopted province of Quebec. Although she works in Montreal, she has at least one foot in the townships as her husband, also a Bishop's grad, hails from Sherbrooke. We are delighted to have her re-engaging with MSEP in a new role, a decision that (we think) speaks to the impact of our project on many of its volunteers.



## THE LITTLE THINGS

By Michelle Frise, 2012 Volunteer

It would be fair to say that I have thought about Mae Sot every day since being back. Leaving was bittersweet. I felt heartbroken to say goodbye to students I had made such connections with, students whose lives I wanted to keep tracking long after the day I left. What would happen to my Grade 11 students who would write the Burmese exam in March? What would become of the Grade 3s, 5s, and 6s who were so happy, so hopeful for the future? What of the schools and the headmasters? Would they continue getting the funding they needed to continue on? Would they become a part of the Thai education authority or continue to be run by the Burmese for the Burmese?



On the other hand I was excited to see family again, to recount my journey, to sleep in a real bed. It surprised me how short this excitement of being home lasted. After a few days the novelty of returning home had faded. I wanted to go back and felt absolutely devastated that I couldn't. I spent my first couple weeks back home looking for jobs and looking at pictures of Mae Sot. I spent hours rearranging and editing photos, reading posts made by people on the "what's happening in Mae Sot" Facebook page, and talking to my old students on chat. They never failed to ask me, at least once in every conversation, when I was coming back. It broke my heart every time. Worse than this was a few months later, when they would message me asking, do you remember me? I don't know how to explain to them the importance they have in my life and that no, I will never forget them.

Since returning to Canada from my life-changing six months in Mae Sot, I have found the smallest things remind me of the life I lived half a world away. One of my students had sewn me a bag as a goodbye present. I use this bag everyday and have gotten a lot of questions and comments about it. It gives me such pride to explain how one of my Grade 6 students back in Thailand made it for me. When I pour myself a cup of tea every morning before work, I remember the Myanmar tea mix that I became obsessed with while in Mae Sot. When I see a biker on the road, I can't help but remember the many people I would see, riding two or even three or four on a bike, sometimes with one hand on the handlebar and the other holding an infant. As I fill up on gas at the 7-Eleven, I glance over at the other cars and think how strange it is that just a few months ago I would pull up to a 7-Eleven on my bicycle and have to find a spot amongst countless motorbikes. When I see my students playing with iPads and computers, I think of my Burmese students who could happily play with a handful of rocks or elastic bands. Even doing hot yoga reminds me of the heat and humidity I used to take for granted back in Thailand!

I am not sure how long these little reminders will continue to bring me back to those six months. What I do know is that these little things all added up to something extraordinary I will never forget.



# DES SOUVENIRS ET UN CHANGEMENT SURPRENANT

By Alexandra Marcotte, 2012 Volunteer

J'étais préparé à devoir m'adapter à un nouveau climat, un nouveau chez-moi; préparée à devoir faire face à de nouvelles bibittes, de nouvelles coutumes, de nouvelles valeurs; préparée à devoir m'habituer à de nouveaux mets et de nouvelles langues.

Mais ce que j'y ai trouvé m'a surpris. J'ai rencontré des visages souriants, des enfants prévenants, des adultes dévoués; j'ai découvert un nouveau regard, un nouveau touché, un nouveau goût, un nouveau souffle; j'ai vue un monde plein de couleurs, un monde plein de contrastes, un monde ancien en renaissance et surtout j'y ai trouvé une nouvelle raison de me lever chaque matin.



2012 volunteers Gabriella and Alexandra with headmistress Daw Htet Htet Aung

C'est un défi d'enseigner à des enfants d'une culture différente. Je devais choisir mes mots avec soin et parler lentement pour donner la chance à mes petits élèves de me comprendre. Je devais aussi m'assurer d'utiliser des exemples culturels auxquels mes élèves pouvaient s'identifier.

J'ai su développer un lien privilégié avec mes élèves en participant à leurs jeux sur l'heure du dîner, en organisant des activités parascolaires et en partageant leur quotidien en dormant à l'école avec eux.

Ce fut une expérience très enrichissante! Mes élèves et moi avons eu la chance de développer notre sens de l'initiative et notre créativité, tout en s'ouvrant à une autre culture. Durant mon séjour, j'ai eu la chance de rencontrer les parents de mes élèves ainsi que de prendre part aux nombreux festivals et journées culturels. Les gens Birman sont curieux, dévoués et extrêmement généreux.

Le souvenir que je garde de mes chers élèves est celui d'enfants heureux, leurs beaux yeux bruns brillant d'étoiles et leur petites voix qui m'appellent pleines d'entrain : « teacher! »

## CAN MSEP HELP THESE KIDS?

How much does it cost for students who have reached the end of what migrant education has to offer to pursue a GED preparatory program? Recently, five of Meaghan's students at BHSOH, Htun Thiri Kyaw, Su Mon, Mary Htoo, Chane Thu, and Myat Linn Aung, were accepted to participate in a one-year GED (General Education Development) preparatory program managed by BEAM Education foundation in Chiang Mai starting on March 11<sup>th</sup>. However, in order for them to participate, the following costs must be covered:

- Passports and visas: 14,000 Baht/ head/ year x 5 head = 70,000 Baht (\$2422.00 CAD)
- Food and accommodation = 13,000 Baht/ head / year x 5 heads = 65,000 Baht (\$2250.00)

The total for one year for five students is 135,000 Baht or or about \$4700. BHSOH School Director, U Khaing Oo Maung, is looking for donors who are able to assist in providing these very necessary funds so that the five students can pursue their education. Parents have provided some of the money needed. A number of individual donors have also contributed. However, about half the sum remains to be found. While the total does not seem like much for a year of education for five very serious and enthusiastic young students, raising it (along with the other funds we need for our regular school donations) is most challenging.

## FEELING STILL CONNECTED – HALF A WORLD AWAY

By Samantha Silva – 2012 Volunteer

I've never been as surprised as when I received my first friend request on Facebook from one of my students in Mae Sot. It was shortly after class in Mae Sot, and the request brought the realization that there would be a way to communicate with my students after returning to Canada, other than by snail mail – or by returning to Mae Sot.

The requests continued throughout my Mae Sot experience, and now that I am back in Canada, I am still talking to many of my students (most of whom are in Grade 9, but many from my other classes), hearing about how they are doing and about things that are happening around Mae Sot. These little updates, and "I miss you" messages, have not only made me miss Mae Sot more, but they have also shown me how these students are continually growing and using what resources they have to reach out to friends around the world.

Every short conversation allows me to see if they had learned from my lessons, I can figure out what they still want to learn, and I can see what they are learning in class.





Although I am not there with them, it feels as if we were all still together and connected. Whether I am talking to students through Facebook, Skype, or Oovoo, I know that my students still care and will continue to grow, with or without me.

My time in Mae Sot has given me the experience of a lifetime, and my students there have made me more proud than I could have ever imagined I might feel after only six short months. I hope that the next group of volunteers has a great experience, and can manage to make the same connections that I feel that I have made in Mae Sot.

## OUR 9<sup>TH</sup> TEAM OF VOLUNTEERS IS GETTING READY!

By Elizabeth Serra, 2013 Volunteer

As the semester at Bishop's carries on, the new team of volunteers for 2013 has more than the return of summer on our minds. With June quickly approaching, we have been working hard in preparation for our six-month expedition to Mae Sot. So far, we have put together two fundraisers with a few more in the making. While selling hot dogs to ketchup-splattered students at the Gait can be a test of will-power, the stories of Mae Sot remind us what the perseverance is worth. We are happy to say, too, that our second Battle of the Bands was as entertaining and successful as the first, bringing students, professors and townspeople out for a good cause, and of course, for some good tunes. I think we are all crossing our fingers that this can become our own little Mae Sot tradition at the Lion. In addition to fundraising each month, we are also enrolled in a course to ready ourselves for teaching activities and lessons in an ESL classroom. At the same time, we are busy familiarizing ourselves with the history of Burma's political and economic turmoil in the hopes of gaining a greater understanding of the backgrounds and cultures of our future friends and colleagues. There is still much work to be done, but I think it is fair to say we are all enjoying the ride and the building anticipation of the exciting journey ahead.



New volunteers! From left to right: Vanessa Laroche, Michelle Vanloon, William Bryson, Elizabeth Serra and Megan Irving

### WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE DO

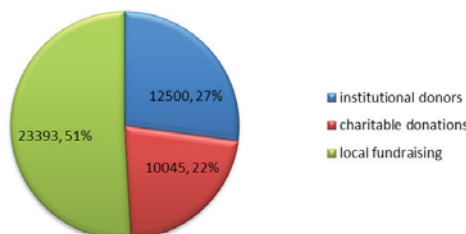
The Mae Sot Education Project (MSEP) is a community project based on the campus of Bishop's University and Champlain College – Lennoxville in Sherbrooke, Quebec. Since 2004, we have provided assistance to six schools for migrant and refugee youth from Burma/Myanmar whose access to education depends on support from the international community. In recent years we have also worked with other schools. Each year we select a group of young people from our campus to go to Mae Sot for six months. While there, they provide practical assistance to teachers and enrichment activities for children in the schools. They learn about the situation of displacement experienced by the Burmese people in Thailand as well as about the challenges for the Thai community in coping with a large population of refugees and migrants. Finally, they share their experience with Canadians. The Project Committee is made up of members of the community, faculty from Bishop's and Champlain, and former youth volunteers with the project. Currently, members are: Avril Aitken, Carinne Bevan, Ron Bishop, Megan Irving, Catherine Isely, Sunny Lau, Mary Purkey, Garry Retzleff, Marjorie Retzleff, and Barbara Rowell.

### HOW YOU CAN HELP

Contributions to the project are always welcome, and tax receipts will be issued. Donations may be made to either the Champlain College Foundation (specify Mae Sot Education Project) or to the Bishop's University Foundation (specify Mae Sot Education Project), Box 67, Champlain College, Sherbrooke, Quebec J1M 2A1.

### A LOOK AT OUR FINANCES IN 2012

Revenue, 2012 (Read clockwise from top.)



Expenditures, 2012 (Read clockwise from top.)

