



DREAMS OF HOMELESS CHILDREN

by Shan Youth Power



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About Shan Youth Power

Due to extreme and systematic human rights abuses, including mass killings, rape, forced labor, and forced relocation committed by the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) in Burma, many people from Shan State have fled to Thailand and areas along the Thai-Burma border to seek refuge. Despite this reality, no official refugee camp has been provided for the Shan. Rather, they live in different places throughout Thailand and work in low-paying jobs due to their lack of legal status and education. To support the needs of Shan State youth and children and to operate as a communication center for this community, Shan students and youth founded Shan Youth Power (SYP) on August 5, 2002. The mission of Shan Youth Power is to encourage youth to participate in social and democratic development through education, awareness-raising, and capacity building.

Shan Youth Power provides migrant Shan children and youth in Thailand with educational opportunities in English and Shan language, math and basic computing skills, in addition to public health trainings, community development projects, and a newsletter with information about the political and social situations facing the Shan community. Through this work, Shan Youth Power maintains Shan culture and literature among the migrant community in Thailand and works to improve outcomes for Shan children and youth inside Shan State and Thailand, and along their shared border

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A Glimpse Into a Migrant Child's life

by Nong Ying

There are many migrant children who do not have the opportunity to study, such as the children who live in the construction camps where conditions are not good and those who live in the mountains far from town and work as gardeners or farmers. These types of jobs are available for migrant workers since they pay little. And many children do not pursue an education because their families, who newly arrive in Thailand, do not have enough money to send their children to school and have other expenses like ID cards they need to pay for. To help their families, many children also become migrant workers at a young age.

However, the migrant children's lives changed when a migrant school came to the village. This school, called Shan Youth Power (SYP), gives free education to Shan migrant children. The teachers teach English, mathematics and Shan language, which is especially important for us. There are many kinds of students - some students have never studied before and some students are currently studying in Thai school. But it does not matter because everyone is equal in this school and they can study and improve no matter where they start from. It might be a little difficult for the children who have never studied. But, they try. At the same time all the teachers are very kind and try to encourage the students.

There was one teacher who told the students that he did his job because he loved it. Even though the salary is not much. But that did not matter to him. When he saw the smiling faces of the students that made him feel happy and want to continue to do his job. Now, the children can read and write in Shan, our mother language. Now they are able to write letters, read stories and communicate with older generations in their native language. This is important for us because it helps us keep our own language and prepare for the next generation. Shan Youth Power does not only teach languages. They also teach dif-

ferent things such as traditional Shan dance, music and sports. The students also have a chance to show off their dancing and singing in the festivals and ceremonies. These activities make them feel happy because this might be the first time for them to perform, and they develop good friendships with each other.

The children attend SYP class on the weekend. Some students can attend only one or two times. As their parents or family have to move to another place to work and the children have to stop going to school to follow their families. This is a problem for them when they grow up. They will become migrant workers like their parents.

I am one of the migrant children who had the opportunity to study in the SYP School. I feel this school is very important for us. It seems different from other schools that I used to attend. In this school, everyone is Shan and we help each other and study together as brothers and sisters. It makes me know that even though we are in Thailand we still have our Shan community and we are not alone. Shan Youth Power gives students the chance to continue their education.

Credits

Dreams of Stateless Children is written by staff, students, and supporters of Shan Youth Power, an organization working to help Shan migrant youth in Thailand.

The stories in this book are all real accounts of Shan migrant children and their lives in Thailand.

This book would not be possible without the following people:

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COMMUNITY INTERVIEW

A conversation with:

Ba Mant, Karnkanook 1 Community Leader

Bi Merng, Karnkanook 1 Community Leader

Pa Lao, Karnkanook 2 Community Leader

Lung Sai, Pong Yaing Community Leader

Pi Mong, Pimok 4 Community Leader

Nang Zeing and Nang Hseng, Fah Laung Community Leaders



1. What is life like for migrants who have moved to Thailand for the first time? Can you tell us what the typical experience is of a Shan migrant child and family when moving to Thailand?

Pa Lao:

It was a very hard life when we first arrived in Thailand because we only received a small pay and we could not afford any services with that payment. My family in Shan State was curious as to why I didn't go back home.

Nang Zeing and Nang Hseng:

We saved our money as much as possible. We move to Thailand when my son was 2 years old. When we first arrived, we had really hard life. I had a low paying job and had to save as much money as possible. We were afraid to go outside – afraid the police would arrest us because we didn't have documents. The document status is still a problem when getting a job too. We only had a pot and a pan. And my poor children also didn't have nutritious food to eat. I had to find vegetables like bamboo shoots and eggplants for every meal. I had to let my children sleep under the tree while I worked. Our family stayed with another family near the mountain, and when it rained all the rooms got wet and our clothes became wet. At that time I was really sad for my children because I could not even buy them a 5 Baht snack that they wanted to eat.

Ba Mant:

Many people come to Thailand because they have relatives who can help them get jobs here. But for the children it is difficult. Many do not go to school.

2. What is life like for the migrant children in Thailand? What is the living situation like? What about the education system? Health care?

Pa Lao:

My daughter, Nong Torn, was born in Shan State and we come together to Thailand when she was 3 years old. At the beginning when we arrived in Thailand, when she got sick, I could not go to hospital because I could not speak Thai and I didn't have any documentation.

One day, I had to go because I was afraid that staying at home was making my daughter worse. But today, she has her 10-year ID card and she is going to Thai school.

Ba Mant:

Some children go to school, others cannot because the cost of transportation. Some parents feel that when their children finish grades 6 or 9, they are ready to work. So, they find jobs for their children instead of sending them to school again.

Nang Zeing and Nang Hseng:

My children had to work with me because we didn't have any money. But when they worked for a few days, they started to get sick. Our family didn't have a bike to take my children to the doctor.

Pi Mong:

When I learned about organizations like the MAP Foundation, Studio Xang and Shan Youth Power, I knew migrant children would have more chances to succeed in life.

3. Given this situation, how are children doing in their jobs and education? What are some challenges children face?

Pa Lao:

For my education, I began school when I was four years old and continued until grade four. After I failed the exam, I dropped out of school. That is also a reason that I try to send my daughter to school as much as possible. Because after she been in school she is more polite and clever. After SYP came and opened the school in our construction site, she has learned a lot and has had opportunities to learn computer skills, English, math and Shan language during the weekend. A lot of her friends from other places also want to learn like her. It is for her future. If I give her money, she can lose it easily, but if I give her education, she can use it forever. If she is educated she can get a better job one day and she will not have hard living conditions like we do now.

Ba Mant:

Some children have decent jobs, but most of them cannot save money. Some save money by eating not so delicious food and others make money by working in dangerous jobs where they are exposed to chemicals. Some get sick because of the chemicals.

Pi Mong:

I saw that they have better opportunities for education in Thailand than inside Shan State. But, for the migrant children, their rights are not equal to others.

Nang Zeing and Nang Hseng:

I feel upset when I compare children's situations here with the situation in my home town. In my home town there are a lots of family members and relatives who are ready to help when I have problem. But in Thailand there is no one that can help us sometimes.

4. What was life like for you in Shan State? Did you ever come into contact with the SPDC? Can you provide details about your experience inside Shan State?

Ba Mant:

When I lived in Shan State, drug-lords ran my village. Most people, including children, could not go to school. We had to learn the Shan language by studying underground. In Shan State, most people worked as farmers and gardeners. Regarding occupation, when we worked harder we did not earn more money. What we earned in one day was only enough for that day and we could never save. Most of the workers developed drug addictions and lost everything because of drugs. At the time, I was worried about this drug problem. So, I had to sell my farm and move to Thailand. Even though I live in Thailand now, it does not mean that I will live here forever. I plan to move back to my hometown one day. But right now, there are a lot of problems: we fear the SPDC. They cut down the trees and ruined our forests for their business. In the past, there were big forests and enough trees to provide water for daily life. Now there are fewer forests and trees, and not enough water as before.

Pi Mong:

When I lived in Shan State, most villagers in my community and I had to work for SPDC. We made rice and money for them. Some of the villagers lost their farms and houses to the SPDC who took them illegally and forcefully, without justice. Some villagers farms' were taken by the SPDC and they lost all of their crops and rice, and were not given any compensation. We were forced to build the SPDC a moat and collect firewood in addition to other tasks. When they raided our village we were forced to cook them food and they took our chickens and pigs. Living in a situation without justice and freedom is why I decided to move to Thailand.

Nang Zeing and Nang Hseng:

When I was in Shan State I helped my parents farm but it still was not enough money for my family, so I decided to move to Thailand. Now everything is better, my children can go to school, can learn their mother language from SYP and they don't have to worry too much.

Lung Jai:

When I lived in Shan State, I had to change my job every day. I decided to move in Thailand for a better life. Another reason I moved is because I did not want to live under the SPDC so I decided to move and bring my family to Thailand.

5. What is it like getting a job without a Thai ID card? What other barriers do migrants in Thailand face?

Ba Mant:

There are many problems for migrants who do not have an ID card. They have to lie to get an ID card and it costs a lot of money. Those who work without ID cards sometimes don't get paid by their employers but can't do anything about it.

Pi Mong:

For migrants who do not have an ID card, they will have difficulty finding a job. For migrants who have an ID card, it is sure that they will get a better job than migrants without.

6. What is the difference in life and experience for a Shan migrant child in Thailand and a Thai-born child?

Ba Mant:

The living standards are different. The opportunity for education for migrant children is much less than the opportunity for Thai children. But migrant children have experienced many different situations and societies, so they are well-adapted and also have a lot of living experience.

Nang Zeing:

Our migrant children and Thai children are different for sure because Thai families have better living conditions than us. However, our children have skills but they need more opportunities and supports. Thai kids can go to special classes but migrant children just have to wait for local organizations like SYP. Some children who don't have opportunities become uneducated and work at a very young age. To make it better, we just need to educate them as much as we can. For example, if they know English they can use it not only in Thailand but everywhere around the world. We hope our children will get better jobs than us. And I will try my best to send my children to school until they finish because I still can work and find money.

Lung Jai:

At first, it was quite difficult. Some Thai children were impolite with the students who came to learn. When schools ask for ID cards or certificates, it is also difficult.

7. What do you think is the best way to fix these problems for our children?

Ba Mant:

We have to meet with parents and encourage them to educate their children. If we do not improve our children's lives with education, we may lose the opportunity to have an educated youth and our migrant community will be worse off in the future. If we do not pursue an education in Shan language and culture, one day Shan people will not be able to speak in their mother

language anymore. Right now, we live in a foreign country as guests. But this does not mean that we should lost our culture and language. We welcome SYP to come teach our future generations culture and language. We believe that knowledge and education will be the eyes of our community.

Nang Zeing and Nang Hseng:

I want to see our Shan people be united when we live far away from our home land. We hoped to have a better life so we came to Thailand, but when we lost our jobs in Thailand, we wanted to go back. We have to try hard for our new generation to have better lives than we do now.

Lung Jai:

In my mind, I want to improve Shan children's education, especially their knowledge of the Shan language. I hope that when they are still young, they will come to learn at school. I want to encourage them to try hard for their education.

8. How has Shan Youth Power helped migrant children retain their culture and mother language? What types of opportunities has Shan Youth Power provided for migrant children?

Pa Lao:

To maintain our culture and literacy, we should teach Shan history and wear our traditional clothes on Shan's culture festival. The main reason that we have to maintain our culture and literacy for our children is for the children to be polite and respect the older people.

Nang Zeing and Nang Hseng:

For our new generations, they teach them about our culture, clothing and customs.

Lung Jai:

I do not want SYP school to close any more schools because when the school closes, children will come and ask me, "When will our school will open again?"

Ba Mant:

The first time I heard about Shan Youth Power was when they went to help at a migrant's funeral. Since then, whenever they come to teach children Shan, English, math and Thai (for adults) in the construction camp they always talk with everyone here and are friendly in their free time.

Pi Mong:

Shan Youth Power helped us build a classroom in our construction camp where we live.

Lung Jai:

I am proud of SYP for providing our children with a chance to have an education.



The dream for a better life makes people stronger than they ever could have imagined. It also makes them capable of making the best of a bad situation.

A Young Dream

by Yord Tai

People dream about their futures. They dream all sorts of things imaginable. But the one dream most people have in common is the dream for a better tomorrow. And sometimes it does not depend on how hard we try or how much effort we put in, sometimes our dream is hard to attain, or even impossible, by the simple virtue of who we are. But when we have a dream, we must hold onto it; we cannot give up.

A boy's cry suddenly woke me up. I opened my eyes and saw a gray spider net floating under the roof in the corner of the room. The room was made of teak wall and sat still in the darkness. I turned to my right and saw a small light shining through the room's only door, where a mother and her eight year-old boy sat. They looked like they debated whether to leave the doorway but the reinforced steel coolly stopped them from doing so. They chose to remain near the doorway of the room that held not only the three of us but over 80 people, each of whom laid on the floor asleep, deep in silent dream.

The room was noiseless except for the sound of the old turning fan, which drowned out the sounds of the pained, crying child. I was sure he was crying because a mosquito bit him, and he was probably terribly afraid of the fat black mice that ran along the dirty floors of the room. This was probably the first time in his life as it was mine in jail.

The boy's mother tried her best to quiet him and promised him that everything was normal and that they would be okay. But she was unsuccessful and soon the other young children in the room began to imitate his crying. The silent room from moments earlier became a busy marketplace as the noisy cries from the other children surpassed the little boy's crying. The sleeping adults stirred awake, opening their eyes and wondering, as I did when I first awoke, what was happening. But instead of returning to sleep they remained awake and began telling each other about their dreams.

A few of my friends and I, as well as some others in the room, had been caught by the police – not because we had stolen someone’s food or harmed anyone – but because of who we are: Shan people without legal papers. Many of us were still wearing our old clothing, the ones we dressed in before coming here, as was the crying boy whose outfit had become muddied while in jail. A moment later, the little boy quieted and turned his head toward the room’s door. I believe at that moment he had had the same dream as me.

Someone from outside was fumbling with the door’s heavy padlock, and as it unlocked and was loosened from its place against the steel door, everyone’s conversations came to an immediate stop. A few men in uniforms entered our cell with bags of rice and began rationing out our breakfast. The adults took their portion quietly, fearing the uniformed men. I could see the fear in their eyes. This was one of the worst times of the day for us.

But after the men left, the adults carried their bags of rice slowly outside of the dark cell and sat with relatives and friends for breakfast. The marketplace came to life once again. We consumed all the food we were given even though it was not nearly as delicious as the food we cooked at home. Some of the adults then continued on in their conversations, some told jokes, some laughed, and the children played with one other.

The dream for a better life makes people stronger than they ever could have imagined. It also makes them capable of making the best of a bad situation. This hope is what drives us and gets us through tough times, even jail. But sometimes hope is all we need to persevere until we reach our dreams. I know a boy who achieved his dream.

Smiles came over people’s faces when we learned this would be our last meal and our last day in the jail before we were being sent back to our home, Shan State, Burma.

The first time the children stepped outside of the jail, they took a deep breath to take in the fresh air and immediately turned their faces

upward while shading their eyes from the beating sun. They looked at the sun strangely. This was no surprise to me since we had not seen the sun in nearly four months. They quickly turned their attention to the big, black trailer bounded by teak iron which would carry us away. I knew they had dreams to drive a big car one day. I wanted to tell them that this wasn't it, but I couldn't bring myself to.

On the bus, silence took over once again. No one knew what was going to happen next – where we were being sent – and we were worried. The boy who had been crying curiously assessed everything that passed us by on the road while his hands held onto the teak iron binding tightly. Our trailer drove past his school, the beautiful housing development that his parents helped build with their own hands, the temple that he went to, and the nearby hospital that he had never been to. His shiny black eyes told me he had big dreams, like me. He wanted to go to school, carrying a small book in his backpack, wanted to live in one of the new homes his parents worked to build, wanted to join his friends for ceremonies at the temple once again, and wanted to be able to access the neighborhood hospital when he became sick. Those dreams began to dissipate as the trailer continued on.

When we arrived at the Thai-Burma border and crossed into Shan State, the first thing I noticed was the smell of soil and flowers. I closed my eyes and took in a deep breath as a cool wind slowly passed. It had been a very long time since I had had this feeling. We were let off the bus where a few men in green clothing stood, staring at us coldly. We did not expect them to help us; we knew better than to expect help from anyone but ourselves. The little boy looked around in great wonder, excited by the big forest in the distance. I really wanted to be able to tell him that this country was where his dream was about to begin and could be achieved. But I could not.

We walked along the muddy road until we reached a T-junction with a dry tree planted neatly at the end. Taking a left would send us to Shan State – a right turn would bring us back to Thailand – and everyone was forced to choose either the left or the right. Our deci-

sion time was extremely limited since the sun was descending behind the mountains quickly. It was the hardest and biggest decision I have ever made in my life, same for the little boy, except his decision was made for him by his parents. I chose to fight for my dream in Thailand again, but his parents chose to go back to his hometown in Shan State. As we departed, an old man quickly shouted out to us, “hope to see all of you again, but not in that room.” Then people gave a last big laugh and walked away from each other. The boy turned his little face and looked at me with his lovely eyes. His sweet smile energized me and gave me renewed passion to fight for my dream again. I know that the boy was also starting a new dream – the dream for a better tomorrow.



Often families move around seeking new jobs and end up settling where they can find work. Sometimes families flee their homes in Thailand to escape suspicious police.

Life of Innocent Children

by Sai Yord

To understand the situation of the people living in Burma, it is important to scrutinize the actions taken by the military regime in Burma, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), which has operated against its own civilian population since seizing power over 40 years ago. To this day the SPDC continues to oppress Burma's ethnic minorities and commits countless human rights abuses.

The SPDC has disregarded its people's needs. It has abandoned plans for internal development, has single-handedly driven poverty by not providing basic social services in health and education, and has ruled without justice or the basic provision of human rights. Rather, the SPDC has evoked fear in its citizens, confiscating their property indiscriminately, burning homes, shooting innocent civilians, raping women, and using violence as a vehicle to maintain control.

The SPDC has ruled Burma with an iron fist and has essentially left the Burmese people blind. People are afraid to fight back against the military regime. Many, instead, have fled from their birthplace and sought refuge in the forests nearby. Young and old, the refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) live in fear, in impoverished and often dangerous conditions in the forests waiting for the fighting to wane.

When things calm down between the ethnic groups and the SPDC, the people hiding in the forests find their way to the border and flee to Thailand. But after waiting for the opportunity to live a new life, in a new country, and in peace, Thailand brings about its own complications and challenges, especially for its migrant children population.

Though in Burma the education system is broken and underfunded, in Thailand migrant children have limited access to the Thai education system and limited opportunities to learn and preserve their Shan language, history and culture. While it is the parents'

responsibility to establish new roots for their sons and daughters, and emphasize the importance of education, many parents can't afford to support their children's education, as earning enough money for the family's survival is difficult enough.

Undocumented migrants in Thailand are not welcome in most employment positions; generally only difficult, dirty, and dangerous jobs are available for migrant workers. The conditions for migrant children are equally difficult. Sometimes parents bring their children to work with them, where they are prone to the heat and developing illnesses.

Many parents settle in poor areas in narrow, dirty and dimlit houses made of zinc with unclean air to breathe. During the day these houses get hot and no one wants to stay inside. During the rainy season, mud accumulates in the homes and children are sometimes made to remain indoors alone, for many hours.

Life for the migrant child is also transient. Often families move around seeking new jobs and end up settling where they can find work. Sometimes families flee their homes in Thailand to escape suspicious police. This complicates matters for children, because they are unable to go to school when their family moves so often from one area to the next. And parents have no way of knowing whether their work will be short term and temporary or longterm so the children live in a constant state of flux.

However, one unexpected but very real barrier to accessing education for migrant children is transportation. Many parents work and live quite far away from the town and the schools they send their children to. Those who have access to transportation may not be able to read the signs on the streets in Thai to direct them to their school. But further, though Thai policy states that education is free for all, there are many additional costs that inhibit a family from being able to afford education, such as transportation, registration fees, lunch, uniforms, books and materials that fall on the parents to provide. Migrant

communities that cannot speak Thai are also at a disadvantage due to the language barrier and the lack of information available about state policies on education.

We take for granted that children should go to school and be educated as a way of life for children. It is remarkable that migrant parents have tried hard to provide their children with education and see the value of developing clever and brave children. They strongly believe that “children are the future of our nation” and they hope their children will use their education to make their lives into something more in the future. They hope it will open doors and opportunities for their children that they didn’t have.

On “International Children Day,” children from all over the world are encouraged to open their eyes and celebrate by partaking in school activities, visiting museums, and learning about their history. The children are given activities to improve themselves. However, for migrant children, “International Children Day” is difficult for them to celebrate because they are concerned about their security and the situation in Burma. They hope that one day they will be able to celebrate “International Children Day” at peace in their home country.

Nong Mong, a migrant Shan child living in Thailand with a dream of flying paper airplanes, entered and won a prize in an international paper airplane competition in Japan. Through the help and support he received from his teachers, the Thai government, and NGOs, his dream came true. In order for migrant children to have the same access to, and opportunities for, education as other children, we have to work together to support and bring their dreams to fruition. Every child deserves the chance to succeed.



Since I've been in Thailand I've held many different jobs. I've worked as a house-keeper and a laborer and in a barber shop and in retail.

When Hope Shall Have a Dream

by Moon Moon

My name is Noun Mon. I grew up in Merng Bun City, a predominantly agricultural town that cultivates rice and vegetables depending on the season. When I was young the economy in Merng Bun City was not very good and few farmers were able to produce but, despite this, the government increased their taxes. With little yield and mounting taxes, many families became poverty-stricken.

Without basic government support for education and health services for low-income families, society as a whole in Burma began producing and developing less. Given this situation, many Shan people left their hometowns for Thailand in order to find jobs and make a better life for themselves and for their families.

My family was one of these families. When I was five years old, we packed up our belongings and moved to Thailand. After a short time, my parents moved us back to Burma but we returned to Thailand again when I was nine. Because of all the moving I had very little time to study and be educated in school like other children my age. And though I went to the school in my neighborhood, I never graduated. This was hard for me and made me resent my parents when I was young. I wondered why they didn't send me to school like other children. I really wanted to study.

One day I got my hands on a Thai book and began to read it on my own. I loved that book. It helped me get through my family's move and adjusting to a new city and new country. I eventually understood why my parents were unable to send me to school. Parents want their children to be educated but unfortunately life isn't always fair and not everyone comes from the same background or family situation, or has the same opportunities to study. I remembered my parents telling me that education is not age-related, but that education depends on how hard you try. Understanding this made me feel a lot better about my life.

I worked hard after that and I am currently studying at a GED credential program through Pa Pai Temple in Thailand. I feel very fortunate that I was given the opportunity by the Thai government to study here. The program is specifically tailored for migrant workers and provides them with opportunities to develop their educational skills.

During the day I also work as a seamstress at a sewing factory. Since I've been in Thailand I've held many different jobs. I've worked as a house-keeper and a laborer and in a barber shop and in retail. For me, every job I do, I do with all my heart. I always try hard in order to learn and improve myself. And I've made mistakes but, when I do, I take them as learning experiences, and recognize that everyone makes mistakes. There are days when I feel bad and I want to give up, but I'm encouraged by my parents and I don't give up. I feel good about being able to contribute to my family's income. And when my parents seem tired and pained by work, I'm encouraged to have a different future, and to study, so that one day I can make a better living and support them so they can finally relax at home.

At night I attend Shan Youth Power's English and Computer Program when I am not at work and not at my GED program. When I study at SYP I feel very happy because I enjoy learning about computers and technology. The more I learn, the more knowledgeable I become. I think this will be helpful for me and for other students in the future. Many migrants don't have the opportunity to study computers, English or technology. I think that it is important for the growth of the Shan people and will help me grow personally in my occupation and in working to develop my country's future.



Currently, people who study become accepted and respected by society. Those without education are often looked down upon.

The Difficultities of Shan Children

by Mon Lao

Editor's Note: After World War 2 and the British retreat from Burma, Shan State, Kachin State, Karen State, and Mon State were offered a significant degree of autonomy. Shortly after, a civil war broke out between these ethnic minorities and the ruling government. The war continues to this day.

The war has caused a lot of damage and has led to many problems. The background of the war is such: it has caused sad loss. It has led to the loss of parents, children, and lovers, and has created a generation of war refugees who have become immigrants scattered throughout the countries that border Burma, such as Thailand. Even if this war were to stop, us Shan immigrants would not be able to go home because we are not accepted in Burma as Burmese citizens nor in Thailand as Thai citizens. We have become the forgotten people who live in Thailand.

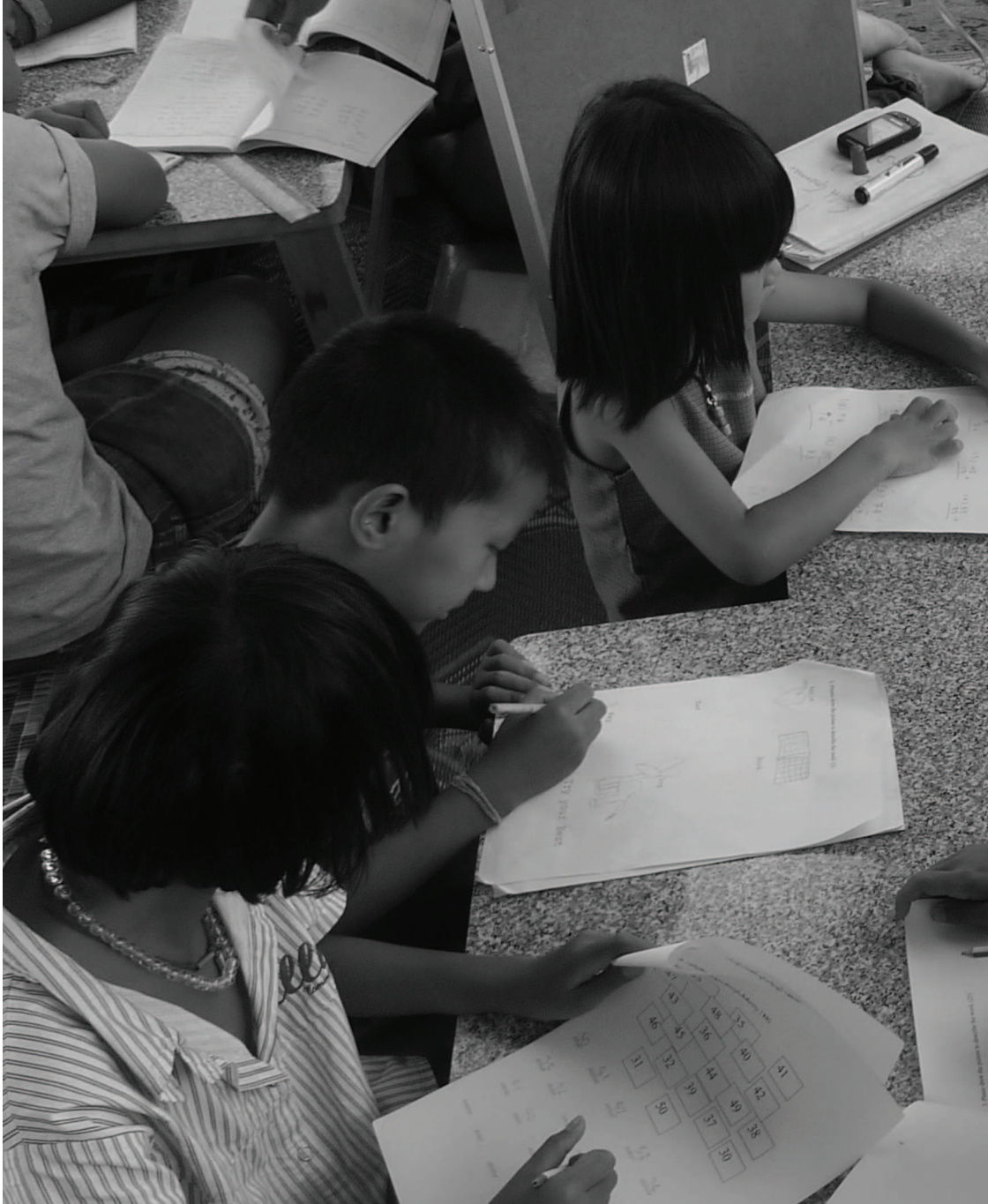
How are our migrant children faring in Thailand?

Children from Shan State, even those who are born here, are not considered equals in the eyes of the Thai simply because they are not Thai. But education is the new hope for parents who want their children to pave the way for a better life, as education is an important tool in human development. Education is about the development of ideas, values, attitudes and behaviors in people and the impetus to be good. Education for society begins first with its children. Children must be taught to be good people when they grow-up. If children do not this it may become a problem. If children step into society without knowledge, they will not be accepted. Every child should have the opportunity to attend school. Children should not have lives as difficult as their parents. Currently, people who study become accepted and respected by society. Those without education are often looked down upon.

Migrant parents in Thailand are doing everything possible to give their children the opportunity to attend school, even if it is difficult to. But poor migrant children will not be able to access the same benefits and supports as Thai children. And many live far out in the wilderness where they do not receive the help that they need. Other reasons these children are disadvantaged: a shortage of qualified teachers, lack of school supplies, and most importantly, technology – which globalization has succeeded in making a very important aspect of everyday life, especially in Thailand. Learning with computers is a vital aspect of learning. But believe it or not, migrant children have no chance to experience this and most migrant children have never used a computer.

Often children will ask their parents if they can have the opportunity to go to school. This is the night in every parent's mind they fear the most because they cannot help their children. And the hope of parents who wish to provide their babies with learning opportunities is shattered; their hearts are pierced. The dream for a better life hangs over their head every day.

I hope that the school children's hopes will be fulfilled. It's a great dream to have the opportunity to attend school like everyone else. These children view the world with open eyes but with an inferior status already. Do not allow disadvantaged children to become even more disadvantaged by restricting them from attending school. They should get the same education as other children. Not be blocked, underscored, or separated. Children are the only future of our nation.



"we study Gmail and search for information on different websites. And we can go or travel everywhere on the web."

A Migrant Child's Hope to Learn

by Myo Oo

It's about 5:30PM. I go to the migrant camp in Chiang Mai where 300 migrant workers live. The situation gets more colorful. The migrant workers who work at the construction site nearby begin to return to the camp. The children run towards them, a big smile spread wide across their faces because they have been waiting a while for their parents to come back. They hold their parents' hands and head back with them to the camp. Some begin to play football on the field. Some fish in the river beside the field.

I see one of my computer students sitting on a long chair beside the camp reading a book. He seems very interested in the book. I decide to go up to him to ask him a question. When I get near him, he smiles and says, "Good evening."

I sit with him and respond, "Good evening." I start asking him questions like, "What is your name?" He smiles and replies, "My name is Sai Leng." I take out a pen and paper from my bag to write some notes.

Myo Oo:

How old are you and how many people are in your family?

Sai Leng:

Now I'm 12. I've got one brother, Sai Juen, my mom Ba Mont, and my Dad, Loung Sai.

Myo Oo:

How long have you been here?

Sai Leng:

My mom said we came to Thailand twice. In 1991, the first time, and the second, in 2000.

Myo Oo:

Do you know why?

Sai Leng:

My mom said in Shan State we had to work hard but we did not make enough money. And we face forced labor by SPDC soldiers. Also, it was expensive to buy rice and cooking oil. That is why we had to leave Shan State.

Myo Oo:

Where do you attend school?

Sai Leng:

I attend at the Sankhampeng School in Chiang Mai and now I'm in grade 5.

Myo Oo:

Which subject do you study at school?

Sai Leng:

At Thai School we study basic English, Thai, math, art and basic computer using. In computer class we study basic typing in Microsoft Office 2003. I look down and point to the book he is holding.

Myo Oo:

What is this book about?

Sai Leng:

It's my computer notebook from Shan Youth Power computer class. On the weekend, the Shan Youth Power organization picks up 10 of us from this camp and 8 students from another camp to attend computer class.

Myo Oo:

Really, so you can study computers at Thai School and also at Shan Youth Power's computer class... Are they different?

Sai Leng:

Sure, they are different.

Myo Oo:

How are they different?

Sai Leng:

At Thai School we study just Paint and Microsoft Office 2003 in the Thai language. At Shan Youth Power Computer Class, we study Microsoft Office 2010, Paint and Internet.

Myo Oo:

Do you think computer class is important for you and your classmates?

Sai Leng:

It's very important because now everywhere in the world computers are used. All of us need to use computers in our future. If we don't learn how to use technology, we will hurt our future.

Myo Oo:

What is your favorite subject at Shan Youth Power computer class?

Sai Leng:

The Internet. In the Internet lesson, we study Gmail and search for information on different websites. And we can go or travel everywhere on the web. We can know where our home is and how many countries are on the world map.

Myo Oo:

Is it enough for you to learn to use computers at Shan Youth Power?

Sai Leng:

It's not enough because we can only study computers on the weekend because we have Thai school during the week. And the session is only for 12 weeks. If we can study more than 12 weeks, it will give us more opportunities. Before Shan Youth Power computer class, I couldn't work in Word since there weren't enough computers for everyone in my Thai school. Sometimes others were using the computer when I really wanted to use it.

Myo Oo:

How about now?

Sai Leng:

Now I can understand many things in Word 2010 and use email to send letters or photos to my friends. In the future, I will learn computers so I can write a website by myself.

Myo Oo:

What do you want to say to friends who have never studied computers?

Sai Leng:

If you have the opportunity to learn computers don't let it pass you by and try to learn as much as you can. I want to say to Shan Youth Power, thank you for continuing to give more opportunities to all of us, who haven't had opportunities to learn computers for a very long time. I look at my phone and it's near 7:00 PM. So we talked for about 2 hours.

Sai Leng:

Sorry, I am very hungry, I will have dinner now. Do you want to join me?

Myo Oo:

It's okay! I have some work to do and I will head back now, thank you for letting me ask you some questions.

Sai Leng:

Bye, see you later.

Our conversation ends and he turns and leaves me. I wait and look after him all the way until he arrives at his house.



What there is government doing. What human rights are. It's clear that Burma is in need of media in order for young people to improve themselves and their country.

Without Media we are Blind

by Phong Wan

In Burma, there is no free and fair media for citizens, unlike other countries that promote media and education for young people. Since the military coup of Ne Win took place in Burma in 1962, Shan citizens were dealt the four cuts: information, funds, food, and education. Most of the young people have become blind and deaf, and even though they have eyes and ears, they cannot see or hear what is happening in their country.

Shan people cannot attend school in Burma because of the high costs. And those who can attend school are not at much of an advantage compared to those who cannot attend because the quality of education is very low. People in Burma spend all of their money and time in school for nothing while other people develop skills during the 10 to 15 years they are in school. Young people in Burma need information in order to prepare for the future. They need to know what's going on in their country. What there is government doing. What human rights are. It's clear that Burma is in need of media in order for young people to improve themselves and their country.

I am one of Burma's citizens and I lived in eastern Shan State for 15 years, but I knew nothing about the democratic movement in the country. I didn't even know that there were resistance groups to free Burma. I didn't know what the SPDC was or who was leading my country. Or what democracy was and why people were willing to risk their lives to demonstrate against the government for it. Only after I left my homeland did I learn for the first time about the events that have taken place in Burma and in the world.

50 years have passed by since the military came to power, and people in Burma still do not know about their own political situation; they do not even know under what bad conditions they live. As they know nothing about it, they just blame their sins and believe that they were meant to be born to these bad conditions – maybe they believe in

the Buddhist belief of Karma. But actually, their country was once the richest country in Southeast Asia, with many natural resources. The regime in power clearly understands that if the young people know about politics and what is going on in their country, they will resist the unfair treatment by the government.

In a democratic system, leaders must provide good information to their citizens in order for the citizens and leaders to make the right decisions for their country. Oppositely, in Burma, all the information is banned from the people, and without information, the people cannot make good decisions and the regime is able to control the news and its people. Without information, we cannot make decisions for ourselves and we cannot expect others to make correct decisions for us. A parent knows to feed its baby when the baby cries; without the cry, the parent would not know it is hungry. Similarly, we need information and media to inform us to make good decisions.

Can government make a fair constitution without getting information from its citizens about what system of government the people want? What will happen if the government does not have this information? It will be a dictatorship like Burma is now. We need to work together in order to get our rights and freedoms back from the dictators. The people are the essence of the movement. Please join us!



"I don't have money for your education. But I will try. So keep studying at school and try to fill yourself with knowledge."

Stars in the Clouds

by NLKO

I was born in the capital city of southern Shan State – a town called Taunggyi. My family lived in the capital, but we were neither rich nor a trading family. Daily life was hard and difficult for us. We were not farmers or agricultural; we were also not educated nor intellectuals. My father worked in a government office, and at the time, my mother did not work at all. She stayed in the house and looked after us, her children. We lived plainly and normally.

After the economy crashed, my father lost his job with the government and began to search for a new one. He took whatever jobs he could find which made his salary inconsistent. Some days we were happy when he brought home money; other days we were sad when money was scarce. My father used to tell me, “I don’t have money for your education. But I will try. So keep studying at school and try to fill yourself with knowledge.” He worked hard to find the money to send my brothers and I to school until we were able to graduate from University.

After I received my Bachelor’s degree, I began to search for a job but it was difficult to find one. The Burmese government claimed that due to Burma’s developing economy, jobs were abundant. But this was not the case. Most jobs offered low salaries though the cost of living and product prices in Burma were very high. An average month’s salary paid for the cost of a pair of shoes. It angered me that the government was so corrupt, and that rather than helping its citizens and the many living in poverty, it was pouring money into its own ventures and interests, leaving the rest of its citizens impoverished, fending for ourselves. Without resources or a safety net, most families had no choice but to move to Thailand.

I left Burma for Thailand in 2007. I moved to a new neighborhood but did not know any of my neighbors. I had no relationships with the people I lived nearby. It was very different from Shan State. When I

first moved here I did not speak Thai and could not communicate with anyone. Furthermore, I was not able to acquire a Thai ID card for over a year. The Thai government registers new migrant workers every few years and I had to wait for the next opening, leaving me illegally living in Thailand. I moved in with my employer, afraid to leave the house for fear the police would arrest me and send me back to Burma.

I will never forget my first job as an illegal migrant working in Thailand. I had a Bachelors degree but my first job paid only 2000 baht, roughly equivalent to sixty US dollars, a month. I worked as a house-keeper for a large family. There were three of us there. I woke up at 5:00 AM every day and worked diligently until 10:00 PM, without any time off. I felt very bad and I thought that all work in Thailand would be like this, and that all employees had such bad relationships with their employers. My breakfast, lunch and dinner were never enough food. Some days I had to supplement my meal with dog food. I couldn't stay there but I had no one to phone for help because I had no relatives in Thailand, and I had no ID card, so finding legitimate work was impossible. A week later, I managed to escape; I could no longer eat the dog food.

I eventually found a new job in sewing. I worked at a company that forced employees like myself – without an ID card – to pay our employers 100 Baht per day, and an 'overtime' fee of 6 Baht per hour. Unfortunately, many employers exploit illegal migrants, like myself, in Thailand. They deter their employees from attaining ID cards because employers with registered migrant workers in Thailand are subject to fair standards and labor practices which are not advantageous to employers who prefer to exploit their workers, paying them low wages and working them overtime while charging them for it.

I worked at the sewing factory for one year and then left to work in Bangkok and southern Thailand but returned to Chiang Mai to work at the sewing factory soon after. While I worked I often listened to the radio. It was the only way for me to receive news and knowledge. I learned about how different the Thai and Shan are. One day, while listening to the radio, I heard an advertisement for a computer

training course at a youth organization called Shan Youth Power. This made me happy because I believe that technology and computers are very important to every day life.

I decided to enroll in Shan Youth Power's computer class. Every-day at 5 PM I left work and rode my bike for 45 minutes from Saraphi to Chiang Mai. I had to hurry to make the class in time, and didn't have time to eat dinner or shower after work. I was worried that leaving at 5 PM could affect my job. I was also worried about driving home alone at night. I was scared, but it was worth it to learn computers and continue my education.

I remember in grade 10 in Shan State, I was a Distance Learner. I attended after-school class to practice my essay-writing – and my teacher didn't believe in me. Learning at Shan Youth Power showed me that there are two types of teachers: teachers who don't believe in you and teachers who do. The teachers at Shan Youth Power were the second type of teacher – they not only believed in me but gave me a second chance.

There are many Shan people who still do not know how to use computers and many migrants in Thailand who can't read, even in their own language. Most migrant workers have to use their energy to work and don't have time to learn to read. In the village near my workplace most children don't go to school. Some parents need their children to help them generate an income, so their children are unable to attend school and educate themselves. Few people in Thailand care about the Shan people or have been working to help them improve their conditions. But I am not one of these people. Today, I believe I am lucky. I finally have a 10-year ID card. And it is my dream to bring the knowledge I've gathered here to my hometown in Shan State to teach students what I've learned. I hope one day the children in my community will be able to read and will have a new library and access to books and opportunities they don't currently have. But right now I have Shan Youth Power to thank for providing us Shan migrant people with an education and a future. And I want to thank them for believing in me.



She said, "We don't have much money to give our daughters but education can serve as property for them."

Education Paves a Bumpy Road

by Ying Kawn Tai

The dirt road is bumpy on the way to teach Shan migrant children at the school on their construction site. It reminds me of my hometown in Shan State. All of the people living in the construction site are Shan; many of them are from my hometown, which gives me a warm and happy feeling. As a teacher at the construction site, I have the responsibility to help the new generation of my people. When I put myself in their shoes I am reminded of who I was 20 years ago and I remember how much help these children need.

Let me tell you a bit about myself. I am the daughter of a family that struggled for the economic livelihood and education of its daughters. I still remember one of my mother's messages. She said, "We don't have much money to give our daughters but education can serve as property for them." Since then, I would like to say, my parents never gave up. They always tried to support us in whatever way they could.

I studied in Burma for eleven years. The children whose parents could support them went to after-school class from the beginning of the term. As for me, there were only a few times from grade three through grade eight that I had the chance to attend these classes. Normally, I went before an exam. By grade nine, my parents could no longer afford the after-school classes. When my mother passed away, I had to help my father take care of the family. During that time, I really wanted to go to school like my friends. I liked to study very much and I always tried very hard because I had a dream to go to university one day. My dream did not come true because I did not pass grade ten. The reason that I did not pass grade ten was because I always missed school to help my father and I was not able to go to after-school classes. However, I still kept it in my mind that education is very valuable. Even though I did not have a chance to study in university myself, I wanted my sister to have a chance to. So I worked hard to support her.

Because of the military government in Burma, everything became expensive. So it was very hard for poor people like my family to earn money. In 1998, I left my sister in Burma and came to Thailand. Although I lived and worked in Thailand, I tried not to forget what I had learned in Burma. My dream to study continued. Luckily, I received the chance to study English in November 2003, at Altsean Burma (Alternative Asean Network on Burma). Class was once a week, but I was satisfied because I also working at the time. That was my first step in continuing my studies. Then in 2006, I was selected for the sixth class of a social justice program at the School for Shan State Nationality Youth (SSSNY). That was a great opportunity for me even though it was only 9 months long because we studied many different and interesting subjects.

After I graduated from SSSNY, I found an organization called Shan Youth Power (SYP) that provides education to migrant children at construction sites. When I heard about them, I was instantaneously interested in their program so I asked a member if I could join. Right now, I am a teacher at a few of the schools located at the construction sites where migrant families live. The lives of the children in construction sites are similar to what my life was like back in Burma —most children do not go to after-school classes because their parents cannot afford them. Whenever I go to the construction sites I feel very good because I see the happy faces of the students who welcome me. Often, when I feel tired, if I go to teach and see my students, I feel well and relaxed. Sometimes the children misbehave but that is fine because I can always find ways to solve problems. I love teaching because I believe most of the lessons that I teach help students in their classes, on their tests, and in their lives. I hope one day all children in Burma will receive this kind of education.



When I learned to play a little, I played for the other students to listen,

The Sound of Music in Fire

by Jing Boon(S4S)

When I was young I never thought I would have the chance to be someone in society because I was just the daughter of a migrant worker who worked in the garden every day. My chance came when Shan Youth Power opened a migrant school at Pong Yiang and I came to join the class to study the Shan language, English and math. When I had free time I did not do anything other than hang out with my friends. One day my teacher came up to me while I was with my friends and asked us, “Who wants to learn guitar?” At that time all of my friends were interested and we joined our teacher and formed a band.

On the first day of our music class, we got into groups of small bands. There were six bands in total. But many of the students could not come to school because they had to help their parents at work. So now, there are only five people, including me, in the class. At first I played the guitar but later decided to learn the guitar bass because it interested me very much. When I learned to play a little, I played for the other students to listen, and I could see it made them very happy even though we were not a professional band. We tried very hard to practice on Saturday and Sunday evenings and find as much free time to practice as a band when we had the chance.

Our teacher tried hard to find us notes and songs to teach us how to play. It did not matter when he could not come to class because he told us that we could practice by ourselves, and when we knew he had something else to do, we knew we had to try hard to practice as much as we could on our own. But we didn’t always have time because we had to also learn Thai and help our parents work when we returned from school.

We tried to finish our homework first so we could have some free time to practice our music. We tried hard because we had dreams to be a good band even though some people think that music is not important. But for us, we think that music is very important, it just depends

on us and whether we make it a priority or not. We believe that it is important, and we will not give up but try harder to make others know that it is important. When I get bored or sad and don't want to do anything, I play the guitar and in a short time it makes me feel good and happy again. When people ask if music is important, I do not answer them because time will show them how important it is.



Food was scarce in the jail and we spent many nights hungry during that month.

The Freedom Web

by Lont Tai

I am Lont Tai. I am from Mong Gung, in the middle of Shan State. Mong Gung is a war zone and a very dangerous area. Many people are forced to relocate because of the war. And when this happens, the children often lose their education. As for me, I finished my second year at Taunggyi University, in the capital city of Shan State. My major was Zoology, but I didn't finish the University because the cost of living and school fees were very high. When I lived in Shan State, I didn't know anything about computers. I just played games and sometimes I heard the word "Internet" from my friend, but I didn't really know what it was. When my school decided to purchase a computer finally, all of the students were asked to contribute to the cost of the computer. I paid money but I was never allowed to use the computer. Only privileged children – such as the SPDC Generals' and teachers' children – were allowed to use the computer. I didn't have enough money to attend a computer-training program outside of school, so I never had the chance to learn computers in Shan State. But I always dreamed of learning to use the computer.

I immigrated to Chiang Mai, Thailand, in 2007. At that time, my aim was to make money and to be rich. But I changed my mind when I met Shan Youth Power because I saw my friends doing work that helped my people and my community. I decided to also start helping my friends do this work.

In the middle of the year 2007, I was jailed for a month because I didn't have an ID card. In the jail, there were many ethnic people from Burma, most of them from Shan State, who also had problems with ID cards. Everyday, between twenty to thirty new people came to the jail. Most of them were Shan migrants. I learned in jail that the Shan migrants who were arrested were taken to jail immediately, and had to leave their belongings, money, and friends behind, sometimes never seeing them again. The prisoners weren't allowed to communicate with the outside world either.

Like most prisoners, I spent the month wearing only one outfit, the one I was arrested in. I asked my friend from Shan Youth Power to bring me a clean outfit, and he did, but on the day he arrived I met a man whose wife was pregnant and was giving birth. He was very worried. He asked the guards if he could visit her in the hospital but they refused to let him. He threw up on himself and then fainted in front of me. I gave him my spare set of clothes so he didn't have to spend the rest of the time in jail in dirty clothes.

Food was scarce in the jail and we spent many nights hungry during that month. Some of my new friends from Shan Youth Power began to bring me food and water to sustain me. It is our custom in Shan State, however, to share our food. Because we didn't have enough, we would close our eyes and throw a portion of our food into the crowd, in an attempt to be fair to the others in jail. But still, many people went hungry. Sometimes we were so thirsty and water was so scarce we had to drink the water from the toilet.

The hunger and pain I saw made me want to cry. Being in jail and with other migrants made me realize that it was more important to serve my community and help the people in jail, giving Shan and other migrant communities a fair life, than to make a lot of money.

When I was finally released I was sent to the border. I decided to return to Thailand and spent all night walking through the forests and mountains back to Chiang Mai. The only lit path was through the main highway, but when we saw cars coming, we had to duck out of the way, and back into the forest, so they wouldn't see us.

Soon after I returned I began to attend Shan Youth Power's computer training. I had wanted to learn computers since I was a boy in Shan State and I was very excited to finally learn computers at Shan Youth Power. When I finished my training, Shan Youth Power was looking for more teachers and invited me to become a teacher. In 2008, I began teaching the migrant Shan children math, English and Shan. But before we teach, we need to fill ourselves with knowledge

and skills. So in 2009, I decided to continue my education and attended the School for Shan State Nationalities Youth (SSSNY). When I finished at SSSNY, I became a computer teacher at Shan Youth Power for migrant children and youth. I believe that we can use computers and the Internet to present to the world what has happened in our community and our country. For children inside Shan State, it is hard to study computer technology because of the high costs, the few computers available, and the government censorship of websites. But we can also use computers to learn about what is happening in the outside world. Together, I hope we can build opportunities in computer technology for children and youth.



The government should fight the disease and provide the knowledge that can prevent the disease from spreading unnecessarily.

A View from the Border Training

by Ying Kawn Tai

One morning before the sun shone, I heard the sound of a hen. I got up and checked my watch and saw that it was early. As I got up early, I thought about the time when Shan Youth Power invited me to the Thai-Burma border to give a HIV/AIDS training to Shan migrants who left their hometowns because of problems inside Burma.

I started to travel to Loi Kaw Wan, a town on the border, on March 13, 2009, for the HIV/AIDS training. There were so many places that our Shan people and other ethnic groups moved to on the border, such as Loi Sum Sip and Loi Tai Leng. The first day I was there I was so tired, happy, and sad mixed together. I felt this way the whole month I spent on the border.

I will share my experiences from Loi Kaw Wan, a camp for internally displaced people. I was very excited when I learned I would be going to the border. I waited for this chance for a long time. When I arrived there, I was tired cause it took a long time on the road. I was happy when I met people who had left their hometowns but were as friendly as they were in Shan State.

The reason I became upset is because our people can't live in our own hometowns and State. I always ask myself, "Why?" When I think about it I feel hurt by the situation.

During the training, we gave health knowledge and exchanged information with one another. I was very happy about my new experience. I met more new friends like Lahu people and Arka people, and I practiced the many languages I knew with people from Shan State.

Villagers and old friends that we attended school with came to welcome us. I knew that my friends from SYP were just very happy.

When the training finished at Loi Kaw Wan, we went to Fang

directly to give another training at Loi San Ju and Loi Sam Sip. On the road our main hobbies were taking photos and eating food. When I arrived there my feelings were the same as in Loi Kaw Wan because it is also a camp on the border for Shan people who are internally displaced from their hometowns because of injustices in Burma. This place is uncomfortable because the one camp is used as a living area, school for children, temple and hospital at the same time. The people are waiting for something better. I thought that it would be great if I held some people's hands to help them get better. We learned a lot from the training, like in Loi Kaw Wan, because each camp included different ethnic groups from Shan State.

A forty-year-old woman said to me, "I was very proud to have attended this training. When I lived in my hometown, there was no training for people aged 40 to attend. I attended the training because I want to this information with my relatives. Regarding health trainings, SYP was the first group to give such a training."

At night, we went to the community leader's house to have dinner with another organization who came to give a community development training. I liked the dinner and we had fun joking around and making friendly conversation. Even in really difficult situations, it's important to remember to enjoy what we do have.

I will always remember Loi Tai Leng. I had been there three times including this time. The community leader and villagers also always welcomed us and helped us as much as they could.

I went to meet a boy who was only 9 years old and in the hospital. He was infected with HIV from his mother and father. He was polite and a very nice boy to his parents and friends. He was so sick, he could not even speak anymore but he was still able to smile for his friends when they came to visit him and he made jokes because he liked to make other people laugh. I felt bad for him that he did not know that he had gotten his disease from his parents.

In my opinion, we have to blame the government for not taking care of its people thoroughly enough and for not providing information about diseases, especially AIDS, which is a scary and serious disease that many people die from but also many people are afraid of. In stead of giving the information that make the people afriad, the government should fight the disease and provide the knowledge that can prevent the disease from spreading unnecessarily. Now, I feel that if only I had a chance to return home and take advantage of the knowledge I have developed, I could save many people. It would make me happy to be able to give the public information they need to defend themselves against diseases.



They built good relationships with each other. The school taught the students to be united and help each other.

Behind The Sence

by Noun Nit

There is a beautiful jewel of nature found on the mountain called Pong Yiang. This place is where tourists come to visit. Especially, many Shan people escaping from the civil war in their home, Shan State, live there. They work in agriculture and grow flowers, vegetables and whatever that they can find in order to support their families. However, some families don't have money to support their children's education. Most children don't have the chance to study, the opportunity to meet other people, or the chance to learn about new technology.

A man named Loong Jai was worried about this issue and knew what difficulty these children would face in the future without an education. One day, Loong Jai contacted Shan Youth Power and asked them to send teachers to teach the migrant children at Pong Yiang. We had to wait for a long time but eventually Shan Youth Power came and built a school for us. This school gave us the opportunity to receive an education without paying money.

The children were very happy when they learned that they will have a school and the chance to meet new friends. They built good relationships with each other. The school taught the students to be united and help each other. And the children had the chance to learn their own language and about their own culture.

At the same time, the children learned and practiced traditional dancing, singing, guitar playing, football, and photography. Students were most interested in playing football. They wanted to have their own football field. So Loong Jai sacrificed one part of the land that was used for agriculture to make a field. The children were happy and helped create the field. Since then, the children know that while they are playing they have to be united and also listen to one another.

The children love and respect all the teachers as their parents. They are grateful that this school provided them with new knowledge and opportunities to learn.

When the children ask, “How can we follow our dreams? How can we develop our knowledge?” The answer is this school, that Shan Youth Power created. The children would like to thank Loong Jai and Shan Youth Power who have given them a chance. They will never forget it.



They asked where I came from and whether it was similar to their village.

A Day in the Life of a Teacher

by Ngao Hseng

The first thing I heard when I arrived at the camp was the noise from the children. I parked my motorbike and looked around. There were many children running around the compound. Just as I began to ask myself, “Who are these children and where did they come from?” a girl held her hand out and said Mai Soong Ka, or hello. I was surprised at how well she spoke Shan. I asked her to guide me to the school and she pointed me to a nearby tent with four tables and two old whiteboards.

Looking at their makeshift school, I began to think about my own schooling. When I was young I lived in a small village which far was from town. The school made me feel for the first time like I was in my village again. Except that my teacher used a blackboard to teach us. I felt a little bit scared and unsure of what I was going to teach the children. I decided to go to the tent and ask the students to open their books and show me what they had been studying. The students eagerly opened their textbooks, very excited to show me their work.

I started the lesson with addition and subtraction. I asked the students to hold out their hands and use their fingers to count in order to solve basic math problems. I began to feel very confident teaching and they were very welcoming to me. After only two weeks, my students felt comfortable with me and began to ask me questions. They asked where I came from and whether it was similar to their village. These conversations made me feel closer to the students and their families. I asked them if they lived in the camp.

It turned out that most children didn't live in the camp. Some students lived near the camp with their families and worked in other people's houses. As teachers, it was our responsibility to pick the students up and, after class, send them back to their homes at night. Sometimes it took a long time because we had to wait for students to finish their dinner if their family just returned from work and only just began cooking for them. Some of the children who didn't live in

the camp cycled to school – even when it was very dark at night and when it rained. I saw how eager they were to study. This made me want to continue teaching them, however, I was exhausted and apprehensive because of the transportation issue. I often offered to transport students on my motorbike. But picking up the students and bringing them home on a motorbike was dangerous, especially when I drove three or four students at a time. Still, I was excited to teach them.

Beyond transportation, I faced many other challenges working with the migrant children's school. It was difficult for me that many of the children couldn't speak the Shan language very well because their parents sent them to schools where the only language used is Thai. Some parents preferred their children go to work and contribute to the family income rather than continue their education. Sometimes, children decided by themselves that they wanted to find a job rather than study. And those who married early often discontinued their education. I felt so distressed when I learned about this and I began to wonder what I would have done had I been in their place and decided I didn't know.

However, the children I taught did have the opportunity to study and, thus, were able to improve their futures and value the power of education. In class they tried hard, asked difficult questions, and made it known why it was important to them. They also talked about what they wanted to do when they grew up. Some of the students wanted to be journalists and teachers. Some of them said they wanted to be doctors and help migrants who have difficulty accessing Thailand's healthcare system. This is important since accidents happen often in many of the difficult and dangerous jobs migrants work in.

The value of education is immeasurable because it inspires us to visualize a successful life and consider new and different kinds of jobs. It opens our minds to the jobs we don't see every day in the camps, where most families work in construction. Education makes us realize that we can make a change in the world and make conditions better for our families in the long run.

In my opinion, the more we can provide our generation with opportunities to see the world, the more we can produce leaders for the future of our country who can lead and provide their skills to others. The children we teach are the future of our country. They need to gain knowledge. There are many places where children are still suffering from war and whose families are displaced that we haven't brought these skills to yet. But I believe that it is our job to guide them to see that the way back home to Burma involves education and knowledge.



Education is the only thing that will help free them from this bad cycle.

Letter from a Thai Friend

by Nui [Thanita Tep-in]

Education is so important because education gives us knowledge of the world around us. It helps us to develop a perspective on life. It helps us build opinions and create a point of view on everything in life. Education makes us capable of interpreting rightly what we perceive. Education is not about lessons and poems from textbooks. It is about the lessons of life.

In Chiang Mai, children of Shan migrant farm workers and construction workers are among the most educationally disadvantaged children in Thailand. Some children are orphans and stateless. Education is the only thing that will help free them from this bad cycle.

The children of migrants are no different from typical children. They have imagination, they smile and laugh, but they don't have the right to study in their own country. So, they and their families move to and live in Thailand for unskilled work and low wages in return for education. Although, they have the opportunity to study in Thai schools, they find a lot of problems such as the environment in schools and their poverty.

The Shan Youth Power Migrant School helps these migrants. They provide education for children in the construction camps in which they live. They teach children to be good people, to adapt to learning in Thai schools and they teach them about their own national culture. They do not receive money from the children, because they want the children to be happy and not forget their national culture.

I saw that the Shan migrant children have many difficulties but still help each other. They work hard for the children of migrants, so I would like to praise them and cheer them for their hard work with children.



Kham Hsy:

Before you joined Shan Youth Power, did you know about Shan society or Shan culture and language?

Nong Nit:

I did not know anything, I could just speak Shan.

Maintaining By Precticing

by Kham Hsy

I am Kham Hsy from Key See Town in southern Shan State. I am interested in Shan cultural dance, especially the traditional Toe Dance and Kinara and Kinary Dances. I came to Thailand in 1998 because of the economic situation in my hometown. The army groups were forcing the villagers out of our homes. We lived there without freedom and yearned for a better life. Finally, I decided to leave my hometown because of the situation, and to improve my life. Today, I still live and work in Thailand.

Even though I've lived in Thailand for thirteen years now, I've always made it a priority to retain my Shan culture. I became a teacher at Shan Youth Power (SYP) and have worked at SYP since 2006. I teach Shan cultural activities such as traditional Shan dance to migrant children in Chiang Mai.

When I teach students, I go to their homes at the construction sites, and I see their living situations. They are sadly similar to conditions in Shan State, and some parts are worse than their hometowns because some do not have houses to live in at all. And those who do have houses often live in temporary houses because they have to build them in the small camps near the places they work. Their home changes depending on the location of the project they are working on.

One day I stopped at one of my student's homes and spoke with his parents. They told me:

"Our children have fewer chances to study in school and learn about their own culture here than in Shan State. There, we had to live under the unfair rule and control of the SPDC. They did not allow us to study our mother languages and our culture because they were afraid we would fight them. When we moved to Thailand, there was some opportunity for our children, but we had to move so many times, and that affected their education. Very few families do not have

to move places for work, which is valuable for their children. Most of our Shan children go to study at the Thai School, where they study Thai language and Thai culture. When people ask them where they are from, I am sure that most of them cannot answer this question. Some children think that they are Thai. Some of them ask, ‘if we learn our mother language, how will we use it?’”

When I heard this message, it stayed on my mind and I felt so hurt and sad by the situation facing our Shan children. This made me realize how important culture and language are. It made me want to retain my own culture and language. Culture and language are the main aortas for the Shan - knowledge doesn’t only make the Shan people know themselves, it also makes other people aware of our history and our ethnicity and ensures that our future that will not be lost. I began to teach my students and youth about culture. At first when I taught them, some did not seem very interested. It was a big problem for me at the time. I explained and persevered, and it took time, but eventually, some began to change their minds and showed an interest in learning about traditional dance and culture. I began to teach the students who showed interest.

I am documenting the reasons that the students who showed interested in culture and language programs stated they were interested. I start with Nong Nit: she is 14 years old and a student from Pong Yiang. She is studying in grade 7 at the Ban Toong Pong School in the Mae Rim District of Chiang Mai Province.

Kham Hsy:

Where were you born?

Nong Nit:

I was born in Thailand.

Kham Hsy:

When did you begin studying at Shan Youth Power?

Nong Nit:

Over three years ago.

Kham Hsy:

Before you joined Shan Youth Power, did you know about Shan society or Shan culture and language?

Nong Nit:

I did not know anything, I could just speak Shan.

Kham Hsy:

When you began to study culture and language, how did you feel?

Nong Nit:

I did not think that I would get a chance to study my own culture, I did not know what it was, but now I am happy.

Kham Hsy:

After you studied, did you improve your skills?

Nong Nit:

Right now, I can write, speak, read and sing Shan songs. And I am learning the Kinary cultural dance.

Kham Hsy:

Have you used it?

Nong Nit:

Sure, I read Shan news and listen to Shan songs. I also got a chance to show off my cultural dancing at Thai school.

Kham Hsy:

How do you feel now?

Nong Nit:

I am proud and I want to study my own culture more and learn new dances.

Kham Hsy:

What do you specifically want to study more?

Nong Nit:

I want to learn more Kinary dancing since I have not finished them all yet.

I have also discussed Shan Youth Power's Culture and Traditional Dance Program with my student from Mae Hae, Sai Zom Wan. He is 15 years of age and is currently studying the 6 Standards at the Sunbassak School. This is what he told me: "Before Shan Youth Power came to teach us about our culture in Mae Hae, I did not know anything about my own culture. I was not interested and I didn't understand it. After I studied my own culture, I felt very happy. I could speak Shan fully, I could read about Shan history in books, understand poems, stories, and the news. Right now, I am a boy who is interested in my nationality. I started to learn Kinara dancing, and when I dance, I feel very proud because I feel brave to dance the Kinara dance at the festival. I want to participate in more Shan activities because I love it. I have shown my dancing at Thai school too, and when my teachers saw my cultural dancing, they always gave me a chance to perform at school ceremonies and festivals. In the future I will try to study more parts of the culture that I have not yet studied."

I am proud of my students for being interested in learning about their culture. I will continue to teach them and conduct research about Shan history so that I can have knowledge and more information that could be useful for them and for future cultural activities. I believe that there will be new momentum in this generation as they are excited to learn about their culture and to preserve it so that it is not lost in history.



she told me. "Now, I really want to learn how to read and write in Thai or Shan or English because when I go somewhere and I can't read I have to ask other people,"

Education as a Changemaker

by Myo Aung

After graduating from high school in Shan State, I immigrated to Thailand nearly 7 years ago. Over the past 7 years, education has been a major concern and an important reason for the changes that have taken place in my life in Thailand. The reason that I came to Thailand was in part for my education; I came to Thailand to find a job to make some money so I could attend university in Burma. However, when I passed the border nothing worked out as I planned it would. I spent 2 years working in a mango plantation and an umbrella-making center. During those 2 years of work, I saw many Shan children who could not go to Thai school, who could not read or write, and who grew despondent and let their lives go the wrong way. It made me sad to see this and have no idea how to solve their problems because I also couldn't see a way to continue my own education either.

While I was working, I felt sad about my education because it seemed hopeless. Fortunately, one day I heard about a school called the School for Shan State Nationality Youth (SSSNY) and applied. SSSNY is a social justice program for youth born in Shan State and teaches students English, computer skills and about social justice issues. I applied to SSSNY, because I thought it would be my only hope for continuing my education. I am grateful that I had the opportunity to attend the School for Shan State Nationality Youth for nine months. After I graduated, I got a job with an organization called Shan Youth Power, which helps migrant children from Shan State. In my first year at work, I learned a lot from the experiences of the founder, from nearby communities and from other community-based organizations. It was rewarding for me to try to help Shan children and youth in their educational development. After one year of work experience I received the opportunity to become a teacher in a migrant school program that was founded by a teacher named Bernice and some of SYP's founders.

The program teaches English, math and Shan language to migrant children in the evening. It aims to improve the language skills

and knowledge of migrant children. While working there, I saw children who had to drop out from their Thai schools and lose the chance to continue their education because of their family's income, status and their parents' educational background.

Pong Yaing, a town 40 kilometers from Chiang Mai, home to thousands of Shan migrant people who live and work in flower plantations along a green mountain range, is one of the locations where we setup the evening school for migrant children. One Sunday afternoon while I was teaching English at Pong Yaing, I saw a sad-looking 14-year old girl who was watching her younger brother read English. After a short conversation with her I learned that the girl, NOUNG NUTE, is one of the migrant children who came to Thailand but didn't have the opportunity to learn. She told me, "I am from a poor family. I can't learn. But since I was a child I really wanted to learn. I also wanted to be able to read and write like my younger brothers. I have two younger brothers and I have to give them the opportunity to learn since I am the older sibling." She also explained that there is a school in her village but there are not enough teachers for all the students and they only teach a few days per week, after that they take long holidays.

"However, I understand them because they just get a small amount of salary from the government," she told me. "Now, I really want to learn how to read and write in Thai or Shan or English because when I go somewhere and I can't read I have to ask other people," she said.

When I asked her about her dreams, she replied, "I want to be an educated person, like you, and I want to help my people, too. But I know it is not possible for me in this life." She also added that she will try to encourage her parents to support her younger brothers to continue their studies.

This is only one story of the many thousands of migrant children and youth in Thailand I have met. And I believe that there are still many children who don't access educational opportunities like NOUNG NUTE. Each day at work I learn, see and know more about the problems that

Shan migrant people face and it makes me want to work more for them. I am also lucky that I am a member of the organization Shan Youth Power because SYP is working to support Shan people in Thailand and in Shan State. As a member of SYP, I tried and will continue to try to show the value in education, and to encourage many parents to encourage and support their children in their education. Even if I cannot make a big change, I will do what I can to make small changes for the Shan people, such as providing their children with resources, support, and access to educational opportunities.



“What do you want to be when you grow up?” The answer made me upset because over 50 of them

What is Impossible?

by Xiao Noom

The boy without a chance left Shan State, Burma and came to Thailand with his parents. He arrived in Thailand with a wonderful dream, “I will study at school every day.” But his dream did not come true. It turned out he could not study in Thai School since he did not have a Thai ID card.

This boy was me. When I learned that I could not study in a Thai school, the only way to study was to become a monk. I was a monk for over 2 years so that I could study. My mom took me out of monk school when I was fourteen years old, and I went to study at Lak Taeng School, operated by a non-governmental organization. I studied for 3 years and during my last year, in 2006, I was admitted to the School for Shan State Nationalities Youth (SSSNY). When I finished my education – over 3 years in total – I thought about my future and decided I wanted to help people, specifically migrant children. I started a job as a teacher with Shan Youth Power.

On the weekends when I had free time, I turned on the television and watched tv programs. One day, after a program ended, an advertisement came on about children who had no opportunity to access education. It made me think about the Shan migrant children I was teaching and how similar they were to the children in this advertisement. After that, I felt compelled to do more for them.

I asked myself, if things were improving in Thailand then why were poor children and migrant children still having the same problems? I proceeded to ask over 100 migrant children, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” The answer made me upset because over 50 of them didn’t know what they wanted to be. They said they had hopes and dreams but they didn’t have resources or access to reach those dreams. I decided to do something to increase opportunities for students and fix this problem.

I began at the Pong Yiang School for migrant children. I started by asking my students general questions. I asked them about their dreams. One of the children in the group said that he wanted to be a football player. And then another one said, “But we cannot be what we want to be.” At that time I grew a little quiet and thought about how when I was boy I wanted to be a football player as well, but I could not be, and instead became a teacher. We finished talking because they had to go home. But when I got back home, I was still thinking about our conversation, and while watching television a commercial for Adidas came on: “Impossible is Nothing.” This inspired me to follow my childhood dream again.

The next morning, I asked my students again to talk about their dreams. We took some time to talk about them and after, I said to them, “Lets form a football team, okay?” All of them looked at each other excitedly and answered “okay” so we divided up responsibilities. My responsibility was to be their coach and sometimes player because we had too few players on the team in the beginning. The first day I taught them basic football skills.

Every Saturday and Sunday my team came together to practice football. We began with two footballs. We began to search for a field and for a team to play against in a match. After a long search, we finally found a field nearby the school. We began to build our field after lunch and after classes finished every day. We also worked on Saturdays and Sundays. It took us over two weeks to finish but when we did, the students were very happy with what he had created. Unfortunately, after only playing on the field for two weeks, the landlord decided to use the field to build a rental unit instead.

Everyday when we came to school to study we saw the remodeled football field turned rental units that we had worked so hard to build. It remains to this day in our minds. We eventually found a new field but we didn’t forget the old field that we built with such determination; it will always be very important to us.

Once we began practicing in the new field we had another problem: we could only play one match per year. For migrant children, it was always difficult to find a team to play a match against. Transportation was a problem and we couldn't play the village team in a match because we were much less skilled. But the one match we had was a great match. Everyone got a chance to play and I was the team manager. There is only one word that can express how it made me feel – happy. We began with nothing. No field, no skills and no hope, and though we are not yet the best, we have transformed and learned so much. We faced a lot of barriers but we pushed through them, rather than avoiding them, because we knew we had to work hard to attain our dreams.

This has been difficult and there have been times I've wanted to give up. But when I feel like giving up, like I don't want to keep trying, I think about the children waiting for someone else to help them, and I try again. I think about the larger picture and how the opportunities that we give our migrant children still many others do not have, not only in education but also in sports, music, and art. It inspires me to do even more. I know I must try hard, not only for them, but for all children who are waiting for someone. It might not be me but I hope my energy and my spirit will be instilled in the children who will grow up and want to help their communities.

I do the work I do because I love it. It might not seem important to some people, but when I see the impact it has on the students I teach, and the pride and hope it gives them, my heart is warmed. The reason I am so committed is because I want to help the children reach their dreams. When successful people talk, they often say "The things that matter to us we must strive for. We cannot give up when times get hard. We must push through barriers and persevere." I believe this too.

I know that every time after it rains, the sun comes out and shines. And that is the perfect weather for a dreamer.



Two boys were playing
after the class.



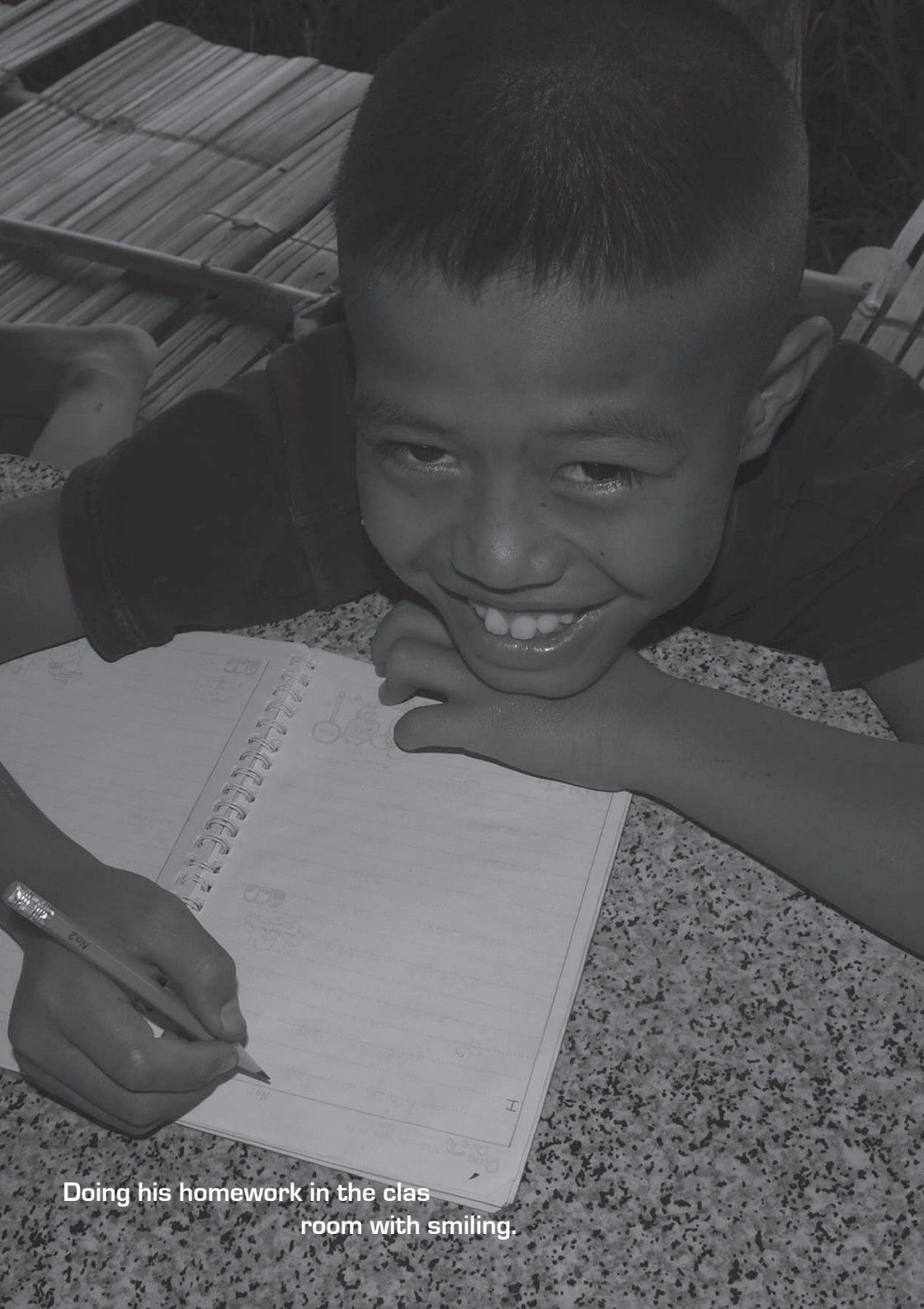
The Children were
discussing in the classroom.

Funny game in the classroom.





Fieldtrip on Thai National Child's Day.



Doing his homework in the classroom with smiling.



She is waiting for her class started teaching.



A cute boy was standing on the floor
and looked up the Camera.



Students from Pi Mok 4's school
were doing thier homework.

The classroom at Night View at
Kan Ka Nok one's school.





The school was flooding
during raining season.



Students were cleaning
around their school.

Students enjoyed their
cooking lunch.





Enjoined their classroom on the street.

Students Enjoyed their studying in Cow Stable.





เกมฝึก

Breathing in and Breathing
out be ready for playing game.



Students were studying in the classroom.



A boy was waiting for his classmate
for playing game together.



Cute baby who visited with her mom
at the school during the class.



Dreaming.....

