

# Global Day of Prayer for Burma

March 8, 2015



*Karen elder, Saw Maw La, prays at a New Year's church service.*

## Dear Friends,

Thank you for praying for Burma all these years. We see and feel the difference this has made, in Burma and in our own lives. In the last relief team training, we had a former Burma Army soldier who had defected and escaped to the ethnic pro-democracy resistance side. From there he joined FBR. During our training he heard the gospel and asked if Jesus would forgive him. He confessed that, as a Burma soldier, he had killed many villagers during attacks and that one time he had killed a pregnant woman.

*Would Jesus forgive him, he wanted to know. Could he change?*

We said, "Yes, Jesus came to do that." So he was baptized and is now a follower of Jesus and one of our strongest rangers. We thank God for your part in this and the prayers and support of all our friends.

While there have been many positive changes, attacks and oppression continue and "Let my people go," has been on my mind and heart for Burma. As we pray for the people of Burma and stand with them for freedom, we find our true freedom in Christ and count on Him to overcome evil. "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8). Jesus Christ did this in the life of the former Burma soldier. Jesus does this in our lives and we pray and act in faith, knowing He can do this for all people. Our part is to obey the Lord and to follow Him in the movement of freedom, justice and reconciliation in Burma.

For me, this means listening to God and repenting of my own sins. It means asking God how to stand with the oppressed and against oppression of all kinds. It means praying for our enemies and trying to be friends. Everyone counts and together we can find a way forward – the Burmans and ethnic groups, the Burma Army and the pro-democracy movement, business and the welfare of all people. Love should



*Baptism of former Burma Army soldier.*

be the center of any solution and is the way to find the balance between freedom and responsibility, conservation and progress, justice and mercy. Our prayer is that God will lead us to better understand and help each other, and work towards reconciliation for all people in Burma. Thank you for helping us do that.

***We may not bring about big changes, we may not stop the attacks, we may not save the day, but the small things we do, if God is in them, are eternal.***

We may not bring about big changes, we may not stop the attacks, we may not save the day, but the small things we do, if God is in them, are eternal. Ephesians 2: 8-10 reminds us, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the

gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

Thank you for praying and following as God leads each of us in the work He has for us to do. May God bless you all and the people of Burma.

Love,

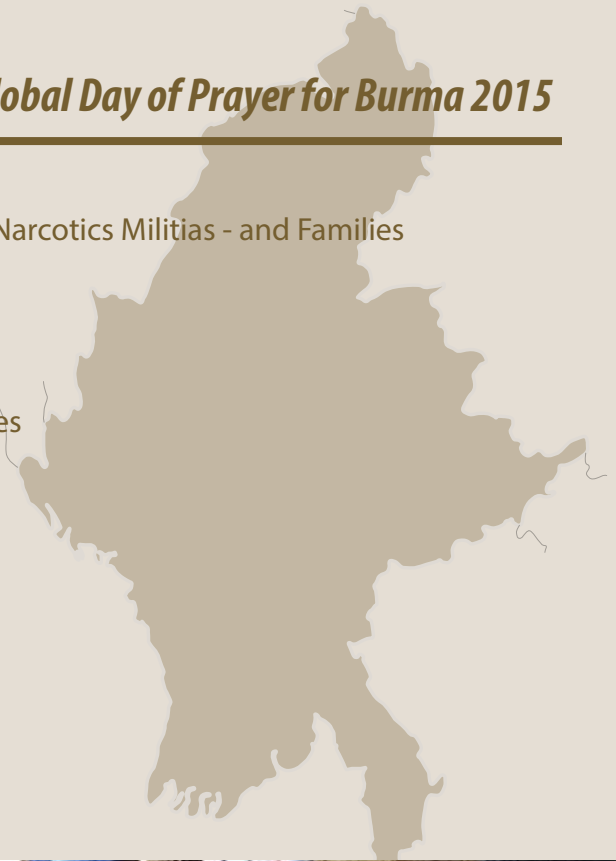
  
Dave, family and all of us here



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Arakan children at a Good Life Club program.



Karen medic treats Ta'ang child at GLC program.

**"And I pray that you,  
being rooted and established in love, may have power...  
to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,  
and to know this *love that surpasses knowledge*—that  
you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."  
*Ephesians 3:17-19***

# TRANS- ITIONS

By Dr. Mitch

TWO YOUNG KAREN MEN, sweaty, breathless and moving fast, carried a long bamboo pole with a hammock strung closely underneath. In the hammock a young pregnant woman moaned with labor pains. Like the reserve horses of a pony express relay team, several more young men ran along the narrow trail behind the precious load. Surrounded by verdant jungle and the roar of a nearby river, they were the picture of strength and vulnerability in a wild land, all facing major transitions.

At some point during the jarring jungle ambulance ride, the woman's amniotic membranes ruptured. By the time she arrived at the Jungle School of Medicine Kawthoolei (JSMK), her abdomen cycled regularly between a painful tight hard ball and a soft cocoon. The cycles accelerated and intensified. Soon, from somewhere almost beyond conscious control, with a primordial guttural utterance, her body began to strain. Her body knew, in the end better than any of us, that it was time to push the baby out.

Eh Su Klay, a female staff member at JSMK, donned gloves and did a vaginal check. She looked up and said simply, "Head," and showed about half a finger length left to go. Students and staff began preparing for a delivery. Some stayed with the mother on the dedicated floor space, encouraging her to push with each contraction and to rest in between. Others peeked over the sorry excuse for a privacy curtain, curiosity and excitement mixing in nervous chatter. Mother grabbed hands, arms and legs of anyone around as she pushed with ever increasing desperation.

In contrast, the baby itself is pretty much just a passive participant in the whole birthing event. He or she doesn't have much to say in the matter and can do nothing to facilitate its own safe delivery. Mom does all the work, with the occasional help of a medical person. But do you ever wonder, as the poor little

*The tiny limp body was completely pale. There was no crying. No breathing.*



*Eh Su Klay and the new baby.*

head is being so vigorously squashed, what do they think? Are they afraid? Is the pain overwhelming? How do they feel about leaving a life of protected darkness and muted sound? And as they enter a vastly different world, how do they experience the new sensations?

After one more total body contraction, a small trickle of dark blood, leaked out of the mother. A couple contractions later, even as the baby's head began to crown, more dark blood seeped out. We listened to the baby's heart beat through the next contraction. Everyone, including mom, heard the thumping of the baby's heartbeat on the doppler speaker slowly, gradually, and very distinctly slow down. Way down, until it was lost in the background of the mother's pulse. And it didn't come back.

Most likely, the placenta, the baby's only source of oxygen for his entire life up to that point, was detaching. They were so close to delivery but from here on out the baby would have little to no oxygen.

This was the woman's second baby and she knew how to push. It took two more mighty efforts, and Eh Su Klay was nicely controlling the delivery of the baby's head. Shoulders, body, baby girl parts – and placenta! – all immediately gushed out afterwards. The tiny limp body was completely pale. There was no crying. No breathing. We dried, stimulated and suctioned. Carolyn, the ER nurse, started breathing for the baby with an infant bag valve mask. The curious students peeking over the privacy curtain silently watched. For a moment, it was as if everyone present held their breath.

And then: a pitifully weak squeak of a cry. The little lass took a few breaths on her own, and, after a few

# PRAY FOR THE JUNGLE SCHOOL OF MEDICINE.

more minutes, she added a little pink to her color, and some muscle tone. Soon she was off and running. With typical Karen enthusiasm for a good meal, her smooth pink little face radiated contentment as she nursed for her first time.

*Welcome to a new life, beautiful little one. It's a life like nothing you have ever known or can even imagine. With bright lights, a symphony of different sounds and smells and textures. You are well loved and as safe and protected as we all can make you in this life. May God bless you and keep you until the time comes for your next transition.*

Another female patient in transition arrived at JSMK. At the other end of life, her face was deeply wrinkled and brown from working in the sun. Her abdomen protruded a little too much for the thin lines of her body. Accompanied by her youngest daughter, whose smile and bright eyes spoke of the vitality of life, in contrast, this lady looked tired. Tired of life, like a Karen Bilbo Baggins, she seemed to "feel thin, sort of stretched, like butter scraped over too much bread."

They had walked about four hours, from another hospital where they had learned little about the nature of her problem. Eventually, after telling her what we found on our exam, she would admit that she knew her pelvis was full of a hard painful mass. It seemingly was stuck to her spine and involved many of her other pelvic organs. It wrapped all the way around her lower bowel to the point that only a small passageway was left for stool, thus causing her distended abdomen. When we explained that we thought the mass was probably cancer, she did not react at all. I think she already knew. Although we had no tissue diagnosis, no CAT scan to define the extent of spread, the history and physical exam suggested that this woman had an advanced cancer. It was not likely that even cutting-edge medical treatment would change her final outcome, although it could greatly ease her transition.

We decided the best we could do would be to send her home.

We have very little physical help we can offer such patients. Tramadol, the only pain medication we have, is slightly more powerful than Tylenol. We gave some dietary recommendations. Then we

gave her the only other thing we had to offer - perhaps it was really the only thing she needed at this stage: a prayer, some fellowship and a Word. We told her what we believed about the next transition, that, like the first birth, the one she faced could lead to a whole new life beyond her wildest imaginations. In comparison, perhaps the lights and sounds of this life are just muted shadows. Also like the first birth, which largely depends on a mother's efforts and not the baby's, we can do little to facilitate our own safe delivery. We all need help. Without it we would be destroyed, a limp, pale, breathless stillborn. As Christians we believe that Jesus loves us and wants to provide that help, our very salvation. Unlike a mother's body which pushes the baby out, like it or not, Jesus waits for us to ask for his help. Having asked, we can trust He is able to deliver us into the next life alive, pink and squawking.

We prayed with mother and daughter. Bway Le Saw, another staff member who is a Christian, spent more time talking with them and gave them a Karen Bible. We had nothing more to offer.

Do you ever wonder, when our poor little beings are so vigorously squashed in death, what will we think? How will we experience the spark of a new life, a new power as we leave this life of darkness and muted voices? Will our instincts lead our little pink faces to drink in new and wondrous nourishment and to experience, for our first time, true contentment? I do believe there will be a Someone making us as safe and protected as possible in our new world.

Our patient walked away with little change on her face. Her daughter however, beamed. And maybe ... just maybe ... we will meet again some day.

*Jungle School of Medicine staff treats infant. (photo: Chris Sinclair)*





# *Opium, Burma Army-Controlled Narcotic Militias —and Families*

*Dear friends,*

This year we conducted missions in the Kachin and Shan states, where the Burma Army continues its attacks on ethnic minorities. The Burma Army also over-watches opium production and logging, and protects a gas pipeline that profits them but few others.

At the beginning of the mission we – my family and I, several headquarters team members and our new Ta'ang, Kachin and Arakan teams – conducted several Good Life Club programs with the Ta'ang people in northern Shan State, where the primary economic activity is tea plantations and charcoal production. We then moved to an area of opium production not far away. We were accompanied by elements of the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and the Shan State Army North (SSA-N). These groups are united in their struggle for freedom in Shan State and all of Burma. They also have a policy to eradicate all narcotics. We went to the Pang Say area of Nam Kham Township, northern Shan State. Here there were opium fields around every village that we encountered. The Chinese families producing the opium are all poor, and some

wretchedly so. Most are living in dilapidated shacks of wood, thatch, stone and tattered plastic sheeting. They are all under the control of the Burma Army-supported People Militia Force (Bi Thu Sit or Ta Ka Sa Pha in Burmese). The militia is led by an ethnic Chinese man named Kyaw Myint, who is a Burma citizen and also a member of Parliament representing Namkham No.2 constituency for the Burma government-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP). Opium production in the past few years has increased in the Namkham area of northern Shan State and this is directly related to Kyaw Myint and his Burma Army-supported militia. Namkham is situated on the China-Burma border close to the Muse-Riuli crossing.

## **Personal Experience with Opium Families**

The Ta'ang resistance has an anti-narcotics education program and every Ta'ang village we visited had a large vinyl poster educating people on the evils of narcotics and the policy of the Ta'ang against it. They have a program to educate, provide subsidies and crop substitutions and to conduct enforcement. As we prepared to go, the local leaders told us that the Ta'ang Army was planning to start destroying all the opium fields in the area later this month. We planned to document that too, if it happened while we were there.

*Opium field in northern Shan State.*

# Pray that political solutions to the drug problem would be infused with love.

We started the movement into the opium area and by the second day began to see opium fields. We stopped at the first large field and began to take photographs. We had only been there 20-30 minutes before we were told that the Burma Army in a camp to the north had heard we were there and were coming to attack us. We finished our documentation and moved on deeper into the opium growing area with a rear guard watching for the Burma Army.

We climbed up to over 5,000 feet and entered into a high valley with opium fields and houses scattered on the hillsides. On top of a small hill in the center of the valley was a village of about 10 houses, with the

After about an hour of taking photos and gathering information, the leader of this part of the mission said we would stay here one night and the next day go to do a reconnaissance of the nearby militia camp. To our surprise we were told we would be sleeping in the house of the family with the jeep – the same family I had photographed and looked down on. “We have control right now, and unless the militia or Burma Army comes we will sleep here,” our local Ta’ang leader told us. “We have told the people here to stop growing opium and we are trying to help them find other ways. Still they do not listen and keep growing the opium. At some point if they do not stop, our Ta’ang troops will destroy it. But for now we just document it.”



Harvesting opium.



Ta'ang soldiers destroy opium harvest.

*“Why, why, why now? We are not ready, I have lost everything, how will we eat, how will we feed our family?” she cried.*

largest house, built of stone and wood, situated in the middle. Opium fields came right up to the house. The combined Kachin (KIA), Ta’ang (TNLA) and Shan (SSA-N) troops set up a security perimeter around the village and we began to document the opium fields. As we approached the stone house on the hill, the Chinese family there looked at us fearfully. I looked back at them and smiled as I took photos of the opium all around their house, the house itself and the 4-wheel drive jeep parked in front. This was the only vehicle we had seen at any farm and signified that this family had connections and more resources than most. Still, to me they looked very poor. I felt pity, but mixed with dislike because of their profession. I took photos, investigated the property and made notes.

I felt awkward as we entered the house of the opium growers but we smiled and in limited Chinese thanked them for their hospitality. Karen, my wife, led the way in establishing friendship and was soon sitting around the fire with the women of the house. As she shared with smiles and hand signals and then later through one of our team who could speak Chinese, the family began to warm up and became very friendly towards us. On my part, I began to like them and by that night felt warm and close. Opium farmers are still people and I was finding that out. It was not a simple, “good guy-bad guy” situation. We told them we were here to find out about the situation and they did not need to be afraid of us. Our local Ta’ang leader told them the





*Freshly harvested opium, northern Shan State.*

same. We all knew the Ta'ang had a plan announced to destroy the fields but did not know when that would happen. For now we were becoming friends.

The next morning we took some of the teams and climbed up toward the militia camp, which squatted on a mountaintop over-watching all the land below it. It can be seen from miles in each direction and it reminded me of a feudal fortress dominating all below. "It looks like Mordor," said one of our team members. It did. A bare, tree-stripped, fortified mountaintop stronghold, ruled with bad purpose, subjugating the people below it. Opium fields were arrayed below the camp coming up the mountain to within a few hundred yards of the outside fence.

We approached carefully and spent most of the day filming and photographing the camp and the soldiers in it. The new flag of Burma, yellow, green and red with a white star, was on the flag pole. The militia troops were in dark green uniform similar to Burma Army uniforms. After gathering all the documentation we could, we started the walk back to the village.

When we arrived we were greeted with smiles by the family we stayed with. They and the teams who had stayed back had become closer. This good feeling was interrupted when a new column of Ta'ang troops came into the village. They were from headquarters and were on orders to begin the destruction of the poppies today. We were all surprised and I said, "Yes, it is good to destroy the fields but please not now. We have been taken into these people's homes, and they have shared their food with us. We told them they did not need to be afraid of us. They knew they needed to do something different but please give them more time. If the destruction starts now, with no other kind of help, they will feel like we betrayed them."

Regardless, the Ta'ang army began advancing through the fields and knocking the poppies off the stalks with sticks. I prayed about what I should do. We agreed with the Ta'ang anti-drug policy, they are our friends and teammates and earlier we had hoped to document the destruction of poppies. At the same time, here were people in trouble. What could we do? "Comfort them and give them love," was the answer I felt. I looked up and saw the woman of the house burst into tears and run away. Her daughter followed her, sobbing. "Why, why, why now, we are not ready, I have lost everything, how will we eat, how will we feed our family?" she cried.

Our kids ran up to me and said, "No, no they should not destroy these fields. These people are our friends!" The situation of us defending opium growers was new to me and seemed ludicrous. But in a flash it showed me how complicated this all was. Here were people trying to survive. They had chosen a bad way to do it, and we were against it and had told them that. At the same time they had been kind to us and we had enjoyed each other's company. We had told them they did not need to fear us, that, yes, we were against narcotics production but the FBR was here to gather information. These were poor people and not evil drug lords. In over 20 years of our work in Burma I have never seen a rich opium farmer – they are poor and desperate people scratching a living out of bare, deforested mountains. Here the militia, the Burma Army and the drug cartels can get rich but not these farmers. They were not innocent but they were also not evil. And they were now our friends. I thought back to last night when Karen had sat with the family and shared the gospel story of how much God loved all of us and sent Jesus to help us. We had prayed with this family and we loved them.

I went up to the crying woman and held her hand, telling her I was sorry and that we would help some way. Her brother looked at me stone-faced and walked away. Karen, Hosannah and the kids gathered around the mother and daughter and tried to comfort them. Sahale and Suu had tears running down their faces and said, "We know opium is wrong but why now, why didn't they have more time, these are our friends, what can we do?"

I prayed with the mother and through one of our Kachin team members told her that God had a way for her. She could ask God what to do, and God would show a new way. She wept as she answered me, "How will we eat and how will we get my son out of prison? He is being held by the Burma Army and they have



demanded \$100 to get him released.” I asked our team if this was a true story and they said it was. “How can we save him, now all our way to make money is gone?” she cried.

I told the woman, “I will give you money for what you lost. Not because I think opium growing is right. I do not. It is wrong and our Ta’ang friends are right to destroy it. But we said that you did not need to fear us and we became friends with you and now this has happened. I am giving this money to help you set your son free, for food for your family and to encourage you to find another way. God will help you do that if you call on Him.” I gave her \$230 which is about what she could have got with her crop. I explained why I did this to the Ta’ang leaders and soldiers and they all agreed it was ok.

The mother stopped crying and thanked us, saying, “I have nothing to give you but I will never forget this, thank you so much for this help.” Karen sat with her a long time, praying with her and encouraging her that this was an opportunity to make a new start.

As we left to go to the next area I thought about this incident and it came to me that if you want to stop people from growing opium, loving them is the most important thing. For me, I see a five-part policy is

needed:

1) Education 2) Crop substitution 3) Food subsidies until the crops substitutes take effect 4) Enforcement and punishment 5) Love. To treat all people with love through each of the parts of a counter-narcotics policy will take longer but it is the moral way and will have the best, most long-term effect.

### Conclusion

“Let my people go,” has been on my mind and heart for Burma. Whether the issue is opium, gas pipelines, logging or outright attacks, there is a way through this. Love should be the center of any solution and is the way to find the balance between freedom and responsibility, conservation and progress, justice and mercy. Our prayer is that God will lead us to better understand and help each other work towards reconciliation for all people in Burma. Thank you for helping us do that.

*God bless you,*

Dave and all the FBR

## 23 TRAINEES KILLED IN BURMA ARMY ARTILLERY ATTACK ON TRAINING CAMP

At 12:15 on 19 November 2014, the Burma Army’s Light Infantry Battalion 390 fired a 105mm Howitzer at the Kachin Woi Chyai Bum Officer Training School, killing 23 trainees. The Burma Army fired from their position on Hka Ya Bum mountain, which has a direct line of sight to the Kachin training school, located north of Laiza in Waingmaw Township, Kachin State. The shell impacted on the parade ground of the Woi Chyai Bum Officer Training School when officer trainees were practicing drills. Twenty trainees were instantly killed and three died of their wounds on the same day. At least twenty people were wounded, including four instructors.

FBR Ta’ang team member, Mai Maung Win, was killed in this attack. He was 21 years old, married and with a young son.



PLEASE PRAY FOR THE FAMILIES OF THESE YOUNG MEN, FOR COMFORT, COURAGE AND HOPE.

# In Memoriam



## SAW LAI MWEH

On the night of 1 February 2014, we lost a member of Free Burma Rangers (FBR). More importantly – we lost a friend. Lai Mweh drowned while fishing in a river near the training camp. He was a 20-year-old medic attending the Jungle School of Medicine – Kawthoolei (JSMK). He had survived the Burma Army torching his home several times – not an unusual story for this part of Karen State, Burma. In between running for his life, he had doggedly pursued what education was available in the jungle. Considering the circumstances, getting through the seventh grade was a big deal. And yet Lai Mweh wanted to do more to help his people. So last year he came to JSMK hoping to become a medic for the FBR. He soon ran into difficulties. Trying to master a real medical course with a seventh grade education was a challenge and he failed the test on basic foundational material at the end of the first three months. But that only seemed to make him try harder. He did not complain, and was known for his smile and willingness to work hard. As a new ranger student in training he had a

smile and strong answer every time we asked during a tough physical session: "Easy way or hard way?"

"Hard way!" he would shout and smile; he was irrepressible. In the field on missions he was always up front as a medic, helping others and also doing any job that was needed. After his initial struggle with his studies, when the final exam came, he passed with no problem and was excited for his future as a medic. He died just days after graduation. He was humble, helpful and always cheerful. He has helped others and his actions convict and inspire. We are all very sad at his loss. We will miss him.



## SAW POE LAW

On 27 September 2014, Saw Poe Law, a young man with a wife and a new baby, was shot and killed by the Burma Army in Kler Lwe Htoo District of Karen State. He was 26 years old. He was working with the Karen National Defense Organization (KNDO), which provides for local defense in Karen State, and had gone to check on a reported Burma Army patrol in violation of the ceasefire agreement. The Burma Army saw them first as they approached, and opened fire, killing Poe Law and wounding one other KNDO member.

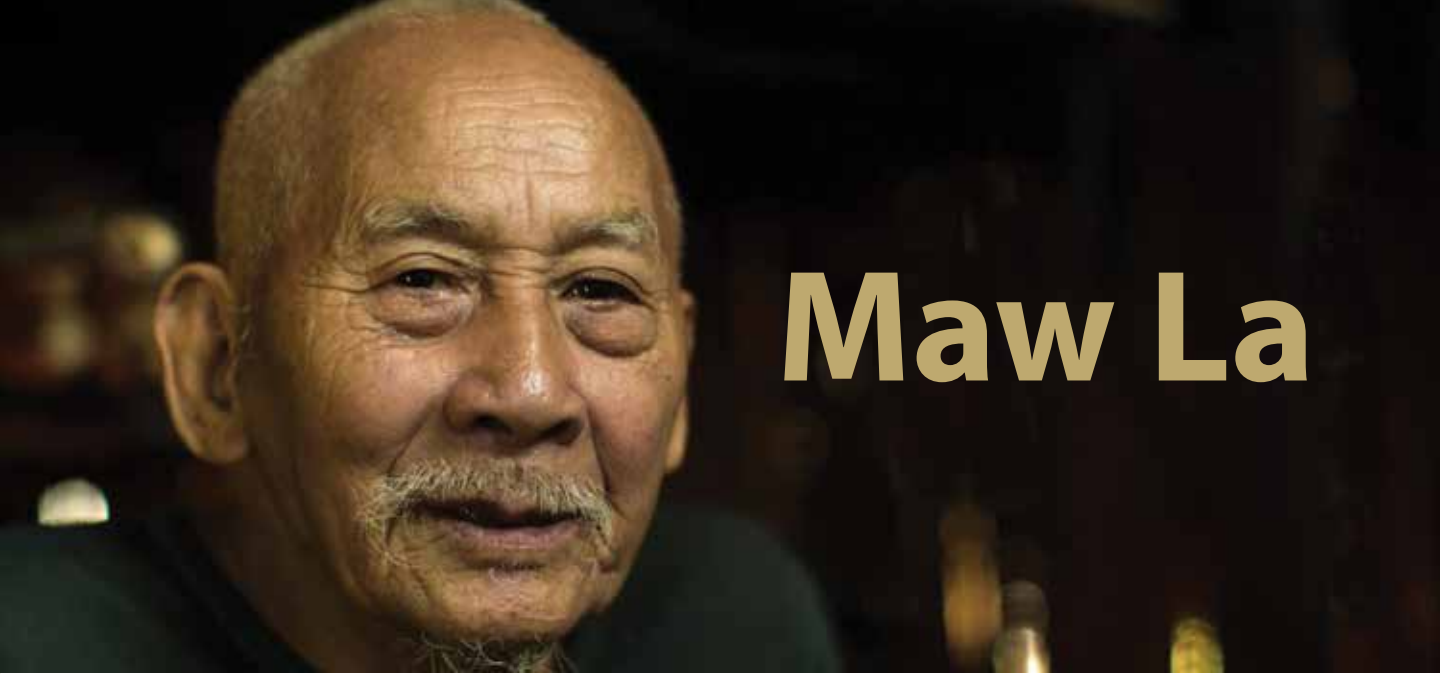
Poe Law trained with FBR in 2007 as a medic and worked with us for 2 years before returning to the KNDO. He was small and had a boyish face, but was strong, confident and always joking and laughing. One friend recalls, "He kept us laughing in the face of any kind of trouble." He was kind and helped to take care of children. Ceasefire negotiations are ongoing in Karen State as they are in other parts of Burma but attacks in other areas and killings like the one of Saw Poe Law show

that the conflict is not over.

This is a great loss for FBR, the Karen people, and, most of all, for his wife and child. We are immensely sorry for them and the rest of his family, and for the loss of our young friend and good comrade. Please join us in praying for them. We look forward to being reunited with our friend, Poe Law, in what the Karen call "the undiscovered land."

## PRAY FOR COURAGE, STRENGTH, AND VISION FOR THOSE ON





# Maw La

## *Saying good-bye to a hero, a leader and a friend*

One of the oldest Free Burma Rangers, Pu Maw La, passed away in September, at 84 years of age. Maw La was our dear friend, uncle, example, encourager, advisor, enabler and a man of God. He grew up during World War II, and as a young boy helped his father fight the invading Japanese army in Burma. His father, Saw Digay, was a leader of the northern Karen and worked closely with the Allies and Major Hugh Seagrim, "Grandfather Longlegs." Maw La helped his father do his part in the liberation of Burma. After World War II, the Karen and other ethnic groups were attacked by the Burma Army and war broke out between the dictators of Burma and the Karen and other ethnic people of Burma.

As he grew up, Pu Maw La became one of the most respected leaders of the Karen freedom movement. He gained renown as a brilliant fighter and protector of his people. He was also a master hunter and on two separate occasions killed an attacking tiger and bear with only a spear and knife. He was one of the first to help us as we formed FBR and his sons were some of our most outstanding leaders. One of his sons, Digay Htoo, died on a mission.

Now we have lost Pu Maw La and this is a great loss for the Karen people and all of us. He helped his people survive years of attacks and his own village was burned

three times by the Burma Army, but he never left. He said, "I would rather die here in the land God gave me, than live as a slave somewhere else." Pu Maw La helped rebuild his village, school and church each time they were attacked and never gave up hope. He prayed for all people and led us all at each New Years' worship ceremony to pray for the Burma Army and all our enemies. He never stopped loving - us at FBR, his people, his land - even when there were many reasons to give up, he never did. He was an example of perseverance and strength, of hospitality and care, and of irrepressible joy and love of life. We thank God

for him and all that he has shown us of our Father and how to live in the world, through both good and bad times. We pray for his family and his people, and look forward to seeing him in heaven where all that joy of life can flow and fly unweighted by the gravity of earth.

**Pu Maw La inspired  
us to **obey God** at all  
costs, to **love all who  
come our way** and to  
**live boldly...****

Pu Maw La inspired us to obey God at all costs, to love all who come our way and to live boldly and with care for others. Once, when a journalist asked Pu Maw La if FBR was good or not, he answered, "If FBR follows God it is good, if it does not follow God it is not good."

Maw La helped us follow God and we thank God for him.

# MISSION TO SUDAN



Dear friends,

18 years ago we started the Global Day of Prayer for Burma and, soon after, the Free Burma Ranger relief teams, with the idea that the dictators could not stop people from loving and helping each other. They could not take away spiritual freedom and a fruit of that, prayer.

God's promises are for everyone and we have shared the promise of abundant life during our programs. God's commands are also for everyone, and He desires all of us to "learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow" (Isaiah 1:17).

Last year we were invited to go to help displaced people under attack in Sudan, where the people of the Nuba mountains are suffering under relentless attacks by the dictatorship of Sudan.

We prayed and felt that even though our main work is in Burma, we should try to respond to the request for help by people in need. We felt as if our hearts were spread wider and love for the Nuba people grew there. This feeling was confirmed by friends who provided the assistance needed to get us there with the relief supplies needed to help.

We saw the tremendous value of our ethnic rangers from Burma in Sudan and it seemed to me like God's mission, bringing oppressed people from Burma to help oppressed people in Sudan – amazing and Spirit-filled. In Sudan we connected spiritually, professionally, emotionally, mentally, and physically, but the ethnic FBR members (Eliya, Ray Kaw and Monkey) connected in a special way with a shared worldview borne of common experiences of resilience under oppression.

We continue as God leads us to help people in all areas of Burma – those still in active conflict and those in improving areas. We pray that if there is positive change here, our FBR ethnic leaders will show us the way forward. As for other areas in the world, people know of the FBR teams and how they have been a force of good in Burma and recently in Sudan and they want our help. There is a need for people who are willing and able to go into the midst of the attack and help physically and spiritually.

Our main effort remains Burma, but if God leads us again to go to other places, by His grace we will go.

Thank you for being in this with us.



*Karen medic, Ray Kaw, treats patients in the Nuba Mountains.*



*Nuban relief team members teaching the motto at a Good Life Club program in the Nuba Mountains.*

## PRAY FOR THE PEOPLE OF THE NUBA MOUNTAINS...



# Rocky Thoughts on Justice

*By Karen Eubank*

I have shared the message of God's abundant life in conflict areas for years, but, honestly, I struggle with discouragement when I see repeat attacks and chronic displacement in these areas. When families are attacked and displaced following our program, it stings the soul. But in the search for answers that follows such a slump, the reality of my relationship with Jesus personally transforming my own life has given me proof that He is real and can be trusted, believed, followed—and even obeyed—in the face of this suffering. Two thousand years ago, Jesus promised abundant life to a people also oppressed and defeated and suffering, and I will continue to share His promise. That the spirit is stronger than the body is a fact in my life that can sustain my testimony.

In these places that have 'less than nothing' on the scale of human, physical abundance, how is God's abundance manifested? Trying to see with spiritual eyes as I look out on the people living here, what should I feel happy about and what should make me sad? My heart is heavy that they have brown water to drink, and only a little bit for huge families—and they have to travel far to get that little bit. I feel oppressed by the anxiety caused by hearing an airplane overhead knowing it has, can, and will drop bombs on them. But I cannot stay sad when I see people smiling, laughing, running and playing, with strong bodies and cheerful hearts. Jesus says, "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul." In terms of souls, these people, the victims of oppression, seem to have healthier souls than those of their attackers—although one only need to go to a family unit to see the familiar ways in which we become attackers and victims of each other. Recently here I was among a throng of children seriously fighting each other to get a small toy I was handing out. A day

later I passed by a house where a teenage brother and sister were threatening each other with a stick and rocks. God's call to justice is hard work—even, and maybe especially, among those we love the most.

Mulling over all this I realized that abundant life must be related to justice—in fact, maybe it is the only atmosphere in which justice can truly thrive. But it also transcends justice. Abundant life happens when the spiritual feeds the physical on a daily level. If it is possible to think spiritually before we act physically then there is hope for treating each other in a way that not only draws us closer to God, but that is the only way to keep from destroying each other—to achieve true justice. At the same time, if we are truly living so that our every day responses are being fed by our spirits, we are able to transcend the slings of injustice that are hurled our way. Practically, counter to our human nature, power and leadership that are yoked with service and humility encourage life instead of snuffing it out. The best that I can see: persevering toward justice by following the example of Jesus Christ is the spiritual food on which our human survival depends.



*Karen relief team leader and medic, Eliya, greets Nuban children at a GLC program.*





# WHAT IS PEACE?

## *FAILING TO COME TO (THE SAME) TERMS*

By Dr. Ashley South

Recent events in Myanmar, such as the 19 November Myanmar Army artillery attack on

a KIO training base, which cost the lives of 23 young officer cadets, have left the peace process in a precarious state. However, across much of the southeast, the lives of civilians affected by decades of armed conflict in Myanmar are undergoing profound transformations for the better, thanks to the ceasefires agreed on since late 2011 between the government and more than a dozen ethnic armed groups. Nevertheless, the emerging peace process is unlikely to be sustainable unless negotiations begin soon to address the underlying political, social and economic causes of conflict.

Part of the problem is that different actors, from the military to donors to conflict-affected communities, have different understandings of what 'peace' is, and act accordingly. For most ethnic stakeholders, the primary need is for structural changes to the state and real autonomy for ethnic communities. However, the Myanmar Army has opposed such changes as threatening to national unity and sovereignty. If the peace process is to move forward, it will be necessary for the Tatmadaw to acknowledge ethnic peoples' rights to self-determination, and also to re-deploy troops in order to enhance conflict-affected communities' sense of security. The government has sought to escape this thorny issue by focusing primarily on the perceived development needs of ethnic communities. In the meantime the government, and many of its international aid and development partners, seem to regard "peace" as equivalent to economic development. This approach tends to marginalise ethnic communities' political demands, and concerns regarding human rights.

The current ceasefires have had real results for villagers in many areas. For example, before the KNU ceasefire, villagers often had to flee from fighting and to avoid forced conscription and portering. Today many civilians report greatly decreased levels of fear. Many villagers have said that for the first time in decades they do not have to worry about fleeing into the jungle to avoid being subjected to serious human-rights abuses. Nonetheless, there is also widespread anxiety that the government and ethnic armed groups may fail to reach

a political settlement and the peace process may yet break down. Ethnic communities are also worried about the future, particularly the risk of land-grabbing in newly 'accessible' conflict-affected areas.

At the level of political negotiations, as of February 2014, there are still important differences between the ethnic armed groups' Nationwide Ceasefire Coordinating Team (NCCT) and the government (and particularly the Myanmar Army). A positive outcome from recent negotiations is the emergence of greater clarity regarding positions on both sides. Since November 2013, when representatives of ethnic armed groups met at a historic conference in the KIO headquarters at Laiza, a fairly cohesive approach to the peace process has emerged on the part of the groups in the NCCT, while on the government side, the military has been more engaged in the peace process. Unsurprisingly however, serious differences remain, between some Ethnic Armed Groups, and more importantly between the positions of the NCCT and the government, and Myanmar Army.

In terms of international support, donors have largely proceeded in accordance with their own assumptions and agendas, rather than an understanding of political concerns and local needs and realities. Most donors seem content to provide funding channeled through traditional – and generally government-controlled – structures, and in accordance with aid priorities set in foreign capitals. This is an easier approach than seeking out appropriate local partners on the ground. As a result, it is not uncommon for peace-support initiatives to fail to engage with the real issues affecting communities and other stakeholders; instead they fall in behind government-focused development and rehabilitation projects. However, the problem in Myanmar is not a "weak state" which needs strengthening, but rather an urgent need to re-imagine and negotiate state-society relations – and in particular mend relationships between the Burman majority and ethnic-nationality communities. There is a risk of missing opportunities for long-term peace if donors continue to support activities that mostly suit aid agency agendas and are understood by many ethnic stakeholders as playing into the government's hands.

International donors and diplomats need to understand the complexities in Myanmar and play a more strategic role in supporting the peace process. Failure to brighten the glimmers of hope experienced by conflict-affected communities would constitute a terrible lost opportunity to support lasting peace in Myanmar.



## AREA UPDATES FROM RELIEF TEAMS

### General – Burma:

Overall, in Burma 45 percent of all human rights abuse claims in the past year have been due to villagers having their land confiscated by the government. The following update from different ethnic areas details some of these, as well as other situations in various ethnic states.

### Arakan State:

Over 100,000 Rohingya have fled the country as a result of the intense persecution they face in Arakan State, but Muslims throughout the country have been subject to attacks, regardless of ethnicity (*see pg. 21 for more information on Rohingya*).

There are many reports of forced labor (carrying rations and weapons supplies, and building camps) for the Burma Army. The Burma Army forces bribes of money and food. There is a severe food shortage due to Burma Army requiring farm animals as bribes, and forcing labor so the men don't have time to tend to their rice farms. There are also reports of Burma Army torturing villagers who refuse to work.

### Chin State:

Disease is the leading cause of premature death here. Potentially preventable or treatable diseases, such as malaria, typhoid or kidney diseases are the most common causes of death.

### Karen State:

*Dooplaya District:* To make way for construction of the ASEAN Highway, the government is forcibly buying land from villagers to use for new businesses along the road. The villagers generally only receive a partial sum of the payment they were promised for the sale of their land.

*Toungoo District:* A government teak project is forcing villagers to "sell" land below market value.

*Mu Traw District:* Burma Army soldiers violate ceasefire agreements by trespassing on KNU land. Build-up of Burma Army camps continues. In one instance, government soldiers had villagers carry what they said was food to the camps, but the villagers soon realized they were transporting weapons and other supplies.

### Naga Area/Sagaing Division

Poverty is the overwhelming problem in the Naga area. There is minimal infrastructure and development. There are few paved roads, vehicles or medical clinics. Most parents cannot afford school for their children, when there are schools available. Many villagers die from curable diseases such as dysentery, cholera, malaria, typhoid, diarrhea and TB because of the lack of access to medical care. Many villagers are addicted to opium.

### Shan State:

*Northern Shan State:* Villagers are forced to sell land to Chinese companies for the gas pipeline project.

*Lahu area (southern Shan State):* Many people in Lahu area grow opium as it is the best source of income. This is true in many areas, including Ta'ang, Lahu, Shan and Pa-Oh areas: meth, opium, and heroin are either manufactured or used by the population and trade is subsidized by the government.



Chin children at Good Life Club program.



Shan medics treat patients during their mission.



Pa-Oh medic treats villager.



Relief team video man shot by Burma Army.

# RANGER PROFILE

## *Kyaw Bo*

The Good Life Club program begins with introductions – hundreds of children sit quietly while all the rangers cycle through, mostly shy and quiet; then, suddenly, there's a spark at the front – this ranger is beaming, he shouts out a greeting, a joke, a song lyric; he has a guitar and strums a bit. He shouts: "My name is Kyaw Bo!" (pronounced "jaw bo"). The children love him – in Karen State, Lahu areas, Shan State, Kachin State. He is a Lahu relief team coordinator, a GLC leader, a medic and a chaplain. He is a pastor and has been a community organizer. He became a husband in March and will become a father in January.

Kyaw Bo was born in Loi Tout Village in northern Shan State, one of four children in a village with few educational opportunities. At seven years old he moved

mostly spent their money on drugs and alcohol.

When they saw that Kyaw Bo didn't, they harassed him for his money. Sometimes he drank with them just so they would leave him alone. He prayed for a solution to this and soon after began working with FBR and has now been working there for five years, as a chaplain, GLC counselor and medic.

In 2012, Kyaw Bo prayed about finding the right person to marry. He asked that God show him the heart of the woman that was right for him. Later that year he met the woman who is now his wife, when she came to visit his sister and then visited one of the medical clinics he was running.



*Kyaw Bo with Karen children at a GLC program.*

to an orphanage run by his uncle because it had a school. His uncle, a preacher and the headmaster of the school, was a man of great faith and throughout the years became a father figure. Kyaw Bo was raised in the church and learned many things that he would use for the rest of his life.

After school, Kyaw Bo moved to Manshu to be a gold miner, then joined the Lahu Political Party and eventually moved to Mae Hong Song, Thailand. There, he worked with the Lahu, Wa and Palaung organizations. For five years he was a community worker, assisting with civilians' needs, communicating with the resistance, and urging villages to support the soldiers by giving food and supplies.

The area and groups Kyaw Bo was working with were fraught with tension; there was conflict with the Burma Army and the groups also fought with each other. His work with the soldiers also was a source of conflict. They

The period before the wedding was another example of God's provision. At first, things seemed to fall apart. The invitations were lost, his parents said they could not attend, and Kyaw Bo had no money. He was worried but trusted God. After leaving it in God's hands, one after another, things fell into place: a friend offered to provide beverages, a relative offered to help pay for the food, another relative gave him a bull to feed the guests, a cook offered to come and cook the food, and a friend from Chiang Mai provided wedding rings for them.

Kyaw Bo says the most important lesson he has learned is that God provides. If you need something, ask God for it and He will provide. Kyaw Bo describes his life as 'abundantly blessed,' and acknowledges that none of these blessings he did by himself. His goals are to continue working for Free Burma Rangers and to keep working on his relationship with God. One thing he has decided: anywhere God sends him, he will go.



# NEW CHAPLAINS

In 2014, Free Burma Rangers began a chaplain training program in response to an expressed desire on the part of several senior rangers to learn more about God, the Bible and how to share their faith. The more missions we go on the more situations we find where we don't have a solution - and the more we see and feel the need to call on God, to seek His solutions. This year the chaplain program trained five senior FBR headquarters



Chaplains: Edmond, Hsa Nu Nu, Doh Say, Kyaw Bo, Ka Paw Say

men, who were then given two weeks with the new ranger teams to lay a spiritual foundation for the rangers to stand on as they prepare to confront evil, disunity, violence, tragedy, hopelessness – side by side and

intermingled with love, courage and sacrifice. **Please pray for this program, that it would build up men and women who humbly call on God and seek His solutions, even as they give themselves in serving others.**

## PROFILE OF AN ITINERATE PASTOR: EDMOND, LEAD CHAPLAIN

*"For how can I bear to see disaster fall on my people? How can I bear to see the destruction of my family?" Esther 8:6*

Edmond has faced bullets, illnesses, weeks walking through the jungle, long periods away from family – all to follow the call of God to bring spiritual light to his people.

Edmond's father was a resistance leader in Karen State before Edmond was born. There, Edmond's older brother died of malaria. And there, one night while Edmond's mother was pregnant with him, gunmen came into the house and assassinated his father. His mother gathered up the rest of the family and fled to Kachin State, where Edmond was born. Growing up, he worked to support his family while also going to school.

While still in high school he took a trip to Karen State.

He planned to become a resistance leader and after school he took a number of short courses, including medical, malaria, and accounting – to equip himself for leadership.

However, during his studies, God put a different plan into his heart: he was to fight for the people in Karen State, not for political freedom but for their souls. His mother told him, "If you want to help your people the right way, Jesus is the only way." Edmond went to seminary in Rangoon, and then to Karen State.

This decision came with a sacrifice. Before he left, his mother said, "You can go, but you can never contact us again." Their security situation was too dangerous. Still, she encouraged him, admonishing: "Never give up your calling – you are a pastor. Don't become military and don't become politician." Edmond left and hasn't seen his family since.

Edmond met his wife at seminary; today they have a grown son and daughter and have "adopted" many more children in need along the way. Many of these have come back to help the work of Edmond and his wife.

As Burma Army attacks on the Karen people intensified, Edmond's work came to focus on the Internally Displaced People (IDPs). He says, "Everyone was interested in refugee camps, at that time no one was interested in the IDPs." Many times, he had nothing to give but the gospel. His own family was displaced often and finally was able to move to a base on the Thai side. Edmond continued his work in Burma. In 1997 he met Dave Eubank, the first foreigner he knew who cared about the IDPs. They became friends

and in 2001 Edmond became one of the first to teach new rangers spiritual leadership and counselling.

Edmond has worked and walked in the jungle for 20 years. When things are dangerous he has the desires that every man has: to provide for his family and keep them safe. Once, he thought about moving into a city and finding a regular job. But his wife told him if they moved to the city, "The people would be a flock without a shepherd." He knew she was right and they continued their work.

Today Edmond is still a roving pastor. Now his journeys aren't limited to the jungle; he has traveled all over the world, including the U.S. and Scandinavia, to teach and encourage Karen people across the globe. He prays that God will use him to bring unity to his people, and a message of spiritual freedom to people everywhere.

***For we live by faith, not by sight. 2 Cor 5:7***



GLC program at Bum Hsit Pa IDP camp,,

# As long as it is day:

By Karen Eubank and Hosannah Valentine

## Finding God's new way in Burma

*"Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. **As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me.** Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world." John 9:3-5*

On 22 January 2014, eight new Free Burma Ranger teams graduated from Leadership and Relief Team Training: five Ta'ang, two Arakan and one Kachin. Our mission plan was to visit the Ta'ang area in northern Shan State for the first time. On our way there, we would stop at two Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps we had visited last year and do Good Life Club (GLC) programs. These first two programs gave the rangers good experience in leading larger groups. At La Gat Yang camp there were about 300 children and at Bum Hsit Hpa there were around 200 children.

At Bum Hsit Hpa we were informed there were people there we knew – the IDPs from Nam Lim Pa Village, who we had seen last year in their camp there and had fled again in November to here. We were happy to see them, but heavy with their reality of suffering and fleeing again. As we gathered with the families for singing, a drama, the gospel message and gift of the bead bracelet, questions of relevance seemed obvious. Hadn't we just done this with this same group last year in another place of 'temporariness'?

Does the message of hope weaken when the situation worsens after we leave? The cycle of suffering of these people we loved chipped away at our faith in our own message. Yet, later God's encouragement of focus came to mind: *Don't look back, despairing in evil's work; face forward, searching for as many opportunities to introduce Me into the equation as possible.* For some it might be the first introduction to a lifeline that God is waiting to offer. The story we share through the colored bead bracelet begins with God's good creation, goes through sin and suffering to Jesus' sacrificial love, forgiveness and finally new life – thus ending again with God's creativity. He has never stopped being the creator and wants only an open door to create life where there seems to be only emptiness. This encouragement would be key as our mission played out.

After these first two programs, fighting again broke out in Nam Lim Pa area. We went there, to report on the situation and see if we could help. The village was abandoned; homes had been ransacked and hastily-erected bunkers dotted people's yards. We found the bodies of three men killed in November; their families, whom we had just seen, had only had time for a hasty burial before they had to flee again. We gave the men a proper burial and a funeral. In the ransacked school dorms we found ripped-up books we had given the school eight months before, a GLC bracelet lying



among scattered clothes and schoolbooks, and GLC shirts. What remained of the message of hope we had wanted to share?

Our next five programs were in the Ta'ang area of northern Shan State, where we saw over 800 children from 12 different schools. The Ta'ang have their own organization and resistance army – they have not yet signed any agreements with the Burmese government – but they don't have their own state, which is what their leaders want. The villages were clean and well-ordered, with primary schools that are mostly supported by the Burma government. Still, one teacher, a young Burman man from central Burma who was very interested in our program and the FBR, summed up their needs with one word: freedom. While these people weren't under immediate military oppression their freedom only extended as far as the opportunities afforded them – which were few, with no education offered in their language, and no education beyond primary school offered in their villages. They had stability, but little freedom.

The next leg of our mission would show us the more dramatic consequences of this.

The road we walked wound up through higher and drier mountains. We had just left tea-growing country and in these mountains, we had been told, was opium. The first field surprised us, spread over the hillside, green and beautiful and ripe for harvest. One family was living in the middle of it, with one young boy about eight years old. They were nervous but offered us what they had, juice. We gave the child some balloons and took photos. Several hours further on we came to a village on a bare and windy hilltop. There were about 10 families here. No school. Opium fields spread out down the hillside below the houses. Some of us interviewed families while others did a reconnaissance of a militia camp standing on a hilltop several ridges away. In the house where we stayed, the family was Chinese and had been there for over a generation. Their son had been arrested by the Burma Army the week before for drug possession. At the same time, their crops were controlled and taxed by the ever-present Burma Army-controlled militia across the valley. This family, too, was

nervous, with the anxiety of people who aren't free – while they lived away from war, they were at the mercy of five competing armed groups and were pawns in a system that reaches all the way around the world. They knew that there was a big picture in which they were nothing.

The one night we spent there we tried to show them a still bigger picture: the yellow bead in our story represents gold, and just as gold is both beautiful and valuable, so are they in God's eyes. They are his beloved children, we told them: He wants to hear from you. We gave the woman who was our hostess a bracelet for each member of her family, reassured her that we were only there to document and not to hurt them, interviewed them about their life and work and became friends in the process.

**She was caught up in a system bigger than her, a system that slowly strangled those caught in it – but it was the only life she'd ever known.**

The day we left, the Ta'ang National Liberation Army, as part of a project to eradicate opium production, came to the village and began destroying the opium fields. The villagers watched as soldiers systematically

gridded out across the field and with swinging bamboo sticks destroyed their livelihood. The woman who had shared her house and fire with us, who we had interviewed earlier and shared the message of the gospel with and who had come to trust us – she watched silently for a moment then walked slowly to her house. Soon we could hear her crying from her room, loud sobs. We tried to comfort her; she said that crop was money for her son, to get him out of jail. Without it, he would be lost. The soldiers swung their



Arakan team leader at GLC program in Ta'ang area.

bamboo sticks through her fields as the sound of her despair poured through her house. How to comfort her? She was caught up in a system bigger than her, a system that slowly strangled those caught in it – but it was the only life she'd ever known. Despair indeed when your livelihood turns to ashes in your mouth.

We sat with her. Gave her some money to help her son. We prayed for her. What to pray for? For God's new way. We had no solution. It wasn't just a question of defeating an enemy, but of overthrowing a system, that she was part of, that she was implicated in, by tradition if not choice. God's offer of new life, as represented by the green bead, was all we had to share: faith in His continuing creativity.

I later thought of the story where Jesus' disciples ask Him about a man born blind: "Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus removes the situation from the zero-sum matrix of reward and punishment and says, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him" (John 9:3). And this became our message, as we continued our mission. Every opium field was its own story of poverty and bondage, from the 13-year-old girl licking raw opium off her fingers as she harvested, to the old grandmother living alone taking care of an orphaned baby girl. We could only affirm that God was waiting

to work in their lives, that they could pray to Him for a new way, and that He wanted them to. The sense of urgency that had begun to build at the beginning of the mission was confirmed; we had watched the Chinese lady's life suddenly change, her plans and wealth stripped away. Each of these families could lose their livelihoods any day. All we could do was to point them to His new life, to tell them they had the ultimate freedom to call on God and follow the way He had prepared for them. Jesus knew, when his disciples asked him, that we are part of a big, flawed system. He didn't blame the system: he healed the man. He says, "As long as it is day, we must do the works of Him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work." And so he gives us our mission, this must be what we are about too, and we must do it now.



Arakan rangers teach Ta'ang junior rangers.



102-year-old Kachin great-grandmother being carried away from Burma Army attack by her 65-year-old daughter.

**One way to help the Good Life Club is to put together children's packs and mom-and-baby packs. These packs are then delivered to mothers and children by relief teams.**

#### SHIPPING INFORMATION

Please send standard gift size boxes with the description "household/ personal goods, no commercial value" on customs form. Send via airmail to: (not to exceed 79 in length/width/girth) Christians Concerned for Burma (CCB) PO Box 14, Mae Jo PO, Chiang Mai 50290, THAILAND. Mark the Package: GLC

#### KIDS PACKS

- Small comb and mirror
- 2 children's toothbrushes
- 1 fingernail clipper
- 1 small toy
- 1 picture of you
- 1 postcard from your city or state with a Bible verse

#### MOM-AND-BABY PACKS

- Small fingernail clippers
- 2 outfits for baby, including cap, mittens, shirt (not a onesie) and socks
- 1 teether
- 1 picture of you
- 1 postcard from your city or state with a Bible verse



# Provocations

By Oddny Gumaer

## Something provoked me the other day.

Let me start at the beginning.

There was a storm in western Burma. It was ironic, because the devastation has already happened. There are more than 140,000 Rohingya people in western Burma right now who are homeless, sick and starving. Partners staff has literally been running ragged trying to be that little drop in the ocean that can mean a difference to some of the ones in need.

What got me provoked (in addition to hearing of the way the Burma government treats its own inhabitants) was when one of our staff members asked people to pray on her Facebook page. And somebody commented: "What about sending something that actually works instead of praying to a God who obviously doesn't care?"

It stung all the way to where I was sitting.

This is why:

We are sending everything we have, including our husbands and wives. We are using money that people have given, every bit of it, to help where the help is needed. Recently, for example, we were able to feed 5000 people who had not eaten for five days. The food will only last them for some days. But at least it was food.

Our team has been sitting with these people in the pouring rain, assisting them, loving them, speaking on



Rohingya displaced people. Photo: Steve Gumaer

their behalf, trying to protect them, trying to comfort them.

Who dares to say: Send something that actually works? I wanted to ask that person: *What more can we send than what we are already sending?*

And how dare anyone speak about a God who does not care? Is the suffering in the world caused by God? Is he the reason state leaders allow innocent people to suffer? Is he the reason we would rather spend more money on ourselves than on children who have nothing to eat?

I have seen a lot of suffering over the years. Much of it has brought me to tears. Much of it has left me depressed and overwhelmed. But it has not made me blame God for the suffering. Because I have seen where the suffering is coming from. It is from people. I have asked victims of violence how the suffering affects their faith, and this is what they have said: "How can we blame God for this? He is not responsible for this. Man is. If you take our faith in God away from us, then we have nothing."

And that pretty much sums it up.

*We are grateful for Partners Relief and Development (PRAD) and all the other organizations providing help, hope and love to people in Burma.*

## THE FACTS

Interethnic violence and government repression continued in western Burma through 2014. Fighting between the local Arakan and Rohingya populations in Arakan State over the last three years has resulted in hundreds of fatalities and currently over 140,000 Rohingya people are living in government IDP camps on an unprotected coastal plain, with minimal provisions. The government of Burma denies the minority Rohingya citizenship. Special Rapporteur Lee, in her September 23, 2014, report to the United Nations General Assembly,

pointed out that Myanmar's 1982 Citizenship Law is in contravention of international law and Burma's international treaty obligations, adding that it "should not be exempt from reform."

Flow of aid into affected areas is severely limited by government restraints as exemplified by the expulsion of medical aid group, Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) in early 2014. Local officials have been shown to be complicit in trafficking schemes taking advantage of the thousands attempting to flee.

# THE BREEZE AFTER THE STORM

## *A story of restoration*

By Doh Say

Life is full of storms – sometimes they are small squalls, sometimes they seem like hurricanes. But one thing I have learned is that if we go through the storm well we will be able to enjoy a nice breeze after every storm.

At the end of 2013 I was enjoying the nice breeze. That year God gave me an insight into His kingdom that freed me from a lifetime of striving after things I could never obtain alone. He had shown me that the only treasure worth having was treasure in heaven, Jesus in your heart. I was so excited to share this with everyone I would see on my yearly trip in Karenni, and even, maybe, with my family who I hadn't seen in 24 years.

Satan saw his opportunity and attacked. Before I knew it, I was engulfed in the biggest spiritual battle of my life.

I got married in June of 2014. It was a joyful day, but both before and after there were many problems. We made plans to marry three different times between 2013 and 2014, and each time something came up to stop it. Because we were in different places we could not talk very much. I began to grow crazy – I didn't know if my wife loved me, I didn't know if the problems were real or if she was making excuses.

### ***Before I knew it, I was engulfed in the biggest spiritual battle of my life.***

At the height of my frustration, I made my biggest mistake: I betrayed my God. I thought, "All these years I have been loyal to God but now I have all these problems. Maybe I'm wrong. Maybe I don't have faith after all. Maybe I don't have God." I felt, while I was there in the depths, that I had nothing from God. Maybe I could change gods – maybe then I would get a truck, a house – my wife's love. And so I bowed to another god. This was my biggest mistake. And that moment of emptiness nearly led to another, worse result.

Consumed by anger and frustration, I began to plan to kill the man who had come between me and my wife. Satan was attacking me, and I was being swallowed by his hate and rage. I nearly lost myself.

I asked God to rescue me. He showed me some very practical realities: if I killed this man, I would either die too, or be thrown in jail forever. I would not be able to share the gift of God that had given me so much joy. I

would no longer be a good son of God. And I would miss out on being with my new, beloved wife. God answered my prayer and the man I was so angry at called one day, God had worked in his heart, and we were reconciled. Now I could go to Karenni State in peace.

As I left for the mission, there were still storms in my heart; God was still teaching me that he was master of the large and the small. One day it rained all day, and all day I was angrily thinking about the conflict I'd had with my in-laws. My ideas of the things I deserved ran through my mind: a happier wedding, a good marriage, a happy relationship. Instead, I mostly had problems. These thoughts cycled through my head all day, as the rain ran down my face and my feet slipped and struggled on the muddy trail. I was angry and wanted to lash out. Towards evening I started talking to God: "God, now my heart is full of anger and revenge. I am not being your good son. I want to be your good son, so please give me peace and forgiveness in my heart."

I arrived at the village at dusk. I saw some visitors in the house where I usually stayed. I thought I should move to a different house but the owner said, "No, don't go – it's not so full. There is plenty of room for you." So I stayed. After dinner I started playing with the family who was also there. They had come a long way and arrived just before me. There were three children between the ages of two and five years old; they started playing near me and soon were on top of me, fighting over who would get to sit on my lap. The mother tried to stop them, saying "Don't bother your grandfather."

I said, "No I am very happy to play with them," and we all played together. After about 30 minutes I realized that all my anger was gone and I felt only peace and joy. I prayed: "God you are amazing. You answer my prayer right away – you sent this family a long way to arrive at this village at just the same time as me and give me



*Doh Say with his new wife and their adopted daughter.*



happiness and joy." We had no plan to meet but He brought us together.

The next day I planned to arrive at a village close to my family, whom I hadn't seen in 24 years. My friends always offered to bring a message to my family, but I always felt empty-handed, and had determined to not return to my family with nothing to give. This year, I had the gift from heaven, Jesus, so I said yes.

We arranged a meeting and I expected a few people on a motorcycle but suddenly four trucks pulled up with 25 people: brothers, sisters, nephews, nieces, great-nephews and nieces. They piled out, excited to see me: my heart overflowed with a prayer of gratitude, but I couldn't get any words out around the tears of joy upwelling in my throat. They convinced me to go home with them for a few days, and every day from morning to evening I was visiting people I

had loved for 25 years but hadn't seen. I was sharing the treasure I had finally realized I always had – but had just received the year before. I realized how I had missed the warm love of family over the years.

I had begun this trip thinking that God had denied me all good gifts, including my own family; I ended it with a family reunion bigger than I ever could have imagined. I encourage anyone who reads this to please accept the gift of the true living God, Jesus, in your heart. You will be receiving more than you have ever asked or could imagine. Truly this has been a stormy year – but I listened to God and was patient and now I am enjoying the nice breeze.

Thanks to all who pray for me, He is helping me all the time to become a good son.

*Other parts of Doh Say's story can be found in last year's Day of Prayer magazine.*



*The life of a refugee from Burma is a continuous running experience.*

**My name is Eh Ku Hser** and I am a Karen refugee from Burma. I was born in a small village on the banks of the Moei River on the Thai-Burma border in 1983. My first running experience started when I was one year old, when the Burmese army came, attacked and burned down our village. My family fled to a place where we thought we would be safe. Again, after four years, the Burmese army came and attacked us and burned down our village. We had to flee again, this time into a neighboring country, Thailand. To get into Thailand, my father had to carry me on his back and swam the Moei River.

The village in Thailand where we took refuge was called Kler Ko. I attended a Seventh Day Adventist School. When I was in the fifth grade, the Burmese army crossed the Moei River and attacked and burned down this village and we had to flee again further into Thailand, to a refugee camp called Mae La. This camp was the largest refugee camp in Thailand and many international organizations such as the UNHCR and the

Thai Ministry of Interior and other non-governmental organizations worked with the refugees but there was no safety. Two times the Burmese army came and attacked this camp.

Every summer, when the weather was dry and hot, the refugees in the camp had to prepare for possible attacks. Without any means to protect themselves, fleeing seemed to be the only option but there was no place left to run.

While living in Mae La camp, there was no sense of security. Fear of Burma Army attacks, fear of the Thai police arrests and fear of being pushed back into Burma were constant.

In 2007, the door opened for me to come to the US and on August 30, 2007, I finally set foot on US soil. I became an American citizen in 2013 and today I run again, not as a refugee running from the Burmese army, but as a free US citizen for the relief of Burma. I thank God for this privilege.

*Eh Ku Hser wrote this before participating in the Chapel Hill Run for Relief in Gig Harbor, WA.*



# Death of a Poet

*"Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight...  
Do not go gentle into that good night."*

Dylan Thomas

On 9 November 2014 Saw Htoo Naw Than Aung was killed in a motorcycle accident in Mae Sot. Better known as Paiboon, his loss has taken from the Karen people a leader and a great ambassador, and from all of us, a great teammate, poet and friend.

A man with many names, his favorite was probably "Grandfather Shortlegs." He gave himself this name, after the beloved and legendary British officer, Major Seagrim who was known as Grandfather Longlegs and who gave his life for the Karen in World War II. Like Seagrim, Paiboon was beloved by many and we of the Free Burma Rangers owe much to his help, introductions and advice since he was part of our forming in 1997. Paiboon's father, Saw Than Aung, was one of the most revered Karen leaders in the history of the Karen National Union, and Paiboon carried this legacy of building people up and helping everyone find a place to serve. He is survived by his wife and children.

An amazingly versatile and caring man, Paiboon could translate his whole persona to relate to just about anyone he ever met. He was perhaps one of the best ambassadors the Karen people had to foreigners, helping others not just understand, but love the Karen people. And it wasn't only political, he helped people to see how being a true friend and part of the community was as important as anything you could "do." He also spent many years working with the Karen Youth Organization (KYO), started a leadership school for young people and was a founding member of FBR. He was a talented musician and some of the best memories of him are of singing together. He had a knack for bringing everyone into the circle – and a talent that covered for any disharmony this might introduce into the performance.

Perhaps most of all, Paiboon was a poet – not the kind of poet that sits down and rhymes some lines but a kind of life poet – he could spin straw into gold. He could take the commonplace and turn it into an experience unforgettable – and almost always pull a laugh out of you. And so he will be missed, as light in a dark room is missed when it's snuffed out. We will miss his vision that seemed to bring light with it, we will miss his music, and we will miss his laughter. And as we are here we will carry on his mission of serving God and all God's people and do so inspired by Paiboon's life.



# PRAY FOR BURMA

Join a prayer network and we'll send you monthly prayer requests as well as real-time immediate prayer needs from teams in the field. For more information or to sign up, email [info@prayforburma.org](mailto:info@prayforburma.org).

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