Mission accomplished

Janita Bond & Michelle Long
Avondale BSc / BTeach (Secondary), and BEd (Primary) graduates who taught for 12 months in a refugee camp in Mae Ramat, Thailand, as overseas mission volunteers.

Their diary entries are continued...and concluded.

From: Janita Bond & Michelle Long
[mailto:janitamisha@hotmail.com]
Sent: Sunday, 19 August 2007, 12:48 PM
Subject: Daily life and life stories

Dear All,

We thought we were going to get a flood on the weekend of August 11, as there was steady rain and the creeks in town rose rapidly. However, the anticipated flood didn't eventuate. Nevertheless, some of the creeks washed out the bottom story of some nearby houses. Maybe next time we'll be luckier!!

Last Thursday, during T5 Maths, I (Janita) noticed one of the girls crouched under her desk. It didn't take me long to realize that she was blowing her nose on the floor. We've become quite accustomed to this type of behaviour as only the occasional Karen person will use a hankie and, as yet, we are still to see one use a tissue. Burping and breaking wind are regarded entirely different here than in Australia. Burps and wind are to be freely released into the atmosphere. Better out of the body than in!! This can cause us to giggle, especially when we hear a series of 'noises' emanating from one person in a short period of time, or in what we consider to be a completely inappropriate place, e.g. church.

(It seems strange to a western mind, but it may be equally incomprehensible in an oriental culture for a person to clear one's nose of mucus and muck, wrap it in white cloth or tissue, and then keep it in one's pocket—perhaps for days!!)

Traveling home that Thursday afternoon, we met an ex-student of EVA on the songthaew. It was interesting chatting to him. I had taught him for the first few weeks of school in June and then he had disappeared. Other students said that he'd gone home to help his parents. The story he told us was that he wanted to go to school, but didn't have the money to pay his school fees (900 Baht, or AU$30). He had planned to work over the school holidays to earn this money but his plans had fallen through. His family couldn't provide the money, as his parents and younger siblings (he hasn't seen them for six years) live in Burma and his older brother lives illegally in the United States. His brother literally 'jumped ship' in the US, six years ago. The student has applied for resettlement in America and is hoping to leave sometime in the next month and a half. He will be travelling by himself and hopes to catch up with his brother. Imagine having this as part of your life story! We wonder how many other students there are that wish to attend EVA but are unable to pay the fees.

Today we attended a different Adventist church in the camp. We really enjoyed talking to the people there that could speak English (limited or advanced). One of the students from school invited us over for lunch. It was delicious as always. Janita is slowly becoming accustomed to eating chicken and fish. We were also asked to do a special item for the youth program in the afternoon. We decided on a song that they had never heard before. However, after listening to us sing it through twice, the guitarist and pianist had it 'down pat'. It was amazing.

Reuben has been having an interesting time at Helen's recently. One night, about a week back, one of the boys, Kyet Noe (pronounced Jano), was in Reuben's bedroom when he suddenly announced, "I'm going to sleep with you tonight". Reuben, shocked at this statement, replied that there wasn't much room on the bed. Jano explained this was no problem for Karen people, as within their culture they are very comfortable with touching between persons of the same gender. Reuben countered that it was a problem for him!! Despite this, Jano did sleep with him that night. Fortunately the bed must have been a king-size single, as Reuben said there was ample room. Since then, Jano has slept with Reuben a few times because Jano gets bitten by bugs that are in his bedroom. This incident illustrates how well Reuben gets on with the boys at Helen's. It is incredible to see them together. The boys treat Reuben like a respected older brother.

Tomorrow is Reuben's 19h birthday. We are planning a birthday party at our house. Helen has bought a cake, and we will have a few games and activities with the kids. Two of the students that live with Helen also have their birthday on Monday; however it's hard to know whether to celebrate them as they are not their actual birthdays. Many of the

students have no idea when their birthday is, or exactly how old they are; it's not really important in their culture.

Well, we hope that all is going great for you. We're sure that you are having adventures too. Our prayer is that God will be with you.

With love,
Janita and Michelle

From: Janita & Michelle
[mailto:janitamisha@hotmail.com]
Sent: Sunday, 7 October 2007, 3:21 PM
Subject: Light and weighty matters

Dear Everyone,

Wow! October! Where has the year gone? Our time here has gone amazingly fast and Mae Ramat has become home for both of us in every respect. The last couple of months have passed quickly with school filling up much of the time. This coming Thursday, end of semester exams begin at EVA. Exams will run for one week, followed by a ten-day holiday. Exams have already finished at Mae La Klo, with the Thai school now on holidays for three weeks.

We are looking forward to the soon arrival of visitors. Reuben's family, as well as Janita's sister, will be visiting us during the holiday period. We have booked a trekking tour for three days to Thailand's biggest waterfall. We also aim to head down south to the beach, which is about ten hours travel from here!

Last week we went into Mae Sot to finish paying for this tour. In the office, where we had to wait, we saw a set of large scales. Asking permission to weigh ourselves, we decided to check if the small bathroom scales at home were correct. Michelle hopped on first and was happy with the result. Then I (Janita) hopped on and my eyes nearly popped out of my head: 92 kg!!! After a few seconds of shock I decided to get off and try again. As I was getting off, I noticed that Michelle was trying to hold back laughter. She had put her foot on the back of the scales!!! After punching her a few times on the shoulder, I hopped back on the scales, discovering that my weight was normal after all. Thank goodness!!

Last week I bought a small, new motorbike. This will give us more freedom and the opportunity to experience more of what Thailand is like. Unfortunately it is taking longer than expected to get a Thai motorbike licence. Before going to the licencing office in Mae Sot, I (Janita) visited the police station in Mae Ramat to find out what was required. The first visit was an adventure, because I went without a translator, expecting at least one policeman / woman to speak limited English. "Hello, how can I help you?" they asked. This was a great start. Unfortunately, they couldn't speak much else. After having most of the police staff called into the office to try and understand what I was asking, I decided to leave and find a translator!!!

With Paw Kyar (one of Helen's girls) as a translator, things went much more smoothly. The fun and games continued though, as different officers kept asking for more documents. I will get the licence though, eventually!! Once I have it, many adventures await us! It will be handy having a motorbike as we will not have to rely so much on local songthaows for transport.

At the moment we have both caught the flu. This was kindly passed on by students who are constantly sneezing and sniffling right next to you. To be on the safe side Janita got a blood test to make sure it wasn't malaria as she had spent a very uncomfortable night with chills, a mild fever and a headache. We've just had a lot of rain plus high humidity which has brought out the 'mozzies'.

On September 29, Janita celebrated her 23rd birthday. She received four birthday cakes, three of them Karen style—made of sago and coconut milk, and one a Thai mock-cream cake. We had lots of fun fellowshipping with friends and EVA students.

This week we had a lovely surprise in receiving a letter from Carly Fletcher, Carla Ansell (who is now volunteering in Cambodia) and her sister Marissa; a parcel from Lisa Fletcher; a parcel from home and three copies of *TEACH* magazine from Wilf Rieger. We keep saying that we are truly the most well-looked-after volunteers ever. We appreciate these kind thoughts so much. We love hearing about your news and what has been happening in your lives. Each of us is on a journey that is both rewarding and exciting, and it's just nice that we can share with one another.

Well, that's about all our news. We hope that those of you who are finishing College this year will be conscious of God's presence and peace, as you make decisions regarding next year.

With love,
Janita and Michelle

From: Janita & Michelle
[mailto:janitamisha@hotmail.com]
Sent: Monday, 19 November 2007, 9:59PM
Subject: Treks and goodbyes

Hi Everyone,

Finally, after two weeks, the internet is functioning again. In the meanwhile, life has been hectic here and is not due to settle down for at least another week.

October and what we've had of November have

[Photography: Janita Bond + Michelle Long]

Reflections, Impressions & Experiences

been great. It was fantastic to spend the October holidays with wonderful visitors—Renee and Reuben's family. The holiday began with a trip to an isolated beach near a famous Thai cave. Trekking, elephant riding and rafting to Thailand's tallest waterfall finished the holiday off nicely. We have many pictures that hopefully, one day, we can share with you all. We enjoyed having a full house again and were glad to share a little of what we have come to think of as 'home'.

It is now time for Michelle to head back to 'good old Oz'. So this week is becoming a week of good-byes. It will be hard for her to leave, because many friendships have been formed. Despite Michelle going home, we will still operate our joint email account as we will be travelling together next year and would like to share our adventures with you. So please keep writing. In turn, your experiences are always read with much interest.

Just this past weekend was memorable, with the most interesting picnic either of us has ever attended. It has shown us that little, unexpected things sometimes happen. Ask us, in person, for the details. The picnic itself was wonderful and helped us get to know the students better.

Michelle's end note: I want thank you all from my heart for the support, encouragement and prayers that you have given to both of us over the year. We cannot express how much your kindness has meant to us and I hope that one day we may also have the opportunity to do the same for you. Please continue to pray for Janita (who'll stay on longer). It will be a little different without me here; a little quieter! Thank you, once again, and I pray that God will continue to be your strength—always. We're signing off now.

With our love and prayers!!

Janita and Michelle TEACH

Epilogue

Janita has completed the 2007/08 school year at EVA. She plans to spend at least one more year teaching there, enjoying the interaction with people from different cultures and the many adventures to be had. Michelle has happily settled back into Australian life. However, little excuse is needed to pack her bags and head back to Thailand and the surrounding countries for a little more exploring!!

[Photography: Janita Bond + Michelle Long]