



Candles in the Dark



The Diaries of SSSNY Students

Foreword by
Nobel Peace Laureate
Toby Williams

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Students

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We would like to thank our Director, Nang Charm Tong, and all the staff, teachers and advisors at SSSNY. Special thanks go to our donors and all those who have been continuously supporting our school.

Our thoughts are always with the people of Shan State and Burma, as they continue to struggle for peace and democracy in their country.

This book is dedicated to all of you.

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Foreword

I will write this message from my heart, as if I am speaking directly to you. I can do so because I've had the good fortune to have met you, and to hear some of your stories first-hand.

We met this past summer, at the end of July, when I led a delegation of prominent women on behalf of the Nobel Women's Initiative to the Thai-Burma border. The delegation included actress Mia Farrow, as well as other human rights luminaries including Dr. Sima Samar, the head of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission. Our purpose was to listen and learn from people living the struggle to bring Burma out of the darkness of conflict and repression and into the light of justice, security and equality.

Like me, Mia, Sima and the other women on the delegation were moved by your stories. In your stories, and indeed also in the songs you sang us, we heard courage, resilience and determination. My colleagues and I were also impressed. The tenacity and determination you have demonstrated in the pursuit of education is truly admirable. Few people in my country have had to make the sacrifices you are making to be educated, and few understand as well as you do what important doors this education will unlock for you in your future.

The stories you tell in this book are important stories to share.

In this book, you document the ongoing oppression of the people of Shan State at the hands of the military junta in Burma. Many of you have had family members killed by the regime, or watched family members die because of the lack of decent medical services. Many of you have also known what it is like to have your village burned and family and friends tortured. Most of you also know what hunger feels like because of the extreme poverty and deprivation your communities endure. Your stories document the injustice and inequality experienced by the people of Shan State and, in fact, so many other communities within Burma.

However, equally important, you document hope.

Pursuing an education is acting on the belief that the future *can* and *should* be better. You did the hard work to get into SSSNY, and then complete the program, because you know that education is what will move the people of Burma forward to a better future. And, in part because of the extraordinary educators at SSSNY, but even more thanks to the extraordinary people you are, you will help make this happen. Each of you, in your own way, is a leader. Indeed, a good education leads to action—and it is clear to me that Burma's hope for the future now rests in your capable hands.

My fellow Nobel Laureates sisters and I spend a great deal of our time talking to youth around the world because we strongly believe that *you* have the power to bring about positive change. As I told you when we met, I had the good fortune to meet my sister Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi in 2003. Though circumstances have not permitted us to talk since that time, I can say with confidence that she is proud of your achievements. We all are.

Each and every one of you will make a huge difference to the lives of your people. Some of you aspire to be doctors, others educators or artists. Stay true to who you are, and your vision for a better world, and I know you will achieve what you set out to do.

Thank you again for sharing your stories. Though my colleagues and I cannot be at your graduation, please know that we are there in spirit. You have our support, and our gratitude for your hard work and your achievements.

Jody Williams
Nobel Peace Laureate
December, 2008

Introduction

Growing up in a country run by one of the world's most brutal military regimes you don't often get a chance to tell your story. That's why, shortly after we arrived at SSSNY, I set my students a task of keeping a diary. I wanted to give them a chance to record their experiences and feelings, so that I might gain a better understanding of their situation. For many, this was the first time they had revealed their past. Their stories deeply moved me. I was appalled as I read about the horrors they'd experienced at the hands of the SPDC, yet was fascinated to learn about their ethnic traditions and culture. Most of all I was humbled and inspired by their incredible strength of spirit.

Their stories were so powerful that it was clear that this had become more than a mere writing assignment for them. Taking inspiration from "Letters from Shan State", a publication produced by previous SSSNY students, I was convinced these stories should be similarly shared. For the students this book became an opportunity to convey the growing sense of outrage and injustice they felt as, during the course of their studies, they explored the fundamental rights they had been denied.

Together, we began working on a collection of stories that would open Shan State and Burma to the outside world. The stories included in this publication have been selected by the students from their original diaries. Many have been edited numerous times and set in context but they remain the true stories of young people from Shan State. The experiences detailed, whilst deeply personal, are

shared by many young people from Burma. Amongst these shared experiences, survival and the overcoming of adversity outrank all others.

The military regime may have devastated a country but it has not destroyed its people. These stories stand as a testament of the strength and courage of the people of Shan State and Burma. Read them, be inspired, and join with them in the struggle for justice, democracy and freedom.

Gemma Niebieszczanski

Program Teacher, SSSNY
December 2008

30th August 2008

My life in Shan State

I would like to tell my story about my family. When I was a child my father and mother were forced to move. When they moved I was so young and I couldn't walk so far. I had to sit on my father's shoulders for a few hours and he walked because in my village nobody had car or motorcycle. Some people could use cow or horse to carry things but my family was very poor.

Sometimes we didn't have enough food to feed our family. If we ate today we had to worry for tomorrow, how to find more food. Sometimes we had to borrow from another family, to survive. However, we had to give back a lot of interest. For example, we borrowed from them 6 cups of rice we had to give back to them 12 cups. If we borrowed we had to think carefully could we give back or not. If we can not give back to them they will come to take something from my home and they will be angry and hate us. At that time I knew nothing because I was so young; I had no idea how to do anything.

Then my father and mother had to decide everything. Many years our family didn't have enough food to eat. Sometimes my father went fishing from the river to feed us. And sometimes my grandmother and my mother went into the forest to try to dig something like yam or honey, from under the ground, the thing that our people can eat.

We never had enough money to buy expensive clothes. Also, at that time when we got sick, everybody in our family was very worried,

because we had no medic or health workers in our village. I had one younger sister and one younger brother. Suddenly my younger sister got sick and she died when she was 1 year six months. I saw when she was dying my mother and me were sitting beside her but we couldn't do anything. I was very sad and I was crying. When I think about that I feel sad, because I love her very much. At that time I was about 7 years old. My life is not easy I feel very unhappy until now. Sometimes I want to tell my story in the class but I feel sad and I can't tell. If I tell maybe I can't finish and I will cry, like something block in my throat so I can't talk right now, I will think carefully and I will try to learn more and more because now I have chance to study at SSSNY school so it is interesting and happy.

I just went to school only 2 years. When I was a child the Burmese soldiers came into my village and burnt down my village. After that our school was closed. The people in my village went to hide in the jungle. No students could go to school and no teachers to teach us at the school because they were afraid the soldiers would arrest them, when they were teaching in the school. They had to run away from the school and they came to work in Thailand until now. They never went back to Burma again, the situation in Burma was very bad and many people have been killed by SPDC (the State Peace and Development Council) and they destroyed our pagoda, our culture (like our house custom) and human right abuses happened.

One day I saw the Burmese troops come into our village. They entered in our home, grabbed my father's hand and forced him to carry the bomb. He was a porter for about one month and then they allowed my father to come back home. My father said he had to carry heavy bomb

and sometimes he had no shoes to wear- he showed us his shoulder and his foot got wounded, and then they tortured him.

After that, when we heard the news that Burmese soldiers would come to patrol in the area near our village, the men had to run away to hide in the jungle for a few days. When the Burmese soldiers went back to the town the people can come out from the jungle to live in the village.

One day, when I was about 12 years old, the Burmese soldiers gave order to our village leader to force one person from each family, to go to build house for them for free. They didn't pay us and we had to bring our own food. If we were hungry they forced us to carry heavy wood to make their home. We could not argue with them anything, we only had to follow.

Then they gave the order that if we wanted to work in the farm, we should go to get permission paper from them. If we didn't have that paper when they saw us in the farm they would kill us for sure but we had to go to change a new one every week. The place that they lived and our farm is 4 hours to go to change that paper and we had one day to change that paper. Everybody in our village got very angry but we could not do anything because we didn't have power, they have power and guns and they controlled us, pointed us to do something whatever they wanted.

Finally, I didn't want to live in my village. I was impatient there and I decided to enter Thailand in 1998. And I started medical training in Thai Burma border for six months. After I graduated medical training, I had to work in the Clinic in Shan IDP camp until March 2008. On 12 March 2008, I came to study in SSSNY School, for 9 months. After I graduate this school, I will go back to help in

my community, and I will continue to be a good medic. I will take care of patients in our Clinic or our community forever, to develop our community and our Clinic. And I will give basic health training and other subjects like environment to people in our community.

By Sai Bay Da

Loi Kaw wan

1st September 2008

Hoping for Lasting Peace

All these things are my experience and about myself which I have been through since I was young, it is including the situation of the education in Burma, the treatment of the Burmese military regime on citizens in the past and nowadays which includes a lot of human rights violations. I want to describe the conflict in Burma and the environment issue that affects the people. The people's suffering began in 1962, when Ne Win took power and military rule began in Burma.

Environment

The situation in Sudan and Burma are similar, in Sudan the government uses violence. Natural resources such as oil were sold to China. China got oil from Sudan, and Sudan got a lot of guns from China to kill people, women and children in Darfur.

Also, in Burma it is like that, because the country has been ruled by a series of military regimes. The current Burmese military, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), allowed themselves government, but they are government without election. SPDC took a lot of resources such as gas and oil in Arakan State and cut the tree such as teak in Shan State and sold to China.

In many parts of Shan State, rich people from another country and their company gave tax to SPDC, and cut the tree like teak and sold to China. In Mong Kung, in Shan State, they cut down the trees and then decide if it's good or bad, one-third of trees they cut they don't

use. The owners of our resources are foreigners, but workers are Shan people. Because of deforestation by foreigners, now the emergent canopy has disappeared. Not only trees, but also resources from under the ground, such as gold and rubies, have been taken.

In Burma no job, even though villagers could get little money, they did it to solve the problem in their family. For worker who worked very well, the company gave free drugs. At first, worker got free drugs. Second, when they finished and stopped their work they still needed more drugs. They spent the money that they got from the job to buy drugs. The SPDC are fighting young people in Shan State and they make the people drug addicts, so the young people can't work.

SPDC plan to build Tasang dam at the Salween River and this dam will destroy the environment, villages and fields because of flooding. Also, parts of Karenni State and Karen State will be destroyed by Salween dams. These dams will produce electricity for SPDC and then they will sell it to Thailand.

Ethnicity

The situation of ethnic nationality groups in Burma is very troubled. The Union of Burma includes 7 States and 7 Divisions. The states are: Kachin, Chin, Arakan, Mon, Karen, Karenni and Shan State. The divisions are: Sagaing, Mandalay, Magwe, Pegu, Irrawaddy, Rangoon and Tanintayí Divisions.

The divisions and states were united quite recently, after Burma got independence from Britain. In Shan State there are many ethnic groups such as Shan, Pa-O, Wa, Akha, Lahu, Palauing, Kachin,

Lisu, Miao, Intha, Danu, Kayan and Kokang. States are mountainous. Local populations in the States are decreasing because SPDC has a policy of ethnic cleansing. SPDC sent their soldiers to control every State. The local people didn't welcome the SPDC. SPDC are invading. They didn't make people happy and the local people didn't want to be under their rule. People in the 7 states were forced by SPDC. Also, SPDC put pressure on people who lived in these areas to leave from their local house and land fields. This is my experience that I witnessed and happened to me, when I was in Shan State.

In 1996, about 1,500 villages were forced to move by the Burmese military regime and about 300,000 villagers were forced to move villages or relocate. Many refugees appeared on Burma-Thai or Shan-Thai border. During relocation, the time was limited by SPDC. Villagers had three days to move their villages. If they were not finished after three days the SPDC killed them. After three days no one could live in the village. The new place that SPDC forced them to live did not have enough land to grow any thing. Also, SPDC forced many villages, about 5 to 10 villages, to live in one new location together, with a limited border.

No one could get out of the camp for work. SPDC tried to make people from Shan State poorer and poorer. SPDC controlled the people in the new location with their soldiers. Also, their soldiers had permit, they could shoot any people who tried to escape from the new location. Even though they controlled like that, many people went back to their field to grow their crops secretly. While they were working in the field, when SPDC saw them SPDC shot them without saying anything. In Burma SPDC are using violence and human rights abuses. Many villagers died, girls and women were raped. Burmese soldiers were

given a permit to rape by their leaders; Shan Human Rights Foundation and Shan Women's Action Network (SWAN) have published "Licence to Rape" report, documenting how the Burmese military regime is using systematic rape as a weapon of war in Shan State.

The tense Struggle for Freedom and for Real Democracy

In Burma it is not equal, not free for ethnic nationalities and ethnic cleansing has happened. The nationalities in the seven states in the Union of Burma have been struggling for justice, equality and peace for several years. I know from my experience since I was young, Shan State is not free. Deep inside their hearts and minds, the people of Shan State want to be free from the military regime. They want to live in peace and spend their life in a peaceful land, making a living in agriculture. Our hope is for Shan State and other states to have freedom and peace. The Shan people have been organizing resistance movements for the past 50 years.

Education



The primary school classroom at Loi Tai Leng

In Burma education is very bad. The military regime teaches us not history but propaganda. If we don't have money we can't study in school. Also, ethnic nationality languages such as Shan language we don't have permission to teach in school. SPDC tried to destroy other ethnic nationality cultures and traditions. This is my experience when I was in Shan state. When I was in my village, I was

never happy and I was always very afraid of SPDC soldiers. Also, I always heard SPDC killed local people who committed no crime one by one, including the people who I knew. "We may be killed by them too" I thought.



Orphans in Loi Tai Leng got help from donors. Photo by Teza, 2001

In 1999 my parents moved to Shan-Thai border far from SPDC control. We traveled on the border to find a place until the end of 1999. After that, the Shan State Army (SSA) found the good place and safety. Shan soldiers lived around the people like a fence. Then, they allowed children and people who don't have a place or migrants to live there.

After that it became a camp named Loi Tai Leng.

- Loi means mountainous
- Tai means Shan ethnic nationalities people
- Leng means the ray of light that can destroy all dark.

A little education for Shan State appeared on our mountain. In July 2000, we were about 200 children with three teachers. Most of my

friends were parentless children or orphan boys and orphan girls. All my friends came from Shan State and their parents were killed by Burmese military soldiers during forced relocation, which happened in the countryside in Shan State in 1996.



Students had assembly and sang anthem song before class in the morning.
Photo by Teza, 2001.

At first, our school was built of bamboo and covered with tree leaves. At that time we had no books or text books. After one to five years, many kind donations helped us. And then, we started to have more books and text books and also more students. We enjoyed the first text book written in Shan language. We started to know what history was, and also we started to know the ground is not flat. We started to know about Geography and some science. It was not so long until we had two more teachers.

On Loi Tai Leng there is always strong wind. And, the wind always destroys our bamboo school. When the leaf that we used to cover broke, the rain fell in our school; it looked like the field with mud where the

farmer grew rice. At that time the rain usually fell about ten to twenty days, never stopped. We could never wear dry, warm clothes. During the rainy season, there was a lot of rain and strong wind with cold mist and cloud all day, we never saw the sun. The orphan boys and girls didn't have umbrella and rain clothes. During the hot seasons, the water is nearly dry. We get water from the bottom of the hill. In the dry season we spent an hour walking to get water. They have a very difficult life.

They are living together with teachers; they want help for their education. Their dream is to be free and equal.

By Teza

Friday 15th August, 2008

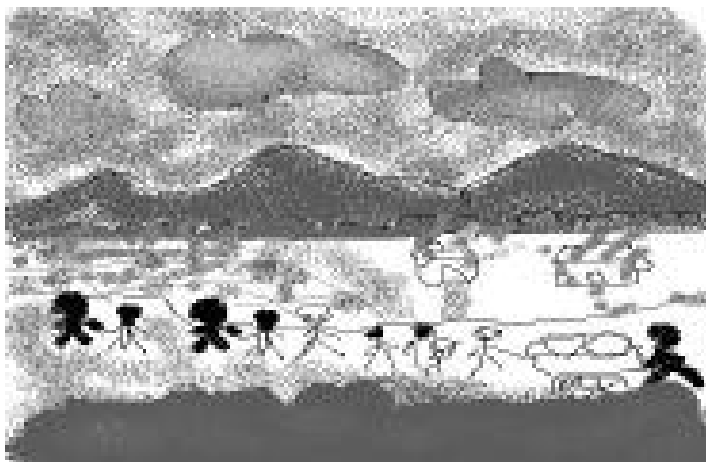
My life & My Education

Today I wanted to write about the story of myself when I was young, to read and remind me in the future, when I am older, so that I won't forget what had happened to me in the past. When I was young, I had a chance to study in a school. The school was not so far from my grandparents' house, but it was so far from our house. When we moved to my grandparents' house, to take care of my grandmother while my uncle and my aunt away for trading, there I could go to school. However, at that time the school had no teacher so I couldn't study. The school was very old; it was built in British colonial time in Shan State or maybe in Japanese colonial time. I am not sure about that but it was good to use for studying and teaching until 1996.

After we lived with my grandmother for a month, there was a teacher came to teach us at the school, but I knew nothing. I just went and played with friends. Later on, the teacher went to visit his home in the summer. Three days later, during his journey, I heard that he died in a village between our village and his home town, because of illness. In the same year, the SPDC forced us to move out of our land, village, farm and our houses that we lived in for a long time. I don't even know what year when we moved to another place, the year that the SPDC forced us to move out of our land, I just knew from our math teacher, teacher Mwe Leun in this school (SSSNY School) that it was in the year 1996.

Saturday 16th August, 2008

I spent a lot of time with my friends and studying in my grandmother's village, Wo Loang. My uncle and my aunt came back from bartering, so we had to move back to our own house in another village, Na Koang. After that, I didn't have any chance to study anymore until I came to Thailand, because in 1996 we were forced to move out of our village by the Burmese military. At that time a lot of people including my cousins, my aunt's daughters, moved to Thailand or Thai-Burma border. Then we had to leave our land, farms, houses and everything we had. We were very sad and hopeless at that time because we didn't have ox-cart to carry our house hold and our things. A few years before, my father and my mother had just divorced because he was using drugs and he came to Thailand before 1996, so there was only my mother, who looked after us and our grandparents. I heard a lot of noise of the guns and bombs in the north of our village. They only gave us three days to move out so we had to hurry.



When we arrived at Kunhing township, my mother had to go back to take our things by ox- cart that my uncle, my mother's elder brother, gave to her. She went back to take our house hold and clothes. My mother and her friends, other villagers, went back to our village to take their things as my mother. They were very lucky, when they got back from carrying the clothes and the things by the ox-cart from our village; they met the kind Burmese soldier. That soldier didn't shoot at them and told them to go back and hide until the military went back, because if they didn't meet the kind soldier they maybe shot by the gun from the military. My mother and other villagers went back and hid in the other place until the military went back. Continue tomorrow.....

Sunday 17th August, 2008

Continued from yesterday.....

However, another group of the villagers who travelled after my mother's group were not lucky because they didn't believe my mother's group. When they met each other, a villager from my mother's group told them not to go ahead because the military was waiting in the next village. When they arrived in that place they didn't meet the kind soldier as my mother's group so all of them were shot by the Burmese soldiers. That village called "Saai Khaao". Many people died there. When I heard the news I was shocked and sad because I thought that my mother was killed in that group, the group that was killed by Burma army.

On the next day, my mother came back and I was very happy to see her safe and she told everything that she had faced. A month later, we had to find some house for our family in that township. There was very new for me because I have never been to the city before. It was

very difficult to find house in the town. Everything there was so expensive. It was so different from my old village that I have lived before. My old village has a lot of beautiful places to visit (such as our farm, hiking on the mountain, our tea forest, the rivers that we used for fishing and swimming in and the coconut that we have climbed before ,etc.), but nothing left after we left, they (Burma soldiers) burnt down everything. The neighbors were kind, if we had delicious food we would give to each other. We didn't have to buy any food. The thing that we need to buy were the household items, such as oil, salt, pot, plate, etc and the candies for the children, that's all. In the opposite side, such as cities or towns, we had to buy almost everything.

It was difficult for the new people to live in the city, especially the villagers from country side. Some villagers they couldn't live in the city and they went back to their village and lived in danger. Unfortunately, when the SPDC's soldiers saw them, they would shoot the villagers or forced some of them (villagers) to carry their food for them (SPDC's soldiers) during their travelling.

Monday 18th August, 2008

My life in Kunhing.....to THAILAND

Every morning at 4:30 a.m, my brother and I had to get up. In our home town the villagers normally get up at 3:30 or 4:00a.m. We got up early because we had to go to work in a farm to grow some crops for the farmers in that city to get money for buying our food. Then we normally back home at 5:00 pm every evening.

I wanted to study in the school at that time, but my family couldn't afford the school fees for me. We didn't have enough money to pay, so

in my free time I usually stayed with my friend who could go to the school to learn how to read and write Burmese language with her. At that time I tried hard to study with her, but now I don't remember how to read, write or understand Burmese language that I learnt with her anymore, because a few years later, I had to go to Thailand. I had to leave Shan State and came to Thailand when I was very young.

When I came to Thailand I was very lucky that I could get into House of Hope foundation and studied Thai and English there. I knew God there and became a Christian, and by lots of help and kindness from visitors and the people around us and outside the country such as Norway, Malaysia and other countries, so I could study. Now by my teacher's help and the chance that this school (SSSNY School) gave me, I can study here and now I know the value of knowledge.

Now, I try hard to study and get knowledge from our teachers here as much as I can so that I won't lose my chance again, like in my childhood. I want to be a good teacher for our people and the poor children, all ethnic groups in Burma who didn't have a chance to study. Although, my life in the past was not so easy I can stay alive, and I will do my best. Now I am here, in the freedom of land but with no status, because the Thai government they do not recognize us as the refugees, but they welcome us as the cheap laborers. When I see our people, who work in the dangerous place (such as building houses or hotels etc), it encourages me to do all my best to help them. I cannot help them to be free now but I can help them by educating them or their children.

By Tzarm Noan

House of Hope Student

12th August 2008

Pa-O ethnic traditional festival, "Poi Luu Phai"

Pa-O is one of the small ethnic groups in Burma. In Burma, there are a lot of different ethnic groups. Some people, they don't know a lot about Burma. In Burma, the military have been controlling the country for nearly 50 years. We want the world to know about our country and our Pa-O ethnic group. We, most of our Pa-O people, live on the mountains. Our business is agriculture. We grow crops, such as, corn, rice and other crops as well. Even though we grow crops, we can't grow freely, because they take our land to grow for castor oil plant. Also, we can't export and sell our crop to another place. In Burma, most businesses are owned by Indian and Chinese people. Although we can sell our crops, the cost of our crop depends on the Indian or Chinese people and they only pay a low price.

Since, we lost our "three Patakat" scripture, and the Burmese king separated our Pa-O people to different areas, some people are saying that we are losing our history. However, it is not true, we already found some of our evidence from the past, only a few are missing; we are still trying to find out about our Pa-O history.

Most of our Pa-O people are farmers. We lose a lot of our biodiversity because the military are cutting down our trees, because of that we also lose our water and the land becomes dry. In Burma, we have tropical climate. We have three different weather, we have dry, rainy and winter season. We don't get enough rain and water for our farm.

In our Pa-O culture, we have some strange festival. For us, it is not strange but for other ethnic groups it is very strange for them. I

would like to share about one of the festivals that only our culture makes. We make "Poi Luu Phai", Poi means festivals, Luu is smoke and Phai is means fire, "the smoke of the fire". The reason that we make this festival is to call the rain. The festival is on the full moon day of May, we make this festival to call the rain. This is one of the beliefs that our old people believe in our culture, and we still believe in today. In our town, the weather is always changing, when we grow our crops, we can't get enough rain or the rain doesn't come regularly.

When we have this festival; we have to make "Myae Phyo", which is made from gunpowder. Firstly, we have to find gunpowder. We crush gunpowder and put into a hollow metal pipe, and then we keep it for a few days. After that we will get "Myae Phyo". And then, we can burn it. Before, we burn it, we have dance around our monastery three times. Then, we will make a wish for a few minutes. When we crush gunpowder it is very dangerous and it is not easy to crush the gunpowder. We have a race for "Myae Phyo". There are many different villages and different villages make one "Myae Phyo" per village. There are 40 villages that participate in the race of "Myae Phyo" festival. When we burn "Myae Phyo", it has to go up to northeast and it has to go very far. We look for the one that goes up very high and we give highest mark for that one. This is what our old people believe.

Even though the festival is not modernized, we are really happy to have this festival. We are very happy for our own traditional festival. We have some of the festival that is not allowed by the military. In Burma, we can't stay more than 5 or 6 people at the same time in the same place.

Many of Pa-O youth come to the festival, they really enjoy that festival. They will meet each other and talk to each other in the festival. They dance together. That is the beginning of their love. After that the boy will come and visit the girl's home at night. Sometimes it can be in the day time. However, in our culture the boy can visit to the girl's home at the night time, because our Pa-O people are working at day time and they don't have time to visit the girl, the girl also work at the day time so, they don't have time to meet each other. Therefore, the boy has to visit at the night time. If the boy comes to visit the girl's home, the girl has to prepare tea or something to eat. During the time that the boy comes to visit the girl's home, the girl's parents also allowed their daughter to talk to the boy. If the boys come, they come group by group. Sometimes there will be some groups at the same time. If they coincide, the group that came first has to leave the girl's home, if not, then the group that comes late has to go to another home. They have understanding between each other. Some of the other ethnic people think that it is not good culture, like the boy comes to visit the girl's home at the night time. We believe that is good for us.

Most of our Pa-O people are very honest, very kind and patient. If the boy wants to visit the girl's home, the boy must be honest. If they aren't honest, we have our own traditional punishment. When we marry, if the boy marries the girl, the boy has to give present to the girl which he is marrying. Before, the boy marries the girl, the boy has to ask "Kho byind Than", the leader of the young people, for permission.

Most of our Pa-O people believe in Buddhism. Some people also believe in Christianity. In our culture, we have "Wa Tawing Laa"; it means

the Buddhist meditating months. During this time, on the full moon day, young people don't go to farm and they stay at home making food for the old people who are meditating at the monastery. Young people are going to the "Kho byind Than's" home with their kettledrum. When everyone has arrived, they start making flower or something to offer to God. After they finish making that they start to dance and sing our traditional song with kettledrum. Some of the young people are declaring their love using the metaphorical speech until the morning.

During "Wa Tawing Laa", our young people are very happy. I like our own traditional festival or culture. Our Pa-O traditional clothes are very polite, and the color of our traditional clothes is "Dark Blue-Violet". I'm also very proud of myself that I'm a Pa-O.

By Nge Pay

20th September 2008

Migrant workers in Thailand

It is estimated that 2.4 million people from Burma have fled to Thailand in the past ten years. They are ethnic groups. The Burmese military forced them to move out from their land, using many ways. The people who were forced to move, if they continued to live on their land, the military tortured them, also they burnt down ethnic people's houses. I had seen around our village, they burnt down the villagers' house.

Many ethnic groups fled to Thailand's border. Some ethnic groups, they were recognized as a refugee, so they could live in a refugee camp. However, some weren't recognized as refugees, such as Shan people. Thai people said Shan language is similar to their language, so Shan people can understand Thai language very well. However, Shan people are suffering the same as other ethnic groups who fled into Thailand.

People who were not recognized as refugees, they came into Thailand secretly. Some, they passed the forest at night to cross the Thai-Burma border. If the Burmese military saw them, they would be shot by the military. Some people borrow money from their relatives or money lender to pass the border and come into Thailand. If they could give money, 8,000 baht (approx. US\$230), to a broker, that person could take people into Thailand by car. This way also dangerous for them, if the Thai police saw and caught them, they were sent back to the border.

Many unregistered people work in construction. We can see some women and girls working, such as domestic workers in Thai people's houses. People who worked in construction, they get a job for three or four months. After that they have to find a new job. For people who work at Thai people's houses, if they are patient, they can work for a long time if they want. All of them get the low wages or salary.

Some of them didn't have work permit card. If they want to apply for work permit card, they have to pay about 5,000 Baht (approx. US\$140). If they have work permit card, they can work under their boss legally for a period of time at least one year. People who didn't have work permit card, if they were arrested by the Thai police, they were sent to the border, but they try to come into Thailand again. They didn't want to go into Burma. They are afraid that the Burmese military will torture them. The reason I can say this, because I had worked with them at the construction site.

Sometimes they got sick because they work hard; even if it was raining they had to work. They needed treatment, but they couldn't go to the hospital or clinic. If they went to hospital, they had to pay more money for treatment. They came into Thailand with their family. When they worked at the construction, their children had to stay and play. They can't go to school. They are illegal. Some organizations went to their camp and taught them our language, how to read and write, also our culture.

We don't want to live in Thailand for our whole lives. If Burma changes to real federal democracy, we will go back to our hometown. We wish our motherland freedom and peace for the future.

By Awn Pha

12th August 2008

My childhood

I have had a broken family since I was 5 years old. My father became a soldier and my parent's divorced. Me and my brother lived with my mom and my grandparents in Southern Shan State, where it is call Keng Tung. Me and my brother went to Burmese school. In this school we can study only Burmese, Basic English and Math. We couldn't study our Shan language. If we wanted to study our language the only place that we could study was at the temple. However, we also have our language and we wanted to keep and didn't want it to disappear. That's why, in the summer, there were some people who could read and write Shan language who shared their knowledge to the ones who wanted to study.

I went to this program and I could read and write in Shan language a little. This program called "Ma Ha Tho". Mor Lu (can read), Mor Tyam (can write), Mor Nub (can count), Mor Lard (can speak), Mor Won (can think), but we had to study at night because in the daytime many people they have to work and also concern with security. If Burmese soldiers came into our village and they knew who join with this program they will arrest us. Some of my teachers were arrested during this program. If the solders came while we were studying, we had to pretend that nobody was in the school, and we were all silent. Many people were interested and joined with this program.

After a few years my brother became a monk because my mom didn't have enough money for both of us to go to school. After that when I went to school, I often cried, I missed my brother and my

mom. When I was about eight years old, my friends went to school by bicycle but I had to walk to school. I didn't have bicycle like my friends. When I came back from school I cried, my mom also cried with me. She didn't have enough money to buy for me. The only way that she could do was told me to wait and she will find money as soon as she can and buy for me. Sometimes I felt sad, when I saw my friends ride bicycle to school. My mom had to sell our old crops. About three weeks later there was enough money. My mom had to travel to another township to buy bicycle by walking. After that I went to school with my little bicycle.

During that time, our family had to pay tax. Before that we didn't have to pay, I didn't know what is the reason? We didn't have enough money to pay tax, because the tax quite often and high. The head of village told us if we didn't have enough money to pay we have to collect the tax for them and my grandfather decided to collect the tax for them, because my mom had to work in farm. My grandfather had to collect almost every day, because for the first time if he collected they didn't have, he had to come another day. He had to walk all day around our village. One day, when I came back from school, I saw that my grandfather was very sick. My mother asked me to collect tax instead of my grandfather. I agreed with her and after I came back from school I had to collect the tax and watering our vegetable and sometimes also gave the animals food.

About one year later my brother was very sick and my mom took him to hospital. We didn't have hospital in our village. My mom took him to hospital by cart and it was very slow and the transportation not so good. He had to stay at hospital about two weeks. After that he felt well and my mom planned to take him back home, but the day

before we planned to take him back, my mom heard from my aunt who visited him that he had died.

My mom was shocked; she walked to my school and took my bicycle to the hospital. She didn't tell me anything and she rode the bicycle very fast. During that time faster transport was only bicycle and I could see she tried to ride as fast as she could and sometime she fell down. I could see only in front of the school compound. I didn't want to think when I couldn't see her what would happen, how many time will she fall down, before she could arrive at the hospital. She was hurried and weak in her heart. My cousin told me what had happened. At that time I didn't know what I felt. I just felt that he went to somewhere and he will be back soon. I thought carefully and I knew that dead never came back and we couldn't meet again. I cried for along time before I could arrive at hospital.

We were mourning my brother for seven days. First day until the last there were a lot of people. We arranged them food and some snack. We used almost all of our old rice that we collected from last year. After that my mom was very sick. We didn't have too much rice left; me and my grandfather had to find food and money for our family. Sometimes I didn't go to school; I went to jungle with my grandfather to find some mushrooms and bamboo shoots. After that we separated some for us and sold them. Some day if I went to school my grandfather had to go to jungle alone and when I arrived home, I took them to sell around our village. If my school day the same as the market day (we have market day every five days) I also brought my mushroom and bamboo-shoot with me and sold them in the market until the school started and I crossed the road and went to class. My friends helped me a lot. Sometimes I couldn't sell all of them and I

gave some to my friends. My grandfather also could do handicrafts such as winnowing bucket, mat, and streamers. After he finished I sold them at the market before class. And sometimes I got order from my neighbor and told my grandfather to do more.

After that, about three months later, my father came to our village with his new wife and my step-brother. He wanted me and my step-brother to come to Thailand. During that time my mom still sick. My father said if I came to Thailand I can study English, I interested in study English, another way I worried about my mom and my grandfather. I asked my grandfather, he didn't say anything, but I knew that he didn't really want me to come to Thailand and for my mom she said depend on me, If I want to came to Thailand it was O.K and also if I want to stay in Shan State it was O.K too. She will try hard for my education. It was a very hard time for me to decide. However I still interested in study English and then I decided to come to Thailand with my step-brother. We came to Thailand in the early morning the day after I had decided. On that day it was rainy; my mom brought an umbrella and looked at me walking through rain with tear. The first night I couldn't sleep. I wanted to go back to my mom, but it was very late for me. The only way that I could do was continue my way. I looked around me and saw only trees, rocks, and river. I thought about my mom and I could see her face in my heart when I looked at the trees. I also missed my friends.

When we arrived in Thailand we stayed at a border village. After a month I had to move with my friends. For my step-brother his mother took him back. We lived in House of Hope. House of Hope was an orphan foundation and is non-profit organization. House of Hope

was founded in January 1999 by David John & Anne Gunn Broomfield and Inger-Lise Bjorkelid (Pi Lisa). We stay like a family and they have the staff and teachers to take care of the students. Sometimes we also had guests to visit us, like our friends. Me and my friends could study many subjects there, English, Shan, Shan history, Thai, and Math. At there they arranged for our basic need. We didn't have to worry about anything. The only thing that we have to do was study hard.

All the children were happy while we lived in House of Hope. Sometimes, for important days, we celebrated and the cook would cook special food for us and we enjoyed in our house and sometimes we also invited our neighbor to join with us. However, sometimes we also had a difficult time. For example we couldn't attend Thai school. We didn't have any ID card, but nothing impossible for our God. We prayed and prayed and then God opened the way for us and the small children could go to Thai school in our village. For the older ones, we had to study at adult school. At that time we just studied for our knowledge, we couldn't get the certificate. After a few years we had a work permit card and now we could get the certificate, but we had to start from the first lesson. It takes along time but it's good for our future. In House of Hope, if some one thought that they were old enough and they wanted to work it was O.K for them, because someone they have to work and send the money for their family. Some of my friends work and send the money to their family. For me and two of my friends, we continued our education in SSSNY. House of Hope gave a new life for a lot of people including me.

Lurn Kham

House of Hope student



A Happy Message from the School

I am Zarm Mawn, I am from Loi Tai Leng at the Thailand Burma Border. Before you read one of my happy messages, please try to smile in your heart and than try to laugh a little bit by yourself. However, my message

will wish for you to stay as long as you would love to live in the world. Wow!

In 2001-2005 I used to attend Loi Tai Leng School, an IDP school on the Thai-Burma border. After that I had an opportunity to join at the clinic in for six months just for learning. So I left from the school. Meanwhile, I heard from someone that "There is a school for Shan State youth" and I was interested, so I tried to prepare for the examination. I passed the exam in 2005 and I came here to learn for 9 months. After the graduation I went back to help my organization. In 2008 I came to SSSNY again to learn in the period of the short course, CLDP (Community Leadership Development Program).

Now I am going to let everyone know about the main point of a Happy Message from the School. I am so happy to attend in the short course. However, I would like to explain more about the school. If you read this message you may know we are different people and ethnic groups, like Shan, Kachin, Pa-O and Lahu because the school has accepted many people from different ethnic groups. I am so happy in my life and feel lucky to have many friends in SSSNY School. Many of the students are a member of an organization, but the

school also accepts students who don't have an organization but are committed to the community. Education is a right for all people. It is very important for all people who have come from displacement, like inside Shan State, inside Kachin State and migrant worker who have escaped from their country.

As we know, in Union of Burma, the regime doesn't support enough for the education, especially in the ethnic area. Probably like in Shan State, Kachin State, Mon State and Arakan State they won't support the education at all, because they are afraid of our people to know about our history. If we know more about our history, our people will go against them, to protest and demonstrate, and the regime will crackdown on our people. So that they just provide for our education 0%. Maybe someone will think we are lying to them. But we don't lie to anyone. Nowadays our people don't know and don't have ability how to find the other way to struggle out of the darkness that's true, because the root cause is from the military regime.

The most important thing I would like to say that "I am so fond of our director, teachers and staff", because all of them try to work hard for us like we are students. The director is trying to work hard how to communicate and advocate to other people who are interested in our school and how to have them to support on our education, etc.

According to our teachers, some of them teach one or two more subjects, they teach us many subjects (including Computer, Geography, Writing, Community Development, Teacher training and Conflict resistance.). I would love to study more subjects too. I always say "next time, if I have a good opportunity to study one or two more time other programs like this, one day I can be a person who

can help more on our people, in our country". Even though I am not well in the subject but I will try as much as I can.

Moreover, the staff they all take care of us. When we need some help from them they can help us immediately. If someone is sick the staff can bring him or her to the clinic soon. The others, likes someone who needs equipment, the staff can go out and buy for them too, etc.

When I came to SSSNY School I just bring **normal brain**. When I go back I take a **special brain**, then I bring it back to my organization. I would like to present that; I am one of the participants; I have learnt more experience from our teachers or in the class. I will try to bring this knowledge to share on other people who are interested in it. And I will never forget all the people who are the one grateful for me. I am very grateful too.

By Zarm Mawn

August 24th 2008

How They Became Orphans

It was a small village, far from the town, with a population of about 3000. Most people in this place were farmers. The majority of people would be hunting or fishing to protect food in their family. Even though they were living under the military rules, they were happy because they could live with everyone in their families. This village was called "Wan Ton Hung Ma Lang" between Nam Zhang and Ko Lam in Southern Shan State.

In July 1997 the situation in this village immediately changed. At that time farmers started to grow vegetables and rice. The SPDC ordered to them to carry materials to many places. Sometimes they had to guide the military, looking at the way that they will go, to check if there are enemies or not. During this excursion with the military, they had to carry a lot of materials and they were very heavy. They didn't have enough food to eat and not enough time to sleep. They were very weak to move on and also got diseases, but the military didn't take care of them. Then the military hit them to carry things and move on, as if they were animals, if they couldn't move anymore the military shot them. Some they were sick and died during that time. That was the first trouble for the people.

A few people escaped from the military. When they arrived at their village, their wives and children came to see them. Some family didn't see their husband or son. Although some returned, they were crippled and sick. This was the second trouble for the people who had escaped. Who will take care of them and take responsibility for them? Only themselves.

Three months later, in the rainy season, the SPDC military forced people in the village to move to the city or another place. They had to move as quickly as they could, if they didn't want to move the military would burn their houses. They got nothing when they left from their village, only the clothes that they wore. Four or five days later, they went back to find their food and their animals that they left, and also rice that they hadn't cut yet.

After they got enough food and they started to leave, suddenly the military arrived in this area. The military already knew before that they would return to the village so the military made a trap. At that time people tried to escape but the military machine-gunned them and seized their food and animals. If women they raped and if men they killed directly. This was the third suffering of the people. Many children were left behind and were waiting for food from their parents in the forest and they didn't know what had happened to their parents. They were waiting with hunger until the next day. Then they decided to go to find their parents. They had to walk for three hours to arrive at the village. When they arrived there they saw their parent's bodies and some people abused and raped. At that time their life was full of darkness and blindness. They lost all in their hope and then their mind was full of gloom and pain.

After this they decided to join a Shan resistance group. However, they were told that they were too young to be soldiers. They should be students and study. In 1998 they arrived at Thai Burma border where they studied basic education for a year. In 2000 they moved to Loi Tai Leng, a Shan IDP camp and studied. Now some they have been working with their hope in Loi Tai Leng and inside Shan State. I believe that they will be successful in their aim.

Finally, I would like to say all of the above really happened to my family and my friends so they "became orphans". Everything in this story made me gloomy and painful but stronger. I will never give up. I will walk on for our country, our nationalities and our families until we get freedom and a democratic country.

By Sarm Hurng

27th August 2008

A Small Village

There is a small village that has a population of 1500. Most of the people are farmers. Some of them try to get money for their children get to education and they don't want their children to be farmers like them. Some of them have money for their children to go to school but some don't. Also, some people have a farm to grow crops and some have nothing.

There is a school and hospital but it is very expensive and difficult for us to get education or health care. Education isn't a right, the people who have money can learn and the people who don't have money can't learn. A lot of young people are not literate. When I looked at my family, no one could read and write. Only I could read and write but I was very bad at this. My younger brother also studied, but he left secondary school. He also couldn't write and read. Why is our education very bad? Because we couldn't learn easily in our village. Now I am lucky because I attend school (SSSNY). In my village, the hospital has no medicine, if people go there the nurses only write down the name of medicine and we must buy our own from the shop. We have a lot of difficulty in my village.

In my village, people are farmers. Our main crops are rice, sesame, soybeans and garlic. The rice is only for eating and paying taxes to the Burmese military regime. We must wait about 6 months for the rice to grow. It grows from May or July to November. In November they have to harvest their rice. They work together. For example, today we work in my farm and tomorrow I help in the other farms until every farm is finished. If we finish it all we prepare the place to grow

the garlic. We need to wait for four months, for it to grow. We start to grow in December until March. While we grow garlic; we need to prepare the place to grow the sesames. After we finish the garlic we grow sesame from May until October. The sesame are for selling and we just use a little in our family. So the farmers are busy all the time. We also grow the soybeans and garlic at the same time. If I think clearly, the farmers have no holiday. If the sun is up, they need to work and if the sun goes down it is time to rest and save their energy. Everyday is the same, day after day. Also they think life is only to eat and to find food. They don't know what is happening in the world and what human rights are. They just do their job without education. There are no newspapers and no television, all the things that we should know.

Also, if I look at the environment, everything is barren. We have a rule "no one can cut down the trees, if government sees it they will arrest us" but for the military regime they can cut down trees at any time. Everyone wants to know why but we can't ask. I like the rainy season because that climate makes me feel a little pleasant, I think others like it too. That season is when the crops grow and all of the leaves of the trees are green. Also our wells are full of water. Some houses have their own well. The wells have enough fresh water only for our families, but it is not enough water for our agriculture. For agriculture, we have a little stream. We couldn't all use the water in the stream to grow our crops, so we would fight (say the bad things) with each other because of water. Why is our water not enough? Because the Burmese military often catches the fish using electric shocks. Our water is decreasing every year. In the rainy season, our farms or land flood. In the summer season everyone needs water. Everything gets bad in my village.

Then, if I look at the Burmese military, I will see they are not doing their duty. The SPDC only have power and control over everything. All the time they collect taxes and give us nothing. We have electricity but we can only use it from 7pm to 9pm and we have to pay taxes every month. I wanted to share with you about my experience, which happened in my house. One day a man who collected the tax for electricity came to my home to take money but at that time my parents were at the farm and I didn't have any money. We didn't have money and I said I would pay later. We had not enough to pay him and they didn't give my family light. When I went to his home and asked him, he said because we didn't pay the taxes. I apologized to him, and said "I will pay you later because my family doesn't have enough money to pay you yet", but they didn't give it until we paid them money.

I think it is only a small village but we can imagine other communities in Shan State and Burma too. I believe that the bad things will change and be better. I hope that my country will be free soon. The people who are suffering under the SPDC, I will see them happy in the future.

By Nong

23th October, 2008

Light in the darkness

I am one of students from SSSNY School. I came from Southern Shan State, Burma. I live in a small village. It is far from downtown about 6 kilometers. We can travel with bicycle or by tractor between my village to another village or to downtown. There are about 50 households in my village and I have many friends. I went to school in my village from grade 1 to grade 4. The school is a Primary School. When we finish grade 4 in this school, we have to go to school in downtown, if we have money.

There were about 300 students when I was in the school. The students came from different villages in the district where I live. I am a son from a poor family. We live from hand to mouth. My mother used to go to school but my father did not. I have one younger sister but she did not have chance to go to school as I do.

The school in my village taught me Mathematics, English and Burmese. I did not have chance to study my own language and culture. Most of the teachers were Burmese and most of them came from outside Shan State. It was very difficult to understand each other as Burmese language is completely different with Shan language. The quality of teaching or the system of teaching when I was in the school is very different from now. I only passed grade 4 at the school in my village but I can read Burmese and English not very well. At the present situation the student in grade 4 can read neither English nor Burmese. They can pass the examination easily from grade 1 to grade 9 but they will fail the exam in grade 10.

The reason was that the teachers do not get enough salary. Most of them will open the tuition (special teaching) at their own house. They will not teach well in the school. The student who can not attend the tuition will not pass the examination. The percent of students, who passed the grade 10 in Shan State, or in other ethnic states, is lower than in Yangon or Mandalay. It is very difficult to pass the grade 10 for the ethnic people. Finally, they have to leave from school with the reason of being poor.

I left the school after I passed grade 4. At that time Mong Tai Army (MTA) led by Khun Sa, was the most powerful armed group and struggled in Shan State against the SPDC for many years. This MTA recruited the young boys from every household in the Southern Shan State from 7 years old up. I was lucky that I heard the news of MTA soldiers coming to take the boys in my village and I left my house and went to the temple and lived there. From this time on, I studied in the temple and I finished my high school in the temple with the light of the candle. At last the MTA did nothing for Shan State and surrendered to the SPDC in 1996.

The boys who were taken by MTA soldiers came from different places. However, when MTA surrendered, the boys were all sent back to one place in Shan State. The SPDC military government did not support anything for the child soldiers. Many of them did not have anyone or parents came to receive them. They did not know where they are from and who their parents are. They did not remember their native village. Even their name they did not remember. They were very young when they were caught to be a soldier. After I left my village, the situation in the village became worse and worse. Many boys were caught to be soldiers by MTA troops until 1996 and some who were in

the village became drug addict. It is easy to buy the drug (like amphetamines). We can buy every where, even 4 or 5 year old children know how to buy it when their parents forced them to buy it.

Most of the young boys or girls in villages do not have chance to go to school. They have to help their parents in the work as many people in the village, almost every household, came to Thailand to earn money. My village is near the SPDC military camp; whenever they come to the village they ask the villagers about the Shan resistance. If we say that we do not know or see, the SPDC suspected we took the side of the Shan soldiers and the SPDC caught and took us to the military camp. They interrogated us about everything and at last, if they did not get what they want from us, they tortured us by many ways.

Some were killed without any reason and the Burmese soldiers did not let their family know whether they were guilty or not. Some were covered with a sack on their head and beaten and some were given electric shock. It is very quiet in the village after 6 o'clock in the evening. There is no one who dares to go out. The SPDC soldiers can come to the village anytime. Wherever they meet the people on the way they will do everything as their desire. There is no law to protect us. Although the Burmese soldiers committed the crime, there is no court for justice to help the victims. Everything ends by the power of the guns in the Burmese soldiers' hands.

There is no healthcare center in my village. A patient has to take the herbal medicine. If one is seriously ill, they have to go to the hospital in downtown. Even though we can go to the hospital, if we do not have much money we will be neglected and even the cotton wool we have to buy it by ourselves. My mother died when she was forty years old

because she took the operation in the hospital in downtown. We did not have much money to give the doctor. I was very sad when she died. I was lucky that I had chance to study in the temple and came to Thailand. Before I came to Thailand I did not know anything, even about myself. This is a light for me that I have chance to study in SSSNY School.

By Noom Wann

10th August 2008

Basic Education in Burma

My name is Nong Lung. I live in Southern Shan State. I was born in a town near the Salween River. My father was a farmer; he wanted me to have good education. He sent me to his sister, my aunt. She worked in a government bank. She had to change place. I studied in many different places because I had to move with my aunt. I studied in Taunggyi, the capital city of Shan State, and Mandalay, the third city of Burma, and Rangoon, the former capital city of Burma and also in my township. I studied not only in different places but also different schools in one place.

Our education in Burma is very bad, like teaching system and everyone can't study the same education so our new generation should find the way to change the bad teaching system. When I was studying in Burma they want students to memorize so even though the students pass their exam they didn't understand anything. They understand they have to memorize them all. I'm very angry about this. The glass ceiling bans their education. Firstly, I want to share about the school in my township.

When I started school, I was four years old. Really the rule of attending the school was not allowing children under five years old. They had technique to test the children. They ask children to pass their left hand over their head and hold their right ears. This technique can be useful but doesn't include people with physical disability. In some places they didn't use this way, also they didn't test anything because they didn't care. At the school, we didn't have

enough teachers or teaching materials. In our school teachers didn't explain in our first language, even though they could speak it. Many students but only one teacher, the problem was they could not focus the students very well.

After I finished the primary school, I moved to Rangoon. My knowledge level was very different with the students in that school. This school was very popular and many attended this school. I don't know why they didn't explain clearly in the school. The people, who have money, can have better education because they can pay for extra tuition. I thought the tuition is only for the student who didn't understand clearly in the class and the tuition could explain again. Really it is not like this; if you attended their tuition you could have the question for the exam. They could have high marks. For me, even though I didn't have strong basic education, I didn't attend the tuition. In the class if you are not rich or intelligent you can't sit in front of the class, this is the same situation everywhere in Burma.

They still use the way to punish students "take off their clothes and beat." very bad! They taught us give one example, "write down on the black board and explain". First if we are not clear we ask them, they explain but second time they are not tolerant. They shout and beat us; they make us afraid of them. This effect made the students not to be brave. I am very lucky because I can attend SSSNY. I had learned about many subjects, including social studies and mathematics. One thing is very interesting for me, this is the teaching systems.

Even though we have knowledge if we don't have teaching method we can't teach very well. We have to find the best methods. I had learnt about how to make student work together. If we want students to work together and understand each other we can make game and

play with them. Not only about that, but also active and interesting to learn. When we are teaching we should make them brave and able to understand each other. We can give suggestion to teacher.

I will improve the children that don't have chance to study because my opinion is we must make sure they do not become like us and have no education. I want them to have a better education system, if they have better standard our world will be full of beauty.

By Nong Lung

30th August 2008

A Migrant's Life in Thailand

At our SSSNY School I watched a BBC news program about Burmese migrants in Thailand. I saw many people from Burma who tried to get jobs and find money in Thailand. The program talked about some migrants who died in a truck, because they couldn't breathe. Some of them who didn't die were arrested by Thai police and sent to the prison.

When I saw that, suddenly I knew how much they were suffering, because I was a migrant worker in Thailand. After my older brother died I had no money to attend high school in Shan state.

"In 1996 migrant worker registration provided 303,088 work permits, of which 87% were granted to people from Burma. In 2004 over 900,000 of the migrants registered under Thailand's state, including dependents and family members, come from Burma, and there are many, more present who are undocumented."

(from Migrant Domestic Workers: From Burma to Thailand.

<http://iussp2005.princeton.edu/download.aspx?submissionId=52058>)

In 2001, I tried to come into Thailand to get a job and money. Also most of the youth in our village came to Thailand to send money back to our families because of economic mismanagement of the Burmese military regime. Although we work hard in Burma we couldn't have enough money for our families, because SPDC oppressed us. Also we couldn't get visas easily. We came to Thailand without passports or visas. So we came secretly and our jobs were

“3D”. That means Difficult, Dangerous, Dirty jobs. The jobs were taking care of animals, building a house or road, work in factories, etc.

I was a mason. I worked hard every day except Sundays. I got 170 baht per day (about US\$5). I worked there over two months. The terrible thing happened to me on the 17th August 2001. Thai police arrested me and put me in jail. I was afraid. The strongest person became a leader of the people in the jail. If the new people come in they must give 20% of their money to the leader.

Over one hundred new people came in the jail every day. Most of them were Burman. They came from Myawady on the Thai-Burma border. Thai police sent them back into Burma every day except Saturdays and Sundays. Sundays and Saturdays, we couldn't sleep well because there were a lot of people. The Shan people came from Mae Sai, Thai-Burma border. Just a few Shan people came in the jail and not every day. The Thai police would wait to deport the Shan people until there were 50 Shan people. So we had to wait for a long time. Thai police said to me “if you don't want to wait pay me 15,000 baht (approx. US\$430) for 10 prisoners. I will use my car to send you to the border”. Then we collected our money and paid him. Some Shan who had no money waited in jail for nearly one year.

I just stayed in the jail for 7 days because I had money to pay for car fee. When I arrived in Mae Sai, Thai-Burma border, the Thai police said to me “If you want to go back to Bangkok give me 8,000 baht (approx. US\$230) per person. I will take responsibility and security for you.” Some of them phoned to their relatives and gave money to the police, and then they went back to Bangkok. I had no money.

Finally I want to say that, there are many kinds of corruption in Thailand and the rights of migrants are abused in many ways. This is about my experiences in 2001. If not necessary I don't want to stay in Thailand.

By Sai Khur

Temporarily in Thailand

1st September 2008

Beyond the struggling lives

I am very sad for my friends but now I am happy for myself. I can study and I can do what I want to do. When I started to attend school we had to pay a lot of money for school taxes to Burma military. My other friends also had to pay. Many of my friends did not have money to go to school even though the school had been built by villagers. They did not have a chance to go to school.

The children's parents didn't have money to send their children to school. The children had to find money by themselves if they wanted to go to school. They had to farm to get money. They didn't know what will happen, they didn't know if they will get money or not, they couldn't know because their parents couldn't support them. Many children had to work in farm even though they were not old enough.

They had to help their parents, after they got money they could not take all of the money that they got, they had to pay to the head villager for taxes. Many of them, when they went to school their ages got older so they didn't want to attend school and they became farmers and they continued to support their younger sisters and younger brothers. Even though older brother/sister worked in farm they could not support enough for their younger sisters and brothers because the school taxes cost a lot. Also in the village they have to pay taxes for village. Every year the taxes were increasing more and more.

In Burma, when children go to school they also have to pay for books, pens and all the school materials. At the end of year they also had to

pay teacher salaries because the military regime didn't support the school and if villagers want teachers they have to pay salaries for teachers. If people didn't have money they had to find as they can to get money. When the children finished school their parents had to pay for certificates. If the villagers didn't pay money they would not get certificates and couldn't continue at the other school. Many families did not have any way to send their children to school.

The next problems were the military, when the military came to the village the villagers had to feed them food. If we didn't feed the food the military would take what they saw. They would torture people if people tried to prevent them from taking their things, the military would torture the villagers badly. If the soldiers saw women working or working alone in the farm they would rape women, sometimes they even killed women. Sometimes the military came to school and they pretended like they were supporting school. However, when they went back they took more than what they gave. This was what I saw while I was 10 years old in the school, we could not do anything. Also, they went to the village and took men to carry things in the forest. The military took people in the village, including my grandfather. After they took my grandfather, they put him in jail because my grandfather went against their orders. When my grandfather was in jail I almost could not attend school. If my grandmother didn't work in town, I would not go to school. If my grandmother got money she had to pay for my school taxes. She worked very hard and collected money for me.

She didn't buy anything for herself. In the morning she got up very early and she came back very late in the evening. She also kept money for my grandfather to pay to get him out from the jail. Even

though she was very sick she went to work to get money. After that my grandfather could pay to get out from the jail, not so many years he could live after that and he died, because when he lived in jail the soldiers tortured him. He got pain from that, and then he was sick. When we sent him to the hospital they took a lot of money. Even though we gave money the nurse just wrote the medicine list. Then we had to buy by ourselves. We also couldn't pay enough money and we had to go back to our home and we treated him by traditional medicine, but it was too late and so we could not treat him on time.

My grandmother was very upset that she couldn't help my grandfather. After my grandfather died I could not go to school. I was about 13 years old. I had to work in the farm to survive. I used to work for many years then I came to Thailand because if I continued to stay in the village I would not get enough food. If the military came again the military would torture me, so I came to Thai Burma border and stayed at the border. When I stayed on the border I saw a lot of suffering people from Burma. I was very upset that I saw people who are suffering. Then I had a chance to go to school. I will try hard for a lot of people. Not only one country that has the military violence, other countries also have a lot of problems.

The world is full of disgusting things. Who will heal the world and save it to be a clear place?

By An SSSNY Student

19th August 2008

Voice of Salween Cry

I'm tired of hearing the voices of cars engine and the smell of car smoke. I want to go back to my hometown where there are a lot of mountains, big trees, green forests, the song of animals and river wave, but it is difficult for me to go back to my home. I was born in Mong Pan Township, in Southern Shan State, at a place 31 miles from the Salween River. The livelihood of residents of Mong Pan is based on agriculture and fishing.

The Salween River is 2,800 Kilometers long and the longest free-flowing river in South East Asia. The Salween River has some of the world's richest biodiversity with one hundred different fish species. It supports many local people who rely on the river for transportation and their economy. They all depend on the Salween River for their livelihoods. The Salween River runs through Shan State and along Thai-Burma border, many ethnic groups, including the Shan, Pa O, Karen, Karení, Lahu, Akha, Wa, Mon, Padang, Lisu, Palaung, Yindalay and other ethnic groups live in traditional communities along the river. Unfortunately, we have not been able to live on our land in peace. Dams in many countries are used to provide water for farming and to control flooding. Many big hydropower dams are producing the electricity for development of the country but they also have a lot of negative impacts on the ecosystem, river and society.

Burma's military regime, the Thai energy companies and Chinese companies have signed agreements for the development of the Tasang Dam on the Salween River. Thai Contraction Company MDX has

been preparing for the construction of the Tasang dam. It will produce 7,100 megawatts, and will be 288 meter high and it will be the highest dam in South East Asia. These projects will not benefit the local people because the SPDC will sell all of the electricity that is being produced to Thailand. The SPDC is able to get money from selling the electricity to make their military stronger and for cleaning ethnic people from their land and human right abuses.

In 2007 Thai company and the SPDC celebrated the start of the building of the Tasang Dam. For security of their planning, SPDC forced our village and other villages around the dam area to move out of our farms, homes and must move to military controlled relocation site near main town and SPDC camp. SPDC gave orders to us to move; also they gave us the date we must leave. After that SPDC burnt down our villages, houses and farms and killed our animals. Most of us are farmers, so we depend on this area to farm. When SPDC came and forced us, we had to run for escape with our family so we couldn't take our home, farm, animals and the main food like rice was left behind. We had no money to move in the city for new lives. We lost our property and also suffered from severe depression and helplessness, so we went into the deep forest. In the forest we didn't have shelter, medicine, equipment and mosquito net to protect us in the night time. Some of us were killed by malaria disease and other problems. In the forest it is difficult for living. We were afraid to use fire because SPDC will see the smoke and will follow us so every second we felt not safe. Many unlucky villagers were arrested, tortured, raped or killed by the Burmese military.

SPDC cut down the teak trees to reconstruct roads and for their worker's houses so we didn't have more places to hide. If we heard

SPDC entered the forest we had to move again and again until we migrated to Thailand. I lived in Thailand for many years and I had a chance to study more about environment. In the training, I focused on the dam projects that are close with my home town. At that time I knew more about our situation in Shan State that many people suffer from hydropower project. Before 1996, Mong Pan Township had about 43 villages and 30,000 villagers. Between 1996 and 2007, SPDC forced people to move out and just left only 21 villages and about half the population was gone. I had never known about many people will suffer abuse from SPDC. Before, I thought this only happened in my hometown, but it also happened around different parts of Shan State, other people lost their land. Over 1300 villages have gone and over 300,000 villagers have migrated to Thailand. We don't have power to go against the SPDC military but I will try to tell my terrible experiences to NGOs and the international community so they know our situation and pressure the SPDC to stop the human rights abuses and to conserve the environment.

Before I came to Thailand, I was hopeless and I had never known "What are Human rights". Also many people in Burma didn't know that they had rights to stay on their own land and to be safe. I am lucky that I have chance to study, so I will try hard to do my best. After I graduate from the training, I am going to go back to my hometown and give training to our people as much as I can and help our Salween River to flow free again.

By Hseng Jom

24th October 2008

Losing our culture?

Every ethnic group has its own culture and tradition. We too have our own culture and tradition. According to our culture we have festivals almost every month.

My native town, a very small and little known town, celebrated festivals too. The most famous festivals in our town are '**lantern festival**' and '**raw food offer festival**'. We celebrated '**the lantern festival**' on the night of 'Buddhist lent day', full moon day. Most of the people in our country made the lantern by themselves. Only a few of them need to buy them. On the full moon night we took our lantern to the monastery to offer the Buddha. At the monastery we decorated the monastery and pagodas with candles. We lit the fireworks and fire crackers. That night everyone was happy and joyful.

We celebrated '**the raw food offer festival**' in November. We celebrated that festival on full moon day too. At dawn, we offered the raw food just like uncooked rice, salt, oil, and medicines to Buddha's son or monks. In the afternoon we took our '**dont-da-bay-sar**' (variety trees) to go around the town. When we finished going around the town, we took them to offer the monasteries. We decorated our '**dont-da-bay-sar**' with household materials like pots, plates, cups, spoons, bowls and brooms, the thing that monks need like towels, monk's bowls, umbrellas, robes and monk's slippers. We made our trees with bamboo and wood. On that day we were very happy.

All of this happiness was gone for a long time because most of us **'were moved'**. We moved to Thai-Burma border. When the time passed by year by year we needed to move into Thailand because we needed to find the honey grass for our huge ocean, a big stomach. When we arrived in Thailand we must work every day. We worked about 10 hours a day and we got the wages about 100 baht (approx. US\$3) per day for one person. If we didn't work for a day it would be difficult to pay for food, because of this fact our people needed to work, work, work and work and they had no time to celebrate their festivals. Although the festival is not as important as our stomach I think we need it. If we leave it like this we'll lose our culture and it will be lost from the earth. Today, most of our people who stay in another country for a long time don't want to remember their own culture and tradition. They want to paddle downstream in their lives in other cultures and traditions. So our culture and tradition is losing little by little now.

Maintaining our culture and tradition is all of our responsibility. If we don't keep it, who else will keep it?

By Sao Doi

12th October 2008

Hungry for Opportunities

Here I would be glad to say a bit about this story, why I wrote it, and why now it's in your hand, waiting for you to read? Of course, it is a very simple story of a boy who was born in stateless place, among the civil war and bad condition without health care or education opportunity. Finally, he could survive and fight to live by studying for free and offering basic



Children live and study at monastery on the Thai-Burma border. (Photo by: SNK)

education and now he could follow his dream to fulfill the hope and dream of the other children who have the same situation like him, to access to better care and good education. This is a story of the boy who could tell you that many children are facing like him, or worse than him, who knows?

I was born in 1988 in a small village deep in forest, which was a few miles from Thai-border, it is in eastern Shan State. There was no electricity or water tap in the village. The area where I was born did not have a clinic or hospital, I was born at home. This area was under control of MTA (Mong Tai Army). There was often fighting between

MTA and SPDC. It was not easy to find food to survive. People were scared and frightened of the bad situation of the fighting and were in unhappy to work in farm.

We could not stay in peace, often we saw troops went to battle field, saw lots of injured were carried back to the village and the noise of bombs lasted all year long. All of the people who lived inside Shan State and who lived close to Thai border, where it was controlled by MTA, suffered from the fighting. Worse than that, people inside Shan State have been tortured, and killed in many cruel ways by the SPDC. I was very sad and angry to be born and faced things like this.

My parents both came from Shan State. My father's hometown is in Mong Su, a town well known for its rubies, and my mother came from Pang Long a town well known for Pang Long Agreement in 1947, it is in Southern Shan State. My father left Mong Su over 25 years ago and has never gone back, his parents were dead. It was very sad for my father that he left his hometown and never had a chance to go back to see his family and, as for me, I have never seen my grandparents. It is because of the bad situation in Shan State, Burma. By the civil war and conflict many lives have been lost and suffered, stayed in bad conditions, and many people fled to Thailand.

As for me, who was born between the civil war in the danger area without official birth record, this made me lack status, not in any country citizenship, and this was followed by lack of chance in education, health, movement or travelling, etc. It is not easy for people who are born and face things like me. All my life I cannot hold Burmese or Thai citizenship. I could never imagine the feeling of

Democracy, though I have studied it in SSSNY School. I was in a good care of my parents and could survive on the border. Everyone who is in a situation like this has to fight a lot, has to face lots of difficulties, the only thing that helps them to survive is a strong heart and struggling.

From 1991-1995 we lived in Moung Taw village. There my parents made a farm to grow crops for food. I just went to the farm with my parents, and there was not a school in the village. I could remember that I often went to the farm with my parents. I was spending time in the farm instead of school. However, the view around our farm made me feel happy and it was like we were living in a peaceful village, without any worries. The truth was we were between the civil war. The battle fields were just on the other mountains of our village. We could not imagine, if SPDC troops could take over MTA, the first place that SPDC troops might arrive was our village. My father always kept me and my sister, brother in his eyes and my parents prepared things in bags, we were ready to flee away. We never knew what would happen to us, we were not safe. All we could do was be careful and be ready to flee.

Though, we loved our farm and that farm could feed us for every year, we had to leave it behind to save our lives when two SPDC jets were in the sky of our village, and they suddenly dropped lots of bombs on our village. Fortunately, we, all the people in the village, could run into the jungle which surrounded our village. The two jets kept following villagers and tried to drop bombs everywhere where people ran. Two jets bombed and destroyed our village, our farms, that was a very terrible nightmare for us.

We fled to a village which was much closer to Thai-Border. We only had a few clothes with us, we lost everything we had. We rented a small bamboo house in a village called "Barng Gum Gaw." From that time I and my family were not able to have a farm to make food. My parents had to work in people's farm. Barng Gum Gaw was a village next to a village in Thailand, called "Lak Tang." Barng Gum Gaw and Lak Tang just separated by Thai border check point. The fighting still continued and there were a lot of injuries that came from battle fields. They set up a big clinic at the school, which before was a Shan School. That School had grades 1 to 10 and had hundreds of students.

I was eight years old, I only went to a school formerly it was a Shan National School. It took at a new place at a temple ground. I attended primary to grade 1. Unluckily, in 1996 MTA surrendered to SPDC, so SPDC troops invaded all the areas under control of MTA, it is in Eastern Shan State. After that, I just ended up my studying at Shan National School. Everything was not same at all when SPDC invaded, we felt very scared of SPDC soldiers. The soldiers (SPDC) took people's things as they wanted, villagers didn't dare to save or refuse to give what they took. Some villagers who were wealthy started migrating to Thailand, and some went to work in Thailand.

When MTA surrendered, the school was totally closed. I was just at home with my parents in Bang Gum Gaw village. I just went to the forest with my mom, while my mom picked grass which made roof to sell. Even though, Bang Gum Gaw village was close to a village in Thailand, it was not easy to go and buy things and carry them to our village. Thai authorities were very strict and didn't allow coming and buying things such as rice, oil and food legally. People had to

buy it and bring it home illegally; they had to bring things home at night time. Sometimes they allowed us to buy things and carry them back home, but very tightly limited and we were just allowed to bring very few thing. Due to this, many people, including me and my family, we carried things for people to earn a few baht per time. We had to go there and back several times in a day.

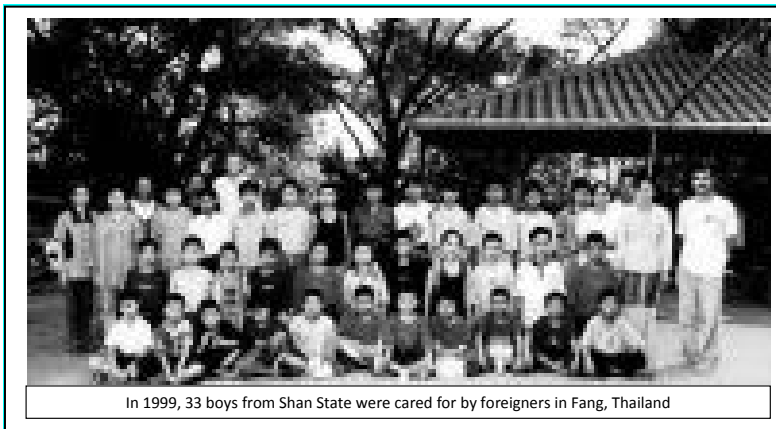
Later on, SPDC took their teachers and opened a small school for our village. It was not a free offering to our village, the villagers had to collect money and paid teachers' salaries, it was including for all teachers' accommodation. Villagers were not happy with this. I went to school where the teachers were Burmese. The teachers were not good to students. They didn't care about students and punished students badly. I was in grade 1 to grade 2. There were over 40 students, ages from 8-15. I was a hard working student in the class. I worked so hard in my lessons, I studied every night. They taught Burmese, every subject was in Burmese. All of the students spoke Shan; it was really hard for the students to learn. The teachers forced students to memorize everything, and asked them to read and write the test everyday.

I was the only one who could answer, read and write the test everyday, teachers told me to punish my classmates, those who could not read or write. I had to pull my classmates' ears and walk around the classroom, sometimes I had to pull my classmates' ears to sit up. I didn't want to do it, I loved my friends and wanted to be friendly to them, but teachers told me to do it. Many times, my classmates got red ears. Back home, their parents asked what happened to them, so they told things about the teacher who told me to punish them by pulling their ears. Their parents didn't understand why it was like

that. They only got angry at me and hated me. They didn't see it was the fault of the Burmese teachers.

Therefore, an unexpected thing happened to me which effected all my life. I was hit with a long thick bamboo on my head by one of my classmate's brother, that boy was about 17 years old, that time I only was 8 years old. The boy who hit my head was a very naughty boy; he drank alcohol and used drugs. This could be seen as social problems. For having bad regime, invaders governed our village, like SPDC, they didn't forbid using drugs or gambling and there were a lot of thieves. It was not safe to be there.

However, in 1997 my parents tried to find the way for me to study. They took me to ordain as a novice monk to stay at a temple. I could study at a temple for two years, studied Thai, Shan, Mathematics and Buddhism. I was too young and had eyes problem (short sighted) which was an affect from people hitting me on the head badly. That time, I didn't know that I had eye problems and should wear glasses. I only thought that I was not able to treat them. I myself kept thinking and expecting that my eyes could get better. I failed the examination twice. In the first year, there were 24 students and only 3 in 24 passed, but the second years all 21 passed, only I failed. I was very sad and didn't want to study there anymore. I was the youngest, 9 years old, novice in the class amongst older students age 14-23. I requested my parents to quit and leave temple. At that time, my parents fled from Bang Gum Gaw to Thai side. At last, they went to a camp which was located on Thai Border; it was not an official camp. I had come to stay with my parents again when I was 11 years old. I only stayed with my parents in a small camp about 2 months.



Then, in 1999, I was sent with 32 boys, from Shan State to Fang, Thailand. The leader in the camp sent us to foreigners who were generous and pleased to look after all the children with no parents and lack of chance to education. We (children) came from different parts of Shan State and different backgrounds with various difficulties we have faced.

We were 33 boys; all of us were 8-17 years old. We all had never tasted good food, enough food or good place to stay before. It was a wonderful world for us. We felt very happy there and it is remembered well in our memories, though, when we compared with the other children who stayed with their parents, we didn't have that. We could study there like a home school. I and my 32 friends had a chance to study English there; we could study 4 basic subjects, Thai, Shan, Mathematics and English. The foreigners rented a small compound and we all stayed there, studied there, and played there. We had foreigners who came and taught us, played with us.

In 2000, we all were sent to Loi Tai Leng, it is a camp on the border in Shan State. There I continued my studying at an orphan school from grade 4 to half term of grade 9. I was a hard working student with a dream to be a doctor and writer. I always got high score in the test and exam; I got first from grade 4 to 8. I had hoped to go to university, though the school I was studying was not an official school and I myself didn't have any ID or citizenship. More than that, I knew that my parents could not support me to learn a high level.

When we first arrived in Loi Tai Leng IDP camp, there was not a school yet. I met my parents, sister and brother again. They were staying in (IDP) camp in Loi Tai Leng. I was very happy to see my family. I learnt the value of family, the meaning of the family, love and care of parents offer to their child when I was far away from them. When I was in Fang, every time I saw a boy with his mom or dad I felt deeply sad in my mind and wanted to be with my parents. Even though, we received good care at Fang, but it was not the same at all, it is impossible to feel like our parents care. Every time I went out I wanted snack, toys but I never got, I had no money. I had to look after myself, I was in the atmosphere where I felt lonely amongst the other children who left their parents the same as me, and I wanted to be with my family.

While I was studying in Loi Tai Leng Orphan School, I loved reading so much. By reading it helped me to feel relaxed and I forgot when I felt unhappy, sad in my life. I always wanted books to read. But, there were very few books that I had. Everywhere I went I had a book in my hands and read it. I took my book with me when I went to take a shower deep down the valley or went to carry water.

It took several minutes to get water full in the bucket, so I spent that time to read.

In 2006, I had chance to apply for SSSNY School. While I was waiting to take SSSNY entrance exam, I started to think what I would do for my community, at the same time, my ambition when I was in primary suddenly changed. I dreamt to be a doctor and hoped to study in university. I went and taught at another small school on the border. I was only 19 years old and did not have experience, and was not ready to be a teacher. However, I was offered such a good opportunity to be a teacher. I taught a few months. After that, I got a chance to come and study at SSSNY.



Two orphans live at a monastery on the Thai-Burma Border. (Photo by: SNK)

I really enjoyed studying at SSSNY. I realized that it was a very good school for me. When I was studying in SSSNY, I had a clear goal to walk in life, I kept in mind to go back to be a teacher on the

Thai-Burma Border. I decided to do best, like a parent, to look after and teach those children who left their family, who are in the same situation as I was in when I was a child. I am glad that I can understand what their lives are like!

"It is not easy having a displaced and poor life"

By Sai Tune Leng

5th September 2008

Akha's culture

We are a small group in Shan State. We are farmers. We believe in animism. We like to live in the mountains. We also have happy New Year, happy new rice festivals, etc that we grow in the farm.

We take bamboo and wood to build our house and also we live like a big family. In our houses, we make two sides for man and woman to come into the house. This everyone believes; we can't come in the way we want to come in. In our houses we have left and right entrances. The left side is for the men to come in and the right side is for women to come in.

Also boyfriend and girlfriend when they talk about love they don't do it in the village, they go to the forest and talk.

This culture is very different from another culture. When we get married or make ceremony we wear Akha clothes and the bride lives in right side of the house with old women and groom lives in left side with old men. We take the groom's shirt and cover the bride's head so we can't see her face during the wedding. During the wedding, the bride wears a short white skirt and we will take wood and water and go to their house.

After that the groom and bride sleep in a small house and they have a big house for their parents but they live together. Bride must live in groom's house.

Before we marry, the groom must call old people and take alcohol to ask the bride's parent's for permission to get married. If two sides agree they can get married.

Other people will take sticky rice and make a roll and then throw to each other and also take soot from the pot and put on each others face and the groom and bride also.

We are polite people. When some guests visit our house we make a meal for them very well and talk with them. When they go back we say goodbye to them and see you again. We are economic. We sell vegetables and corn that we grow in the farm. We make the farm very big and there we make a hut to take a rest and have lunch. We also have trade; we help each other at our farms. We have buffalo to work in the field.

However, now many people live in Thailand or another country and they forget Akha culture. Also Akha clothes they don't wear and they can't sew clothes and Akha language they can't speak. They just wear their clothes for important days. We have one plant. If this plant has flower we make a party and we dance with drum and take bamboo and dance. At this party we will cut the tree and make a swing.

We will ride the swing for 4 days. When the party has finished we can't ride again. We can't take knife and cut the swing. If someone cuts the swing this person must kill an animal for it and pray. This swing we can't make and ride when we want to ride. In our culture we just make it on the important day. Also we have a song that we sing when we ride the swing. We make this party in August.

Men and women have their own clothes. Woman makes clothes for man. When we sew we take time for 3 or 4 months. Every woman must practice to sew clothes because it is very important for us to make clothes. When we are 10 or 12 we can sew ourselves. Akha clothes are very beautiful and very expensive. We make by ourselves and sew by hand. Also we have our own lesson but just a few people can read and write. There are more people who can't read and write than people who can read and write, so many people forget their own lesson because no school.

I am very proud to be Akha people because our culture is very different from other cultures. I am very happy to make diary book. This is my first time to share about Akha culture in the world. I think nobody knows Akha people.

By Jenny

1st August 2008

Horrible New Year's Eve

My name is Ah San. I am 21 years old and I am Kachin. I am very lucky I have a chance to talk about my stories. I would like to tell you one story about seven Kachin people. From December 20 to 30th 2005 I had to serve in Kachin church for Jubilee in Lashio. I came back to my village on January 1st 2006. When I arrived at my home, my Mom and Dad were not at home.

My Mom and Dad went to a funeral for seven soldiers from the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) who were killed by the SPDC in one area of Jelan. That area was part of Northern Shan State in Burma. On December 30th 2005, seven Kachin independence soldiers were enjoying New Year's Eve with Burmese Soldiers.

At that hill, only seven Kachin Soldiers and one cook were living. The Kachin soldiers had a cook in their house. The seven Kachin soldiers were enjoying dinner with the Burmese soldiers. After one and a half hours, the Burmese soldiers started shooting the seven Kachin soldiers with their guns. When the Burmese soldiers were shooting, the cook was in the kitchen. When she heard the shooting of seven Kachin people by Burmese soldiers, she jumped out off a window and ran away from the hill. If she had not run away we would not know about that problem. Although she had escaped the Burmese soldiers were trying to kill her, because she knew details about that event.

After the seven Kachin soldiers died thousands of Kachin people and soldiers were waiting at a farm under the hill to get the dead bodies.

Burmese soldiers did not move away from that hill. They just stayed at the hill and they did not allow the Kachin people to see that area. So, the Kachin people stayed about two weeks at the farm. Even though they wanted to get their dead bodies they could only get their ashes.

Kachin Independence Army (KIA) had a ceasefire agreement with Burmese military since 1994. However, Burmese soldiers were abusing the rules of the ceasefire, like in this case. They apologized to KIA for their mistake. However, in this case, I think Burmese military wanted to provoke the KIA.

I will never forget in my life about this story because one of my best friends was included in that seven people. So does SPDC only abuse the rules of ceasefire with KIA? No the military also commits cases of rape of ethnic young girls in our society.

Now I would like to share a story about the SPDC committing rape in Kachin areas. That happened in N'mauk, or part of the Kachin state, in August 2008. There was a girl who was working in her farm, which was far away from her village. Outside of her village was a Burmese military battalion which was located beside the way that she used to go to the farm. Every day, she had to cross by that battalion to go to the farm. On one unfortunate day, she went to her farm from her house. Three Burmese soldiers were following her, but the poor girl didn't know about it. So three Burmese soldiers raped her and killed her. After three days, her family and her villagers found her body without clothes. The Burmese soldiers had buried her.

The poor girl was only 15 years old. She was attending middle school in N'mauk. Her family and villagers reported to the head of the

battalion but three soldiers who committed that crime were in hiding without punishment. The Burmese military said there was no evidence to prove the crime was committed by Burmese soldiers.

Don't you think they could punish the soldiers for that crime? Many Kachin young people were angry with Burmese soldiers and felt sympathy with their poor younger sister, so they started to put the Kachin revolution flag in their Google chats. That inhuman case was all around Kachin society. Many Kachin people showed their disagreement with what the Burmese military committed in this case. In Tokyo, Japan more than 200 Kachin people protested in front of the Burmese Embassy against that inhuman abuse of the young girl.

However, when the Burmese generals met with a Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) leader to apologize for their soldier's actions, N'ban La, who is a leader in KIO, gave a comment, "Even though your military has no special punishment for that kind of crime we (KIO) will give death penalty for that kind of soldier if he is a Kachin soldier." The Burmese military and soldiers are killing not only Kachin but also other ethnic groups. Our ethnic groups are dying every day because of SPDC. I will never stop doing whatever I can do for our ethnic groups and I will never give up protesting against SPDC until I can help ethnic groups.

There is a Kachin word "Pu gang sin machyi" which means if you hit a part of our body it also causes pain for other parts. We are all one body.

By Ah San

21st September 2008

One life in the world

I was born in Shan state in 1984. When I was 8 years old I left my family to start Novice life. I started learning Shan letter. I was studying and staying at a temple all the time. When I was 12 or 13, I wanted to learn Burmese language but my father and my mother they said sorry but I couldn't. I had problem about money to start Burmese language. At the time we had to pay about 3500 kyat to learn but I had only 1300 kyat, that's why I couldn't learn Burmese language. But at the time I was very lucky too, I heard some information about some way I could learn Thai but very far from my temple. I should move if I want to study.

Yes, at the time I decided to move to learn Thai language at Thai-Burma border. I came to Thai-Burma border in 1996. I had to stay at the Thai-Burma border over six months. I could write and read Thai a little, but I couldn't speak well.

One day a monk from Chiang Mai came to visit our temple. He told our Abbot he wanted some Novice to go to stay with his temple because his temple didn't have Novice. Our Abbot asked us who wanted to go "if you want to go depend on you" he said. I decided to go with him, because if I stayed I could read a little bit but I couldn't speak Thai well because all of us were Shan. Usually we spoke Shan, that's why I couldn't improve my Thai language. I decide to go with him. "If I go to stay with Thai people perhaps I can improve myself about Thai speaking more and more" I thought.

When I arrived at Thai temple I learnt about Buddha with Thai letter. The Buddha is our God or our religion. We believe the Buddha because the Buddha taught us to be good people. He taught people to be peaceful, no fighting so he taught people to calm down. If we calm down we won't do something wrong we will do everything right.

I stayed in the Thai temple from 1996 to 2003. I didn't go back to visit my village. One day I got information that my Grandmother had passed away. I went back and then I came to Thailand again. I stayed in the temple until 2007. I couldn't go to Thai school because I didn't have Thai I.D card. However, I was very lucky because I could learn Thai from the monk in our temple, now I can read and write Thai.

In May 2007 I changed my robe so I stopped being a monk and I became an ordinary person. And I got information about SSSNY School from my friend. He told me about this school "Hey friend, if you want to study English I have some school for you". When I heard I laughed at him and I said thanks to him "What school can receive me? You already know about me, I never went to school before."

He said, "Not a problem some people are like you they never went to school before too. But they came to attend this school, you should try, maybe you will be lucky and you can improve your English" and he give me a form for SSSNY. He said "now the school announces for students for 8th program in 2008 " and I had to take exam to attend SSSNY School.

I was lucky again; I passed the exam this year. It was very important for me and I was very excited to come to join this school because I have chance to study now. When I am studying in school I am free to

learn Democracy, Social Studies, Math, News, Listening, Grammar, Health, Human Rights and many subjects that we learn in our school. I get a lot of experience and knowledge. We came from different places to live together, all of us have different language, culture, religion, and we have different ideas, but it is not a problem for us because we have the same goal and aim.

In school we practice English, Shan, Thai, Burmese, and other language if we can speak, it depends on us. Everything free to us. For me, I can practice or speak Shan, Thai, English, Laos and Burmese, a little bit. In school I am very happy because all of my friends are very kind to me. We do our homework, sometimes we have to do in a group, and we can help each other. I don't feel alone in the Earth the same as before; and it's a lot of fun to join this school. My idea is maybe one day I will be successful and if I have knowledge, after I graduate this school, I want to go back to my state to share my knowledge to children and orphan.

Education and knowledge I am not studying to keep; I am learning to share to people in the world, who wants to know, who wants to learn, who wants to study.

By Sai Panh Jing

7th September 2008

The School for Orphan Shan Nationalities Children

The children in Shan State they do not have rights to education so they have just been looking after the buffalos and cows. They did not know where their families went so they are orphan children.

"I joined to study at an Orphan School (from 2000 to 2007) in Loi Tai Leng, a Shan IDP camp."

I was born on July, 23rd, 1988 at 5:30am, in Na Kaw village, that is the part of Kesi township, central Shan State, and my parents named me Kwang Kham. When I was with my family, I could not go to school because my family didn't have enough money for me to learn. On 20th February 2000, I left my family to learn in Loi Tai Leng with my cousin, at that time I was 12 years old.

I arrived at Loi Tai Leng on 31st October 2000. A teacher with three students went to get me at the house in the morning of 1st November 2000 at 8:15 to go to school. I had one blanket and old mat but the mat was for two persons and I couldn't sleep well because it was very cold during the night. The cold wind blew strongly and I tried to sleep but I couldn't sleep so I hoped to see the day and I could get warm from the sun.

All students that were strong enough to work, we got up 4:30 am to go to carry the wood for building school. Before I arrived at the school, the students had learnt in the temple for two months. The school was made from the bamboo and its roof was thatch. It was

opened on August 15th 2000. When I arrived at the school, it was the rainy season and the school was broken by the wind and rain. The students got wet because the roof of the school had holes and the wall was destroyed. Sometimes I did not have any clothes to change into when I was wet. I made the fire so I could dry my clothes near the fire and my clothes would be dried by the fire. Some days I couldn't go to school because I did not have clothes to wear.

In the morning we went to carry the wood in the mountains from 4:30am and got back at our dormitories at 7:00. Our classes started at 8:45am to 3:00pm. In our school are many different ethnic groups, like the Pa O, Shan, Lahu, Palaung, Wa, Kayan and Akha. We were happy to live together and we helped each other forever. Our lunchtime was at 11:00am. When we had lunch, we did not have vegetables or meat with our lunch but we put oil and salt in our rice and made our meal. Sometimes the monks gave us the vegetables or meat. After lunch, we went to cut the bamboo in the valleys for building a new school and we got back at 6:00pm. However, we were very happy to work when we were in the forest; someone sang the song so we forgot we were tired. Our new school was finished on July 20th 2001. In 2002 we were donated the money to build the new school again. That money was from some foreign groups. We could study well and we do not have to work like before.

We have different religions and we celebrate Christmas on 25th December every year. On January 14th we make the party for the children's day every year.

The headmaster gave the speech on children's day. The headmaster spoke about the children in our country compared with children in other country. On 14th January we had the party for the children

and we invited the old people in the difference sections of the camp to enjoy with us. And also all people in Loi Tai Leng we invited. The reason, the headmaster explained, was about the children.

"Good morning everybody today is a special day for our children so we mustn't forget it. All children in Shan State they have never known about the children in other countries or other parts of the world. They have never studied and they have to work in the farm and they have fallen into misery with their parents. Sometimes they have to move into hiding when Burma army came to their villages. They do not have rights to school. When we compare our children with them, they are very different. However, the children are here, you have known how different your lives are with the lives of children in another country. You have rights to education here and you don't have to pay for your materials, school, and food so everything is free for you. You have to try hard in your learning and don't forget your friends who are in misery in Shan State. They don't have any education and food, so they are like people who are in the fire. They are hungry and their tear is on their cheeks every day.

You are learning now is for the people in our country to get peace and also everyone in the world. If we get the peace, we can stop the drugs that are produced in our country. Now you see many soldiers in the Burmese military have made our children foolish by the drugs. I think all of you have understood that the military of Burma are cleaning us from our land and you have known a little bit how to solve the problems." He said this from 9:00am to 9:35am on 14th January 2006 in Loi Tai Leng.



Monks went to Loi Tai Leng and donated us Latasoys (soyamilk) on March 15th 2006. Photo by Kwang Kham.

Sometimes the monks from Thailand or foreigners donated the food to us. The picture includes teachers and students. We were very happy and we show that we were thirsty for a long time.

Some of my friends told me about their stories when they lived in Shan State and they lived in Wan Tam village, southern part of Kesi township, central Shan State. Most children in Shan State couldn't go to school and also the children in Wan Tam had always looked after the buffalos. When ten of them were in the forest looking after the buffalos and cows, their village was burnt by SPDC troops on August 15th 1999.

When they came back and were near their village, they saw the big fire in their village so they were shocked. They did not think that the Burmese soldiers had burnt it and they walked on to the village. Suddenly they saw the Burmese military in the village and they

stopped their walking immediately. Then, they hid in the bushes, near the road so they could see clearly what the military did to the villagers. They saw the villagers' hands were tied with the ropes and they went with the military. And then the Burmese soldiers separated the men and women.

For the men, the Burmese soldiers took them to be their porters to carry their clothes and everything to go in the forest and other places. If someone was weak, they were not allowed to take a break, they were injured, and then they were killed. For the women, the Burmese soldiers took them to go in the forest that is not so far from the village. They were injured and then they were raped one by one by the Burmese soldiers. After the soldiers were finished, they killed the women with the knives, some women were killed by the fire in the village and someone was stabbed in their vagina by the wood. After the Burmese soldiers had left the village, the children also left the bushes to find the place to live and to be safe.

They lived in the farm that is not so far from their village and it is the northwest of the village. They had lived in the farm for thirty days and after those thirty days they had no food anymore. They went to find the food in the forest and sometimes they fished the fishes. Some days they did not have anything to eat so they could not do anything. And also they could not go to the town because they had never seen the town and their village is too far from the town. They did not have the road from the village to the town. If they wanted to go to the town, they had to walk for 6 hours to get to the town. They knew nothing about what happened in the town.

They did not know anything about how to survive. They had lived together for fifteen days and nobody got sick but after fifteen days

five of them got sick. The sick persons, sometimes they got high fever, cold and shaking. There are three seasons in Shan State. When their friends were sick it was the rainy season. They did not have the warm clothes and had no medicine to treat and give their friends so they made the fire for their friends to get warm. Their hut was made from the hay and they could be kept warm by the hay. They could not make the fire during the night. If they made the fire, they were afraid of Burmese soldiers seeing them. If the Burmese soldiers saw their light, they would be killed. On September 8th 1999 Sai Kham, Sai Moon, Ai Lum and Kham Lha went to find food in the farm that was east of their village. When they were picking the fruits, suddenly the troop of Shan State Army (SSA) appeared near them.

Sai Kham and Ai Lum stood and turned their faces to the south and they saw the soldiers near them. Then they tapped their friends on the back to vanish but they could not vanish. They were afraid and their bodies were shaking and they said nothing for five minutes. They said to themselves "Today is the last day of our lives". Then the leader of the troop of SSA asked them "Why are you here and where are your parents?" They told the SSA what had happened to their village and the people in the village. And then they whispered everything to them that they had nothing and about their friends were sick but they were happy because that was not Burmese soldiers. After that the leader asked a backpack medic and three soldiers to go with them for safety. The soldiers lived with them and treated the patients for five days. When the patients got well the soldiers were going to leave them, they asked the soldiers to go with them. The soldiers did not allow them to go and they felt unhappy and they said to them "If you don't want us to go with you why did

you treat us? Although we are fine, we are in the evil and now we have no way to go" they cried. Then the soldiers allowed them to go with them. When they got to Wan Geng the leader gave them the clothes and shoes.

Wan Geng is northeast of their village and from their village to Wan Geng about one hour by walking. The soldiers did not allow them to carry anything. In 1999 they were just ten or eleven years old. On October 15th 1999 the Shan soldiers sent them to Loi Tai Leng but it was very difficult and dangerous to get there because the Salween River was flooding. And then they went back to Wan Geng until January 2000. On January 20th 2000 they sent them again and they got to Loi Tai Leng on April 5th 2000. In this month is the winter season in Shan State. When they arrived in Loi Tai Leng, the leader of Loi Tai Leng built the two dormitories for them.

We have chance to study everything that we want. The subjects that we have studied in our school are English, Thai, Shan, Math, History, Chemistry, Physics, Biology and Basics of Democracy. We have had primary school and high school. The students come more and more every year and we have the problem in our school. The problem is that there aren't enough dormitories for living and the school for studying. I am lucky that I am a student in SSSNY 8th program because it is very difficult to attend. I have understood more about how Human Rights, Democracy, Environment, Political movements and Economics are all connected with each other from SSSNY.

If I graduate from this program I will go back to be a teacher in the orphan school. I will share everything that I have studied in SSSNY.

"The Children Today Are An Energy For The Peace In the Future"

By Kwang Kham

Orphan School in Loi Tai Leng

22nd July 2008

One of the most important days in SSSNY

22th July 2008, we had hoped for this day for a long time because we had to meet with Nobel Women's Initiative (NWI) member, Mrs. Jody Williams and her colleagues. The NWI website says that "the Initiative was established in 2006 by sister Nobel Peace Laureates Jody Williams, Shirin Ebadi, Wangari Maathai, Rigoberta Menchú Tum, Betty Williams and Mairead Corrigan Maguire. The six women - representing North and South America, Europe, the Middle East and Africa - have decided to bring together our extraordinary experiences in a united effort for peace with justice and equality". This was a golden opportunity for all students of SSSNY. Even though we had this opportunity; we were a little worried for our meeting because we had never met with famous people before such as those who received Nobel Peace Prize.

The night before July 22th 2008 we couldn't sleep very well with our excitement. We went to the hotel an hour before the meeting. When we arrived at the hotel, we prepared our meeting room and changed into our traditional clothes. When we started the program for our meeting, I was still worried, excited and my heart was beating. I tried to relax by myself.

In our agenda, our teacher, Amanda, was moderator. First, Pi Charm Tong, our school co- founder and director, introduced and said welcome, after that all of us introduced by ourselves. Then NWI members Mrs. Jody Williams, Mía Farrow, Dr. Sima Samar and Qíng Zhang addressed. Next we showed the 8th program students'



Jody Williams comforted a student.
Photo by NWI.

selection slide show and then our academic coordinator, Lyn Vasey, said about his experience and the teaching method we use at our school. After that we showed a music video, the song title was "The Changing Voice" that was a song by the 7th program students and was shot and edited by our 8th program students. They enjoyed that music video. Then four of our students presented their

testimonials about what happened in their lives. We could present only four students because we had not enough time. During presentation time, one of our friends couldn't present about her story and she cried, at the same time Jody ran to her and gave encouragement. After that my friend felt well and she presented again. During this time we couldn't control our tears and cried with her. Also we felt warm, friendly and confident because they have very good mind and they were understanding, warm and friendly.

After presentation, we made four small groups for discussion with each delegate. I met with Dr. Sima Samar; she is the Chairperson of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission and, since 2005, United Nation Special Reporter on the situation of human rights in Sudan. We discussed about Burma, Darfur, Pakistan, and Afghanistan and also about her. Even though she has a high position of government; she and her children are in danger. Her daughter

can't go to school without a bodyguard. She said to us that if you want to live in democratic country, you have to be united.

After discussion, they gave comments to all of us. Then one of our student said thanks to them and gave presents and gifts for children in Darfur. The gifts were postcards, we made by ourselves. In the first page of postcard, we drew map of Burma, Darfur, Shan State, Sudan and cartoon design of children in traditional clothes of ethnic groups in Burma, a picture of a view of our field, mountains and houses. Children from Darfur know only war and guns. We saw they drew terrible pictures such as how Janjaweed killed their ethnic groups, how Sudanese government destroyed their villages and how their parents were killed by bombs from airplanes. That's why we drew our maps and lovely cartoon of our ethnic people. We expected that they will enjoy our picture and they will copy and draw. When we gave these postcards to Mia Farrow, she looked very excited and happy. Also we gave our school logo t-shirt, CD and Letters from Shan State, a book by the 7th program students. Next we sang a group song that was composed by one of our students, they sang with us together. Finally they said closing remark and took photos.

The result of this meeting was we had no worry and we thought that we are friends and also we knew that they are famous people and they didn't look down to us. That day, we could get only one and a half hours, but it was very important and valuable for us to share our feelings, dreams, hopes and how we are suffering from the Burmese military regime.

By Thukha

8th August 2008

A Shan Woman's True Life

First, I'll introduce my family. We have five people in our family. I have one younger brother and one younger sister. I was born in "Wan Leng". "Wan Leng" is my native village. When I was born my parents were poor. They didn't have money. They had a lot of trouble. My dad had to go to "Palaung" village, on the mountain. My dad went to the mountain twice a week; my mom was "worker on daily wages". When I was five years old my parents were workers at the "Primary School". My dad had to go to the mountain every week. At the time we didn't have our own home yet. We just stayed in the small tents beside school. Sometimes when my dad went to the mountain and my mom went to the farm it was just me and my younger brother, at the time my younger sister wasn't born yet.

I was very afraid, at the time I didn't know anything. I called my younger brother then we went to our grandparents' home. Our grandparent's home was far from my family. We did not live in the same village. When my brother and I arrived to the middle of the road, my young brother walked slowly, so I wasn't patient, I was very afraid and then I took a small stick and hit my younger brother then my brother cried. When I heard my brother cry, I also cried.

When we were still crying, we met our mom as she came back from the farm and then my mom asked why we are crying. What happened to us? Then I told my mom about that and my mom said "You shouldn't hit him, you should talk to him very well, because he is younger than you, he doesn't know anything, don't do like that

again, you have to love him so much, I just have you two, if we don't love each other who will love us?" When I heard my mom said like that I was very sorry, very sad and pity my younger brother. After that I never hit him again. I love him very much.

I started to study when I was six years old; at the time my life and my family also changed to new life. My dad worked as a merchant for Chinese; because my dad was "faithful" they trusted my dad and assigned everything to my dad. My dad had more work to do. We also got some more money to save. After my dad worked with them a long time, about one year, we had money to buy a place and to build our home. After we built our home my younger sister was born, and then my mom was very sick, so at the weekend I had to take care of my younger sister. My dad always travelled. Sometimes my dad had to journey a long time, because my parents worked very hard for our life and family. Our family can live like other people; we didn't need to envy each other. We had everything that we needed, but at the time I didn't understand anything.

I just knew we had what other people have; we didn't need to envy them. I didn't know "Human Life" could change. Our homes were wide and near the school. In front of my home was football playground, so many SPDC soldiers liked to stay in our home very much. When SPDC were around the town and the village they always went to stay in our home. At the time I didn't know about SPDC.

One day when the SPDC stayed in our home I saw they hit the "Porter" who they arrested, and they cut his face. When I saw that I was very afraid, I cried and then they heard my cry and they looked at me, like they will hit me. I was very afraid and I ran to my mom. At the same time I was very afraid of the SPDC soldiers. They always

came to stay in our home; because our villages were a little far from the market and no other people could speak Burmese well. They knew we could understand Burmese a little bit. However, when they stayed at our home they never met my dad, so they asked about my dad, what was his job? Why can our family live very nicely?

We were not the same as other villagers; we were like the richer people in the town. They thought my dad was a Shan resistance soldier. They always asked about Shan resistance. I did not understand why they asked about them, so I went to ask my mom. My mom didn't say anything about them. If the SPDC asked you "you reply to them that you don't know". I also replied like that again and again so the SPDC weren't patient with me. They said "you shouldn't say that because if you say that you will never really know your whole life". I didn't understand what they meant, and then my mom suddenly called me. I ran to my mom, I told my mom about what they said to me. My mom said if someone wants to ask you something you don't have to say anything. That was our security. The SPDC suspected our family. We couldn't do anything, but they didn't stay a long time in our village, they left our village. I thought our Buddha could help us.

After the SPDC left, SSA came again. We couldn't avoid this problem; we had to entertain because we were the home owner. The SSA stayed a long time and their leader and my dad were friends. They were very friendly and best friends. Sometimes their provisions were not enough so we had to help them. We helped them with everything. Then the SSA knew our families were very friendly and they told us what they needed. If Buddha day, their leader donated a towel to old people at temple, at night we had a festival to feed

villagers at our home. We donated every Buddha day. One day we didn't know the situation would change very fast. The SSA left our village. After they left our village, there was a big problem again. Some villagers and Leaders, who had signed a ceasefire agreement with the SPDC, said my dad supported SSA soldiers. They said my dad was a detective for the SSA soldiers. The ceasefire leaders, who worked with the SPDC, tried to kill my dad again and again.

First, the ceasefire leader called my dad to visit Rangoon with them. Then my dad couldn't do anything, so he had to go with them. My dad had to pay for their transportation. If they did something wrong they wanted my dad to join them. If they used drugs they called my dad to join with them and to pay for the cost of the drugs. If my dad didn't join with them they said "he is a detective for SSA, he doesn't want to join with us". If he didn't join with them they said they "would kill him and all of our relatives". My dad was afraid they would kill all of us, so he decided to join with them. Our family life changed to poor life again, because my dad couldn't travel far away. If my dad went anywhere they sent "spy" to follow my dad, so we couldn't do anything. They really killed people if they didn't like them and if other people didn't listen to them and didn't do what they said. We heard and saw things ourselves in September 1997.

One day they planned to kill my dad, but we knew fast, because my dad's best friend came to tell us immediately, so we didn't have any way to choose. That night my dad became a "monk". After my dad was a "monk", my mom had to work hard for our study and survival, but she could not travel away, because we lived under them. We could not escape their spy. They always followed us, but they didn't get any evidence to kill us, so they stopped following us. Even

though they stopped following us it was too late for our family, because at the time my dad used drugs so much. Then he came to stay home and he was in despair, he didn't work. He slept all the time. We also didn't stop him. Everything was very late for our life.

My life was a "Drug Addict's" daughter. First, I was very angry with my dad and I always blamed him. Finally, I understand everything. I wasn't ashamed to be a Drug Addict's daughter. I knew that my dad did everything for us to be alive like other people. That's how he became like that, so we have to try hard for our life.

My younger brother and I also tried to pass "Grade Ten". After we passed "Grade Ten" we worked to earn money for our family. My younger brother bought a motorbike in Lashio and sold in Panglong to earn money to attend the university. Both of us attended the 1st year together. When we finished the first term, we had three months for holiday. During the holiday, we came back to our hometown and my brother worked at a phone shop, diverting calls when people called Burma from Thailand, and I went to work daily. In September, I went to 'reap the rice' to get more money for the 2nd term.

After we passed the 1st year our family met trouble, we didn't have enough money to continue the 2nd year. Nobody helped us, including our relatives. When my mom went to borrow their money for us to continue the 2nd year, they didn't lend to us, and they said if you don't have enough money you don't need to continue again. They said "if you can't attend school you won't starve". When I heard that, I was very hurt and always cried, so my mom said don't worry about money, she would find money for us to continue. Also my younger brother sacrificed for me to continue the 2nd year. He worked to support me to continue. When I finished the 2nd year 1st term, my

mom and my younger brother came to Thailand to work for our family, to support me and my younger sister to continue high school like others. I stayed with my dad and my younger sister in Shan State, my mom and my younger brother were in Thailand, so our family stayed in different places, we were separated.

At that time, the 'large duty' was on my shoulders. I had to take care of my younger sister and my dad, because my dad was a 'Drug Addict' and my younger sister was too young. When we finished one term, we had 3 months for holiday every term, so I came back to my hometown and, took care of my dad and my younger sister. I always talked to my dad to stop using drugs but he didn't stop. At the end I could not control my mind then I told him "Dad! You should stop using drugs, although you don't love me and younger sister but you should think about mom and younger brother. All of us love you, so my mom and my younger brother have sacrificed for us. We have to think about them". At first, it seemed he understood and he asked me if he stopped using drugs would I help him. If I helped him he would stop. Then I said I would help him, so he agreed to stop using drugs. At night he wanted to use drugs, he couldn't sleep and he made so much noise, when he groaned I had to massage him. He said all of his body was painful so he could not sleep. I understood him and it happened to him for 4 nights. I always had to take care of him and massaged him the whole night, every night. Sometimes I didn't have enough sleep but I didn't care. I was very happy to take care of my dad, because he stopped using drugs.

At the time my younger sister and I rejoiced and were very happy, but when I went to university for the 3rd year, he used drugs again. I tried to stop him 4 times and he still used drugs again and again. I

could not control him. At last, I could stop him. I was very happy that my aim was successful, like I got the moon. After that, I was confident to travel away. I had to go to the mountain with my aunt. I went to sell vegetable at Palaung Village. We went there once a week. When we went to the mountain, we went by 'htawlaggy' (like a truck). Then, when we arrived at the village, we had to carry the vegetable on our shoulders and went to sell to the Palaung villagers' houses.

In March, the situation changed and it was difficult to travel because the SPDC soldiers were around the township. When they arrived to the village, if they saw the women, they raped them even if they were pregnant.

Once a week, the villagers (Palaung) had to come to the market at "Kaptur village" (the main village). One week they had to come to the market and they met the SPDC soldiers at the mid road. Some people couldn't run away. That time one woman was pregnant and she couldn't run. She met the SPDC soldiers and five of them raped her and she couldn't survive and she died immediately at the mid road. She hadn't reached the market yet. When she died the soldiers put her body in the bushes beside the road. Then the villagers came to bury her. The SPDC were pitiless. Also when they saw the men they arrested them to carry their provisions. If the villagers ran they shot them, some people died immediately and some were hurt. They also said "if you tell SSA, we will punish you by burning your village." Some villagers were not brave enough to go to there again. (It really happened on 12th March 2006 at the Palaung village "Num Pen", Southern Shan State.)

After that I decided to come to Thailand to help my mom and my younger brother. I called my dad to come with me because I didn't want him to use drugs again. Then I asked him "Will you come with me?" and he agreed to come with me to Thailand, to an IDP camp. We left our hometown on 11th June 2006.

Now everything is OK. We tried hard to start a new life again. We want to say, we are very lucky, it is good for our future. I never thought in my life, we would have a good chance again; we would have a chance to study like that again. Now we have a job. We didn't get any salary but it is for our nationality and ourselves. I enjoyed working at this job. I would like to help our people inside and outside Burma. Before I came to study at SSSNY I worked with "Shan Relief and Development Community", SRDC. All of my family members are now working for our Shan people and community. All of this is my true life. I promised myself, I will work for our people. I will never forget that. It will be in my heart my whole life.

Thank you so much for the chance to open my feelings and share my stories, because I would like all of the readers and my friends to know my life and how the SPDC and their supporters abuse human rights in my home town.

By Snow

21st June 2008

I will never give up

I wanted to be a good English speaker. That was my hope when I was young. I moved to Rangoon after I graduated high school because I had to wait 1 year to go to university, so I had time to learn something that I wanted. Then I stayed at a Shan monastery. There were many monks who studied English. I went with them in the downtown and started to learn more English.

At the beginning of arriving in Rangoon, I didn't know how to take the bus and I learnt from the monks for several weeks. Then I tried to go everywhere by myself. I learnt about the city life, how did they live, how did they eat, how did they study and the difference between the country and the city lives.

I learnt how to live together among the people who were from different parts. There were a lot of beggars or poor on the roadside that made me feel unhappy. People who were rich got richer and richer, and the poor got still poorer and poorer. Most of the rich people were Chinese. I used my experiences and the things I had learnt and compared with lives of people who were in conflict areas. Their lives were so different.

I didn't know how much my English was improving at that time. However, I had learnt a lot about the city life in Burma. I drew a map in my memory. I learnt about people from Shan State who lived at the monastery in the city of Rangoon. The monasteries were very important places that we used as schools for children from the villages.

There were a lot of training centers, computer classes, English speaking classes, other foreign language classes and so many kinds of outside training in the downtown. I paid for my Basic English speaking class about 20,000 Kyat per course (three months).

I took money from my home but I felt unhappy, I had no choice. I went to attend my class regularly. I took a bus about 1 hour to reach my class. I spent half an hour waiting for the bus, so I spent my time on the road 3 hours a day. In Rangoon, the bus was so crowded and sometimes very difficult to breath. No air-condition, the smell was bad but I had no choice, I must do that. Sometimes the bus was delayed at the traffic light and we were waiting by the red light for 15 or 20 minutes. I would be late for my class so I felt upset. I understood if I didn't get some money by myself I couldn't stay in the city for a long time. I got a message from university that first term would start soon, so I had to go back home and prepare for attending university.

Then I studied at Taunggyi university, which is the capital city of Shan state and is about 300km from my home town. I studied by distance education. I was a history major at university but I knew nothing about the History of Burma. The university taught the first year's syllabus in 10 days. Our classes were in English but I didn't know the meaning of what was being said, so I just learnt by heart or copied. I had to take it in turns to attend tuition and push to get into the lecture room. I studied for 3 years to graduate.

After I graduated, I worked with the Shan Literature and Culture Association (SLCA) as a volunteer teacher in my hometown. Ethnic languages were not allowed to be taught in Burma, so I joined with volunteer teacher groups and went to the villages. We were staying at

monastery or secret place (for example, in the farm or forest). I taught the children our own literature and culture and other knowledge such as healthcare.

The Burmese military didn't give permission and support for our association (SLCA), so we had to ask the military officer for permission for every activity such as celebrating Shan New Year. Every year we had to try to find the way how we would be able to celebrate our New Year ceremony.

There were many ethnic groups in Burma and in Shan State. The SPDC never wanted Shan people and other ethnic groups to cooperate and communicate. We had our own literature, culture and languages. However, we had to learn everything only in Burmese. They tried to destroy everything in our state (example - language, culture and perspectives).

Although we didn't do anything to them, they could beat or shout at us as if we were animals. They forced us to give them rice, money, and meat. If not, we would be punished. Therefore, nobody wanted to be the head of the village. We grew oranges, rice and pineapples in our region, very natural and sweet. The Burmese Army went around the state; when they saw the farm they picked the fruits as they wanted without asking the owner.

They never paid money. Nobody dared to talk to them. If they saw our villagers, either boy or girl, they arrested them and forced them to carry weapons and go along with them. They raped women and children and killed them. They burnt our village. Our life was frightening all the time. We couldn't work happily. A lot of children had no opportunity to learn more. That's why I decided to join with

volunteer teacher groups and help our children. However, I needed more skill and knowledge to be a good teacher. At first, I had to find the way that I could improve my knowledge and skill that was what I was always thinking in my mind.

Fortunately, I met a friend who graduated from SSSNY School. He gave me some information about SSSNY and shared with me his SSSNY life. I was very interested. Then I decided to travel to Thai-Burma border to join this school and I had an entrance exam for this school. Then I was accepted to be a student, so I was very lucky.

In this school I had a chance to improve my English skills, our own history and other knowledge. I hope that my dream to be a good English speaker will become true. Also I am excited that I will become a good teacher to help our children. Our lives were so difficult. But I will never give up. I will try hard, as much as I can, for the future. I believe one day my dream must become true.

By Hsarm Hseng

18th August 2008

My Traveling in the Darkness

When the sun came up from behind the hill, it was hot season; the cows and buffaloes woke up and went into the field to gather their food. The nature and river surrounding our village were beautiful. Most of the villagers in our village were farmers who planted the vegetables and rice to feed the families every year in rainy season in Shan State. Some of the farmers took their tools and things to prepare and went into the farms. In the morning, my dad and others had a discussion about their farms and trades while they drank tea, sitting on the floor. My young sister drew a cartoon happily and mum had chosen the strong seeds to grow in the farms. During that time, I did not know what was happening in our village, but our village had a bad dream and wasn't safe for me to stay there forever because of the Burmese military.

From March 1996 to June 1998, was a terrible time in our Shan State. We received orders from the SPDC that we had three days to relocate to town. It was not too far away that I heard the sound of the guns. When SPDC soldiers came to the village, they shot the pigs and others animals that they wanted to eat. Our family was busy and didn't know what to do. I asked my dad what was happening with us. I didn't understand my dad's explanation. After my parents collected the materials and put them onto a cart, so I understood that we had to take our family into town. However, I remembered that my father's face was red and angry, when we received the order from SPDC soldiers that we must relocate from our village to town in three

days. After the three days they would kill every person if they saw them there.

I will never forget that day; SPDC soldiers took the men from the village to carry their heavy bombs. If the men couldn't relocate or went slowly, they were beaten at once by feet and guns. Some women were abused and tortured by the soldiers. I did not know what genocide and violation meant at that time. After moving to town, our village was burnt, everything was gone. Then I cried because our house was gone into the fire, which had been established forty years ago, before my dad was born. I hated SPDC so much, then I decided by myself, when I grew up I would kill them at once, but that was a young decision. By the time I went to attend at school in town after moving there, I often had problems with some Burmese students because there was discrimination against ethnic students by the Burmese teachers.

We spent our life in town for a few years to develop our lives, but I disliked living there. My dad tried to find money for my education to be an intelligent student, but dad's dream did not happen. In March 1998, I decided to leave the school and relocated to our old village with dad to look for our animals in the forest, but when I got there, I was very sad when I was looking at our broken home. Our farm was full bushes, grass, and weeds. During that time I wanted all the Burmese troops to leave Shan State, but I was too young to know how to do that. In my life I was suffering from the regime, losing everything and I had no chance to achieve a good life or make my own decision. Everything was different before the military regime came and controlled the Shan State.

However, from 1996-98 I was suffering, no opportunity to speak our rights under the regime, it was very difficult to live and find food for our families; I just had to hide and stay safe. The suffering and conditions have strongly affected my own life and encouraged me to be a strong person. Eventually, one day I expect something will change the situation in Burma to my dream and we will have peace in Shan State.

By Sai Noom

SSSNY Student

25th August 2008

The life of Lahu people

The Lahu is an ethnic group of Southeast Asia. We Lahu people are originally from China and settled in Burma thousands of years ago. The Lahu divide themselves into a number of subgroups, such as the Lahu Na (Black Lahu), Lahu Nyi (Red Lahu), Lahu Hpu (White Lahu), Lahu Shi (Yellow Lahu) and Lahu Shehleh. I am Lahu Shi (Yellow Lahu). Where a subgroup name refers to a color, that is the traditional color of their dress.

The Lahu are a hill tribe of whom the majority lives in eastern Shan State in Burma. The population is estimated 150,000 and some are in Thailand, Laos and Vietnam. As Lahu people have different colors, also they have different traditions and languages. Mostly Lahu people are pious in Christianity since ancestor time. We celebrate the three main festivals. These festivals are Ca Shi Aw Ca Paweh (celebration for new crops from agriculture or thanks giving day), Merry Christmas and Happy New Years days, holidays and important days.

Since many Burmese military troops came into Shan State in the 1950s, Lahu's life changed. We live on the mountains and we cultivate rice, sesame, corn and vegetables. However, we get very little profit from our land because we have to give the taxes and supply to Burmese military every year. Therefore, the local people have no chance to choose their life and they are obeying SPDC rule. More than that, now the SPDC take all of our native land and want us to move to another place. Furthermore, the local people are faced with various

problems. For instance, forced labor, rape, torture, discrimination, difficulty getting citizenship, difficulty to get job in office, land confiscation and forced relocation. These kinds of problems occur every year.

In addition, most Lahu women just give birth by themselves, they do not go to hospital in urban area because it costs so much money, also very different to travel and access there. Traditionally, they just use their traditional medicine but some of them have suffered malnutrition due to less food and family financial status. The military regime does not establish and open any clinic for local people. The regime only forces local people to pay taxes and forces them to work, like sending to construction site. Even though some local people have access to hospital, doctors do not give sufficient medicine. Doctors discriminate against Lahu behaviors and just give the list of the medicine to buy at another outside shop that is very expensive. Only the rich people get the opportunity to receive great medicine. Therefore, many Lahu people are suffering from insufficient healthcare system.

The Lahu people very rarely focus on education, only a few people can complete high school, I think 80% of them end at middle or primary school. Most significantly, the school fees are so high and during the school time, Burmese teachers teach only a few hours without good instruction and explanations. Only the Burmese students and rich students can get understanding and pass exam easily. The Burmese teacher used corruption and exploitation. Therefore, poor parents can not encourage, support or afford to send their children to school. Consequently many children become illiterate and take care of animals at the farm.

This problem is not only in Burma. As I mentioned at the beginning, Lahu are separately living on the mountain areas of Burma, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam. Lahu have no certain land to rule themselves. Therefore, I believe that Lahu people in other countries may also suffer like Lahu people suffer in Burma. So every night I pray for the equality and freedom of Lahu people on the earth.

By Na daw le

28th October 2008

My experience on the way to Thailand

I came from northern Shan State. When I was a child, I never stayed with my family; I grew up with my uncle, aunt & grandmother because my parents stayed in Thailand. They couldn't go back into Shan State; they are working with an organization. After I finished my high school, I decided to come to Thailand to stay with my mother. I left my village in 2004; I came with my aunt, with her son who was 1 year old, my sister who was 12 years old and my friend. We were 5 people on the same journey. I always thought it would be easy to come to Thailand.

When I arrived near the border, I had to walk for 5 hours from a small village to Nong Aok. There was a guide who led us to walk to Nong Aok. There were 50 people walking together. There was a child in the group of 50 people and the guide said that we had to give the sleeping pills to the child because it would not be safe for the security. We did as the guide told us. The guide fed four sleeping pills to the child. After we had walked for two hours, we arrived in the jungle and the child started to cry. We walked separately. The child cried and cried, we couldn't go forward so the guide took us back to the village. The guide forgot the way so we lost our way in the forest. So we had to sleep in the forest for a night. I thought I would never see my parents again.

The next day, in the morning, we walked a few minutes and arrived at the United Wa State Army (UWSA), the Wa army military camp. The Wa army asked us how we came, how we walked in the forest because there were a lot of land mines. In the forest we were very

afraid. After that we went back to Nar Kong Moo. After we waited at Nar Kong Moo about 10 days we tried to come again. But the Thai soldier didn't allow us to pass the gate. My aunt, her son and my sister requested to the Thai soldier that they had to go to the hospital because my sister was sick and they passed the gate.

For me, I came with the guide through the forest again. We started walking at midnight and after walking 1 hour we met the police near Nong Aok. We were arrested by Thai soldier and they took us to their camp. At the time my mother had been waiting for me at Nong Aok. The guide ran out from the camp by telling the soldier that he wanted to go to the toilet. And then he went into the village and informed my mother that I was in the military camp. When my mother heard about me she went to the village head man and requested him to help me. The next day the village head and my mother came to the military camp and they took me home.

This experience is always in my mind.

By Mo Hom

7th October 2007

Mong Su: Deserted Land of Blood Rubies

I was born in southern Shan State, Mong Su Township near Salween River. My father was a farmer and my mother was a midwife in hospital. Most people in this township were happy being farmers. Day after day, we worked at our own job. Some were in the farm morning to evening. Some traded place to place. We rarely met each other, but in the early morning it was very crowded in the market with elder people and children. We have Shan traditional ceremony each month. When we celebrated, the other villagers around our township came to participate with us. They stayed at their friend's house until the end of it. Our ceremony was very crowded with people, because that time was our holiday to relax after working the whole year. During it, we could make more friendship with each other.

In 1989 our plentiful life collapsed by fire. First the fire started from one house and spread out to other neighboring houses, then affected all around the town. We had to move to the jungle which was far from the fire. We had no food, no clothes and no shelter. Therefore, my grandfather and his group tried to find some food in the river. Fortunately they saw some rubies in there, so they tried to dig rubies from the river. After that our town was famous for rubies, most of our people started to do this job, also my family. We used land for finding ruby that we had used for agriculture since ancient time.

Most rubies are found on mountains in the small village that was 2 hours away from town, where Palaung ethnic people live. They grew tea for their job and sold it in town. While they did their work they

found rubies in the ground. First they didn't know what it was and then they thought it was very bright and beautiful, so they collected them and changed for a kilo of rice. Then rubies became very famous all around the country, so people from other places found a good economy there, and then it became an area for many business people and SPDC, the Burma army.

A city grew up for making business which produced a lot of rubies. That was a conflict resource mine in Mong Su, supported by both the military side and resistance to buy weapons. Money from selling the ruby went to building the murdering army instead of developing the basic infrastructure in the country. SPDC held the special ceremonies to sell the natural minerals like ruby and jade. When the population was increasing in the country for finding ruby, the Burmese military, resistance armies, bandits, thieves and drug addicts were making homes there.

Also a lot of Chinese companies were moving into that place to make benefits from our natural resources. The people who are poor in that area are local people who owned that land for thousands of years. There were many ways to get pleasure and the price of everything increased. Many children left school and tried to get job to earn money for their families. If they could go underground they could get a job, so our school lost many students. After that they couldn't analyze themselves, they could walk a wrong way, most are addicted to opium and alcohol because they thought they could work hard when they took it. Also many of them became gamblers and worked in brothels; many of them were young people under 16.

Moreover, these situations have affected our environment, and the people who had depended on it to survive all their life. At one time our

town climate was cold and wet. Everywhere around us was green and fresh. In the morning there was a beautiful view around the river of children's swimming competitions and people washing clothes. We used the nature resources that we had, we ate our own food, we wore our own clothes that we made with our own hands, and we could stay comfortable and satisfactory all our life. Today we may not see that view again. Even in winter we get hot in day time, also the place that we used to run and have competitions was disappearing. They are gradually becoming barren, now they are places for drinkers and drug addicts. Then we have to be careful of groups of robbers and thieves at night.

The ruby land taught us a lot of lessons. It was changing young people's lives, also relationships with friends and relatives. Today we may not see unity of young people again. Most are addicts and some go away to study, then they are not allowed to return, because their parents worry about them meeting dishonest people. The people who were finding jobs in the mountains were killed by landslides, bombs exploding and land mines, including my best friends. We often heard people were killed but we didn't know the killer. Some died from HIV/AIDS, and some families transmitted HIV to their partner, so annually there were increasing numbers of orphan children. Some left their children with their grandparents and moved to another country seeking work. Especially they moved to Thailand.

For these reasons the population decreased, some are fortunate but many are very poor. Today the most difficult part of our life is scarcity of job. The businessmen have stopped their job, because the rubies are almost gone. Also, our farms were destroyed by finding rubies, almost all have holes and drought, and we can't do anything

with them again. My life was affected by this situation, since then my family was separated from each other. Therefore we were in an IDP camp on the northern Thailand-Burma border.

By Kaw Kaw

12th October 2008

Nightmare of my life

I am Kawn Wan; I'm 21 years old. I am a teacher at Loi Tai Leng, an IDP camp on the Thai Burma border. I take care of the orphan students at the dormitory.

When it was time to sleep one night, I couldn't sleep, I heard the song of crying and I woke up. I saw one of my students was crying and I asked him "what's wrong with you?" And he replied to me "I can not sleep any more." I lit the candle and saw he was crying. And I moved to him and pulled his body to my shoulder; let him cry in my chest, hugged him. And he cried to me very loud and many students woke up. After I said to him "do you have anything to say to me?" After that he looked at my face and said to me "every time, I'm sleeping I dream and see my father's face full of the blood, falling down to his body. He calls me "my son run away from here quick, quick." His crying makes me suddenly wake up."

As he told me about his bad dream, also many students could not sleep and they woke up and came to listen to him. They were all silent and made me wonder. And I asked myself "what I am going to do right now?" The other students came to him and they asked him many questions. They asked "why do you have a dream like that? What happened to you when you stayed in Shan State?" After that I told the other students "Don't ask so many questions." Suddenly he looked at my face and said "I don't mind I can explain to them." I told him "I don't want you to think too much about the past, because you will get pain in your heart, you won't have energy to study." He said he would like to tell the story of his past to all his friends and

me. I couldn't stop him and I let him tell about himself. I sat down and listened to him.

He told about his life when he stayed inside Shan State, in 1996 after Mounng Tai Army surrendered to SPDC. After that many violations were happening such as people lived in situations of extreme poverty and drastic restriction on movement. Before the MTA surrendered, the military had announced to the villagers in the Shan State that they would let them be in a free country. They would promote education system better than today, and they would develop better living standards. Who knew they broke their promises. Instead of developing the country they committed many crimes they were brutal- rape, torture and they arrested the innocent person without the reason. Before 1996, the country was free and villages were built outside the city. Everyone could follow their culture freely and many people were happy and didn't have to worry about their lifestyle and they could survive.

This was the story that my student shared with us that night:

One day, when it was the time for animals to go home and also the bird come and gets the children and went to their nest too. Then the sun was setting down on the north so this time I also pulled my buffalos and went to my home too. When I got home I tided my buffalos and I heard my mom and my sister call me to come in "my son wash your hands, it's time for dinner, today we have vegetable salads and we know this is your favorite curry" they said and I replied to them "Mom I am coming now." After that I washed my hand and went inside the house and we sat and I looked at my parent face and they talked to me "where did you feed your buffalos today?" And I said "near the river, sir."

While we talked and ate our dinner we saw one villager came to our house and said "Hi! Anyone stay inside?" and my father replied "yes we are, come inside." We looked at his face and it was full of sadness and we asked him, "Why does your face look so tired and sad?" And he was sad and talked "do you know immediately we have to move our village to the town?" We looked at him and said, "What are you talking about? We don't understand." He said "I am not making a joke come and see." We followed him and unbelievably suddenly we saw flashlights were bright everywhere. Then we went with him and saw the Burmese military from the city. They called all of us to come together and the soldiers ordered to us "you have 5 days; you have to move your village to the Mong Nong city."

During that time, the villagers were shaking but we couldn't do anything and my father got angry and he got out from the group. "Why do we have to move?" he asked the soldier. The soldiers are not kind and one soldier used the butt of his gun and pointed it to my father's chest. After that no one dared to go against the military. And as they gave us the deadline, we had to move to the city and that night the soldier didn't stay in the village. They left when they finished their duty. All the villagers and monks were crying and some of the old people didn't want to leave and they tried to go to meet with the monks. They requested the monks to go and talk with the SPDC. The monks refused and said "how can I request to them to let us stay here, you saw just now they use violence to us." They were silent and didn't say anything. And they started to separate from the group and go back to their home with lost minds and lost energy. Some were crying and some were angry but we couldn't do anything. We just went and collected our wealth and our equipment.

That night we didn't sleep, my parents were busy. I asked my parents "why do they want us to move from here?" They looked at me and replied "they accuse us of supporting the other rebel group." I was silent for a moment and asked again "if we don't move will they kill us?" My mother answered to me "did you see my son they have guns, how could we refuse them?" they cried and said to me. Our village was far from the city and we had five days but how could we move our pets, animals and how could we live in the city? If we didn't have a farm, where will we live? Did we have a house? And after that night the villages tried to start going to the city.

When we got there, there was no house for us to stay. The soldier told us to go live outside the city area, where the people throw the garbage and here was filled with plastics. We couldn't stay but the soldier's forced us "if you don't stay here you have to go to the jail." Because of this reason, and even though the area was dirty, we had to live there. On the fourth day, we still couldn't replace all of our property and at that time the soldiers came into the village and said "your time is gone" but we still had one day left to move and they didn't tell anymore.

They used their guns and burnt the villages with unkindness and some of the villagers were still in their houses. And collected their cloth the fire was burnt with the bodies and we tried to help each other but we couldn't, the soldier didn't let anyone help them. I looked at my father and I said "why don't you help them?" and my father also looked at me and I was crying and he didn't want me to be sad. He was going to help the victims, but suddenly the soldiers arrested him. They tied him and tortured him and the soldiers said "you are the one who supports the Shan rebel group" and my father tried to explain to

them about this. They didn't listen and the leader of the soldiers picked up his knife and sliced my father's arm and his face. We couldn't do anything.

For me, I was crying and wanted my mother to help my father and many of the villagers they couldn't do anything and we were looking for help at that time. That night we didn't sleep and the soldiers didn't release my father and wanted him to accept that he had supported the Shan army, but he said "I don't know what you are talking about." After that night the soldier killed my father. Before the soldier killed him, my father looked at me and said "if I have to die, don't stay here, try to find the way to escape from here and educate yourself." And I saw him when the soldier killed him and his face full of the blood and my father called to me "my son, don't forget about what I told you" and he called "my son, my son, don't worry."

After the worst time happened to us, only two months later my mother was sick when we went to stay in the city. We were lacking food and we didn't have a home to stay and didn't know how to live in the city. Many villagers got sick and one of them was my mother. She was suffering and we didn't have money to buy medicine for her. One day I wanted to help my mother and I went into the city and tried to earn some money to buy medicine. I went to see the rich people in the city and one said to me "if you want to get money please send this box to the guide who stays at the west of the city and don't open the box." I was happy that I would get money and help my mother.

While I walked to the west of the city I didn't open it and I put the box into my bag. When I reached the one who he wanted me to send the

box to, I gave the box to him and he gave me 200 kyat. He opened the box and said to me "do you know what this is?" I said "I don't know, sir" and he said "this is heroin powder and if the soldiers see it they will put you in the jail." I looked at him and I ran away from him and went back to my community.

While I was walking on the road, about six o'clock, I saw one of the police and he said to me "where have you been?" I said "I went to the temple, sir." And he looked at me "you're not city boy, are you?" I said to him "no sir, I just came here two months ago." And he tried to ask me many questions but I could not answer. He said "what is in your pocket?" I said "I don't have any thing, let me go home." I said like that but he didn't care and he used his hand and put it into my pocket and he took my money 100 kyat. I said "don't take it, I will buy medicine for my mom" but he said "I don't care and if you tell other people I will kill you and your mother" and I could do nothing. He looked at me and said "go to your home." After that I went and I was afraid, I didn't tell anybody and I gave my money, 100 kyat, to my sister and wanted her to buy the medicine for my mother the next day at the market day .

That night we slept under a tree in the tent. Before I fell asleep, my mother said to me "my son don't forget your promise that you gave to your father and don't worry about me. I think after this I will send you to the Shan resistance to go to the other area and study." I said to her "I don't want to stay away from you; I want to stay with you forever." No sooner had I said that, her voice was silent and my sister and I fell asleep. That night I was so tired and I didn't feel anything myself, also my sister.

In the morning, about 6 o'clock, we woke up and my sister and I went to ask our mother about her illness. When we opened her blanket her eyes were not closed and her face looked white and when we put our hand on her chest, her heart had stopped beating. We shouted to the other villagers and they came and looked and said "your mother has died." My sister and I came to my mother's body and cried and after that the villagers and my uncle carried my mother's dead body to be buried. They dug the hole and put her into the ground.

Three months after she had died, many people didn't want to stay in the city. The youth and some others escaped from the city to the countryside to go and farm their crops. They tried to plant the opium to sell to the city and by this way many people could survive and they didn't need to take care of the opium for along time and also it was easy to sell too.

I decided I no longer wanted to stay without my parents; I could not live alone like that. I wanted to become a soldier and to take revenge for my parents. I went to see my uncle while we stayed in the countryside. I told him "I want to be a soldier, if I stay here one day I will become soldier in SPDC." He answered to me "good, I think you should do that. As you know I can not take care of both of you, I think for your sister I will look after her and if you want I will send you to the Shan soldiers tomorrow." I said thanks to him and at that time my sister stayed in the city with her friends.

The next day I woke up and my uncle asked me "are you ready?" I said "yes." He said "let's go" and I picked up my bag and followed him and in my mind at that time was full of anger and I wanted to hold the gun and kill the Burmese soldier, do as they did to us. We

walked though the jungle and we shouted and we didn't think the Shan rebel group would hear us but they did.

They came and talked with us and said "why did you call us?" and my uncle replied "I want to request you to look after this child, he doesn't have anyone left. Please take him with you." The Shan soldier said "too young for us, however, even though he can not carry the gun we will send him to the border one day and he will have chances to study and he will come and help his community one day." My uncle and I were so happy. Before my uncle left, I said to him "please tell my sister, don't worry about me and one day I will come back." I said to him "take care my uncle" and he said to me "don't give up and don't forget your promises that you gave your father."

After my uncle left, I stayed with the Shan soldiers for along time, from 1996 to 1998, and we came to the border and walked too far. At that time, it was not only me but also many children that had the same background as me. We came to the Thai-Burma border and the soldier sent us to stay in the Thai temple, in northern Thailand. until 2001 we stayed in Thailand and studied Thai language and English and we were so happy.

After that, we moved to Loi Tai Leng IDP camp and we had school and many students. We didn't have to worry and were not afraid of the Burmese soldiers anymore. Here, the community leader looked after us and we could study without paying the money. Here, we have hope until now. After we graduate here we can go to continue our education so now I don't have to be lonely anymore. Like my teacher Kawn Wan, he can go to attend SSSNY School and come to help his community and one day also he will go inside Shan State and help his community.

That was the story my student told us.

We listened to him telling his story and I asked him "what are you going to do after you graduate? Do you want to be a soldier or study more?" and he looked at me and said "I don't want to be soldier, I want to be a teacher like my teacher and I will go to attend SSSNY school and come here to help my people and our younger brothers." I asked him "do you hear about your sister?" and he shook his head and said "I don't know how to answer, some of the villagers told me she was raped by Burmese soldier and some said she disappeared." But one thing that I wanted to ask him "why do you say you are happy here but I don't see you sleep well like other people?" And he answered to me "since my father's death, the few nights that I can sleep well I see my father's face full of blood." I didn't know how to ask him again, I said to him "don't worry, tomorrow I will bring you with me to the temple and pray and make merit for your father."

That night I could not sleep anymore, I had to write about him and want the world to know what the situation is like in Shan State. I hope my students and other children in our country can sleep well and don't have to startle from their sleeping. This is the real experience of our children in Shan State, what has happened to them from 1996 until now. When will they be free and able to have their basic rights?

By Kawn Wan

28th August 2008

Kachin family structure

Thousands years ago, a tribe who were good at fighting wars stayed at a place called Mongolia. They were nomadic people and they migrated south. By passing one of the world's largest deserts, called Gobi, they arrived to Burma. They are known as Kachin people. They are in the group of Tibeto-Burman people. For Oriental Asia, this is the structure of Kachin families.

7 main groups formed Kachin. They are:

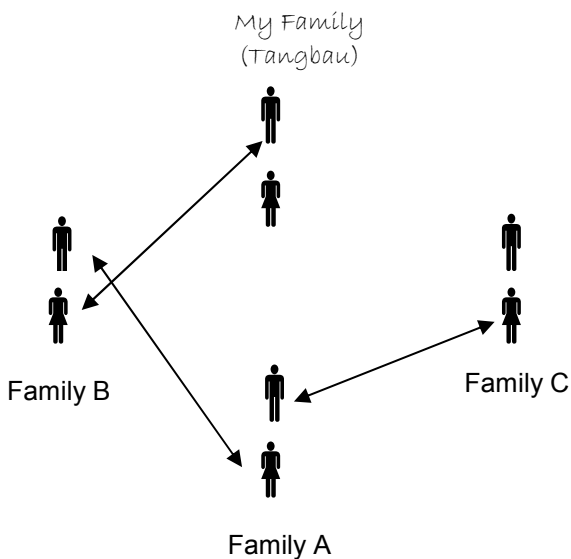
- 1) Rawang
- 2) Lisu
- 3) Lachik
- 4) Zaiwa
- 5) Lhao vho
- 6) Jinghpaw and
- 7) Nung

The relationship between these groups is like a web, interesting and beautiful. For all of these groups we call ourselves "Wunpawng". Under these groups, Kachin has several big family groups. Example, in the Rawang sub-group the family group is "Mayit", in Lhao vho it is "Tangbau". In Jinghpaw it is "Maran" and they are the big families. For me, my family group name is "Tangbau" and I'm in the Lhao vho sub-group.

So, what is the relationship between them? Answer is in 3 sides or trilateral relationship system. The basic foundation of Kachin society is:

- 1) Mayu (in these families the daughters marry into another family group, we call "daughter in law" family)
- 2) Dama (in these families, a son can marry with a girl from a Mayu family. We call "son in law family")
- 3) Kahpu Kanau (The families in this relationship already become brother and sister with each other. Even though they are not relatives in blood, they are brothers and sisters, and so they can never get married with each other)

One family can become all of these positions at the same time because a family can have "Kahpu Kanau", brother sister relationship, with a certain family but a "Mayu", daughter in law relationship, with another family at the same time that it has a "Dama" or son in law relationship with a different family.



- My family has a “Kahpu Kanau”, or brother and sister relationship, with family A and family C, so we cannot marry each other.
- Sons in Family A cannot get married with daughters from Family B, because A is “Mayu” or daughter in law, with family B. However, the sons of family B can get married with the daughters of family A.
- Sons from my family can get married with family B’s daughters because we have “Dama”, son in law, relationship.
- Daughters from my family cannot get married with sons from family B.
- The sons of Family A can get married with daughters of family C, because they have “Dama”, son in law, relationship.
- Families C and B cannot get married with each other because they are “Kahpu Kanau” or brothers and sister family.
It can change depending on another family.

Thus, Kachin people cannot marry as they want, according to Kachin custom. It is a big mistake and society may point badly forever when they break the family relationships. Furthermore, if they have sex outside a marriage, they have to pay “Jahpu”, a fine. Custom then allows them to marry in those cases.

In Kachin culture, everybody can become brother, sister, aunt, uncle, niece, nephew, sister in law, mother in law, father in law, etc even though they haven't met each before and are not relative in blood. Kachin people introduce family name and groups fast the first time they meet. Example, our school advisor Shirley Seng (Kachin Women Association Thailand) and I had never met before and when

we met for the first time we introduced our family groups. After this, she and me became Aunt and Nephew.

We don't call our mother's brothers our uncle. We call them father in law, because they are "Kasa", or father in law- we take the girls from our mother's family, and our father in law (uncle) has to give his daughters in marriage. Also we don't call our father's sister our aunt, because she has to go to another family after she gets married.

Family name is always taken from the father's side. These are some examples of how we call people in our families.

Father's side:

- ♂ ("Wa di" or First uncle, father's brother)
- ♂ ("Wa bawk" or Second uncle, father's brother)
- ♀ ("Moi ba" or Mother in law, father's sister)
- ♀ ("Moi bawk" or Mother in law, father's sister)

Mother's side:

- ♂ ("Sa ba" or father in law, mothers brother)
- ♀ ("Ni ba" or mother in law, mother's sister)
- ♂ ("Sa bawk" or father in law, mother's brother)
- ♀ ("Ni bawk" or mother in law, mother's sister)

In our custom, what we call our father's sister depends on her husband. We call our uncle's wives "Nu ba" or Aunt.

We, all of Kachin people, have practiced these customs for thousands of years. And we are still maintaining our beautiful traditions.

By Maw Le

30th November, 2008

Return to the light

I didn't dare hope that I would be a teacher for the children. I am very poor in education because my father died when I was young. I didn't learn well. After I got out of the school, I worked several jobs, such as a spare car mechanic, a driver, seller, cultivating the crops and construction worker.

In February 2004, I arrived in Fang, northern Thailand. I got a job in a factory picking oranges. While I was working in that place, I saw most of the children in the orchards did not get any education and I wished to teach them immediately. In 2005, a school which was supported by SWAN (Shan Women's Action Network) in Fang needed more teachers. I applied to be a teacher. I got chance to be a teacher at one of the schools located at the temple. Most of the students are displaced people. There are thousands and thousands of Shan people who fled from the middle of Shan State, Burma. Those people fled from extreme conflict, in the area of human rights violations, torture, rape, killing and forced relocation by the SPDC military regime. They looked pale, suffered from malnutrition and were thin.

I enjoyed teaching and taking care of them. Sometimes when we talk about their experience in the past, we are very sad. Most of the children's parents were oppressed, killed, used as forced labor and porters by the SPDC junta.

In 2008, I was one of the SSSNY students. This school will help me to improve my skills and then I can work better in my community

Written by Mr. Short, CLDP participant

24th August 2008

I will never forget in my life

I was born in southern Shan State, Khem Kham one of the small villages in Lawk Zaw township. The population of the village is 1,000; most people in the village couldn't speak Burmese language. They have a primary school, but no teacher came to teach. Nobody wanted to come to teach, because it is very far from town to our village. That's why the people in the village they couldn't speak Burmese, even their children couldn't speak it.

They have no awareness, knowledge and education, working day by day until now. If we want to buy some materials, we have to spend time to travel to the town, about 3 days by cart that is pulled by a pair of ox to get there. The people who were living in the village they were working as farmers. I'd like to share my sad story that I will never forget in my life.

One day, the military came to our village. They stayed in our village for 3 days; while they were staying in our village they took village chickens and vegetables without asking anyone. They took all that they needed from the village. The leader couldn't do anything, because the villagers couldn't speak Burmese very well. At that time I was a little young, even though I could speak Burmese I couldn't help them. During the time that they stayed in our village, we had to pay everything as they ordered. We had no chance to say "No" only "Yes" all the time, we were as their servants and slaves.

Sometimes they forced us to cook and prepare their food for dinner or lunch. Three days later, they had planned to leave the village but one

of the SPDC, who was in the high position, said that, before they left, they needed people as porters to carry their guns, bullets and some materials. One porter per house had to go. After that the village leader asked about the households that didn't have any men, what should they do?

The SPDC said the houses that didn't have any men the women should go. Therefore, one of the families didn't have any brother or husband, they had only girl. At the time it was difficult to decide if she should go. If she didn't go they had to pay money to the military and they had no money. Unfortunately, she had to go to porter as well. The military said if the girl only showed the way to go in the forest that was enough. The reason she decided to go was because she loved her family so much and her family had no money to pay the military.

After they left we heard terrible news from her that one of the military captains raped her. Then she tried to escape from the SPDC military at night time. When she arrived at home about 5am she had heavy bleeding from her vagina and coma in front of her family. She couldn't speak for 3 days; unfortunately at that time in the village there was no medic or midwife so she got shock and anemia. Even though there was no medic or midwife, she got treatment from traditional leader, they tried everything possible and three days later she recovered. When she knew that her mother was next to her, she started to cry. She said that she was afraid of the SPDC military; she tried to explain what she remembered. When village leader heard that, he couldn't help her, he just said sorry to her. He understood the problem, but he didn't have any power.

When her family heard what happened they started to cry. Then she said to her mother "did you know it was very painful, he did me as a dog, I hate him, and my life is gone with bad man. What should I do mom? I don't want to stay in the world anymore, I feel shy to stand in front of many people, and I don't dare to face in front of my friends. What should I do" said the girl. Consequence, 1 month later she tried to kill herself, but luckily her mother saw her. Her mother said "if you want to die you have to kill me first and then you can do as you want". The girl said "I was very shy to face in front of many people" and her mother said "I love you my girl don't care about the other people. We won't reject you; you are the one who I love the most. I couldn't survive without you" said her mother "please don't try to leave me alone." At that time her mother couldn't do anything just gave encouragement as much as she could. And then the girl recovered, but she didn't go anywhere for a long time.

Honestly, everybody was talking about her, when she heard that news she was very sad. And her mother said "don't worry, if we did a good thing they would just talked for 7 days, so even though we have a bad story they will just talk for 7 days too". That's why her medicine was her mother. When I knew about her everything I was very proud of her that she was deciding to live in the world. Even though I couldn't do anything I was very pleased she was alive. She was one of my heroes, I love her and I'm proud of her as my sister. Finally, I want to say that nobody thinks the SPDC military are good, they are worse than ghosts.

By the one who presents the real situation in Shan State,

Homm Noon

Loi Kaw Wan

2nd August 2008

How Our Forests are Decreasing

In our community there are several ways of destroying the forest. Like cutting down the trees for logging, for making charcoal and clearing the forest for farming but logging is the most serious problem.

Logging

Logging is allowed by military, if people give the money for permission to them. The military doesn't care anything about the forest in the ethnic areas, so we can do anything what we want to because the military only cares about the money. The more we destroy the forest, the more military are happy, because when there is less forest, they can clear the ethnic armies easily and have more control in our lives.

Usually, local people cut down the trees just for building the house but now logging has destroyed all the trees around the village. It's a very difficult situation for the villagers to get the trees to build their house. They have to bring from very far away, or if some people have money they could buy from the other person but the price is very high.

They also have some conflict between the car driver and local people because in the rainy season the car always destroys the road and local people always have to repair the road. The military regime doesn't care about the infrastructure. Usually, ten wheeled and six wheeled trucks are running all year, except rainy season. Sometimes when some villagers want to travel to another place and they try to

stop the car, the car doesn't stop and doesn't even look at the villager. When it has happened many times the villagers get angry and shoot the car that they remember with the gun that they have. The villagers didn't really want to kill the driver, they just want the driver to care about their feelings, but when the military hears about that, they punish a lot of villagers around there.

Charcoal

According to the difficulty of electricity and the high price of oil, the people in Burma have to use charcoal, mainly in the cities. I would like to explain a little bit about making charcoal around our village because when I was in Burma I used to work with my father. He has about twenty families of workers. They stay in the forest that is very far from our village. They stay separately. They stay at the place where a lot of trees are around them.

At that time, I was in middle school, but I knew nothing about global warming or the impact on the environment. We destroyed a lot of trees by making charcoal but if we didn't do that other people will do that for sure because the military allowed everybody to destroy the forest if they give the money to them. About ten years ago, charcoal was made by local people in summer time because there are a lot of jobs in rainy season and cold season, but fewer jobs in summer time. Some people make charcoal to get money for daily use but now a lot of workers came to make charcoal. They were brought by some rich people in the village or business men. They work harder than local people and they don't care about the forest because they had come from far away to get the money.

This problem seems like a small problem but actually it's a big problem too. It's difficult to solve this problem if the country is not free but we also need to solve this problem. In my opinion, while we are trying to solve this problem, we also need to solve the political problem too. After the country is free, then we can do reforestation and we can take care of the forest more effectively.

By Moe Aye

28th October 2008

My Bad Dream

The year 1997, the hell year, I'll never forget it. I don't want to remember it, but I can't forget because the horrible pictures were left in my eyes, my memory mind all the time. I was afraid and felt pity with the people who were punished by Burma army. In 1997, I was in 5th standard at my home town, Murng Kung, southern Shan state. At that time, Burmese soldiers relocated people in the villages and countryside to the towns. I saw people carrying their back packs and came into town just like a troop. Many hungry children were crying because they didn't have their meal or food.

The time that they had to relocate was the time to harvest the crops. They left their farms, which were full of green fields of crops. So how can the villages have food to treat their children who were crying for food? It was very difficult for our Shan people who were experts in making a living on the farms. All the things such as lifestyle, literature, culture, which old generation had, were gone with Burmese military soldiers. Most of the people give up their spirit to go back silently to their old place. Someone who was unlucky lost their objective and disappeared forever.

I've heard about a girl who went to pick up some vegetables in the forest that disappeared and no one knew where she was and what did she do? All of the people in her community and her family worried about her so much. After three days, villages found her corpse at the town gate and had seen that there were many injuries on her body, just like she was raped. After this matter happened, people were afraid to go back to their old place again.

A short time passed and they heard news that everyone could go back to their home but if something happened the military couldn't protect them. So they couldn't decide if they live or die or leave. If they live they'll die or be hungry, if they left it was too hard for them to work or they may be hungrier.

By Nang Sao Tai

8th October 2008

Unrecognized Nationality

I was born in a small village; in Southern Shan State, but my family and I moved to the Shan-Thai border under control of Mong Tai Army, (MTA) which was led by Khun Sa and surrendered to the SPDC in 1996. I grew up with the changing situation all the time; there (the Burma side) I had chance to go to school (primary Shan school) but the school opened only three or four years, it had to close down because of an attack by Burmese soldiers.

After MTA surrendered to SPDC, most of villagers, also my family, fled to the Thai side. I grew up without identity and was stateless, unrecognized as a Burmese or Thai citizen; I didn't know what rights I had. I didn't have any ID card, even though I was born in Burma, I didn't register for a Burmese ID card. Burma's military regime doesn't take care of its own people; instead they force people to relocate and torture and rape them. After a year passed, I got a chance to attend the school again but it was the community schools set up for displaced children. Even though I applied to school, I was not asked for any document about myself. I studied in this school until I finished 6th grade because the school provides until only 6th grade. Even though I finished the 6th grade, the school could not give me the certificate that meant I could not continue my high school. If I wanted to study in Thai official school I had to begin from the 1st grade because I didn't have certificate. I did not have any chance to do so I decided to leave the school.

After I left the school, I did not have anything to do. I just stayed at home. One day, I asked my brother to go to work in the town. He said

to me "you need to have some kind of ID card to work or pass the Thai police check point". His speech made me think about my situation. I asked him "how can I get an ID card?" He asked me "did you use to register for any kind of hill tribe card?" I told him that I used to register but I did not know how to get it, that made me think how could I ask for my ID card? Then I went to ask for advice from my cousin about my ID card.

The next day I and my cousin, who can speak some Thai language, went to the immigration office to ask for hill tribe ID card. It wasn't easy; we didn't get any answer on the first day. We could not do anything, instead we found someone (in the immigration office) to help us, but we had to pay them a bribe. Some day we went to the immigration office without any hope. We spent almost five months to get only Hill Tribe Card.

It says that we are allowed to stay in this district only temporarily, to visit other places in Thailand we have to ask for permission. If we get the permission it gives us only 7 days to travel and we have to come back in the limited time. For working, we get three months a time and then we have to go back to the immigration office and ask again. We also need to have the employer to register us, if not we are not registered; we risk being caught or fined by police. Also there are some laws that owning property is banned, we can not own our land and we can not buy a motorbike. If we want to buy a motorbike, we need to ask for the person who has Thai ID card to buy for us. If they want to take our motorbike, they can take it easily because they are the owner, so we can not do anything because we don't have a right to own it. And also, even though we have motorbike, we are not allowed to drive because we don't have the driving license. Our hill tribe card

can not ask for driving license. If the police catch us driving, we will be fined 2,000 baht or more.

When I got the permission, I went to the town to find the job. At that time I didn't really know how I could get a job. Fortunately, a friend of mine told me that he could help me to find it. It was so difficult; almost all the places we went into wrote an application sign and the first question they that asked was "do you have Thai ID card? If not we can't employ you." I was very serious and worried. We spent almost one month looking for a job. Finally, I got a job as a waiter in Thai restaurant. I had to work about eleven hours per day and got 3,000 baht (about US\$85) per month for salary and had to rent my own room. And every time I had to stay in high risk and avoid the police. If we got arrested or fined by police, we have to pay them 2,000 baht so that means that month we don't have any money.

Even worse, more and more people fled to Thailand because of the economic mismanagement of the Burmese military regime. They hoped to get better life standard, earn more money to support their families inside Shan State, but what they have faced is they have to hide for survival, risk being arrested and deported to their terrible situation with horrible treatment by Burmese military regime. And without some kind of ID or work permit cards, they are employed as construction workers, house maids, waiters or waitresses with low payment and long hours, working every day. I want to ask "Is it our fault that we have less knowledge? Is it our fault that we don't know and understand the law? Is it our fault that we have an unrecognized nationality and are stateless?"

By A Border Man

25th August 2008

Horrible life in Kayan Land

I would like to introduce about Kayan ethnic people. Our Kayan ethnic people have lived in Burma for thousand of years, but Kayan people were divided into four parts or areas by the British colonialists. Most of the Kayan people lived in Southern Shan State, some are in Eastern Mandalay division, some are in Northern Karen state and some are in Western Karenni state. The Kayan population is estimated to be approximately 300,000 people and they are believed to have descended from Mongolians. Like the other ethnicities, Kayan ethnic people have been living in Burma since ancient times.

They have their own history, own languages, own culture and own economic system of life. Actually, Kayan ethnic people are simple, peace lovely people, honest and pure. But the SPDC took power and they sent their military to ethnic areas, using their weapons and persecution. Torture, killings, suppression, oppression, and exploitation were the order of the day until now. The Kayan ethnic people were far from the city and trade and transport were difficult. Their education and healthcare were decreasing in many ways. SPDC have no sympathies, they are only greedy.

Therefore, the local people have no chance to choose their life and they are obeying SPDC's rule. In addition, SPDC are taking out the local women and they are using force on them and burning their villages. The SPDC mind has only wanted to do genocide against our ethnic minority groups. How much pain for our mind? We want to ask to them, "Where is the SPDC duty to protect the country?" The SPDC want to influence the local people with their power and they are greedy

to get more power. It is difficult for our local people to find food. They have to try growing crops and they don't care about rain and weather, only seeing their crops growing.

Now the climate is changing and their food is not enough. Nevertheless, they don't give up their life and they try to grow crops for export, chili and Pha La crops (it is a kind of seed, good for medicine). They get their crops and need to exchange for rice. They have to go to the city and change for food to eat, but SPDC army are waiting near the road and they stop the transportation. They talk like this; if you want to export the rice you can't export other goods. They allowed us to carry only one kind of thing. That is very savage for local peoples' lives, because they wanted to eat rice, so they have to go to the city and they will sell. If the SPDC does this, how do they get money and rice? If we export only crops, we get money. We can't get more money, because they disagree with the exporting of rice. I think that they want the ethnic groups to leave and go to other places.

More than that, now they take all of our native land and want the Kayan people to move to another place. Also SPDC did not allow using land for our shifting cultivation or agriculture, because they wanted to expand their land for their new city, at Pyinmana (NaPyi Daw) palace. They are expanding their land into our Kayan area; they make many military compounds for security of their palace. So, what can the Kayan people do? Where can they go? What way can they grow crops for the survivors live? The SPDC were also taking out our stronger male villager's to carry their goods as a porter. In the village only, old men, women and children are left. Who is going to feed them? Most of the time, the villagers have to porter for the SPDC, a few times a year. So in their family, it is difficult to find food to

feed their children as well. This was like a house with no owner and SPDC come freely in the villages and take out native Kayan women and torture, rape and kill them. Therefore, many children became father and motherless children and stay with their grandparents.

The SPDC have destroyed our ethnic groups, not only now but they also destroyed our future leaders and new generations, because parents were tortured and killed by SPDC and so their children get no education, no parents, no hope for their life. The SPDC are preparing to destroy our native Kayan people by force, step by step. The local people have no chance to choose the right way. SPDC have done that and now our country has many children and villagers who don't have enough food.

Therefore, they have so many health problems, malnutrition and they get diseases. Now the country is not peaceful and safe, because of the system of government. They should change the government system. So now, how can we change the SPDC and what way can be used for the ethnic brothers and sisters? How can we take back our property and our land?

By Amego

About Akha People

First, I don't really know where Akha come from and also nobody really knows, but most people said that many Akha people live in Laos, China, Kengtung in Shan State and also in Thailand. Most people in the world don't know who the Akha are and they don't care how Akha people live, because Akha is a small group and most people in the world never heard the name of Akha people. Also Akha people don't share who they are. So, now I would like to share about Akha people.

They like to live on the mountain and farm. They don't have school for study so they start to work or get married when they are young. They are Animist and they have many important festivals. They believe in spirits, however, now many of them become Buddhist, Christian or another religion more and more because they live between different religions. A few young people will forget their own culture because they study different cultures or religions and most of them become another religion. However they don't study their own culture or religion. They don't care how their religion or culture will become in the future, if they don't study now and after all ancient people die. Some of them become another religion because they have no men or boys in their families. Ancient people believe if they have no men or boys they can't be animist because women or girls can't offer the food to spirits when they have important day, so some of them become another religion because of that. When I was young my family also was Animist, but after my father died we could not be Animist, because we have no men or boys in our family. So now my family is Buddhist. This is about Akha people that I know.

By Om Seng

24th August 2008

Horrible Memories

I was born in an area which is close to Burmese battalions 423 and 424 Southern Shan State in Burma. There were 500 houses and 2500 people. Firstly, in my village local people were happy and comfortable with their life; they have their own shifting cultivation, trading systems, tradition, culture, language and religion. The village was surrounded by many kinds of trees, mountains and lakes; the village was so beautiful, serene and calm. There was no conflict, disorder and fighting amongst each other. The local people had no worry or anxious conditions.

However, unfortunately, in 2001, the Burmese military came and settled and the situation was changing ruthlessly. They constructed so many camps by forcing local people violently and also using their merciless power. Furthermore, the conflict was occurring between SPDC and ethnic minority rebel groups due to extreme political oppression and economic hardship.

At that time I was 13 years old and grade 4. I had witnessed that the military troops forced my father and other local people to carry their ammunitions and load. They were treated very harshly and cruelly without being given food. Also I had seen many people who were unable to carry military materials beaten severely and tortured in several ways. They were beaten in front of family, there were many women crying including their child when they were seeing their father suffering from this. It was so terrible; I did not see my father for 3 months. I was so distraught and disappointed. Only my mother had to take responsibility for family, so how could my mother

support our family? We had lost our occupation. My family faced serious problems for daily survival; there was no one to help my mother.

Moreover, in 2005, the situation in my village deteriorated. There were serious problems for local people. There were numerous human right abuses such as deprivation of education, land confiscation, forced labor, rape, slave labor, forcible relocation, arbitrary arrest and intimidation using torture. It was happening in every area. They seized many land without paying compensation, the SPDC told the local people that they would run the development for local people. The result did not come true; instead they made their own profit.

The military controlled the main lake which is called TITAN, this lake was owned by local people since ancestor time. This lake was most significant and vital for them; they depended on this lake. Military took and irrigated the lake back to their camps. Also, they confiscated several lands based on the lake side. Most people lost their agriculture and farming. Annually the local people have to pay tax and distribution of their crops. It was impossible for local people to make income. If local people could not fulfill the SPDC command, they gave ferocious punishment and coarse treatment in evil conditions. I was very upset when I saw this kind of situation. Many local people were trafficked into certain types of workplace such as dangerous work, paving the way or building road. The local people were very vulnerable. People who could not tolerate and endure that hardship fled and migrated to other hillsides. Some fled to neighboring countries and started their new life there.

In addition, I left my village after I graduated grade 7, because my parents could not support and afford for further education owing to

our family financial status. In school there were insufficient materials and resources were not fully available for students. The school fees were so expensive. The teaching method used in school was not student centered; the students have to focus on the teacher or lectures. Student participation in classroom education was totally ignored. It was nearly impossible for students to critique or contribute to their own knowledge and experience in the classroom. At the basic education level, teacher did not empower students to ask questions about their studies to expose critical thinking and participation. Teachers used corruption, exploitation and discrimination. Only Burmese students or rich people could get the right to pass exam easily and get a good understanding of teaching lectures and what they have learnt, because they gave money to teacher.

There was no school that was constructed by government, for local people's free education. Instead local people had to build the school themselves using bamboo; it could not run and be sustainable for several years. However, local people still pay tax. It was really difficult for poor students to get the same right. They have learnt the subject by heart and memorized it in their mind. Teachers strictly prohibited student initiated discussion, seminars on specific education subject. Also teachers did not encourage the use of personal interpretation or way of critical thinking from outside classroom lectures.

Therefore, benefit of real thing, understanding meaning, general application of skill, subject competence, knowledge empowerment, numeracy, literacy and improved communication skill creativity could not be developed for students. Not only had I quit the school,

but also other poor students who faced the same situation as me. As school fees were sky high, many families were reluctant to send their children to school. There was no effective and useful formation to develop local community and personal sustainable development.

Finally, now I am in exile, I attempt to gain further education and various skills that positively benefit my community. I will not give up for my people, I have learnt and understood human rights, justice, democracy, environment, international news, etc from SSSNY. This school opened my eyes and brought me from darkness to light. I have great aims and goals for my community. I will promote and work for my people strengthening their knowledge, education, and capacity building. I will guide them to work hand in hand for their people, for establishing the way to democracy, freedom, and justice.

By Khun Doe

12th October 2008

The Rights That We Can't Enjoy

When the other children in the world play and they can stay with their family until they get old,

When the other children in the world sleep well with warm heart from their parents, in the free countries, and have the child right to protect them,

When we look on the Shan land, why can the military men who have the guns kill other people as they want?

When other children in the world are sleeping, why do you have to staying in the forest and let the mosquitoes bite you and no mosquito nets?

When the children in the world go to the school, why do you have to escape from your own land and family to the deep jungle?

While other children enjoy the happy time and happy in the school, why do you have to stay in the dirty area and have no help from other countries?

When you cry do you have someone to give the shoulder and let you cry on it? Which articles of rights do you have in your country?

When the other students have the good, soft shoe to wear, why do you have to stand on the landmine and lose your leg? This is your nature.

When you stay in the darkness like this, who will come and light the way for you?

I want to hold my hand out to the windows of the world- please come and pull my hand and give the wind for the children in Shan State, let them fly on the sky like other children in the world.

By Kawn Wan

Sunday, August, 10, 2008

A short time in SSSNY

I heard about this school for a long time and I never thought that I would have a chance to study in this school because, I thought I didn't have enough ability to follow what teachers teach. After my friends graduated from this school, I also wanted to be like them. I wanted to help my community and I thought my friends tried many times so, I will try, if I don't try how can I know how much ability I have? I thought like this and I tried. When I took the exam, it was very difficult for me, I didn't know a lot of vocabulary and I could not understand all the questions. When teacher interviewed me, I didn't understand all; I also did not know the meaning of what I wanted to say so I needed to use hands or actions. I hoped teacher would understand what I meant. I thought that even though I didn't pass this time I won't give up, I will try until I can do it and I was a lucky person of over a hundred people who took exam from this school. When I heard that I passed and could attend this school I was very happy.

When I arrived to this school, it was difficult for me. I have never spoken English to many people. Some of my friends could not speak Shan and I could not speak Burmese too. I also could not understand everything that the teachers said and the questions they asked. I tried day by day and it is improving day by day. I can speak to my friends easier. Even though we have each other for a short time, it will be with me forever. We have teachers and staff so even though it is a small land in Thailand, we are happy in it.

I meet many ethnic groups. We can share our background and our experiences. We love each other like brother and sister. We help each

other and work together. Only in this school we can improve our skill and know that many people and many ethnic groups in Shan State are suffering from SPDC. Even though it is just a short time, we can know each other and support each other. If our time is over we need to go back to our communities and work for our people. Even though we don't want to leave each other, we need to leave with tears. The tears that we lose are important for us, they come from our mind and encourage each other to keep going on for our responsibility, try hard for our people, use knowledge that we have learnt from this school.

For me, I am very happy that I can study in this school and meet all of my friends. I never thought I would have today, even though SSSNY is a small land, for me it is a big school and bigger than schools in other countries. I also thank people who support our school very much. I believe SSSNY will bring more and more light into the darkness. I won't forget that I have spent nine months of my life in this school.

This school is like a candle that gives me a light and makes me see which way I need to walk and how can I help my people. If I graduate from this school I will help our people as much as I possibly can. When I am so tired, I see the children who are suffering from the SPDC and don't have parents; they live in my village. They can't even remember their parent's faces, they respect the teachers as their parents and they only get love warmly from their teachers. I think they are waiting for me to teach them. They are hoping somebody will give them the light. I will give them the light as this school gave me. Even though there are many ethnic groups and it is hard to teach I will try my best. When I think about the people who live in my village, most of them they have never gone to school, they cannot write and read their own

languages, even their name they can't write. In our village we try to have training in the summer to teach them how to read and write. I think this is one way that I can help them.

I will also never forget all my teachers, I want them to know that everywhere they are I won't forget them and all of you will be in my mind forever. Thank you, you taught me to walk on the right way; because of all of you I have a good way today. I hope you will all stay healthy.

By Charisa

12th September 2008

Steps of My Life

My name is Kham Khur Lake. I am a 21 years old. Who is interested in politics and system of government? I am going to tell you about how I became interested in politics. Even though I never thought it before, many things that I have learnt from my mistakes.

I was the boy who was always a problem. I use my life in the past to compare with today. I was a black sheep in my family, before my life was getting worse and worse. I used to be a good boy and a good student, but when I grew up I opened a door of my heart to follow my friends, and then I couldn't control myself. The situation surrounding me affected my life. When my age was between 15 and 18 years old, I was very bad. I didn't listen to anybody. I did as I wanted to do. I didn't care how sad my family would be if I was doing wrong. I had never thought that. I was happy with the way that I was walking.

The way that I used to walk was smoking, drinking and fighting. Wherever they were fighting I was always there. I was in a gang before. I liked to fight. I always wanted to be the winner. I had shot one person before when I was 17 years old. I didn't know if he died or not. I was sad until today. I tried to change my life many times. I couldn't get up from the bad dream. I had always done bad and bad. When my age was 19 I started to think I wanted to get out of this terrible life. The reason was one of my best friends had died, because of fighting. Before he died he told me to get out of the way that I was walking. If not my life will end like him? After that I tried to run off this way. It was very difficult. I was trying and trying.

In 2008 I was accepted by SSSNY School to study more. I had learnt many things and many subjects that I have never heard of before. I was starting to know our Shan history. What happened to our State? How many people have to suffer violations from SPDC? I became interested in what happened to the ethnic groups in Shan State. The situation in Burma's changed my life; they showed me I want to continue struggling for freedom. At SSSNY School, I felt pain when I saw the people who are suffering. I felt like I had never felt before. It makes me want to cry, when I hear somebody cry because nobody listens to them. Another point, I know myself. I know who I am. Which country is belonging to me, as a Shan nationality? I know what I have to do. I had never known before that my life can be used to help my country instead of doing nothing. It is because I didn't know or feel that there are many people suffering.

Shan and ethnic groups have never had chance to speak out what the military did to them, the SPDC will kill them right away. Even though they didn't fight against Burmese military they still kill ethnic people in Burma. They have to suffer and suffer. I would like people around the world to know what the Burmese military are doing to them. They have a right but they can't enjoy it in Burma. Even though they have mouth and hands they can't do anything or speak as they want. People in Burma, they don't even breathe fresh air; they have to breathe the smoke of houses burnt by SPDC. People don't know what the air of freedom is. They never learn; they don't have a school. No education for them. That's why we can't wait for freedom, we have to struggle for the freedom.

Now I am very happy to have an opportunity to write about ethnic groups in Burma. Our opportunity is coming now. I hope you will

keep what we have written in this book from the other stories of my friends. I hope you will keep in your minds and discuss with your friends or your family about what SPDC did to the people in Burma. Also, there are many people still suffering in Burma. I am sure that the people who are suffering want to say the same as us, but they don't have the way. We would like to help them because we have a chance to study and we can try many ways to help them. Also, they are human and we can speak on behalf of the people in the same country as us.

The country of Burma needs many Shan and other ethnic people to take back their land. The education is very low in our Shan group and the other ethnic nationalities. There are many people that wait for help. We have our own land or state but we are not allowed to live in peace. Some children know how to read and write but not in their own language. We are not allowed to wave our flag in our country. There are many Shan and ethnic youths finding a place to have education. Some ethnic groups have to live in the jungle to study. Education is very important for Shan and other ethnic groups in Burma. You have got knowledge and information about education in Burma from some of our students that have written about education in this book.

There are so many ways that you can support us wherever you are and whatever your job is, please tell everyone the stories or situations that have been written in this book. Please support Shan people and ethnic people who are suffering. Please don't give up on the principles of non-violence, democracy and human rights. The people in Shan State want to live in a country that will allow us to work peacefully to help each other. They want government that they trust and can

work for a better future. They want education. We know helping them is something that will not be easy to achieve but we won't give up and we will join hands and work for change in Burma.

By Kham Khur Lake

About the School

The School for Shan State Nationalities Youth (SSSNY) was founded in 2001 by a group of youth from Shan State, including award-winning activist and one of TIME Magazine's 2005 Asia's Heroes, Nang Charm Tong. Unlike other displaced ethnic nationalities who have access to established refugee camps, refugees from Shan State are not recognized as refugees by UNHCR and therefore have difficulty accessing basic support such as food, shelter, health and education.

SSSNY offers a 9-month in-depth Social Justice Education Program, as well as a shorter 3-month Community Leadership Development Program, for displaced Shan State youth to provide them with the basic skills and education necessary to take an active role in the struggle for human rights and democracy in Burma.

Since 2001, 260 youth from Shan State, Burma, have graduated from SSSNY. They are now actively participating in social and political change in Burma.

For more information about SSSNY, please visit our website at www.sssny.org



Education is a Right

"I just went to school only 2 years. When I was a child the Burmese soldiers came into my village and burnt down my village. After that our school was closed. The people in my village went to hide in the jungle."

"Today I wanted to write about the story of myself when I was young, to read and remind me in the future, when I am older, so that I won't forget what had happened to me in the past."

"Deep inside their hearts and minds, the people of Shan State want to be free from the military regime. They want to live in peace and spend their life in a peaceful land, making a living in agriculture. Our hope is for Shan State and other states to have freedom and peace."

Candles in the Dark are a collection of stories from the diaries of students of School for Shan State Nationalities Youth. They offer a rare glimpse of life growing up inside Shan State, a land of rich cultural and ethnic diversity torn apart by half a century of brutal military rule.

All proceeds from this book will go towards the academic programs run by the School for Shan State Nationalities Youth.