

V-STAY GAZETTE

February, 2006

Every Little Thing's Gonna Be Alright

Still here after almost five months and I haven't quite figured out yet if it has felt like more or less. But for the first time, and with just one more month and a half to go, I'm starting to feel glad I'll be returning home. There are a lot of things going on down here; a lot of changes and worries. Not only here with all the roommates gone or leaving shortly, and the new housing situation, but also doubts and questions about my life when I return. What will I be doing with my life? But the experience is still making it worth my while. If not only for the sunsets and for watching my wooden creations grow and take shape under my fingers day by day at work, at least for the amazing people I

get to meet with their simple and positive attitude towards life.

For instance, let me tell you about Lisa. She's one of my new neighbors, a Canadian girl in her thirties. A couple of days ago we were talking about Thailand, and she gave me a glimpse of her life so far. She managed to get your average dream life after leaving high school: a well paying job, big fancy house in a beautiful city, two cars, a loving husband, even a god darned perfect Labrador. Her life was cut-out from a TV commercial. But it just didn't make her happy, and at the end of the day, she found herself wanting.

So one day she broke up her relationship, sold her house and cars, left the dog with her ex, packed her bags and left. She's traveled a bit, working in different places, and ended up here in Thailand living for a couple of months on some savings. She's happy. And to every question I asked in awe and admiration, she would reply with a broad smile, "I used to worry about that too but now I find myself realizing that at the end of the day, it's alright."

And as I watch a Bob Marley tune spring to life, although still chewing on questions about life and the future, I leave believing it more - that whatever happens, it can be alright.



V-STAY has been such an adventure for us all. Each roommate has experienced so much, including the popular tourist attraction...THE ELEPHANT SAFFAR. Here, Peter (Australia) and Ana (Portugal) explore the Khao Lak forests on an elephant!

~Ana, Portugal

Volume 1, Issue 3

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Volunteers' stories

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- What it's really like to teach English.
- A final goodbye!
- Ali's unforgettable memory.

Here's The Story Morning Glory.

Does the title sounds like an Oasis song? It should!

It is a great feeling to know that you have the weekends to relax, take time off and gear up for yet another week of construction. This weekend was quite the opposite.

I'm in Bangkok at the moment and my head is spinning from yesterday. Not because I knocked my head on the bathroom floor a few days ago and got 20 stitches on my eyebrow (photos available upon request), but because yesterday I went to the first of a 2-day music festival and had the most incredible time.

I came up to Bangkok with 9 other volunteers just for the weekend, especially for the concerts. It's well worth it as yesterday's headliners were OASIS and FRANZ FERDINAND! Today there are the Futureheads, Stereophonics and Placebo, as well as some Thai bands with awful names such as Ebola, hmmm....

"Ali and I went to the stage and asked the roadie for (and got) the Oasis's set- list and drumsticks...god...I tremble as I type!"

My friends and I purchased the cheapest 'C' section tickets. By midway through the day, assisted by blue make-up, our group soon had 'B' section stamps on our wrists. By Franz Ferdinand, thanks to some generous strangers lending us their ticket stubs and transferring their stamps, our group was in the 'A' section where we enjoyed Franz & Oasis in true heavenly bliss.

I'll seldom let an opportunity pass me by, so at the end of the Oasis set Ali and I went to the stage and asked the roadie for (and got)...THE..... Oasis's set-list and drumsticks..... god..... I tremble as I type!

Oh, and then we just walked backstage, met Ian Brown, chatted to him for a bit. I told him the bandage on my eyebrow was from a Blow-fish biting off my eyebrow ring when I was snorkeling (which is impossible as it wouldn't be able to get through the mask and I've never had an eyebrow ring) and got his autograph. And then, as we wished to have Oasis sign our cherished drumsticks, we asked the security guard, "Oasis ti ni?" (where is Oasis). He said, "Dusit Thani hotel." I had to draw the line there - there was more fun to be had until the next day.

I've been having a pretty great time, and I'm glad its not going to be coming to an end any time soon. Last week I visited Laos and in about a months time, Ali and I will be heading to Pakistan to assist with the Earthquake relief effort (we're doing a fundraising appeal, so please visit <http://www.pakistanvolunteers.wordpress.com>). That's it from me -

Oh!!! the memories!



Ban Lampi 6th grade students taught Koura (USA) a traditional Thai dance during their lunch break one afternoon! Koura participated in V- STAY for three months, teaching at Ban Lampi School and building furniture at Thaikea.

From left to right; Carrie, Jessica, Jenny, Larry, Ana and Adam join forces at Tsunami Volunteer Center's Wednesday Quiz Night. Unfortunately, even our team of 7 didn't place in the top three (shhh don't tell, your only allowed 4 team members).



The Honest Truth About Teaching at Ban Lampi

"How does taking a break from work for 4 months and doing charity work in Thailand sound?"

This was the question that I asked myself before actually taking off for 4 months from my responsibilities as an engineer and booking a flight to Bangkok on the 2nd of December, 2005. There were pros and cons, as usual. But after being here for nearly 3 months, I would say it was a great experience and I think that everybody should have this opportunity.

Being here and actually experiencing the culture, the people and being surrounded by nature in such a beautiful place like Phang Nga is really rewarding. But teaching is not only rewarding, but a challenge.

I never taught children before, let alone, teaching English. I never thought of myself as being really good in the English language or any language. Just take a look at my English grades and you will know. I thought I was not cut out for this (maybe I'm still not). But I gave teaching a try...

The first thing that I noticed during my first time at Ban Lampi School was how quickly the kids warmed up to me. They were giving me hugs by the end of my first day! "What wonderful angels were they?" or so I thought.

The truth came out when I really began teaching them on my own for the very first few weeks. They were quite uncontrollable but nevertheless, tolerable. Classes after lunch were usually headaches for me. It was difficult to

get them to sit and listen. These were minor challenges that made teaching a bit more interesting. Having to give all my attention to so many students at once was no easy task either.

Adding to the challenge was the language barrier. Not knowing the Thai language made teaching harder but never impossible. Now along with other non-Thai speaking teachers, I am an expert at communicating through body language and drawings. With the aid of a Thai-English dictionary too, learning Thai and communicating to them was a bit easier.

"How does taking a break from work for 4 months and doing charity work in Thailand sound?"

A thing that I like about Thai kids is their respect that they show to their teachers. Kids being kids can be uncontrollable at times; running around, kicking the soccer ball whenever

I'm teaching. But I never experienced a situation where I had to use a cane to discipline the children. A little raise of my voice or a stern stare usually did the job. But the "wais" or bows that they do as a manner of greeting reminded me from time to time that this is a culture that emphasizes seniority and respect for the elders.

As for my personal relationship with my students, I am going to miss them. I will always remember their jokes about me being "stingy" for not giving them enough stickers or that I was "crazy". And I would retort back in Thai saying that they were "smelly" because they didn't shower. These exchanges always stirred smiles on their faces. Sweet indeed were my rewards as a teacher. I am going to miss this. ~ Larry, Malaysia

Left: Students at Ban Lampi School are not camera shy. May (Australia) and Carrie (USA) both taught at Ban Lampi during their traineeship!



Right: While working at Thap Tawan construction site, Jessica (USA) learns how to lay bricks. Days later, her wall was still standing. Surprise, surprise!

Volunteers- Serving Thailand And Yourself

V-STAY's emphasis is placed on mutual benefits: empowering and providing experience for youth volunteers while helping local communities recover.

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“We would
rather act than
react!”

Thank You, One Last Goodbye!

As some of you already know, this will be the last (yep, final) issue of the V-STAY Newsletter. The program is coming to a close soon; volunteers are saying goodbye to friends that have become more like family, it is a bitter sweet goodbye.

And with this final issue, on behalf of all the volunteers that have participated in V-STAY, we would like to thank all the people that have made this program possible. From AI ESEC to World Youth Peace Summit to 4Kali.org to TVC...from the bottom of our hearts, we thank you. Because of this program, hundreds of people's lives were touched and not just those we helped, even us, as volunteers! We will walk away with much more than when we came. Thank you so much. We truly appreciate all your time, energy and efforts!



Cheers!

V- STAY Volunteers

A Completed Project and an Unforgettable Memory

A project was recently started at TVC - to paint and supply benches and tables to a Burmese school in Ban Nam Kem. The school children were working off the floor due to the fact that they had no furniture to use.

The project involved 10 benches and tables, painting them with an undercoat and then bringing 21 Burmese children ages 5-12 years-old into TVC for one day; letting them express themselves artistically on the benches and tables. The aim was not only to give them furniture, but also to provide them with a day full of activities and laughs.

I was asked to help with the day of painting, which ended up being an incredible experience. As I was the only volunteer there who had worked a bit with kids before, I ended up having to entertain the kids and lead most of the day. It was a complete success where all 10 tables were painted using sponge stamps, finger paints and stencils (which the kids loved).

There was one child who was deaf and could not communicate well with the other children, teachers and volunteers. He was very shy in the beginning but by the end of the day, he was quite expressive and creative. The table he worked on was extremely imaginative, fun to help him with and see as a finished product. It was amazing to see the difference that the opportunity to express himself through art had on this child. He could communicate without needing sound.

The whole day was a complete success and I was exhausted at the end (especially after multiple rounds of playing 'heads, shoulders, knees and toes') but was really glad to have been involved in the one-day project.

~ Ali, Australia

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