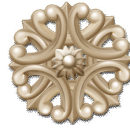


# Travel Journal

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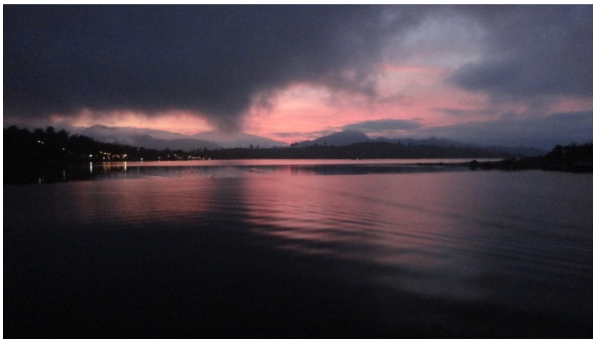
## The Bridge

### Little River Kwai Mission

November 28 – December 3, 2012

**When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. (Isaiah 43:2 NIV)**

It was almost dawn in the town of Sangkhlaburi, Western Thailand. Purple crimson rays of light just began to permeate above the softly serrated mountains surrounding Lake Vajiralongkorn, created in the 1980s by damming the upper part of the Khwae Noi River (“Little River Kwai”). Up early due to jet lag on this first working day of the mission, I found myself walking on the oldest handmade wooden bridge, *Saphan Mon*, in Thailand. Only a few Mon village merchants lined the bridge entrance lit by dim street lights. As the bridge made faint squeaks with every footstep in the tranquil darkness, I was transported back to a bygone time centuries ago. Midway crossing the bridge, amazing hues of the sun began to color the sky as if God was painting with his hands right before me, revealing the greatness of his creation.



**Dawn Over Lake Vajiralongkorn**



***Saphan Mon* Panorama**

**May the favor of the Lord our God rest upon us; establish the work of our hands for us—yes, establish the work of our hands. (Psalm 90:17 NIV)**

The medical mission group consisted of twenty-eight Lord's servants, ages 20s to 60s, in various fields: Internal Medicine, Dentistry, Ophthalmology, Acupuncture, Anesthesiology, Health Education, and Pastoral Care. It was a joint effort between Bangkok Christian Hospital, Grace Foundation Thailand, Chinese Christian Medical Mission, and Luke Christian Medical Mission. Although we were given the background information beforehand, most of us did not know what to expect here on the Thai-Burma border. Volunteers from Taiwan had three mission training meetings to help the participants understand the rules and attitudes one should have for short term missions by studying

the stories of past cross-cultural missionaries and the "Ten Commandments of Short Term Mission Trips." We all came simply because of faith and calling to partake in God's good works.



**Participants from LCMM (North America)**

Indeed, the natural sceneries around the lakes were breathtaking and mesmerizing. Every morning during prayer and sharing meeting, we would gather by the belvedere in the hotel's restaurant to praise God while bathing our eyes, minds, hearts, and souls in his glory. A closer look of the area behind the natural wonders, however, would reveal the deep problems of incredible poverty, polarizing inequity, and burgeoning sin. This is the porous frontier land between Thailand and Burma. The upper River Kwai and its tributary valleys used to be homes to many minority groups such as the Karen. The building of the large dam thirty years ago inundated ancestral homes and led to mass relocation. Furthermore, due to decades of political instability and suppression of the ethnic minorities in Burma, large Burmese refugees and workers seeking better economic conditions fled across the border to nearby towns in Thailand. Poor sanitation infrastructure, healthcare, and living conditions in this tropical zone have contributed to the surge of tuberculosis, malaria, dengue fever, and HIV, not to mention diarrheal diseases. Most people are idol worshipers who attend huge Buddhist temples and bow to mini household shrines to ask favors from false gods. They are not resistant to accepting the Gospel but have a hard time quitting idol worship in their hearts.



**Registration**



**Church Tent**

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!" (Isaiah 6:8 NIV)

Thanks to early missionary efforts to outreach minority groups, the Kwai River Christian Hospital was established in 1961. It is a collaborative effort between several foreign mission boards and the Church of Christ in Thailand. Located 16 km from the town of Sangkhlaburi, the hospital provides care for a population of Thai, Karen, Mon and Burmese people. Within a ten kilometer radius of the hospital are ten villages, comprising a total population of around 15,000 people. The hospital also serves a great number of displaced persons, refugees, permanent migrants and transient migrant workers from Burma, and residents of a large refugee camp nearby. The hospital has 25 inpatient beds, an outpatient clinic open six days a week, and 24 hour triage for emergencies. There is a basic laboratory, x-ray, and pharmacy. Two physicians, Dr. Scott Murray (Director and Surgeon) and Dr. Sha (Family Practitioner from Burma), and seven nurses staff the outpatient, inpatient and surgical services. Dr. Murray comes from a family of missionaries and is the local physician sponsor of our medical mission as required by the Thai government. He took time to speak to us personally about the hospital and its mission during his busy schedule as the *de facto* surgeon on call for an area extending 250 km in radius from the hospital. We were impressed and moved by his humility, sincerity, and character as a model Christian missionary doctor. Dr. James Yu from our mission team remarked that Dr. Murray could operate all types of surgeries delivering anesthesia himself and would stay after each surgery to clean up the operation room along with his staff nurses. Our mission team ran two full day clinics in the nearby church utilizing translators for Thai, Karen, and Burmese languages.



Dr. Rakaram, Dr. Redhelm Weng, Dr. Scott Murray



Hospital Ward

'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' (Matthew 25:45 NIV)

*Three Pagoda Pass* has been the main land route between Thailand and Burma since ancient times. During World War II, the Japanese army built the Death Railway (Thai-Burma Railway) through the pass to invade Burma at the sacrifices of prisoners of war. Nowadays, about 7,000 Burmese laborers cross the border everyday to work in low-paying sweatshops. The local church here is shepherded by Missionary Meihua who came originally from Yunnan, China. We spent two days of the medical mission at the church, seeing close to 300 patients for various medical services. We deployed our treatment teams in the church sanctuary (currently the first floor of the missionary's house), fellowship area and the front courtyard under a tent. The tight congested space led to hot



and humid working conditions, but the Holy Spirit guided us as brothers and sisters helped one another to give much needed relief from heat and work exhaustion. The patient population consisted of mostly Thai and Burmese. As it was difficult to find translators for Burmese, Missionary Meihua's obedient children also helped. While the patients were waiting for treatment or pharmacy, our health education team taught the villagers about proper hygiene, transmittable diseases, and captivating hymns in Thai. We made a good contact with the local Health Ministry official by helping a post-delivery patient. In turn, God answered our prayer of need for a compressor to drive dental equipment—the official allowed us to borrow one from the local government dental clinic. We also gave Acupuncture treatments to the local Thai village head and the Burmese one from across the border, establishing good will to all people nearby. The promotion was done well in advance that many patients actually crossed the border to receive clinical care. On the second day, we led Sunday worship with praise hymns. Dr. Weng gave the sermon on the love of God. More than 20 people raised their hands to accept Jesus as their savior in the packed church.



Sunday Worship (Sanctuary Section)



Pharmacy Section

A bridge may not connect two parties but actually annihilate them. During WWII the Japanese army tried to build a rail bridge across River Kwai in preparation of invading Burma. They rounded up British, Australian, Dutch and American prisoners for forced labor. Their attempt failed when the prisoners revolted and blew up the bridge. The bridge has since been rebuilt as a tourist destination, especially for movie fans. After four days of medical service, the mission group rested and concluded with a tour of the new bridge of River Kwai. Walking along the train rails of the bridge, we could not help to reflect on the unimaginable atrocities that a man would do to one another. God was teaching us a lesson. When we do cross cultural ministry we must be prudent in building the right bridge. If we try to build it our way instead of relying on the Lord, we may become an obstacle potentially destroying relationships and hurting the ministry.

**"Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?" And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. (Matthew 14:28-32 NIV)**

When we pass through waters, the Lord will be with us. God does not always promise a safe bridge ahead. Sometimes He chooses not to divert the waters before us, but asks us to walk directly into the water with him at our side. The trials in our Christian life are to mold us into fitting vessels

for God by strengthening our faith through surrender and dependence on the Lord. Do we become afraid and sink whenever things appear to be difficult or fearsome? Or do we have confidence in God's providence and deliverance? All of us in the mission group come from different walks of life and have our own unique challenges to face. We might have doubted before the trip whether we could contribute or what difference we could have made in such short mission. Some around us might even question the value of the money we spent on overseas airfare alone, just like the disciples did when a woman poured expensive perfume on Jesus. We should humble ourselves and realize that the mission is God's good works, not ours!



**Dental Treatments**



**Thai Village Head Receiving Acupuncture**

During the entire mission, we would gather together for daily morning and evening fellowships. We studied psalms 90 to 100, one for each meeting. Though normally associated with glory praises, God used these hymns to speak to us about the various aspects of the mission. Despite jet lag, fatigue and heat exhaustion, we found plenty of opportunities to share our own testimonies of faith and thanksgiving with each another. At the end of the trip, there was a sense that we had known each other for a long time. We would long for the mission to last forever as every day was filled with the joy of the Lord. We learned invaluable lessons working together. Seeing the devotion and hearing life's spiritual experiences from missionaries and elders further strengthened my faith. Watching the contagious enthusiasm for Christ in young people replenished me with hope. Experiencing the Holy Spirit working through us and on the people we served filled my heart with indescribable joy, peace and love.



**Pediatric Examination**



**Children Playing with Balloons**

The 400-meter Mon Bridge connects two sides of a lake valley. It was built by an influential Buddhist monk to make the trip easier for visitors to a temple. Returning from my morning stroll on the bridge every day, I would see old monks with juvenile apprentices in saffron robe lining and waiting to receive alms. Like the ideal of all other religions conceived by man, their hope is to accumulate enough good deeds to attain salvation. Early in history, mankind attempted to build the Tower of Babel to reach the heavens. But we all have sinned trying to become equal or greater than our Creator. Christ's perfect sacrifice on cross is the only way to salvation, "for God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16 NIV). God grants us the privilege to work along with him and live through him by bringing the good news to non-believers. He wants us to become a bridge to all nations. This requires us to come out of our comfort zone and depend solely on the Lord. If we trust and obey, we will see that his grace is more than sufficient for us.



**Fellowship & Sharing**

Thanks for the sharing and fellowship of all the participating brothers and sisters in the mission. Thanks to those who supported this ministry and prayed for us while we were in the mission field healing the sick and sowing seeds. Glory be to God!

**For The Lord is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations. (Psalm 100:5 NIV)**