



Update 10 from North Andaman Tsunami Relief (NATR)

24th February, 2005

Message from Bonnie on behalf of Bodhi:

I am honored that Bodhi has given me the opportunity to write update 10, especially in light of the fact that this is my 32nd and final day of service with NATR. The day is bittersweet, leaving me feeling as though I have just sped to the last page of my favorite book, read its final sentence, and now wish for just one more secret, hidden chapter. As I turn the book upside down and half-seriously search for it, still feeling like I've stepped out of a dream dimension, I come to be comfortable that this is the end of my story. The conclusion was perfect, and there are so many more stories to come. What's more, the assistance that my friends at NATR provide to the Thai people has gained so much traction of late that the stories coming out of this humble office have only just begun. So, without further diatribe, allow me to now encapsulate this precious week at NATR.

Our Moken Handicraft Programs

Over the past several weeks, we have supplied all the necessary knives, drills, saws, sanders, pandanus leaves, and dyes for the Moken villagers to regain a portion of their livelihoods by carving the miniature boats of their heritage. Prior to the tsunami, they would sell these boats to tourists in the area, but with the tsunami went their supplies, the tourists, and their livelihoods.



Weeks of skilled craftsmanship have yielded an initial supply of elaborate boats that are now ready to be sold to interested markets, but tourists remain hesitant to travel to our area. Thanks to several alliances, including the Rotary Club of Thailand, we are now providing markets for the Moken boats and other Moken handicraft. You can see an example of their workmanship in the photograph attached (and possibly in the near future on the Rotary Club's website).

Scholarships

Thanks to those of you who have donated money for our longer-term programs, we have now given a first month's scholarship check to sixteen children in Laem Naew. With continued funding we look forward to providing these children an education. We hear stories of families taking their children from school early to help make a living during this difficult period. NATR remains committed to circumventing such desperate measures by including short-term labor and livelihood programs to the villages we help.

Four days ago, a few Thai men quietly entered our office without appointment. To provide perspective, the Thai people in the community are reticent to venture into our chaotic and intimidating facility. We summoned a translator to discover that their village had been overlooked by many of the care givers in the area, and they came hoping to secure assistance to pay for their children's schooling. Unlike many countries with more socialized infrastructure, the Thai must pay for their children's elementary schooling. On the spot, we committed to paying scholarships for the remainder of the semester for their six children. We will be sending an assessor to further determine need in their village.

Squid Traps

We provided the first installment of 50 squid traps to the 41 squid fishing families in Bak Jok this week. If you questioned for a moment whether or not your donations were going directly to villagers and not to the pockets of administrators, allow me this small snippet:



HOW THINGS GET DONE AT THE "LEGITIMATE" NGO DOWN THE STREET

Their office sends air conditioned car and driver to come get you (distance: 1 block). You enter their office and it is also air conditioned. One of the several 19 year old Thai girls gives you a tour. You make mention of the fact that their refrigerator is new (their old one was holding tsunami body parts for identification and I guess that was a little too gross for keeping their Coke cold). They thank you for your time and offer an air conditioned ride back to your office (distance: still one block). You say 'no thank you' and walk.

HOW THINGS GET DONE AT NATR

You need to meet a delivery of supplies for squid traps at the Kuraburi Pier (distance: 10 miles) and you have no way to get there. You hail a motor bike "taxi" (just some dude riding along the road at the proper moment that collects 40 baht for his troubles) and arrive. Truck is there with goods. You and two other NATR volunteers split the supplies which will make 25 squid traps for 41 families into 41 piles along the side of Bak Jok village's temporary housing. Some important ingredients are missing--like the nets. You hop onto the back of a motorbike with your translator and head to the only two fishing supply shops in the area. No nets. Your director calls other translator to see if she can acquire nets from another town. You sit down and stare at the 41 piles and wonder what to do next. The translator's father agrees to watch them and you head back to the office the same way you came. Yes, in case you're wondering, your contributions are going directly to aid.



That's it for this update. Thank you for your thoughts, contributions, and support.

Bonnie Doyle

NATR volunteer on behalf of our Director, Bodhi Garrett