

## Letter from Bodhi Setchko NATR Volunteer

8<sup>th</sup> March 2005

Dear Friends,

I'm back from Thailand. I want to thank all of you for your support. It was a transformative journey and I feel like we did some good work.

We were a group of 20 people from California, Hawaii and Nepal. Joining up with a local relief group of 10-20 more floating volunteers from around the globe, we brought a new wave of hope and possibility to the west coast of Thailand. NATR is committed to activating sustainable recovery and ongoing aid in the most efficient way possible. It can be a very delicate process. Many well-wishers come by for a day or two and want to leave money or things and then leave. With no follow-up or research as to what is actually needed, this can sometimes cause confusion. Locally they call this the "Stop and drop" syndrome. Bodhi Garrett at NATR is creating a more sustainable model of support. (I was Bodhi Star for the trip to differentiate between us).

In this region, many villages were destroyed and the survivors have relocated to sites inland, often next to another existing village. They keep the same village name and the government set up temporary housing for them. Many are afraid to return and some cannot return because of the lack of proper paper titles to the land. I think this will be the major problem in the years to come as the people try to reestablish themselves in a new life. Some are actually rebuilding boats in the hope of returning to their original village site to begin again.

As we visited the village sites I saw the devastation of the waves' power - towns and buildings are completely gone, boats stranded far inland, individual stories of personal loss very deep. We did a beautiful prayer at a village location where many died, with flute and words from my Monterey minister friend, Rory Elder (see photo).

We took fishing nets and food out to a small village where they lost all the fish in their fish farm, the nets all broke open, many boats lost and/or damaged. Also brought many tools and a new generator. (They are doing partial Solar power, hope they will do more of that in future). They also lost their entire cashew nut tree orchard from salt flooding of the field. They are willing to replant but not sure when the soil will recover enough to grow again. It is now covered with 2-4 inches of sand.

In crews of 4-10 people we went out in shifts for 1-2 day stretches to different locations, some doing cleanup work, burning brush and debris. Another project was to rebuild a bridge between two relief camps (see photo). Our crew designed it, got materials and tools, started to build it and the villagers stepped right in and took over. There were over 75 people working to replace structure and decking. They are determined to rebuild their lives. Only requiring tools and materials to do it. They definitely have the will.

Some of the most beautiful connections were with the children. Many were affected quite deeply and yet seem to be very resilient in their recovery. We did some art therapy projects with kids in the schools (see photo) and often just had very playful, spontaneous encounters in the villages. The secret is the 'smile'. It is the same in every language!! I played my flute whenever there was a moment to share, for kids and adults alike, some playful "pied-piper" moments and also some deep prayer time. Music is another universal language that transcends all differences.

So that is my story in a very brief nutshell. I know how many e-mails you are snowed with! I have 100's of pictures and will probably have a party here sometime to share them. I do hope you are well and enjoying the beauty of the Earth in every moment.

Take care,

Bodhi 'Star' Setchko