

## **Comeback to Makay Soam**

*By Christine Prötzel, February 2007*

It was a great feeling to enter the small village with the well-known yellow pick-up again. I arrived there in the middle of September 2006. Compared to the last time I came here, everything was very green, many people were busy working on their rice fields, one could realize very easy that it was raining season.

I was welcomed by Benjamin's wife and his daughter. We put my things into the little volunteer hut and sat together enjoying fresh tea and steamed peanuts. On this day Benjamin himself was busy in Mae Hong Son, selling fruits. He came back the next day with another volunteer, named Kathi, who usually worked in a Nursery School of Child's Dream in the city, but visited us for some days.

I was happy to see, that the number of children attending the English school has increased and to meet with many I already knew.

The C -class with the youngest students was taught at this time by Benjamin or his daughter Saeng. But after about three weeks a new assistant teacher came. Her name was Asompta and she was 18 years old. She seemed to be happy to have this job, she enjoyed teaching and the children really liked her. Because she couldn't speak any Thai at first, they communicated in English or Karen, but she picked up more and more Thai words from the children every day.

In the four months I stayed at the school, I met with four different volunteers. Every one of them had his own way of teaching and for our lessons we had many different ideas, but we shared the same target. We wanted to help the students to have a good future.

I think sometimes it is a little bit hard for the students to have so many different teachers in a short period, but on the other hand they get to know many different people, and, because the volunteers come from all over the world, gain knowledge about their countries.

There was a new student in the A-class and with 29 years he was the oldest, too. Being a monk in the village's temple, suddenly, after some weeks, he wasn't allowed to take part at the English lessons any more. We couldn't find out the reason. Therefore he decided to stop being a monk for sometime to be able to learn English again. He still stays in the temple, being responsible for cleaning it.

Another new student was a 19-years old girl named Noi. Her English was already quite fine and she had just graduated from her school. She applied for a place in a private school

program called SSSNY (School for Shan State Nationality Youth) in Chiang Mai. To be accepted she had to write an essay and give a short interview. She was very excited, because out of the around 300 applicants only very few were accepted. She asked us to give her some extra lessons during the daytime to be well prepared for the test. By the end of December we all were glad to hear that she was accepted, and proud, because her results were the best of Mae Hong Son district. Thankful for the help her family invited us for a great breakfast in her house.

The children's English is improving steadily. Most people of the B-class are now ready for past tense and simple future, there is no problem with writing, but speaking more fluent will take some more time. We practised building correct sentences and learned many new words. In the first part of the lesson we worked with grammar, practised reading skills and made some small dictates, the second part was used for learning-games like "memory", "snakeword", "tabu", "vocabulary football". It was easy to hear that they enjoyed the games. Working with the B-class is now easier for me, because I can understand a little bit Thai. But often I have to use a dictionary if we can not find out what the other one wants to say. The A-class again wanted to learn some German. What we did in these four months is all they need, I think. Now they can introduce themselves, ask about names, age and country. They learned about food, numbers, the days of the week and directions. If they want they can practise with an English - German exercise tape, which I created for them.

The students take care of their school very lovely. Every Monday about six persons are responsible for cleaning the classrooms, the toilets and the boundary. On the walls they put many nice pictures and sentences. There was something like "Knowledge is a candle lightening your way and shining your future."

The first evening of 2007 Benjamin invited all the parents to a meeting. He informed them about the students' learning progress and that it will be necessary to fix the classroom of the C-class. Therefore he asked the parents for support and to help rebuilding it. When it rains the floor develops into a small muddy stream and everybody, especially the teacher is slipping through the lesson (this was the reason for my cold in September).

It was a great time again and because I am already addicted to this friendly warm atmosphere I will come back this year again, if I am allowed to.

It's nice to meet with family and friends again and enjoy some more comfort, but I miss my students very much.