

# Teachers Training College

Thai-Burmese border

2012-2018

Edited by Alaster Gibson



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ISBN:

*Cover photo: View from 'Prayer Mountain,' across rice fields to the Thai village of Noh Boh; hills and mountains of Myanmar in the background.*

## Preface

The purpose of this e-book is fourfold. Firstly, to provide a record of a pioneer teacher-education programme that Bethlehem Tertiary Institute (BTI) Tauranga, New Zealand has supported, in association with Effective Aid International (EAI) Australia, on the Thai-Burmese border, from 2012-2019. This cross-cultural service to mainly ethnic Karen, disaffected by the ethnic conflict and economic challenges in Burma, has been a practical extension of BTI's vision statement, 'to be a relational, responsive and transformational Christ-following tertiary learning community committed to growing a faithful expression of the Kingdom of God on earth.'

Secondly, this e-book is an acknowledgment of the kind support from so many people who have contributed in a variety of ways to the success of the programme. A common thread throughout the book is the outstanding sacrificial ministry of Graeme and Kendal Cook (Graduates of BTI), who have been the faithful and caring tutors, diligent administrators and strategic leaders overseeing the programme 'on the ground' over the past seven years. Their relational, compassionate mentoring of the student-teachers has been a vital ingredient to the students' personal and professional growth.

Thirdly, this e-book provides insights into some of the student-teachers' lives who have graduated from the two-year 'programme of preparation for teaching' course. Nine people were interviewed during the graduation and intensive teaching week, held at TTC in Noh Boh, during May, 2018. The transcripts of the audio-recorded interviews help to personalise the narrative of this teacher training ministry on the Thai-Burmese border. It is hoped their experiences will encourage others who are facing similar difficulties in their lives.

The fourth and most important reason for producing this e-book is to acknowledge the leading of God in this ministry; his faithful provision of people, suitable facilities and resources. Through this book we give thanks to God for the fruit that has been and will be produced in people's lives. Currently there are twenty three graduates teaching close to three hundred children in five school communities within the Karen State of Myanmar. One of the graduates, Thaw Thi, is now assisting Graeme and Kendal train the student-teachers. Looking forward to 2019, the programme is moving from the small village of Noh Boh to Hpa-An, the capital city of the Karen state, in Myanmar.

*'Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy. To the only wise God our saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen'*

Jude 1:24 Bible KJV

*Alaster Gibson*  
*BTI*

## Acknowledgments

Pastor Somchai (1<sup>st</sup> on the left), a local Christian leader, has been a key person involved in the development of TTC, as well as assisting with the building of schools in Myanmar for the graduate teachers to serve in.

Iain Aitchison, founder and former Chairman of Effective Aid International, Australia, (2<sup>nd</sup> on the right), was involved in the first two years development of TTC in association with Andrew Smith, BTI, New Zealand. We also acknowledge Mark Gladman's kind support through EAI during 2014-2015, and Chris McConnell's practical and personal ongoing commitment through his leadership role in EAI over the past four years.

Pastor Jollie (2<sup>nd</sup> photo) has been another important local Christian Karen leader who has played a key role in the story of TTC. The teacher training classrooms and accommodation facilities are all located on Pastor Jollie's church property in Noh Boh. The church meetings are attended by the student teachers.

Graeme and Kendal Cook have been TTC's pioneer on-site teacher-educators and administrators for past seven years. Their compassionate, dedicated service has been invaluable to the sustainability and fruitful expansion of this ministry.

Andrew Smith (Dean of BTI, Tauranga New Zealand from 2012-17) co-developed the programme memorandum of understanding in association with EAI (Australia). Andrew invited Graeme who was a graduate of BTI to join the programme as its founding tutor. Keith Francis, former Principal of Hillcrest Christian College, Queensland, and the school's short term mission teams have provided wonderful support. Likewise the short term mission teams from Emmanuel College (also from Australia), are gratefully acknowledged.



*Pastor Somchai and Iain Aitchison, 2015.*



*Back row: Chris McConnell, Pastor Somchai, Graeme.  
Front row: Kendal, Keith Francis, Andrew Smith, 2017.*



In the first two years, TTC received unique support from Keku (photo right) who provided significant educational and translation assistance both in the Mae La refugee camp and then at Noh Boh.



Several graduate teachers have served as teacher leaders in schools and as tutors within TTC. For example: Day Naw (at her 2014 graduation), Thaw Thi, and Paw Pearl Wah (2<sup>nd</sup> photo on the right, taken in 2016 enroute to study at BTI for six months in New Zealand).



Several BTI teacher-educators; Andrew Smith, Marion Sanders (Leader of Offshore Programmes), Raymond Stripling, Rachelle Hulbert and Alaster Gibson have visited TTC over the years to lead week long intensive teaching sessions in various courses and have helped develop the two-year training programme. Penny Merton and Johnny Wilson have also visited TTC to assist with teaching intensives.

We also acknowledge the professional support from a number of teachers from Bethlehem College (NZ) who have accompanied BTI staff for the intensive teaching sessions. TTC has also received support from the families and friends of Graeme and Kendal, several church organisations, John and Rose Whitehead's Charitable Trust, (NZ) and many donors connected with EAI (Australia).



*Kendal, Marion Sanders and Graeme, 2014.*

Finally, but not least, we acknowledge God's blessing on this project over the past seven years. Many students' lives have been positively influenced through this Christian ministry. To our God and Father in heaven, be all glory, honour and praise, through Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen.



*Andrew Smith, Kendal & Graeme Cook, Mark Gladman (EAI).*

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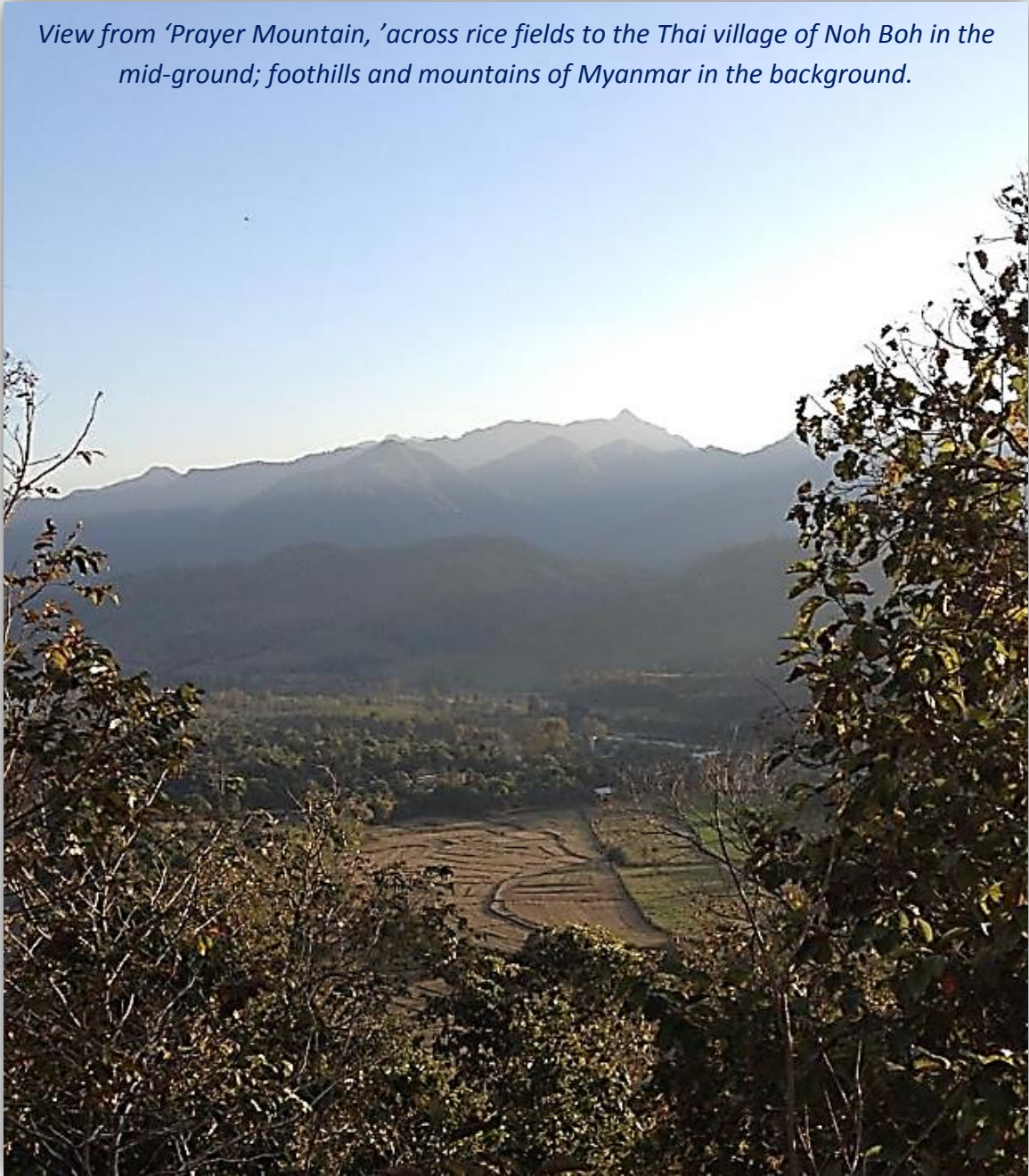


*TTC classes during an intensive week in the Thai-Burmese border village, Noh Boh, 2013. Alaster Gibson (BTI) 2<sup>nd</sup> left middle row and Shane Reade (Bethlehem College) left back row. Thaw Thi, Yu Par, Lay Gay, Dorcas and Paw Pearl Wah are also in this photo-see if you can identify them.*



## Part 1: Introduction

*View from 'Prayer Mountain,' across rice fields to the Thai village of Noh Boh in the mid-ground; foothills and mountains of Myanmar in the background.*



**Click on link** below to view a video by Graeme and Kendal Cook in 2015 inviting people to support the programme <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CQ58Ru1hhNA>

## Effective Aid International, Australia

The following information is mainly derived from the EAI website <https://www.effectiveaid.org/who-we-are.html> with additional photos from the 2013 graduation celebrations in Noh Boh.

Effective Aid International is an Australian registered charity operating as a non-profit company limited by guarantee. Ian Aitchison founded the organisation in 2005 to bring accountability and better structure to the work he had commenced almost ten years previously. The organisation is based on the Gold Coast in Queensland, and is managed by a Board of Directors and complies with all relevant Australian company and tax laws. Its finances are audited annually by a qualified independent auditor and returns lodged with the Australian Securities and Investment Commission. In 2015 Chris McConnell with wife Debra took on the challenge of moving EAI work into the Karen State (also spelt Kayin) within Myanmar (Burma).



Effective Aid International aims to provide under privileged and disadvantaged people with the basic necessities that enable them to survive, but beyond that to provide development to communities, thus empowering them to take charge of their own futures. Effective Aid International is working to make this world a better place, offering relief from the daily suffering endured by many. Effective Aid International believes in 'less talk more action'. We simply get on with the job, not wanting to spend money on advertising that should be spent on changing people's lives. Our commitment to our donors is to maximise the effect of their donations and minimise the amount spent on advertising and administration. We want to be known for our good deeds – evidenced by the life changing results in the individuals and communities with whom we work. While Effective Aid International's core values are Christian, we do not discriminate in the delivery of aid and development within our projects. Participants are welcomed regardless of ethnicity, religion, gender, political persuasion, age or disability.

Effective Aid International's main focus is on children because we believe that the most effective way to change the future is to educate and nurture today's children.



On the left: Graeme, Kiku, Dr. Andrew Smith (Dean of Bethlehem Tertiary Institute), Pastor Somchai. On the right: Pastor Ian (Chairman of EAI), Kendal.

*The first graduation ceremony, Noh Boh, 2014.*



Effective Aid International believes strongly in the development and training of people within our target communities. Our policy is to only use foreign volunteers when suitable local staff, are not available. Over the years we have assisted in training and employing numerous teachers and other key local people to both manage and staff several schools and other projects. In recent years it has been exciting to employ many of the teacher graduates for a range of primary schools within Myanmar.

We currently support five primary schools in the Karen State, four of which are fully funded by EAI. Historically, many refugee camps were established in Thailand to cater for Burmese people disaffected by the civil war. EAI began supporting the educational needs of some of these people in a camp called Mae La over ten years ago. More recently, the Thailand government has been putting pressure on the people in the camps to return to their homeland. In response to this scenario, we have commenced building a regional high school in Myanmar, in the vicinity of where this population growth is likely to occur.



*Pastor Somchai, a key local leader who has supported and promoted TTC, addressing the 2014 graduation ceremony.*

**Visit the following link** to read about EAI's involvement with the teacher training programme on the Thai-Burmese border  
<https://www.effectiveaid.org/teacher-training.html>

**Visit EAI's Facebook page** <https://www.facebook.com/EffectiveAidInternational/>

## Bethlehem Tertiary Institute, New Zealand

<https://www.bti.ac.nz/>

By Marion Sanders and Alaster Gibson with quotes from Graeme and Kendal.

At BTI, we are passionate about making a positive difference in the world. Our educators, students and graduates live out this commitment in many ways in their individual careers and personal lives - but from time to time, an opportunity comes along for BTI to serve offshore. In 2012, BTI in partnership with the Australian organisation Effective Aid International (EAI) began the delivery of a two year Primary Teacher Education programme in the Mae La Refugee Camp in Thailand. This camp is one of several along the Thai-Burmese western border, catering for thousands of displaced indigenous people from Myanmar disaffected by civil war and economic hardships in Burma.

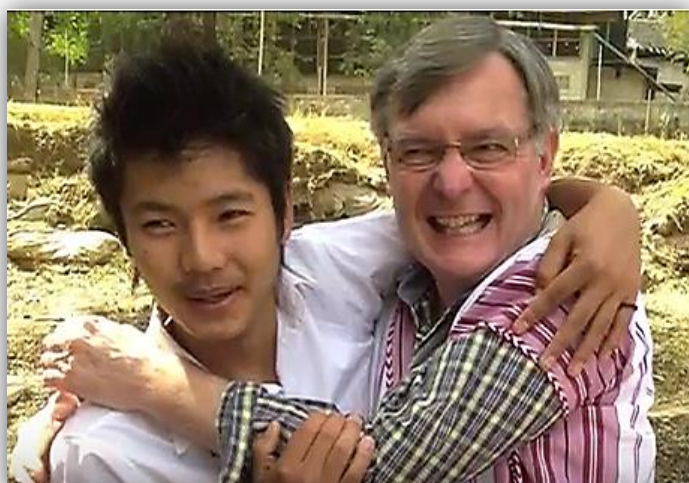


Most of the student teachers in the first cohort were displaced people from the neighbouring Karen State. The initial aim was to train teachers to serve in several of the schools operating in the Mae La camp. Teacher education in the refugee camp at that time was non-existent. School classrooms were very basic with wooden chairs and tables facing a blackboard. There were very few resources available. The dominant mode of instruction was via the teacher standing at the front of the room with pupils listening and taking notes.

Graeme Cook, a BTI graduate, was invited by Andrew Smith (Dean of BTI) in 2012, to serve as the pioneer educator, training student teachers in this Mae La camp context. Prior to coming to BTI Graeme had travelled extensively around many parts of the world and his professional skills and dispositions were ideal for this extraordinary challenge. Initially he commuted each day from the nearest town of Mae Sot to Mae La by public transport. One of the first major assignments undertaken by Graeme and the enrolled student-teachers was to literally, construct their own classroom.

The training programme was supported each term by a week-long intensive led by visiting teacher educators from BTI (Andrew Smith, Alaster Gibson, Marion Sanders, Raymond Stripling and Rachelle Hulbert).

Later in that first year Graeme obtained permission from the Thai military guards, to reside in the camp during Mondays to Fridays. At the end of 2012



*Lay Dar (original cohort student teacher) and Raymond Stripling (BTI) 2012, Mae La refugee camp.*



Graeme married Kendal (another BTI graduate) and together they have been serving in this offshore ministry ever since.

In 2013 it was decided to relocate the teacher training programme away from the restrictions of the refugee camp to a nearby village called Noh Boh. This village of approximately one thousand residents had only a few small shops, a medical centre, a Thai primary and secondary school, and on its outskirts, the Noh Boh Christian Academy, which has an intermediate and secondary school. As a Thai border village there are many Burmese migrants living and working there. The sprawling community is surrounded by rice fields, lush bush and overlooks the Moei River; with the jungle clad foothills and cloudy mountains of Burma in the distance.



TTC , Noh Boh, 2017

The teacher training campus was located on a Christian church property overseen by a local Karen leader called, Pastor Jollie. With his support, and that of Pastor Somchai and EAI, student teacher dorms were made available and a two storey classroom facility erected. In the first few years, student teachers gained professional practice experience in a small primary school situated on this campus and within schools in the Mae La camp. More



TTC classes of 2014 at Noh Boh with Marion Sanders (BTI), back row, 3<sup>rd</sup> from left.

recent years have seen students enjoying practicum placements in several newly built primary schools across the border in the foothills of Myanmar and a school near Mae Sot.

Over the past seven years Graeme and Kendal Cook have been serving faithfully and compassionately, equipping their students with the necessary skills and knowledge to teach in village and suburban school contexts. Their hope is to inspire the next generation of learners and teachers, so that they will make a difference in the lives of others. This year, ten students graduated from TTC and began their first teaching assignments spread out across five primary schools that Graeme and Kendal help to support. Tangible progress has been made with the two schools at Mae Te Pu Kee and Klay Moe Kee as they have now been operating with TTC teachers for several years. When the graduate teachers started in these remote villages it was more like the wild west of education where children for the most part worked on subsistence farms helping families just to survive. Now the students are more confident, in better health and able to manage themselves.

Graeme and Kendal have had to work through a range of challenges along the way. For example, engaging in cross cultural conversations with both parties having limited understanding of each other's language, background and expectations requires much patience. The graduate teachers have received encouragement as parents of pupils at the schools witness positive changes in their children and the word has spread throughout communities close by. Families from these communities are choosing to send their children to the schools and as a result, the schools are growing steadily. They have even had students returning to their villages from Thailand so they can be closer to family and get a better education. Previously the only option was to send their children to Thai schools if they could afford it. As the primary schools grow they are faced with infrastructure challenges and staffing problems.

Graeme and Kendall also provide Christian guidance and support to the student-teachers. Some of the student teachers arrive at TTC in Noh Boh with very limited experiences or understanding of Christian faith and living.

Throughout the programme Christian biblical principles and values are modelled and encouraged. Occasionally some of the students express a desire to be baptised. This ordinance is conducted down in the Moei River.

Graeme and Kendal are currently planning to move TTC to Hpa-An, the capital of Karen State, Burma. This has required a considerable amount of inquiry to engage collaboratively and transparently with



*Graeme baptising Lay Dar in the Moei River with Kendal's support, 2015.*



the various government agencies and educational authorities. Graeme has written several memorandums of understanding (MOU) and had the privilege of speaking with high ranking officials about the intentions to provide teacher education services for the Karen people.

If they are able to re-establish the teacher training programme in Hpa-An, it will be unique to that part of the country.



*Graeme with representatives of the Teachers Training College, Hpa-An, 2018.*

Graeme has also met with the education minister of

Karen State and had the opportunity to observe how things are done within the Government Primary Teacher Training College. These experiences could open further opportunities for Graeme, Kendal and even graduates to have a teaching role in that college as Burma is currently modernising its national education curriculum. Many Karen teachers and educators do not know how to teach the newly introduced subjects. As part of the MOU to move TTC to Hpa-An, Graeme has stated that he and Kendal are prepared to help teach these new subjects on a part time basis within the Government College.

They have also had discussions with a Christian community on the outskirts of Hpa-An who have agreed to provide them with land to build the new Teacher Training College. This has also been a difficult exercise as the Burmese laws governing foreigners and Christians set up roadblocks at every turn. On top of this there is also the need to find people of integrity to partner with in this substantial project. To meet this need Graeme and Kendal travelled to the Gold Coast, Australia for meetings and presentations with Christian school communities hoping to enlist supporters to help them build the new facilities in Hpa-An. Graeme says,

*All these challenges aside, if we allowed ourselves the delusion that we were doing any of this under our own strength or direction then the wheels would well and truly fall off in a short space of time. We are continually amazed how God structures and funds his ideas, and how He only funds His ideas! If you have no understanding of God the Father and what Jesus has done for you then life here looks like a fruitless endeavour. Indeed we are often asked by friends when are we coming 'home' or when are we going to be finished with those people over there. It is a life that brings joy but not always happiness, but it's a life of purpose and adventure, ups and downs and we could not imagine doing anything else despite the hardships.*

## Graeme and Kendal Cook; TTC educational leaders

Click on the link below to view a video produced by Graeme Cook in 2012, two weeks before he set off from New Zealand to commence his role in teacher training on the Thai-Burmese border.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EHN3g8i\\_Ajs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EHN3g8i_Ajs)

Graeme writes: My journey began nine years ago in New Zealand when in 2009 I deluded myself into thinking that living on a student allowance to earn a degree in Primary Education would be a step towards being called a 'grown up' and allow plenty of time to go fishing and surfing. The best place to base myself for outdoor activities was the Bay of Plenty. So at the age of 33 with my priorities completely upside down, I filled out the BTI enrolment forms with the usual stuff they want to hear and sealed my fate at the Post Shop.



*Kendal and Graeme Cook, Noh Boh, Thailand, 2018.*

What followed did not exactly go to plan. My life was not my own for the next 3 years as we all lived from one assignment to the next. Free time was what you had when you slept, and the outside world only ever happened for three glorious months over the summer where even hard manual labour was a welcome relief from study. But despite the hardships, something was happening to me that God was orchestrating through various staff members of BTI. Sometimes it was through their words, but more often through their character. I had travelled to many places but here I found some of the most genuine people I have ever met.

And so it was that late in 2011, with my sentence almost completed, I foolishly entered into a conversation with the then Dean, Andrew Smith about a visit he had just been on to a refugee camp on the Thai/Burma border. This conversation set the wheels in motion, for where I find myself today. I have never been to prison (not marriage, I mean a tangible prison) but I guess this is what it feels like when you are denied parole!

Two weeks after my innocent conversation with Andrew, I was called to his office (every student knows that's never a good thing), and the meeting went something like this, "As you know BTI has been approached by an organisation who supply education to refugee camps

in Thailand. We don't know where you could live, who you will teach, we have no curriculum yet, and there is no money, how sayeth you?" (Andrew is English).

Not exactly the first job offer I was expecting to pay back my student loan with, but despite all the logical arguments as to why I should decline, and there were many, the moment this opportunity was presented to me my spirit said yes straight away, and my brain caught up about a month later. Besides, it sounded at the time like an adventure and I had never been one to listen to logic anyway!

So, to cut a long story short, I travelled to Mae La refugee camp on the Thai-Burmese border to begin my first teaching assignment. The first week inside the camp was hectic. Andrew was meeting with new students who turned up every day, and I watched Andrew teach a hastily put together programme (we had no idea the training would



Map showing location of Noh Boh on the Thai-Burmese border and the nearest city, Mae Sot. Map ref: <http://gyaw.org/the-story/>

begin on day one of us being there). I was left at the end of that first week in the nearest town called Mae Sot; a 45-minute drive away from the camp, to fend for myself.

I was to live inside the camp Monday to Friday, and return every weekend to this town on the back of a local transport truck to plan and get resources. I was one of the first foreigners given permission to stay inside the camp of 40,000 people. My first teaching assignment was to train 20 adult students (mainly ethnic Karen) how to teach primary school level subjects. In effect, I was to teach what I had just learned at BTI. My students were from over the border in neighbouring Burma, which was and is still going through the longest civil war in recent history. My students' life stories humbled me, and changed my life forever.

Some of the students shared how they had run away from their villages when the Burmese soldiers attacked. Many villagers were killed, some were raped; often the soldiers would burn their homes. Some of the students recalled how they had fought as child soldiers against the Burmese Government forces. Other students had fled with their families from political and religious persecution. Some of my students arrived in the camp because they had heard there was a chance for extending their education and even the possibility of migrating to safer countries.

Having been *tricked* by Andrew Smith into committing for six months, I soon realised what sort of person I would be if I left so many in need in such a short space of time. I



finally understood the words of Jesus when he said, “he who desires to save his life will lose it and he who gives up his own life will save it.” After ten months in the camp, Kendal Waterston came to visit. We had gone through BTI together and what started as a good friendship became whatever you call it, when you’re not just friends anymore, but not in a relationship either. Before our relationship could go any further I wanted to see her reaction to the refugee camp and the students. She was a big help over the phone during my first months at the camp, helping me with lesson ideas and encouragement. She fell in love as I had with the people, and we were married on the beach at Cape Reinga, New Zealand in December 2012.

We returned back to the refugee camp for our honeymoon! I could not imagine ever being here and doing the things God has called both of us to do without her support, guidance and abilities. I know of no other person who could have taken the many hardships we face in her stride, and would still willingly choose to live under such difficult conditions; to put others’ needs before her own.



*EAI drone photo of TTC campus at Noh Boh, 2018. The main lecture room is at ground level.*

After one year in the camp we moved to a small village, called Noh Boh, right on the Thai-Burmese border, where it is less strictly controlled by the Thai authorities. Seven years later, we still work as volunteers with support from BTI and an Australian aid agency called Effective Aid International (EAI).

EAI is the original organisation that approached Andrew Smith to see if BTI could train people from Burma to be primary school teachers. The original programme has grown well beyond just training teachers, to include the building, resourcing and staffing of several schools in villages located in jungle regions. Currently we have 23 graduate teachers serving in five primary schools, teaching around 400 children. They endeavour to teach a Christ-centred education and the hope that this can bring to children’s lives.

We are also in negotiations with various Burmese Government ministers and leaders hoping to move our teacher training college to Burma next year (2019). This is a tight-rope walk through a political minefield. If we are given the go ahead, we will be the first and only non-government teachers’ college in the country of 58 million (that we’re aware of). We could be given an opportunity to teach newly introduced subjects to as many as 500 student teachers, as Burma looks to modernize its curriculum.



What sets BTI apart I believe, is the character and integrity of the people that work there and their greater understanding as to why they are there in the first place. I have seen this example time and time again, as various staff members have visited and continue to do so with humility and grace, and with the ongoing commitment to what God is doing through all of us over here. I will not name people for fear of missing one out but in my three short years as a student at BTI the staff that spoke into my life set a course for change I never thought was possible. You know who you are and I continue to teach the lessons you never had to speak.



*Graeme, Kendal, Andrew Smith (BTI), Keith Francis (Hillcrest Christian College), graduate teachers and student-teachers, Noh Boh campus, 2017.*

Click on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-mgAaEgE2ao> to learn more about the early development of TTC within the Mae La Refugee Camp, 2012.



## Part 2: Graduates' Stories

The following chapter has been compiled by Alaster Gibson from interviews with nine graduates from the Teacher Training College in Noh Boh who were present during graduation week, May 2018.



*View from Prayer Mountain across the Moei River in flood; the foothills and mountains of Burma in the distance, Noh Boh is out of shot to the left. Student teachers have to travel across this river and walk three hours to reach Klay Moe Kee School and five to six hours walk (less by motorbike) to reach Mae Te Pu Kee school.*

Click on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iFNcfu40dg> to view a video shown at the first graduation ceremony in Noh Boh 2014. It highlights 'just how far' the first cohort of students had come from starting in Mae La refugee camp in 2012

## Interview 1: Yu Par TTC 20<sup>th</sup> May 2018

**Please describe your past life experiences prior to coming to TTC; for example your family, education, experiences or memories, social cultural religious experiences, or things that were happening in Myanmar.**

My father; I want to start with my parents, he is Shan and lives in Yangon and my mother she is Kachin who lived in north part of Burma. He is Kachin and my mother lived in Kachin State. So my father, he left because of the Government, because of his responsibilities, he moved to Kachin State and there he met with my mother...



He is Buddhist, very strong Buddhist and my mother is Christian, but like traditional Christian, which means she become a Christian because of her parents. So she doesn't really know Jesus deeply at that time, so they married. My mother and father decided to live in Yangon. So my mother was influenced by my father's family, so she became a Buddhist. She changed everything, even her name. My mother's name is Kachin name but when she married my father she changed everything, her name, her religion everything... So even in her identity card her religion is Buddhist, and ethnically she identifies with Myanmar even though she is Kachin. So my grandfather, my mother's parents are very angry and they reject her.

But my mother explained to me, that when I was six months old, my grandparents invited her to Kachin State. And they [grandparents] loved me so much and it became well again, meeting my parents and being with my grandparents. And when I am five years old I am attending a nursery primary school in Yangon, but when I am five years old my parents divorced. So my mother take me back to Kachin State, and we are living in Kachin State. And at that time it is 1988 it is very complicated and fighting a lot, and changing in Government at that time. So I cannot; almost all students cannot attend school because of the fighting. 1988 is very popular in the war. Most of the people know what is going on in 1988 in Burma.

**So were you living with your grandparents at that time?**

Yeah ...

**Back in Kachin State, and was war breaking out. And you were about five or six years of age?**

Yes... and in 1988 my grandfather was killed by Government army, they killed my grandfather.

**Was he a soldier or was he just caught up in the fighting?**

He is a leader of the village, so he tried to put school in our village, and the Government didn't accept to build school in our village... And they [grandfather and other village people] are meeting, but my grandfather really want for a school for his villagers, so he discussed with teachers and the other leaders of the village. So at the time the army come and shoot

all of the people in the meeting... so all are died (tearful)... yes this is a bad time; it was a bad time for my mum and my grandmother and our family because it is very difficult time for our people who live in Burma because of many fightings in Burma. So it is a good chance for Government to killing who they want to kill.

**They got away with it?** Yes, and so my mother and my grandmother they have much difficulties and struggling for their lives.

**And this is in a village, not in a town?**

This village is far from town, near army compound...

**And did you have to run away, did you and your mother and grandmother have to leave the village?**

No. But actually we know that the army killed my grandfather but at the time the uniform is changed and they are hiding with clothes and things like that, but we know that no one can handle the gun, so it is very sure is not accident. Government don't let them build the school in our village, it is very sure that they, the Government killed my grandfather. And other families who killed by Government they know that, yes.

**So what happened next to you and your mother?**

And also they keep our land, they took our lands. We had many farms because our grandparents are rich, but they took all of our things, yes. Sometimes, they give their reason, they have to build the roads, they want to cross our lands... and they took it, yes. So we lost our business and we lost our grandfathers and my mother divorced my father; so many difficulties, my mother faced many difficulties and my mother's family too. I think four years later, my father came and apologised; to marry again with my mother and mother agree. And she decide because of me. So my mother decide to choose marry again my father, and she decide to live in Yangon again...

**So did you go back to Yangon and attend school there?**

Yes, in Yangon which is very popular... my school is very popular in Yangon... so this is a mission school, nuns opened this school, catholic nuns. But after 1988, the Government took all the schools and they put Government schools not private schools.



Map reference:

<https://www.economist.com/banyan/2013/01/16/lengthening-shadow>



**So you came back to a school which was originally a Catholic school, but not anymore.**

Yeah, not anymore because Government took all...

**And you went through Primary School and Secondary School?**

Yes, secondary school and I graduate in Yangon, I graduate with physics (laughing).

**And physics was your major subject at High School?**

Yes.

**And what other interests did you have at High School as well as physics? Did you play sport or did you play music?**

Actually we have no like subject, we have no PE; we have no art lessons.

**Just the sciences, maths and academic subjects?**

Yes, just the academic subjects... So as for me at the time have nothing, just education, no PE time. We don't know how to play PE, and art and everything we didn't know. And we cannot choose what we want to learn it is depend on our marks.

**So if you get good marks then you get the opportunity to...**

To go medicine... Yes, medical school, but if you interest in medical school you have to get the high marks, and it is not fair between boys and girls, because for example, medical school marks, we can attend for girls if 550 marks, but for boys it's 500 marks.

**And you were very good at Physics. Did you want to be an engineer? What did you want to do at university when you left school?**

Actually I want to attend nurse training, assistant of doctor, I apologise my pronunciation ... so every student had to try to get high marks but if you no money, not enough to pay money to study tutoring, it is very difficult. Because in our school, teachers, how do you explain, we need to get tutor and they want teach a strategy and it actually mean they didn't teach well in school time, so they actually teacher in extra time so it makes money for them. So if a poor student we cannot ever get the high marks.

**So this is at high school, it is very competitive. And the wealthy families can afford extra tutors for their children, so their marks get better, but the poorer students can't do that.**

Yes, so we have not enough knowledge to get learnings... so most of the wealthy people can get medical because the medical is the very top and second is engineering and third is IT, information technology, and then economics, and after that like nurse training and teacher training and lower is major like maths major, language and physics... so at the time I cannot get this, this, this... no medical, no engineering, no, no, no. So I got a normal major, but in our year Physics is top in the majors, so I got the physics major... that is not I really want to be... but my mark is with the Physics major... and I get a chance to attend at university with physics major.

**Did you go to university?**

Yes.

**Was that a university in Yangon?**

Yes.

**What was the name of the university?**

East University [East Yangon University].

**And did you complete your degree?**

Yes.

**What was the name of your degree? What was it called?**

BSc- Physics, that's a lot of science...

**Did you want to be a nurse or train to be a nurse?**

Actually I want to be after this, but because of my family business, so I have to work for my family when I finish my High School.

**To support your mother and father?**

Yes.

**And you have brothers and sisters?**

Yes, I have two sisters... I'm the oldest... and so my father, he is alcoholic and my mother has to work, so she cannot afford me much so I need to work when I finish my High School.

**So how did things develop from there? What happened in Yu Par's life next?**

So my job is a lot and I earn money but I have to work at 6 o'clock (in the morning) to 8 o'clock (at night) and no holidays.

**Was that a family business?**

No, a job... my boss, they are doing an unofficial ... they have no permission from Government, so it is very dangerous, but it make money a lot for her, I have to help her, which is kind of dangerous for me... and so sometimes the Government inspector come and check then we close our shop and we ran away sometimes... it is the currency, the currency is very risk, we have to hide in another place. But sometimes we put a notice up, we visit to the, we go to trip, like holidays, because the currency is very high... and so it make me good money, but very dangerous for me too. So after the three years I am nearly finished my university, that year, my boss was arrest by Government. Yes the Government arrested her... so she arrested in jail, ten years... and for me, nine years, how to say, the judge he decide for me, nine years in jail, but my boss' husband give a lot money , under table money, and I am three months in jail, then I rescued, yes. I can support my family a lot, and my mother can spend half (time) in Kachin State and that is very helpful for my family.

**So the money was helpful, and helped you get through your university?**

Yes, but for me it is very bad; which is good for my family. And I drop out from that, I left that job, I start working at ILBC, International Language and Business Centre. It is very popular in Yangon, and I work in the international school, maybe eight years [in total].

**So you were training people for business studies?**

And I am administrator, but not a high position. And I work in administration department. In that administration department they have 21 people in administration... My boss request me to move to help the Kachin school in ILBC... And I met my husband in Kachin State. He work in ILBC too in Kachin State, in Myitkyina; a town of Kachin State.

**And that's where you met Julius?**

And he was working in the copy department, a copier... and print... I finished high school at fifteen, start work at job sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, nineteen... and after that I start working in ILBC and I met Julius and we got married when I am twenty one.

**You've fitted a lot into your life.**

Yes, changing and moving around and it is very hard for me, but it is very good for me, I met different cultures and I got different business experience, and which is good for me and at the same time which is not really personally good for me but for my family which is good and I can continue and make money for my family. And when I am 24 I drop out from ILBC and I start working my own business. I am a shop keeper and I also do a jade trade, a dual job.

**And that would have opened up some interesting experiences for you.**

Yes, I trade to China, trading to China but that is not official job, it is very secret... so sometimes I got a lot of benefit, profit and sometimes I lost... And so I am twenty seven and my business start falling down because the Government catch things so my business loss,

**The Government was tightening up on that sort of trade?**

And war... fighting between KIA, Kachin Independent Army, and Burma; because I had to give tax to KIA and also Government. So, half way is village with Burmese Government and half way is include after the border finish, then I have to start pay the KIA because they are bordering China. Sometimes they are fighting even though I give the tax, I cannot get my jade and it is lost... and I don't know where I need to find, and I cannot go to there... so my business start losing and finally I lost everything, my home, and everything I lost and I lost a lot of, how to say, I borrowed money, yes I owed, I am face down and nearly suicide myself, it's very bad (tearful).

**And you had some young children at that time...**

I got Samson, and so when I nearly suicide myself, but I think, my body is something changed because I didn't notice my period time, and I went to make sure I have a baby, and it is very dangerous and so I go and check a doctor and I don't know when my period finish last time so I don't know, am I pregnant, and doctor said that it's baby so I cannot suicide because baby is coming... so that's why because of business and everything around difficulty, that why Steven and Samson gap of eight years.

**And then something must have happened between you finishing that business and coming to TTC. What happens in between there?**

Yes, so I decide to come to Thailand but my aim is to go to Bangkok and work in Bangkok, but I don't know how to get in to Bangkok, because I have not enough money to go to Bangkok. So my brother in law, Julius' brother, is in Mae La camp, so we decide to go to Mae La camp and then we will move after that to Bangkok.



So we arrive to Mae La, 2013. So I met with Ki Ku and Mu Ku who is attending TTC (Teacher Training College) and working with EAI [Effective Aid International] so Ki Ku loved me so much and so she gave me advice to attend TTC, even though I'm not interested. But I'm thinking that it is difficult to go to Bangkok because we have not enough money and my baby is so young but for me I am a person who is always trying to work hard, I don't want to be lazy, so I don't want to waste my time in refugee camp really, so I want to attend TTC.

Yes, the aim is not good, because I don't, I never think that I become a teacher... but because of opportunity and a chance I want to improve my skills. Because Ki Ku explain me that foreigner teachings and you can get a lot, because I'm working at ILBC so I know how much education is important and honestly I can make money if I education...



*Photo of a family and their home within Mae La refugee camp.*  
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mae\\_La\\_refugee\\_camp.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mae_La_refugee_camp.jpg)

**But it's practical, you've got a family and you're in a very difficult situation in Mae La camp, you don't want to be lazy and sit around do nothing. And you're thinking, how can I spend my time wisely and improve my chance of moving forward?**

Yes, but every time I think I am right, now I'm thinking I'm selfish, I just think for myself personally, how to get money for my family, how can I get support... because my husband has a good heart but he is not greedy so he cannot make money a lot, not like me and he cannot give advice, he always accept me what I do, he never reject, which is good, which is not good, I cannot discuss with my husband, and he cannot give me good idea, because he trust me, and he thinks I have more abilities than him, so he trusts me to do what I do...

But my brother in law said to me that if you go to TTC, you have no supporting, you have not enough money to attend TTC, you have 2 cents and it is impossible. So he wants me to do like selling traditional foods, so it can make money and it is suitable income money for my family in refugee camp. So it difficult time to decide which is good and which is not really good for my family... but for me the selling traditional food besides main road is very low job for me and I have pride and I lost a good business and I don't want my life like that very low situation... that is not good for my sense too, so I choose to go to TTC, however I face difficulties... but I will try my best.

So I make the entrance exam and I'm clearly pass, but for my husband, he has not enough English, so it is difficult for my teachers, Teacher G and Teacher K. And they called me and they accept me to attend but not Julius. And they ask me if Julius not able to attend TTC what will I do. Then I say if Julius is not included I will not go... and they said OK we will reply later. Then Teacher G and Teacher Kendal, EAI and BTI they accept, my leaders accept me, our family into TTC.

**So Julius obviously found it hard because his English was not very good. But with your support you were able to both study and grow.**

Yes, and actually as a husband and wife we are very difficult because in TTC we are old, not old, but older,... mmm more mature than the other students, so if we are lazy that is not a good model to the other students, we try hard, and I try to get A+ and A and B and my husband he also try hard even though he doesn't understand well because of his English. But when we arrive home so we sharing and discussing and he give his idea and he write down with the Burmese and then I translate for him. So but there is a lot of hard working during two years because he become a teacher, but if he doesn't know really about what he is learning so that is difficult in his future teaching, so he try more than me... he have to try, so it is a hard time for him too.

**So he can speak Burmese and Kachin?**

Yes

**And you can speak?**

Kachin, Burmese, and now Karen, and English a little bit... and Thai a little bit now, yes.



*Y1 & Y2 class photo, Noh Boh, 2014. Yu Par and Julius 3<sup>rd</sup> & 7<sup>th</sup> from left along back row.*

**So that's how you both came to TTC. Thank you for sharing that.**

And during this interview I want to talk about a religious, my religion. So my father is very strong in Buddhist, and I already explain my mother is being like him, so but you know, God put me, sometimes I want to think what is real God... because I live in Kachin State and my



grandparents teach me a doctrine of Christian view and when I live in Yangon my grandparents teach me a lot of the Buddhist doctrines and teaching. So it's comparing in my life always, always, but my father sometimes I am singing a Sunday School song and he'll beat me, yes,...

And when I am eight years my aunty, my mother younger sister come and taught me what is God

and what is Jesus and what Jesus done for us and I start interesting... so I start thinking, but you know it is like a crazy thinking because I honour the Buddhist doctrine and I start interest Jesus and God, so I'm comparing but sometimes I want to follow Jesus, but I'm feeling 'ana' [phonetic; a Burmese word] ...

### **You were torn between the two?**

Yes, yes, so sometimes I want to listen to God, I think that is really right, other time I cannot decide good or bad, but I'm doing the Buddhist things, so for example if I want to pass the exam so we have a spell, so I used to do with the way like that and but in Christian doctrine that is really bad... it is struggling a lot in my life, so that is my religion.

So when I married Julius, I began Christian, because I love my husband and my husband tell me you should baptise if you want to marry me we cannot marry Buddhist and Christian. So you have to baptise, so I just learn three days Bible...

### **What sort of Christian background did Julius come from?**

Baptist... yes, so I learn a little bit about Bible and the pastor teaching something, like baptising and what Jesus done for us, not deeply... so I'm baptised and got married to Julius and I become a Christian and but I'm really stay in trusting between what is Buddhist and Christian. But my husband's family and my grandfather and grandmother, they are very traditional and my

husband's family is not good modelling for me. Because my brother in law at the time, they are alcoholics and using drugs in the Kachin State, yes... so my father in law and my mother in law they... I never heard about Jesus from them, they just believe God and believe Jesus but they are doing things and their life is like the other religion... not like Christian so they cannot help me to grow in spiritually...

And when I ask, I'm reading Bible, 'cause I stand in a Christian side and my father's family reject me because I become Christian and I married a Christian man so they reject me and



*Yu Par creating a sculpture of a gecko in the visual art class, 2014.*



so I stand in Christian side. So I'm trying to forget, I'm trying to release Buddhist things in my self so I'm trying to read Bible and trying to understand what is this and sometimes I go and ask my father in law and my mother in law and my husband, they cannot explain... they didn't know how many chapters including in Bible... that kind of Christian... so is a Sunday Christian. So I start go interesting in religion and I just focus in my business... that is my religion story.

When I arrived [in Kachin State] I lost everything in my business and I don't know which God can help me, you know... I cannot confident and everything around is very uncomfortable for me and but one day, the pastor the new pastor, and I know him, not in Mae La in Kachin State, before I move to Mae La, he came and just make a relationship. But he didn't talk about Jesus and God, just make a relationship, helping my mind and courage, all that lies, and you will be OK, you are young age, you are not forty, just twenty eight or twenty nine so you can start your life again and he went like that, but he didn't talk about anything about God and Jesus... and he start trying encourage my mental [health] and supporting. And one month and two months later we got a good relationship, because he is really helpful for our family and one day he invite to come to his church and I said, OK I will go to his church and he start preaching about God, what is God... even though as a human we can make mistakes, but we can learn from that mistake and God never let us fall down, yes that kind of preaching, so I should try again.



And at the time I said, 'God if you are real, God help me to draw to your ways.' And I start reading again the Bible and pastor tell me I should ask the Holy Spirit and you should invite first in your life then he will help you and you can be different when you read Bible and your knowledge might be confused when you read the Bible but when you read with the Holy Spirit then God will guide you and you will know, you will understand what is the real meaning of Bible, and the way,... So, before I'm reading the Bible, I'm always thinking of David and Abraham and Sarah and they modelling stories of high interest to read. The Old Testament because they have many stories, but new story [New Testament] is a little bit difficult for me because Jesus died for us, is quite difficult for me to believe, is it sure, you know- can you understand me?

#### **Yes I hear what you're saying...**

But our pastor help me and he try to explain and he comparing with the stories and things and really good is his background is Buddhist and he become a Christian and his family reject him too. He has a lot of difficulty when he stand a Christian life and he can share. So that is not accident, I understand now that is not accident.

#### **He was the right person to help you understand.**

Yes, and we decide to move to Mae La, and in Mae La I heard a lot of God and Ki Ku helped me a lot, and when I arrive TTC I learn a lot from TTC I learn a lot from teachers and you and everything. It is very different, because I'm growing in a Buddhist, around Buddhist, and traditional [Christian] and a business area, which is very selfish, you know... I can just focus

on my family and for myself, not for others. It is very hard for me, and I have tried because I was rich, and difficult to request to other it attack my pride (tearful).

**Yes, difficult to receive support from others. Because you were once very well off...**

And my clothes, I never wear the way like that... it is very cheap and so changing a lot in my family and my life is always changing. Up and down [Yu par moving her hand up and down].

**You covered a range of questions very clearly. Could you describe for us what you have been doing since you graduated from TTC and how your training has contributed to that. Where did you go after TTC? You went back to Mae La?**

Yeah, so at the time, so it just open [teaching jobs] in Klay Moe Kee, Mae Te Pu Kee [two Primary Schools across the Moei River and in Burma] and Noh Boh Primary. So I cannot speak Karen, so teacher G [Graeme Cook] difficult to get job for us. Even I can speak Karen, but I cannot read and write Karen, just speaking I can understand, so I cannot explain to my students in the Karen language and write and reading, and everything, so I go back to Mae La and Sarah, High 6 Principal, [Her three sons have attended and graduated from TTC] she request me to teach in High 6 as a high school mathematics teacher for Grade 10, 11 and 12. So it is hard for me again.



*Yu Par, Julius and children at graduation.*

**They would speak Karen; that would be very difficult.**

Yes...but also the KED, the refugee Karen Education Department, they start Karen language Grade 1-Grade 9, everything is Karen except English. So, all is Karen. But after Grade 9 finish Grade 10, 11 and 12 is all English... maths, geography, history... everything is English, except Karen and Burmese [language courses]. All these subjects is with English, so it is hard again because I cannot speak Karen and students is low in English. So they have to learn mathematics with English, new words, and for me difficult to explain the English meanings through with Karen language, because I can speak just very little.

**Did you ever study English back in Yangon?**

Yes, Burmese up to Grade 8, but after Grade 9 and 10 all in English.

**That's where you got the foundation for English?**

Yeah. So I decide to run away from High 6. So I search a job in Mae Sot and Ki Ku help me again. Because at that time she left from TTC and she stay in Mae Sot, so she help me to get job and I got job in orphanage, one month for 5,000 Baht [approximately NZ \$228] for each [month] so I got a job, so I go back to Mae La and pack my things to move to Mae Sot. At the time I clearly heard God said, 'Don't go, don't go!' And, 'Please listen his words.'

**Were you planning to go with your family?**

Yes.

### **Would that have been an illegal move?**

Yes, illegal move. But my job was supposed to give the Visa and everything, so it is safe for me to working in there. So I pray again and I'm apologise to Ki Ku I cannot come to Mae Sot, and please apologise to my new boss, and Ki Ku is so angry because my new boss and Ki Ku is good relationship and she recommend for us and I cannot go... but you know at the time High 6 can give me just 1,700 Bt. But my new job in Mae Sot give me 5,000. But in my spirit it is very sure and comfortable to stay in Mae La. But my physical is shocked. So I start studying for Y10, 11 and 12 mathematics. And the internet and the information and I cannot sleep well because I have to learn. Because TTC finish at February and High 6 start at June, I have just March, April, May, three months... for Grade 10, 11 and 12.

So and Julius didn't get a job in High 6, he got in High 4, near High 6 and he got 1,000 Bt for one month [Approximately NZ\$46]. But we brave to choose God's way 'cause God want me to stay there. So it is comfortable for my spirit, and we believe God will provide. Me and my family, income money is important but not more than God. So we obey God and decide to stay in Mae la again, and we have no home in Mae La. So we stay with another teacher, he let our family to stay with his house so we living in the other house... one year, after one year later Sarah give half her house and we move to our new house and we live here.



*Yu Par, 4<sup>th</sup> from the right, with fellow students, Noh Boh, 2013.*

**So 2017, last year, you got your house... and you have now left Mae La High 6 and now you're employed by EAI. Just briefly tell us, what your new job is going to be with EAI.**

Honestly, I don't understand now, what is my position in Mae Sot, because last year I'm just a teacher in High 6 but now I don't know...

### **But you've all moved to Mae Sot...**

And Chris [Chris McConnell, CEO of Effective Aid International], he will tell when he arrives to all people and I don't know too... (laughing), I will know with you what is my new job.

**So in the next couple of days you're going to talk with Chris about this new role helping with EAI interests in education in Burma, across the border in Hpa An?**

And Maw Ker...

**Where the high school is, but not in Klay Moe Kee and Moe Tee Pu Kee?**



Because it is quite different in curriculum because Klay Mu Kee and Moe Tee Pu Kee using KED and New Zealand curriculum. And in Maw Ker and Hpa-An combined curriculum with New Zealand and Burmese curriculum; which is quite different.

**Thank you so much. I've got one last question. Based on your experiences and your understanding of TTC what aspects of teacher education and community life here at TTC do you feel could be strengthened or improved for current and future students?**

It's a good question. Um... but for me, from my experience TTC is the best place for me to changing our thinkings and living styles, it is the best place for me, for mental for spiritual and physical too. So it is a diverse culture in here, so we can learn a lot from other and share our cultures to others so if we move to another community it is not difficult for me, for us, because we have experience in here how to live with a new community and also my teachers love God and they are a good model for us.

Um... I want to become a teacher because of my teachers, yeah. So this is the good place for education, who wants to get a quality education and also this is the best place for deliver a quality education for children. So um, actually I don't know how to give the advice for more strength, because almost everything here is a bless for me so I don't know how to give the advice because TTC provide us for food, and a good educations and for our spirit, everything is really good for me because my age [36] is older than the younger students so I have experience so because of my experience maybe the students can think this is a blah, blah, blah...but for me my experience here I got a truly peace and I know real God.

Because here, some of the students are non-Christians so it is a good place to learn about God in here. So even though they change or not change, that is they are tight but I believe that God put them to here, it is not accident. He has aim, one day he will change, I believe that because everything around here and our teachers love God and are good leaderships and good modelling.



*Noh Boh, 2014: Yu Par working with other student-teachers on a group mural project.*

## Interview 2 with Ah No at TTC 20<sup>th</sup> May 2018

### Please describe your life experiences.

Yes. My name is Ah No, I live in Burma, Ayeyarwaddy Division. I live in a small village which near a small town, but my village very small, about twenty four houses altogether. We are from a farming family, we plant the rice and some gardens.

### Your father was a rice farmer?

Yes, my father and my mother, do the planting for the farming and garden.

### And do you have brothers and sisters?

I have three brothers and two sisters. I'm the youngest of my brothers and sisters.



*Ah No's family.*

### What was it like growing up as a young boy in your village?

For me, because I'm the youngest, I got more opportunity than the other because my brothers and my sisters care me... they said to me not to do or what to do, so every time I ask them what to do and I get advice from them...

### And they cared for you?

Yes.

### Was it safe growing up in that village when you were a young boy?

Yes, because we are living under the control of the Government, so we live at their rules, yes, so we don't need to worry then about the fighting.

### And did you speak Burmese?

Yes, I can speak Burmese and for me I am Poe Karen [Second largest group of Karen languages- four distinct types].

### Did you speak Karen when you were a little boy in your family?

Yes, my first language is Poe Karen [a Karenic branch of the Sino-Tibetan language family], not S'gaw Karen like here [many students at TTC speak S'gaw Karen]. It is different, another Karen, West Poe Karen.

**And you also learned Burmese?**

Yeah I learned Burmese and S'gaw Karen we use here right now.

**I didn't realise that...**

We have two Karen [dialects] in Ayeyarwaddy and in Yangon. We speak S'gaw Karen and Poe Karen. The S'gaw Karen is the same here. But for the Poe Karen it is different. West Poe Karen is not the same...

**And what sort of religious upbringing did you have as a young boy?**

I was born in a Christian family and in a Christian village because all of the house and family member, everyone in my village are Christian. There is no other religion in my village.

**Tell me some of the memories you have of being a young boy growing up in your village? Do you remember any interesting stories, any adventures?**

Yes, when I was about thirteen years old, because my sister, my oldest sister she got a problem with her body so she has to go to the hospital, she had to go to Rangoon to operation, to do operation, then my mum had to go with her. So my mum left me home with my father. Because I never like to stay with my father; I mostly spend my time with my Ma at the time, I feel I miss my Ma. Because of my father, he never spend (much) time with me when I am child...

**He was very busy was he working on the farm?**

Yes, most of the time spent with my Ma... I really miss her and I do not happy at that time...

**And did your sister get better at the hospital?**

Yes, she stay about one year...

**And you felt quite sad because your mother was a way for that time looking after your sister?**



*Ayeyarwaddy Division lies to the west of Yangon. Kayin (Karen) State lies to the east, bordering Thailand.* Map source: <https://www.pinterest.nz/pin/461619030533029026/?lp=true>



Yeah. At that time I poor nutrition because when I was born, I did not grow like not very healthy so sometimes I need my mother to look after me...

**Tell us what your school experiences were like in the village.**

Yeah, I studied the primary school in my village, a small school, it only have primary school in the village. At that time when I finish Grade Six, then I have to move to the other school, in a small town...



**Did you live in the small town with a relative?**

I stay with my sister, we rent a house and cook ourselves... then we go to the school, we live in the town.

**And you would have been about ten or eleven years old?**

... about twelve or thirteen.

**So at about twelve or thirteen, Ah No moves away from the village to the small town and stays with your sister in a house... and tell me how many years did you stay at this school for?**

From Grade 7 to Grade 10. Then I finish there.

**What were your favourite subjects?**

Maths, because for me in Burma we need to read a lot and write a lot and for me and I had to memorise but for subject like the maths I enjoy it and can do...

**And when you finished school were you about seventeen?**

It were between sixteen and seventeen.

**And what did you do next?**

I tried to join a university, we call it distant university, I try with the economics subjects major.

**And were you accepted for that study?**

Yeah I got the chance to study to university then I study for a year. The first year I did not pass the examinations, so I failed, for the first year.

**And how did you feel?**

I feel like I have nowhere to continue with my education because I have to redo again, so I feel like just waste my time.

**Was it expensive to study for that year?**

Yeah, you need to paid to the school [university], for the books and for dormitory, for the tuition...

**And who was helping you pay for all those costs?**

Because we do not need to do, we do not need to attend for the whole year, we just go the part time... so when I get free time I worked in my garden, planted vegetables and I sell... some of my brothers and sisters they support me some money...

**So here you are about eighteen or nineteen, you have done one year of distance study, but you haven't passed... what happens next to Ah No?**

Yes, before I got the results of the exam, then I heard about TTC.

**How did you hear about TTC?**

From my brother because my bother and KeKu she was teaching here, then she went to Burma, and she met with my brother about TTC. Then my brother asked me if you want to go an study in a English school... because when I was in University I used to live in a room, a Catholic dormitory for our food, so we don't need to find food...



*Ah No and other students preparing dinner in the kitchen at TTC Noh Boh 2015.*

*Note the open fire and dirt floor.*

**So they subsidised your costs?**

Yes, no costs, they get the food, free.

**How did your brother meet KeKu?**

Oh because my brother's wife and KeKu's husband (Mu Ku) are from same village, and they know each other.

**Was it KeKu who encouraged you to come to TTC?**

Yes, before I hear about TTC, I am waiting for the results of the university, then after that I knew I could not understand and could not answer the test very well I heard the message from my brother. I would like to study at TTC because before I came to here (TTC) I see that some of the people in Burma, they just read and just remember answer and pass so, it's all memorizing.

**Were you interested in becoming a teacher at that stage or did you want to learn English?**

Yeah. I want to study in TTC because one of my friends (Bwar Sein) because he can speak English he can communicate with the leaders and the foreigners; so I think if I stay in the university I could not learn anything about English or communication, so I started to think about to learn English in an English group...

**And why did you want to learn English?**

Because in Burma, if you are good at English, or if you can speak it very well, you get more opportunity to work.

**So how old were you when you came to TTC?**

About 19 year... about four years ago.

**Tell me now with moving into your experiences at TTC, what was it like for Ah No to come from Burma to TTC in Noh Boh?**

It was adventurous... because I never been to the other country, I just stay in my own country. I just stay in town... I never been to other town...

**Was it hard?**

Yeah... I dare not visit Burma itself... I was on my own.

**What are some of the memories of your training, what was it like training here?**

It helpful a lot for a young man to grow up, 'cause in TTC we just we're not just learning about the training, we learn about God and we learn about community, and relationship. So we grow with many things in our life...

**So it was helpful as a young man to learn about community, about God and share with us how succeeded...**



*Graham helping Ah No get ready for practicum.  
Note: Students had to carry all their requirements  
for living in the village for several weeks.*



**because you had to do some extra time didn't you. Tell us about the struggles that you had.**

For the first when I came to here and I couldn't speak English and couldn't understand all the teachers' teaching. If they teach about something I only catch about three words... it was very difficult for me to understand for the full lesson. Then I was struggling with the languages to understand the sentences. Then I do a lot of assignments, because when I live in Burma I never do about assignments, so it's very difficult for me...to think and to reach out to give time.

**What was it like going out on practicum to schools to practice your teaching?**

It very difficult in the beginning, 'cause sometimes we don't know about the children and we don't know about the teacher's strategy and planning. So when we are teaching the students in primary school it is difficult what to teach or how to plan. Sometimes we confused what we are going to teach... we could not teach very well.

**How did you feel when you finished your training and you graduated?**

What I have noted, in the past I couldn't understand about teaching but when I graduate I see that I see myself as a teacher... I know that I have responsibility for the school.

**And which school are you at?**

Klay Moe Kee, in the Karen village.

**You've been teaching for 1 year, share with us about that experience. Share the highs and lows of being a beginning teacher at Klay Moe Kee.**

Last year I taught Grade 3 students... In the beginning when I was teaching about two weeks I decided to run away (laughing), it was so difficult for me. I could not know about the children's situation and about my teaching. One of the difficult for me, I could not write Saw Karen very well, it's very difficult to teach the children.

**Is that because the Karen language is different from the one you grew up with?**

Yes... they speak a different dialect?

I just learn about S'gaw Karen here (at TTC) and learn about to speak, but not to write and read... I never learned. I learned Poe Karen and can write Poe Karen and read Poe Karen, but Saw Karen is different, I never learned it about reading and writing it.

**So at Klay Moe Kee they speak a different dialect of Karen language, and that made it very difficult. And after two weeks Ah No is planning to run away.**

Yes... I told the other teacher, I can't do anymore... I feel depressed. Every night I could not sleep because I think about ooh, it's very difficult for me to teach and I don't know what to do... I have no idea about teaching. Then it is good to run and do the other job... then I talked with the other teachers and they encouraged me... but it doesn't work. I still trying to run away... but I came back to here (Noh Boh) and met with Graeme and Kendal. Then I asked to give me plan... ideas.

Because in Klay Moe Kee all the other teachers are experienced teacher, for me I have no experience because that was my first year... the others have been teaching for two or three years, so they can teach more than me... For me if I compare with them I could not do very

well. Then teacher G (Graeme) and Kendal encouraged me. We do not expect you to be like them, you just graduate now... we appreciate what you do, even though you do the mistake, it's no problem... we just want to see you are trying to improve and develop...

**And did you go back?**

Yeah I go back...

**And how has it worked out for you since going back?**

When I go back I want to start with prayer because I know that for myself I could not do. I know that God teach me what to do, then it is much better. Then after two months it's getting much better to teach.



*Ah No with his Grade 3 class in 2017 at Klay Moe Kee Village.*

**Well done. And how do you feel now? You've finished a year and you're about to start at Klay Moe Kee with the same level?**

No I'm going to teach grade 7-8...

**How old are grade 7 and 8 students?**

Starts about thirteen to sixteen... at Klay Moe Kee.

**Your maths will come in handy.**

Yeah...

**Is that the highest grade at Klay Moe Kee?**

Yes and the highest grade we can work at...

**But you would know some of those children, because you would have taught them before.**

When I was teaching last year, Day Nor was teaching Grade 7-8. When she was busy she asked me to lead in her class so I have some experience with Grade 7 and 8.

**When Day Nor was busy with the leadership of the school you could teach the children and get a bit of experience...**

Yes.

**How are you feeling in your heart about going back to Klay Moe Kee to do your second year of teaching?**

I feel that this year I will have a lot of responsibility, like last year I do teaching and look after the generator for the lights and the motor-bike for transportation... then I help with cleaning for the classroom, then the teacher house... For some time we need to cover the library books for the library.

**When you think back on your training at TTC what do you think could be strengthened or improved for the current students and the future students? How could it be made better?**

I think we need to teach the students about their lifestyle... if they are going to develop their life by themselves it won't work... but if they listen to the teacher and they obey God to guide their life, so they will improve for their future life...

**Is there anything else you like to share about your story?**

I have to study in TTC about three years, and in the very first year I could not finish for the first year... and then I studied about six months and a ran away from TTC. Then I go to my village and try to do the other thing like economics or business. But it did not work so I decided I needed to continue my education... so I need to find out my way to continue my education and if I go back to TTC maybe I could get the chance again... if the teacher assess.

Then I went to Thailand, to the Mae La camp and then I worked with a carpenter, I worked about three months with building, building a house and building the church here (at Noh



*TTC, Noh Boh, 2016. Ah No back row, third from left.  
Kendal middle row on the left.*



Boh), I feel very tired, very hot working in the sunshine... I tried building to earn money... I felt I had no time to rest. Even though you are feel sick you need to go and work because you want money.

**So then you came back to TTC... was that hard getting accepted back into the programme?**

Yes... but not very difficult for me because, before I leave TTC Teacher Graeme and Kendal told me, we do not say go back but if you do want to join TTC, to come back to our family, you are welcome to... Then I remember their words that told about that.

**So you remembered those words that you would be welcomed back?**

Yeah...

**And you did decide to change your mind... and so you came back and finished...**

Yes.

**What a wonderful story. And what do you hope to do in the future?**

Sometimes in my heart, it is not normal... if I go back to my village all my family members, my relatives tell me if you are working in the village if you are teaching, how much do you get paid? Then they ask about money and I said to them, I got about 3,000 baht for a month... They say it is not much for you... you can earn more money in here in Burma with your education you can go to the hotel and translate and earn more...

**Do you think you might do that?**

Sometimes, when I see my family, they needs money I have studied for more than 10 years and haven't paid back to my family so do I need to help people or do I need to help my family? I feel like that... so if I go to my village my ideas changing, earn some money. But when I come here my heart is to help people...

**That is very special. So was that small village near Ayeyarwaddy?**

Yes...

**What was the name of your village?**

My village, Myaungmya (several hundred kilometres west of Yangon).



*Ah No graduating at TTC, Noh Boh, 2017.  
Congratulating him is Chris McConnell (EAI).*

### **Interview 3 with Joshua and John Win at TTC 21<sup>st</sup> May 2018**

Their mother has served as the principal of a school in the Mae La refugee camp. Their older brother, Jonathan, was in the first cohort of student teachers and graduated in 2014.



*2017 second year enrolment photo.*

**Please describe where you were born and what was life like for you when you were growing up?**

Joshua: I was born in Yangon and I have five people in my family, mother and father, Jonathan, me and John.

**Did you grow up in the city?**

Yes, in the middle of the city... When I was in Yangon we live in Yangon for ten years and then we study there for five years...

**When you're growing up in Yangon, what was life like for you? Was it a happy time, challenging...? Tell us about your mum and dad.**

John: Mostly I can see that my parents cannot spend much time with their children, and my mum worked at the bank and my father a driver... a taxi driver.

**So they were very busy? And you didn't see them very much.**

Joshua: In Burma we have three types of people, low, middle and high. And we are just the middle. In Burma we have to struggle a lot to... our parents have to struggle a lot to send us to school... because the salary is not enough for us...

**Tell us about your primary school experiences... what was it like going to primary school in Yangon?**

John: I go to YAS, Yangon Adventist School... mission school and when I was in that school I learned the gospel and grew up in a Christian family, so we just know stain a little... about other Christian I do not know...

**Thank you for sharing that John. Were you good students?**

Yes.



**Did you get good grades?**

No just the middle...

**Tell us what happened after ten of age... you lived in Yangon for ten years... what happens next in your lives?**

Joshua: We lived in Yangon and then our relatives here are working KNU (Karen National Union), he's the leader of that... it's not safe to live in Burma for us...

**Because you were related to this leader in the KNU? The Burmese would persecute you if they know who you are?**

Joshua: My mum's cousin husband is working in the KNU and then we also have to struggle a lot in Yangon, before we moved to Mae La.



*2018 photo of a small section of the Mae La refugee camp from the road. Established in 1984; the largest of nine camps in Thailand. Population 40,000 – 50,000.*

**Because you hoped to be safe? Were you hoping to travel to America, Australia or somewhere else?**

Yes, we also hope to move to other because there is no safety in Yangon.

**So at the age of ten you two boys packed up your home in Yangon and you move out, all the way through the jungle and you come through to Mae La camp... What that like for you as ten year old boys arriving at a refugee camp?**



Joshua: First we don't know where we are going... and we just follow our parents, and we don't know anything... where we are going, or what we will do... but when we arrive in Mae La we also have nowhere to live, and so we live with aunty together...

**Was it a sad for you? Were you worried?**

No (laughing)...

**You were too young... you think it's a bit of an adventure**

Yeah... (laughing).

John: We also like to travel and move to different places...

**Now as ten year olds in the refugee camp were you able to make friends amongst other families and children?**

John: We can speak Karen but not very much, so when we started to go to school we have to learn Karen language and we have a Karen friend and by making friend we have much better speaking in Karen.

**So in Yangon you spoke Burmese?**

No we spoke Burmese at school, but at home we spoke Karen?

**Was you mum Karen or was your dad?**

Both of them are Karen.

**So here you are in the Mae La camp, having to learn the Karen language, to write it and understand it at a higher level at school... and what are some of the memories that you have?**

Joshua: When I arrive to Mae La and I go to school, I cannot write Karen, and the teacher is reading Karen so I do not know how to copy in my book... everyone, he tell everyone to write but I can't write so I have to watch to other people... so very difficult for me to start to learn there... and when we arrive to Mae La we are not the same grades and I study five and he (John) study Grade 3.

**So how much difference in age is there between the two of you?**

Two years... and some of my friends are always joking at me and they also bully me, like putting crap in my bag... so sometimes like they hurt me... (punch, fight with you)... so I am not happy to study there at all... that's why at that time at Middle school... and one year there and then we move to 'Hi Six' school.

**So you're moving to Mae La High Six school... was your mother the principal of the school?**

No, not yet.

**When did your mum get involved in Mae La Six?**

Joshua: At the time when we arrived Mae La, I think 2007.

**So she started as a teacher and then moved up to being the principal?**

Yes.

**What did your dad do in the camp?**

My dad just stay in house, at that time and then when we moved to High Six and now he helps with electric...

**He helps with the electricity?**

Yes.

**John, any memories of the camp you'd like to share?**

When young... I was same with Joshua, my friends bully me... but after I bully them, I fight back and we got friendship.

Joshua: When I moved to High Six, I want to study together with my brother, so I go back to grade three... because I'm not happy to be alone at school because of bullying... so I ask my mother to put me in a lower level.

**So you stayed at the Mae La camp and you finished high school?**

Yeah

**What grade did you finish?**

Grade 12 same time.

**How old were you then?**

Sixteen and eighteen.

**When you finished your high school what was going through your mind? What were you hoping to do?**

John: When I graduated (from school) I do not think for any way, I just ask my mum, my parents to plan for me to go wherever they want...



*Eh Hser, Sunday Moo, Ah No, John and Joshua (Joshua two years older).*

**How about you Joshua?**

I ask my mum, my parents about where to study and I ask them that I want to continue to learn more...

**You wanted to go on to a university? But you weren't too sure what you wanted to do...**

Yeah...

**So how did you find out about TTC? How did you get involved?**

John: TTC- the only first point I know that TTC is teacher Graeme. He come to Mae La and start to build a school... so my brother (Jonathan) is the first student

**I remember that... and Jonathan was in that first class.**

John: At the time I know teacher training college, but I do not get interested because I just a student and maybe grade 8 or 9 (12 or 13years old).

Joshua: I am the same like John, when I was in grade 12 the teachers from TTC like Yu Par and Thet Paing Tun and Aung, they are going back to teach us, at that time we are in Grade 12...

**They came through TTC and then they started teaching at your High Six School... and Yu Par would have been one of your maths teachers?**

Joshua: And I see the different teaching styles and they are a good teacher...

**What were the other teachers like at the school?**

John: I saw teachers have trained in TTC and teachers that come from Burma and teach in High Six and I can see they are different...

... teacher that come from the village usually they just teach us for the lesson, normally just want to learn from the text book...

**Just give you information and facts...**

Yeah but when we learn with the teacher from TTC, Yu Par, Thet Paing and Aung I can see that they build a relationship with students and have different style of teaching in the classroom, strategies... and they have high expectation of their students... to try hard... and give us our hope.



*Joshua and John with several other students travelling on the back of a ute, Noh Boh, 2017.*



**Any other thoughts you want to add?**

Joshua: After graduated (from school) what we do... we give many reasons for the hope to be something...

**So those experiences with teachers like Yu Par, Thet Paing and Aung it made you interested in TTC but you were still not sure what you wanted to do with your life? So what encouraged you to actually come to study at TTC?**

Joshua: My brother, Jonathan, encourage us to go to TTC and tell us about in TTC they are teaching better than our university...



*TTC Mural art: Cho Cho Oo, John and Mu Phaung,*

... and he also encouraged us to speak a lot in English and he tell us about they learn about many things like spiritually, about teaching or about life.

**And now I want to invite to share some experiences of living the TTC community. What do you remember about coming to TTC? What are some memories of the past two years?**

John: When I first come to TTC after graduating from High Six School I come here and feel like I am a student not influenced by anyone, just stay to myself...

**Like a stranger?**

Yeah a stranger...

**And how did that change for you? What happened next?**

In TTC we have to learn a strategy like a group work... participation, ... from that participation I build my friendship with the other students.

**How about you Joshua?**

We in TTC... we have to work with group and have participation and also sometime we pray



*TTC 2017: Joshua using maths equipment.*

together and go to Prayer Mountain, and we become like a family...

**And that helped you to study and keep going?**

Yeah... sometime we feel down and we encourage each other...

**Do you remember any funny experiences or anything you want to share that was embarrassing?**

Joshua: While I was in practicum I was practising for teaching dancing and we are practising to dancing funny and the students are looking at us and laughing and a student hit me, and I was shocked, ... I just give her eye contact and maybe she later scared... (laughing)- to stop me from dancing like ADHD...

**What was it like for you on practicum John?**

In my practicum I get diarrhoea, and I run to teacher toilet, the woman toilet, ... so I run to the teacher toilet and because I am very rushing I forgot to lock the door and I just thinking about my stomach and at that time the teacher come ... I didn't know that she is coming... and when she opened the door I shout, but she open more... (laughing)...

**What happened next?**

She shouted...

**Looking forward, what are you hoping to do now? Today is your graduation from TTC... Tell us about what you're hoping to do now.**

John: This year I am going to teach in High Six and I am hoping to teach students. I will share my experience about in TTC that I have learnt... and in that I want them to train to be confident.

**What grade do you think you will have to teach this year?**

Grades 10-12.

**And what are you hoping to do Joshua?**

I'm thinking the same way...teaching in High Six... same grade.

**So you'll share the same grade levels?**

Yeah, 10, 11 and 12... teaching maths.



*Left to right: Joshua, Cho Cho Oo, Sunday Moo, Zar Zar Win, John, Hser Nay Wah, 2018.*

John: English and Geography.



**How old are you now? What are your hopes and dreams for beyond?**

Joshua: 21...

John: 19.

John: For me I got a suggestion from Somchai's wife, his wife give me a suggestion about future... about to work at bank, to build Karen own bank and that way step by step...

and after getting higher she want me to work with the Karen people to start working with Karen people. Because the reason that idea... I can also help the Karen people with the job that I have... and also create the Karen community to support...



*Joshua Win during 3<sup>rd</sup> practicum in Klay Moe Kee village, three hours walk from Noh Boh.*

**Businesses and the economy?**

Yeah

**How about you Joshua, what are your hopes and dreams?**

When I was young, my dream is I want to be a policeman...

**What about now?**

Yes, yes...

**In Burma or where?**

Not in Burma... somewhere...

John: Even though Somchai's wife give me a suggestion I still talk about my aim to her about I want to be a soldier... because I'm very interested in... I want to train in a good army camp far country... and after come back and help myself... but Somchai wife let me think about the soldier and the bank man and who is more powerful... who have more power?

**So you're at the crossroads of your lives... you've got a year or so at Number Six school in the Mae La camp. How much longer that school will continue we don't know... And then you'll be looking to do something else.**

**My last question is, having been through TTC and you've experienced life here, are there suggestions for improving or strengthening the programme for the new students and the students who might come in the future? How could we make it better? Any ideas?**

John: I think for a new student who comes to TTC and the teachers teaching here, Teacher Graeme and Thaw Thi, I want that... before they are planning something I want to be



discussed each other and getting to accept that presentable, that have agreement between each other, teachers and students... to discuss their plans.

Joshua: I think everything is going well...

**Any other final thoughts as we finish this interview?**

Joshua: I said before I want to be a policeman, but only God knows... I'm not sure what will happen in my life... I just put everything, every worry to God.

John: I was thanks for BTI and from having people to learn from here, and go back to teach... and I want to encourage ... we don't know everything that will happen tomorrow that's why I make very many mistakes, 'cause I have plans for tomorrow, I just want to ask from God and don't worry about tomorrow.

**Thank you so much for your time and I've enjoyed listening to your answers.**



*Joshua and John at the summit of what is known locally as Temple Mountain, looking down over Noh Boh, across the Moei River to the foothills and distant mountains of Burma.*

## Interview 4 with Lay Gay Paw and Dorcas Htoo TTC 21st May, 2018

Tell us about your past life experiences before coming to TTC, your family life, your education, memories of social life.

My name is Lay Gay, I'm twenty-eight year old. I was born in Karen State in a village called Ler Du... in 1989.

**Was that a little country village where they grew rice?**

Yes.

**And what were your parents doing?**

My parents are farmers, farming the rice fields...

**Did they have machines or did they use oxen?**

Yes they use ox, we have no machine.



*2017: Lay Gay with Grade 4, Klay Moe Kee School, Myanmar.*

**And have you got brothers and sisters, Lay Gay?**

Yes, I have two sisters and one brother. I am the younger one in the family.

**Tell me a little bit about your family... what do you remember as a young girl growing up in this village?**

When I was very young we have difficult life in our village because we have the problem of political,... yes political problems. We cannot stay in the one place very long time and we also have... because we have political problems we also have the problem about life, food... education... we cannot study very well. We have to move place to place.

**Was that because of fighting?**

Yes because of fighting. When the soldiers come in the village they shoot everything they want to shoot... and we are not safe in the village.

**And can you remember as a young girl having to run out of the village to escape the soldiers?**

Ah... yes I remember when I was very young, maybe I'm Grade 1, when the soldiers come and they shoot, all of the students and teachers they run away and they hide under the school... I remember yes. If we in the school – we die.

**Did you hide under the building?**

Yes.

**Did you see people killed?**

At the time I don't know, I can't look ... we afraid and crying...

**So friends and family would have been hurt or killed?**

Yes... and some of the villagers are hurt but my family is safe... we run and come back in the village. When the soldiers go back we can stay in the village but when they come we are afraid.

**So I am going to take a break from that story and I am going to go to Dorcas.**

**Can you tell us where you grew up, where you were born and what life was like for Dorcas as a young girl?**

I was born in Burma, near Yangon. I just live in the village...

**Describe your village... what was it like?**

We have floating – like water,

**Was your house on poles above the water?**

Mmmm... not all the time, but water would flood across... because we live near Ayeyarwady River so it releases lots of water... sometimes our house nearly washed away...

My parents are farmer, we are planting rice field... I have two older sister and one older brother and youngest sister.

**And what are some of the memories that you have growing up in your village?**

Uh... when I understand the war I know my father how you say, ... drunk alcohol... I was born in a Christian family... (beginning to cry)... My father was Buddhist and when he marries my mother, he became a Christian...

**Your Mum was a Christian?**

Yeah...

**And do you know any of the stories around how your mum became a Christian?**

Because my grandma... my mum parents are Christians already...



*2016, TTC students heading across the Moei River, enroute to practicum placements in primary schools in Burma,*



**That was the influence?**

Yes

**I'm going to give Dorcas a little break and come to you Lay Gay, thank you... there you are in Karen State in Ler Du village and you are growing up and there is fighting and education is difficult, food is difficult... what else can you remember about growing up beyond Grade 1? Tell me some of your experiences when you were a bit older.**



*Lay Gay 2017 trying out the motor bike at Noh Boh.*

I remember that the fighting is become again and again so we have to ... the military they say to our village we have to move to another village and they many villages stay together in the one place... in the rainy season it is very difficult to travel, very difficult to bring the things like building things...

**And of course you would have lost your land so you couldn't farm the land any more...**

Yes we lost the land... we have to move to another place and so it very difficult then... and also my father is also dying... When I was very little, when I was two or three... so very difficult for my family, my mum...

**Was his ill health from the fighting?**

Not from the fighting, we have moved and we cannot have good medicine, he was sick and dying... we have no money to send him in the hospital...

**And when you moved to this new location, this big village, was there a school you could go to?**

Mmmm... many villagers come together and they build a school, a primary school and I go to the school there...

**And what are some of the memories of your primary schooling? Were they big classes? What were the teachers like?**

One building and many Grades stay together, very noisy... and teacher who teach us they are very... how to say... strict and they beat the students... we also have afraid them...

**They beat you with a bamboo stick?**

Yes a bamboo stick... sometimes they do like this (they hit your head on the table)...

**Did you have that experience Dorcas?**

I did, but not me... some of my friends...

**Lay Gay:**

They would hit you on the hand...

**Dorcas, can I come back to you now? Thank you. Tell us about your school life in this village near Yangon. What was it like going to school near the Ayeyarwady?**

In my village we have just a Primary School. If you want to go like Middle School, we need to walk one hour and thirty... and we row the boat ... but at the school they have only Grade 5 to Grade 8... Grade 10 to 12 you need to go to town...

**So you have to go on the boat to the Middle School... and what are some of the memories you have of your school?**

In Middle School one of math teacher all Grade 1 to Grade 8 afraid him because he very strict... we can see the class... we can see everything that happens... we just afraid even if we see him we are shaking, because he can hit the students with a stick, sometimes a vase (container) with the flower... throw it into the students... I can't memorise Burmese language, because it is hard because we are Karen... I always hit by teacher with stick...

**So these schools you went to Dorcas, were the lessons in Burmese?**

Yes... some teachers are Burmese...

**But at home you would speak Karen?**

Yes...

**What about you Lay Gay, were your school lessons in the Karen language?**

Yes in the Karen language...

**But for you Dorcas it was a bit harder because they would sometimes speak in Burmese?**

Yes because the Burmese teachers came to the village... some are Karen, some are Burmese.

**You (Dorcas) mentioned going to other schools on the river boat, what about High School?**

High School we came to town of Pantanaw the name of the town, Pantanaw High School we go to the border, we go and stay like a border, a dorm...a house, we need



*Noh Boh, 2015: Dorcas front row with dog.  
Mark Gladman (EAI) and Andrew Smith (BTI) in the backrow.*



to pay some money...

**But you were away from your home and family?**

Yes.

**What was that like going to High School as a young girl?**

I missed my family... and sometimes it is hard to live with other people... many people, different people...

**Were they kind to you? Did they look after you?**

Yes... many people, different views and thoughts...

**How did your High School studies go? Were you a good student?**

The first year we are nervous... because a lot of students speak Burmese but I can't speak it... not very well.

**And was your high school all taught in Burmese?**

Yes...

**No Karen language?**

Yes... also because at the time the subjects difficult for me is English. Physics is very difficult for me... the first day I was learning physics and chemistry...

**Thank you for sharing that. Lay Gay, let's pick up on your story, we've mentioned the situation with the fighting and you've moved to this other village, you've shared how your father sadly passed away when you were very young [yes], and when you went to school it was very noisy and the teachers were very strict and they would beat you and things like that... what happens next as you journey through into high school?**

**Tell us about your high school.**

Yes, ... I have to go to the high school in another village. We have to walk by foot one hour and very far from my house.

**Did you stay at a friend's house or walk each day?**

We walk and came back every day... like that.

**What was high school like for you at this new village?**



*Lay Gay, 2017*



The high school is relative to the primary school. They build a good building, they have different class... big building above, separate classrooms... But what was difficult for me was I always speak Karen and they are mostly Burmese... and difficult to make relationship with them... also teachers they are Burmese and they look down the Karen people.

**Why do you think the Burmese look down on the Karen people? Why is that? What has happened in the past?**

I don't know exactly, but when I'm at school I know Burmese hate Karen, some Burmese – not all. Some public hate Karen... Burmese soldiers hate Karen soldiers... the two sides they fight so we are in the middle. So we have to face difficulties.

**What was a happy memory for you at high school?**

Happy memory? Um... I have no happy memory in the high school... just sad memories.

**How old were you Lay Gay when you finished high school?**

I left at Grade 12 – no more schooling, because I cannot pay the money. When I go to the school I was very shy and very disappointed because I could not pay the money...



*Marion Sanders (BTI) and Lay Gay, TTC 2014.*

**So what did you do next with your life?**

I leave the school also because my mother have to work hard us so she cannot pay the money for me and she has to struggle with the food and our house so I left school and I help my Ma back in the farm...

**So she was able to get some land and a farm?**

Yes and in a different village...

**Dorcas, tell me how old were you when you finished high school?**

Seventeen.

**What was a happy memory for you from high school?**

We don't have much, just got some friends ... we don't have activities, no sport... we have drawing time but no teaching. We have PE but no teaching. Teachers give us free time. You can do whatever you like to do...

**So Dorcas, here you are at the age of seventeen and you finish high school, what did you do next?**

My family, we have difficulties like to study, to look after their children... I will not study anymore. My cousin, she live in a town near Chiang Mai (in Thailand). She need people to look after their children, so went to stay with them... I was 21 years old. I moved there and lived there three months and then moved to Chiang Mai.

**So you're now in Chiang Mai... and what happens next?**

At the time my cousin told me you have time to study, she want me to study – like learning English... so I go to the migrant school... they provide for the migrants so study there one and a half years. And then I thought I will go to university in Chiang Mai... but my cousin say she want to move back to Burma because she worry about her children cannot speak Karen and Burmese so she go back.

**So how did you get in to Chiang Mai? How did you get into Thailand?**

By passport...

**You came through legally as a migrant?**

Yes.

**And so you're experiencing a migrant school for a year and a half in Chiang Mai, you are in a different country, you have a lot of sadness with family and difficulties and your cousin decides to go back to Burma. And you went with her?**

Yes...

**Whereabouts did she move to in Burma?**

Yangon. In Yangon my cousin met with Somchai.

**So that's where the story connects with Somchai... so your cousin meets Somchai, and what does Somchai tell your cousin?**

At that time I am packing my things to move back to Yangon, so I can travel with my cousin and he [Somchai] ask my cousin do she really like to study more? My cousin ask me, I'm talking with Somchai and after that he give me the number [phone] of 'G' [Graeme] from there and I interview by phone.

**So Somchai encouraged you to get in touch with Graeme to study here at TTC?**

Yes, also I thought if I go back to Burma I will not have any job or work to do... and I want to study we need a lot of money... so I decided to study at TTC?

**How old were you?**

Twenty two...

**I remember you in the class.**

In the church [at Noh Boh]...

**So that's how you came to TTC... so I'm going to skip back to Lay Gay.**



*Dorcas at the commencement of her studies at TTC, Noh Boh, 2014.*

**Lay Gay, you've left school, you were still a teenager and you're working in the village to help your mother with this farm; farming the rice... what happens next in your story?**

Next? When I left school I always dream about I go to the school and learn... so I want to continue to study but I have problem so I cannot. But next to our village is also conflict, the soldiers fighting again and so they make the problem so my mum decided... she heard about the refugee camp at Mae La Oon... so she find a way to come and we come in the forest and come to the Mae La Oon camp.

**And you walked with your mum?**

Yes...

**Any brothers and sisters?**

Yes all the family, we came in the forest, across the river...

**What was it like for you to come through the forest and across the river with your family to a refugee camp? Tell me some of the memories you have.**

When we arrive in the camp we surprised because we see the many people in the camp and large population and there is also have school, so I feel very happy. I think all my dreams is come true now.

**And were you able to make friends with other children at Mae La Oon camp? Was it a friendly and safe place?**

Yes, at first we are not friendly but when we stay very long and became friendly.

**How many years were you at Mae La Oon refugee camp?**

We arrived at the camp in 2005 and stayed seven years until I came to TTC at Mae La refugee camp.

**How did you hear about TTC when you were in Mae La Oon?**

At the time Mae La Oon have a mission school and Pastor Somchai was there... and I go to the mission school to teach there and I met with the Pastor Somchai and he said to me, 'You want to teach, if you study more it is better to become a good teacher.' He talk to me like that and I come to the TTC.

**So it was Somchai who spoke to you at Mae La Oon camp to come to TTC to improve your teaching skills... amazing... Somchai spoke to your cousin Dorcas and to you Lay Gay ... isn't that interesting that common connection Dorcas:**

Yes, God's plan.



*Lay Gay with Chris McConnell (EAI) & his wife Deb, Noh Boh, 2016.*



**Now Dorcas let's go back to TTC... share with us some of your experiences at TTC. What was it like for you arriving at the age of twenty two, you'd had all sorts of experiences but now you are at TTC. What was it like?**

First I am happy because I met with different people [student teachers] and understand how to live with them... and live in community. I feel like I learn more about God.

**Had you had much Christian experience earlier?**

I just heard a little bit, I learn more here and when I live with my cousin...

**And Lay Gay, what was it like for you to come to TTC? You were twenty three... what were some of your memories of arriving at the Mae La camp where TTC first started?**

When I arrived at the Mae La camp teacher 'G' already started the term and when I arrived I feel very strange and very lonely and I also have a struggle speaking English... and so I want to run away... I feel like that at the first time.

**What made you stay?**

Next I find a way to run away but I can't so I prayed and also teacher 'G' encouraged me and show his love and care to every student. So I prayed and God also give me strength, so I can stay...

**I remember you very clearly in that first class. Dorcas, anything you'd like to share about life there, practicum experiences... life stories of TTC?**

My first practicum at Mae La camp school I cannot speak Karen dialect. We have three Karen language but I can only speak one. I can speak Po Karen and difficult to me to speak and teach the children in the camp school in S'gaw Karen. At that time the teacher can speak Burmese and S'gaw Karen and I can only speak Po Karen.



*2015: Dorcas near the summit of Temple Mountain; looking down to the Moei River near Noh Boh; Burmese mountains in distance (top right).*

And I had a student who was using the drugs and very difficult... and he hate Burmese... so I introduce myself and my name is Dorcas in Po Karen but I cannot speak very much... so he didn't like me... every day he bring something like a knife and showed it to me... I would worry about my walking around to him... to be careful of him... after I just prayed and he always bully one of the girls in the class, the Karen girls tease him; he become a bully.



*Dorcas with her students at Klay Moe Kee School, 2018.*

I want to say something, what happened to you... I then talk about my grandfather's story and how he was a soldier with the English army during the World War 2; my grandfather was soldier with the English... and at the time my grandfather moved to the village near Ayeyarwaddy and he met with my grandmother so they marry.

**Was your grandfather British?**

No.

**But he worked with the British army.**

Yes... he met with my grandmother and married, at the time my grandfather start to work with the army and he became a pastor; everybody loved him. So he has one friend who loved him at the time Burmese soldiers coming, they held the guns at my grandfather's friend ... and he said there was a gun at my grandfather's place... and they come and beat him up but not kill him... my grandfather cannot talk for two or three days (unconscious). At the time my grandmother told me my mother and her sister were very little... go away go away... but when my grandfather wake up he told his daughters don't hate Burmese people because we are God's children so we need to love them. At the time I shared the story (with the students) the children who were teasing the bully... I get more relationship with them ... I told them not to hate everybody... because we are not doing that... the past is the past.

**And did this help the bullies to change their ways?**

Yes, yes... the first week very difficult, the second getting better, better, better.

**Lay Gay, back to you, you've mentioned how you wanted to run away from TTC but you prayed that God would give you strength, and Graeme encouraged you, is there a story you would like to share about being at TTC?**



In my first practicum I teach the Grade 2, there a lot of students in the class and at first I don't know how to treat them.

**Which school were you at?**

Mae La refugee camp school called Mae La High Six. And the memory is I teach them a wrong word. I never forget it, because the first teaching when they read, their pronunciation about an English word and they say, 'lemon' (the fruit) and I asked them how do you read and they say lee- mon, a lee- mon; and when I know the pronunciation is wrong I think oh I teach the students wrong... and I feel not good. So I never forget about that and again when I have practicum in High Four and I have to teach the Grade 8, I have to plan the lessons and at the time some of the Grade 8 have, they go to the temple, they are Buddhist so I cannot teach them as I had planned, and the Teacher 'G' came in to observe me teach.

**So what did you do?**

And he call me and said go and teach Grade 1, and I had planned for Grade 8 and I have to teach Grade 1- how can I do this (laughing)? I was very shaky... and at the lesson I use my energy a lot and in the evening I feel very tired (laughing). But I feel good with the new experience.



*Dorcas with her Grade 2 class, 2017*

**Dorcas tell us where you have been teaching and what has it been like?**

I have been teaching at Klay Moe Kee, after graduation, for three years. This year is my fourth year teaching.

**And what grades have you taught?**

The first year is I just teach special needs, Grade 1 to Grade 4. And second year I have my own class like Grade 2. And third year I have Grade 1.

**And what are some of the memories you have of being a teacher?**

I have learnt a lot with the children, I play with them and go to find vegetable with them or go fishing with them in the river... in our free time. And also we have singing with the children.



**What about Lay Gay, what have you been doing since you graduated?**

After I graduated I teach in the school at Klay Moe Kee. First year I teach Grade 3 and 4. And second year Grade 3 and 4. The third year is Grade 7 and 8. And fourth years is I teach Grade 4.



*Lay Gay with Grade 7-8 in her third year of teaching at Klay Moe Kee.*

**So you've had four years at Klay Moe Kee and now you're back at...**

Mae La Oon.

**So you've gone back to Mae La Oon, have you got family at Mae La Oon?**

Yes. I have a mother...

**Oh, she's still there... and you're hoping to go to America now, is that right? To study?**

Yes.

**What do you want to do over there?**

So I want to study if I have a chance...

**And when do you think you'll leave?**

June 20<sup>th</sup>.

**All the very best with that process, because that's another big chapter in your life about to start. Thank you for the service that you have given at Klay Moe Kee.**

**Before we finish though is there any little story that you'd like to share about those four years of serving at Klay Moe Kee? What was it like for you?**

At first when I was at Klay Moe Kee I no friends and the first is hard for me because the village life is different, not the same, their activities and different... so it was difficult for me to make meals with them and eat with them... but we take the time and we become friendly and they care about us and when I stay there for four years I can see their (the children's) life, lives changing; their activities are not like before.

**And was it sad to say good bye to Klay Moe Kee after four years of your service there?**

Yes.

**Did they have a celebration for you?**

Yes, they do that celebration... very difficult for them to say goodbye.

**Because four years, that's a long time...**

Yes.

**And Dorcas, you have been at Klay Moe Kee for three years... what was it like saying goodbye to Lay Gay, because you would have got to know her as a teacher and a friend from your student days.**

I don't want to say goodbye because the first (beginning to cry), I'll miss her, we are very close...

**Is there anything else you'd like to say, perhaps a funny or embarrassing story?**

**Dorcas:** My second practicum experience in Grade 1 (at the small primary school on the campus at TTC) and the teacher 'G' came and observe me teaching the last lesson, so Grade 1 (laughing) for us is not easy... at the time my plan is not working... I have observation and I was shaking like concern, so my lesson plan and my lesson are not going well so I up and ran away... I left the room in the middle of the lesson... I can't control my tears and I left the room and I was worried... so I go to the classroom at TTC and teacher 'G' come looking for me (Dorcas laughing as she recollects the event).

**Thank you both for what you have shared.**



*Lay Gay with her mum at TTC graduation, 2014.*



*Dorcas at the graduation ceremony, Noh Boh, 2015.*

## Interview 5 with Paw Pearl Wah at TTC 22<sup>nd</sup> May, 2018

Please describe your past life experiences prior to coming to TTC. It might be a story of your family, your education, memorise of where you grew up, life experiences...

I have four siblings, I'm the eldest daughter in my family and I grew up in kind of in a town, but near the town... a suburb...

**And whereabouts were you born?**

I was born in Taungoo township, in Myanmar in the Pegu (Bago) Division (north of Yangon). Not in Karen State, but very close to Karen State.

**You mentioned that you are the eldest daughter and you grew up in Taungoo, tell me a little bit about your mum and dad.**

My mum and dad are gardeners. They grew things, they plant things for living.

**Like a little business selling plants.**

Yes but they have an orchard... for fruits in the Karen State on the mountain side.

**Would your dad have people working for him?**

Yes. He was in charge of the business. Not a big business, a small, small business.

My mother and father grew up in the Karen State but when I was born we had a lot of conflict, like a lot of Burmese soldiers and Karen soldiers were fighting... so my father and mother moved to town because they did not want us to face the conflict.



Map showing Taungoo.

<https://www.worldatlas.com/as/mm/02/where-is-taungoo.html>

**So you grew up near this town and your parents had an orchard and grew fruits...**

Like durians, ...

**Tell me some of the memories you have as a young girl growing up. Anything you'd like to share?**

Yes. I had a happy life, and I like singing, I sang all the time, once a week in the church and many people said I'm pretty good at singing (laughing).

**You're also very good on the guitar...**



Thank you... and but I didn't spend time with my father much because he always spends his time during the planting in the orchard... most of the time we grew up with our mother. And I have one more memory that I attended this school and that school with most of the children were the children of Burmese soldiers who came to that school. We had two schools but the other school is not a very good and the Burmese soldiers' children go with the good school so my mum sent us to that school.

**What was it like knowing that? Did the other boys and girls play with you nicely?**

Yes... not much problem... and one more memory is we were picked up... I think at that time the Burmese soldiers and the Karen soldiers fight in the Karen State... and I heard that but I just grew up in the town so I don't care about the war thing like that and the teacher picked volunteers to like when the soldiers they came back from war we have to give them flower or plants, things like that... and I was picked and I have to wait the soldier until it was near to dark, and we go and give them flowers and then I went back to my house... and that day my father also came back from the orchard ...

**And was that dangerous?**

Not dangerous... but my father said that ... he was very angry with me because ...

**Because you were supporting the Burmese soldiers?**

Yes... like your father came from work and you didn't cheer him...

**He would have felt quite offended?**

Yes... and it was dark and he was so worried for us... maybe my sister and I were picked to give flowers to this 'germ'...

**So you mentioned that you went to this school that was for the Burmese soldiers' children, what was it like being at this school and have you got any memories of school life when you were an eight, nine or ten year old?**

Yes, I have many friends but not much close... their father is general... they have many star (on their uniform). And I heard after the war, I heard that their father die and I feel upset for them but happy in some ways...



*Paw Pearl Wah with her sculptured gecko during a visual art intensive, TTC, 2014.*

**Very difficult?**

Yes.

**What were the teachers like? What was learning like for you as a young person?**

Ah, the teacher are... she is very good at teaching because our school is different with other schools and we all trying... we all want ... they give first, second, position and prize... we all try to get the prize and we all compete each other and reading...

**Can I ask did you get a prize?**

No... just I am fourth, sometimes fifth... and at that time my mother and father didn't have much money so they can't, I couldn't get (extra) tuition... even we have like orchard it's hard for my dad to get to the orchard because the soldiers didn't allow the villager or walker to bring rice because they worry they will support the Karen soldiers. So he secretly have to bring rice and medicine and batteries... fruit not such a problem...

**So your dad had to always be careful?**

Yes... now is easy but at that time it was not easy.

**And is your mum and dad still alive?**

Yes... and they are well...

**Is he still gardening?**

Yes...

**Do they still live in the town where you grew up?**

Yes... when the time for planting out he go to the orchard.

**Paw Pearl Way, you finish your primary school experience and you move into high school, tell us about some memories... where did you go to high school? What was it like?**

We just have one high school... so I went to that high school and lots and lots of children... in just one grade... we have to separate into Class B, Class C and Class D... not in the same room... I think sixty children in my class...

**You had to work very hard to concentrate and listen?**

Yes... and to be Karen, we down about ourselves because Karen are minority and Burmese have priority... we also have India friends and other ethnic friends... we are minorities and Burmese have priority so we feel down about ourselves.

**Did you learn to speak Karen at home?**

Yes. My mum and my dad always force me to speak Karen. We have to attend Karen language programme in summer holidays...

**But you were educated in Burmese?**

Yes...

**Where did you learn English?**

When I was eleven I just finished my Grade 7 I think... and my aunty Paw Eh Wah, you remember (Paw Eh Wah also studied at TTC)... she was at that time, she was looking after the children from Blessing Home (an orphanage in Noh Boh).. yes the orphans... she came to visit our family and she told me, would you like to come to Thailand and study more

English? And then I interesting... so I came with her to Noh Boh. I arrived in Noh Boh in 2008, I was twelve years old... and I live in Blessing Home for a year.

**Blessing home is down the main road isn't it? I think I know the one... built by the Norwegian architect.**

Yes...

**And your aunt Paw Eh Wah was working there... so what was it like leaving your mum and your dad and your sisters to come over from Myanmar to the Thai border here in Noh Boh? Any experiences you'd like to share or memories? You're only twelve years old and it's a whole new experience...**

Yes... I have to adjust food because here they eat somethings that I've never tried like... at home we have, I like things watery (soups) but here they don't have that and I have to adjust... and I had a lot of friends in Blessing Home on the first month, but sometimes not... we are like children we are young, sometimes we didn't like each other... and I think with the first month I had a lot of friends but later on, I not have much friends because I just be by myself and I feel lonely...

**Which school did you go to?**

Academy School  
(Noh Boh Christian Academy)

**I know where that is. I have been up there several times. What was it like going to Noh Boh Christian Academy?**

Ah... I remind me of the first day I have no Thai language.

We have to learn Thai as a second language; Thai, English and Burmese. I know Burmese very well but I have no idea of Thai and on the first day the teacher taught us alphabet of Thai and I have no idea and the teacher picked me to stand and say the alphabet and I cried.

**So you can speak Thai?**

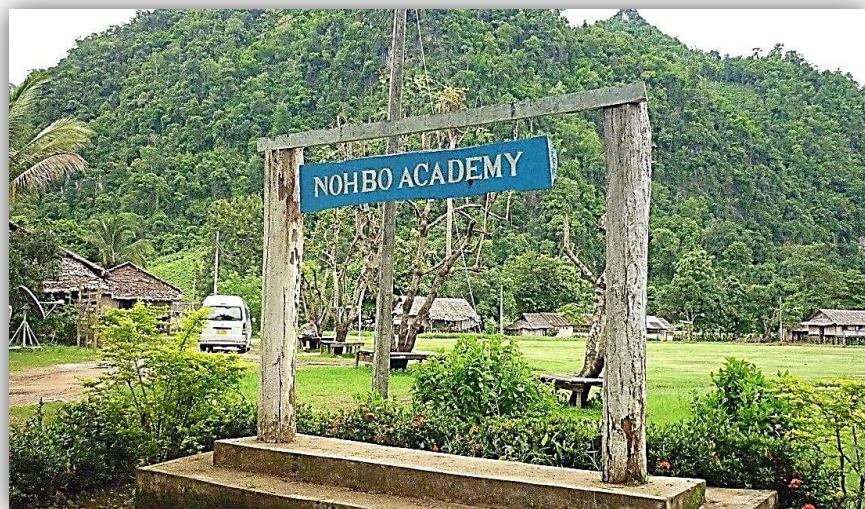
No, very little... I can read and write very little.

**But you can speak English, Burmese, Karen ... What dialects of Karen do you speak?**

I can speak... my mum and my dad they speak different dialects,

**Do you speak S'gaw Karen and Po Karen?**

I can speak ... ah we have twelve dialects...



*Noh Boh Academy Christian School.*

*Photo: <https://www.christchurchbanakok.org/karen-how-to-donate?lightbox=datattem->*



**I didn't know that...**

I can speak Burmese and S'gaw and Pagu; that is my own dialect...

**So you are staying here in Noh Boh... did you go back to see your mum and dad?**

No not for five years... I just stay in Noh Boh for one year and I move to Mae La Camp, I also have relatives in Mae La Camp...

**So you were only in Noh Boh for one year (yes) but then you moved to Mae La Camp... and you would have gone to High Six School?**

Yes, High Six where I met Mu Ku and Keku, Thaw Thi, Jonathan (John and Joshua's older brother)... But at that time we were classmates... with Thaw Thi and Jonathan...



*Marion Sanders (BTI) during a English intensive, Noh Boh 2014.*

**So some of your friends went to TTC... but you didn't go straight away?**

No... I passed the interview but I didn't choose to go to TTC at first. I went to a different post-secondary school... Pu Taw Memorial Junior College (PTMJC, an institute of higher education offering a four year programme specialising in education located in the Mae La Camp).

**What did you study there?**

Mainly English, maths and social science...

**And were you hoping then to go to university?**

Ah, yes... at that time I thought that if I finish PTMJC for two years, we have to attend four years but junior for two years, and teaching for further two years... I don't want to be a teacher at that time... so I thought that I would just finish two years of junior college, then I will like do the examination and continue my study...

But I only stay at PTMJC for half a year because I didn't feel like the right for me, and I am the first fruit of my family, I always told myself that I have to serve God cause the first fruit or being the eldest daughter...

**And there was an expectation culturally?**

No no, just me I feel like in my family I'm the one will do the ministry or like that?

**What do you mean by ministry?**

Like being a pastor or something like that... a missionary yes... that's why I stop attending the PTMJC ... I didn't feel it was the right school for me cause we didn't learn about the Bible just teenager time, happy and I don't like that school.

**If we just go back to your town Taungoo, and you mentioned you had a Christian upbringing (yes), how would you describe your Christian upbringing?**

Ever since I was born I always have to go to Sunday School,... I enjoyed that and I know that on Sunday I have to go to church and I have to learn Bible, I have to sing solo... my mum gets very good at singing and she taught me and my siblings to sing choir... I have to sing alto and my sisters sing soprano and my younger brother we have to sing choir...

**Ok... back to Mae ... how did you decide or what influenced you to come to TTC? Because you came to TTC when it was moved back to Noh Boh because it was only one year in Mae La.**

Yes... I feel like God was telling me to come to TTC... not because of anyone telling me to come to TTC but I just felt like God is telling me to come to TTC I think. And ... when I was a high school student I always taught the Sunday school in the church at Mae La and I felt like God wanted me to be a teacher and I joined TTC.

**So those early Sunday School teaching days introduced you to planning and teaching children... and you came to TTC in 2013. How old were you?**

Seventeen at that time... I'm twenty two next month.

**Let's remember back to 2013-2014 when you are here at Noh Boh at TTC, your aunt came and studied, and she was in the same year group (yes)... did she encourage you do you think to come?**

Not like that I just decided... I stayed at my aunts own home – not the Blessing Home.

**What are some of the memories you have of studying at TTC? Are there any experiences you would like to share?**

Mmm, first I like to share one thing that really changed my life... when I was a high school student I always thought that I want to ... if I born in America it will be very good... I've heard of Oxford and Harvard... cause I like learning I thought it would be good if I was born in



*TTC Graduation, Noh Boh, 2015: Graeme, Paw Pearl Wah and Kendal.*



America and attend famous school ... so why, why God let me be the Karen people and live in Mae La refugee camp...

I always thought about it when I came into TTC... teacher 'G' was sharing the Bible study with us and the topic is knowing your purpose and on this day I felt like God changed my thinking and everything.

And on that day I started to know that God has a reason I'm Karen girl and I can stay in my town or my school but God has a reason I can come to Mae La camp and know more about my people and I really feel the way they suffer...

And really know how to speak ... when I was in Tung Tau know how to read but not much speaking in Karen... yes but when I arrived in camp I have to speak in Karen and read learn, learn the history and I felt like God has a reason for me to come through all the things to come to Thailand, to come to Mae La camp ... to learn about Karen history, to learn how to speak Karen... and I know God has a reason for me to walk with my people.

**Now let's move to our next question, what have you been doing since you graduated from TTC in 2015? Can you share some memories or experiences of going to serve in one of the schools?**

Yes... after we graduate teacher Kendal and 'G' asked us where would you like to teach? For my own desire I don't want to teach in the jungle... because I want to continue my study and will like to be a very educated person but... the day we have to give answer I read the Bible and God told me ... take care of the poor people and at the minute I read that in the Bible I felt that God wants me to go to the villages and I gave the answer that I will go to Klay Moe Kee (three hours walk from Noh Boh, across the Moei River into the foothills of Burma).

**Can you explain what you have been doing at this village school... what's your role been?**

Yes... I was a class teacher, Grade 2 class teacher... but I didn't finish teaching for the whole year cause Thaw Thi and I went to New Zealand.



*Thaw Thi and Paw Pearl Wah on the summit of Mauao, Mt Maunganui, during their six month professional development time at BTI, Tauranga, New Zealand in 2016.*



So you and Thaw Thi travelled to New Zealand in 2016 to study at BTI for six months, I remember that... what are some of the memories you have of the visit to New Zealand? How did it impact your life? What did you learn?  
I've learnt a lot of things... um... but I can't think of anything...

**And that's alright... I can imagine it was quite different**

Yes

(Editor: It was their first international flight, they had never seen the salty sea and they stayed at Marion Sanders' home. They were provided a special six-month scholarship to attend BTI course lectures, visit schools, and observe teachers to help strengthen their professional knowledge and skills).

**Now you finish your visit to New Zealand with Thaw Thi and I remember driving you and Thaw Thi from Tauranga all the way up to Kerikeri so we could do a presentation to a couple John and Rose Whitehead, who support the work, and then I think you stayed at Graeme's parents home and went out on a boat to see the dolphins.**

Yes

Now that time comes to an end and you come back to Noh Boh and TTC. What was it like coming back?  
Um... very hard... very hard and I felt like I'm home now.

**Isn't that lovely...**

Yeah... I know I'm home now and I'm starting to walk...

**What do you mean- talk to me about that...**

Like I've learnt a lot of things and So now I have to share everything. I learn from the knowledge but now I have to put on action...

**Put knowledge into action**

Yeah into action.

**Did you go back to Klay Moe Kee?**

Yes just for a visit and then Mae Te Puke as well but mainly in Noh Boh doing the curriculum.

**And what is your current role, what are you doing this year?**

This year 2018, I am the head of the school, the principal at Mae Te Pu Kee School.



*Paw Pearl Wah with students, 2017*

**And what does that involve you doing? How many teachers are there?**

Including me there are six teachers, now we have Grade 1 to Grade 6. And this year I am getting more than seventy students.

**And Mae Te Pu Kee, is that about six hours walk into the hills?**

Yes but we have road so we can travel on motorbike or by car.

**Can you share a memory or an experience of your role as a teacher or principal of Mae Te Puke School?**

In our culture there are more male than female, so for me as a female in this school at this young age, cause I'm just twenty one at that time, ... and very hard for me to speak with the older village leader and the school community... but I know that God always with me...

And because of God grace it went well the whole year... and one thing that God ... I learnt the most like we didn't have peaceful time all the time in our team... we don't feel good to each other... and I remember on that day one of my colleagues he angry at me... I didn't know why he angry at me... and I prayed to God I know that this is not him... there is a Satan behind him... he didn't talk to me for the whole day... I try to talk to him but he just ignore me and walk away. I feel very sad...

I felt very sad and I pray to God. And God say Satan wants to destroy our relationship and I prayed and just... I know that I need to pray... and at night time he came to me ask for forgiveness... and I know from that I cannot not do with my strength, God is always with me and guide me to do the decision or how to speak.

**The last question: based on your experiences and understanding of TTC what aspects of the teacher education and community life do you think could be strengthened or improved? For the current students and future students how do you think we could strengthen what we do at TTC?**

Keep doing what you are doing... because every year is getting better... I don't have list of fix things... just keep on what you are doing and because it really change Karen people's lives.

**Thank you.**



*2017: Paw Pearl Wah and Thaw Thi working on the schools' curriculum at Noh Boh.*

## Interview 5 with Si Blut at TTC 22<sup>nd</sup> May, 2018

**Please describe your past life experiences prior to coming to TTC. So go back in time, where you were born, your family and all those sorts of things.**

I was born in Yangon, in 1999. I had my father and my mother and my three siblings and also my grandmothers; a great aunt and a grandmother. When it was 2004 my father died with a heart attack so my mother was widow and she was the father and mother of home. She had to work hard... she was tailor... but as time goes by everything was expensive and as we got higher grades (older classes at school); my brothers got higher in their standards at school, we have to pay more fees and if it goes on then we would not have enough money to life.

So my mother thought of coming to the 'camp' so that we would get better education; so that we could go to the third country... but it didn't happen. So we stayed at the camp...



*Si Blut Heather Sein (middle of back row) with members of her family.*

### **Is this Mae La or Mae La Oon?**

Mae La camp... so we stayed at the camp. We came to the camp in 2007 with my family. My oldest brother graduated from the camp (High 1 School) and then two years of Leadership and Management Training College (LMTC) also in the camp. And then he attends Australian Catholic University (in Mae Pa near Mae Sot)... after he has graduated he worked for one year and then he got scholarship from Hong Kong...

**That must have been encouraging to you because if you study hard you could hopefully go to a university and then go to a better country... is that what you were thinking?**

Actually for me it's about me learning new things; I love learning new things so that's me. I didn't care much about going to university so I could live in another country but I did care about learning new things... that's what I wanted.

And my middle brother he also attended LMTC and he graduated from there and now he's working... in Mae La. So for me I studied at Middle School in Mae La Camp and I study at High 1.

**What's the difference between High 6 and High 1? How do they name those schools?**



It's just where they are... same sort of school. So um when I was studying my problems with what I have were... like I love learning English and if I could say I'm a bit good at English... so some teachers came in and they are not very educated and they would ask me an English pronunciation and I would tell them. But then they would say something else... and they would tell me that they would gossip about me and say that she is the 'know it all' ... things like that. So it was sad for me.

So at the time I really didn't like those teachers and I didn't want to talk to them but then I really got to like them and to have a relationship with them... so that worked out well.

And in the future when I was in the high school I also have those things and I also love music so I was focussing on music and the competitions in that way I didn't have much time to focus on the education.

**When you say music... unpack that for me.**

Singing... I write songs... to compete and our group got first and second at church...

**How old were you when that happened?**

I was thirteen -fourteen...

**So you like composing... what sort of songs?**

It was political, about Karen people, or about also God, about gospel for new people.

**And do you play an instrument?**

Yes, I play guitar.



**What a lovely insight into your life. Can I just go back a little... when you were growing up in Yangon you were born in 1999 but you came to Mae La at eight years of age... are there any childhood memories you have of life in Yangon before coming to Mae La that you'd like to share?**

It was perfect when my father was alive. Every Karen New Year we celebrate... we would have BBQs at home and there were a lot of people at our home because my grandmother let her relatives from the villages stay at our house to work... they worked in the shop, so my grandmother let them stay...

**Your mum and dad were tailors?**

Just my mum, not for that but they have a shop for selling everyday things... but that's not ours it was our relatives. There were a lot of people and in Christmas we would have presents for everyone and we have to pick those and everyone people who live downstairs would come up and all would have presents like that...

**So did you live in a multi-storey apartment?**

Just two storeys...

**And what sort of job background did your dad do when he was a younger man?**

My father worked in a company, a medical company... I don't know what kind of medicine it was but he have to advertise it I think and he also give the samples to poor people or his friends to sell in the markets,... like that so everybody knows him.

**And how is your mum doing? Is she still at the Mae La camp?**

Yes... my mum is great, she is a strong woman and she sometimes sew things but she is a teacher at KKBBS, (Kawthoolei Karen Baptist Bible School and College in the Mae La Camp).

**And what does she teach there?**

She teaches medicine.

**We've journeyed from Yangon to Mae La. You were eight years of age when you moved to Mae La. What are some childhood memories of growing up in Mae La? You mentioned that you loved singing and writing songs, and that the teachers didn't respect your knowledge of English... are there any other memories of life the Mae La refugee camp? People who read this book will probably not have lived in a refugee camp.**

In Mae La it wasn't free. There were curfews and there are also gangsters. My grandmother didn't like us, me and my siblings to go outside... and to participate with the church because the church was very far from our house. When they do celebrations and some things they do at night, so we didn't have any opportunities to go because my grandmother and great aunt were very worried for us.

Those were some issues and also two gangsters punched my brother with an iron fist once... not because he did anything but they just randomly come and say, 'Are you a Burmese?' And then he said, 'No I am Karen.' But they punched him anyway. So he lost teeth and his face, he has to stitch it up.

**So you're in Mae La and you go through school there... how did you find out about TTC?**

Actually when I was in Grade 12 TTC came and they presented about their school. It was the first time I had ever heard about TTC. The



*Si Blut (L) with fellow students at TTC, 2017.*

presenters were Teacher Aung and Teacher Thet Paing (TTC graduates). It was the first time that I have ever heard of TTC. Aung has moved to Yangon now. And Thet Paing is still at the Mae La camp.

**So they did a presentation when you were in Grade 12. How old were you then?**

I was fifteen.

**What was happening to you when you were listening to this presentation?**

I was interested, because it was outside the camp... I was tired of living in the camp... and also they said it was from New Zealand and foreigners come and teach. So it kind of interest me...

**Had you heard of New Zealand before?**

Yes I have heard.

**Did you know about Noh Boh? Did you know that it was the little village where we are now?**

No I didn't...

**Had you ever travelled to other places other than Mae La?**

I had been to Mae Sot to the hospital or something like that.

**When you were at the camp?**

Yes...

**If you weren't well?**

Yes.

**And what made you decide to sign up and come?**

At first I never plan on coming ... actually it was for my friend, my best friend... she had an issue with going to school, so I thought of helping her and I told her that I will also answer the entrance exam with her... and I also thought that it would be an experience, so I entered...

**And did she come too?**

Yes...

**And what's her name?**

K'ri.

**Oh, she's just graduated too...**

Yes...



*Si Blut (centre) with K'ri and fellow students, 2017.*



**So K'ri was in the Mae La camp with you and you went through school together...**

Yes.

**And the two of you signed up to come to TTC.**

But I wasn't sure back then... yeah I might enter...

**I'd like you to think about your two years' experience at TTC. What are some memories, what are some experiences of your study here that you'd like to share for this book?**

Actually I love coming back to TTC. I realise this is where I belong... like it's my family, my family in Christ, and I feel close to God when I come back here because back then my spiritual, my spirit was kind of low... so I love coming to school and I didn't even want to go back to be honest... the thing I love the most is about when everyone gathers and we praise God together and we make praise and worship... those are the memories I love the most.

**And do you have any memories of when you were training to be a teacher on practicum... any story or memory of being in front of a class for the first time and practicing your teaching?**

For my first practicum I had to teach Grade 5 and 6 and everyone was bigger than me, some were bigger than me and some were just my size... and I was really scared. I tried to be as much older as I could be and also bought glass- spectacles, so that I will look older... yea and higher shoes... my eyes ached so I don't use it anymore... when the children hugged me they can almost pick me up and I was like, 'Can you please put me down.' And on my first practicum I had no idea what I was doing... I simply had no idea...

**What age are Grade 5 and 6?**

They're about from 11-14...

**And which school was that at?**

It was in Klay Moe Kee

**So your first ever teaching was three hours walk to the jungle school...**

Yes.

**And you're with 11-14 year-old children; that's scary.**

Yes, that's really scary (laughing).



*TTC 2017 English intensive with Rachelle Hulbert (BTI) centre back row. Si Blut, middle row 4<sup>th</sup> from left. Graeme and Kendal on the right.*

**What are you hoping to do now that you have finished your training? What's your dream for this year and beyond?**

At first when I first came here, when I was in the first year and second year, half of my second year I only focused on the education... for the Karen people to have better education... but now my focus is changed. I want the children to grow in Christ. Because at the end of the day what matters most is Jesus. So that becomes my focus and my dream<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Interview 180523\_0016.MP3 7 23/05/18; 7:35 to go or 20.25 into recording.

**And I think Kendal was sharing on that this evening, wasn't she... to encourage you.**

Yes.

**And so that's quite a shift; you had a desire to educate the Karen people, but now... it's still educating the Karen people but with a Christian perspective and reality...**

Yes.

**And do you know where you're going to go to teach? Tell me about where you're heading?**

I'm going to Klay Moe Kee...

**And what level (Grade) will you have?**

I will have Grade 4.

**I little bit younger...**

Yes (laughing)...

**You won't need such high-heeled shoes and you won't need your glasses!**

Yeah (laughing).

**So they would be about 9-10?**

Yeah, 9 and 10...

**How do you feel about that?**

I feel excited about that but also worried and nervous at the same time because I it's twelve children in my hands and I have to guide them and I really need the help of the Holy Spirit and from Jesus...

**And if you imagine ... have you got any dreams for maybe five years ... what would you like to do? Where would you like to be?**

I would still like to teach but I don't know where else, it's in the hands of God.



*Si Blut's graduation 2018: Chris McConnell (EAI) left, Alaster Gibson (BTI) right.*

**As you look back over your experience of the last two years is there any suggestion you could give about how we might strengthen or improve the experience of life here and the training at TTC?**

What I want to say is, what we need is, we need to be united in the spirit... I have a verse Romans 15:5-6 May the God that give endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity [NIV] and when we follow Jesus it is never easy because we Satan is always lurking around to break us, so it is very important that we depend on God and that we have one unity, that we are united and we focus on what on one thing... because what I can see is sometimes between friends or between colleagues we have conflicts, arguments, fights and sometimes we just ... we see only the outside, we just blame each other. Actually it is the devil that is doing and what I want to say is we need to know more... as we know more about God we need to know about the devil, what he's capable of so that we can be always aware of his schemes.

**I there anything else you'd like to share, that maybe we've missed out... for your chapter?**

I think just, this one missed out... people who have motivated me I could say my Grandma and my mum... and that is from the family side. Before I came here I panicked and hesitated and was so scared that I didn't want to come... I told them that I was study also at LMTC and maybe if I get education then I can teach like that but my mother and my grandmothers were like, 'No you have to go, you are going there!' I didn't know why, but OK if you say like that I will go... and I came here I always thought about my future... I always thought about T Ed or things like that because my friends were telling me to... and I was very confused.

But then I Teacher 'G' (Graeme) and Teacher 'K' (Kendal), and they're inspiration for me because they're even if you're not our people that it is very difficult to live here 'coz even for me ... I came from the camp but to live here and go and shower there and to live here it was difficult for me so I can understand how difficult it would be for them.



But they love us and they came here to serve us and it was, it was a very good motivation. Every time I think about myself to go and study somewhere I always look back at them... and I thought if they could do it why couldn't I do it... it's just for my people...

**Thank you, I've thoroughly enjoyed listening to what you've shared.**



## Interview 6 with Thaw Thi at TTC 22<sup>nd</sup> May, 2018

**Please describe your past life experiences prior to coming to TTC. You might like to share things about your family, your education experiences, or memories of social, cultural, religious things.**

I was born in Yangon, and I was born in Christian family and when I was thirteen years old because of Christianity, Buddhism, they do not like Christianity and then kinds of abuse happened because my father is a pastor and because of that our family, we moved to Thailand, Mae La refugee camp. Then I continue my studies, start from Grade 9 until Grade 12.



*Thaw Thi, 2017 at Noh Boh. Four years after graduating and now assisting in the teacher education programme at TTC.*

**Now I just want to pause the story there because a lot has happened. You were born in Yangon and at the age of thirteen you leave Yangon, you leave Myanmar, you come across to Mae La. Let's just go back and find out a little bit more of the story. So tell**

**me about your family, about your mum and your dad. Do you have brothers and sisters?**

Yes... I have mother and father... father is a pastor and mum is helping and is caring us... and I have one elder brother and two younger brothers. And because I am childhood and then I think my life is perfect and then the war and because in the city I think that everything's good... that the other side also ... when I was start from eight years, because I start noticing something was happening wrong, then first time I remember is my mum doesn't sleep because of my dad is not at home and also...

**Was he arrested? Is that what you mean? She was not sleeping because he was not home... had he been put in prison?**

Yes... like that... but at the first time I didn't know and I'm thinking of why mum cannot sleep... and then like and also crying ... we can see that face ... and then after that I ask my mum, 'What, where is Dad?' And then she said, 'And let's pray for your father.' Because I was young and she doesn't let me know...

And then start from like eight, nine, ten not too long... not like prison but in jail. And not too long maybe two or three day and then my dad can come back... and then things go into normal... then later my dad cannot come back and two, three, four, five days in the jail and whoa - what's happening? ...Like eleven, twelve I start asking my mum a lot... and then my mum let us know, pray for your father... because of like the neighbours doesn't like Christians and Bible studying and they go and tell to the military government that... and the

village leaders like city leaders and they come, they call my dad and then at that time my dad they ask my dad to sign I will not do training or bible study anymore but my dad didn't sign. Because of that they arrest him like that.

**And how long was he in prison for or in jail?**

Not long period of time, like three days and come back and then another two or three days and can come back... many times that happened again and again.

So then when I was thirteen my parents decide to come to Mae La refugee camp because they heard about the Mae La refugee camp and there is a way we can keep going our life... If not we love loved Yangon... 2008... straight away we finish Grade 8.

**Thank you. Can I just also go back a little bit... what ethnic group do you belong to, do your parents identify with?**

Karen.

**And do you think the opposition to your father was also connected to him being Karen? Or was it mainly because he's a Christian pastor?**

No he is Karen...

**You know in some parts of the Karen State the Burmese are fighting Karen, was that a problem for your father? Or was it really that the Buddhists didn't like the Christians?**

Because of the religion they didn't like Karen... because my mum and dad even they are Karen because they live in the city and family people; they prefer people speaking in Burmese...

**They didn't like your father teaching the Bible?**

Yes.

**Now when you said you were little you thought that your childhood went well... what were some of those nice experiences, those nice memories that you remember? Tell one of the stories. What was it like living in Yangon as a little Thaw Thi?**

For me every day go to school and then whatever I need, I ask parents... and they can give me... and the Saturday and Sunday for every week for me I like rice noodle and another week for my father what does he like and do special things for



*Thaw Thi's birthday cake celebration with Kendal and Graeme, TTC Noh Boh 2016.*

me... and summer times one year for my dad I go and visit his relatives, the place, and the next year for my mum and there go... everything's beautiful for me and I really enjoyed...

**So when you were very little sometimes you travelled from Yangon to the Karen State to visit relatives?**

Ayeyarwaddy. Ayeyarwaddy is another division where my dad was born, but another village... to where my mum was born (see map on p. 20).

**And in Yangon where Thaw Thi grew up, were you in a very built-up part of the city or were you in a smaller suburb?**

Um... in big city... yes like the middle part.

**Were you in a high rise apartment or a separate house?**

A separate house... my parents like to live with their own house... not with apartment.

**Let's then catch up, so how did you travel from Yangon and get across the border into Thailand and come to Mae La refugee camp?**

Because before we arrive some of my father's friends, they know before that... and then firstly my dad heard about refugee camps and then he alone came to Mae La refugee camp by himself... and then after that everything is fine and he already plan... then we already have friends like that and then he came back and called... and at that time maybe they will not think we will come and live in a refugee camp so when we travel we travel to Karen State or Ayeyarwaddy or just short time and then go back... and when we go to Ayeyarwaddy and connect with Thai-Karen people then we approach the river and the bridge at Myawaddy.

**Now Thaw Thi arrives at the Mae La camp, you are thirteen years of age. What was it like for you, who had only known Yangon and a happy childhood... what was it like coming to a refugee camp where all these people are crowded around in these houses...**

For me on the first week I cannot sleep well because in a city maybe lights but in Mae la camp outside silences, everywhere around outside is mountains, then the house also changes a lot... and especially the language... everybody speak in Karen.

**And could you speak Karen?**

No... that is the main problem...

**So you grew up speaking Burmese?**

Yes, even [though] I'm Karen...



*Rachelle Hulbert (BTI), Thaw Thi and Day Nor, TTC, 2018.*



**So even though you are Karen suddenly you've got to go to a school that's in the Karen language... and what was that like?**

(laughing)... I was really angry because I speak Burmese and for Karen people they don't like Burmese people...

**Ohh, they thought you were Burmese?**

**Yes... because I speak in Burmese a lot... the girls teased me... I was really angry for the first year.**

The first year then trying a lot and as I listen next year I cannot speak very well but I can understand what they are talking and I can reply little words... and I say I am not Burmese girl and then I speak in Karen and from that day they do not do not call me Burmese girl again.

**It took a year or so... and what were the teachers like? What was the school like? Did you go to High Six?**

Yes...

**How did that school feel for you? What memories of going to that school do you have?**

School teaching styles and the teachers' communication and leadership is the same like Burma school. Difficult for me; some of the teachers in High Six cannot speak Burmese so that to communicate for me was very difficult because they are teacher but I cannot speak Karen so how can I do that... so some of the teachers who came from Burma, so also came from Yangon and then they help me a lot.

**How old were you when you finished high school?**

So sixteen...

**And when you finished high school what did you do next or did you come straight here to TTC?**

Before I can sit in on final exam, I thought that I will try to improve my English and I will like to learn communicate but actually my ambitions, what I want to become is nurse or medic so I real interest in that...

My like human thinking, I really want to be like that, that's my idea. One day I have gone out with someone I will try medic but if not then I will like to improve my English... so that I tried to join the college in Mae La camp called ELTC.

**And you were hoping to go to a university?**

Yes... and then after I finish Grade 12, I go to sit exams, like entrance for ELTC. Then after I came back from entrance exam I heard everybody is talking about, especially my parents, my aunty-uncles and some of my teachers and High 6 principal... they are talking about, 'What about TTC, Teachers Training College that will open in this school?' And so like they are talking about these [people] are from New Zealand and then but to become a teacher... no I don't want to become a teacher...

Because I don't think, ... in my view teachers are not good (laughing). It was because of my experience. Yes some one or two is good but most of them is not good; just come in to the

class and then, 'Open page 1, then page 2... let's read together .. then finish off... these are your homework ... do this.' So I hate this... but I don't want to, but my aunty also encouraged me...

**She was the principal?**

At that time assistant [principal]...

**So she's your aunty. Is she you mother's sister or father's sister?**

My mother's sister has husband, that husband's sister... Sarah.

But you can have a lot of different views because this is not training from Burma, because the teaching style come from New Zealand and then final, why not try? Go and try...

But actually, I ask I will think about and pray... and then one week later I heard result of exam from ELTC and I didn't have a chance to go and look at my result and at the time ... and one of the ELTC teacher call me, 'Thaw Thi, why don't you come, your name is on the top list like one, so she really want me to come to ELTC...

Actually that last week I was keep praying, 'God please show me because of the two paths. This one is I really want to do...this one also parents or teachers guided me so which one want to... so clear my mind, show me.'



*Photo of some graduate teachers, January 2016. Thaw Thi wearing red heart shirt.*

And then after that I heard about that result... normally I would think that I will yay, I am passing the final exam I will go do that... But at that time I do not feel like that... No, why why? Surely I want to attend that school but I feel something... then finally I decided to come to TTC... and I met with Teacher 'G' and Teacher 'Andrew'.

**And were some of your school friends going to TTC?**

Yes, I passed Grade 12 with Jonathan and also Paw Pearl Wah, we passed Grade 12 together... but for TTC first year Jonathan Win and I.

**And Paw Pearl Wah came the following year...**

Yes.

**Was that an influence as well, that your friends were going?**

Yes... because of Jonathan and I also cousins...

**And that was in 2012**

Yes...

**So here you are at TTC and I think the classroom was built (yes), you built the classroom (yes) and you started teacher training in the refugee camp just for that first year. I remember visiting...**

**So are there any memories of that first year that you'd like to share for the book? What was it like to be a student learning to be a teacher in that context of a new**

**training organization in Mae la camp? Apart from when your *brain hurt* (a joke) when Alaster was teaching you (laughing)...It was first year, there were lots of challenges for me... because in my life, my whole life I didn't have an experience of foreigners teaching me. And also I'm not like a social person so that I do not even foreigners came and visit to our school, I didn't go and talk with them. After I see them OK I go back school...**

First year of TTC is challenging because every day Teacher 'G' is talking, talking,... and to think and also other teachers like Teacher Alaster, Teacher Marion and Andrew and many people come and then I think a lot and also language really difficult. And another thing is even as teacher training that surely for a first year before the end of the year, beginning and middle... until middle I feel oh ... I felt myself like I'm just dreamt... I do not see oh now I become adult... I am child, I am still a young student ... I felt like that. That's why in many parts my study in classroom was showing that I'm not there to do somethings... I'm afraid of to do somethings...

**And can you share a memory of your practicum placement on your first year. What was it like?**

It was like how of my first year of training I taught Grade 7 and 8 classroom, so that already they are older not children... teenagers (12-14 years old) ... I do not feel like I am a teacher at that time I am trying because practicum time is like (at) half-year that time... so I see



*TTC inside the Mae La refugee camp 2012: Photo shows the classroom that Graeme and the students built and where training and intensive lectures were held. TTC moved to Noh Boh the following year.*



more of myself like I'm gifted to become a teacher and sharing so that at that time practicum time, I try to teach the students...

**And then TTC moves in 2013 to Noh Boh and we are having lessons in the church room and they are building the (new) classroom, what was it like coming out of the camp and living with a bit more freedom in Noh Boh?**

Yes because outside the refugee camp there will be more freedom in the village but for me, at that time, I didn't think that freedom, because of I wasn't really long part from my parents since I was young, so that everything is new and also yes challenging for me, challenging for my life.

**Did you feel a little homesick?**

Yes- like that... and also every day I need to sort out, without parents like that... and to sleep with friends and also who have different style of mess...



*Most of the original TTC class from Mae La in their second year at Noh Boh, 2013. From left Jonathan, Lay Dar, Aung, Day Naw, Thaw Thi, Handy, Lay Gay, Pearl Htoo, Nar Nay, Pearl Shee and Zar Zar.*

**Can you share with us who or what influenced you the most to stay at your teacher training and to finish your teacher training? As you reflect and think back over those two years who or what encouraged you the most?**

When you ask that question my mind, I see that my parents and Teacher 'G'. Because everything is like life... challenges for my life, outside and something happen and I call my parents and then they say that like work for God and take time with God and they keep focus and keep teaching me to focus on God and also ask God what you are doing, and God, what will happen?... like everything and keep encouragement – this is life! With these you will face like this... so that they encourage me do that because they also say that start, and try to finish... So I keep moving and also at school [TTC] I'm really enjoyed ... if I will not enjoy then my parents will not let me finish... but I was enjoying ...

I do not remember the words... even I'm not really [confident] talking with foreigners because of my speaking (laughing)... my first year and second year at TTC it was obvious I

know my weakness of speaking in English so yes I'm not really confident ...every time I stand back that first year Teacher 'G' call us and then he ask me to do PowerPoint and tell us about me. And at that time I said and this and this, and my feelings, and at that time Teacher 'G' said, 'No we are not thinking like that... we love you because of you... not because of what you do.'

The words are already five years ago but I really keep remembering them words because I have never word like that before... Even my parents love me but the other side is oh maybe because I'm listening to their words and also I'm not against them so maybe they love like my good side... that why at that time Teacher 'G' told that words. Also I'm learning because I love you not because of what you do ... and because of that words I feel warmly and also I know that our teachers care ... later I know Teacher Kendal in the second year and also I still remember that words and see their actions also.

**Now we come to 2014, you graduate and you're going to share with us your experiences of the first year of teaching... tell us about that adventure.**

First year of my teaching I'm in Noh Boh Primary School and teaching Grade 2, 3 and 4. The teachers combined 2, 3, and 4 because not a lot of students. Start with sixteen, like that, and one or two they leave the school so that like thirteen, fourteen students. There are some of the students (student-teachers from TTC) in my first teaching and for me first year teaching is really challenging and again because we have learned in TTC that it is not the same teaching style as I had when I was young so with that... I want to make changes for my people...



*Keku left and Thaw Thi on the right with a composite class at Noh Boh Primary School, 2014.*

And then after I finished TTC then I thought I'll do this, I'll do this... but when I'm really met with my students Grade 2, 3, 4 then really different... oh there's one learning style, their behaviour is really different... I was really cautious at that time and also at that time Teacher Kendal really helped me a lot with lots of feedback and encouragement.... and how to do. And I stand back... because with lots of (pupil) behaviours and I cannot manage them... I feel that I want to give up and then went back to the office and I stand and cry and Teacher 'G' and teacher Kendal came, 'No this is just middle (primary), you can try... keep moving... even with lots of encouragement . Oh OK, this is like the worst and not the end of the world and



I need to try more... and then and later the students know more about me... even though I cannot speak Karen very well, 'till know this boy, he helped me a lot ... 'Teacher, not like that... you can say like this...' And then he correct my language.

**Do you see her around the village still?**

Yes... yes she lives in Noh Boh....

**What a lovely photo** (photo elicitation technique used to prompt interview responses).

She doesn't get a lot of like warmly love from her parents at that's why comes to school and then come and hug me, greets me, everything like that... All of them like that because the students' parents are farmers ... in the morning when they wake up there is no parents and then some of the parents prepare food , but some of the parents didn't prepare food because they don't have food and then they come (to school) hungry and come and tell me and the teachers we come and hug, good morning... and then some of them say that like I'm hungry now and then I give food ... that's why later when I go with Teacher 'K', teacher Kendal then later we plan for a feeding programme.



*2014 Thaw Thi (left) begins teaching Grade 2-4 children in the little school on the same campus at TTC. Day Naw taught Grade 1 and Pearl Htoo taught Grades 5-6.*

**That's a lovely story and beautifully prompted by the photo... Thank you for that. Tell us now what Thaw Thi is doing. What is your role now? What are your responsibilities now four years later?**

For now I'm helping Teacher Kendal and Teacher Graeme and start that from last year... so this is second year that I am helping them in TTC.

**And what does that involve? What are some of your responsibilities?**

Taking some course like the teachers they give me to take a course, this is for you to teach... and also plan unit plans...

**What are some of the courses?**

Like planning... at that time I need to tell them how to plan... before for two years I did the planning at the primary school and help the primary teachers... so they know the planning



and the plans formats. So that's why I took that part at TTC. And then explain and probe the TTC students and how should they do to complete the format.

**Let's just pick up on that... so before you came into this present role you were helping the teachers with their planning, curriculum and development at the school here?**

Yes

**Did you also help teachers at Klay Moe Kee and Mae Te Pu Kee?**

Yes...so first after my first year teaching with my own classroom and then second year of my teaching I'm not like first teacher I am kind of relief teacher and making the school's resources for their teaching and I am helping teachers because of first year teaching... so that I helped a lot and in the office like making resources... At that time when they are planning and then I'm helping in their planning and showing them resources... and also Day Naw and Paw Pearl Wah we helped together and plan for the teachers... plans no very detailed ... like guidelines.

**So it was Paw Pearl Wah and Day Naw and yourself working together, thank you. Now you've also been going across to Burma to get certification or accreditation to teach in Burma?**

Grade 2 Myawaddy...

**And what's that called?**

That's for Grade 2 new curriculum.

**That's the new Japanese supported curriculum...**

In Burma because they are trying to make changes to their Burma curriculum...

**And is this so you will be accredited to teach in Burma if you wanted to? Why are you going?**

Because I was two weeks ago training, because I wanted a certificate from that... one day if I need, then this is one of like one of qualification that I can show them like this... I attend this one... I'm qualified for that... and another thing so there is another four teachers from TTC went there so I went there to help them also...



*After graduating in 2014, Thaw Thi began teaching Grade 2-4 students at the small primary school on the*

**And as you look back over your experiences in TTC do you have any suggestions for strengthening TTC for current or future students? Is there anything you think could be done to strengthen it, maybe improve it, as you reflect?**

For me, start from last year I was thinking if TTC is because of the foreign teachers are teaching, and also good curriculum and good strategies... so that I want the students to be more confident in speaking English and also to improve their English skills... that is because some of the students last year, my experience some of the students come and talk with me and they can't speak and they don't understand at all... and that's why they missed out the main parts twice so I'm worried 'cause if they missed main points of what the teacher said they will become the same like some of the teachers that attend the summer training... like that... so I'm worried that...

**So what could that involve? Maybe a special English class for those students do you think?**

Yes, I will be happy.

**Is there anything else you would like to share for this story as you reflect on your life and coming to TTC?**

Yes... at first I think I came to TTC because of my parents, or anger or teacher said... after two years at TTC and then working for the teachers then finally I know that I'm really enjoying in my heart... and also every time I ask God, and God show me I want to be where you are. And every time here is a peaceful place... I feel that. And also during this five year myself that I am more confident in doing something and making a difference... to become like that also Teacher Kendal and Teacher 'G' also helped us a lot... and I really appreciate that and also not just our physically, and not earthly knowledge, not just that and also spiritual... so I am really happy and also I can see my life improve, mature...

**Now there's one thing that hasn't come up which fine but I thought I would just ask ... in 2016 you and Paw Pearl Wah visited New Zealand. Is there anything you would like to remember, any memory, experience of your trip to New Zealand to study at BTI for six months that you would like included in this chapter?**

Yes... so that my second year of teacher training I heard and the other part I am also trying to prepare to go to New Zealand so that after that year I get worried and I had a chance to go to New Zealand and everything's for me is new and also I didn't have experience like that before so that if I'm, had a chance to write down this my first experience, this is my first experience to do then... it would be full...

And also I had a chance to of serving in different schools and also talking with different teachers so that after that I can compare... how can I make changes... how our teachers did in past in Burma school or refugee camps or like that and I can compare so that I have more visual way that I can help for Klay Moe Kee and Me Te Pu Kee schools... and other time Teacher Marion and family also helped a lot and that also really happy memories for me... and also Teacher Ruth (the late wife of Andrew Smith) because of her, we travel a lot to many different places, and also she explain a lot about this place and what does it mean... that we know more about that...

**Thank you very, very much.**



*2012, Mae La refugee camp: Raymond Stripling (BTI) with the first cohort of TTC.*



*2012, Graeme and Marion (BTI) during an intensive at a temporary site near the Mae La refugee camp.*





*Co-operative group visual art mural, Noh Boh 2016*



*Graeme and Kendal with students down by the Moei River, Noh Boh, 2017*



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