



December 2018

Border Crossings

A Newsletter of the Brackett Refugee Education Fund



Checking on Students

By Doug Offenhartz

As winter in America brings snow and freezing temperatures, Thailand's "cool season" makes it a popular destination. It's time for the Brackett Foundation T-Reps to make plans for their annual trek to meet their continuing students and interview new applicants.

Daruna and I started our first tour in October to meet our students, visiting 40 students and graduates at nine university campuses throughout western Thailand over ten days. We caught up with other students throughout November and December.



Fifth-year student Nawlawba and Daruna.



Daruna with Rujirat and Supaporn, from Sirindhorn College of Public Health, studying to become dentists.

I have the benefit of a Master's Degree in Thai Studies and passable Thai language skills, but mostly the support of my partner T-Rep, Daruna. At 84 years old, she remains vibrant while serving as my translator and guide, and grandma to our students. As a retired university librarian, she knows the Thai education system and maintains valuable contacts everywhere we go.

Our first stop was at the College of Public Health in Suphanburi, where we met third-year student Supaporn and first-year student Rujirat. They are both studying to become dentists at rural public health clinics.



Doug with Sintaymo and Mayleemoo.

Later that day we had dinner with fifth-year student Mayleemoo, aspiring to become an English teacher, and first-year Sintaymo, in the Faculty of Social Sciences, at Mahamongkut Buddhist College.

On Sunday we had lunch with Poysian, in her last year of a nursing program, and dinner with three students and one graduate at Rajabhat Nakhon Pathom. And so it continued through Ratchaburi, Suan Phueng, Chom Bueng, Kanchanaburi, Thong Pha Bum and Sangklaburi, nestled against the mountains separating Thailand and Burma.

Compared to the agony of selecting only a few students each year for new scholarships, this part of my stay is pure delight. We visit our graduates who have jobs as nurses, public health workers and teachers. We observe our fifth-year students doing their student teaching; and we reconnect with all our other students, conducting brief interviews and offering encouragement and advice as they face sometimes monumental challenges to complete their education.

Our students are from ethnic minority groups on both sides of the Thai-Burma border, many of whom were stateless with neither Thai nor Burmese citizenship. Recently, the Thai government has opened up the process of granting “Thai IDs” to university students and about a dozen of our students became Thai citizens this past year.



Dayuna and Poysian, in her last year of the nursing program.



Daruna with three students and one graduate at Rajabhat Nakhon Pathom University.

All of them struggle financially, often working at resorts, restaurants or factories on the weekends and during term vacations. And many have family problems with health, alcoholism, abandonment, and debt. But they all have hope of completing their educations, getting good jobs and supporting their families.

What is hardest to explain are the benefits of working with these wonderful and deserving young people. Besides keeping Daruna and I engaged in meaningful work during our retirement years, they bring us joy and love. Watching them mature, overcome challenges and achieve their goals is a reward beyond measure.

We will hear from other T-Reps in future newsletters. They are an amazing group of caring and dedicated volunteers who travel to Thailand and conduct our work at their own expense.



Students from Rajabhat Kanchanaburi and Kanchanaburi Vocational College with Daruna.

Dr. Cynthia Maung Honored in the US

On Saturday, September 29, Tom and Liz Brackett hosted a celebration honoring Dr. Cynthia Maung, a refugee, a medical doctor, and an internationally celebrated humanitarian.

Dr. Cynthia had traveled from Thailand to Washington, D.C. to receive her twenty-third international award, the Roux Prize, which “recognizes the person who has used health evidence in bold ways to make people healthier.”

Dr. Cynthia says that her idea was to have trained medics interview pregnant women and advise only those likely to have problematic deliveries travel to the Clinic. This reduced the number of unnecessary deliveries at the Clinic, allowing more time and effort on the difficult cases and saving lives.



The 2018 Appeal

As of December 1 we have received \$153,205 so far in the 2018 year, which is about \$20,000 behind last year. We hope to receive \$85,000 more in these next few weeks, in order to equal last year's result, and of course would be enormously pleased to exceed that. This comparison does not include the “Directed Gifts” which are large gifts directed toward a specific project, and were very large last year because of a substantial grant for the elementary schools for the Rohingya population in Bangladesh.

We've been concerned about whether the new tax law would lower donations. Of course, the primary reason people give to BREF is because they agree with our mission, not to lower their taxes. However, if one is able to reduce one's taxable income by the amount of one's donation that is an additional reason for giving. The new tax law makes that more difficult because of the new limitation on real estate and state income tax, so that more tax payers will simply use the Standard Deduction.

However, for those who are old enough to be required to take income from an IRA, there is a tax advantage in giving it directly to your favorite charity. That way you never have to report that amount of income from your IRA. One donor arranged this on a continuing basis last April, and we are happy to be the recipient. The only requirement is that it must be a 501(c)(3) organization, and that it must go directly from the IRA to the charity. In order to set this up you will need BREF's EIN 16-1523586.

The Brackett Refugee Education Fund, established in April 1997, is a small not-for-profit foundation organized to help educate refugees. Currently the Fund is concentrating its efforts on refugees from Burma in India, Thailand and Bangladesh. Our trustees are Sally Brackett (Chair of the Board), Mark Sommer, Russell Brackett, Doug Offenhartz, Melinda Jackson, Dianne Becker, Penelope Smith Brackett and Elizabeth Brackett. The Fund has received 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status from the Internal Revenue Service. It is identified by EIN number 16-1523586, and it seeks support from friends, family and foundations. In order to make most efficient use of the money it receives, the Fund has adopted the following policies:

- All administrative and communication costs will be supported by the trustees;
- Living and travel expenses of trustees and volunteers, while on business for the Fund, will be donated by themselves;
- The Fund will not sell or give away the names and addresses of any of its contributors;
- Although the Fund is happy to receive contributions at any time, only one fundraising campaign will be made each year;
- The Fund has no paid employees, so administrative and fundraising expenses are very low, typically less than 4% of total expenditures;
- Because the trustees donate far more than required for administrative purposes, every dollar donated will go towards helping people receive an education.

