

Christian Stewardship is...

...giving God what He is due.

...an act of obedience.

*A **tithe** of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the Lord; it is holy to the Lord.*

Leviticus 27:30

...to grasp the essence of life's meaning.

*...giving of your time,
talent, gifts and
service.*



Legacies of Love

Bethany has been blessed with many dedicated stewards whose gifts continue to touch us and connect us. Initiated with a hopeful spirit and carried out with teamwork and camaraderie, each gift reminds us of the power of love at work.

Our previous *Legacies of Love* stories have linked us to our past. At this close of our 2009 Stewardship Campaign, we offer a final story of shared gifts, which we hope will carry us into our future and inspire all of us to create new ways to make a difference through giving.



“Gratitude” in Thai

*This little
light of
mine,
I’m gonna
let it shine!*



Melissa Sossen and Kristin Olson

Discovering God's Plan:



Bethany's Mission to Thailand

By Kristin Olson

With photographs by Melissa Sossen

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When I was in my late teens, Audrey Hepburn was traveling around the world as the International Goodwill Ambassador for UNICEF. I saw reports of the places she visited and the children she worked with and helped. That is what I saw myself doing when I was older, as well. I wanted to travel to countries ravaged by

war and famine and help the children. I felt that somehow that's what I was meant to do. Until then, I would work with children here in the States. I believed that when it was time for me to go somewhere faraway, the moment would just present itself.

Teaching at different schools taught me how to work with all different kinds of people, see and smell things that were quite unpleasant, and be strong and supportive when other people were falling apart. This was my calling...but when was I going to get to do what I really felt was my mission in life? I had never imagined myself as a missionary, but felt that I was here on earth for some reason. Certainly, God had a plan for me.

When the student is ready, the teacher will appear.

I met Kristen Jones when I became a member of Bethany. Plans for the Mission Trip to Nicaragua were being made and I had decided that I wanted to go. I had heard all about Kristen and her mission trips and



Kristen Jones with a
Burmese child

thought that Nicaragua was a good start. When I went to the information meeting, Kristen took me by the arm and said very quietly with a knowing smile "I want you to go to Thailand with me, too." I didn't know it at the time, but I learned very quickly that when Kristen Jones says she wants you to do something, even if

you think you aren't going to do it, you will do it. I didn't think I would be able to afford to go to Nicaragua and Thailand and take Brad with me. Kristen, however, did think so.

The first thing I did was not to worry about how I was going to get there. I just believed that if I was meant to go, that I would figure it out. In fact, all the way to Thailand, I thought this. I had no expectations of the trip at all. I was open to everything and anything.



I researched as much about Burma and the Karen people as possible on the internet. It is hard to understand that genocide exists today and that our world leaders just seem to allow it to happen. Although there are other parts of the world where this is happening, I was focused on the fact that I was going to one of these places. I was going to meet people—refugees—who were escaping from their country to a country that really doesn't want them. The Karen people were being driven from their homes,



tortured and killed by the Burmese army. Thailand did not open its borders to the refugees and integrate them into Thai society. Instead they have “secured” them in camps that the refugees are not allowed to leave.

I knew this is where I was supposed to be because I wasn't scared. I'm not sure why I wasn't. Maybe I trusted that Someone had a plan and I didn't know what it was, but that's ok.

Sometimes in order to do something big, you have to be a small part of something bigger than you. I am a wheel in the God machine. Everything I had experienced up to this moment had prepared me for whatever I was going to do next.

Thailand is beautiful, green and lush. It is mystical, peaceful and it is dark. There are good people and there are very bad people. I went to help the good people and to teach the very bad people a lesson, even if it was indirectly. The lesson being that God is bigger than all of us and in the end, the very bad people DON'T win. They don't win because the people





they are hurting are faithful and their faith gives them strength, a lesson that I learned, as well. Hopelessness is what you find when there is a lack of faith.

One of our first goals was to paint the school that is run by Ivy—a Karen refugee herself—and her aunt. The children who attend illegally cross the Burma-Thailand border every morning to be picked up under the border bridge by Ivy. Several of the children are under three years old and often cross the border alone, sent by their parents to receive a Christian education (although many are Hindu or Buddhist), care, and a meal.



The children helped us wash and paint their school. We sang with them, played on their playground with them, told them Bible stories, ate lunch with them and then watched as they got into the truck to return to the border. Many of the children would be returning to their families or other people who were taking care of them until family could be found. Ivy had compiled case histories of



the students. Mothers and fathers had been killed or were prisoners or were suffering from mental illness or had just disappeared one day and no one knew where they were and the children were left to those who could take care of them.

Years of teaching here had taught me that all children need the same things: love, safety, and food. The school offered God's love, a strong building, and a kind woman who owns a restaurant to feed them. I was a witness to it all. My purpose for being there became clearer to me. My mission: to return and tell everyone what I had seen and heard and to do whatever I could to make the bad stuff end. I am a wheel in God's machine.

Sometimes our plans have to fall through in order for God's plan to work.



Refugees crossing the river border between Burma and Thailand

This was evident the day we were going to an IDP (internally displaced person) camp. Initially, we thought it was in Thailand and we had gotten special dispensation from the government to go there. It turned out that the camp was across the border in Burma and the prospect seemed a little scary. I'm sure if I had asked my

parents if I could cross the border, my Mom would have said no...and other moms did, so not all of our group would be crossing the border. I was more concerned about the people not going with us than I was about actually going into Burma.

We pulled into a checkpoint area, where an overzealous Thai guard declared that we could not go into the camp and he didn't care who gave us permission. We had two vehicles: one carrying bags of dried fish and potatoes, and our van, filled with our group and suitcases with toys and candy. After studying our passports, the guard said that we would have to go back somewhere up the road to where they had failed to properly process us. That would have taken a long time and we were running out of daylight and it was going to rain. It was all surrealistic to me. We had come all this way to be turned around? At that moment, I didn't know what God's plan was and I was curious to see how it was going to turn out. While we speculated about what was going on with Flower (the name I had given the guard), what we were going to do with the food, and whether or not we would actually get into the IDP camp that day, our van had already turned around and headed back. In the other truck, phone calls were being made, and after several unfortunate circumstances for Flower, including having to apologize to us, we were told that, although we couldn't go to the actual camp, we could go to the Community Center for the camp, which is located on the Thailand side.



The Community Center

Again, I had this revealing moment that told me why I was here across the world from everything comfortable and safe. Refugees

were rowing across the river that separated camps in Burma from the Community Center where they got food or gathered on the Thai side. We were invited inside the center where a group of children sang songs in their language for us. The people welcomed us, and although it was communicated to them who we were, I don't think it made sense to them. While they unloaded the bags of food to replace the food they didn't have, suspicious looking men claiming to be from the government photographed our passports. Here I was—not feeling comfortable and safe—and it started to rain and we were taking pictures with the food and with the people and I began to think again about The Plan.

We handed out the candy and the toys. Nearly all of the children had never seen a toy before and it was doubtful about the candy, as



well. Everyone from our group was smiling and hugging the kids and they were staring at us, as if we weren't real. After we prayed together, the people began to leave to go back across the river and many of them were coming up to us and taking our hands, hugging us, blessing us, and smelling us. We walked back to the van and one of my friends said, "Did you hear what one of the kids asked Ivy?" One child had asked if we were people (human) like him.

The sun came out and the clouds disappeared.



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*The privilege of a lifetime is
being who you are.*

Joseph Campbell


A New Legacy of Love Begins... Halfway Around the World

What our gifts mean to the children of the
United Christian School in Thailand.



Hello,
My name is Mg Mg Oo. I
am 10 year old and in
grade one. I want to tell
you that I enjoy your
visit. My best part that
have you here are making
my school beautiful. Also
I paint my self and my
friends. See you again.
Mg Mg Oo

Hello,
My name is Nong Sai. I am 11
years old. I like you very much.
You all so kind and lovely. I want
to speak English like you. Waiting
for you to come to us again.
Nong Sai



Hello,
My name is Naw Pow No. I
am 13 years old. Thank you
for your visit and food that
give us every day in the
school. I like the songs that
you teach. I teach your song
to my friend that they stay in
the other school. They want
to come to my school. Thank
you and God bless you.
Pow No



Hello,
My name is Moe That Aung.
Thank you for coming and
teaching me song to sing.
Come again.
Moe That Aung