

# Reflections from Bangkok

By Sara Stephens

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## Please pray for:

- My teammate Resty as he has been leading some English activities with youth in Phothong, and for Christy, Kevin and I as we also try to get to know these youth better. The goal is to connect these youth with teenaged believers Resty is investing in from different slums.
- Families from my old slum of Permsup as they are in the last phases of saving and relocating to a new housing project.
- Yut, that she would give her life to Jesus!

## Building hope that change is possible in Phothong

“The youth program I was involved in growing up was so important to my development, for helping me to graduate college and get a good job,” a woman from my community told me. “Kids in this slum today should have that opportunity. I’ve always wanted to do something for



*Father's Day cards made by kids in my slum, proudly displayed on our wall.*

them, but I didn't think anyone else would want to work together on that, until now.”

There are now a core of six women in my slum

who are excited about working together for the good of their community, particularly around the development of the children. The first action we took together was an activity around the king's birthday (which is also Father's Day). The kids made cards to give their fathers on the holiday and practiced the traditional anthems sung in honor of the king. On the holiday, December 5th, the children gave their fathers the cards and led the community in lighting candles and singing the songs for the king in front of the community.

Many people told me this was the first time the whole community celebrated this holiday together, rather than just in small groups near their homes.

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## My good friend Yut is considering following Jesus

When I first came back to Thailand after furlough in mid-2007 I still did not have a teammate living with me in my slum. I also didn't have any other women on the team for a few months. But during that time God blessed me with the friendship of Yut, a woman my age in my community who also needed a friend. Almost immediately we were sharing deeply with each other, and I spent a lot of time with her especially at the end of her pregnancy with her daughter Pahjai and after she was first born. Yut's life has not been easy lately. Family and financial drama forced her to leave the slum for many months, but in early February she moved back to the community. It's been really great having her back.

We've often talked of spiritual things, but these days she seems to be asking deeper questions about Jesus. Twice we've sat and talked for a good part of the afternoon about what following Jesus means. She has even asked “what would someone need to do to become a Christian?”

I am praying for the day when I get to celebrate having a new sister in Christ!

*Me with Yut and her kids.*



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## Christmas a time of celebration, sharing the Gospel with Buddhists

Christmas this year was maybe the craziest of the three I've spent here. This is always the season that is most focused on outreach, but this year it felt like the scale was way ramped up.

Around 30 of my neighbors piled into two cars and a pickup truck to attend our combined Christmas party, held for members of the 6 slum and low-income communities we work in. Last year about 10 from Phothong came to the party, so this was a huge increase! Several people even accepted free Bibles that were being given away to people impacted by the talk.

The very next day we had our house full of children and then adults, for Christmas songs, sto-

ries, crafts and lots of great food. We managed to separate out the kids' program with the party for the adults, so we could actually sit and talk with some of the adults without chaos in the background. Part of how we pulled all this off was that a few of the women who have been a part of our house meetings came to help out with the activities, unasked. They did a great job, and it's exciting to see the increase in desire to contribute and work together.

The season was tiring, a bit chaotic, there were definitely things that could have been better, but so many people in my slum heard about Jesus and had a great time. It was exhausting but worth it.

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Around 10 adults contributed supplies or helped run the card-making event, and more were involved in the celebration on the 5th. To my neighbors who tend to see other families as only caring about themselves, this has challenged them to believe that it's possible to work together on shared concerns and hopes.

Our goal now is to attempt another one of these events, to begin to set a pattern of people working together for positive change. With such a long history of the community deferring to the council to make anything happen, it has at times been challenging to help people see the value of their experiences and ideas, that they have something to contribute.

**Finances:** My personal financial needs are met, but additional donations to my ministry expenses can always be put to good use. If you'd like to give, contact me or refer to the info on giving on my website (see below).

We have had some false starts and disappointments. But there are still these six women who care about the dozens of kids who will soon be left unsupervised during the summer break. In the next couple of weeks we will be meeting to plan a series of activities for the children that will provide some structure and a safe place for them to be kids. We will look for ways to involve others in the community and have part of it be public, like the Father's Day activity which caused so much dialogue in the community. Our hope is that more people will begin to see that change is possible and that they, too, could play a part.



*Singing Christmas carols in our house*

### Please pray for:

- The six women I am most invested in developing as leaders in my slum
- The summer term and activities we may help lead with women in Phothong for the children
- My discernment process as I pray about how God is leading me once I leave Bangkok in October.

### Coming up:

- Monthly leaders trainings, focusing on evangelism and community engagement for the next few months. In March I will lead the morning study in Acts.
- April 15 we will throw a party for youth in our slum and plan with them for future events.
- Our annual church camp, May 1-3

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