



Heart's Home USA

Spread compassion

Volunteers' Letters

Erika – Bangkok, Thailand

Erika's Sponsors Letter # 3 – July 2011



Dear Friends,

Happy Independence Day! This is my second 4th of July living overseas, and just

like last time (July 2007), my patriotism is swollen with American pride! There is nothing like distance to build nostalgia for the homeland! As you are settled into summer routines, here in Bangkok is it election season. July 3 was national election day for Ministers of Parliament. There were over 30 political parties campaigning, and over 100 candidates. It has been exciting to learn about the current political scene from the signs littering the streets to the campaigning in trucks with loudspeakers through the neighborhoods and even door to door bulletins! The party who won may bring Thailand its first woman Prime Minister, elected from a coalition government -however, the feelings among the people are not all positive with this party... The next few months of these politics will be quite interesting to observe!

Community Life

We have gone from seven women in the house down to five. First of June, Laure returned to France, having completed 18 months on mission. Kate and Bernard have come and gone. Bernard was in Bangkok for two days, joining us for a small retreat with friends for the month of May. I had a lovely meeting with him about School of Community, which I now am guiding once a week for our community. Kate stayed three weeks, waiting for a visa to return to India. Meeting her and having her in our community for that time was a blessing! When I met her at the airport and found she is from St. Louis, in less than 30 seconds, we discovered we have like one hundred mutual friends (no joke!) between Camp Tekakwitha and Benedictine College! We enjoyed swapping stories about our friends and inside jokes from the Archdiocese of KCK :)



Our community at Sala Dang for mass with some ex-pat friends from Argentina and Spain

Before she left for India, she offered to share her talent with our community and painted a beautiful mural on our wall of Mary and Jesus: Thai style!

Last week we welcomed six visitors from Poland. It was a group of young adults from a campus center in Warsaw led by the chaplain, Fr. Peter. Two by two, over three days, they visited our home, wanting to see our community life and our mission. Domenica, one of the women, asked me how it is to live here, saying, “the conditions are not so great”. This surprised me! I remembered my first impressions three months ago, and realized I too thought of Thuy: “How could she choose this life forever?” Amazing that it took such short time to become home. To have visitors like this is like living life with glasses—visitors come with a little handkerchief and wipe off all the dust and grime, clearing my vision, and pointing out something new!

Birthdays!

I received a package from my Mom, via Katie’s sister who traveled to visit for two weeks, which included some peanut butter, Mike ‘N Ikes, MilkyWay candy bars, and coffee. My community learned quickly how I love birthdays as I took one of the bags of candy, wrapped it in paper, wrote in Spanish, English, and Thai “Do not eat! Save for Erika’s Birthday on July 19!” Then I stuck it in the freezer, seriously waiting for July 19 to come! This love for celebrating my day comes from the traditions of childhood: choosing a birthday cereal (something *not* healthy), picking a theme for and inviting my friends for the party. Here in community, I am happy to say we celebrate birthdays! For the kids, we usually have a small cake with a candle, give a gift, sing Happy Birthday, and make popcorn! We do this until about age 12, which is usually the age the kids stop coming to play. We have two special friends with whom we continue to celebrate, both long time friends of Heart’s Home.

Naa just turned 17 in May. I feel a special closeness with her for two reasons: One, we go running together on Sunday afternoons. Two, she reminds me of Claudia, a girl from the home in Huaraz, Peru that summer of 2007. Claudia, like *Naa*, had the toughest life of most the kids we knew, and could act strongly to discipline or love, but still craved it. It is difficult to be *Naa*’s friend. We will go running and she will talk on her phone (or pretend to). She will call the house late at night just to talk. She sometimes calls and hangs up at random! She often comes to our house after school, still in her uniform, and usually takes a nap and asks me to braid her hair. I do, and then she lays her head on my arm and closes her eyes to sleep a little more. Then she will just randomly get up, say good bye, and leave, sometimes returning to school for the afternoon, sometimes not. Having known *Naa* from when she was a child, this was one more year of a celebration with her. When we asked what she would like to do, she surprised us by insisting all 6 of us come, with 2 more expatriate friends, to her Mom’s house. The house is a shack by the river, between the railroad tracks and the road to the port. We walked over to her house bearing soda, cake, and a gift. It was a simple, beautiful sharing of food and friendship, ending with some songs—in Thai—on the karaoke DVD.

Oh is 25 and another long time friend of Heart’s Home. She doesn’t have many friends - being handicapped in Thailand, or looking at all less than perfect, is like having leprosy. People are scared and stay away. *Oh* lives by the tracks with her mom, and comes over to our house two or three times a week to join us for lunch. Every time she comes, she tells us how much she loves coming to Heart’s Home. For her birthday, we went to Chatuchak for lunch, and then to the Butterfly House. She loves beauty! Living in Klong Toey, we were happy to spend a day simply in the quiet beauty of a park. As we were walking through the park with *Oh*, we took pictures together - I think she felt loved and beautiful, as she ambled over to me to take my hand, grinning from ear to ear. I was struck by this: At home, it’s normal to have *Oh* come. I don’t see her as very different. Then, I found myself in public with this beautiful person whom the world says is unimportant, inconvenient, and unattractive, but who from me is a friend.



Oh and I on Tiaw for her birthday!

“Who doesn’t do crazy things for love?!”

Each week we have School of Community, where we gather having read one text and then we share from our personal experiences (very important!). We are now reading from Sister Magdalene of the Little Sisters of Jesus (Spiritual sisters of Charles de Foucauld, Little Brothers of Jesus). We read recently about Love and Friendship. In our discussion, Eva shared about one of our ex-patriot friends. This friend lost her husband at age 60 and felt as though all purpose to live died as well. One day, a man knocked on her door and asked if she’d go to Africa. She said ‘yes’. She became a missionary in Rwanda, right as the war was breaking out. She stayed for 16 years, working with the people in the refugee camps. Now, she is in Bangkok to be near her son. She began going to visit the prison with Eva once a week. It takes her about two and a half hours to get to the prison, where they must wait until they can visit three women, for only a 20 minute visit. Then it’s time to go for lunch and make the trek home. As Eva shared the following, it struck me too:

“She is 76 years old. She lived and served for 16 years in Africa. She could very easily say, ‘I’m old, I’m tired, I’ve done my share. I’ll sleep in.’ But no! She is 15 years old inside, wearing a smile always, and she doesn’t measure time at all! I need to learn from her, from the testimony of her life! Who doesn’t do crazy things for love!”

In Closing

I am learning to live in and to love community. Similar to family: I don’t choose who I live with. This brings a lot of opportunity to grow in humility, patience, and forgiveness. I’m only on the brink of those lessons (I see a lot more of that to come!) This is a beautiful country, with beautiful people, I am living a beautiful mission, enjoying delicious food, and being Christian in the least Christian sector of the world. It’s incredible - people on this end of the world literally die for their faith. This week I will meet a young couple from the Middle East and will begin to teach Catechism once a week as they enter the Church and are waiting to hear which country will sponsor them as refugees. Speaking of dying for your faith—the woman is from a Muslim family and they have a bounty on her head, saying she was kidnapped and will be forced to become Christian. A story like this, and meeting this couple face to face really puts my faith into perspective!

Thus, I continue to ask for your prayers, that I may learn to love the culture, my community, and this mission more each day. That I may open my eyes to see the beauty of this life and to really see with clarity the suffering and the joys of our friends. I ask that you pray for our children, especially those whose parents are in prison. I ask that you pray for the neighbor girl I saw the other day with a swollen cheek and blood in her mouth. I ask that you pray for our friends, the ex-patriate families, who host us on our day of rest. I ask that you pray for our community of Heart’s Home in Bangkok— that we may grow in understanding across all these cultural and language barriers! Finally, I ask that you pray for each other! Your lives now cross in some way as the 80+ of you are all a piece of this mission, even if you never have and never will meet.

Thank you for your continued prayers and support. Thank you for the letters, emails, and packages! I love getting mail and I really enjoy writing letters in response!

Enjoy the pictures and I have been keeping up my blog with more experiences from time to time. Please share it as you wish!

In Him,

Erika

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The "tracks" come this close to the homes around us!



Last community picture with Laure as she leaves for France!



Oh with one of the sculptures in the park!



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