



our developing world's voices Volume 19, No. 2

Cuba Tour April 10-20

Family members diagnosed with cancer and other illness meant 6 travelers dropped out. Our hearts go out to all concerned. Warm wishes for speedy recoveries. We need at least 9 for the tour to go. Check our website for the great unique itinerary which can be modified to suit, plus other details. Do join us! Send in deposits now!

Plan now for 2013: South Africa/Botswana in the summer (their winter)

We welcome invitations for Programs and Simulation facilitation. Toiletries packed.

Burma (Myanmar), Ever Changing: Nonviolence in Action!

The three university students who participated on scholarships contributed photos and comments. We warmly welcome tax deductible donations to repay that loan:

" The Dogs

Even the dogs here have a very " zen" like quality. I've been watching them interact with one another and they don't fight, they don't have their own territory which they protect and snarl at you if you get near. If one finds food the others don't come running and fight each other for it. They simply keep looking until they find their own or if one wishes, they share what they have found. It is so Buddhist! I love it! They are not greedy. " Merina



Photo from Pindaya by Owen who comments: I have never been so immersed in a culture so different from my own. From the day we arrived in Yangon, I was amazed at the sheer number of pagodas I saw just on the hour long drive from the airport to our hotel. The importance of religion was very different from what I was used to

at home. The giant golden Shwedagon pagoda in Yangon, the caverns lined with Buddhas in Pindaya and Mandalay, and the silhouettes of thousands of pagodas at sunset in Bagan were highlights of the trip. After seeing so many monks, it was a treat to see where they lived.

Seeing the daily life of people in Myanmar was fascinating. I enjoyed seeing the process behind several different products, including the weaving mill used to make long-ji (the skirt worn by men), the pottery town on the way to Bagan, the coconut milk distillery in Bagan and the numerous ox powered mills used to extract peanut oil. It was great to visit the schools around the country and teach to the kids, and later talk to a group of teenage Burmese in the English language class.”

Burma, country of lush beauty, hospitable people with 136 ethnic groups with 7 primary ones.

Humor: a way to cope, demonstrated often by our guides:

A Burmese with a bad tooth ache and swollen jaw went to Japan and found a Burmese dentist. The dentist asked Why didn't you see a dentist in Burma? It would cost much less. “In Burma”, the patient said, “we can't open our mouths”.

Later the dentist returned to Burma and saw the same patient! How come you're seeing a dentist here now? The patient replied: “Now we can open our mouths a little bit”.

One of the renowned satirical Mustache Brothers warned: “Don't steal! The government doesn't like competition!”

The times they are a-changing!

Many young people didn't know why Aung San Suu Kyi got the Nobel Peace Prize because TV, radio and official news papers didn't say anything about her, we learned talking with Spoken English students.

Now the media is saying more every week, and underground journals and BBC are more informative. A government newspaper, Myanmar Times started an opinion page and letters to the editor encouraging diverse opinions! The first time in their 12 years of publication! U Win Tin wrote one of the first, a highly respected NLD leader who was imprisoned for almost as long as Daw Suu. Barby spoke with him briefly at the NLD (National League for Democracy) headquarters. These government papers usually only report non-political matters. On January 24 they announced that the EU had recognized Myanmar and could be lifting sanctions soon, that the US has upgraded diplomatic relations and will be appointing an ambassador, On the new Opinion page there was an interview with U Khin Nyunt, a former Intelligence head and former prime minister 4 days after his release from house arrest since 2004. He feels sanctions have hurt the people so should be lifted. That will also help the economy in dire straits. January 16 there was a prayer for peace ceremony as a symbol of unity of Christians, Buddhists and Muslims.

Until recently if someone traveled he or she had to apply and pay for permission to stay in a private home rather than a hotel.

All the monks have been released, but they're asking an apology. That's not yet come.

There aren't military on the streets any more. Police, less violent and corrupt, replaced them.

Exiled journalists and others have been invited to return. Journalists are freer. (Would that this were the case in Honduras!)

Hope is growing every day!

Since The Lady's release (Aung San Suu Kyi) many changes have taken place: She was emphatic that a her release wasn't important, it was the release of all political prisoners. There have been many releases: one of more than 6,000, some were political.



Fear is decreasing,



optimism increasing!

A student leader arrested for almost as long as

Daw Suu is free, the underground journal headlines told the people! A doctor remarked, without our asking, that people are having community meetings now, talking more freely about changes that should come. He stressed that democracy hasn't yet come. Many more steps must be taken but hopefully Burma is on the road. It will take time. He appreciated the help of the US. He had been in prison, consequently his family members can't get government jobs or study in the government university. When anyone was imprisoned or looked for to be jailed, the entire family was put under surveillance or arrest. Many stories!

1. Another announcement was the right of workers' unions to have some teeth and to organize strikes. Transport workers are testing this. Petty regulations are also being challenged.
2. The movie industry is asking for more power over the kind of movies they can make. American films are shown but censored for TV cutting any public show of affection since this is considered offensive by the culture.
3. Capital punishment has been changed to life imprisonment, (Something we're still working on in the US) 30 year sentences reduced to 20. Some prisoners of minor crimes have been released. (Yes, they have some things we can learn from!)
4. Education can be privatized. As in the US this would only benefit the children of the wealthy and those few able to get scholarships. The government is encouraging privatization of high schools. Teachers now often tutor after school to earn more money because they're very poorly paid. They need more than the 60,000 kyats (\$70 /month), definitely not enough for a family and perhaps parents. A 70 year old is so worn out from the hard life he/she is not able to help.
5. The suspension of the Irawaddy dam project with China for export of hydroelectric energy p 3

by the President until the end of his term brought a cease fire . This was a major cause for the civil war between the Kachin people and the army. It would create massive displacement and ecological damage. One of our guides is Kachin. Peace is real in the north!

Fighting for autonomy.

In the south on the Thai border the Karen people (four generations here)



are divided between the Karen Christians and the Karen Buddhists fighting the Burmese army because of discrimination against the Karen people. The Buddhists decided not to fight the army.



Shan people were also fighting government troops. Both the Shan and Karen people were fighting for autonomy. That's stopped.

Hopefully no more fighting in Burma now!!!!

Not all children go to school.

Children study English from Kindergarten. When we visited a government elementary school, a monastery after school program for poor kids and an adult spoken English class everyone was eager to practice! Songs and games with the after school group, questions and answers and practice of their lesson with the first graders, and conversation with the adults.. That's where we learned how the media had deprived them of so much of their history and heroes: adult students didn't know why Daw Suu was given the Nobel Peace Prize!

We happened upon a Buddhist Baptismal ceremony. Children of all ages dressed in white as princes and princesses were on horses, those too young were accompanied by a family member. Some babies were in horse drawn carts with their families. This is a ceremony remembering that Buddha was a prince before he renounced the material world. These male children were going to spend a couple of days to perhaps three weeks living in the monastery. Some might opt to remain and begin to study to be a monk, a way for poor to get educated. Girls have a different process to become nuns.

Sustainability:

One community grew beans to cook in soup, the stalks fed the fire to make syrup from the palm tree fruit into brown sugar, peanuts were ground by an ox walking round to turn the press for oil and the paste (peanut butter) which was used for cooking and a treat for the oxen, Palm fronds made thatch for roofs, seat covers for seats from dead trunks, and decorations.

Inle Lake in the mountains is huge, with every activity revolving around the water: fishing,



transporting everything from bamboo for construction, sacks of rice to market, propane, fish, veggies and fruit to restaurants, vendors on boats selling jewelry to tourists on boats, carrying sod from the mainland to build up other shorelines, to floating gardens made of “land” created with water hyacinth beds staked with bamboo poles for growing tomatoes, cucumbers, flowers, etc, and for feeding ducks, dredging silt for adding to the floating gardens, And of course many bathe, wash clothes and dishes in the lake. Children often must go to school by boat, everyone must take a boat to a clinic or hospital. For us the boat rides were so relaxing and a wonderful way to enjoy the beauty of the area, the activities and the variety of building construction, including a just completed home for a poor family whose house was demolished by the monsoon. The Foundation provided materials and some skilled carpenters while the family and the whole village helped provide labor; rough pine plank flooring lasts about 30 years (instead of the bamboo they had before), woven bamboo walls, sugar cane thatch roof all supported by huge bamboo beams. A bedroom for the family of the mother, who rolled cheroots, a fisherman father and 8 children: the three smallest go to school, three boys help fish, two girls sell flowers in the market of a neighboring village. They are subsisting but couldn't afford to rebuild, the criterion for becoming a candidate for a new home. The village chief is involved with the selection and the village agrees to help build!!!



Like a local habitat project, but here a part of the clinic/hospital project that services 6 villages with the RN outreach program for pregnant women and babies visiting clinic every Saturday. This includes training midwives and education about contraception, providing IUDs and tubal ligations when asked. During the week visiting doctors and nurses treat other ailments. The major problems are water borne: dysentery, diarrhea, TB and malaria. Their malaria prevention program during the past 6 years of operation: spraying ddt (which they no longer use now knowing it's toxic), educating people to not allow standing water, swatting mosquitos and coming in for diagnosis as soon a symptoms appear they now have on average 2 cases a year!

In the Inle Lake area there is very little HIV/AIDS and what there is comes through foreigners. They don't have retroviral drugs but bigger hospitals in the cities do. **Doctors! Nurses!** This project continues with the help of small groups of healthcare professionals who volunteer for one week or more. E mail the Metta Hospital c/o Hla Kyay Mon Tun, Administrative Officer (Her father is the MD in charge) for more information! A beautiful setting and an amazing project sponsored by GCSF (www.GlobalCommunityService.org). In 2010, GCSF expanded its 10-year health initiative in the Inle Lake region by launching the Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies program at the Golden Girls Dispensary and the Metta Hospital, facilities GCSF established and continues to support. This endeavor brings counseling and improved medical care to more than 32,000 families living in villages around Inle Lake, one of the most beautiful yet poverty stricken areas of the world.

Burmese women pilots



contrast with women in tradition dress volunteering to clean the pagoda grounds



The Lady!

We saw Daw Aung San Suu Kyi! close enough to touch. We actually had an appointment but she was way past time and tired. We did deliver gifts from a good friend and active BAWA (Burmese American Women's Alliance) Secretary. A few words were exchanged and Judy was able to get a book autographed!

The NLD (National League for Democracy) headquarters was mobbed with people being given lunch outside, T shirts with her photo being sold plus many milling around waiting to catch a glimpse of her. We were fortunate to talk briefly with U Win Tin, a leader who was imprisoned almost as long as the Lady. He's optimistic!

Letter to Daw Suu:

It was an exciting pleasure and privilege to learn we had an appointment, but of course we understood that earlier meetings with opposition members were far more important so we weren't able to ask our questions. We were pleased to give the gifts from Yasmin Vanya and that you signed Judy's book! If it's possible to get some answers to the questions we were prepared to ask, we would be happy to share them widely and do whatever would help you and NLD for the good of the people. Our group of 8 came to learn realities of the people, incredible people!

1. What messages should we take back to our friends, families and colleagues and to our elected political people?

2. We've been asked what motivated the President to make the changes that we saw happening almost every day? Are they sincere? Is there anything we can do to encourage more changes?
3. What are your hopes for the future?
4. What do the people of your country need to do to institute changes in the country?
5. Which projects would you prefer us to direct any small funds we might raise that would best help the people?
6. Which international NGOs would you suggest we encourage our friends to support?
7. What is the most important infrastructure project you feel the government should address?
8. What do you wish for your people both in the long and the short run?

Again, if any answers are possible we would be very grateful and would share widely.

With great admiration and hope,

In peace,

Sincerely,

Barby and Vic Ulmer/co-directors of *our developing world*, an all volunteer educational nonprofit, for Judy Specht, Apple Special Tech, John Wytmans, Jane Kos, retired teachers Merina Rainville, Ava Ulmer, Owen Ulmer, University students

What an ending to an incredible reality tour that our two guides arranged! And they invited us into their homes for dinner! The entire trip helped us know how hospitable Burmese people are. And we all agree with Owen that the food was delicious! We wanted to learn the messages she would like us to bring to you. Meanwhile keep letting our elected officials know that every step taken toward opening up freedom to speak, to organize, to campaign for election should be rewarded. Perhaps encouraging international election observers would be the next positive step? EU, Carter Center and the UN, too.

Malaysia (Bali next issue)

Malaysians are concerned with Myanmar and hope that they can learn from Malaysian mistakes: Myanmar should be wary of playing catchup as they develop, be careful not to be exploited as cheap labor and have natural resources extracted with negative environmental results. They should do all they can to keep their culture alive. Let's hope they can be a model. Already Myanmar teak trees are marked with a white painted line to mean they should not be cut! And they've stopped the huge dam project. That's a good start, say some in Malaysia!! They also hope that Myanmar doesn't mimic constructing more skyscrapers! In Malaysia there are multi-story condos going up that are 6,000 square feet (an entire floor) for millions of dollars! There are some very wealthy people and foreigners also who are buying these expensive homes to live in part of the year and possibly rent the rest of the time. Several people who grew up in Georgetown Penang told how they've tried to stop that kind of development, have fought to preserve a green mountain area and the building of a park.

Education is compulsory. There is a fine for parents who don't send their kids to school. Cyril, our taxi driver went to Catholic school based on the British system with exams from Britain and scored there. He doesn't feel the schools are as good now without that control.

The electronics industry have offices and factories here for the export of their products so there is no unemployment. In fact, they employ foreigners from many countries. There is some trafficking of workers and a crack down on that. There is a procedure for legalizing workers. p 7

The military is certainly well represented on TV.

Penang is the most progressive part of Malaysia and its religions are Christian, Buddhist and Muslim in that order whereas the rest of the country it's Muslim, Christian and Buddhist. Everyone celebrates all the holidays. It was Chinese New Year! There is a Burmese Buddhist temple in Penang with a huge standing Buddha. The third largest reclining Buddha is just across the way and is from Thailand. Many nationalities come to worship, give money, or food as devotion which allows the monks to live.

British colonization left street names, Methodist, Catholic and Baptist Churches and schools. AFSC (American Friends Service Committee) has a presence with the CAP (Consumer Advocacy Project) which spawned **Third World Resurgence**, the best magazines we know of for in-depth third world news and analysis. It's website is: <http://www.twinside.org.sg> where all of their publications are listed. If you'd like a complimentary copy we'd be happy to send it to you if you'll just send us \$2 for postage. For teachers who have used our simulation the issues: Globalisation, Economic Development and the Role of the State and IMF/World Bank are especially useful follow-up for Starvation or Survival.

Crafts include batik that uses metal stamps dipped in wax and stamped onto cloth or they hand-paint with wax and then handpaint the desired colors: beautiful! And very labor intensive. The fan hats use batik cloth.

Basketry, sometimes with wood or coconut combined, wood carving, gems and jewelry, pencils made of recycled newspaper!! They're trying to become green. But with 1.5 million people in Penang and 2.+ million cars running on gasoline! In KL (Kuala Lumpur) taxis run on natural gas. Japan is importing a great deal of natural gas from Australia..to take the place of some nuclear energy. Let's hope eventually all of it.

Bali next issue! Thanks for your past and future generous gifts that nurture the next generation.

Programs: Updates on Burma (Myanmar), Honduras, Cuba. Simulation: Starvation or Survival puts participants into the role of subsistence farmers (50% of the world's population) to feel the local and global impacts on their lives. Powerful for 5th graders through adults. They remember us when we return. Can be set in Central America, Africa, SE Asia or Women in Development in Africa.

Thanks to your generous tax-deductible donations we were able to get an electric motor bike to Dr Alex in rural Cuba where he can charge the battery by the solar power on the community building. The bike belongs to the community so it will be available for whoever is the family doctor there. If you come with us to Cuba you'll meet him and see the bike!!!

Now we **need** your continued generosity to help us pay back the loan for the scholarships given to three university students whose writing and photos are included in this edition of voices. This generation needs to experience other cultures and ways of being to become the sensitive leaders of the future. We're half way there! Thank you, thank you, thank you!!!!

And do come to our Feb 26 potluck 5:30 and program on Burma 6:30!

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