

BARNHEM MUANG MAI

Monday, April 13 through Sunday, May 10, 2015



Today's calm will be gone by tomorrow, since all of the kids will be returning from school break, and we will also be welcoming nine new family members. The new school year will start this coming week, so we have lots to do – but we also have lots to tell about our time spent since our last letter, so let's just get started.

We'll start at the beginning and with important things – celebrations. On Monday, April 13, we celebrated Songkran, the Thai New Year; and yes, if you associate this with water, then you are correct.

This year's celebration was a bit different, but in a very good way. We kicked off our celebration by going to Wat Manik – the temple where our boys spent school break as monks. In other words, for us Songkran began with a more traditional celebration at the temple, which was both worthy of the occasion and fun. It started calmly, with all visitors donating food to the monks, and when the monks had finished eating, the rest of us also got to try the delicious food. Then the actual ceremony began as everyone poured water, containing flowers, on the monks' hands. That part was very calm and dignified...but then there was a free-for-all as anyone could pour water on anyone anywhere, and the fun began. This is one of the things about Thailand and the Thai that I admire – their ability to mix dignity with fun in a very relaxed manner.

After our visit to the temple, we left for Nai Yang to continue the water fight. This year the natural elements wanted to participate as well, and we yielded when it began to pour – where's the fun in drenching one another when Mother Nature tops you?

We enjoyed a special visit by Mia Bodén, who is one of Barnhem's board members. She's been involved since the very beginning, and it was wonderful to have her here again. Mia was one of the founding members of Deep in Our Hearts, whose support largely explains Barnhem's existence, since they managed to raise significant funds during the first years.

School break probably would have been a bit too quiet and boring, albeit cozy, if it hadn't been for Songkran and Mia's visit. Some of our kids did remain here, but most of them left to visit relatives over break, and eight of our boys were at the temple in Wat Manik.

Wow managed to arrange for our monks to come home for a visit on Thursday, April 23, when we spoiled them with lots of good food. It was a bit odd to see them arrive in their orange monk garments, quiet and dignified – was it really our rascals who were coming home?

They sat calmly and quietly at the table as they ate, and we got to watch them until they were done. I must say that I'm very proud of them – they have proven that they can do what they want to do. I wonder how many of us Westerners would manage to live as a monk for a month?

Our monks spent the morning and early afternoon with us, and then we had been invited by wonderful Rebecca at Anthem Wakepark to spend the afternoon with her. Thus, our kids got to go wakeboarding for this break as well and had lots of fun. Rebecca promised that our monks would also get to visit her once they had returned from the temple.

Little Daa and little Bang moved in during break. Daa is a little like Brenda Brave, talking non-stop, and not surprisingly, she and Bow have found one another. Little Bang is a more cautious little man – for now.

Some of our grown kids, Jean, Bonut, and Dang, returned to the nest for a visit. Bonut and Dang moved out 1.5 years ago and live on Phuket, which means that we see them quite often, but Jean moved out six years ago, and it was therefore a special treat that we got to see her. Well, I don't know about 'kids' – the 'girls' have grown into three independent and strong young ladies, which is fantastic.

Bonut, Dang, and Jean chose to accompany us on Sunday, May 3, when we finally got to bring home our monks. The day began with a nice closing ceremony and we were back home after lunch. And now Barnhem is no longer quiet and boring. Every day brings more noise, which is wonderful!

Three days after the boys had returned, it was their turn to go to Anthem Wakepark – guess if they had a good time.

What's fun is that Anthem Wakepark is across from Wat Manik, where the boys had been monks, so they went back to almost the same place to do something completely different from what they had done at the temple. From calm and meditation to wakeboard and speed. And we can confirm that our boys are pros at both.

And yes, of course we're keeping in touch with Lann and Dee and their mother, and they are having a wonderful time together, which means that Lann and Dee won't be returning. It is absolutely fantastic that they are able to live together again and that everything is working so well – we at Barnhem are the only ones feeling a bit sorry for ourselves, since we miss our boys terribly.

Before Wow drove up to Khon Khen on Tuesday, May 5, we took the time to thoroughly review the kids' grades. And I am quite proud to report that practically all of our children raised their grades again!

The child whose journey was the longest is our beloved Team, who barely knew how to read and write when she first came to us, but who now has significantly improved all of her grades. She has done it on her own, but with great support from her wonderful friend Fon, who managed to get Team to believe in herself and her abilities.

Team is proof that you can do what you set your mind to do as long as you believe in yourself – and Fon and Team are proof that true friendship can yield strength.

Today two more of our older 'kids' paid us a visit – Jum and Gung, who also have grown from 'girls' into young ladies.

We feel very privileged that our old kids want to come back to visit us, and this for several reasons. In part because we'll know how things are going, both when things are going well and also when things are so-so or not so good; and especially because they let us be here for them as a source of security, even after they've outgrown us.

And tomorrow our whole family will be gathered once again, a much larger family. At the beginning of the school break we had 18 kids living with us, and when the new school year begins, we will have 26 kids living with us.

We are tremendously excited to get to know all of our new kids and we have some exciting and fun weeks ahead of us. We scheduled a Barnhem party on Saturday, May 23 to celebrate that we're together again, to celebrate the children whose birthday came and went, and to celebrate that the children are doing so well at school – more on that and many other things in our next newsletter.

We want to end with a great big THANK YOU to the kids at the after-school program GIII who did it again – the tenth year in a row!

This year they raised approx. \$1,000 at the bazaar. We are so very fortunate to have friends like you, who are there for us year after year. We cannot express our gratitude in words.

Warmest regards,

Sussi and Hans



Song-kran at our monks' in Wat Manik began with food...



...continued with food...



...and ended with a water fight.



A hot plate of sukki is particularly good after a long day of water fighting.



Bat and Kajsa playing the drum.



Our monks came home for a visit.



And then the time had come for them to return to the temple...



...while the rest of us went to Anthem Wakepark.



Two happy wakeboarders.



Daa arrived very recently, but is already one with the gang.



Our big girls, Dang, Bonut, and Jean, accompanied us as we went to bring home our monks.



Bang and Bat, two newfound friends.



It is tiring to listen to words of wisdom at the temple.



At home at last and time to go wakeboarding.



Maeo likes the Anthem Wakepark.



When it's hot, it's nice to play cards by the fan.



...as many would agree.



Gung and Jum paid us a visit.



We're preparing ourselves and Barnhem for the rest of our family and our new friends.



And there are many ways of preparing for a larger family.