



"Never be afraid  
to trust an unknown future  
to a known God."

Corrie Ten Boom

We can't say things have completely gone as expected, but we have officially moved to Thailand! Eleven months after we learned about this opportunity with Partners, we're



here meeting staff members, making adjustments, and preparing for our new position as Volunteer

Coordinators. We are currently in

Chiang Mai, where Partners headquarters are located. We're planning to be here until about February 10 for training and planning for our role. We'll then move on to Mae Sot to find a place to rent and finally settle in!

Over the past ten days we've enjoyed time in England with Kelli's sister & brother-in-law. It was such a blessing to be able to stop there and have a chance to rest. After many goodbyes at the Little Rock Airport, it was good to have a few familiar faces at the end of the day. We've included some photos from England and our time with Chris & Jenn.

Thank you so much for your prayers and support throughout this process that have

gotten us to this point. We have faced quite a few turns and surprises along the way, but God has been faithful. **Please continue to pray** for us:

- For smooth adjustments, including our flexibility, patience, and wisdom. Please pray that God's favor would go with us, and that we would rely on him and stay close to one another.

- Our monthly support is currently coming in at about 90%, which is such a blessing! We also have some additional one-time gifts raised that will take care of these gaps for a few months. Even so, we would love to see God provide the additional monthly support we need.

We'll do our best to keep in touch! Visit our blog at [spurlockadventures.com](http://spurlockadventures.com) to read the

most up-to-date stories and photos, and always feel free to email us!

*Stephen & Kelli*



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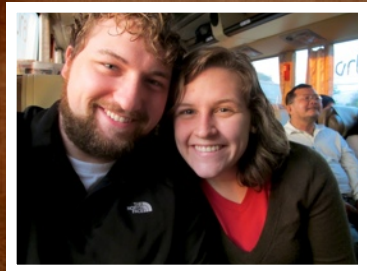


## "Glorify the Lord with me, let us exalt His name together."

Psalm 34:3

It's been a very busy month, but we are officially living in Mae Sot! It has been a month of patience as we try to feel like this is home. When we first arrived in

Thailand, we spent ten days in Chiang Mai organizing our work permits to stay here. We then moved down to Mae Sot and began to look for a place to rent. God has provided a wonderful little house, and we love it!



We're just now starting to get things unpacked and purchase some of the things we'll need. We also purchased a motorbike that will be our primary form of transportation around town.

For the first three months we are here, Partners requires their staff to take language training. After some coercing, we were approved to study Karen for the first month and then switch to Thai. We have now been told that we will be able to continue studying Karen through the three months! We are in the third week of our Karen lessons, meeting with our tutor, Lavender, for two hours a day and studying on our own in the evening. (Lavender is in the larger photo with us above.) This will continue until June, at which point we'll cut back our studies but hopefully continue language lessons one day a week. We hope to still learn some Thai in the future, once we are grounded in our Karen.

For now, we're only in the Partners office three mornings a week for training and orientation. The goal is for us to be prepared to take our first two teams in

June! We're already in contact with these teams and making preparations for them to come.

We love the Partners team here in Mae Sot, and we are so thankful to be working alongside them. We can see God working here, and we're excited to be a small part of that. We are so thankful for how God has provided with this team, our home, and our motorbike. God has continued to faithfully provide for us!

If you could, please be praying this month for

- Continued adjustments and settling into our home. Pray that we would learn to be patient and even appreciate cultural differences.
- The Karen language to come easily to us! Pray especially for Stephen, as the language study can be draining.
- Relationships to be built with our Burmese and Thai neighbors. We have chosen to live in a diverse part of town, and we feel our ministry here could be part of our purpose. We have already started to make connections with some of the kids as we go out in the street to play soccer, and we hope these bonds continue to grow despite the language barriers.



Thank you for your continued love and support!

*Stephen & Kelli*

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"I'm very proud to have been  
only a very small cog in the wheel."

Olive Christopher, after serving alongside Winston Churchill in WW2

We're officially two months in, and Mae Sot is slowly becoming home! We've been settling in and learning the ropes of paying our electric bill, having internet installed, and cooking with one burner. We were particularly excited to purchase a large toaster oven this month that is functioning as our oven; we're excited to have fresh bread again!

We have continued our Karen lessons and were able to read our first children's book in Karen! It's been a very slow, tedious process, but we continue to improve. Our days at the office have been busy with training and preparing for the many teams that will be volunteering this year. We already have seven teams planned for July through December!



For the weekend of March 17-20, we traveled back to Chiang Mai with other Partners staff from around the world to enjoy the annual Partners Staff Retreat. It was a great opportunity to meet all 53 staff from Australia, New Zealand, the US, England, Canada, Switzerland, South Africa, Norway, Italy, Thailand, and Burma (including Karen, Shan, and Kachin ethnicities). We were encouraged to see the influence Partners has in Burma and along the border. We are very humbled to be a "[small cog in the wheel](#)" of a wonderful ministry.

A few things we're thankful for this month:

- Safety. God has answered many prayers and kept us safe as we learn to drive a motorbike and travel along the border. We are also thankful to have had zero break-ins or anything stolen at this point!
- Growing relationships. We have started to build a sweet friendship with our neighbors, and have spent a few mornings playing with the kids. We are excited to see them more comfortable around our home and coming to see us in our yard! We are also getting to know many of the Partners staff in Mae Sot and building relationships with other local missionaries through the home church we attend. Stephen has begun leading worship occasionally at church, too, which he has really enjoyed.
- Mail. We are already loving and celebrating each letter and package that we receive! It has been fun to get small, familiar treasures!

What we'd ask you to be praying for:

- Language learning. We still need prayer for this! Please pray for retention and for our speaking abilities.
- Sorrows and joys. We'd love your prayers as we learn to celebrate from here—we had a new nephew born this month and a dear friend get engaged! And although both are wonderful things, we are learning how to count the costs.
- Our marriage. The challenges of adjusting to a new culture and working together full time are upon us, and we'd love your prayers as we learn to live more selflessly and love each other better.

We'd love to be praying for you, too! Please send us an email with your prayer requests. We couldn't thank you enough for your support!

*Stephen & Kelli*

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And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises."

Hebrews 6:11-12

A few noteworthy events of the past month:

- Language study has continued! We have been using a "Say It In Karen" workbook & CD, flash cards, and vocabulary recordings for the past month while our teacher was away. Though this was a welcomed opportunity to catch up on our vocabulary, we're excited to be starting back to our daily lessons with Lavender tomorrow.
- We celebrated our first Songkran holiday! Songkran is an annual three-day water festival in Thailand; in essence, it's a big water fight. The streets are filled with people, all armed with hoses, buckets, and water guns! You can read more and see photos in this [blog post](#).
- We were trained in off-road four wheel driving. We can honestly say we didn't know this is what our lives would look like, but we were thankful for the training that enabled Stephen to maneuver through deep mud the following weekend!
- Kelli braved the motorbike and went out for lessons with Stephen one Saturday. Despite an hour of successful driving, the practice was ended after a minor (and thankfully slow paced) collision with a pole. Despite a few bruises and scrapes, we're thankful the bike is okay and Kelli is healing!
- We are still preparing and training for upcoming teams, with our first coming on June 15th. We are also helping out with Partners children's projects for May through July while the staff coordinator is on furlough in the States.
- Kelli celebrated her first birthday in Thailand! Celebrations included a dinner out with Partners staff, multiple international packages, and a day off with Stephen to explore local waterfalls.



We are so thankful to announce that we reached 100% of our financial support! God has been so faithful to continue to provide, even as we did relatively nothing to increase our support since we arrived. We realize funds will always be fluctuating as people are able to give more and less, but we do want to take a moment to rejoice in God's faithfulness. He has provided for rent, insurance, trips to the market, visas, and more!

Our prayer requests remain the same for our language studies, our marriage, and the adjustments of making Thailand our home; but we bring an additional request before you this month. Recently, there have been news articles stating that Thailand may close all nine refugee camps along the border, sending over 140,000 people back into Burma. You can read more in a blog post we wrote a couple weeks ago, [defining hope](#), to learn more. We do pray that the camps wouldn't be closed and that these thousands of people would be protected, but more importantly that God would be glorified no matter what happens.

Thank you for joining us with the full assurance of hope!

*Stephen & Kelli*

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"Wherever you are, be all there! Live to the hilt every situation you believe to be the will of God."

-Jim Elliot

Over the past month, we have been busy temporarily managing Partners children's project programs around Mae Sot, which involved multiple trips to various

refugee camps and migrant schools along the border. We have continued to plan for upcoming teams, the first of which arrives in just two weeks. We also had our first volunteer visiting for one week in May. Despite



this being our last official month for language learning, that became merely a side task for us! Please continue to pray that we will become fluent in Karen as we study on the side of our full-time work with teams.

We made a trip to Beung Klung & Laytonku, two remote villages on the border. Amidst the **surprises** of the trip, we were able to perform basic health checks on the children in Beung Klung and deliver mosquito nets & medical supplies to Laytonku. We arrived in Laytonku just days after a horrible incident had occurred. The headmaster, vice-headmaster (his brother), and their father had visited Burma to discuss trade options with the Burmese government. Laytonku is very close to the border and quite difficult to get to from Thailand, so most of their trade is done through Burma. Despite the men agreeing to all the terms of trade, the Burmese Army attacked them as they were leaving. Two of the men managed to escape, but the vice headmaster was shot and killed, leaving behind his wife and three children, his parents, brother, and a grieving village. Although there was little for us to do, we met with the family to pray for them and continue to pray that God

will take what Satan intends for evil and use it to bring His kingdom.

Amidst all of this, we were so excited to welcome a team of eight from Conway, Arkansas, that was working in Mae Sot for a month this summer! The team comes with Chi Alpha Campus Ministry each year, the same ministry that Kelli first came to Thailand with five years ago. Though we weren't able to host them through Partners this year, we loved seeing them around town and enjoyed many dinners together! We were also so thankful for a huge box of goodies from America they brought for us, including books, games, and instruments we couldn't bring with us in January. We'll be sad to see them go in just a week!

Another very exciting development this month was the start of our **community garden**! This is our attempt to get to know our neighbors as we work together with them. We are also hoping this will enable us to bless them with sustainable food one day! We discovered this week that three of the families across our street are Karen, while the rest of the community is Burmese. We continue to pray for God to open doors with or without the ability to communicate. Please join us as we pray He will show us ways to love them.



Thank you for keeping in touch with us!

*Stephen & Kelli*

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*"We can make our plans, but the Lord determines our steps."*

*-Proverbs 16:9*

This past month has been one for the records--we officially started our job, and we had our first team! After a few long months of training, language learning, and getting acclimated to living in Thailand, we're excited to play a recognized role on the Partners team. We're still planning to continue studying Karen on the side, and we're not even sure what it looks like to actually become acclimated, but we're still hoping for that someday, too. Meanwhile, work must be done! On June 1, we met with our bosses and became the Team & Volunteer Coordinators for Partners Mae Sot.

And on Sunday, June 5, we met our first team--ten days ahead of schedule! They were in Thailand for two months working with various ministries, but one had fallen through, leaving ten days unplanned before they were scheduled to travel with us on



the 15th of June. And thus, in the middle of making plans for this team, we learned that "the Lord determines our steps", and we did our best to allow God to use both us and them in that time.

It was an amazing team. We spent time in Mae Sot first, playing with the kids in our neighborhood, packing hygiene packs for the migrant schools & orphanages, and sorting through donations that had

been received. We also traveled to Noh Poe refugee camp to spend a week with the two hostels that Partners supports there. The team was wonderful and gave all they had--even being outside their comfort zone--to love on the students. We played games, sang songs, made crafts, and attempted skits. It



was exciting to see our role develop into what we had envisioned and catch another glimpse of why God has sent us here.

We are now preparing for a team coming next week, as well as making preparations for teams scheduled in the coming months. We have been building relationships with the local contacts Partners has along the border, and we were even able to visit Noh Bo, the school we volunteered at in 2009. It was wonderful to see the students & teachers again and have your name remembered!

We are so excited about what God is going to do in and through us in our time in Thailand. We still have many things to learn and accept, and we crave your prayers in all realms of our lives here--living in impoverished areas, missing family, learning a new job, and working together as a couple. We also ask that you would join us in prayer for the freedom of Burma and for our work to bring the Kingdom here.

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"be kinder than necessary because everyone you meet is fighting some kind of battle."

~ unknown

We have been warned about the six month mark of being overseas, and we're just proud to say we survived! As of today, we begin our seventh month in Thailand, and we'd like to take some time to just be thankful.

First, we are so thankful for our supporters that have equipped us to be here. It is amazing to receive a report each month that documents God's consistent provision and the faithful generosity of so many people. We are also thankful that finances have not created another stressor.



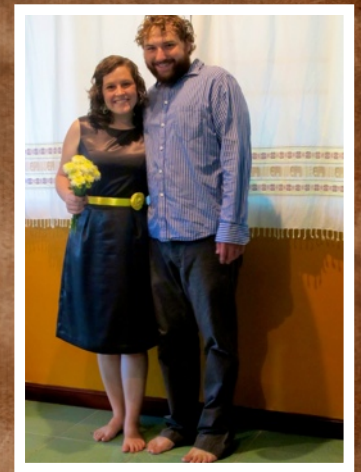
We are really thankful for our neighborhood. We love coming home to dozens of children shouting hellos and goodbyes,

the two English words they know and yet don't know the meaning of. We love working together on our garden and watching it grow; we love hearing the kids play a rubber band game right outside our door. We love hearing Burmese and Karen languages surround us. We really feel God couldn't have placed us in a better location in Mae Sot, and we're thankful for our developing friendships.

We are thankful for the ways we can remain connected to the US. The packages and letters, the emails, and the countless Skype calls are more of a blessing than we could express. Just this week we

Skyped into the wedding of two dear friends, and we realize that is a very a modern privilege.

As we move forward from here, we have three prayer requests. First, we ask for good health. This past month was a doosie--Kelli has had a four week ear infection & Stephen was sick for the third time. We travelled to Bangkok last week to visit the doctor and will be back in Chiang Mai tomorrow for a followup on Kelli's ear. Please pray that she gains back full hearing and the pain subsides soon; and that we'll continue with good health!



We have started back our Karen lessons with Lavender and will be meeting with her regularly around our teams. Please continue to pray for our improvement and for bravery to practice in the community!

And last, please pray for wisdom. We are learning so many things and still have so much to learn! We ache for wisdom in every small word or action daily, as well as the long term decisions we face.

The biggest thanks we can offer,

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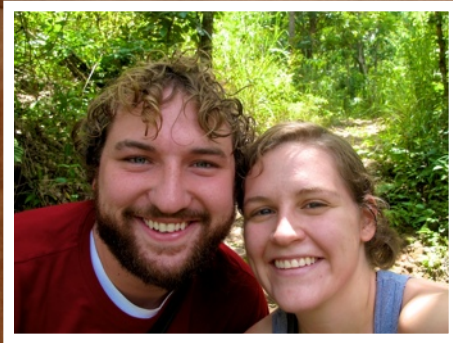




*"strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees"*

Isaiah 35:3

August was a very refreshing month for us. We spent just two days in the office, two days in all-staff strategic planning meetings, and twenty days in Chiang



Mai! Chiang Mai is about five hours from Mae Sot, and is a hub for Southeast Asia. It welcomed us with westernized stores, amazing food options, and—most importantly—doctors that speak English.

We visited an ENT five more times, after the disastrous doctor visit in Mae Sot and one long trip to Bangkok in July, for Kelli's ear. Though not completely healed yet, it continues to heal and is much less painful. Her ear drum was perforated from the infection, so it will take another month or so to gain back full hearing.

We continued to work from Chiang Mai to prepare for future teams. Partners was wonderful to provide an apartment for us to use in the Chiang Mai office while we were there. We remained in the city to meet with our next team from Canada and drove down to Mae Sot with them. They spent ten days serving at a migrant school in Mae Sot, organizing activities with the students and orphans, encouraging the teachers, and even helping in the construction of two small on-site homes for teachers.

This team was a complete blessing to us, reminding us of why we came to lead teams and volunteers. They

were excited for what God was doing and teaching them; they were engaged here and exploring why God had brought them. It was wonderful to share with them about Burma, open their eyes to the situation along the border, to pray with them, and to discuss the experiences with them. They were also incredibly flexible, which turned out to be absolutely necessary with the eighty times our plans were changed! In all, they reminded us of what God is doing here and how we can be a part of sharing the stories and hope.



And so we head into September with these prayers:

- energy for our next team arriving 9 September and staying for two weeks around Mae Sot
- as we continue to learn when to say yes, when to say no, and when to be patient with ourselves as we continue to transition
- for full hearing to return to Kelli's left ear!
- creativity and wisdom as we develop curriculum for teams and volunteers in October & November

God continues to meet with us here; thank you for your continued prayers and support!

Stephen & Kelli

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After our fourth team in September, we have officially begun what we'll affectionately call a hiatus. We have a break from teams, giving us time to update Partners' volunteer materials. We're also working to evaluate how things have gone and how we'd like to improve. We spent every day last week in our office, and it was a welcomed treat. We are doing our best to continue Karen lessons and always praying that God would bless our feeble efforts.

One of the most encouraging aspects of this past month has been the growing friendships with our neighbors. The team in town blessed our neighbors with an afternoon of health lessons, teaching hand washing and basic dental care. Soap, toothbrushes, toothpaste, and some small toys were handed out and cherished by the children and adults alike.

We have also made yet another hopeful attempt at a community garden. Though it seems to be one miscommunication after another, we are getting closer to the goal, and have already been able to share some pumpkin and okra with the community. The garden was weeded out yet again today, and we're hoping to start with a fresh batch of seeds this week or next.

We continue to play with the kids and enjoy the games, hugs, and laughter. Regularly cleaning crayon and pencil off the side of the house is not a favorite, but we are learning and growing as much as they are. We are particularly thankful for additional contact with the adults in the community, though it is sometimes through difficult circumstances.

It has been a very challenging journey as we continue to learn and process how to love the community around us. It has required great prayer and great flexibility, while bringing many tears and burdens. Our [blog](#) has become our storybook as we are learning community with our neighbors, and we'd encourage you to read more there.

It has been a weighted month for us, and we continue to ask for your prayers. First, please continue to pray for patience as we find our confidence within Partners. It has been difficult to fill our role, remain encouraged, and continue to endure as things take time. Pray for us to remain faithful, humble, and gracious.

Second, we continue to pray for the Karen language to come fluently to us. This can be such an area of discouragement, and it has become an important dream for us.

Lastly, please continue to pray for our relationships, both here in Thailand and with our friends and family around the world. We are seeing the importance of our friendships here, and realizing how our introvert natures can easily keep us isolated. We are also feeling the pull of being here while longing to be with those we love during the challenges and celebrations.

And with complete joy, we are excited to announce that we'll be making a short trip to the states over the Christmas holiday this year! After much prayer, we believe the current circumstances surrounding both of our families require our return. We'll be in the states for about three weeks from the end of December into early January, and we're so thankful for this opportunity!

But for right now, until that completeness, we have three things to do to lead us toward consummation:

trust steadily in God;

hope unswervingly;

love extravagantly.

And the best of the three is love.

1 Corinthians 13:13 (The Message)

Thankfully,  
Stephen & Kelli

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**"For everything there is a season,  
and a time for every matter under heaven."**

Ecclesiastes 3:1

The verse above captures this month well for us as we are trying to embrace each season as it comes. We are currently cherishing some seasons, including the time we had in October to spend a few weeks in the office. We were able to begin developing curriculum for teams and volunteers, as well as enjoy seeing other staff every day! We are also taking some time to evaluate how things have been going, where are headed, and how we can improve in our role.

We are celebrating our first visit from family! Kelli's sister, Jennifer, and her husband, Chris, arrived last week.

We have been enjoying some time off with them, soaking up conversation we can understand, and showing them a glimpse of our lives here. It has taken on a form of sabbath for us--a chance to rest, reconsider, and



refresh. God has been good to give us these moments of sabbath throughout the year at just the right times, and we're basking in that now!

There have also been seasons of challenge recently. In the smallest, literal meaning, we are missing the autumn season here in Thailand! Further, it has been a difficult time for us to be away from family and friends, wishing we could be close to experience the seasons of life together. Both of

our families are going through a variety of changes, and we wish we could be near.

Even so, we are looking forward to the next few months with great anticipation. We have two more wonderful weeks with Kelli's family, followed by a full month of Christmas celebrations with Partners. We'll be busy with Christmas programs at each of the children's homes Partners supports, and shortly after we'll be flying out for a holiday in the states!

We are continuing to fall in love with our neighborhood and sustain great hopes for our

friendships! Our garden is flourishing in new ways and has seen some true commitment from the community members. We have also continued to get to know the children, learn



names, and love on them in new, creative ways. These relationships continue to be a strong encouragement to us, in addition to our developing role within Partners.

As you think of us, please continue to pray for our community here. Pray for our relationships with locals & foreigners and friendships in & out of Partners. We also appreciate your continued prayer for language; may we never give up, but ache to love and connect with the Karen in their own words.

With joy,  
Stephen & Kelli

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It's hard to believe December is here already, particularly as we are still wearing our short sleeve shirts and sitting in the air conditioning. Even so, it's upon us-- we are headed out to host our first Christmas party tomorrow!



We enjoyed some time with Kelli's sister and brother-in-law last month, and then spent a week catching up in the office. We even had the fun of celebrating Thanksgiving with some other Partners staff and some local Karen.



Over the next three weeks, we'll be attending six Christmas parties for the children here! Partners supports children's homes in four refugee camps, which we'll be visiting to bring presents, a skit of the Christmas story, crafts, and games.

We also had some presents donated for our neighbor kids. We are busy wrapping them and will be handing them out to the parents, to then give to the children themselves. We are also taking the opportunity to share the story of why we celebrate Christmas.

And shortly after all these trips, we'll be off to the States with great joy! We're admittedly a little fearful of the cultural adjustments back to America and the intensity of three weeks packed full, after three weeks packed full here. I found this

written by someone on Facebook a few months back, and it has captured this stage in our lives perfectly:

**"Terrified and full of joy. I live there. It is possible to be afraid of what obedience might bring next and be full of thanks and trust anyway."**

We are so thankful to see God building our community here, and we continue to ask Him to provide encouraging relationships, mentors, and friends. Our garden is still growing, and we are praying for the crop to bless our neighbors.

We are also rejoicing at the opportunity to go to the States, but would beg for your prayers in this time. Please pray for energy to celebrate the time we have with family and friends, but also for the passion to return to what God has for us here. Please also be praying for Stephen's mom, as she will be starting chemotherapy next week, and continuing for the next two months.

Happy holidays,  
the spurlocks



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