

"Yet there is hope
still, if we can but
stand unconquered
for a little while."

Gandalf, Lord of the Rings

We have celebrated Christmas since the first of December, bringing Christmas parties to 1,000 children in hostels along the border and hosting a party for the children in our neighborhood. This was all before flying home to celebrate with our entire families, including all seven sisters and grandparents. We are grateful for nearly two more weeks in town, but also thankful that God has provided for us to return to Mae Sot in January! We're counting it a privilege to be a part of what God has planned for the people of Burma in 2012.

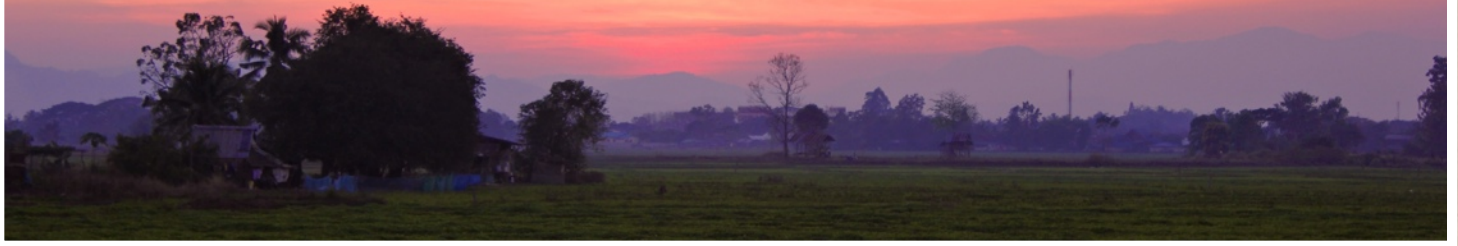
the spurlocks

If you'd rather not receive our monthly updates, we completely understand.

Just send us an email and let us know to take you off the list!

spurlockadventures.com ■ stephen.spurlock@partnersworld.org ■ kelli.spurlock@partnersworld.org

*"But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it."
Romans 8:25*



We have so many things to be thankful for, a number of things to mourn, and still a few unknowns.

But God is good.

First, we are so thankful for our time in America. We couldn't have asked for more, and God was so gracious to us. He provided energy in abundance, wonderful times with family, and even time to catch up with some of our friends and community. We really feel he blessed the time, while still confirming that we were to return to life in Mae Sot.

Another praise? Just as we were flying to Mae Sot, the Karen National Union signed a ceasefire agreement with the Burmese government! This is a huge praise for us, for our work, and for our friends. We hope this is the first step toward reconciliation, growth, and development in Burma.

This also means that there are many unknowns ahead of us. We are praying through our role at Partners, as well as Partners praying through their role in development. Please join with us as we pray for wisdom in finding the role God has brought us here for. Either way, we are hopeful, and we believe has called us here "for such a time as this" (Esther 4:14).

Sadly, there are a number of things for us to mourn at this time as well, and we are facing the challenge of mourning long-distance. Kelli's family has continued to spread out around the globe this week, as her sister and her family moved to Uganda on Monday. Further, Stephen's infamous grandfather, Papa Doc, is continuing to decline in his health, and we are learning to mourn with his family without being there. Please also continue to pray for Stephen's mom as she continues chemotherapy treatments for cancer. She has four more treatments remaining, and we are praying for strength and energy to continue strong.



God is teaching us many things as we are learning to trust him with our work and purpose here. He is growing us as individuals and pushing us deeper in our relationship with each other. Please continue to pray for us--

- for our families and relationships; that we would love well over great distances
- for our roles and purpose at Partners; for wisdom in transitions and trust for leadership & the Lord
- for our continued language learning; that our knowledge and confidence would continue to increase and that we would remain faithful
- for our growing relationships with our neighborhood; that we would love with open hearts and eyes

Thank you for rejoicing with us, mourning with us, and sustaining us here with your love and encouragement!

Stephen & Kelli

*If you'd rather not receive our monthly updates, we completely understand.
Just send us an email and let us know to take you off the list!*

spurlockadventures.com ■ stephenspurlock@partnersworld.org ■ kellispurlock@partnersworld.org

*"And Sideon came to the Jordan and crossed over,
he and three hundred men who were with him,
exhausted yet pursuing."
Judges 8:4*

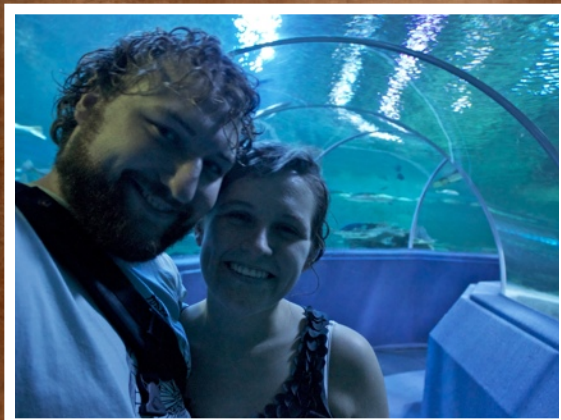


This past month was full for us. We took a team of nineteen--yes, nineteen!-- for ten days. We also seemed to be in endless meetings, including an office-wide security meeting that Stephen prepared for and led. It was also a month of mourning, as we learned--and are learning--how to mourn over a great distance. We lost Stephen's grandfather, the legendary Papa Doc, in early February.

Amidst the usual responsibilities, things are changing: inside Burma, along the border, within Partners, and in our day to day. As the ceasefire talks continue among the Burmese government and various ethnic groups, Partners is evaluating its role in development within Burma. How do we support change, play a role in positive development, and equip the local people to take hold of this opportunity themselves? As an organization, we are trying to make the most of the opportunity for change that is currently present.



How do we fit into this? In January, we were asked to consider additional roles we could be a part of.



For Stephen, the security and technology management he started helping with months ago has become a much bigger project, and needed full-time assistance to bring the office up to par. For the next four to six months, he'll be helping the staff establish secure processes and update all their computers and files. After these procedures are set up, he'll move into other projects that are currently in the dream stages. There are talks of him helping with sound recordings to capture Karen culture, practicing photography for the media team, or creating videos for medical, agricultural, and animal husbandry trainings.

For Kelli, she was asked at the end of last year to begin helping with political research for our Karen contacts. In January this quickly moved from one day a week of research to teaching courses regularly. As of this month, Kelli will be creating a Social Development department. She'll will

be researching and creating curriculum to provide training for university-aged students from inside Burma. Her first five-day course will be held 26-30 March, so prayers are appreciated as she is sorting through material and writing curriculum to be translated!



Where does this leave teams and volunteers? We are still very passionate about short-term missions being done well, but at this time we believe its best to pursue these other avenues. We are currently in the process of handing the role of teams & volunteers over to additional staff and continuing to pray that God will lead us with these new responsibilities.

In addition to all of this starting our second year in Mae Sot, we have just signed a two-year lease to continue renting our home. In signing for two years, the landlord agreed to lower our rent by 25%, which we are so thankful for! This allows us to continue building relationships in our neighborhood and for the community garden to continue blooming; and we're even making plans to put on a layer of colorful paint to make it a

little more like home!

We came to Mae Sot for the advancement of the Kingdom, and we are now seeing how that can change shape. We are thankful that Partners has equipped us to be here and for a shared passion for Burma. We are also rejoicing in fresh opportunities to invest in development while we continue to play Go Fish with the neighbor kids.

Please continue to pray for us!

- *Pray for community.* We are still building relationships with our neighborhood, and we are also seeking to create relationships among other English-speakers in Mae Sot. For two introverts in a town with limited friend options, we could use some prayers for true community to develop.
- *Pray for us as we're away from family.* It's always difficult, but sometimes harder than others.
- *Pray for our new roles!* Pray that we would be encouraged and feel valued in our new roles. Pray for security procedures to work smoothly, and for Kelli's curriculum & classes to come together quickly!

Stephen & Kelli



*If you'd rather not receive our monthly updates, we completely understand.
Just send us an email and let us know to take you off the list!*

spurlockadventures.com ■ stephen.spurlock@partnersworld.org ■ kellispurlock@partnersworld.org

"Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us,
and establish the work of our hands upon us;
yes, establish the work of our hands!"
Psalm 90:17



At the beginning of March, Stephen led his last team of volunteers to visit a remote village and refugee camp. He enjoyed the team, but felt it made clear this was a good time for us to move on to new roles.

He has been working hard to increase the security of our office computers and files, while teaching many of our local staff a variety of computer skills. He also used his Mac skills to take apart the office iMac and replace the hard drive--something the local computer shop insisted could only be done in Bangkok!

SPURLOCKADVENTURES.COM

*Come see the changes to our website
and read more stories on the blog!*

We also began painting the interior of our house this month and attempting to make it more of a home! You can see the bright colors we chose on our [blog](#). We have one more living & dining area that we'll be painting over weekends in April.

Kelli spent much of her time researching and reading to create curriculum for her first training course, which she taught from 26-28 March. She really enjoyed the training, and is very excited for many more on the horizon! You can read some of her responses to the first day on our [blog](#).

She plans to continue expanding and improving her curriculum while additional trainings are organized. We are also waiting & praying for the ceasefire talks that will be held in early April.



Some specific prayer requests for us:

- We are still trying to learn Karen. Pray that we don't give up, but see fruitful results!
- Pray for friendships, both as individuals and as a couple. We want to continue building relationships with our neighbors, that might not always include words, but we also want to create healthy, encouraging relationships with other foreigners in the area.
- We are expecting a refund on our taxes this year and have decided to use a small percentage to bless our neighboring community. We are trying to determine a wise way to help without creating a expectation or future issues. We have considered a few options and would love your prayers for wisdom and continued blessings on their community.
- The Karen National Union will be in ceasefire talks and peace negotiations in early April, and we would beg for you to be praying! We are hopeful that these are the beginning stages of true change in Burma. Pray with us!

If you'd rather not receive our monthly updates, we completely understand.

Just send us an email and let us know to take you off the list!

spurlockadventures.com ■ stephen.spurlock@partnersworld.org ■ kelli.spurlock@partnersworld.org

He has showed you, O man,
what is good.

And what does the Lord
require of you?

To act justly
and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God.

Micah 6:8

May 2012 ■ Vol 16



This month, we had the privilege of spending nine days in two refugee camps that are more remote along the border. With two other staff members, we hosted a VBS-style program for six of the children's homes we support in these locations, including music, Bible stories, memory verses, and games. Stephen has also been busy with photography and has begun training a local Karen man on photography & videography this week. Kelli has continued her research for social development trainings, and has been helping with various documents for the ceasefire talks between the Burmese government & Karen National Union. The second round of discussions was completed in mid-April, and the team is now gathering proposals, ideas, and agreements to be discussed again at the end of May. Kelli has been helping to edit these when she is able, though it's admittedly outside of her expertise!

We have continued to practice our Karen and play with the neighbor kids in between; Stephen pursues recording when he can. We are praying for wisdom on a daily basis as we see new challenges, new questions, and new unknowns in every direction. Please know that we are thankful for you--for your friendship, your generous gifts, and your prayers! We're rejoicing in His faithfulness.

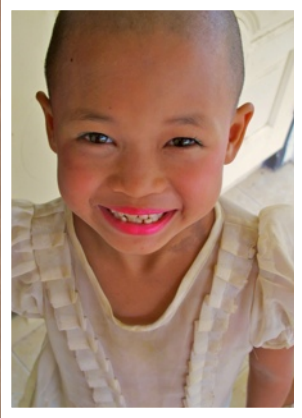
the spurlocks



If you'd rather not receive our monthly updates, we completely understand.

Just send us an email and let us know to take you off the list!

spurlockadventures.com ■ stephen.spurlock@partnersworld.org ■ kelli.spurlock@partnersworld.org



"all I have seen
teaches me
to trust the Creator
for all I have not seen."

ralph waldo emerson



what we are giving thanks for

- We officially completed our role with teams & volunteers!
- Stephen has begun working with our media team, helping with photography and organization. He is excited for what he's started and even more for what is developing.
- Kelli's Social Education & Development Training has been tentatively scheduled as a two-month course beginning in August. She is now busy with research and curriculum development.
- Some friends and supporters from Arkansas arrived as a volunteer team! They are a group of seven that will be working with us and other local ministries for two months.
- Kelli was able to take a **batik course** at a local studio. You can see her two completed batik pieces on [our blog](#).
- We continue to spend time with the neighbor families, and they are often some of the brightest pieces of our day. We are constantly **learning** and praying through these friendships, and **thanking the Lord for them**.



what we are praying for

- Please pray for our language learning! It has been **quite the challenge**, but we can feel the importance now more than ever. We are studying Karen daily and praying for God to bring miracles.
- We are praying for Kelli's curriculum to come together speedily and in a way that brings hope. We are also praying that God will choose the right students for her upcoming class.
- Please pray for Stephen's growing role in photography and videography. He is currently learning more about film from a volunteer and working to incorporate all of his skills in a way that benefits Partners work and the people of Burma.
- Pray that we would be wise and compassionate. Pray for our decisions, attitudes, and responses to daily challenges as well as in critical decisions.

the spurlocks

If you'd rather not receive our monthly updates, we completely understand.

Just send us an email and let us know to take you off the list!



God has been good to us!

This month, Stephen officially joined Partners' Creative team. He's responsible for photo and video in our Karen projects office. He takes advantage of any opportunity he has to visit our project locations to grab footage of recent trainings, health checks, and programs. He has also been working with a volunteer to learn video editing so that he can begin helping with Partners marketing videos. This is all in Stephen's skills and interests, so he is excited for the opportunity to learn more and use these skills to capture the stories of Partners and the Karen.



Kelli has been buried in books and at the computer this month as she finishes up her Social Education & Development curriculum. The final pieces are coming together and editing has begun, with hopes of the final curriculum being sent off for translation by mid July. She will be giving a two-week condensed training to community leaders in August, followed by a more intensive two-month training to university graduates starting in September.



We have been very busy with our neighborhood, including a health check that Partners provided for the families. We have also made multiple trips to the hospital for some emergency situations, and we are doing a short-term project to provide healthy food for two malnourished families. Even with all the unexpected surprises they bring, we are so thankful to live where we do. We continue to pray for wisdom in each situation that arises, that we'll know how to best love them and care for their current & long-term needs. We are also praying for our language studies to help these relationships grow deeper.



We have just scheduled a vacation for next month, and we'll happily be visiting southern Thailand! We are so thankful for the break, and for the fact that beautiful beaches are just a jump away.

Thank you for your support and prayers for us--we are desperate for them. It is rarely easy, but God has been good and continues to provide. You can read more of our day-to-day stories & struggles on our blog--spurlockadventures.com.

the spurlocks

If you'd rather not receive our monthly updates, we completely understand. Just send us an email and let us know to take you off the list!



July has been a month to give thanks for!

After hours of research and writing, Kelli finished (with notable help) creating a **90-page curriculum** for Social Education! The training is designed to equip local rural populations with the knowledge necessary for them to participate in the changes taking place in Burma's government and economy. She will be teaching a two-week course beginning next week, followed by a two-month training in September & October. She is also developing a schedule and budget for next year, considering what locations should be targeted for this training program.

Stephen spent many hours working on video and photography, including a marketing video and contributions to the Partners magazine. This new role has been very enjoyable for him, and the other staff are grateful for his skills. He is also considering schedules for 2013 and deciding dates he can travel to document a variety of Partners projects and help with program training videos.

For the last two weeks of July, we had an incredible opportunity to take a vacation to an island off south Thailand! This was such a blessing and well-timed. We left Mae Sot exhausted, but loved our time away. We came back refreshed and excited for the next few months ahead of us. You can see the **photos** and **stories** of our picturesque time on our blog.

And now, we continue on! Our prayer requests remain very much the same:

energy and guidance in our work, particularly as we plan for 2013
love for our neighborhood and wisdom for each situation that arises
efficient language learning

Thank you for all your support and encouragement in our work. We are so thankful for the opportunities that wait for us each day!

the spurlocks

*If you'd rather not receive our monthly updates, we completely understand.
Just send us an email and let us know to take you off the list!*



“And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?”

Esther 4:14



Our August could be described as endless activity; but this is how you describe any return from a lovely vacation, right?

Early in August, we woke up to find our road flooded with about two feet of water, and our community facing three and four feet of water around their bamboo huts. We are thankful to say that our house remained dry and became a resting place for the day and into the night. With the help of Partners and friends, we helped move valuables into our dry home, kept the kids dry inside, and fed over thirty people through the day. For the children, it was a glorious day of playing with magnets on the fridge, watching movies, and using our bathroom. For the parents, it was a day full of stress, and we were thankful to bring some encouragement, care, and a full day of meals.

It was a long day, and perhaps an even longer recovery as we attempted to de-luxe our house and clean up after our thirty (many very small) guests. Even so, God was good. It was a good reminder that we have come here and embraced our community for such a time as this.

Otherwise, we continue to see the kids daily, make regular trips to the hospital and clinic, and attempt to improve our language!

Both of us are in full swing of our roles at Partners. Stephen has a few of his photos featured in this month's magazine and in the 2013 Partners Calendar. He has continued to help the office with his computer knowledge, making our projects more secure and more efficient. He is expanding his work with photography and video as we plan to travel more in the coming months.

Kelli held a two-week training in August for ten community leaders. She loved the discussions and was reminded that she might have come for such a time this, too! It is a great privilege to teach and apply the basics of democracy and social participation to Christian leaders in Burma.

Per usual, you can read more on our blog about [the flood](#) and [our recovery](#), plus stories of [tortilla making](#), [bicycle rides](#), and [Kelli's training](#)! Click these links or visit spurlockadventures.com/blog.

Please pray for...

Our community. We are always seeking wisdom on how to best love the community around us. Please continue to pray that we would be wise and generous with our time, finances, food, and smiles. Pray that we would communicate God's love well and take advantage of every opportunity.

Language learning. Please pray that we would be faithful to study, try speaking, and not become discouraged.

Schedules and plans. We have much on the horizon with Kelli's parents visiting in October and Stephen's mom & a friend visiting in January! We are also planning for a three-week trip in November for Kelli to train and Stephen to get footage for photography & videography projects. As we look at the next year, please pray for wisdom as we plan our travels in the area and our return to the States for furlough.

With love,
the spurlocks

If you'd rather not receive our monthly updates, we completely understand. Just send us an email and let us know to take you off the list!

spurlockadventures.com ■ stephen.spurlock@partnersworld.org ■ kelli.spurlock@partnersworld.org

May God bless us with discomfort at easy answers, half truths, and superficial relationships, so that we may live deep within our hearts.

October 2012 ■ Vol. 21

May God bless us with anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of God's creations, so that we may work for justice, freedom, and peace.

May God bless us with tears to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, hunger, and war, so that we may reach out our hands to comfort them and to turn their pain into joy.

And may God bless us with just enough foolishness to believe that we can make a difference in the world, so that we can do what others claim cannot be done: to bring justice and kindness to all our children and all our neighbors who are poor.

a Franciscan benediction



This month has been blessed.

Our roles at Partners have continued to expand. Stephen has excelled in his photography and videography, and the Creative Team is thankful to have him. He is enjoying the opportunity to use the skills he has and continue learning while he attempts to capture the stories of the people of Burma and share them worldwide.

Kelli has continued to teach Social Development courses focused on democracy and basic political participation. She is currently in the middle of a two-month course with fifteen students that she teaches for about three hours each morning. Her department has also expanded, and she will soon begin researching and writing curriculum for an economic development course. A Thai-Karen woman has joined Kelli to help with research, writing, and teaching in 2013.

Our community is still a highlight to our lives in Mae Sot. The stories are endless, really; there always seems to be something unexpected. One Karen family patiently translates for us regularly, and challenges our language learning. We are continuing to open our home when we can and pray through every opportunity that arises.

We are currently beginning the second year of our community garden. With the help of Partners' staff, we are hoping to provide education on sustainable, organic agriculture that includes a greenhouse-style structure, creating your own biochar, and strategic planting. Though this will require more investment on our part and more community participation, we feel like it will be a sustainable way that we can contribute to ensuring that our neighbors have sufficient food sources.

October welcomes a three-week visit from Kelli's parents that we are anxious for! Thank you for your continued support and prayers for all that we do; please pray that we would love well in our community, work with Partners, and every aspect of our lives in Mae Sot.

Blessings,
the spurlocks

If you'd rather not receive our monthly updates, we completely understand. Just send us an email and let us know to take you off the list!
spurlockadventures.com ■ stephen.spurlock@partnersworld.org ■ kelli.spurlock@partnersworld.org



On 10 October, we welcomed Kelli's parents to Thailand for a visit! We enjoyed showing them around for just a few days when we learned that my grandfather had passed away. We spent a few days organizing flights and then saw them off again, two weeks ahead of schedule. While we are so thankful they were able to come at all, it has been a difficult few weeks. It is always difficult to be so far away from significant moments like this, and this was compounded in having family arrive and leave so quickly.

On 1 November we celebrated our third anniversary! We took off a few days for rest, reading, and prayer. Please continue to pray for wisdom as we make plans for next year and pray through what God has for us. Specifically, please pray for wisdom and direction with:

- our neighbors
- Stephen's video & photography projects
- Kelli's trainings in social development
- furlough plans
- language learning



Our neighbors still bring us both the most responsibility and the most joy. We are regularly encountering more opportunities to build relationships, which this month including driving for a funeral procession. Another man had outpatient surgery to remove a benign growth on his forehead. His daughter informed us each day after the surgery, "Father! Good!!!" There always seems to be surprises, a little bit of chaos, and more questions; but there also many, many smiles and hopes for us to cling to.



We'd like you to meet Yim, who recently began working with Kelli in Social Development. She is Thai-Karen, and a wonderful asset! She recently graduated with her Masters in Political Science, and she's helping to expand the curriculum to include the basics of economic development. She is also helping with research, training, and translating.

All of three of us will be traveling to a remote area for three weeks in November. Kelli & Yim will be training while Stephen takes photos and gathers video footage for upcoming projects.



Our November was spent in the middle of nowhere.

There were many beautiful aspects of our time away: the stars at night were indescribable. A month surrounded by Karen people gave us a new love for the culture and a hands-on language lesson every day. The trip came with challenges, as well, including icy cold bucket baths, and more meals of rice, pumpkin, and "jungle animal" than we would have ever chosen.

Even so, I really enjoyed teaching a three-week course where I was able to live among the students. Their passion and commitment to study and return to their communities to make a difference was both astounding and inspiring. I loved hearing their creative ideas for development and change to their country, people, and families. I love the opportunity to equip them with the basic knowledge that they can take further than I ever could.

Stephen enjoyed the opportunity to gather footage of the day-to-day life of the Karen, as well as capture their stories and music. He was also able to teach basic photography skills, a few songs, and Bible, while fixing technical problems that arose. He is really wonderful at connecting with the students and teachers in conversation, discussing different topics and taking the time to listen to them.

Time spent more secluded from society gives you plenty to think about, and time to think about it. We found ourselves discussing, "Why do we do this? Why do we come here--in the middle of nowhere and live uncomfortably? And why do we live in Mae Sot, where it is not as uncomfortable, but our families are so far away?" It was refreshing to reconsider why we are here and what motivates us to stay. In some ways, it was encouraging that we both feel that we are here for a calling; that God has told us to be here in these roles. However, in some ways this is discouraging, because there is a temptation to pack up and return to America; and this calling requires us to stay. Overall, the jungle was beautiful. The opportunity to build your lives around the sun and live in the depths of another culture is a privilege. And after a bit of a whirlwind time in our lives, it was similar to long, deep breath of fresh air. As we return back to Mae Sot, my parents will arrive in just a few days and spend the holiday season with us! We are thankful to have them returning so soon and have even some of our family here for Christmas. We hope you have the privilege to enjoy the holidays with your families, as well!

Happy holidays!

Stephen & Kelli Spurlock

For more stories from this month, [click here to visit our blog!](#)

If you'd rather not receive our monthly updates, we completely understand. Just send us an email and let us know to take you off the list!

spurlockadventures.com ■ stephen.spurlock@partnersworld.org ■ kelli.spurlock@partnersworld.org