

**We are settling into the US for our furlough and already enjoyed celebrating Kelli's dad's 60th birthday with a surprise! We are hoping to see many of you while we're here. With all the opportunities opening in our community, we found leaving Mae Sot more difficult this time than before. We are so excited about what is around the corner, and even more excited to share them with you in person! Until then, here is something Kelli wrote to give a glimpse into our lives with our Burmese neighbors.**

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*We went to Burmese church on Sunday with eight kids in tow. Five of these were teenagers, which we were really excited about. We arrived thirty minutes late and tried to sneak into our seats quietly when the teenage boy with us was called up on stage. Within minutes of us arriving, he was standing with a group of kids from the community—ones we hadn't even brought—and they were reciting their bible verses from the Saturday program.*

*Even though the church had picked up some of the neighbor kids for this special week, they were now with us. There were little whispers and an occasional shout for Stephen & Kelli as the kids realized we were there, and it would certainly be an exciting ride home as we fit seventeen of us in the car to go home—Stephen & I, six teenagers, and nine kids. I had two ten-year-old girls on my lap.*

*But before that, as we sat listening to the sermon, one of the little girls peered over at me from the kid's area and asked if she could come sit with me. I nodded yes, and she quietly padded over and climbed into my lap.*

*She's ten, and she didn't really fit. She has been one of the primary care givers for her eighteen-month-old nephew since he was an infant. Watching her cook, clean, and care for a young baby, I have wondered if she carries more responsibility than I do.*

*I hugged her close and put my cheek against hers as she cuddled up into my lap; she was certainly trying to be small again. Tears sprung to my eyes, and I realized two things. First, I hugged her like my mom used to hug me: so tight with her teeth clenched. Physical touch is near the bottom of my love language list, so a whole lot of me wanted to pull away as a child. But I really knew my mom really loved me, and she held me so tight because she loved me so tight. I knew that I was hugging this little girl like my mom hugged me.*

*Second, I knew I really, really loved this little girl.*

*And I guess it surprised me. Perhaps first because—and I mean this in the kindest way possible—she isn't my favorite. I know we aren't supposed to have favorites; perhaps I shouldn't think that or at least not say it? But I'm human; I do. And she isn't one of them.*

*But I love her. And as I looked at the kids sitting beside me...*

*a teenage boy who is just figuring himself out and growing in confidence,  
whether its in English class or Scripture memory or football*

*a teenage girl who limped to us this morning because her father beat her yesterday; who we really pray for and love and try to look out for; who we've gone out of our way for; who we've cried for*

*the girl beside her, whose wounds from her own father I've bandaged more times than I could count; who has stolen from us and given us a very real chance to show her grace and redemption*

*the young girl beside her, who has an incredibly healthy little home, but still carries the burden of helping care for the four siblings younger than her; who just loves to have a chance to have fun or get special treatment; who just delights in a bottle of hand sanitizer more than anyone I know*



My mind raced to the kids that are often heavy on my heart: those in abusive homes, those who we've been offered to adopt on multiple occasions, those who come looking for a meal.

I realized how many of them I really, really love.

It reminds me of when I was falling in love with Stephen in university.

With family, you grow up learning to love them. The love is there, and you learn to identify it. But with Stephen, it was like I was discovering it come on me. I would suddenly realize how much I loved him, and then be shocked when it continued to grow. Even now in marriage and hopefully until we die, I continue to be amazed at what that love becomes. It is still moulding. It feels more new because I know where it started—at nothing; as strangers. And perhaps this is the significance of loving your own child to, as you discover the amount of love you can have for something that didn't exist until recently, and before long will be walking around as an individual beyond your reach. You actually experience the love growing.

This is what I see in the community. I see the growth of love.

But then I also see that they go home each night. They are separate family identities, however broken or splintered, and that love goes with them. It's vulnerable.

And it's often the bloodiest events that remind me of this, or perhaps those involving arrests.

And even in us leaving, I realize the vulnerability of loving on two different continents. Or loving children that don't really come with you.

I find myself thinking that it would be easier if this were a job; if I could leave an away message and a stack of papers on the side of my desk. It would be easier if it were a task or a project; a ministry that is separate from my life and my family.

We took a different road than that, though.

This is the first trip back to America when our whole lives have been wrapped up in these relationships. Maybe that is the difference; I'm not really sure.

Really, I'm just thankful this is where we are now. I'm thankful we're not all called to the same thing. I am also thankful that he called me to this thing right now! I am thankful that God has ordained so many things to bring us here. I am thankful that our lives—particularly in the last year—have been littered with God's faithfulness. I am thankful that this is where he has called us today and where He'll continue to provide for us through so many people. I'm thankful that I can rest in a peace that passes all understanding.

And I'm really thankful that I can fly from one loving community into another loving community, sitting beside my favorite love, and being carried by Love.

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**Please pray for this time in America, that we will be able to cherish the time and connect with friends & family. Pray that we'll be able to raise an additional \$300 of monthly support!**

**And pray for our neighborhood in 2015: the new ideas, the growing relationships, the continued language study. We need your prayers and are so thankful for those journeying with us! Pray for seeds to continue to be planted and watered, and pray for God to make them grow.**

In Him,  
Stephen & Kelli Spurlock

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Soon after our return from the States, I read a post someone had written on the Woman at the Well in John 4. This quote has resonated for us:

*I've always wanted to believe that after the Samaritan woman met Jesus, she was instantaneously emotionally neat and clean—she would bear none of the emotional and spiritual scars of the life she had lived up to that point. I find no evidence in psychology textbooks or the Bible to support this case.*

***She was messy when Jesus met her, and likely only somewhat less messy as he left.***

*When we truly engage her, we commit to unconditional love.*

We live and work in a very messy community.

It is messy with poverty and paperlessness, languages and cultures, abusive homes and relationships. While our goal is to live out the gospels communally, to love as Jesus loved, and to share the hope we stand on—that's messy. Because really, in some ways we're just as messy as they are, and sometimes that hope requires a reach and stretch.

**But we are really, really glad to be back in this mess.** In many ways, we are back to our "normal"—children at our house regularly, English classes throughout the week, and trips to the hospital for ear infections and stitches.

We practice language, chat over tea, & welcome our neighbors into our home.

God is showing up in this mess! And we are hopeful for this little neighborhood to know His love and be a little less messy!

**And we have some friends joining us in this mess!** Kelvin & Laura are Canadian friends that we met in Mae Sot about six months ago, and now they have moved in *just* next door to us.

We are excited to partner together in this community.

*Pray for this mess!*

Pray for our friendship and partnership with Kelvin & Laura, and for their relationships in the community.

Pray for our dreams of a Bible story class that we plan to start in the next few months. This feels like such a great opportunity, and we'd love to have you praying *now* for the community to come with excitement.

Pray for wisdom in each situation & family around us. We are always facing difficult situations, including two situations of domestic violence and one young girl in a vulnerable situation just since we returned. We really do need prayer to walk this road, and we do want to ask for it!

Keep praying for language acquisition, particularly in memorizing & recalling vocabulary.

*We'd love to pray for you! Send us your prayer requests at [spurlockstephen@gmail.com](mailto:spurlockstephen@gmail.com).*

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Last August, we began delivering flowers every Friday with Daw Ma Oo. She regularly sells in the market, but after her family was forced to move with the political changes last June, their living costs were higher and it was difficult to make ends meet. She told me last week that of all the places she sells—daily in the market and different night markets on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday evenings—“Stephen & Kelli’s car” is the best profit for her! It is really encouraging to see this idea work, as well as have a few hours each week to talk together and build a relationship with Daw Ma Oo & her family.



For Kelli’s birthday, we took a couple days away in Bangkok. We travel through often, but this was our first time to make the most of the city. We enjoyed a night bicycle tour, stopping at a candy factory, and just the fun city things we don’t have access to: movies, shopping, and specialty Western food!



**:: Praise the Lord for growth!** It has been a exciting challenge to do life with Kelvin & Laura, our newest neighbors and partners in ministry. Please continue to pray for growth in the four of us and around us in community relationships.

**:: Pray for our newest venture!** While we have had some neighbors interested in attending church with us, most of the teaching is too in-depth for those who aren’t familiar with the basic stories and concepts of Scripture. We are going to start meeting once a week for a bible story class, where a bible story will be taught in English & Burmese and connected into the bigger story of Jesus, and then we’ll have snacks and conversation together. We are not entirely sure where God will take this, but we would love for you to be praying for big things with us! We plan to start on Thursday, 21 May. Please pray with us!

**:: We’re going to keep asking for you to pray for language learning!** Kelli is still using her Karen throughout the week and is now in the beginning stages of learning Burmese. Stephen is an avid reader and writer of Burmese, but is working to memorize vocabulary. While it is so exciting to see conversations and relationships slowly unfold, we would love your prayers for it to unfold a little faster... We’d be excited for that, too!

In Him,  
the spurlocks





What then is Apollos? What is Paul?  
Servants through whom you believed,  
as the Lord assigned to each.

**I planted, Apollos watered,  
but God gave the growth.**

So neither he who plants nor  
he who waters is anything, but only

**God who gives growth.**

1 Corinthians 4:5

This month was truly rewarding as we had the opportunity to see a few things flourish!

First, we had our first bible story| house church in our neighborhood! We had many children and a good number of adults who came! We are simply working our way through the Bible in story form, while we try to connect each story into the greater story of Christ in each of our lives. We also pray together each week for specific requests in the community and then enjoy fresh soy milk and fruit together. As we continue to meet each week, please pray with us! **Pray for adults to come, ask questions, and participate; pray for them to see God answering the prayers we are praying together!**

School is starting back this month and school fees went up this year, which gave us an opportunity to connect with a few families to help. Through a small microloan with one family and by connecting another family to a local organization, we were able to help the families make ends meet and prioritize education. It is opportunities like this that make us so grateful to be in the community to see needs, discuss options, build relationships and help find solutions.



One of our constant challenges is looking for ways to build relationships with the adults outside of medical emergencies. God has opened so many doors for these relationships, and we are so excited! We had a community meal to introduce Kelvin & Laura to the community and to announce the bible story each week, which gave us a day at the market and cooking together with the adults.

We have also started partnering with another organization in Mae Sot to host monthly medical trainings at our home. Each month they bring a Burmese staff member to share on a new topic, such as nutrition, worms, wound care, and more. We have had many adults participating, which we are so excited for!

We also hosted our first Bingo night, where we played Bingo inside with the adults and outside with the children. This was a raving success on many fronts: first, they loved it and have asked repeatedly for us to do it again. Second, we had our house full of adults—men and women alike! This is such an accomplishment we can't even explain. We also had prizes for them to win, which included soap, toothpaste, toothbrushes, dish soap, & laundry detergent; they absolutely loved it. The entire Bingo night provided a positive, inclusive activity for all ages and help the families in little ways.

We are so thankful to see God opening doors for us to engrain our lives into the community. Thank you for equipping us to live life here in this neighborhood! **Please continue to pray with us for the moments we have in homes, in tea shops, in conversation, and in play!**

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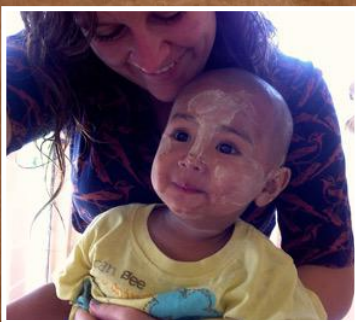
**Would you like to make more community events possible?** We have a community fund that provides for every tea shop visit, every medical trip, every Bingo prize, every micro loan, every cup of soy milk after house church, and every other community need! If you'd like to donate to this fund specifically, please contact us at [spurlockstephen@gmail.com](mailto:spurlockstephen@gmail.com).



This month we had a team from our former college ministry come to visit for a couple weeks, and a group of them came out to spend some time at our house. While we loved having them play with the kids and help with some projects around our house, they also spent a morning praying for us: praying for our neighbors, praying for us, & praying for our house.

While we are praying for our neighbors and lives here often, we are two people praying for such big things, day after day. It was such a beautiful encouragement to us to see a team gathered around us, praying *with* us. In a place with few Christians, daily fighting battles far too big for us, this was powerful in fighting loneliness, timidity, and fear.

So we just want to ask all of you to pray with us, too. We would be honored if you'd take a few minutes to pray for us in these areas, or maybe even consider putting these things up on your fridge this month. Please pray with us!



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### *pray for health*

At our home church each week, the two recurring prayer requests are for health & money. We are praying that our neighbors, particularly those adults that are hearing us pray for these things, will see God answer—bringing health to their families and providing financially.

Particularly as we have entered rainy/monsoon season, we have already had several cases of dengue fever in the community (as part of a larger outbreak in Mae Sot). Please pray for health! Pray for our neighbors to see God answering their prayers.

### *pray for growth*

I'm not sure how to shorten this, so read Kelli's recent post on our prayers for growth in the community, and please pray with us, that God would make things grow!

### *pray for hope*

Most of the beautiful things about our lives here are built on hope. Every relationship, tea shop visit, bible story, language lesson, puzzle, and flower delivery is pursued in the *hope* that it will bear fruit. Meanwhile, most of the sad things in our lives are very tangibly seen: abuse, broken marriages, poverty, sickness, suffering. In some ways this is inevitable, because the kingdom is built on faith, hope, and love—things we cannot see, but will some day see fully. However, this means that hope is the thing that pushes us forward, keeps us here, and keep us going. Please pray for hope, and for *miracles*!

### *pray for us as a couple*

Pray for us in our marriage and as individuals. We continue to trust that God will provide for us—spiritually, physically, emotionally, financially—to be here as long as He has us. Pray for God's provision for each day, each season, and each surprise.

*Thank you for partnering with us in every way!*  
*The Spurlocks*

Would you like to be more involved with us in prayer? We'd love to connect you with a particular person or family in the community and have you praying for them regularly. If you'd be interested, send us an email and we'll send you a name, a little about them, and a photo if we have it!





We often don't know what we are doing here. I could list a number of reasons I'm not equipped or skilled in our daily encounters; I could tell you of the countless times this week that I walked into a situation desperately praying and fully aware it was entirely beyond me. If anything will make you feel small and incapable, it is a month long language intensive. But I think of the words God spoke to Jeremiah when he said something similar:

"Do not say, 'I am only a youth:' for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, declares the Lord."

Jeremiah 1:7-8



So instead, I will say this: Our God is good! Because while we don't entirely know what we are doing or where we are headed, we serve a gracious, good God.

I certainly hope you've taken time to look at

[WWW.THEHOUSECOLLECTIVE.ORG](http://WWW.THEHOUSECOLLECTIVE.ORG)

to see the incredible doors God has opened to us.



September was mostly wrapped up in a Burmese language intensive. It was exhausting but rewarding to have the time & energy focused on language. Keep praying for the relationships we are building on budding language skills.

We are also enjoying a visit from Kelli's parents for two weeks! Though Mae Sot isn't too exciting, our lives certainly provide for some interesting experiences.

Our Housewares "Flour & Flower" deliveries continue to expand throughout the city and bring in more profits to our neighbors, which we are so excited to see. House Church continues to grow, as we read about God's goodness to the Hebrews throughout the Old Testament. We also held our third annual OneHouse worship night in Mae Sot, **and we'd love for you to read about it!**



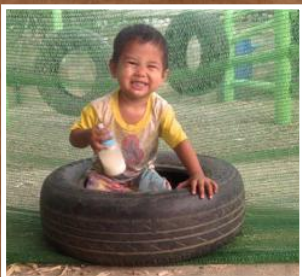
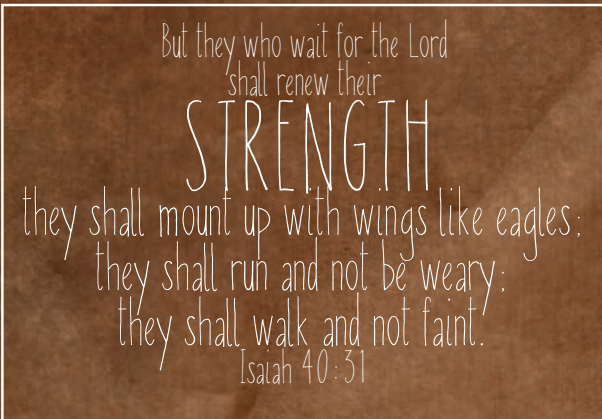
Please continue to pray with us as we seek God's direction for every next step in this neighborhood. Thank you for lifting us up in prayer & support to make our day to day lives in this community possible. God is good, and we are really thankful to see the opportunities grow in our little Collective.

In Him,  
Stephen & Kelli



Contact us at our new email address:  
[thespurlocks@thehousecollective.org](mailto:thespurlocks@thehousecollective.org)





There is so much to be thankful for and to share, and never enough time to say it all.

Today we are celebrating six years of marriage, five of which have been spent here in Mae Sot. It's been the start of something great, and we're thankful!

A friend helped us to install a playground in our front yard! The kids are absolutely loving it. Although we didn't quite anticipate how much fun they'd be having right outside our bedroom window at 7am, we are really excited they are enjoying it so much! We have both commented that it is the first time our house feels more "like it used to" before many of our neighbors were forced to move off the land they were squatting on across from us. Thank you to all who give to The House Collective Fund and made that possible!

God is answering our prayers for language! We were really thankful for the language intensive in September, and the neighbors have been encouraging to tell us how much we are learning and improving. We continue to take lessons a few times a week and study daily, so please do keep the prayers coming. We can see them being answered: the conversations are happening and the relationships are growing! Please keep praying.

We also had a last minute surprise: Kelli's roommate from university is getting married next month and has gifted us tickets to return to the States for the wedding! We are excited about this and the opportunity to fly around the world for a trip. It will be truly quick, as being away from here is more and more challenging, but we are excited to see our families over Thanksgiving and be a part of our friends' big day. We will leave in mid-November and return the first week of December.

Our bread & flower businesses—Flour & Flower Deliveries—are flourishing! They are both expanding, and we are really thankful!

With all the growth and blessing, it has been a difficult season in the neighborhood. There have been complicated conversations and dynamics as we try to live life, operate a {very small} business, help with systemic problems, and share our faith across cultural & language barriers. It is a very challenging road to walk as we pray through the best way to love each individual we encounter—sometimes with gifts or blessing, sometimes in hard conversations and holding accountable. We need the Holy Spirit guiding our every conversation and moment! **Please do pray for wisdom.**

Thank you for your continued prayers and support. We are so thankful for the many people who love this community with us!

The Spurlocks