

# LIFE STORIES

## Mae Tao Clinic patients

All interviews, note-taking, writing, translating, revising and photography were done by MTC local staff, who were originally from Burma



## A Dangerous Step!

*By Khun Ney Way, Training and Volunteer staff*

Thun Thun is a twenty-five year old farmer from Hlaing Bwe in Karen State, Burma. One day, he was walking in the forest and searching for food and vegetables. He took a dangerous step; there was a landmine. The landmine exploded and his right leg was blown away.

The villagers came to see what happened. They carried him to a local Burmese hospital. It took three hours from explosion site to the hospital.

Unfortunately, he was denied access to the hospital. Thun Thun did not have enough money to pay the cost. One of the villagers told him to go to Mae Sot hospital to undergo surgery in Thailand for suturing and stitching.



Thun Thun came by car. However, when he arrived at Thai-Burma border, He had to cross the Moei River under the bridge. It took one day from his original village to Thailand. By the way, he had to float across on the inner tube of a truck tire because he did not have a Burmese ID card or money for the checkpoint. In addition, he had difficulty with this transportation. He stayed at Mae Sot Hospital for a week. Then he came to Mae Tao Clinic (MTC).

Currently, Thun Thun is at the Prosthetics Department in MTC. He is a tall, kind, and friendly man. He is waiting for a new artificial leg to help his rehabilitation. He has been staying here already two weeks with his wife, who takes care of him and one seven-year old child.



His face looks depressed and unhappy. "Now, one of my legs is lost and I do not know how I can support my family as I am a farmer. I cannot do the same work as before," said Thun Thun. He wants to send his child to school to get an education.

However, his occupation is difficult. He owns a few pieces

of land. Some of his land is controlled by the Burmese Army. There is no safety for farming and Burmese soldiers are always coming to the village asking for food and taking chickens. That is why it is hard for him to get income so he also worked as a day laborer.

He is very close with the Mae Tao Clinic staff and said, “The staff members here are very friendly and patient. I am very happy to be here.”

“Mae Tao Clinic is not only offering health care services but also the food is free,” he added.

After Thun Thun receives an artificial leg, he would like to go back home and start working again. He wishes to try his best to make a happy family life and he expects that his child will be able to attend school.

## **A Worried Mother**

*By Paw Wah, Clinical Supervisor-Child Outpatient Department*

Daw Soe lived in a small village near Myawaddy in Burma. She has three children: two sons and a daughter. Her husband liked to drink everyday until he got drunk. He didn't take care of or support his family's needs. Everyday, she went to the forest near the village and got some vegetables and fruits. Sometimes she collected firewood to sell it and got money for food.

She heard about Mae Tao Clinic (MTC) because, if people in the village got sick, they came and got treatment at MTC. But, she didn't know how to come here and she didn't have enough money to get here.

One day, one of her neighbors advised her to come to MTC. Then, she decided to come here and she asked for some help from her neighbor to have money to come to MTC.

The next morning she got up early and she brought her daughter. They started to walk. She had to walk twenty minutes from her village to Myawaddy. She saw many taxis



waiting by the riverside. It was very crowded. Then, she got a taxi to come to MTC.

When I saw Daw Soe was coming and had brought her daughter I thought she looked worried and tired. She was a little tall, thin and has shoulder-length black hair. Her daughter looked sick, weak and skinny.

When she arrived at MTC, she was standing and looking around and she didn't know what to do. Then I went to her and asked her what she was looking for. She told me she came to the clinic because her daughter was sick. I invited her to come inside and let her have a seat and relax.

I started to ask about her daughter. She said her daughter had been sick since birth. I took all of the history of her daughter but I was not sure what was wrong with her. I discussed with a senior medic what to do.

After two days, we referred her to Mae Sot Hospital. After one week, she came back to MTC and met me again. She said she was very worried and disappointed when the doctor let her know that her daughter had congenital heart disease.

The doctor wrote a referral letter for her to get treatment in a Chiang Mai hospital because she couldn't get treatment in Mae Sot Hospital. I was talking with her for one hour. I explained to her that Mae Tao Clinic had a relationship with Suan Dok Hospital in Chiang Mai and how difficult it was for Burmese people to go to Chiang Mai.

MTC could arrange for her travel, but I told her, "You should wait until your daughter finishes the treatment." She was thinking for three days. Then she promised me she would give this time for her daughter.

After that, we gave her an appointment to go to Chiang Mai. She went to the hospital in Chiang Mai three times. Now her daughter has finished all the treatment. She looks well and happy.

I asked Daw Soe about her experiences in Chiang Mai. She told me she was very surprised. She saw tall buildings, which were clean and very different from buildings in Burma.

She said, "The people dress very neatly and they speak very politely." When she was in the hospital, the doctors and nurses looked neat, nice, and kind. They have a good relationship and every day they take good care of all the patients. She also mentioned the doctors and nurses never spoke about money. While she was in the patient house, she helped with cleaning and cooking.

At first, she didn't want to go and get treatment for her daughter. She was afraid

because she couldn't speak Thai and never had been in Chiang Mai before. I told her not to worry that there was a translator for you.

Now her daughter is one year and eight months old. She looks happy and active. She likes to draw and watch television. She also likes to play with the others.

Daw Soe says thanks to all the people that helped her and saved her daughter's life. She thanks the medics at Mae Tao Clinic for planning for her to go the doctors and nurses for her daughter's care. She also thanks the donors that help the Burmese people like this. She will never forget them in her whole life. She hopes her daughter will be a really good person and be a teacher in her future.

## Everybody has malaria

*By May Soe, Program Manager-Child Outpatient Department*

Two weeks ago when I saw Daw Aye, I was very surprised because all eight of her family members were sick.

I asked Daw Aye, "Why did you wait so long and why did all your family members become sick at the same time?" She answered to me that they did not have enough money for transportation to Mae Tao Clinic. Also, they were afraid of the Thai police arresting them on the way to Mae Tao Clinic because they did not have IDs for traveling.



They had no energy and looked feverish and malnourished. They were very worried because they had not taken care of themselves and did not have enough money to support their family.

When they arrived at Mae Tao Clinic, the medics explained to them that they all had malaria (*plasmodium falciparum*, PF). They were admitted to the Inpatient Ward and given treatment until they got better. The Clinic gives free health care and food.

One year ago, they decided to move to Thailand to find work. Daw Aye said their family was living now in Mae Tao Ta Lay village in Thailand. Mae Tao Ta Lay village is close to Myawaddy on the Burma side. They had to do farming to make money and feed their family. Only her husband does day laboring and he earns 100 baht per day. But, he can only work twenty days a month because the other days they did not have a job for him to do. They do not have enough to support the family and they also had to move from one place to another to get work. At that time, the whole family became sick.

Daw Aye said before they moved to Thailand they lived in Burma near Kawkaik Township in Karen State. They were doing tenant farming in the village. They did not have enough to feed their family and they could not support their family to go to school. They also had to pay a monthly levy in their village.

Finally, one week later Daw Aye was so happy with the treatment. All the family got better. However, they did not have enough money to go back to her home. Then the medics had to organize transportation and get her to her place again.

### **Future dream: doctor**

*By Tint Tint, Clinical Supervisor-Surgical Department*

Saw Thu is a patient in the Surgical Department at Mae Tao Clinic (MTC). He is fourteen years old. He is a Karen and is in Grade Six at school now. When I spoke to him, he said:

“I decided I will continue to go to school until I finish high school. If I can finish high school, I want to go to university. After I finish university, I will go to medical university until I become a doctor. So, I hope to help my family and community with health care.”



“I am a very young man, but I am productive and rational. Therefore, I listen to my parents and I answer the teacher’s questions.”

“Suddenly, when I was not thinking, I fell down and fractured my right leg. My

parents couldn't send me to the hospital and I was treated in my village because my parents didn't have money. It was difficult for me to travel to the hospital."

"Once my leg is healed and I can walk, I will try to study and go to school to get more education. My teacher, headmaster and friends pity me because they know I am an intelligent and hard-working but poor young man."

"This month, I took an exam for a university scholarship and scored the highest in my class. So, hopefully, I will get a sponsor to help me attend university."

"If I have free time, I am productive and try to use my time wisely. I work part time as a waiter to get money to use for my studies. I will maintain my work ethic until I become a doctor."

"If I become a doctor, I do not want to work in Rangoon or Pa-an Township. I remember my past life so I will try to go to work in my village in the countryside."

"Education and health care in my village are not good and transportation to the nearby towns is difficult. So, a doctor is needed in the village. Though I will work in the village, I won't stop communicating with my friends and teachers at the hospital of my training."

"Every month, I will contact them to get donations, medical supplies and other things for the health care of hundreds of villages in the jungles of Karen State."

### **Goal to be a midwife**

*By Noh Ta Mala, Clinical Supervisor-Reproductive Health Inpatient Department*



Mya Mya has a dream. She wants to be a good midwife. She wants to help the people from her village. Mya Mya's dream will be difficult to make come true.

Mya Mya came to Mae Tao Clinic in 2003 to attend community health worker training for six months. After training she volunteered in the Reproductive Health Inpatient Department. Mya

had more training for emergency obstructive care for ten months. She decided she wants to be a midwife and practiced and tried her best.

Mya Mya is twenty-six years old. She has two sisters and two brothers. Her parents died when she was fourteen years old. Her father died because of malaria and her mother died because of hypertension or a heart attack. She had finished Eighth Grade but her younger brothers couldn't go to school. They lived in a Buddhist monastery. Her older sister married.

After Mya Mya was married for two years, she had a son. Her son is so cute just like his mother. Her husband sometimes drinks alcohol. Mya Mya is patient, kind and understands her husband.

She likes coffee. She felt a little ashamed but she's brave, successful and helpful when she's working. Mya Mya wants to be happy and help people and keep her family happy and confident.

She wants to be a midwife because there was no health care service in her village. It is very important to know about pregnancy, delivery and complications. If we know about that, we could save mothers and babies lives.

While her brothers live in the monastery, she lived with the Pa-O Women's Organization. Because she was a girl, she couldn't live with her brothers. When she was a student, her favorite things to do were read, sit in a garden and go on picnics with her friends. Now she would like to learn the Thai language and English speaking. She wants to improve and get more knowledge and education.

## **Homeless Way**

*By Sher Mu Ler, Clinical Supervisor-Outpatient Department*

Kyaw Min Htun is a twenty-six year old man. He came from a small village near Bago and he is a Burman. He is thin and pale because he has been sick for two years. He received some treatment for his symptoms. It could be tuberculosis or cancer. However, he is getting thinner day by day.

There was something else. He feels a sharp pain in his abdomen and he feels hot. When he gets these symptoms, he can't eat anything and he can't support himself.

Kyaw Min Htun is friendly and sensible. He has got a long face and is of medium height. He is usually wearing a *longyi* and a t-shirt. *Longyi* are Burmese typical trousers.

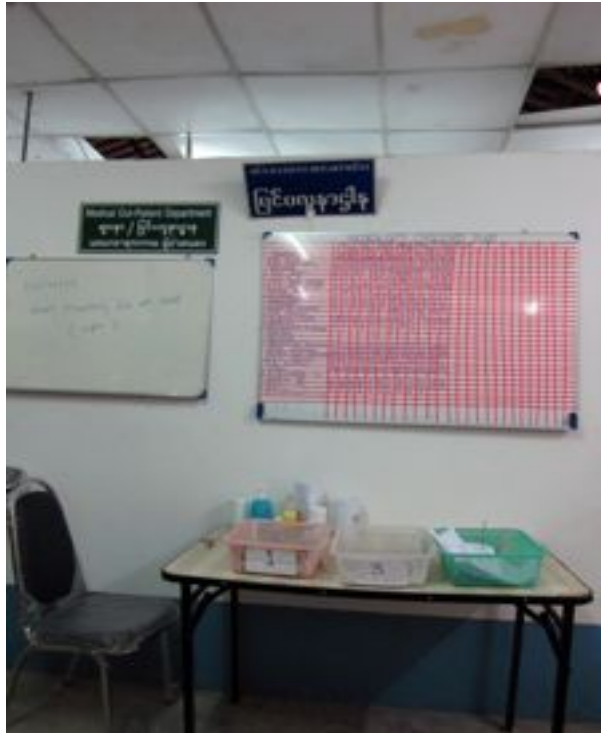
Kyaw Min Htun has one older brother and one younger brother. His older brother got married three years ago. The brother moved to Thailand to find work last year. But his younger brother stays with his parents and works around Bago. He is a day labourer. Kyaw Min Htun hasn't worked for two years.

Neither Kyaw Min Htun nor his brothers could go to school, but Kyaw Min Htun and his older brother studied at a Buddhist monastery for three years. His younger brother studied at school until Grade Six. Therefore, they can read and write.

Kyaw Min Htun's parents are poor. They couldn't send all their children to school. They are tenant farmers. They didn't have enough land for a building or growing vegetables. They all eat typical food like rice, vegetables and fish paste. Fish paste is very nutritious in Karen and Burmese food. One or two times a month they eat fish and chicken curry.

Before he came to Mae Tao Clinic, when he got fever and abdominal pain, he went to the local hospital many times. They treated his symptoms. He didn't get better and he spent a lot of money.

One morning, one of the neighbors told him, he should go to Mae Tao Clinic (MTC). At that time he didn't have any money to go there. He wanted to go to MTC so he discussed this with his mother and borrowed 40,000 kyat (USD \$50) from his aunt.



In the second week of October in 2011 he arrived at the MTC and was admitted to the Medical Inpatient Department for two weeks. The medics gave him intravenous fluids and antibiotics so at least the fever went down. After two weeks, he felt better and could eat soft food and fluids. But, he doesn't know the diagnosis.

Kyaw Min Htun's mother said if the medics let him get better and then discharge him, how will they go back to Bago? This is because they don't have any money. She needs to find some money for transportation.

One of her friends phoned to her and said come to Huay Kaloke for one or two weeks to help with the rice harvest. Huay Kaloke is a Thai village near Mae Sot.

Kyaw Min Htun would like to do agriculture as a farmer if he gets better to help his parents. If he can get a lot of money, he will build a beautiful house and buy a

field. He doesn't want to get married too early. However, he doesn't have money and his parents are getting old.

## Story Without Hope

*By Saw Lweh Wah Say, Program Manager Acupuncture Department*

I am aware of how difficult the health situation is in Burma nowadays. The Government has other priorities than caring for their people.

I spoke with U Soe in my Acupuncture Department at the Mae Tao Clinic. The Mae Tao Clinic (MTC) is in Mae Sot, Thailand and is near the Thai-Burma border. U Soe told me how difficult was the health care situation in Burma. He said:

“When I was forty-seven, I felt weak and sick in the whole body. I was lying in the bed at home for a few days and my niece took care of me. But I felt worse and could not sleep at night. . I also had tremors in both hands and feet.”

“My niece brought me in a cart to the town and went to show me to a doctor. My village is three miles from the town and there are no roads for cars. We use carts for travel.”

“My doctor checked me and gave me medicine. After that my niece came back with me. I took medicine at home and felt better. But I still had tremors in both hands and feet. I went to my doctor several times and took medicine for three years. My niece and I were charged a lot of money for this medicine. After that, I didn't have any more money.”

“My niece took care of me because I don't have a family. Ten years ago, my wife died with a kidney problem in Mandalay, Burma. Mandalay is the second city of Burma.”



“I met my wife in Mandalay. She was a vivacious girl and who was kind-hearted. I married her in Mandalay. My wife and I worked for three years and came back to my village. My village is near Bago City.”

Bago City is a Division capital in Burma. Then, U Soe continued:

“My wife and I helped my parents until they died. After that, my wife and I went to the mountains to cut bamboo and wood to sell. I lived with my wife in the

mountains for six months. At that time she was pregnant.”

“ A few weeks after that she got malaria. I took my wife to my village. When I arrived at the village she had a miscarriage. After the miscarriage she never got pregnant again.”

“When she got better I followed her to Mandalay. This time, the Government had a bridge project on the Irrawaddy River. We worked at that project for six years. After the project finished, we stayed in Mandalay and worked in the transportation department. I carried sand, cement, metal and stone every day. I lived there ten years with my wife.”

“One day, my wife felt sick and had a kidney problem. I went to a doctor in Mandalay several times but her doctor could not help her. I was charged a lot of money for her medicine. After she died, I worked in Mandalay for two years and went back to my village. I lived with my niece for four years. My niece also has a family therefore she needs to take care of her family too.”

“Many of my villagers went to work at the Thai-Burma border like at farming. If they work in our village they get little income. Some of my villagers also went to Mae Tao Clinic for cures for their diseases. They saw me and asked about my situation.”

“They said, ‘*You should go to Mae Tao Clinic because there is nothing to pay for the medicines cost.*’ So, I thought this is my last chance for life. I discussed it with my niece. She gave me some money for transportation and then I came to Mae Tao Clinic.”

“The MTC is 120 miles away from my village. When I arrived at MTC, I went to show my disease to the Medical Outpatient Department (OPD) and the medics gave me some medicine for my anemia. That time I was very tired and weak.”



“The medic told me, ‘*Your disease is Parkinsons. We don’t have medicine for Parkinsons because medicines are very expensive. But if you want to treat it with acupuncture we will send you to the Acupuncture Department.*’”

“I agreed with them and

went to the Acupuncture Department. When I stopped the treatment the disease became worse. The medics in MTC keep me in the patient's house until now. I have lived at the MTC for two years. Most of the patients in the patient's house are from far away inside Burma. For some time, I was depressed and could not sleep at night."

"Now, I am happy with this clinic because they feed me and give me a bed. If I lived like this in Burma I would die soon. I really need to cure my disease. I want to go to a hospital where they will help me with a disease like I have. I keep myself strong because many people are feeling worse than I do."

"I think if my disease is cured I will go home and work as a gardener. Now, I miss my village and have no other hope."