

The Lao "m"pression



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Dear Friends

Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you.
I Peter 5:7

These past few weeks have been among the toughest that I (Mike) have faced in the past 3 years of being here in Laos. I need to remind myself about the truth of the above verse knowing also that all things will work out for good. There is much to be thankful for as you will see in the stories I share below.

A new Project

In March 2007 we had submitted a request to begin an integrated project in remote areas of northern Laos, in Mai District of Phongsaly province. Then we started to pray and wait, albeit not always so patiently. On February 20, 2008 we signed the agreement which gave us permission to work there in 12 villages for a 5 year timeframe.



Signing the Agreement with the Ministry of Education to work in Phongsaly

Now, the waiting is over, but the prayer needs to continue along with the hard work: There are project proposals to write and project funders to be identified, staff to

recruit, vehicles to purchase, an office to set up (we are considering building a new office as there are limited places to rent), detailed project planning with villagers to be initiated, and activities to be implemented.

Overcoming opium Addiction

The term Golden Triangle was first coined in 1971 to refer to the opium-producing highlands in Laos, Thailand and Myanmar. At its peak in 1989, production in the region exceeded 3,000 tons of opium per year. Laos was then a majority opium producer and supplier for the world's opium needs. In 1998, Laos harvested close to 27,000 hectares of opium poppy (equaling about 215 tons of opium) and was the world's third largest producer after Afghanistan and Myanmar. With half of its yield consumed locally by over 60,000 opiate abusers, Laos had one of the highest rates of addiction in the world.



The Opium Smokers toolkit

The government has done a very good job at reducing the production of opium in Laos, but a number of large challenges remain. Firstly supporting farmers to find alternative sources of income to replace what they have been earning

from opium sales. Secondly supporting those who are addicted to opium who are now doubly affected by both loss of income source and increased price for maintaining their bad habit.

Our project activities address both these needs. In the following section I take some time to share with you about our recent focus in helping opium users kick the habit!



On Oct 16, I traveled by truck from Phonsavan, the capital of Xieng Khouang province, to the banks of a river downhill from Vieng village. Tarps had been set up to keep the rain off of a group of some 25 people (including opium addicts, project staff, government staff and village volunteers) who had been living together in this makeshift shelter for the last 9 days. We ate fish caught in the stream running past the temporary camp along with pumpkins provided by the villagers and, of course rice.

There were 18 addicts in the group who had committed themselves to overcome their bad habit. The first few days at the camp were the toughest for everyone. Many of the addicts were very pessimistic, and were saying that it was not going to be successful. The withdrawal symptoms were very strong and thus tensions were quite high. By the time I arrived on day 9, the worst was behind them.

At 5:30 AM the wake up call sounded. Everyone was required to get up and join for an early morning jog up the mountain in the cool refreshing morning air! As we arrived back at the camp, it was time for exercises and games! Then everyone took a turn singing or dancing. Even I was required to take my turn. You might be curious as to

what I did. Well, I gave my best rendition of "In the skies His handiwork I see."

Breakfast each day was followed by training by one of our multidisciplinary staff members on a specific topic on health and agriculture related issues such as personal hygiene, HIV and Aids, growing forages, raising livestock, etc. In the early evening we would show videos; while I was there the video was about opium addiction and how important it was to have support from family members.

While I was there, Mr. Chue Houa Taw handed over to our staff the tools and paraphernalia he had used for smoking opium. On day 9 of the 15 days of intensive therapy, he was ready to speak with



actions louder than words; he was ready to part with his bad habit forever. I noticed that some participants had already handed over their equipment earlier; others were not quite ready or confident enough to part with their toolkit. Throughout the day that I was there various participants came up to me and expressed their thankfulness to our organization for giving them this opportunity and for supporting them in their attempt to overcome their opium habit. By the end of the 15 days at the camp, everyone was ready to end their habit. There was a special ceremony to burn the opium paraphernalia as a visible reminder that they were no longer dependant on opium.





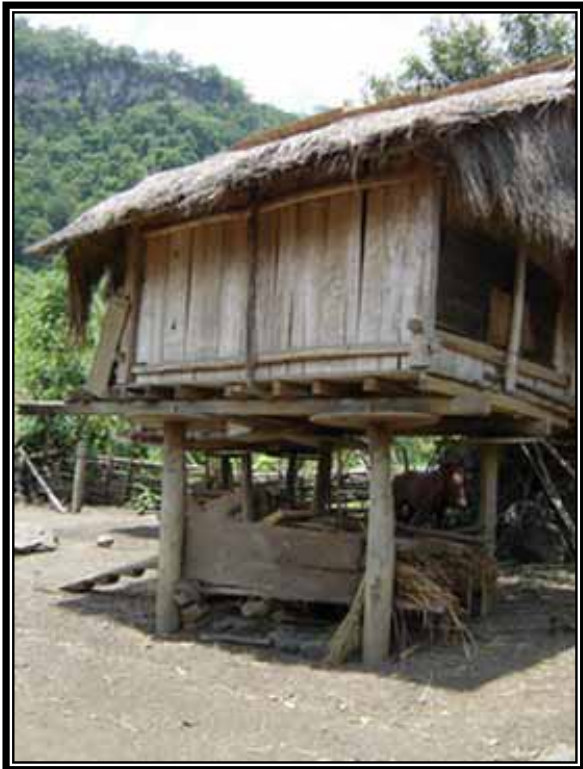
The Mystery

Your guesses were:

- ❖ a big stone used for making things small (like a mill).
- ❖ a wooden mushroom
- ❖ some kind of churning system
- ❖ a pizza base maker
- ❖ a discus to prepare for the Olympics
- ❖ a grinder of some sort

And the correct answer is.....

Rat protection on a rice store.



There are a number of creative ways to protect rice storage buildings from rats. This was the first time I had seen this particular solution. A more common solution is wrapping pieces of slippery tin sheets around the post making it impossible for rats to climb them.

AN Update on the family

It has been an adventurous month for our family. On March 7, Maria fell off the monkey bars at school and ended up with a broken arm. She was very brave though. Very quickly Maria learned how to write, brush

teeth, and change clothes with her left hand. Matthew showed his concern for his little (but older) sister by sticking close by and offering to carry her backpack home.



A big event for Monica was the yearly grade 3 performance on March 25. This year it was called "Beach or Bungalow." It was about lazy kids who watched TV and ate pizza and threw away garbage into the ocean and active kids who went swimming and snorkeling at the beach and saw the impact on the coral of the garbage. The active kids found a creative way to have a positive impact on the lazy kids! Monica did a great job as an active kid.



A few days later, on March 28, Monica and her grade 3 classmates performed for their parents once again. This time the event was called "Night of Notables." Each student had carefully researched a significant person, and on this evening they had to dress up as and give a speech about that notable person without telling the name (they had to pretend they were that person). We as parents had to guess who each person was. Some were easy, like Elvis Presley, others were not so easy. Monica was Bessie Coleman.

Lately we are concerned for Matthew. He is a very precious, caring, and yet sensitive little fella. Over the past few months he has started to develop a temper which we have not seen before, stomping his feet and pouting vehemently when he does not get his own way. Please pray for him and for us to find the best way to support him through this phase. This coming summer we are going to be in Canada for a few weeks for deputation, and

some rest and relaxation. The boys (Mike and Matthew) arrive on June 10, while the girls (Moe Moe, Monica and Maria) arrive on July 1. Letters have been sent to churches and we are waiting to hear back as to what events we can get involved in, and which groups are interested in having us share about our learning's and experiences here in Laos. If a group that you are involved in would like us to share about our experiences and learning's in Laos with you, please contact us.

What's That For?



Take a close look at the photo above. What could it possibly be used for? Don't hesitate or be shy, but send your best guess to Mike at fivemfamily@gmail.com. The mystery will be unwrapped and exposed in the next newsletter!!

Prayer Requests:

- For wisdom and encouragement during this busy period of time.
- For Matthew to grow in confidence and learn to control his temper.
- Our upcoming period of deputation, that the details will be worked out, and that creative and meaningful presentations will be prepared in time.
- Pray for the new project as it gets underway in Phongsaly province.
- Pray that we can identify sufficient funding to carry out the proposed project activities. We are specifically looking for one or two

churches to get more directly involved in committing to directly support the project.

- Pray that we are able to recruit one additional community development expert to join us here in Laos!
- Pray as we begin to plan for a continuation of the project that is ongoing in Xieng Khouang. The agreement with the government of LAO PDR for the current project ends in December 2008, and we need to develop and submit a new proposal by the beginning of October 2008.

CONTACT US

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