

Thursday November 6, 2014

Yangon, Myanmar

Roger, Sharon, Joy Davey and Lawrence Stibbards arrived in Yangon off the China Airlines flight from Taipei. Sai Oo met us at the airport and we stepped out into torrential rains. Yangon has been experiencing a tropical storm and there was flooding and water everywhere.

At Classique, we were greeted happily by Kalya and her mother Daw Khin Aye Kyi and Naw Li. The boys name is Sea Doo, a name that gives us some amusement.

After a short nap we went to City Mart, then to the Sule pagoda, which to my mind was fairly shabby, then for a walk in the Mahabouli park. Then we had lapaya at a tea shop guarded by six feral dogs. After dinner at the Alamanda, Joy slept for 11 hours.

Friday November 7

Up to offer alms to the monks, always a wonderful way to begin the day. After a huge Classique breakfast, we went to Scott Market where Joy and Sharon had skirts made and bought blouses. Skirts were \$10 including tailoring and blouses were \$25. A good deal. Roger and Lawrence bought longyis and waited for the women to finish gathering. Lunch at the market with a good conversation with a young Karen girl (betel chewing, reasonable English) and a taxi ride home through wretched traffic (\$5). Big white SUVs lined up outside the International School blocked the tiny road to the Classique.

Steve arrived at 2 PM and we talked until overcome by nap-neediness. Then off to the Shwedagon Pagoda at dusk, with thousands of candles and flickering Buddha lights. Home for dinner at the Allamaden again and check-in. Good conversation, came home to the party sounds of a concert across the way. Loud. Techno. Still going.

Saturday November 8

Up early to join Ma and Kalya in offering alms to the monks who were on alms rounds. What a privilege to participate in this ritual that has been going on for centuries. Ma has provided food for the monks every morning for 25 years. Such a commitment.

Fine breakfast on the outdoor patio at the Classique and the opportunity to hear from Steve about his partnership with Duke in building the first of their schools in Myanmar and the subsequent emergence of MSP and MBSPF.

This morning we were joined by U Hla Maung, his wife Kinsana and daughter Yu Yu Hlaing for a visit to **Daw Sanda's** nunnery. This is a three storey building which Roger, Sharon, U Hla Maung and Kinsana financed. So many moving encounters: dozens of young nuns sitting quietly as we entered the room, racks of robes hanging out to dry, Laurie evoking smiles and giggles from the young girls at his antics, Daw Sanda's warm and loving face. We heard a report on the three schools which Daw Sanda has started.

- (1) **Yangon.** Building looks vey good and well used at capacity with 70 nuns. There was a request for a new roof on the older building behind the new one and also a new roof over the kitchen. Total cost to be \$1500. Steve committed these funds from money raised from his and Kamala's students. We left Dana from several groups.
- (2) **Pyapon.** This school in the delta with nine teachers accommodates 320 students in grades from 1 to 7. They have already spent \$25,000 on the two storey school and will require an additional \$15,000 to complete the building. The fence has been completed. They have water available all year. We may consider using money from the Stewart's donation to complete this project.

(3) **Hmawbi.** 120 students and 5 teachers in grades 1 through 5. Fifty-eight nuns live there. Property is 150 feet square. Have six toilets. Problem: land is flooded 3 - 4 months per year; access only by boat. Their need is for a teachers' cottage on stilts, 25'x50' at a likely cost of \$10,000 - \$15,000. Probably, MSP/MBSPF will not take on this project.

Good conversation at lunch about how to set up a spreadsheet to record all the information in an easily accessible format. Moments out from our discussion to compliment Kalya on her beautiful going-to-a-wedding clothes.

This afternoon, we visited **Daw Yuzana's** nunnery, again in the company of U Hla Maung and his family who provided translation for us as well as frequently rounding out the picture of what we were observing. Daw Yuzana faces many problems with her own health and with an ongoing struggle with the adjacent monastery which have a call following her death on most of the land on which she operates, with the exception of the school. She seemed worried about the future of the nunnery. Despite this, she is building a new dining/ assembly hall. She is now 57 and spoke about the possibility of retiring at 60. She has a large school with a total of 430 students, 204 of whom are nuns. The school covers grades 1 - 11.

Our meeting ended with her responding to personal questions from us as she has done in the past. We left Dana and made no commitments for future action or support.

Out for great spicy Thai food tonight at Sabai which has moved again. Hot food was matched by a hot conversation about anger, intention and delusion. Early to bed.

Sunday November 9

Today's breakfast conversation moved from anger to generosity to the seed. What is it that allows things to manifest, that moves causes and conditions on to the 'next thing'?

Visited the Mahasi Sayadaw's Meditation Center with Steve as guide. We saw the old buildings including the one where he was a resident and many new buildings as soon as the center continues to change. U Pandita's former residence is now a bookshop.

Next went to a dress shop to see the beautiful fabrics and colors, and then on to pick up Thi Thi Win, our lively and lovely translator for the day. She treated us to a numerology reading for Steve's year which we all participated in.

After a stop for lapaya, we reached Shwe Oo Min meditation center. Things were very quiet and we met no yogis we knew. SUT is currently teaching in Korea, which may account for the lack of western yogis right now.

Walked to visit **Ma Rupasingi** at **Chan Myay Thaya Nunnery**. She was hoarse as she has just returned from three days of chanting some long verses. We were pleasantly surprised to see the elaborate new metal and concrete gate and fence built with our Dana. They all feel much safer now behind the wall. She has 25 nuns, mostly orphans, ranging in age from 6 to 16. This has been a very difficult year with the flooding as it prevented them from going on arms around. It costs her \$10 per day at the very lowest level to feed her nuns and they were short of food this summer. Now there is enough food.

Steve offered \$2000 Dana to build to build a fence on the back of the property alongside a busy public roadway and to build another two toilets. This was from his students in Seattle. Laurie and Joy, Roger and Sharon offered \$500 Dana to pay off the debt on the newest building (\$300), with the additional money to go toward food.

We are so happy to have been a supporter of this nun over the years. She has been in operation for nine years. Her mother works at the nunnery as housekeeper and we congratulated her on her resourceful daughter. Steve gave her an additional hundred dollars Dana.

We then walked around the corner to **Appamada** where the children were in school despite the fact that it was Sunday. Another amazing nun who has 250 students, a hundred of which are nuns, and 15 that stay there.

Surprisingly, she has started to build her new nunnery building With the donation of \$8000, she has laid the foundation in cement as well as the pillars with rebar. That is all the money she has raised so far. When she is able to get more, she will continue with the project. The total amount needed is likely over \$60,000. We said that this was not something that we could support at this time.

When asked about other projects, she said that she was not satisfied with the generator and water pump that she is currently using. Also, she would like to move the cooking stove away from the generator and build a concrete room for it. All of this would probably cost somewhere between \$2000 and \$3000. She needs help in choosing the equipment and we will need to follow up on this as 4 Friends will donate the money. Thi Thi Win may be able to help or we may need to wait until MIA visit them. We finished up by helping distribute the green juice which was a Dana gift from one of their neighbors.

On the way back to the van, we inspected the new **kutis at Shwe Oo Min**. They appeared to be of excellent quality and all should be finished, ours included, within the next two months.

Back to Classique for a delicious early dinner, and we are up early tomorrow to go to Beelin.

Monday, November 10

Up early for a 4:45 am departure to **Belin**. Into the van with a bag lunch after Steve's frantic unsuccessful search for his envelope of cash! Bummer! We're to meet Ma Kamalanani on the side of the road at 5:30. Shortly after the appointed time we see her and Ma Parama alongside the road, stop and after quick, heartfelt greetings we're back on the bus heading into the dark again.

Quiet conversations in the back rows while Ma Kamalanani rests in the shotgun seat. Dawn is just breaking when we pull over to the now familiar roadside cafe for Kalya's bag-breakfast of tuna sandwiches and bananas. Belin Sayadaw had just sat down for his breakfast offered by Daw Khin Aye Kyaw when we pulled in, piled out and greeted them. No opportunity here for Steve's breakfast smoothie, nor Rogers grape-nuts cereal-we're going local today!

After another couple hours driving across the agricultural flood plains at dawn we turn right at the huge banyan tree a mile from our first stop at the monastery. We follow Sayadaw into the monastic hall where he is greeted by about 50 novice monks and a contingent of local villagers. After a short greeting we're back in the cars to head for **Belin #1, Nyaung Palin**. We've been coming to this area for 5-6 years doing a little bit at each of 5 village schools each year and this

year is no exception. We're here to see what they got accomplished with the funds we sent them earlier in the year and to hear from the school and village leaders what they'd like funds for in 2015.

Villagers had requested and we had offered funds to build a pre-K classroom newly mandated by the Mon State educational department. Indeed they had used the nearly 58 lakes, (\$5,800) to construct a 30' x 45' single room with verandah and attached two toilets. It was nearly complete and it was being used. It was nice to see 40 of the usual 50, 3-5 year old kids in the room. We inquired and were told that the toilets still under construction we're smaller size for the smaller kids. Appropriate! In addition we were told that a disproportionate amount of the funds were used to install a wooden floor because kids this age don't use desks and the usual cement floor would be inappropriate. The kids were being taught by 2 teachers paid for by the village. The villagers were requesting an additional 30 lakes (\$3k) to complete the building's plaster, ceiling, painting, windows and if funds were available for toys and pillows!

When we saw the location of the proposed site last year, it looked as if a tree or two would have to be cut down to make room for it; but we were told, "no" they didn't have to remove any tree but a large branch of the nearest tree had fallen off making the space available for the room!

We were then shown the adjacent primary school building which was built in 2002 but needing renovation of the ceiling, classroom partitions, 20 sets of desks and painting inside and out. We weren't given an estimate of estimated cost for the renovations but guessed it would be about 10 lakes (\$1k).

After inspecting the other classroom building, greeting some students we got out the Frisbees and showed the students how to use them and as we were leaving, a group of 8-10 boys and 12-16 girls were performing a cultural dance in their Pa-O traditional clothing. The villagers were very respectful of Sayadaw and they were very well prepared for our visit with a detailed report of the funds received and what it was spent on as well as the estimate of funds needed in 2015. We like coming to the Belin area as we have over so many years because they now know what we need and are prepared for our visit.

We were back in the van after the hour on-site for the short drive **to Belin #4, Lake Khone Gyi** (Big Turtle Back village) where we arrived at 9:45 am. As in the past, we were greeted by the long lines across the school playground of the boys along the left hand side and the girls along the right hand side. We got out of the bus and we all walked down the line greeting the students and teachers along the way. It is always so moving to be greeted by the students lined up in this way to greet us.

From the van we could see a partially constructed pre-K classroom to the left of the current assembly hall where more than 30, 3-5 year old kids have been meeting in the far end for the past year. However we noticed a nearly completed building of 3 large classrooms for the 9 and 10th standard students, a partial high school! We were told that all of the 157 lakhs (\$15,700) we had sent in 2014 had been used for materials for this classroom building and the villagers had volunteered the considerable labor to dig the foundation, build a stone retaining wall for an elevated platform for the building and had offered the labor to help the skilled carpenter and mason construct the building. The villagers were rightly proud of what they had accomplished together. We requested a group photo of all the village overseers of the construction with us. The building and the three toilets out back were very well constructed though they were yet unfinished. We were told they needed an additional 22.28 lakhs to install a ceiling, finish the verandah and to paint the building inside and out.

After looking at the new classroom building we inquired about the partially constructed pre-K classroom that they needed an additional 35 lakh (\$3,500) to complete the construction along with 2 toilets and which included 15 lakhs for the wooden floor. All the pre-K classrooms we saw were built with a wooden floor, a government standard evidently.

As we were preparing to leave we were shown the badly deteriorated ceiling in the adjacent primary grade building. It sorely needed to be replaced, estimating it would cost 7 lakhs (\$7K). We'll consider it.

Back in the van, we headed back to the monastery for lunch; so Sayadaw could be finished before noon. Arrived and over the course of an hour or so he and we too along with Ma Kamalanani at her own table were served a feast of 12-15 curries, 4-6 fruits, tea -more than we could even sample let alone eat.

After eating, Sayadaw told us we'd head out at 1 pm giving him time to rest or with the monks or village folks; Roger, Lawrie and Steve walked next door to the **Hnan Tha Myaing** school where we'd glimpsed a new building with an outstandingly blue metal roof! We looked in to discover 15+/- 3-5 year old Pre-K kids napping after their own mid-day meal. They were so cute. The village monk had caught up with us and informed us he'd built the classroom building with our donated funds in 2014. It was a good looking building with a couple teachers in attendance, but because he didn't speak English we would have to wait until later in the day when we'd return for the official visit.

In the meantime we wandered over to the main classroom building to look around. Here was our most impressive accomplishment with the least amount of funding by the most "can-do," headmistress we've met. Young, smiling she had over the previous 4-5(?) years transformed a very poor school, with very dispirited kids and teachers into a well-functioning, tidy, well-run and organized school building and the kids were quite well behaved. Since they too were on lunch break, we got Frisbees out of the van that Joy and Sharon had arrived in. We all, teachers, kids, and the five of us quite enjoyed flipping the Frisbees between us for several minutes until everyone knew how to throw them. When one accidentally landed on the shed roof of the school, a young student shimmied up an adjacent Palm tree, hopped over onto the corrugated galvanized roofing and retrieved it. His feet must have been toasted as the sun was fierce and the roof must have been like a griddle-no complaints though. He was proud!

With the time to leave approaching we returned to the monastery yard sat in the van with the air conditioning on and waited for Sayadaw. When he emerged and got in his own SUV, we headed off to Belin #2, Hnin Pale (Snow Pearl) village. The educational campus of this village has changed dramatically over the years we've been coming to fund improvements. There are now 624 students with 30 teachers in grades K-10 with an additional 48 Pre-K students. There are currently 18 suitable water toilets. In the past we funded renovation of a run down barn into classrooms, built a new multi-classroom building, built several new toilets, improved the water system by supplying a pump, storage tank and underground piping to the toilets. In 2014, we had funded construction of a 30'x90', 3-classroom building, constructed in the space of where one old wooden 2-classroom building had been but was torn down. The new building was nearly finished along with an additional two toilets with the 170 lakhs we'd sent and the far end of it is to be used for the pre-K room and the yard on 2 sides of it are fenced in for their exclusive use. Some playground structures had been built from the material salvaged from the demolition of the old wooden building. In fact, a new single classroom for grade 1 and teacher housing for four teachers had been constructed from the used lumber of the old building too, we were

impressed with their recycling efforts. The ceiling for the new building needs funding for 20 lakhs. In addition, they would like to tear down 2, double classroom wooden buildings and construct a new 4-classroom building in their place. With the headmaster acting as general contractor he estimates he can build the 30'x120' building for 240 lakhs (\$24k). Which is considerably less than the 324 lakhs the government had paid a contractor to build a 30'x90' 3-classroom building on campus this year!

After looking over the new building we went to look at the teacher housing which was 2 rooms for 2 teachers each: simple, adequate and tidy but certainly not extravagant. We asked one of the teachers staying there what she would most want or need if she could have it but she couldn't think of anything to request.

In the course of constructing the new school building, one tree had to be cut down. We had asked them last year to plant 2 trees for each tree they had to cut down; instead they had planted nearly 200 trees though half of them were lost in the monsoon flooding. Again, we were impressed!

Back in the van we headed to another small primary school in **Hnin Pale** village where we had visited the past two years. In 2014, we'd offered \$4,200 to build a fence, gate, renovate 2 toilets, build 2 toilets, and repair the roof. We noticed that many students in this school did not have uniforms, it appeared to be a poorer section of town and we made a note to have uniforms sent from Mandalay to supply them to these and other students in the Belin area.

For 2915, the headmaster U Hla Myint was requesting \$8,800 for 16 new shutters (\$550), roof repairs (\$1,800), 30'x120' ceiling (\$6,500) and finishing the brick footing under the fence. It was suggested that maybe only half the roof could be done in one year and finished in 2 years.

When we looked at the new toilets, we noticed a lot of trash and litter in the school yard and asked the headmaster to have it picked up and buried and to have the students keep the yard clean daily even though they complained that villagers threw the garbage in the school yard. We encouraged them to take pride in the school! We again left several Frisbees for the students. Before leaving, while we were all in the van, we noticed Sayadaw speaking with the teachers and speculated that he might be admonishing them, though we were not sure.

Finally we were back in the van to visit the last school we'd walked to during our lunch break in **Hnan Tha Myaing** village. Greeted by the students in lines leading into the new pre-K building, we all entered to hear from the village monk that he had built the 25'x40' building with \$5,200 of the \$5,800 we'd offered. Along with the remaining \$600 he'd need an additional \$500 to install tile in the bathroom and lavatory, glass in the windows and Korean ceiling tile.

In the ensuing discussion, Belin Sayadaw suggested better quality ceiling tiles for greater durability. Belin Sayadaw also requested that we offer funding for construction of side fences to the school yard where students had trampled on plants on property adjacent on one side and where students throwing rocks in the yard on the other side had precipitated a complaint from the neighbors there. He requested a brick fence 5' high to cost \$1,800. In total the request was for this school compound was \$3,000. The headmistress requested we consider funding an assembly hall for the frequent meetings with the villagers and the occasional awards ceremonies attended by regional school officials. We calculated it could cost \$7-10K, a lot for a small school of approximately 30 students. We offered \$500 to the village monk for meeting the needs of the 14 male orphans he cared for at his monastery.

In the end, we were very pleased to see how our donations had been used in all **5 Belin villages** and impressed with the clarity of their presentations and the economical restraint of **their requests which totaled \$53,200 for 2015!**

Back in the van we headed off for the hour long ride back to Kyaitiyo, home of the Golden Rock pagoda where we'd be spending the night instead of driving all the way back to Yangon. We were all in a pretty light mood when we arrived in town and Sharon and Joy headed into the hotel while Ma Kamalanani went to check on getting a ride up to the pagoda, about a 45 minute ride. Since it was approaching late afternoon, when she came running back she said one truck was just about to leave and we could get a ride if we hurried and were willing to sit in the front of the cab with 4 of us crammed into the second back seat and she and Steve in the shotgun seat. We agreed and piled in since the back of the truck was already filled with 42 people!

It was a wild ride up a very steep climb around dozens of hairpin turns and through construction zones where they were repairing the road. As we approached the top of the mountain, the clouds and dusk were descending and the crowds of tourists and vendors was thickening. After disembarking, Ma Kamalanani inquired and discovered we'd only have about 30-40 minutes to climb to the pagoda rock, look around and hurry back to catch one of the last rides down since the gates close at 6 pm.

We scrambled through the crowds racing past the numerous stalls and shops, restaurants and hawkers. There were hundreds of pilgrims ambling and strolling about in a very festive atmosphere. Eventually we arrived at where we had to pay the foreign visitors fee, pay to leave our slippers and pay for some gold leaf for Roger and Lawrie to stick on the rock. Steve couldn't get through the security gate as he had his cell phone with him. Later we all assembled for group and individual photos in view of the rock before hustling back down to the awaiting trucks to take one of the last trucks taking the daily pilgrims back down. On the way back we were able to sit in the back and watch the night sky appear as we wound down the switchbacks along the precipitous mountain roadway. It was all pretty thrilling and an exciting high spirits time for us all (while we hoped the brakes didn't fail!!!).

We checked into our rooms where Steve discovered his envelope of nearly \$8k cash which he'd safely put in a place he couldn't remember (duh?), showered and all but Ma Kamalanani went out for dinner and a recounting of the day: full, fun, foreign and fantastic!

Tuesday November 11

On the drive back to Rangoon from Golden Rock, Steve and Ma Kamalanani talked mid-ship, Lawrence watched out for on-coming traffic in the front passenger seat with Sai Oo and Joy and Roger and Sharon held down the back seat. Four hours.

We stopped at Ma Kamalanani's newly constructed center for lunch. I loved seeing her room and the beautiful place she will be spending her time studying and teaching. She taught us the Ten Ways or practices for Attaining Merit in the car and we could all see her ability as a teacher. Besides, she radiates joy, love and generosity. A dear soul.

Back to Classique where Roger and Lawrence went over the accounts with Kalya and Sharon and Joy made an emergency run to the Longyi Shop with Kalya. We then walked over to Panditarama where we had an unscheduled and generous encounter with U Pandita. Vajiranani translated for us (she is recovering from TB). Sayadaw inquired about our EQ and what to do about the state of the world. Dinner at Alamanda for Roger and Sharon while Joy

and Lawrence and Steve stayed home. Steve called his publisher (love those words!) before bed which for Sharon came early as she had a physical melt-down brought on by too much heat.

Wednesday November 12

While Steve and Roger went off to work, Joy, Laurie and Sharon boarded the plane for Bagan. It turned out to be a welcome tourist style retreat at a most luxurious hotel, the Thiripyitsaya Sanctuary Resort, on the Ayarwaddy river. It had western or Asian menu choices, a large pool overlooking the river, manicured grounds, and solicitous service fit for royalty. The massages at the spa gave us renewed energy and delight. The evening meal out on the open patio with candles and stars and harp music was a relaxing respite.

Our guide was a most joyful being, a former teacher born and bred in the heart of Bagan. In the morning Joy and Laurie took in the sight of temples, pagodas, stupas. A most striking moment was seeing a few hundred people standing, waiting for the monks to appear so that they might give them dana. Everywhere we went were boxes of money given to sustain these temples.

Sharon and Joy opted to stay at the hotel for a restful afternoon. So Laurie was the only one to go on the afternoon guided trip, ending on the upper tier of a large stupa watching the sun go down on 16 square miles of spires, large and small, like a thousand masts of ships sailing in a sea of green. The peaceful co-habitation of thousands of people during the 11th to the 13th centuries must have been a model for life back then. I asked the guide how this could have occurred and he said simply, "The Buddha".

Roger and Steve's day in Yangon:

First we all attended a Dana breakfast at Panditarama joined by our Classique family. The dedication was to our children and all the children in Myanmar. It was very satisfying and inspiring plus the food was good, chicken curry with noodles and sweet tea.

Steve and Roger then went to a meeting with Sayadaw U Pandita who was generous enough to spend 2 hours with us. Steve updated him on the upcoming publication of the Mahasi Sayadaw ms Manual of Insight in English. This led to a long discussion on teachers and the characteristics that they should have. Sayadaw then talked to us about many topics including dana which opens the door which you must enter with compassion and loving kindness. When you purify your dana, sila follows which can solve many of the World's problems. We then went through the brahma viharas (loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity) and ended up with the way to find lasting happiness which does not come through the sense doors. This is why the yogis are here. There was much more including reincarnation. It was hard to keep up at times. Roger made lots of notes for review and Sayadaw asked his usual challenging questions. Quite a privilege now that he is 94 and so clear.

Next we went to visit the new Canadian Ambassador, Mark McDowell. He has been here almost a year and a half but the office only opened recently. By the end of the year they will have 4 Canadians, 7 locals, plus some interns. Mark was previously responsible for Myanmar from 2003 to 2007 when living in Thailand. He arrived here from China. We exchanged details on each of our activities and he was very supportive of the work we are doing. He said that he would be pleased to help in any way possible. They will start by doing a write up for their Facebook page. He suggested we do some follow up case studies on some of our schools and villages and gave us names of professors at UBC and Simon Fraser who had graduate students that might take it on. Overall he said reform within the country has slowed down, not stalled, and

needed time to be assimilated. Current issues may be exaggerated in the press but an open and fair election next year is the top priority. The biggest challenges to growth will be having enough electric power and improving the civil service as new laws are crafted. It was a very good meeting and nice to spend time with him.

Roger inquired about a more efficient way to get funds into the country and Mark agreed, there are a growing number of Canadians here who are all having problems getting money over. Mark suggested we contact our local MP and have him relay our request to Ottawa.

Back to Classique for an afternoon of emails and catching up on notes.

Thursday November 13

Early morning, Steve and Roger leave Rangoon for Bagan where Sharon's, Joy and Laurie will join for the flight onto Heho and our time in **Kalaw** area. Uneventful flights on a new Burmese airlines:Yardanapon.

Met by **Ernest, Kyaw Kyaw** and three familiar drivers. After loading up we went to **Chan MyayThar** (?sp) where we had built a new classroom and had renovated teacher housing into 5 much improved rooms. We looked over the improvements and were somewhat surprised to discover that the teachers would soften rather live and sleep 2-3 to a small room rather than to live in their own room alone. (Quite unlike Westerners preference we thought.)

After looking over their request for an additional classroom building (which we considered unlikely since we had done so much over the past couple years) we were back in the cars.

After leaving ... We were back on the road heading to a village **the Education Officer in Kalaw, U Maung Maung Lun**, wanted to show us. It was a long ride over very poor roads across agricultural lands. Most of the journey was through uninhabited ag lands but eventually a large monastery building came into view, soon to be followed by sighting village homes and eventually the school yard that we pulled in to.

Looking around the school compound we saw several buildings in disrepair and well-worn. We were greeted by the headmistress and other teachers and several community leaders. We went to an empty office room prepared for our arrival. We sat down on all sides of a heavily laden table of drinks, snacks and fruits and Steve led the questioning of the headmistress to discover the name of the village is **Kamparni**. a Taung Yo ethnic village with a population of 1,773, a school plot of 1.02 acres and a student body of 285 students in grades K-6, taught by 11 government-paid teachers. They are farmers of mostly potatoes and their own personal use crops. Some also make knives from car springs and during the hot season, others in the village make pottery from clay secured 60 miles away. The headmistress, Daw Sabathwe gave us the number of male and female students in each grade from which we saw a huge decline in numbers after grade 5. There are currently no boys and only 3 girls in grade 6! We were told that children go to work in the fields after grade 5.

The infrastructure of the school compound includes:

- A 3-classroom building built with help of the UN in 2002 that needed room dividers.
- A 3-classroom building, suitable but crowded and worn.
- Two building for single teacher dwellings: one brick, one bamboo, both new corrugated roofs.
- A third shed in which the headmistress lives.

- 5 suitable water toilets.
- 2 poorly maintained tanks for catchment water, which is the only but inadequate source of water. After January each year, water is carried by bullock cart from a lake some distance away.
- The government has requested that all primary schools be expanded to include a middle school classes (6,7,8), so the need is for a 4-room building: 3 classrooms and an office. 120'X30' The classrooms would be used for 5,6,7 (for now) and also hopefully making space for the expected 40, 3-5 year olds that would attend pre-K classes the first year, if offered.

There is a clear need for the new classroom building which should also include a catchment system and a new, large water storage tank. We also thought to install a large solar power system to light at least one classroom and the teachers dwellings. It would be efficient to renovate the entire catchment system and the storage tanks.

After checking out all the school yard infrastructure, we walked through the village to observe three men making knives. It was a very simple operation in an open air shed where the car springs were cut and forged into blades. The fire was forced air through a couple different kinds of bellows to heat the coal or charcoal hot enough to heat the steel for forging. A wooden sheath, banded by brass rings was made and the handle of wood with brass ferrules was attached. The final touch was to burn a crosshatch design in the wood of the handle. The boys bought a knife each with a 16" knife costing \$5, and a smaller 8" knife costing just \$2.50! We didn't get to see the pottery being made as it is not the season for it. The villagers seem very entrepreneurial. We appreciated that.

After inquiring and finding out there was no shorter way out, we backtracked the roadway in and headed along the highway toward Kalaw and a few miles out of town turned off to the left and after a few miles came to another school compound of three buildings in the village of **Kyi Gone**, another village that the Educational Officer in Kalaw wanted us to see. Farmers here grow beet roots, cauliflower, eggplant, rice and their own potatoes.

The 1.52 acre school compound contains three building in which 8 government-paid teachers, who live 1 mile away in the village, teach 160 students in Pre-K through grade 6. Spring water is supplied by a pipe from the village.

- Building #1, 55 years old, 23'X64' contains 3 classrooms and needs extensive renovation of: roof, ceiling, plaster, partitions, paint.
- Building #2, 28'X40' contains 2 classrooms and needs renovation of shutters, desks, roof, ceiling, verandah cement repair, partitions and paint.
- Building #3 is temporarily used as a classroom is made of woven bamboo with a corrugated roof.

The need is for a 30'X90', 3-classroom building for grades 6,7 and 8 and there is suitable space located along one side of the plot for siting. After greeting all the teachers and a few villagers, it was approaching dusk and we headed out of the compound toward Kalaw. We arrived at and checked into the Honey Pine Hotel, conferred with the Educational Officer about his priorities and with Ernest about the schedule for the following day before we headed to our rooms for showered in preparation for dinner at The Seven Sisters restaurant nearby.

Needless to say the Indian meal we were served: beef, fish and vegetable curries with sweetened avocado pudding and Marsala tea for dessert was exceptional and well worth the \$40 we spent for it. The Sisters were once again just delightfully friendly, gregarious, efficient and great cooks. We'll be back our two remaining evenings.

We walked back to the hotel and we were all ready to call it a day, a good day!

Friday November 14

Awake early for breakfast at 7 to prep for an 8 am appointment visit from a mid-wife, assistant hospital head and village chief about **building a clinic about 10 miles north-west from Kalaw on the road toward Pyinmana-Rangoon**. After a quick b'fast, Steve heads out for lapaya and e-jagway (raised fried dough) just as Roger and Sharon are returning from a quick trip to the market. Lawrie and Joy host us all over scrambled eggs, white bread toast, orange mix juice and weak tea.

While **Roger, Steve and Sharon went off to assess schools, Joy and Laurie were led on a 15 km trek** by a delightful young woman named Sunshine. (She has a sister named Moonshine). The trek was not too strenuous and led past several villages. Morning glories and Calla lilies, rice, rapeseed, cabbages, cauliflower, beets, pumpkins, eggplant and zucchini were just some of the abundance of food growing in this rich soil. Such hard work, yet such abundance for these farmers. It was stepping back a few hundred years to watch plowing and transportation done by oxen and water buffalo, that is with the exception of motorcycles whizzing past us and iPhones making their familiar ringtones. At the midpoint, we were given tea in the bamboo home of an older couple. They dressed us in traditional garb and we laughed a lot. It was painful to see that the man had been blind for 11 years and had not ever sought medical help. And we faced our helplessness in the face of the pain of this world.

It was a great workout and Joy and Laurie were glad to get home for a bath and a good rest.

Ernest, Kyaw Kyaw and Daw Hin Su Kyin, 2nd in command of the Kalaw hospital showed up about 8 am and we spoke with Daw Kin Su Kyin about her request that we build a school in her native village, Shaw Byu Bin, which is about 40 miles or a 2.5 hour drive from Kalaw, in the Mandalay Division. The population is 1000 and the school site is more than an acre in size.

The nearest school to the village is 3-4 miles but there could be 60-70 students in grades K-5. She showed us the plans for a 30'X60' classroom that would also need partitions, desks, 2 toilets and housing for 2 teachers and a custodian. The school site is supplied with water from a well operated by a leg-action pump.

She would very much like us to build the school though it is far away and would serve a limited number of students. We'll consider it along with the other projects we have seen.

Since the head of village and mid-wife did not arrive by 9 am we took off for **Ywa Daw**, a village we looked at last year about renovating a partially constructed classroom and building a new classroom building. For unexplained reasons or because Ernest ran out of time, neither got done. Now we were going back because the village wants to relocate the entire school compound to a larger, 4 acre plot, 5 minute walk away. The larger plot is needed because the grammar school is needing to expand to a middle school.

The farmers in this village grow mostly ginger, tomatoes, rice, little potatoes, cauliflower, cabbage...; it is good land for farming.

We met with the headmistress and village committee when we arrived. After a very prolonged discussion on the possibility and merit of relocating the entire school campus, we concluded that

they don't have enough students to justify relocating the students in Pre-K-5th grade (ie. just 31 total), but because the 118 students in grades 6,7,8 come from other 7 villages to this village and because this area is rapidly expanding into suburban households and more students can be expected, we eventually settled on the possibility of building a 4-classroom building for grades 6-9. The new site will also need 3-4 toilets, and a well and water tank for water. Electricity will be available within a few months. After grade 9, students would have to go to the nearby town for high school.

The educational officer also likes this project to be done.

On the way back to Kalaw, we stopped off to look at a clinic and another school we were to look at in Lwemakhan (hilly region of chillies).

The clinic was an old building in need of cleaning, painting, some renovation and installation of cabinets, furniture, a solar system and for which two toilets were already under construction. After requesting that we build a new clinic at another location in the village (and converting the existing clinic building to a library), the hospital administrator acknowledged that she had requested and expected to receive funding from the government for the renovations. Though we looked at the potential site for a new clinic, we were not motivated to consider it likely.

We also stopped by the small school compound in Lwemakhan, (population: 400), with a 1.8 acre compound and 45 students in grades K-5. We spoke with the headmistress, Daw Mya Mum, who has been there 15 years and will retire at the end of the school year in March. She is one of 3 teachers who live in town.

The school compound has two classroom building, 3 water toilets and catchment water stored in what looks to be a 10' diameter X 6' high cement water tank built in 2008. The smaller of the buildings has 2 classrooms and a small teacher office. The larger has three classrooms.

After speaking with the headmistress who told us she'd received \$800 from the World Bank this year for incidental and miscellaneous supplies and equipment, we asked her what she needed and she couldn't think of anything. Maybe when you are just a few months from retiring, you have few unmet demands from work, having learned to accept the way things are. Nevertheless, when we inspected the buildings we discovered that each could use some renovations.

- Building #1, built by Italian and Japanese NGOs in 2003, needed partitions, a ceiling and paint inside and out.
- Building #2 was very old and needed new corrugated roofing, ceiling, one gable end enclosed, cement floor, desks and painting inside and out.

There was a need but not urgent. We moved on easily.

We returned to Kalaw to meet up with the mid-wife and some village men from the village, Wet Phyu Ye, about 10 miles outside of Kalaw that needs a clinic. On the way out of Kalaw we stopped at a roadside restaurant for lunch at which Roger, Sharon and Steve sat at the table with Kyaw Kyaw, the mid-wife Theingyi Shwe Wah and the 2nd in charge of the Kalaw hospital, Daw Kin Su Kyint. We had the opportunity to discover the following info:

- Theingyi Shwe Wah is 25 years old, married without children. After completing 1.5 years mid-wife training after HS, she was assigned to this village for her first posting. As a mid-wife, she earns about \$120/month. In her first year as a mid-wife working out of a village library temporarily since there is no clinic yet, she helped 30 women deliver babies in their homes.

- The mid-wife is responsible for 4 villages with a total population of 1540. One day a week, she visits the other villages and on Wednesdays serves at the library, those under age 5 or over age 45. She rides her own motorcycle to the villages and has the library as clinic open 9-4, the other 4 days/week.
- The mid-wife explained that village women are interested in family planning, which she instructs them in with educational booklet and home visits. She acknowledged there is no unmarried teenage pregnancies and most girls marry around age 18. There were many health educational posters on the walls of the library for help in educating the population for which there is no charge for any service or treatment. She mentioned that there are very few cases of malaria since almost everyone uses a mosquito net. Cases have dropped significantly.

After lunch we continued on to the village, looked in on her temporary clinic and went on to look over a potential site for a permanent clinic. At a bend in the highway. There was a site, alongside the highway that had been donated by a nurse who lived on the adjacent property. There is a betel-nut grove of 15-20 trees on-site and a few other trees. There is a steady stream of water flowing alongside the road, in front of the property, over which a bridge will have to be built for vehicles to enter the property to get off the road. The stream runs year round and will provide a reliable source of water for the clinic.

We looked over the site and everyone agreed it would be a very good location for the clinic. We were told it would take about 15 days for the village to prepare the site for access across a bridge and to clear and level an area, back off the highway, upon which to build the clinic. Everyone agreed not to cut the grove of trees. We'll have to ask them to cut as few other trees as possible when laying out the site. Ernest acknowledged it would take about 45 days and cost about \$15k to build.

We were all stoked about this potential clinic.

We returned to Honey Pine Hotel in mid-afternoon to work on the travelogue, rest, wander through the town market and wandered up to Seven Sisters around 6 pm for another delicious dinner of Shan food topped off with chocolate pudding and sweet ginger-lemon tea. A delightful meal for all.

Just before finishing up, Luisa, a German woman who rode from the airport to Classique with her boyfriend, Peter, and Steve last Friday, dropped into our room, having seen us from where they were sitting, and we caught up with her since she'd left Classique several days earlier. We invited she and Peter to dine with us the following night as we enjoyed meeting them at Classique and wanted to catch up with them mid trips.

We hit the sack early since we had a 6 am departure the following day for a day of opening ceremonies at the Rural Health Center and the Nan Yoke school. Great day done!

Saturday November 15

The day began very early because we met Ernest at 6 AM. We drove in two cars to a noodle shop where we had chicken soup and coffee mix. Then on to our first opening, the **Pin Mei Health Center**. Celebrations for the opening included many dignitaries, the most important being the Minister of education and health for the Shan state and the local senator. Because we had a wonderful second translator, Sunshine, we were able to get a good idea of life in the community.

After the ribbon-cutting and speeches, villagers put on a big lunch for everyone present, including visitors from other villages and clinics. The old health center will be used as a residence for the nurse and her husband. The village agreed to fix it up for her. The new building needs some new furniture, an examination table and a solar system which we said we would provide.

The health center will be open from 9 to 12 and 1 to 3 each day. Currently there are up to 10 births per month and 10 visitors per day. Most families had 3 to 5 children and birth control and spacing of children were taught.

The nurse's name is Daw Nan Sai Thaug and the midwife's name is Daw Khin Win. Steve collected data and photos of the inadequate catchment water supply and tank storage system in order to seek funding for an overhaul and upgrade of the current system of collection from 5 buildings into 4 storage tanks with a capacity of 36,200 gal up to a 1000 liter elevated SS tank to eventually be supplied by a generator and reliable pump. The need is for a unified system design, more storage capacity and upgrade of many gutters and collection pipes. To see how other storage tank systems work, we visited the village to see their method of water storage. Steve is to investigate this further as catchment is the only source of water for the health clinic.

Visited a yogis home and met her aged father. We then saw how the foot pump works for this family to pump water from the catchment storage tank up into the house or to a garden. Cost:\$50. Exercise: unlimited.

We went next to open the new school at **Nan Yoke** comprised of 2- 60 x 30 buildings at right angles facing onto a large yard with a huge Banyan tree that overlooks the whole valley. The school is beautiful and Ernest is very proud of his work. There are 100 students in kindergarten to grade 5 but numbers drop off as the children get older. There are 19 sameneras from the local monastery. They have 25 in grade one and only eight in grade 5. When asked about this it became apparent that the older children were staying at home, either to work in the fields or to look after their siblings. Many discussions took place on this issue and at the end of our visit they agreed to visit all the families early next year to count the number of children and try to get them all to attend school.

We also built a teacher's cottage in which three of the teachers live. The headmaster Nwe Myint and her husband live across the field. The old building is now only used for kindergarten but has electricity while the new building does not. They said they need 20 to 30 benches and tables for the new school.

Like at the health center there was a big ceremony attended by many officials with gifts offered to us. We also gave out uniforms. Afterwards a large lunch was offered to many guests. The village appears to be a prosperous one.

After a large lunch, Steve and Laurie put on the Pa'O ethnic clothing they have been given as a gift. They were taught the graceful tribal dance by the village 'dance master' and they danced gracefully and were happy and the villagers were amused and the girls thought they were swell.

After the dance, before wrapping up to leave, Steve and Ernest met with several individuals and groups of villagers from other villages petitioning for funding for:

- Daw Yi Yi Win, former recipient of new teacher housing near the monastery on the way to Pan Lon, travelled more than 2 hours to request a solar system for her school and dwelling so that

students could study at night. She showed photos of students each studying with a candle burning beside their open book. Steve offered Ernest \$1000 for a solar system.

- Two teachers at the Pin Mei school asked us to stop by the school on our way back in order to look at replacing a corrugated roof on an historically old wooden school building. We promised to stop, did so, saw the need and will likely approve the request and were also shown current teacher housing for 4 teachers which was deplorable and UN-renovatable. We located additional area of school compound where new teacher housing for 6 teachers could be constructed since the school will soon be upgraded to include grades 6-9.
- The headmistress of Myin Sai Gone, where we had offered a new roof last year when leaving the clinic where Sharon interviewed the mid-wives, appeared to remind us that her school needs a computer and science lab rooms, that she thought we had promised to construct this year. She too had traveled considerable distance to meet with us.
- A village headsman from Pan Lone, where we had built a school a few years back appeared and appealed for funds to construct housing for 2 government-paid teachers. Together with Ernest, we designed a 17'X24' double room building estimated to cost \$1500 in materials and Steve offered Ernest the funds to get the materials.

On the way back from Nan Yoke, we stopped at another Pin Mei school, this one known as Market Square. There are 200 students +30 in kindergarten. This middle school has four buildings and a new building 120' x 30' is being built by the government. We were surprised at the high cost --648 lakhs. We would build such a building with community help for less than half of that, and as Ernest pointed out, it would be better built.

What they really wanted was a new teacher's cottage. Currently the teachers are living in a building where the wood is falling apart, the roof leaks and it is dark and rickety. It cannot be fixed up. But they showed us another location on school property right behind the old wooden school where the new teacher's cottage could be built. As this may become a high school with additional teachers it was suggested that a six room teacher's cottage be built. Seems like a good idea.

Next stop was Auban Number Eight, a sad looking school of 97 students with 11 in prekindergarten going up to grade 5. The building is 100 x 26 and both the headmistress and another teacher live there. They wanted a supply of water as it currently comes from the military base next-door on an irregular basis and they would like the building plastered and painted. Perhaps because it was the end of the day, we were not enthusiastic.

Last stop: lapaya with the local senator and education officials. Finally we headed back to Kalaw and a last dinner at Seven Sisters with the German (living in Zurich) couple Luisa and Peter, first met at Classique more than a week ago. A delightful, laughter-filled evening was enjoyed by all. Tomorrow is our last day in Kalaw and we are scheduled to fly on to Mandalay in late afternoon.

Sunday November 16

Last day in Kalaw area with a 9 am departure for **Chaung Nyi Poke** opening ceremony. Before departing, Sunshine stopped by to drop off her business cards for future correspondence. Steve got his lapaya and e-jagway. Others went to town market. Steve offered MSP T-shirts to Ernest's eldest son and the Kalaw township educational officer. We were then into the vehicles with all our luggage, eventually to be dropped off at the Heho airport for flight to Mandalay.

We were not able to visit Chaung Nyi Poke last year due to the conditions of the road; and this year we were able to understand why. Even now well into the dry season, the road was nearly impassable due to the rutted cart trail we were on the last 5+ miles to CNP! We were traveling at a snails pace to straddle the deepest ruts to keep the SUV from bottoming out. The journey was well worth the trip since there was a grand celebration, ceremony, feast, speeches, local and state politicians and all the mid-wives from around the district were there!

We were met by the local men's band clanging cymbals, clapping bamboo clappers, beating on large and small drums and a general festive air of enthusiasm and appreciation. Again, we walked a couple hundred yards between facing lines of children: girls on the right, boys on the left. We were offered water, damp cloths for cool cleaning, smiles galore and curiosity.

At the entrance to the clinic yard we were met by a huge contingent of villagers: men, women and a lot of kids! We were told there were a lot of kids in this township with 50+ in the pre-K class alone! There was a temporary ceremonial pavilion set up with seating, podium for speakers, a table piled high with gifts, a gaggle of mid-wives clustered around the mistress of ceremonies stand and a huge crowd of villagers.

The clinic was only recently finished and the appointed mid-wife, Nan Kathi Hlaing, was in the process of just moving in and setting up. We were told that a second mid-wife was to assigned to CNP too. CNP was identified as a site needing a clinic when recently a young woman in town died in childbirth when she could not be transported to the hospital in Kalaw due to impassable roads. The villagers were very appreciative of the choice and gift.

Initially, Steve joined the region's Senator and other dignitaries in ceremoniously cutting the opening ribbon held by several young women dressed in their Taung-Yo ethnic clothing. Then we settle in for the speeches and gift offering. Steve had an opportunity to acknowledge our appreciation of their invitation, how the gift of a clinic was offered by students of the Dhamma that Steve had received from Burma and had taught them and the value of good health and education as a foundation for being happy in life. Other local and state dignitaries spoke along with the doctor of the area. Numerous gifts were offered including traditional men's clothing to Steve, Lawrence and Roger and traditional Taung-Yo women's' clothing to Sharon and Joy.

Later after being shown through the clinic and a demonstration of the fantastic life- changing waterline to the village offered by Corinne and Amanda from Vancouver, the young women of the village helped Joy and Sharon into their traditional clothing and eventually they were invited to perform their traditional dance with them for the assembled villagers and guests. It was a joyful, delightful time for all.

Eventually we were taken to the school across the playground for lunch offering while the villagers and guests were offered their meal in other school classrooms or under the large tent erected outside. It was a very festive, noisy, celebratory, community enhancing event in which everyone had a part to play by just showing up!

Later while we were all shown through the old and in complete neglect and disrepair school classrooms and teacher housing (all of which should be replaced instead of trying to renovate them!) the villagers were lined up for inspection and treatment by the assembled mid-wives and doctors who had set up a temporary clinic to mass process the hundreds of villagers seeking consultation and medical attention. It was overwhelmingly moving to see it all unfold around us. We were very happy to be there and wished we could do more to further contribute to the betterment of the schools and deplorable teachers living situation. Maybe at another time.

Since we had another village to drop in on and to get to the airport for a 4:30 flight, we left the festivities around 1 pm and headed out in a change of vehicles. After a relatively short ride, once we were back on a road(!), we pulled into the school compound at Baw Yar Thit, where we had previously built a school building, teacher housing and last year had offered funds for purchasing the pipe to bring water to the village from a spring 1.5 miles away. By installing the pipe, the village now had a steady stream of water at the turn of a valve, and in fact, there was a direct waterline with tap into each of the 500 houses in the village. This was a huge change in their daily habits since they now no longer had to carry water from afar. Fantastic!

We noticed a new corrugated roof on a woven-bamboo walled building and were told it was teacher housing for 2 teachers. We were also told the school would be expanded to a middle school, ie. an annual addition of a class to 6, 7, 8. And more teachers would be assigned to the school. While sitting and discussing the school with the teachers and village committee, we were told that they needed a new solar system for lights at night to study by. Steve offered the \$1000 that Ernest indicated it would cost and he indicated to the village headman to come to town after three days to pick up the system.

After looking around the school and yard after the discussion and we were preparing to leave, one of the teachers asked Steve why they gave uniforms to all the students but not to the teachers. Steve explained that the students only came in a few sizes and shapes so it was easy to make uniforms for them; but teachers come in all sizes and shapes and have preferences as to what style they want, so it is much more difficult to offer uniforms that fit. Everyone laughed! And Steve offered the headmistress \$100 so each teacher could buy two uniforms for themselves.

We then were back in the cars heading to a cafe for a final meeting with Ernest and Kyaw Kyaw. Sitting around cold drinks and lapaya, we discussed the major projects we were inclined to undertake and asked Ernest and Kyaw Kyaw about doing them. They were agreeable and confident that they could get them done. We also settled up the expenses of having us in town for 4 days: car and driver, food and miscellaneous expenses amounting to \$800, so we gave them \$900. Took group photo of all who had accompanied us for the 4 days: Ernest, Kyaw Kyaw and his eldest son, the Kalaw educational officer, the senator, the drivers and we were back into the cars for the short trip to the nearby Heho airport.

After pulling in to the parking lot and re-packing our bags and making gifts of things we couldn't take with us, we were emptying out the cars when Lawrie discovered he could not find his yellow knapsack containing his iPad and Sharon's iPad was also not in sight. This led to a detailed remembering and recounting of the numerous car changes they had gone through to get across the nearly impassable road to CNP and back as well as the different car to get to Baw Yar Thit, trying to remember where it might have been left. It didn't take too long to phone the various drivers of the various cars used who all promised to go look for the bags while some anxiety crossed some minds as we were checking in and awaiting their return calls. Eventually the call came confirming the bags had been located and they would be delivered to the airport within 20 minutes, well before our flight was to depart.

After they arrived we went through immigration, into the gate waiting room, on to the plane and off to Mandalay. Upon arrival we were met by a driver who took us to the Ayarwaddy River View Hotel where we were met by John and Maung, had a delicious dinner on the roof and got caught up on the past year, how we each were doing, the schedule for the next three days and general hanging out. We departed to our rooms with a plan to meet in the morning at 8:30 for

the trip up to Pweyedaung and Inyar schools we built this year in the Pyin Oo Lwin area. It was great to see Maung and look over the booklet of info John had prepared of all the schools he and we had built and the maps and stats of the schools we'd be visiting over the next three days. A full day done!

Monday November 17, 2014 in Mandalay area

Good sleep and delicious breakfast at the Ayarwaddy River View Hotel. John and Maung arrived to pick us up at 8:30 in their comfortable 9 passenger van. Our first stop was the uniform shop where Maung's wife employs four young women to design and make school uniforms. Such a lovely atmosphere there, talk, laughter among the women as each one carried out one step in the sewing of the uniforms. Their workmanship was so careful such that the garments were not only beautiful, but also sturdy to withstand washing. There were thoughtful touches that showed their caring. Sharon and Joy finally had a chance to try out thanaka, the paste that the women and children of Myanmar wear on their faces. One of the young woman had her eye on Steve's iPhone6 (or on Steve), but he resisted the opportunity for generosity. Maung was obviously proud of the work that his wife was doing. We will take as many uniforms as we can carry back to the children in Belin.

Our trip took us over an hour up into the mountains around Mandalay. The van had to stop half way up to allow the engine to cool down before completing the trip. Arrived at the school at **Pyawedaung** mid-morning to be greeted again by a corridor of children to greet us. Always a joy to walk between them and share greetings.

We saw the 120 x 30 school built by MBSPF that is being completed, with an additional 30 x 30 room on the lower level (matching the grade of the land). The 30 x 30 was paid for by the village and built by the MBSPF crew. The rooms had lots of windows; construction was very good.

The school has 13 teachers and 528 students in grades 1 - 7. They are planning for a prekindergarten next year, as well as grades 8 and 9. The teachers have been promised by the government to teach 8 and 9. The new building will accommodate two grade 8 and two grade 9 as well as one grade 1 classroom.

The government had put new roofs and ceilings on two older buildings previously.

There is a 90% chance that this school will be designated for a high school, but they need to wait for one year before considering what other building they would need. The village is growing. They anticipate that they will have the required 600+ students to become a high school and that other grade 9, 10 and 11 students would come to this school. If this happens, they would need a five over five building for the high school.

Their current needs: They have water from a well but it needs purification for drinking only. We will investigate this. They requested DVDs, a DVDS player and TV as well as computers for grades 6 to 9.

Between school visits we stopped for a lovely lunch at Fresh, a beautiful restaurant overlooking the lake.

Our second school visit was at **Inyar** where there are two new schools: MBSPF has just finished a 120 x 30 building (grades 1 - 4 plus an office/ library); the government has built a 100 x 30 school (grades 5 - 9). They plan to switch grades and buildings next year. They just moved into

the school two weeks ago. There are 239 students and 13 teachers, 11 of whom are qualified with two helpers. There are 12 children in prekindergarten who are in the same class as 21 kindergarteners. They have sufficient space but have asked the government for a 30 x 30 building for the pre-kindergarten. The government has built four toilets, MBSPF three. The villagers wanted us to build one more. There is currently a barbed wire fence along the edge of the steep embankment in front of the school. This will be replaced.

Need: There are no teachers who live on site yet as there is no space. They have requested a teachers cottage for the five teachers that currently stay in the village at the foot of the embankment. Maung proposed a 20 x 25 building that he could construct for \$2000 with the help of villagers. MSP or Steve will pay for this.

We arrived home weary and satisfied at 5:30. A little quiet time then supper under the stars on the roof of the hotel.

Tuesday November 18, 2014

Today we were scheduled to visit 5 villages and schools that John and Maung had vetted and selected as potentially good sites for new school buildings in 2015. After breakfast we re-loaded our SUV's and brought along another translator, Justin, to help Sharon, Joy and Laurie converse with the teachers, students and community members while Steve and Roger, for the most part, kept Maung busy collecting the data required to make the decisions being asked of us: whether there was sufficient need and community resources to warrant our selections for a new school building. We headed south to the villages around Kyause.

We stopped to pick up Daw Hnin Oo, the Kyause township educational officer and proceeded on to **Ah Shae Ngae Toe Ah Shae Ngwe Toe**. We were met by a short line of students and a few officials on either side of the road in front of a school yard with one classroom building of cement and two bamboo classrooms to the right.

We were shown the school and sat down with the Headmaster Saw Hla Thein and other village committee members and several teachers at a food loaded table outside and were told of the situation. The village of 667 houses holds a population of 2900 with 365 children in grades K-8 on the 1.5 acre school compound. Grades K-3 are held in the two bamboo rooms with grades 4-8 held in the old cement building; all the classrooms are very overcrowded. The need is for a new 7 primary classrooms building to be built along the back end of the plot and a second building of 2-30'X60' classrooms to be constructed out of the used material from the demolition of the current three buildings. Maung suggested a U shaped design with 5 classrooms in a row, with an additional room at right angles of each end along with an entry hall/teacher room to the front and in the middle of the 5 classrooms. If placed at the back end of the property, the foundation of the building would have to be raised a few feet to get above the potential flooding of the low-laying land to be built on. For the student population another 3 toilets would need to be built to complement the current 5 student toilets and single teacher toilet. Water for the school is procured by students from a lake 300' away, but Maung suggested that with the eminent installation of electricity to the school that a pump and waterline be installed from the pond adjacent to the school yard.

The village committee members and headmaster confirmed that village volunteers would be available as needed but that stone and sand would need to be bought, thereby raising the cost/square foot a bit. 2 teachers live in the village and the other 9 ride motorcycles from Kyause nearby.

Grade 9 and possibly Pre-K class would be added if a new building were built. The Education Official indicated this building had the highest priority of need in the Kyause area. With the higher construction costs, we estimated this building would cost \$55,000. We could see the great need and were inclined to do it.

Htan Sin Taw was the second village school we visited, just a short distance from the first. Population is around 1000. 125 students. Headmaster Daw Htwe Htwe. A small 2 building school, 120 students in K to grade 5. With five teachers, all of whom live in Kyause. There are two buildings on 2.6 acres, one 80'x20' with four classrooms, which is acceptable and one bamboo building in bad shape, 35' x 15'. They asked us to replace the bamboo building with a new 30'x60'.

They have a hand-pumped well with good water all year and will have electricity within the year. They will need two more toilets and the gov't has agreed to contribute 20 lakhs. Like almost all villagers, they greed to provide labour, transportation and food for the workers.

Our next village **Tan Yuwa Tan Ywar** had a very large school compound of many buildings and a large parking lot of hundreds of bicycles; seems everyone here comes to school on a bike! The population of this village is 3500, but with 2300 students attending school here from 29 villages nearby, the several school buildings built by the community are woefully inadequate and the need is for 8-classrooms for primary school which is now housed in 4 bamboo buildings: 45', 40', and 2-36' long buildings. With this number of students in grades K-11, the need is for an 8-classroom building and an additional 11 toilets to supplement the current 35. 13 of the 68 teachers live on-site in fair housing along the right hand side of the compound.

The village headsman, U Myo Tun and the school Headmistress, Daw Khin Win Shwe told us that though the community had built all the current buildings without government support, they have no money to do this needed school to which they will add Pre- K next year. They acknowledged that the village could supply sand, stone and volunteers and would approach the local cement factory for their best price for the school. Maung thinks this is a good project to do though we may have to do it over two years as it is a lot to do in one year. We are optimistic we'll find a way to address their overcrowding problem.

We had one more small school to visit before lunch and drove to **Pe Khin** where the village farmers grow bananas, turmeric, sesame, rice, betel, the 4th school of the morning. Located on .72 acres in a village with a population of 1025, the school compound currently holds 134 students in grades 1-7, with 9 teachers, 5 of whom live at the school. The headmaster is Daw Thida Khine and they have well water all year and are expecting to get electricity soon. Currently there are four buildings and a couple of teachers' cottages, one behind the school in poor condition, one in the right end of the school and one beside the school.

Since the school will be adding three grade over the next three years they will renovate one open air shed to a classroom and would like to construct a new 120x30' six room primary school, removing one of the buildings that is in the worst shape on the far left by the well.

While like many schools in Burma, this school clearly could use some renovation, all in all it was in pretty good shape and **we considered just renovating the two additional open air sheds and making some improvements to the teachers dwellings.**

When leaving, the villagers tried to offer us a couple huge hands of bananas but there was no room in our SUVs for them so several minutes were needed to cut them apart to fit smaller bunches in back of the rear seats.

We stopped at a roadside restaurant for a longish lunch of very oily vermicelli with chicken or fried rice with chicken and then waited for John's order of something different, that arrived long after the rest of us had finished. Steve inquired of MMG about a cup of lapayay and they crossed the street to the local tea shop for a quick sip. As we were leaving, Steve stopped to speak with the 2 police who had come around to question MMG upon our arrival. Steve shared in his broken Burmese and their broken English what we were doing and they were very appreciative and smiley when Steve told him he'd been a monk at the Rangoon Mahasi meditation center for 5 years.

Then we were back in the SUVs for the longer drive to our remaining village across some very rough roads coming to our last village, **Na Chan Gyi Kone Nwar Chan Gyi Kone**, as dusk was descending. Nevertheless, we bounded out of the cars when coming upon the first villagers lined up along both sides of the road and began what ended up being one of the longest greeting lines of BSP/ MBSPF history with more young babies than any of us could remember in any village. After what seemed like a very long line, (maybe most of the population of 1400 were there!) when we looked up we could see that it continued along the road after a slight turn in the road! Eventually we reached the 3.32 acre school compound with 3 buildings and teacher housing for 5 of the 9 teachers sleeping all on one platform.

Greeted by the headmaster U Khine Lwin Tun, we were ushered into a classroom converted to greeting room with a long table of food piled high and we were offered tea and coffee, cakes, fruit and chips. The 200 students in grades K-9 are crowded into 9 small classrooms and the 52 pre-school kids were in a newly constructed 18'X36' open air shed with a brick floor. Currently the 5 classrooms in the 24'x64' cement building house grades K-5 which they would like to convert to the middle school. Grades 6-9 are housed in an old 18'X72' bamboo with corrugated roof building which they would like to demolish to build a new 6 (5 classrooms and an office/library) room building. They would like to use the recycled building materials to renovate the teacher housing.

In looking over the school compound we were shown the far end of the current fenced in area which had numerous trees that would have to be cut to build the building they would like. We inquired and they confirmed that the empty adjacent property was also owned by the school and could be used for the new school building, which we preferred.

Since the need and wish was for more than we could do in one year, we suggested doing the entire project in two years by doing a new 30'X80' 4-classroom building on the empty plot and renovate part of the bamboo building to include a temporary office/ library and building new teacher housing for 6 teachers for \$6K. In year two, we suggested building a new 30'X80' 4-room building for a classroom, new pre-K room, and office and a library. By the time we finished looking over the school compound, dusk was approaching dark and we said our goodbyes to the most friendly, interested village any of us could remember. We were very impressed with the village and wanted to do the school for them.

Back in the cars we took the long drive back to Mandalay hotel in the dark, arriving in time to get another late dinner on the rooftop restaurant and being the last ones out as the staff were piling up the chairs on tables as we finished up, exhausted and looking forward to a much needed rest.

Wednesday November 19

We left our lovely Ayarwaddy River View hotel with the pool and roof top dining after a breakfast meeting with John and Maung to plan the coming year. At the meeting we discussed John's request that we consider doing a school down in the delta in **Wakema**, where Steve had visited one school site last year. The current school was badly deteriorated and needed replacement but we have more than enough projects to deplete our resources this year, so we asked John to find a donor for half the cost of the building as it was more than we could offer alone. We are not so inclined to spread our resources this by going into more areas but since Steve had visited last year and John had something of a commitment to do another school in that area, we offered tepid support. On the road by 7:30. Stopped for lumpy lapaya, with a long and scenic walk through the market to the toilets. Back into the car where Laurie and Sharon and John practiced their hymns as the countryside rolled past. Our translator was amused.

Speaking of which, having a second translator, Justin, these two days, for the trip visitors, is a huge benefit. Makes it more of a community event, for sure.

John will investigate the possibility of providing School visits for tourists coming to Mandalay.

Drove to **Thein Kone** where Joy and Lawrence gave out uniforms. Currently there are 45 students, five teachers and 5 children in Pre K. We left \$400 Lakh to pay for a combination Office and furniture(?). Steve offered 20 lakhs to finish/renovate/furnish the Teacher's cottage (the abandoned old wood and bamboo classroom bldg). Two of the teachers will move into the old school. We left \$100 for teacher uniforms. It was good to see the old school put to good use and to see how happy they are with the new school (40'x45').

On to **Thi'Yone**, a school with a growing population. We were met by a huge line up and traditional dancers--two little girls. They have added pre K and Grade 9 and now have 376 students, expecting another 60 next year. There are 15 teachers, five of whom live in our beautiful new teacher's cottage. What a relief! Our new 120' x 30' building houses the office and grades 7, 8 and 9. Altogether there are six buildings, the worst of which is now a 55'x 30' wooden building on stilts which looks like it might fall over and is very hot. They would like to take it down and replace it with a new 60'x30'. We concur it is a good idea. We said we would consider it next year when we visit.

Last stop before lunch was **Shin Myint Gyin**, another small school, ie. 45'x30' where we gave out uniforms to all students and left \$100 for teacher uniforms. Currently 57 students, including Pre K with seven teachers, four of whom will live in the old school building. Maung needs 11Lakhs to finish the school, renovate the old school and complete the fence around the property.

We did an interview to send to Roger and Frances and Robert and Nina to show them the school their money has built.

All good.

After lunch at a roadside, open air restaurant, amongst the roosters and pigs, we bounced an hour to get to **Subpyarkyin**; the school viewed by headlights in the dark last year! The students and teacher numbers are the same as last year--156 students and 7 teachers: all teachers live in town. There are now 20 children now in pre-K.

We built a 100'x30' and the government fixed up another building 50' x 30'--Enough room now for the current students but they need a water catchment system for both buildings as they run out of water during the year.

Maung Maung Gyi will investigate and get back to us--estimated cost, 20 Lakhs. It was a flying visit and we had to race back to the airport to catch our flight to Yangon. On the way we met the widest array of obstructions possible in Myanmar--livestock of various kinds ahead of us on the road, terrible roads being prepared for asphalt now consisting of double-fist sized rocks mortised together tightly, but still very, very rough and painful on the tires and shocks, short cuts, bridges out, a huge village celebration with decorated ox carts and horses and girls, and still we made it with 20 minutes to spare.

After viewing a beautiful sunset from the plane above the clouds, we arrived Yangon, Home at Classique, soup and salad (SALAD!) and bed

Thursday November 20

Steve went to Hse Main Gon to speak with Belin Sayadaw about our decision to offer \$48K for projects in the Belin area in 2015. Sharon showed Joy around the forest retreat center.

Roger and Lawrence left at 5:30 am for an early morning round of golf with Kyaw Thet.

The afternoon was spent with Steve and Joy getting traditional Burmese massages while Roger and Lawrence laid low recovering or nursing symptoms of congestion.

We wrapped up our list of projects to undertake in 2015 and finalized transfers of payments for Classique expenses and to Maung and John.

Roger, Sharon, Joy and Lawrence are to leave about 8:15 am Friday morning. Steve has decided to stay on another week to see a couple nuns, U Tejaniya when he returns in a few days and to spend the day with his friend Steve Wilhelm from Seattle who arrives from Sagaing Friday morning.

More to occur in 2015, but for now, our work this year is done.