



Doing Good That Is Good

The newsletter of FARMS International

October 2017: Thailand Update — Life stories of God's grace

Providing revolving entrepreneurial loans to poor Christian families - Galatians 6:10

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Earlier this year a young man contacted me about a possible internship with FARMS in Thailand. He was specifically intrigued by our work with Christian coffee growers. As we corresponded, Jaime Garcia shared of his desire to learn more about what we are doing and his willingness to help. As we shared, I learned that he was a graduate of Moody Bible Institute and that he had lived in Thailand for over a year and a half, doing short term mission work and studying the Thai language. His skill level in speaking, reading, and writing Thai is phenomenal. He had invested over 1000 hours in formal Thai language study!

Last June he returned from his home in Michigan to Thailand to explore various mission opportunities. During that time, he was eager to see the FARMS Thailand programs in action and visited our Chiang Mai and our Chiang Kham programs. He did in depth interviews with many project holders. His skill in Thai, helped people to really open their hearts and to tell their life stories. In this letter, we have shared just a couple of these amazing interviews. They are very enlightening and encouraging!

Joe Richter, Executive Director

Aphisit (Aphi) and Nawntipawn Kwantanatruthai, Akha tribe, two children, 22 and 28 years old, village, Mae Suai, Thailand.

On the rolling hills of Chiang Rai Province, Thailand, a quaint village was nestled deep in the throbbing heart of the mountains. For centuries, this remote settlement had been called Mae Suai by the locals, meaning *'the beautiful matriarch.'* During the 1960's and 70's, turmoil in the Laos and Myanmar forced tens of thousands of minority peoples to flee their villages. They slogged through precarious tangles of overgrown jungle, to cross the bloodstained, Thai guarded border. With great anxiety, throngs of newcomers arrived in 'the land of freedom.' Thailand became, for many, a place of asylum and opportunity, and for the Akha people, a rugged group of hunters and once-famed warriors, it became a place to proliferate their heritage unfettered from the oppression of their homelands.

The Akha people were known for being hard line animists, believers in a



Akha ladies in traditional dress



(R to L) Aphi, Jaime Garcia, Nawntipawn, daughter and granddaughter

spiritual world that suffused itself in the land, the trees, the animals, and the forest. Aphi was born into this environment. He understood from a young age that these "evil and good spirits", were lurking behind rocks, in bamboo shoots, and hidden within certain animals. As subsistence farmers, the Akha believed that virtually everything that touched their lives was at the mercy of the spirits, even life itself! Life for them was consumed with satiating the spirits through annual rituals, ornate

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ceremonies, building edifices in a certain fashion, consulting the diviners, saying certain incantations, as well as the daily offering up of oblations. **They lived close to nature, and utterly simply. Yet, they also lived in agonizing fear of the spiritual realm and its inescapable power.**

In this oppressive atmosphere, a fellowship of Christians began meeting nearby. These brave believers were committed to only "One God." They followed Christ, called on the Father, and trusted in the Almighty Spirit. Word of their gatherings, and their unique beliefs, spread rapidly through the community. Small children, normally left to wander the village or play together, were warmly welcomed to the gatherings. During the lessons, the person and work of Jesus were gently shared. Even as young as he was, **Aphi began gaining a deep sense of trust for this Heavenly Man, and by the age of 7, he had come to a sincere and personal faith in Christ!**

Within the confines of his old-world village, years passed by like clouds in the sky. Now in his teens, Aphi met and married a local girl. They united their lives together, and split away from their parents, to work and to foster their own family. Those first years, as they recount, were seared by tumult and trial. The only work Aphi could find was, labor-intensive and his wage was exploitive. **"My pay was so low, our family felt like we were not going to survive at all."** He declared.

As their family trudged through the murky depths of poverty, he prayed to his Heavenly Father. **"I asked God to help my family,"** he shared. Thereafter, the atmosphere subtly changed. The royal family of Thailand, known for their benevolence, set their sights on the poverty-stricken tribes of the North. Desiring to better the lives of the tribals, who depended on growing crops for the drug trade, a plan was laid to replace these crops with a profitable alternative. With sincere generosity, Queen Sirikit officiated over the royal project. Its goal was to exterminate the production of opium, and to create self-sufficient families and villages. With these convictions, they commissioned a road crew to carve a large road over a harrowing mountain pass in the 'Mae Fa Luang' mountain range. A new village was fashioned in these high, cloud-covered mountains.

Aphi's family was one of the few chosen for this royal project. They were overjoyed! They were eventually relocated to a fertile plot of land high in the mountains. The soil was raw, and aching to be cultivated. They were provided with a modest dwelling place, starter

seeds, various agricultural tools, access to community solar cells, and a small elementary school. Eagerly, they began to sprout coffee beans provided to them by the government. They were to produce organic, pesticide-free, top-grade coffee. Meanwhile, the beautiful cloaks of dignity, purpose, and self-sustainability were wrapped warmly around their lives. God was answering their prayers.

At the start of the project, the family worked hard to clear the plot and plant their coffee. In total, they planted five-thousand plants on their hilly plot.



Even though they experimented with different techniques, their coffee yield was minimal, and they yearned to see more for their efforts. **At this point, the couple were introduced to members of the FARMS loan committee.** They found them to be very understanding and helpful. They applied for a revolving loan, and received \$300. With this, they sped off to purchase organic fertilizer. Their yield greatly increased, and the loan was paid off in rapid fashion. Subsequently, they received several larger loans, and used the funds for the same purpose. **"It was amazing to watch,"** he divulged. **"We had so little fruit at the beginning, yet, now, we were getting more than twice the coffee we got before!"** Aphi, joyfully continued, saying, **"We just got a medium size roasting machine. In the future, we dream of starting our own coffee shop, and eventually, we want to create our own brand!"**

As we finished our conversation they remarked, **"Our health is very important for our work. Pray for this and pray for our village. We want to see the whole community become Christians. Out of the eleven families here, only four of them have faith."** On the creaky, shifting floor of their bamboo and grass hut, we all cried out to God together. Many eyes were filled with gentle tears of joy. *Jaime Garcia*



Mike Phillips (missionary), Jaime and the FARMS committee pray for Aphi's family and the village

Aja (Pawnanath Prisawnsakun) an Akha living in Chiang Rai Province

Within the congested city-center of Chiang Rai, Thailand, resided a young boy named Aja. Throughout his meaningless childhood, he worked as a service station boy. Many like him, were well acquainted with the oppression and dangers of being a pump boy. Corporate gas stations usurped hundreds of young, uneducated boys to become pump helpers. **Aja's bare necessities were barely met by the measly wage.** A decade later, he found himself still slaving at the station. His desolate future began to etch painfully into his soul. **The vanity of the whole affair created an acute sensation of meaninglessness. He despaired, and longed for something, anything at all, other than endlessly rushing petrol into drivers' vehicles.** His heart was sick, yet his mind was brimming with dreams.



Around this time, Aja found a wife and they were blessed with two children. He felt as if he could only persist a little longer at the petrol station. Something had to change. **During this time, God heard his cries, and showed compassion on this young family. Out of the thousands of Akha in Thailand, Aja's family was one of the few selected by the Mae Faa Luang Royal Venture.** He gladly left his gas pump and relocated to the new coffee farming village, high in the mountains. His children were granted their public education at the newly built school. In addition, the government made many provisions for him to become self-sufficient, mainly through producing high demand organic coffee. The government encouraged them to become fully 'paw

piang,' or self-sufficient. Never the less, there was a problem.

Within several years of planting their five-thousand coffee plants, they were struck by a great predicament! The yield of their plants was minuscule, barely enough for them to eke out an existence. They needed something, some "Nitro", so to speak, to ignite greater growth and a higher quantity of beans. **About this time,**



Aja, his daughter, wife and mother outside their home they hope to replace

they heard of the ministry of FARMS and sought their help. With their newly approved loan, they set out to buy a large supply of fertilizer. These added nutrients enabled their coffee plants to reach their full potential.

Now, he sells his bountiful crop to a government cooperative that contracts to buy all their organic coffee beans at a relatively stable and good price. The Lord continues to bless their harvests, and they are now saving up to build a modest new home on their property.

Jaime Garcia

Jereun Suk and wife, Surimath Yangyue have two children and are members of the Black Hmong Tribe.

Jereun was a small-statured man, with a big smile, and all blackened teeth (a custom of the Hmong). Prior to receiving a FARMS revolving loan, he lived in a small grass hut. He did not possess any transportation, and was at the mercy of whatever storm engulfed him. **In this dire time, he regretfully took out a loan from a secular institution. He was quickly overwhelmed by the exorbitant interest rate; roughly 130% of the original amount he owed.** During the backbreaking season that ensued, he was placed into the vice grip of depression. He struggled to survive and feed his wife and children, while at the same time paying back the loan and the interest. Not only was the financial yoke bearing down upon his shoulders, but also the cruel fact of his land being signed over to the loan company for collateral was leaving its mark.





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If he failed to make payment, his property would be seized, and his family would potentially starve. These harsh burdens lasted for the next several years.

After paying off the loan completely, Jereun experienced some relief. He was in a season where he desired simply to live, support his family, and create a humble, sustainable income.

Over the course of the next year, he was introduced to several representatives of FARMS. He heard of the simple, yet profound philosophy of this ministry that supported and empowered local Christian farmers. **There was no interest charged on loans, the program was Christian led and administered, grace was actively practiced, the leaders worked with the locals to create a plan that worked for them, and a tithe of whatever profits they made would be contributed directly to their local, Hmong church.**

With FARMS' help he prospered, and in the course of five years, Jereun was able to purchase 8 acres of rice paddy, and 8 acres of corn field. He also purchased 2 motorcycles, finished renovating their home, and was now able to pay the minimal fees for his children to attend government schools! **"Most importantly,"** he shared, **"I actually had time to spend reading the Word of God. Having no debt, and not constantly worrying about the bare necessities of life freed me to pursue the Lord, and the Bible, and fellowship within my church. I am so grateful for this."** *Jaime Garcia*



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