

Life in Thailand



Steve Thompson

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After arriving in Thailand in February 1991, Sister Joan Evans spent eight months in language training and, at the beginning of 1992, began to walk the slum areas of Bangkok.

Sister Joan is a religious Sister from the Western Australian Congregation of Presentation Sisters. Prior to her retirement at the end of 1990, Sister Joan was a Secondary School teacher.

Since 1992, she has worked in the slum area of Klong Toei, Bangkok. Through the establishment of specific projects, she is a constant source of support for many families in this area.

Living examples

I missed my first appointment with Sister Joan due to the fact that the good lady was busy doing what she does best – selflessly putting others in need ahead of herself.

Sister Joan had been monitoring the health of a woman who had been very sick and had to attend hospital during the previous day. The woman was not feeling so great on the morning of our scheduled appointment, so Sister Joan had automatically done the right thing – accompanied this person in need back to the hospital, but not before leaving a note for me (thank you Sister).

During our rescheduled appointment, I got to see close up the kind of experiences the good Sister must encounter on a daily basis.

A woman living within the community knocked on Sister Joan's door at her simple residence located where she is most needed – deep in the heart of the slums.

This was an experience I would like to share since in many ways it demonstrates the 'other side' of the Sister's daily encounters.

While the woman seeking some money for transport was clearly in need, the Sister had to follow procedure and refer her to another location. The fact that the Sister was aware that the woman was still involved with Ya Ba – the speed pills that have been a scourge on Thai society – the Sister was, on this occasion, unable to help.

If you take a look for yourself at the situation in the slums, it quickly becomes clear that in some cases, “you have to be cruel to be kind”. Is it fair to make exceptions? I don’t think so.

A source of nutrition

One of Sister Joan’s best-known projects is the so-called ‘Milk Run’. I have chosen to have a quick look at this project since some friends from the Bangkok Veterans League (a football [soccer] league for veteran players) chose to donate money from a special tournament to Sister Joan, as well as turning out to help with a Milk Run.

The Milk Run has become a form of ‘life support’ for many families and operates fortnightly. It began in 1992 when Sister Joan was made aware that women living in the slum with their babies were often in need of milk. Sister Joan would often personally walk to their homes to bring them supplies, so she eventually decided to establish a sustainable project in a bid to ensure supplies over the longer-term.

A typical Sister Joan Milk Run now serves up to 200 babies with milk at a cost in excess of 30,000 baht (US\$831). On average, it costs about 580 baht (\$16) per fortnight to feed a baby, or just 1,161 baht per month to supply them with all their nutritional needs. Much of the funding for this comes from Australians from Sister Joan's congregation in Western Australia, but all are welcome to donate supplies.

Sister is aware that this writer has made a pledge to join an upcoming Milk Run, so anyone interested in joining me, feel free to drop me an email (sf_thompson@hotmail.com).

This is far from being Sister Joan’s only project, so visit her active and informative website at <http://www.sisterjoan.info> to learn more about the wonderful work of this ‘Sister of Mercy’.

Supplying the Milk Run: If you’re interested in providing supplies for Sister Joan’s Milk Run, please note that the following supplies are always welcome:

Dumex 1 (0-6 months)
Dumex 2 (6-12 months)
Lactogen 1 (0-6 months)
Lactogen 2 (6-12 months)
Bear 2 (6-12 months), and
Carnation (full cream)

<http://www.thaiasiatoday.com/life-in-thailand/community/milk-run-a-nutritional-lifeline-for-many-slum-residents.html>