



CHRISTMAS 2020

Dear godmothers, godfathers and friends of Le Sourire,

Looking back on the events of the year 2020 forces us to reconsider our way of life and to accept changes in our existence. The COVID-19 pandemic is having a considerable impact on the world's population. The 5 continents are facing serious and dramatic health, economic and social problems. And this same situation has led everywhere to human solidarity and has awakened admirable initiatives to help the most fragile, the poorest and the most destitute.

In Thailand, millions of children are raised by their grandparents because they have been abandoned by their parents who have left to work in the big cities. Some 30% of minors in the most populated region of the country grow up far from their parents. This phenomenon of internal migrants, which is considered normal, is now being suffered by a huge number of children.

In the former Thailand, the elderly held a very important place and were perfectly respected. The family, as an important nucleus, had to take care of them. Walking through the villages, one can still see typical houses with large spaces and many rooms, capable of housing a large family of all generations. The eldest son had his place there, he was the wise figure of the house and was taken care of until the end of his life. It was at the same time a thank you, a recognition for all that he did for his children. This more or less harmonious and economically advantageous cultural cohabitation of the generations proved its worth.

Now things are changing. The modern and technological world is attracting young people to the cities and senior citizens are less and less considered. The number of neglected older people is increasing year by year and many of them live in a very precarious situation. And the grandchildren are still left to them! Not really out of respect, but out of comfort! Tired and physically reduced to a harsh existence, often poorly educated, grandparents are totally overwhelmed by this new generation. This context often leads to an unhealthy feeling of superiority on the part of the children and provokes growing domestic violence. A social challenge for the government, as there are very few retirement homes to date. Moreover, placing an elderly person in such a place is frowned upon by most citizens.

Our young people often have the opportunity to be with older people because many of their classmates live with their grandparents who accompany them to school. An outpouring of good feelings has led them to the realisation of an action in favour of the elderly.

During the period when the pandemic was taking its toll, young people at home had to study online. In their free time, they organized activities in the forest. This was during the rainy



LE SOURIRE DE CHIANG KHONG

season and the mushroom harvest was abundant. In order to keep them for consumption, they washed, cut, steamed and stored them in freezers. Other teams went in search of bamboo shoots and found them.

prepared to be eaten later. Another group turned into fishermen to catch as many fish as possible. After cleaning, gutting, preparing and mixing them with salt, they put them in large jars. These jars are then left in the sun so that the fish can ferment for several months to keep them as long as possible. Other fish were simply salted and dried in the sun. There was even a team that was in charge of catching frogs which they also prepared before freezing them. As a result, we had a full range of food straight from the wild, deposited in our freezers.

Thai gastronomy is known and highly appreciated all over the world. In the Thai countryside, however, it is quite different! People eat very simply finding the ingredients in nature. People living close to water points use mainly aquatic fauna as culinary ingredients. Herbs and plants have a special place in their cooking. Older people and villagers are used to eating very simply, a fish out of these famous jars or a dried fish with a bit of sticky rice is enough to see several meals. The younger generation, however, is starting to eat in a more modern way.

Our young people agreed to give one of the few retirement homes in the north-east of the country, the poorest region, the benefit of the food they had prepared with all their love. All these good things were carefully put in bags to be transported. On the big day, five agents of the home, designated by the young people, left to meet the residents of the house. They even had the privilege of cooking some of the mushrooms together with a few elders and to participate in a good meal together. Back at the home, this happy, warm and convivial moment was shared with the other comrades. They realized that their modest intentions towards these fragile people filled them with joy and peace, enriched them and encouraged them to continue in this way. They experienced "that one is never happy except in the happiness one gives. To give is to receive" (Abbé Pierre) and realise all the more the value of the gift you give them through your faithful and generous support.

Filled with a feeling of gratitude, we can tell you that to date all our young people, as well as our staff members, have been spared any health problems. We sincerely hope to be able to continue our activities and to expand our mutual aid activities even further.

We express to you, dear godparents, dear sponsors, dear donors, dear friends of Le Sourire, our most sincere gratitude and wish you with all our heart a beautiful and peaceful Christmas and a year 2021 filled with joy and health.

See you soon

