



LE SOURIRE DE CHIANG KHONG

NEWSLETTER 2014

EDITORIAL COLUMN

SCHOOL OF LIFE



Coming from different cultures and at the same time open-minded, Barbara and Prapapone have come together in perfect agreement to realize their SCHOOL OF LIFE.

SCHOOL OF LIFE: these three words reveal the entire meaning of the pedagogy that we put into practice for and with our children.

Each child has the right to an education. It awakens and develops natural gifts, and builds on the values which are passed on from generation to generation. But for that to happen, one's surroundings are of the utmost importance and are a determining factor.

The children of the Sourire de Chiang Khong come for the most part from places which have been lost and forgotten, from ancient societies where the law of the jungle prevails, from families decimated by drug trading. These children are projected suddenly and unceremoniously into modernity via the Internet; they lack discernment and are courting disaster.

Without education or valid information, they only dream of becoming materially rich as soon as possible: having a TV and phone and driving their own car means success, no matter how it is reached. The result is often a certain arrogance, which lasts as long as it takes to obtain these material goods. The last stop on the line is frequently called "prison".

We are committed to providing schooling for the children, but not only classroom education. We are trying with all our energy to keep them from an illu-

sory existence, and to make them aware of the realities that are sometimes difficult in life, and also to make them attentive to beauty, self-esteem and human values, which are moral, intellectual and spiritual.

Before the young people can be seduced by the temptation to get involved in trafficking and the consumption of drugs and prostitution, we regularly organize meetings in order to prevent these young people from experiencing the dramatic consequences that these illegal activities can have.

We foster a work ethic in the children, both at school and at home, and we encourage them to discover the satisfaction that comes from the results.

Our path is strewn with indications that confirm that we have gone in the right direction. We delight in the success of a community life of more than one hundred and fifty children, ages four to twenty, from different ethnic groups, most originating from rural areas who live in a joyful environment where the natural hierarchy extends from big to small and the strong protect the weak; each person assumes a task.

For a few years, the home has been able to enrich the land and animals. The children take great care of the animals, show respect and also know how to meet the needs of the Center. By cultivating their rice, vegetables and fruit they are involved in all steps from planting to eating the fruits of their labor.

And if the land that surrounds the buildings of the Center is more and more like a natural park, it is because the children are equipped with an innate knowledge of nature, which allows them to miraculously transform the forest. In general, wherever they come from, they possess a lot of common sense and manage surprisingly well in situations that are not always easy.

Building our SCHOOL OF LIFE using the natural talents of children enriches us in an unprecedented manner. Encouraged by all those who support us in Switzerland and elsewhere, we will continue each year to provide an active life for responsible young women and men whom we will attract like magnets.

Barbara Gautschi et Prapapone Khotsanlee

The story of Pi Aie

"My name is Sutheethida Saeya, I am called Pi Aie. I am 20 years old.

I come from the ethnic Hmong group; I was born in a remote and impoverished village in the hills of northern Thailand. My father has two wives who have given him fifteen children. To my mother three of these children were born, of which I am the youngest.

My sister and my brother have followed the compulsory schooling in the village without going any further. The two are married with children and live a very simple life.

As for me, I was 10 years old and was attending the 2nd year primary when Barbara and Prapapone visited our village. I had the great opportunity to join the Center of the Sourire and go to school, completing secondary school. I am very happy in my new family, this has encouraged me to make something of myself.



Thanks to the support of the Sourire, I will be able to continue my studies in letters at the University of Chiang Mai starting next August. I have a preference for languages and I would like to become a travel guide or perhaps a translator.

I am infinitely grateful to Barbara and to Prapapone, as well as to any person who supports the Sourire de Chiang Khong for this gift of life that I have received through this association. A special thanks also goes to the Godfather and Godmother who have encouraged me to persevere and succeed."

Pi Aie

A drop in the ocean

Barbara explains:

"One Saturday morning, a missionary priest of the Mission of Phan, not far from the Center, contacted us. He sought to find a place for a boy of four, whose mother had AIDS and tuberculosis, and was dying.

The next day, Sunday, we went to see this family and found a house in ruins, in front of which was lying prostrate an Akha woman and her three children, all

with empty eyes, totally abandoned to their fate! They were aware of our coming and were waiting for us. Our decision was immediate: no question of separating siblings, we would welcome all three children!

As we were settling the final details for the reception of children with the help of the woman's sister, we learnt that three years ago they had fled Burma and that their father, also stricken by AIDS, had returned to die there.



In a wrenching situation, the mother was sad, yet relieved to entrust her children to us, knowing they would be in a secure and warm place.

The children from the Center who had accompanied us welcomed their new brothers and sister into the waiting truck along with their meager luggage - a small plastic bag with a few worn out t-shirts. The same evening, the young Burmese discovered their new home. These are situations that we live regularly and we know that a child needs a minimum of adaptation time. Time and love do the rest! »

The Khamu



Along the Mekong, Laos side, there are very simple villages where the Khamu live, an ethnicity whose people are descendants of Hmong. Often hidden behind thick vegetation, their houses are made of bamboo and covered with thatch and are made up of one room around a fire. In front of the huts, throngs of children, often naked, play in the dust with the wood, stone and leaves.

The Khamu live on rice, maize, vegetables and fruit. Skillful hunters, they consume snakes, lizards, rats, and dogs, cats and all sorts of insects. Schools are often far

away and school education is most rudimentary. The population does not receive any medical assistance, but the Khamu inherit from their ancestors plant knowledge, which can cure and heal. Money is lacking, everything is traded among villagers. On occasion, we negotiated with merchants who were sailing on the great river.

According to the animist religion, a man has the right to two women. A boy is preferred to a daughter, because he remains in the family to later take care of older parents.

The daughter is married at the age of 13 or 14 for a bottle of rice alcohol or a chicken! If she does not give birth to a boy, she is often rejected and can no longer return to her family of origin.

Surprisingly enough parents are always able to install a TV somewhere; they prefer, however, hiding it from the young people, out of fear of losing them.



Will they be able to do this much longer? The only valid solution is education, and more education; but how, where and when?

Touching solidarity



At the end of last year, a benefactor offered blankets to all schoolchildren from Ban Chiang Kian.

Since our young boarders at the Center have all they need, Barbara and Prapapone proposed to them that they share the gift with the Laotian children living in misery. However, the gesture would come from their heart and would in no case be an obligation.

The first two stand up and place their blankets in the middle of the room. Others follow and in a short time, the eighty-four blankets received form one pile ready to be routed further!

The joy of sharing is noticeable.

A few days later, accompanied by Barbara and Prapapone, a team of Laotians deliver the blankets to children who do not believe their eyes. The surprise of Christmas, tender glances from child-to-child!

SONGKRAN

Thai New Year 2556/2557



It is the hottest month of the year, from 13 to 15 April; throughout the country the Thai celebrate the New Year according to the Buddhist calendar. Government offices and banks, as well as all the shops, remain closed.

Songkran is primarily a religious holiday of thanksgiving. People come from far away, sometimes very far away, to visit the temple and venerate Buddha and wash many statues of him in holy water.

In keeping with tradition, houses are thoroughly cleaned and families join together to celebrate the feast. Respect for elders is still deeply rooted: young people pour perfumed water into their elders' hands as a sign of humility and to ask for their blessing. It is also a gesture of purification that chases away all of the past year's misfortunes.

Celebrations continue in the streets where young and old engage joyfully in water fights, forgetting their worries for a few days.

It is this time of the year that the village of Ban Rai chose to invite the Sourire de Chiang Khong to a friendly meeting. Barbara and Prapapone went there with a dozen children from the Center. All of the students from Ban Rai, who are sponsored by the Sourire, came to confirm their commitment to the Center and share a delicious meal prepared by the parents, which was served under a tent especially put up for the occasion.

A ceremony of thanksgiving followed, during which the persons present passed before the guests, wishing them happiness and blessings. The well-known "white twine" bracelet was tied onto the guests' wrists, to remain there for three days! Then came the hand-washing ritual described above. This was a moment of sincere emotion and profound mutual respect - a soothing and beneficial balm in a world which is experiencing violence and injustice.

The school in Ban Rai

When passing through a village, the visitor cannot miss the impressive building that constitutes the government school with its sports field and flags. Each morning, the flag is hoisted while the national anthem is sung by the students.



Let's visit the primary school in Ban Rai, some 25 kms from Chiang Khong:

The establishment receives approximately one hundred and fifty children, of whom 90 per cent come from the Hmong group. At its head for several years, the director is an efficient man who puts projects in place that are related to the safeguarding of the environment: an organic vegetable garden and orchard to provide the food for the school kitchen and a system of sorting out waste; profits from the sale of these recycled products are reinvested in school equipment.



Through the financial assistance of the Sourire, the school has been able to launch mushroom cultures inside three huts built for this purpose.

Further on, a large panel recalls that the school library was funded by the Sourire. In order to encourage the reception of a greater number of children, our association pays the salary of one of the two kindergarten teachers. Each project is followed very closely to make sure that it is useful and that the investment is being respected.

The more pupils a school has, the better it is considered to be. During a certain period, the Department of Education invested massively in schools, with the intention of improving the educational system of the country. However, a large number of establishments are now threatened with closure, because only those that have a sufficient number of students survive. Therefore, within this context, the surrounding schools welcome "our children" and the Sourire thus brings benefit to the entire region.



The Sourire de Chiang Khong likes to remind us that twelve young people from the village of Ban Rai are currently studying at universities in Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai. They provide constant inspiration for the younger children.

In total, 65 children of the village have been or are currently supported by the Sourire.

The youngest of the Sourire



On strong recommendation from the Queen Mother, the Government is striving to develop aid to the most impoverished populations. A delegation visits cities and rural

areas to spot those in most urgent need and to find humane solutions worthy of human existence.

It was thus last February that the Sourire was contacted by the department of "Social Welfare" of Chiang Rai so that it could give us a little boy of four who had been abandoned. Little Supachai had never known his parents and had been placed in a poor village in the care of an elderly woman who was too weak to take care of him.

How could we refuse this innocent and defenseless child? Supachai was quickly integrated into the Cen-

ter. At first we found him a nearby nursery school. Then in mid-May he entered the first year of kindergarten.

He adopted wholeheartedly Siri as "his" private governess, an eleven year-old girl, who looks after him like a mother, day and night. Siri is Anouwat's sister.

Anouwat is currently working in the computer field in Bangkok; he returns "home" regularly to share his knowledge in accounting, thus making sure that there will be people to carry on.

Good news: Suphachai has already found a sponsor.

1st August in Bangkok

For our country's national holiday, it is a tradition that the Swiss Embassy invites expatriates and representatives from other countries to an informal reception. In a colourful, festive atmosphere a giant raffle takes place in favour of a humanitarian organization.

In 2013 the Sourire de Chiang Khong is the fortunate beneficiary.



But on this day, Barbara and Prapapone are in Switzerland. The Swiss Ambassador, Christine Schraner-Burgener, decides to wait for them to come back in order to make a visit to the Center and personally deliver the donation. She invites members of the Thai government and also the Ambassadors of Argentina and Norway to accompany her. On their side, Barbara and Prapapone invite several local dignitaries.

It was a wonderful day of encounters and exchanges! The children gave the visitors a joyous welcome and had fun performing their traditional dances for them.

The Center expresses its gratitude and says khop khun kha (thank you) to the Swiss Embassy and to everyone who contributed to the event!



Massages at Festi'Neuch !

Every year at Festi-neuch, a team of volunteers gives seated massages in favour of the Sourire de Chiang Khong. Katia Billard, a certified practitioner, is their coordinator. Here's her story :

« I learned about Le Sourire de Chiang Khong when I took a training course in seated massage in Switzerland. I fell in love with this Association and visited the Center in Thailand. I decided to support it and have had a seated massage stand at Festi'Neuch since 2005. The masseurs are usually volunteer students who donate their time and perfect their massage techniques. In exchange they can attend a few concerts.

This open air festival takes place by the lake in Neuchatel for 4 days in June. All kinds of music blend there, including Grand Corps Malade, Marilyn Manson, Alpha Blondy, Raphael, Stephan Eicher, Carrousel, or...Massive Attack, Cypress Hill slightly more hairy !

These precious volunteers are present in all sorts of weather. During these past 8 festivals, we've lived through fierce, cold winds, storms, endless rain, soggy ground, but also gorgeous sunny days and balmy evenings when the lake invites us to dip in our toes.

At the start, business was slow. The first adolescents who came for a massage were embarrassed, their friends looked on, laughing. But some of them have continued coming, year after year... and now their friends come with them! All kinds of people like getting massaged. In spite of the crowds, noise and music, they come out smiling and happy with the pleasant time they've just had, in exchange for a donation for Le Sourire. But words cannot describe the joy in the eyes of children or people with disabilities who come back for more. We experience touching moments of exchange; this gives us the energy to continue again this year."

Katia Billard, Neuchâtel

Picnic of the Sourire

Mark down the date

The traditional picnic for all friends of Le Sourire will take place on Saturday 13 September 2014 at the Mas de la Borgne in Bramois-Sion. Sign up at comite@lesourire.ch

My sewing adventure



"We've been members of Le Sourire for 10 years. From year to year we have admired the improvements, extensions and especially the unrelenting enthusiasm of the children, Barbara and Prapapone.

During a brief visit to the Center I discovered the embroideries the children were making during their free time. Since these beautiful strips of embroidery are no longer used for their traditional costumes, I proposed to take them and create various small bags and glasses cases with them. These articles were an immediate success.



The month of May is an intense period at the Sourire. The Center welcomes its new residents and mends the children's school uniforms. Huge work, for each uniform is

carefully checked and tried on by the child, mended if needed and embroidered with the name and form corresponding to the school (s)he will be attending.

Barbara and the older girls sort out, inventory, recuperate and embroider all day long, while Prapapone and the other children harvest and dry rice, work in the corn fields, take care of all the animals. Not to mention running errands in town, explaining life at the Centre to the new children and giving them remedial lessons if needed.

Last year I naturally offered to put my sewing skills at their disposal. I set up my sewing machine and rolls of material in the guest room and spent the first week making fifty fitted sheets for the new children's mattresses. The next week I moved my equipment to the big building in order to mend clothing and change dozens of zippers. I finished just in time and had the pleasure of seeing each class parade in front of our Directors, receive their advice and instructions before proudly going off with a package in their arms.

This experience was rewarding, an opportunity to bring a little help, but especially to admire how this little world functions. Thanks to Barbara and

Prapapone's explanations, I was able to better understand the traditions of this country with so many different ethnic groups.

I also had the occasion to communicate in English with the older and less shy children. I loved watching the children blossom, in spite of their often difficult situations; they're courageous, always respectful and just as spontaneous as all the children in the world. I was sad when I had to leave this haven of peace.

But it's decided! I'm going back, because once you've tasted it, you can't do without it!

Moreover, next time I'm taking my husband Jean-Marc with me."

Mireille Juillard

Christmas fund-raising event

The Espace interculturel in Siere organised a fund-raising event at Christmas under the auspices of the local Parishes: a magnificent Christmas tree decorated with sweets, in benefit of the schooling of children of Le Sourire de Chiang Khong and of Couleurs de Chine. The public was warmhearted and generous!

The schoolchildren of Martigny go into action



There are 1387 children, aged 4 to 12, who attend the primary schools of Martigny. These youngsters come from many different countries and speak various languages; some have disabilities. Although the school's priority is to enable the children to succeed in the academic program, the teachers and school principal have also decided to create a Charter, which places emphasis on living together in harmony. The school takes into account this variety of cultures and religions. It encourages openness to others and integration into society by respecting each pupil's identity, language and cultural values. Mutual respect among the children is a high priority. The teachers and



pupils work daily to respect the environment and to develop solidarity, cooperation and tolerance. Such are their values!

In keeping with these values, every year they support a good cause which means a lot to them: helping children here, or elsewhere, who do not have the opportunity to attend school or to live in

healthy conditions. During 2013-2014, they chose to help « Le Sourire de Chiang Khong», to enable children in northern Thailand to attend school.

Each class is free to organize an event or to raise funds for this cause. Ideas burst forth and the children enthusiastically commit themselves with their teachers' help: cake sales during recess, writing of brochures in connection with the theme (stories, letters to the editor), creation of small objects (key chains, bookmarks...), secondhand market of books and toys, concerts.



Let's listen to the children themselves. All of their texts will be on our website soon: www.lesourire.ch

- ◆ Hello. I go to school in Martigny. I'm ten and my name is Lucas. I'm very happy to have been able to help someone my age on the other side of the world.
- ◆ Hello. I'm Fabien and I'm ten. I was very happy to help children like myself who aren't able to go to school.
- ◆ Hello, my name's Axel, I'm ten. I go to school and live in Martigny. My class and I decided to give schooling to children from Le Sourire de Chiang Khong. Here's our story: First of all, we coloured the first pages of a small notebook entitled, "Letters to the Editor". Then we went around selling these little notebooks. Finally, we organized a cake sale. It was very successful. I'm honored to be helping a humanitarian organization that helps children.
- ◆ Hello. Let me introduce myself. My first name's Shagana, I'm ten. I'm in the sixth form. I'm dark. I'm from a country very close to Thailand, Sri Lanka. We were delighted to organize this event for you; I'd like to do it again another year. I hope you'll be able to go to school now, and buy your uniforms... Take advantage of it! Goodbye!

Children, lights of the world!



They are the ones who make us tired
They are the ones who give us worries
They are the ones who provoke us
They are the ones who annoy us
They are the ones who, sometimes, exasperate us
But they are the ones who always amaze us
Who make us flexible
Who make us laugh
Who teach us to love
Who make us grow and give meaning to our lives
And they are also the ones who say thank you to you!

Prapapone Barbara



*The reporter and movie director, **Claude Schauli**, a long-time friend of Le Sourire de Chiang Khong, created a "Temps Présent" program about our Association in 2001.*

In 2006 he made a second film for the French-speaking Radio and Television (RTS) to illustrate the sustainability of the action undertaken by Barbara and Prapapone.

During a recent trip to Thailand, Claude was impressed by the participation of the children in the daily work of the Center.

How to help the children of Le Sourire

Long term

A sponsorship costs 50 CHF or 40 Euros a month.

It enables us to admit a child into the Center, to provide for her/his food, lodging, schooling, health care and leisure time activities.

Whenever the family and school context is appropriate, it is possible for a child to both benefit from a sponsorship and remain in her/his village.

An application form is available online. Or simply contact the Association.

Occasional

By a donation to a specific project

CCP 17-185665-4 Le Sourire de Chiang Khong
UBS AG 8098 Zurich - CH48 0027 9279 2021 9727 U Le
Sourire de Chiang Khong

An up-to-date list of the projects is available upon request.

Our heartfelt thanks to our printer Gessler SA in Sion for the realization of this publication.

The Board

Lisa de Beauregard, president, Geneva ; Babeth Schlegel, vice-president, Sion ; Roland Sprenger, vice-president, Sion ; Georges-Alain Zufferey, treasurer, Sion ; Nicole Fivaz, Blonay ; Anita Fumeaux, Sion ; Peter Gautschi, Arbaz ; Thekla Gautschi-Michel, Arbaz ; Nathalie Jacquier, Genthod ; Jean-Marc Juillard, Coppet ; Mireille Juillard, Coppet ; Willy Schlegel, Sion ; Anne Terry, Genève ;
as well as the co-founders Barbara Gautschi and Prapapone Khotsanlee, in Thailand.

"CHILDREN ARE SOCIETY'S MOST PRECIOUS TREASURE, OUR GREATEST HOPE FOR THE FUTURE."

JOHN F. KENNEDY

Case postale 6382 | CH 1211 Genève 6 | Tél +41 22 756 04 42 | comite@lesourire.ch | www.lesourire.ch