

200 children in the Smile House

That was and will always be the ambition of our self-help project. Is this too ambitious a goal? No, but we have to be in tune with reality and consider social changes. If at the beginning of our humanitarian programme we had some 20 protégés, we have accommodated up to 160 children in the home.

Covid came along and prevented us from making progress in this direction - instead we had to lower our ambitions. The virus blocked our access to ethnic villages to recruit new residents. In addition to the curfew, we were confined by region. This was unfortunate, but it allowed us to consolidate our organisation, strengthen our education system and explore the workings of our staff in more detail.

Currently, visiting the border areas with Burma or Laos is strongly discouraged. This situation has led us to support more schools, more remotely sponsored children and their families, and more people who have suffered a tragic fate. While waiting for better times, we are supporting more Thai families close to home - an increasingly impoverished, exhausted and desperate population. Due to lack of financial means, sending a child to school often remains a problem - the right to education, the root and foundation for building a decent future, is denied them.

Your altruism and loyalty, dear friends of Le Sourire, help them to hope, to rise up, to build themselves up - we pass on their gratitude.



Abbay our Benjamin



At the beginning of 2014, one Sunday morning, we were contacted by a local priest who was looking to place a boy, the youngest of a family of three children from Burma. Our first reaction was "the three or no one" because separating a sibling seemed cruel, especially as we learned that the parents were seriously ill with AIDS. In addition, the mother had tuberculosis. They had left their homeland because they were counting on the help of the mother's sister who lives in Thailand. However, she was not able to solve the problem on her own, living in precarious conditions.

For us the decision was quickly made - these three children were welcome at Le Sourire. A week later, with some of our young people, we arrived at the hut where the family was staying. The father was absent, the ailing mother huddled outside the front door with the toddler

in her arms, waiting for us with the other two children, Naphawane a little girl and their older brother Trailphop who was already 12 years old. A heartbreaking farewell and at the same time a look of gratitude and trust from the mother!

After a difficult start for the three at home, they soon found their place with their new "brothers/sisters". The two older children were quickly integrated into the school, while Abbay was entrusted for a few hours to a nursery. He lived with us as he was too small to stay in the dormitory with the older children.

Naphawane and Abby obviously had no problem adapting to their new life, but their older brother soon showed his disagreement with our politics and rules. At school and at home he tried to form clans with unsavoury ideas. Discussions were going nowhere, he was sure of himself. So we had to come to an agreement with his aunt who took him home and enrolled him in a school in her area.

Naphawane, a rather secretive and melancholic girl, is doing well at school and is very helpful and friendly at home. Abby, on the other hand, is more outgoing, likes to laugh and has a subtle intelligence. He follows us everywhere, wants to know everything and is liked by everyone. Yes, our Benjamin is promising - may he continue to do so and may the future open up to him.

2564 – 2021

According to the Buddhist calendar, Thailand entered the year 2564 last April. Songkran, the Thai New Year, is celebrated from 13 to 15 April, based on the lunar calendar. Also known as the Water Festival, which marks a new beginning, this commemoration comes at the hottest time of the year.

As tradition dictates, a large number of Thais travel to their home town/village to see their family and friends. Each time, a crossroads across the whole country! It is also a time to thoroughly clean the homes and decorate the houses with dignity.

The 12th of April, the day before the festival, and the 13th, are devoted



to religious ceremonies. Visits to the temples where statues/images of Buddha are sprinkled with holy water as well as the hands of the monks who bless the faithful in return. Water, the sign of purity, purifies and refines the mind, forgives and blesses. In some cities, sumptuous ancestral processions lead participants from temple to temple.

April 14 belongs to the family. Parents and elders are particularly honoured. With devotion and respect, the young people pour perfumed water (rose and



jasmine petals) on their hands and receive the parental blessing in return.

On the third day, the festival takes place in all the streets of the cities/villages throughout the country. If you want to avoid a shower, you have to spend the day indoors. Outside, no one escapes the splashing - water guns, hoses, buckets, basins of all kinds are used to squirt "the victims" accompanied by shouts and laughter! If for the Thai people Songkran remains a sacred event, with tourism however, the public manifestations have evolved enormously. The festival has become a pretext for water fights that are sometimes exaggerated and disproportionate, which unfortunately risk diminishing the initial meaning of the most important event of the year.

At the home it's a party and Barbara and Prapapone are delighted every year when several young people who spent their school years at Le Sourire come to ask for the blessing of "their mothers"

The Smile is illuminated by the Sun

In the early days of Ban Sarapi, we had to make do with a few lamps to light the first buildings, but our electrical network was gradually expanded with the various buildings scattered all over our land. However, the small roads and paths connecting the living and working areas



remained in darkness as soon as it got dark, so torches did the trick. So we called on the sun! Enthusiastically, our young people got organised and created a circuit of beautiful outdoor solar lights that turn our home

into a starry garden at night! As soon as the sun goes down, around 6pm, the lamps take over to illuminate paths, trails and sometimes a beautiful tree or plant bed. Nature takes over in every sense!



Solar aerators for oxygenating pond water



In order to oxygenate the water in fish ponds, we have acquired solar aerators for aquaculture. These devices oxygenate the water with solar mechanical aerators (the motor turns paddles). When the motor starts, the wheels turn and touch the surface of the water, it compresses the air in the water and thus increases the oxygen. The job of the turbines is to make enough water splash and a strong current. The waves and current thus created remove harmful substances and turn dirty water into clean water.

David and Goliath



About ten years ago, the postman at the home was chased by one of our dogs in a very aggressive manner. Deeply frightened, he refused to return and we were asked to collect the mail directly from the post office. Our reputation was made, many people still today, do not dare to enter our

property, well protected by our guards, the dogs. Not bad, because on several occasions we had to deal with ambiguous and unpleasant visits. Recently, however, a new, younger postman decided to take up the challenge. With a clever smile, he explained his tactics to us. He makes little paper pellets and hides them in his satchel, and with the help of a small homemade wooden slingshot, this "little David" manages to defeat "our Goliaths". He is very proud that his strategy works and that he can hand over the mail to us. Conclusion - fear can become friendship!



Leisure day





Recovery of uniforms



Depending on the school and the level of education, Thai children are obliged to have between 4 and 5 paying uniforms, a dramatic obstacle for the poorest of the population. At the end of each school year, we therefore take back all the uniforms from our youngsters in order to carry out a serious sorting! First step - a thorough washing! For a fortnight, the laundry team runs the machines from morning to night without interruption. Then, the uniforms in good condition are put aside to be redistributed to the right people at the beginning of the next school year. Those that have suffered too much will be used as cleaning rags. There is still a lot that needs repair - missing buttons, damaged zippers, loose or torn seams. In short, every year it's a lot of work!

For several years, "our" Mireille, a member of the committee in Switzerland, has been coming to stay for a few weeks to offer us her precious help in this area.



Each time she was assisted by two of our teenagers to pass on this know-how. These two talented apprentices have become our seamstresses - they have even become familiar with our sewing machines! Unfortunately, for two



years, the girls had to do without their Swiss mentor because of covid19. They "went it alone" and did an excellent job - well done girls! And a big thank you to Mireille!



History of Pii Lek



Le Sourire was born in Chiang Khong in 1997, where Prapapone and I volunteered at the Catholic Centre in Chiang Khong, a centre for AIDS patients. We were part of the staff that accompanied the patients in various activities such as weaving, sewing or the production of homeopathic medicines. A young patient from the Tai Lue tribe, Pii Lek, particularly impressed us with her exceptional weaving skills. Her work began in her head - the ornament, the colours and the exact amount of thread to be sewn for a carpet that took at least a month to complete and all in a rudimentary setting. Married at a young age, her husband was diagnosed with AIDS at a medical check-up. He died a year later leaving her with only one legacy - AIDS! Shortly afterwards, Pii Lek remarried to a boy who also had AIDS. Despite a severe warning about having offspring, she gave birth to a baby boy. A wonderful gift, the newborn showed no signs of HIV. Shortly afterwards, Pii Lek lost her second husband and now she is a young widow with a child!

When we started our sponsorship programme, we counted Waranyou, Pii Lek's son, among our

godchildren. He spent the primary school years at Le Sourire. When he reached secondary school, following a wish of his mother Pii Lek, he continued his education in a temple. Now he is in his fourth year at a university in Chiang Mai.

Pii Lek started her own business and trained other women to make a living from her beautiful profession. Even her own mother joined in! Her reputation has spread beyond her region and her talent is recognised



throughout the country. It is amazing to see the example of this sick woman who has been struggling with her suffering for many years, sharing her courage with her son and her mother. Of all the women we knew in Chiang Khong, only two are still alive, including Pii Lek.

Pii Nouk - Ninatcha takes care of the Smile's accounting



After several years in Le Sourire, Ninatcha successfully completed her studies at a professional college in the field of accounting. Attracted to Bangkok, she has been working there for three years in a large company, in charge of various administrative tasks, as well as accounting. For the past two years, at the beginning of the year, she has spent a week at the home to do the Foundation's annual accounting. Ninatcha's generosity of heart touches us deeply, knowing that in Thailand the right to holidays is almost non-existent. Ninatcha only has the right to short government holidays and very few of them. A beautiful return from a grateful girl!

Covid19 - children's quarantine and online studies

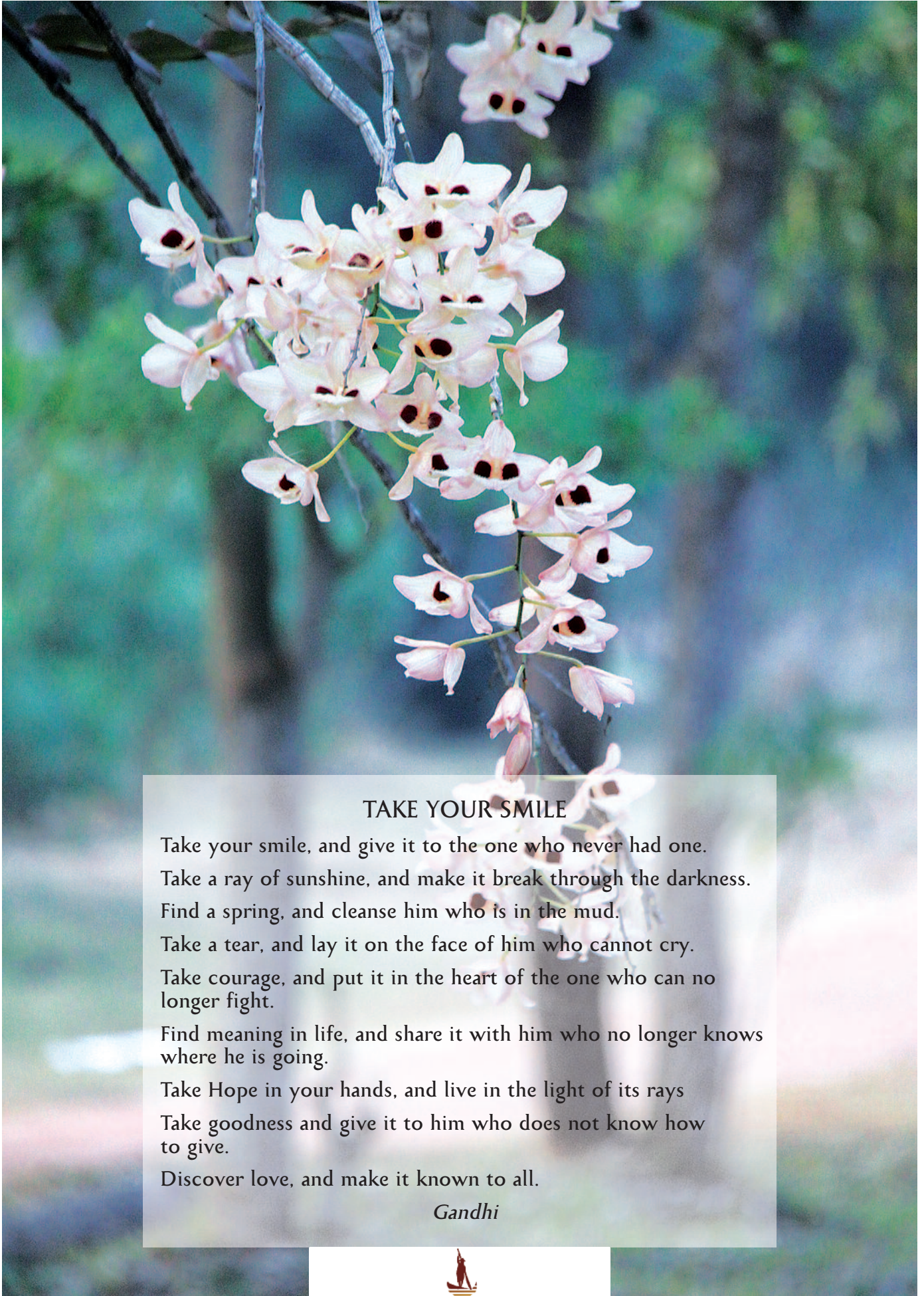
The first cases of the Covid 19 pandemic were detected in February/March 2020, during the school holidays in Thailand. Very quickly, the government took protective measures and dictated very strict rules of behaviour.



When the young people returned from the villages for the start of the school year, we had to quarantine them for 14 days. In a fictitious camp, surrounded by some of the staff, educational activities were organised. A dormitory was set aside just for them. However, not all the children came back at the same time, so our confinement period went well beyond the 14 days! A rather intense period, as the children who had stayed at the home during the holidays also had to be looked after - and in a different place.

Secondly, the government had decided to postpone the start of the school year from mid-May to 1 July with online studies in demand. With children in primary 1-6, teenagers in secondary 1-6, young people in vocational colleges and finally students in universities - a real headache! Despite our small computer room, making it possible for everyone to work properly required an enormous amount of organisation. Computers everywhere, wifi installation, chairs and tables in every corner, in short we were challenged and we overcame it!





TAKE YOUR SMILE

Take your smile, and give it to the one who never had one.

Take a ray of sunshine, and make it break through the darkness.

Find a spring, and cleanse him who is in the mud.

Take a tear, and lay it on the face of him who cannot cry.

Take courage, and put it in the heart of the one who can no longer fight.

Find meaning in life, and share it with him who no longer knows where he is going.

Take Hope in your hands, and live in the light of its rays

Take goodness and give it to him who does not know how to give.

Discover love, and make it known to all.

Gandhi