



Message from Fr Shea

Back in 1984, I was transferred to Viengkuk. The Sisters of the Lovers of the Holy Cross, who ran the parish school, informed me that they were leaving. They would only be teaching in their own schools. After a year, they pulled out of Rosario Catholic school in Viengkuk. The school was shabby, undermanned, and in some cases, teachers were underpaid. So, for a few years, I went over to school to teach grade school and junior high school English and Religion. There I met some diligent young girls, in fifth and sixth grade. Gung was a serious little girl with big pig tails, who worked hard on her English. Jeep was giggly, smart and alert. Dtim was a third wee one; all three were first cousins, and the fathers of all three had deserted their families. Fr. Larry Patin sent Dtim on for further studies, and I sent Gung and Jeep. All three subsequently worked for Fr. Joe Maier, in his Human Development Foundation in the slums of Bangkok.

In 1999, I began working for families with AIDS, and Gung returned home to help, together with her cousin Peh, and a lovely grandmother named Tongbai (Tongbai later died from leukemia). Gung was soon followed by Jeep and Dtim. Both of these ladies run our financial office. Gung was at first a shy, quiet little thing, but then her leadership skills and hard work began to emerge. Today, Gung is the real leader of the work of Sarnelli. She has trained staff and older children in their particular work, and gives invaluable advice. She is surrounded by hard working staff, who are not afraid to speak up. No leader can succeed without a hard working, honest, dedicated team. Her mother is in charge of the grade school girls of Jan & Oscar House, and her sister Nok is head honcho at Nazareth girls' house for older girls. I have helped many kids get an education, but it really paid off with the ladies who returned to help set up Sarnelli House.

Fr Michael Shea CSsR

Shining star

Sarnelli House could not have progressed from a small refuge for a handful of abandoned kids in 1999 to a large organisation housing 150 children of all ages without having loyal and enthusiastic staff.

Along with housing the children and all that goes into providing care for them, there are all the add ons that make up Sarnelli House. Jomp's Farm is 112 rai (18 hectares/ 44 acres) of farm land. The Outreach program reaches out to the poor and sick in surrounding villages, two clinics for local villagers and for people living with HIV /AIDS also have to be manned and managed. The need for reliable staff to make all these projects work is great.

A shining example of one of the senior staff who continue to drive Fr Mike's vision for Sarnelli House is Ms Gung. She wears many hats and is often the unsung hero behind the quiet hum of the organisation. She is Fr Mike's right hand woman and a competent, calm presence who is a great role model for the children. Gung hails from the village of Pi Si Tong which is now the location of House of Hope, home for infants and toddlers, Jan and Oscar House, home to grade school girls and St Patrick's Home for small boys.





was built. Gung and her husband moved in upstairs and were the house parents to a bunch of rowdy boys. She then went on to manage Sarnelli House which was a home for 70 children with HIV. With the addition of more children and the building of more houses the children living with HIV were integrated with the children without HIV. This posed no problems for any of the kids and the stigma of HIV was significantly reduced by living, learning and playing together. These days Sarnelli House is home to thirty one grade school boys. Gung's office is located on the ground floor and the door is always open to welcome and listen to children and staff alike.

One of Gung's tasks is the unenviable job of "organising the vans". Each children's house has a vehicle and the office, the Outreach program and Charlene House (the guest house) share a vehicle. There are three designated drivers on the payroll. Every day there are places to go; the office staff need to go to Nongkhai for banking, posting and business needs, guests need to be picked up and dropped off from Udon Thani airport and Nongkhai train station, sick people and children from Sarnelli House need to be taken to the hospitals and visited in their homes, groceries and school supplies have to be purchased and children ferried to and from six different school locations. This coordination task can be somewhat of a headache. Gung does it all in a Monday morning meeting with the heads of the children's houses, and has her phone on 24 hours a day for all the





changes and add ons that inevitably occur. She never raises her voice or expresses her exasperation but takes it all in her stride, smiling and tweaking this and changing that.

Another particular skill of Gung's is her hosting of all the parties, get togethers and functions that are held in the Joseph and Mary Hall which holds a badminton court and a large stage, and where the acoustics tend to echo and the noise of the children floats upwards. To the right of the stage is the sound system where Gung lurks until all the guests and kids have arrived and then she takes over the job of introducing the event and remaining cheerful, smiling and welcoming. She is there to coax the children on to the stage, to sing and dance along with them, to welcome guests and respond to requests from them, to act an interpreter when necessary, organise group photos with all the kids, and to sincerely extoll the children to thank guests and volunteers for their generosity at the end of the party. It must be an exhausting role which happens almost every weekend with different groups and donors – yet Gung is always gracious and unruffled. She also manages to catch the small child about to fall off the stage or give the limelight to the little one that feels the need to dance better than anyone else.

Gung has also taken on the management of Jomp's Farm with Fr Mike as the ideas man. On 112 rai or 44 acres (18 hectares) rice, corn, fruit trees, vegetables, herbs, and bamboo are grown. Cows, pigs, fish and fowl are cared for. Farm vehicles are maintained and the rice mill and the fertiliser pellet machine are used. Even though there are 15 paid staff who work on the farm their work has to be managed for the different seasons. Gung also plays an important role



in encouraging the children to be involved in farm work – whether it is teaching the girls to gut and descale fish, helping with the weekly slaughter of a pig, organising for the insemination of the cows, selling young bulls or planting and harvesting rice she is around to teach by example.

When Gung was asked how she saw her role working with Fr Mike at Sarnelli House she replied “Fr Mike is the same as a father to me so I work with my father in our family. It’s not like being a staff member it’s like being his daughter and contributing to the family” Gung sees herself at Sarnelli House in 10 years time living and loving the children. Without staff like Gung whose natural loyalty, competence and compassion have been nurtured and allowed to grow under Fr Mike’s care, the children of Sarnelli House would not have the opportunities for their futures they now have. Gung is one of the shining stars of Sarnelli House.

CEBO RIDE DATE SET FOR 2017

SATURDAY JULY 22ND IS THE DAY!

Can't make the ride, but you'd
still like to donate?
Go to ceboride.org
to support our riders!

Celebrations

This year two of our best supporters, fundraisers and gentle men of God are having a big celebration. Fr Chuck Bierewaltes CSsR from USA is celebrating 50 years a priest and Fr Dave Pollock CSsR is celebrating 55 years a priest and 60 years a Redemptorist at Mary, Mother of the Church in St Louis USA. Together with Fr Mike these three amigos in their late 70s, early 80s continue to act as true fathers to the children of Sarnelli House. Long may they live secure in the knowledge that their example and work changes lives for a whole lot of people both big and small.



New Address for
Friends of Sarnelli House
UA in the USA

**Box 88234
Milwaukee WI
53288-0234 USA**

(The foundation can give
tax deduction slips,
please request)

For Donations by Bank Transfer

Bank: KRUNG THAI BANK PUBLIC
COMPANY LIMITED

Branch: THASADEJ

A/C No: 295-0-01542-5

Account: SAVING, A/C

A/C Name: MR. MICHAEL SHEA AND

MS. BOONCHAN LASA, MRS.

WIMON THAMMAWONG

Swift Code: KRTHTHBK

Routing No. /CHIPS UID: 00785

For more donation details see

www.sarnelliorphanage.org under Support

Facebook : facebook.com/sarnellihousenongkhai

Postal Address: Sarnelli House,
PO Box 61, Nongkhai, Thailand 43000.

If you would prefer to receive this and future
quarterly newsletters by email or be removed
from the mailing list please email to
volunteer@sarnelliorphanage.org

To protect the privacy of our children we have not used their real
names or identified them in photos.

Written by Kate Introna, March 217