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## 16 January 2019 / Quarterly Report IV / October - December 2018



Discovering a new pleasure...

Out of luck on the banks of the Irrawaddy



In my garden at Lei Thar Gone...

why go far when the fish are so close

The year 2018 is gone, many memories remain – happy occasions, sad experiences, painful moments, joyful times and overall a deep gratitude for life – thankfulness for my health, which amazingly stabilized time and again, and even allowed me to go fishing on the shores of the Irrawaddy!

There were again several highlights this last quarter, with the Christmas celebration as always very special. I would like to share these moments as well as some facts & figures with you.



**Christmas at Light of Love** – Zoe and the 10<sup>th</sup> grade students did a great job decorating the whole compound! There were Christmas carols, dances, games and generous amounts of food for everyone. The children enjoyed the special treat of cake **AND** ice cream for dessert!



### Some school facts, figures and events:

- Unfortunately, another child – Ma Thazin Phyu @ Ma Mi Tan Lone, Grade 1 – was bitten by a dog. This time however with a happy outcome. After the tragic death of Mg Naing Aung Lin during the last quarter, the children were instructed to report to us immediately in the event that they were bitten by a dog. The rabies vaccine is in short supply world-wide, but opposed to last time, the vaccine was available in one pharmacy in Yenangyaung (fact that the vaccine must be kept refrigerated is an added challenge). The post exposure prophylaxis is very time-consuming as five injections over a period of one month are required. With a total cost of US\$65 it is also costly and therefore unaffordable for most people in the country. We have managed to buy two sets of vaccine so as to be prepared for eventual future accidents.
- Sad news is the death of U Khin Mg Thein, the night watchman at LOL. He was such a kind and gentle man, amazingly well at over 80. Unfortunately, old age impaired his hearing and eyesight so that he did not hear/see a motorbike while crossing the main road on his way for some breakfast at a local shop. We took him to Magway Hospital where he later succumbed to his severe injuries.
- We added middle supports to the new school building to stabilize the structure which had the tendency to sway during strong winds.
- Half term exams were held during the third week of October. After that, school was closed for the much looked forward to Thadingyut Light Festival holiday.
- To increase the water available for use in the kitchen, we built a new water tank. This makes work for the ladies in the kitchen, who prepare lunch for 210 people every day, easier.



New water tank



New building with middle supports, used for assembly, exercise-class, sport

- Paying students are charged monthly tuition fees of 40'-60'000 Kyats, depending on the grade they attend. This income helps finance the running of the school which has become quite a notable institution. Cost of lunch for the children is about US\$1'200 per month, food rations come to a monthly total of nearly US\$2'500.

- The solar installation is now complete and has been functioning since the end of November. Lei Thar Gone and Light of Love now run on solar power from 7am to 9pm daily. Electricity is taken directly from the panels and surplus is stored in the battery, saved for use during power cuts. After 9pm we switch to EPC, the government power supply. Should both solar and government power fail, we can switch to the generator for emergency power. Timing has worked out well, as for the next three years government power will be cut every Saturday and Sunday from 6 am to approximately 2 or 3 pm, reason being the national refurbishment of the electricity network. It is reassuring to know, that – except sometimes during the rainy season, we will still have power.



Solar installation with 87 panels



View from the roof towards LTG

## Visitors / Volunteers



Inspired by last year's action by the Swiss Foundation Hirtenkinder, which gave all children a hand-knitted gilet, a group of French sponsors knitted hats for all the children. The first 58 have arrived, the rest will follow in January 2019.

Catherine & Annick sorting the hats



Catherine Guettier, of Enfants-de-Birmanie was once again here for three weeks to teach French. The children enjoyed learning and were eager to try out their newly acquired vocabulary in various role plays.

Annick Bayle from Lyon, France was here again for six weeks to teach the children to sew. You will find her account at the end of this report. The Light of Love »sewing studio« has become quite impressive, thanks to now three electric sewing machines. We would like to take this opportunity to thank Annick Bayle and Lilian Senn who each sponsored a machine. Thank you for your generosity!



Students with their finished bags – dots are in fashion!



Even the boys enjoyed the sewing classes and proudly present their bags – more dots!

## Meanwhile at Lei Thar Gone Guest House...

- This past quarter was busier and more guests found their way to Lei Thar Gone. We have the impression, that bookings for the coming months are also picking up. In December a travel agency booked **ALL** rooms for a Chinese group, so we were sold out! They stayed only for one night, which is unfortunate because the first night is always the most expensive one for the business. It was the first booking made by this Yangon based travel agency which caters to the Chinese Market. They even have a 9-day tour called »Yenangyaung Monument« in their program which goes from Yangon to Mandalay and includes a stop in Yenangyaung. They were very satisfied and the manager promised more guests in the future.
- In November Therese was again here – for the 11<sup>th</sup> time. She continues to train the staff, teach English and works with MaThu in the kitchen, testing new ideas and teaching new recipes.
- Travel agencies we regularly work with have over the past year requested we provide lunch for their guests. One of Therese's goals was to develop a lunch menu that would be doable for the staff, offering guests a light lunch without generating unnecessary stress because arrivals are often unplanned. This undertaking was very successful and MaThu is now proficient at preparing various dishes such as Shan State Rice Salad, Chicken puffs with Myanmar carrot salad and our personal favourite »Pulled pork wraps« prepared with homemade slow-cooked pulled pork & homemade hummus in a chapati wrap.
- Guests continue to praise Lei Thar Gone which is an important factor for our success because sites such as booking.com, TripAdvisor and AirBnB are frequently referred to by travellers to help them decide on and plan their routes. More frequently than in the past, people come to stay based on reviews read, even if it means adding a detour to their itinerary.
- Frontier Myanmar is an English-language weekly magazine. On its website the publishers state: »We are an unbiased voice in transitional Myanmar and inform and entertain with a weekly review of current affairs and business, offering insights, analysis and understanding.« In November, Eva Hirschi, a Swiss Journalist at that time working for Frontier Myanmar visited LTG to interview us. Her report about Light of Love and Lei Thar Gone was very well received and will be a useful tool for future promotional activity. <https://frontiermyanmar.net/en/only-thanks-to-my-aids-this-project-exists>. We take this opportunity to thank Eva for her excellent article!



Pulled pork wrap, our new favourite food!



A Superior Double room decorated for a British couple that got engaged on the day of arrival

- Loudspeakers from the surrounding Pagodas continue to be a nuisance which often upset the peace and quiet guests seek when staying with us. This is especially the case in October/November after the Buddhist period of Lent – despite new laws that regulate the use of the loudspeakers but are regrettably often disregarded. An article also published in Frontier Myanmar gives insights into the problem. <https://frontiermyanmar.net/en/quiet-please-myanmar-festival-stirs-debate-over-religious-noise>

**We are happy to share two of the latest reviews with you:**

#### **AirBnB Megan from Oregon 11-2018**

I agree 100% with all of the reviews below! Lei Thar Gone Guest House is a wonderful place, and we're so glad we came to stay for a few nights. The location is beautiful! The breakfast tables are outside, overlooking the valley and river below. And then make sure you're around for sunset to enjoy the view again. :) All of the food we ate was delicious and healthy. Breakfast is included, and then plan to eat dinners at the restaurant - definitely the best option in town AND helps the school. Can't beat that! We spent a few hours at the Light of Love High School, and led a short English lesson with the pre-schoolers which was fun, and then hung out to play for a bit. It was cool to see the school and all of the children it supports. Oh! Make sure you spend time with the binder in the lobby with the school's quarterly reports! You'll learn so much about what it took to start and build this school - challenges, moments to celebrate, etc. It's a super inspiring story. Finally - you might think: "I'd love to stay here, but where is Yenangyaung and how will I get there?" No worries! Just send a message to Therese, and she'll get you sorted. :) She purchased our bus tickets for us both ways, and we had rides to and from the guesthouse to the bus station. It was easy to detour to Yenangyaung, as it's just a couple of hours south of Bagan and made sense on our loop from Kalaw.

#### **Isabelle B. Trip Advisor 12-2018**

We spent a beautiful Christmas night and day at Lei Thar Gone. More than a guest-house, this is a guest-home. I have lived in Myanmar for more than 7 years, and I can say this is the perfect place to experience true Myanmar, outside of the beaten tracks (but with the comfort rarely found in most places, and a delicious breakfast to Swiss standards, complete with muesli and real bread!). The profit generated by the guest-house contributes to financing the school fees of 130 underprivileged children in the school created by the guest-house owner. I cannot decide if this, or the amazing sunset view of the Irrawaddy more justifies a stay in this little heaven...



Guest Review Awards 2018



Concentration required... worksheet on »Daily Routines« teaching the use of »always, sometimes, never«

This report was compiled and written by Therese, on behalf of Eric & Zoe.

This year, thanks to Éric and Thérèse, I came with a business visa. So, I was able to stay long enough for all levels - and especially grade 5 - to complete at least one item.

The »sewing« room is taking on shape; Lilian Senn and I each financed a sewing machine. There are now three electric sewing machines plus a manual one.

The schedule planned by Zoe provided 2 lessons of 1:30 hrs. per week for each grade. To make lessons more profitable for everyone, I asked her to split each grade into two groups; except grades 8 and 9, as there are fewer children in those classes and they are already more independent.

I think this was effective.

So most had 1h30 of workshop per week .... often, they even skipped taking a break between lessons!

So, we worked well, we »tamed« the sewing machines and we also sewed by hand!

It was the year of the peas (dots)... Very fashionable!!

Before starting an object, they all reviewed the main points on a fabric sample. And that was then their reference point.

All objects were doubled (double layer of material), which makes them stronger but the exercise more difficult and time consuming.

The children had the choice of colours, but the whole group chose the same; so, to differentiate their bags, they embroidered their initials (sometimes 3) in chain stitch.

I want to especially mention the boys of grade 9, super motivated who quickly became self-sufficient, referring to the model to be copied independently; one of the boys even said he would like his own machine, because he really enjoyed sewing! By the end, even the more reserved girls got into it too. They all had time to make a backpack, a card (or ticket) case and a shoulder bag with drawstrings. They even machine-stitched a small towel for the Guesthouse (dotted of course!)

Grade 8, girls and boys, also worked very well; two boys who boycotted lessons last year were hardworking this year, it was a pleasure! They made a pouch and the shoulder straps. Then a little backpack.

In grade 7, some of the girls were not very motivated ... one girl even said that she does not like the school because they don't get enough time to play .... She started to make a row so I told her she was not obliged to come .... along with two of her friends, she skipped the last three sessions.

The others worked well! We shared a memory of July 2016, when our »studio« was installed in the future reception of the Guesthouse, still under construction, and we had a good laugh. They made a pouch with cord, a case and fabric flowers.

Grade 6: very serious and kind ... We often worked quietly and efficiently .... clutch bags and fabric flowers for the girls.

Grade 5: a very good group with a small minus because some are very young (10/11 years old). They all did their best and finished a small bag they proudly wore on Christmas day.

And patience for all the little ones to whom I had to say ... Yes, yes when you are in grade 5, of course you will be able to come!

The problem I had encountered in previous years was that they were going too fast, they were eager to see the results and for them it seemed important to be the first one to say "finished", without much care given to the actual sewing. So, this year, I learned to say "work slowly, make beautiful" in Burmese. And this became like a mantra, laughingly repeated over and over, but I believe it did the trick and bore fruit!

Therefore, I think sewing still has a future at LOL, and not only for my own pleasure ..... I will have to find new ideas for next year.

In the future, I hope they will become enthusiastic about using their skills to repair clothes! One girl actually came and asked me to help her repair a sweatshirt, but as it was during rehearsals for the Christmas Celebration, we didn't have time to do it.

Perhaps we could organize a »repair workshop« once a week or every two weeks ... Of course, mothers and grandmothers often know how to sew, but don't always have the necessary equipment. An idea to follow up on...?

See you next year, with pleasure.

*Annick Bayle*