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### A short note from Therese:

Dear friends of Eric, Zoe, Light of Love and Lei Thar Gone!

While compiling this TR III, together with Eric and Zoe, news reached me that Eric had suffered a life-threatening heart attack on 21 December. Emergency surgery was performed in Yangon immediately after he arrived by ambulance from Magway Hospital, where first emergency treatment had been given. At 5am (local time) Zoe sent me a text message with the tense words *"Bad news. Eric is in Pun Hlaing Cardiac Catheterization Lab. Heart attack. We are awaiting the result."* A dramatic situation!

A stent was placed in his right heart chamber and thankfully, Eric survived this risky intervention. He remained in ICU for several days before being moved to the ward. Zoe and Nikki, his sister, are with him 24hrs. a day. Although Eric's condition has improved, discharge was postponed as the ECG showed irregularities. The heart muscle in the area around the blocked vein was damaged and will take time to heal. Eric is receiving special treatment and medication in an effort to regulate the heart rhythm. Once stable, he will be permitted to leave the hospital and go to his Yangon home, but he must remain in Yangon under close medical supervision.

Eric will be happy to receive messages or news from you, but please understand that given the challenging circumstances he may not have the strength or energy to reply.

I am sending you the report, as compiled before Eric's heart attack, as all information is still valid. A few photos of Christmas at LOL are at the end of the report. It was a beautiful event but was overshadowed by concern for Eric and the absence of Zoe and himself.

I wish you all a prosperous, happy, healthy and blessed 2020 and hope to see many of you in Yenangyaung in the coming year! *Therese* Just now – getting ready to send this report to you, I received news that Eric has been discharged!

## 31 December 2019 / Trimestral Report III / September – December 2019

Hard to believe that 2019 is nearly over. As always, many memories remain – happy occasions, sad experiences, painful moments, joyful times and overall a deep gratitude for life. I am thankful that I have completely recovered from a few bad falls. I have had regular check-ups in Mandalay and in Yangon and although I have lost weight and am generally weaker than a year ago, my health remains stable.

The last four months have been busy, with the new school year in full swing. I would like to share some of the highlights well as some facts & figures with you.

Birthday celebrations are always a highlight of the month for the children. Here a few impressions of the November Celebration:



Biryani was the menu of choice this month



The children congratulate the celebrated



Special treat – ice cream for dessert – sponsored by a Swiss teacher and her class. The children baked cookies and cakes and sold them in their neighbourhoods around Bern, collecting more than \$600, which will be used for special occasions as this

**I take this opportunity to wish you, dear friends, a wonderful & blessed Christmas and only the best for the New Year!**

### **Some school facts, figures and events:**

- This year in High School we have 11 students in Grade 9 and 7 students in Grade 10
- As already reported, 7 of the 8 students in Grade 10 the passed the 10<sup>th</sup> Standard exam in March. Mg Moe Min Kyaw, the boy that failed, is repeating the 10<sup>th</sup> grade this year. He is very clever and has many talents but because his adoptive mother died just before the exams, he was so upset and sad that he couldn't concentrate. We are confident, that he will pass this time.
- The others are doing well. Naw Li Zar is currently working at the Guest House, the other three young women are working as assistant teachers at LOL: Khaing Mi Mi San mentors the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade students, Noe Zin Hmwe is assisting in Grade 3 and Ma Yamon in Grade 1.
- The four young women will go to Yangon for English training at La Salle Centre and after one year they will start teacher training at PSYE.
- Bo Khaing, Khaing Mi Mi San's twin brother, is currently working at Lei Thar Gone. He will take a computer and an accountancy course until the Distance University he has been accepted to starts next year.
- Mg Tint Lwin Oo is only 17yrs old. He is the first student ever to be accepted for teacher training at the Pakokku Education College. He will attend College for four years. During this time, we will provide for him by paying board and lodging, transportation, school fees, uniforms and books
- Mg Htet Wai Aung is currently back home in his village working, as he is the oldest child and must care for the family
- Good news is that the three young ladies – Cho Cho Nwe, Hnin Htet Htet Naing and Shwe Yamon Poo - that have already spent a year in Yangon, doing English courses at La Salle Centre have all been accepted for teacher training at PSYE (Pyin Ya San Yae) and will begin their 2½ year training on 09 January 2020.
- Cho Cho Nwe receiving her certificate from La Salle Centre



- Because of the timescale the current educational system makes life difficult for students that passed the 10<sup>th</sup> standard exam and is far from time efficient! They sit for the exam in March, results are received first week of June. Then in November, the government ASSIGNS the majors subject to the students that passed. With this system, it is possible that a student that had a poor result in Physics for example, is assigned a Physics Major at college... Begin of the higher education – college or university – begins only 6 – 12 months later, leaving the question on how the young adults are to survive unanswered. That is why we continue to provide for them even after they finish their education at LOL.
- Which means we provide 163 portions of rations every month. The rations include: rice, oil, la pet, salt fish, chilis, salt, potatoes, fried beans, eggs, lentils, soap, toothpaste and washing powder. The price, including transport (we do 5-6 trips to the villages) and packaging is 23'000ks



per portion / per month + 1'500ks given in cash for fruit and vegetables... indeed a substantial financial burden! We are thankful for the faithful and generous donations received from Kinderhilfe-Birma. Without this financial backing, this support would not be possible.



*Ma San Win does the bulk buying, portions rice and dahl every month – and has everything 100% under control*



The pick-up, loaded and ready to go for a first run...

- The Ministry of Education also makes life difficult for private schools and LOL is no exception! On Saturday, 16 November at 7.30 pm a Ministry staff member phoned Zoe and announced an inspection of the school for THE NEXT DAY – Sunday! The purpose of the inspection was the verification of construction as stated in the original application for the school license in 2012! Zoe, Eileen and four teachers spent Sunday morning preparing for the inspection and organizing refreshments. At noon, six inspectors arrived and with measuring tapes, meticulously measured classrooms, whiteboards and recreation areas. They drank some water, didn't touch the offered cakes and left an hour later admonishing Zoe to label the new classrooms (that hadn't even existed at the time of the application)

## Volunteers and new teachers from PSYE

- We are very pleased and thankful to have Marie Duchesne, a lovely young teacher from France with us. Marie arrived on 30 September and will be here until the end of the school year. She is a very kind, calm and serious young woman and is very much loved by the children in all classes. Her lessons are always creative, well prepared and fun. The children learn much more than English in her classes! Thank you, Marie!



**Marie in action...** and the children enthusiastically working on their projects – here the three boys with their “Dave Dragon Gay Star Master Island” (which they named that way by themselves)

**Marie would like to share her experiences of the first months at LOL:**

### **Report on my first two months as an English teacher at LOL**

*My first impressions:* I was positively surprised to discover how much this school looks like a big family. Children and adults alike are very welcoming. There is a good relationship and a lot of confidence established between teachers and students. It is also very touching to see the older ones taking care of the younger ones. In addition, I was touched by the many marks of respect shown by the students to the teachers.

*Teaching English:* I thought, when I arrived, that I would only teach in the primary grades. Finally, I work between 2 and 3 times a week in each of 10 grades, from KG to G9. Being French and not having a specific training as an



English teacher, I was a little apprehensive about teaching in grades 6, 7, 8 and 9. But in the end it is very pleasant for me to teach at different levels and it also allows me to see that some basics (such as telling the time) are not always acquired by the older ones. It is interesting to note the difference in the level of English of students who have completed all their schooling at Light of Love High School and those who have just arrived this year (this is particularly striking in grade 9 where newcomers have a lot of difficulty to follow).

The noise level of the classes also challenged me a lot. The students are used to recite all together very loudly, so it is sometimes difficult to make them understand that they do not need to scream to pronounce correctly!

I also try to offer activities that allow them to develop other skills: creativity, imagination, expression of personal feelings (which is really not an obvious thing), group work, continuous oral communication in front of the class...

Skills that seem to me to be as important, if not more important, than knowing how to speak English!

Two new Burmese English teachers, trained in Yangon, arrived at the school at the end of October. They are highly motivated and offer a pedagogy that is completely different from traditional Myanmar teaching. It is therefore very pleasant for me to be able to exchange and work with them.

So that's a very short summary of my first months at LOL. I am particularly grateful for the welcome I received from Eric and Zoe, from the entire family of Lei Thar Gone and from all members of the school. I feel very lucky to work every day in a school that is full of knowledge, projects, hope.... and where, judging by the daily smiles, children grow up in a caring environment. *Marie*

- **Volunteering for the 4<sup>th</sup> time is Annick Bayle** from Lyon, France. Each year she tackles the sewing projects with great enthusiasm and energy. The children that have attended her classes every year have a much better manual dexterity and an understanding of what sewing is all about! Thank you Annick for your faithful commitment to the children!
- Annick in action & the proud owners of the finished bags – even the boys enjoyed the classes!
- For more information, you will find Annick's report at the end of this TR



- Two Myanmar English teachers, both graduates of PSYE arrived in November and will be at LOL until March 2021. We are happy to have them with us and we are convinced, that their efforts will again improve the level of English at Light of Love. Thank you, Alberta Yin Hla and Margaret Ja Pha Aung, for your dedication and efforts on behalf of the children!



Margaret (top) and Alberta (bottom) in action



#### **Alberta and Margaret would like to share their experiences of the first month at LOL:**

We have been teaching for a month at Light of Love Private High School in Yenangyaung. We are blessed to have the students who are willing to learn and the teachers who are very supportive in socially and emotionally. We are grateful to Mr. Eric who gives us a chance to be teachers for the students. We deeply appreciate Light of Love School for providing us safe and clean environment and other facilities. Therefore, we can focus on teaching part fully. We really enjoy and satisfy to serve here through contributing our best to promote holistic education for the school. *Alberta & Margaret*

#### **Meanwhile at the Guest House...**

- For Lei Thar Gone, the economic and political framework remains challenging! Food costs are up, the price of EPC – the government electricity has nearly doubled and continued unrest in various areas of the country creates a negative media presence and reduces the willingness of foreign tourists to travel to Myanmar
- Nevertheless, November and December were quite busy and although the turnover was less than in 2018, it was quite positive.



- Construction of the sustaining wall continues. It is a major undertaking that consumes time, energy and is backbreaking work! And it is very expensive – the rocks alone cost 400'000ks per day! At 126ft. (40m) length it will be the largest wall to date.
- progress being made... (compare the position of the tree trunk in the photos)



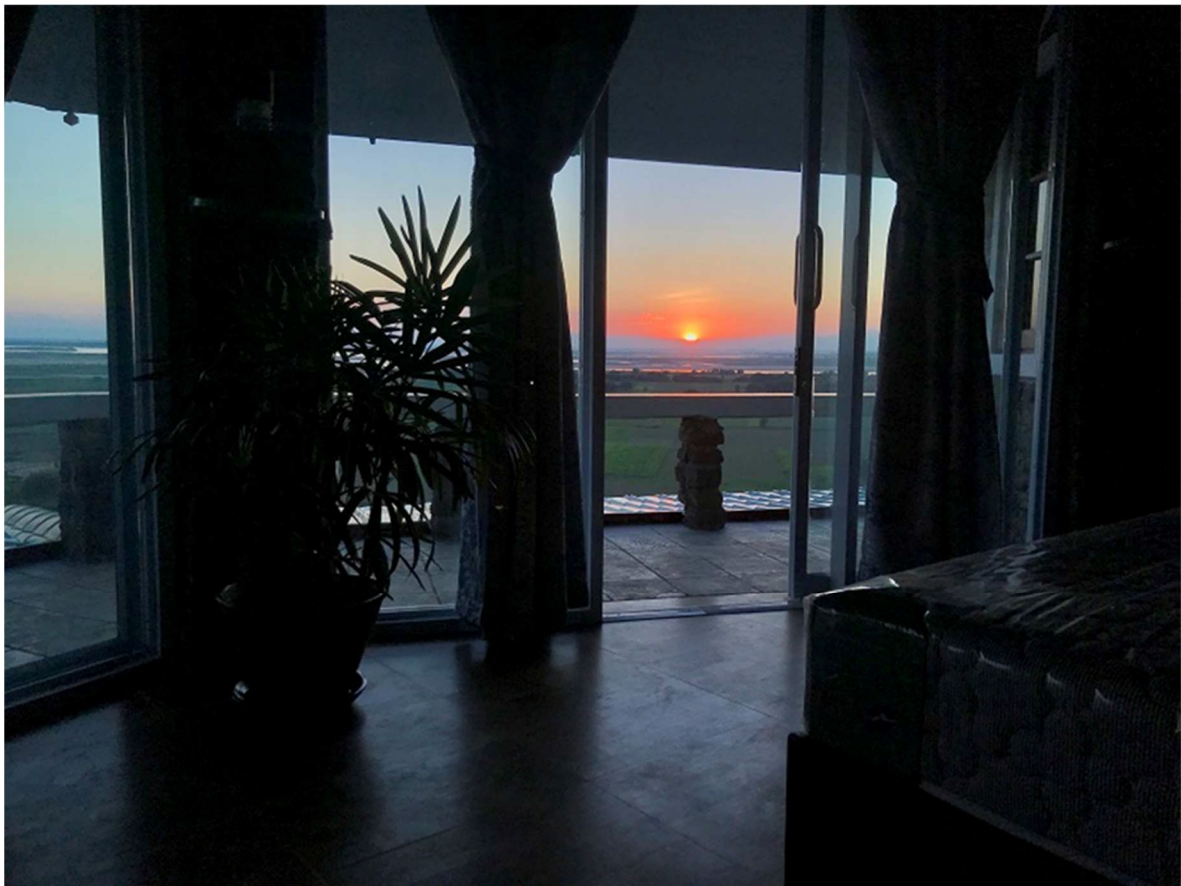
- Construction of the new houses is finished – thank God – and it's a huge burden off my shoulders! The rooms have both been occupied over Christmas and the guests enjoyed the magnificent views of the Irrawaddy flood plain right from bed!







New house with two suites as seen from the south end of the Guest House grounds



Enjoy the sunset from the spacious terrace in front of the Suite



Christmas 2019 at Light of Love



## **Annick would like to share her experiences at LOL:**

For the 4th year, here I am at LOL for the sewing workshops: the children always seem so happy..." they like..." told me Eileen, the director.

I arrived in early October but there were many holidays, so in mid-November we had to hurry a little bit to finish what was planned.

And what's more, it was an exceptionally hot and therefore tiring month of October for everyone.

This year again, the ranks have been doubled, i.e. 7-8 students (sometimes 9); which is more than enough considering the room and especially the fact that very few of them have any amount of self-sufficiency... many could, know, but do not dare to do. And it is particularly pleasant to see the few who take the initiative.

The ideal, to really progress, would be equal groups, but I know that it is impossible to organize..... especially since it is not so easy to find 1h30 slots (thanks to Daw Zin Mar Htun who kindly left 2 slots for grade 9, at their sole request)

Yet some people - girls or boys and whatever the age - really love it, and are very diligent, of course when they have an object for themselves afterwards. And it is not unusual for them skip their breaktime in order to start earlier....this year, I was the one who needed a break!!!!

Moreover, some students seemed to me to be more restless than in previous years, the larger number may have had a lot to do with it, and the most talkative had gotten together!

A group of grade 7 and grade 8 were difficult to manage.

However, I think that through this workshop they can develop self-confidence and autonomy - which many people lack - which can be useful to them in many areas.

It is recognized by psychologists that manual work, especially when it is a little difficult, boosts self-confidence. Thinking "I did it" is good for gaining autonomy for the future.

For some people, using a pair of scissors wisely is far from being natural and easy... they are afraid to do something stupid and are totally inhibited, while doing something stupid is also a way to learn.

It takes a little attention to understand and not to make mistakes again.

Certainly, I don't pretend to want to train dozens of dressmakers, but if there was a training in Yenangyaung like that of Anisakan.....there would be volunteers to go there, I'm sure. But leaving Yenangyaung seems impossible for many: congratulations again May Thazin Aung who is pursuing a beautiful path!

And then leaving YY entails costs either for Eric or for the sponsor if they want to follow up financially.

Concretely:

For everyone, a little exercise to review the main points, and the fitting of buttons..... can be useful, I hope, in everyday life.

For a greater motivation, this piece of fabric was used to make a small bag, everyone could have something for him quickly enough.

What's new: a pair of pants - quite simple - for Grade 9, we went to the market together to buy the fabric.

No luck, it was a holiday for the merchants..... the choice was limited, but it was still a nice experience.

One test on the other hand: the cut of the pants..... I asked for their initiative in a new field, it is not very frequent.

However, one girl showed that she liked doing this work and trained her classmates. I had already noticed when she was in grade 7 that she wanted to and could move forward on her own....well done.



A little pride for me, those who have been attending these workshops since the beginning, for a little bit that they are motivated, know how to do much better than for example the 3 newcomers who arrived this year in grade 9, who were like paralyzed in front of their piece of fabric; two of them put themselves there afterwards, and one made me a beautiful greeting card.... a big thanks to her.

They often help each other.

Another new feature for grade 6, where a group is really good, a zippered pocket, which is not that simple. In this rank, some boys have applied themselves well...

And still the famous little backpack, (grade 7 and 8); the pocket with the embroidered initials which has been very successful This year, we added buttons.

In the "new grade 6" (ex grade 5), some are particularly willing and gifted.

Some grade 4 girls asked me to come during the lunch break on Friday, unfortunately they often have to go back to school after lunch.....they still made the little bag. And I spotted a grade 2 student who was very interested and diligent.

Four friends who live at the bottom of the Guesthouse wanted to make a T-shirt on Saturday morning: a great success

Zoe has shown patience and skill in repairing one of the machines....let's wait and see! For the moment, it's fine. A big thank you to her

And of course, thank you to Eric and Zoe for welcoming me once again.

And also, to Thérèse for her help in obtaining the business visa and in finding answers to my questions.

PS 1: I was pleased to read that the workshop was mentioned in the 2019 report of the Kinderhilfe Birma association (nb: small works concern girls AND boys)

PS 2: The "bonnets" operation initiated with Lilian Senn has ended: all the children present in 2018-2019 should have received a cap, in the colours of the school.