



## LEGACY INSTITUTE

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Dallas, Texas

May 27, 2000

Dear Friends,

Gloria and I are back in the US after our trip to Kachinland for Passover and Unleavened Bread and then, right after our return to Bangkok, a whirlwind trip to visit COG brethren of the Karen and Mon tribes in northern Thailand. We have been traveling non-stop for over a month! I will now tell you about our often times quite arduous, but very rewarding trip into the remote mountains and jungles of Southeast Asia. Every time I travel on these journeys to visit and encourage God's people, I come back very tired – but energized by what I see the Hand of God accomplishing!

In my last letter to you all, I mentioned I was in Dallas taking care of family matters. As soon as I returned to Bangkok, Gloria and I started on the Kachinland Passover trip. This time I was able to take along a camcorder to record our experiences among the Kachin members of God's Church in what today is called Myanmar (Burma). I hope to produce a VHS video and make it available free of charge to you all so that you can vicariously experience what it is like to visit with Pastor Lazum Brang and the Kachinland Church of God.

As I have explained in previous newsletters, Kachinland is a very remote mountainous area that borders Tibet. There are few roads. What today passes as "roads" in northern Myanmar are remnants of the Ledo Road out of India and the Burma Road into China built by General Stillwell and British allies during WWII to supply Generalissimo Chiang Kai Shek's troops fighting the Japanese. These roads augmented air supply routes over the Himalayas. This air route was called "The Hump" by allied and mercenary fliers who braved some of the most dangerous weather conditions imaginable delivering needed supplies to Chinese troops. Many died or disappeared, never to be found.

This area of Asia has a very strong connection with America that few Americans are aware of. It came as a surprise to me when I visited the Lake Indawgyi region of Kachinland for the first time in January, 1999, that I was the first American to arrive there since "Merrill's Marauders". Col. Merrill led a US Army commando force under the operational command of the famous General "Vinegar Joe" Stillwell that operated in this area against the Japanese in World War II. While all these events happened before I was born, it made me study more about the history of American and British soldiers who fought and died there. I met a number of veterans of a unit called the Kachin Rangers who are still living there today. The Kachin Rangers were a mercenary unit formed under the command of the OSS, the predecessor of the CIA. Their job was to fight behind enemy lines against Japanese forces occupying Burma. They came to see me because they heard that I was an American. Now they are old men, but they had many tales to tell and showed me the scars and commendation certificates to prove it!

Gloria and I flew on Thai Airways to Yangon ( Rangoon), the capital of Myanmar. The next day we flew north to Mandalay on the modern aircraft of the newly formed Mandalay Airlines. Mandalay is where our adventure really began. We arrived during the height of the Water Festival. Every spring

around Passover, Myanmar erupts into one giant party as people celebrate the beginning of the rainy season. One custom that can be very frustrating is that they throw water all over each other and any visitors they can find! For 5 days we were constantly soaked by revelers any time we ventured onto the streets.

We met up with Lazum Brang, Pastor of the Kachinland Church of God, in Mandalay. There are only two ways for foreign visitors to get to Kachinland from Mandalay. One is by plane and the other is on what I call the “rock and roll” train. I call it the rock and roll train because one is constantly being bounced about and rocked and rolled back and forth on very hard bench seats by the motion of the train on uneven tracks as it journeys north. My best advice for anyone traveling by train in Burma is to bring along one of those inflatable donut seat cushions!

The journey north to the railhead of Hopin takes about 22 hours if there are no halts due to rail construction or bad weather. Of course, Myanmar train tracks are always in a state of needing repair. It is very difficult to get a sleeper compartment because they are almost always sold out on the black market. So if one wants to sleep, one stretches out on the floor in the aisle between other bodies and the packages of travelers. The train latrine is a small room at the end of the car with a hole in the floor directly over the tracks. The latrine has no light and no water. It is not an experience for the faint of heart or someone who has picked up an intestinal bug!

Once we arrived in Hopin, we stopped in to visit a Karen family whose daughter is interested in learning COG doctrine. This girl lives with her mother and grandmother who are Pentecostals. She told us she was not interested in “counterfeit Christianity” but wants to learn the truth of the bible. After spending several hours discussing the bible with this girl and her family and anointing the mother for an abscessed tooth, we were able to find seats on a four-wheel-drive pickup truck traveling over the mountain road to Na Mawn near Lake Indawgyi where Passover was to be held. This is quite a trip as the road is dirt and constantly in a state of repair due to washed out bridges and landslides. As we were foreign guests, Gloria and I were given the privilege of riding in the cab with the driver. The other passengers rode packed in the back (about 20 persons)!

The journey over the mountain took about 2 hours. We had to stop several times at army posts to show our passport and report our movements. Myanmar is a Socialist country run by a military junta. Individual freedom is only an abstract term in this country. Lazum Brang was constantly reporting to military camps, government officials and immigration offices about who we were and why we were in their particular area.

As an American citizen, it makes me think very seriously about the incredible freedoms Americans have by right but take for granted. In Myanmar, each citizen must report for a government work party at least 3 months out of the year or pay a stiff fine. This includes even the elderly and sick. We visited one elderly widow who had to sell her house and half her property to pay the government fine because she was too old to work! While we were staying in Na Mawn, a village official came to collect Lazum Brang and his younger brother to help repair the local army camp. Because we were keeping the feast, Brang had to pay the fine.

The Passover and Feast was observed in Lazum Brang's (Lazum is his family name and Brang his given name) home. His house is very small with a dirt floor and bamboo platform to sit on and is not suited for church meetings. Brethren from around the world have donated funds to purchase land and

- 2 -

construct a bamboo church meeting hall, but that construction has been temporarily halted. The reason is that the local Baptist and Catholic leaders successfully petitioned the town authorities to pass a law that only Baptist and Catholic church buildings can now be built. This was done specifically to thwart the activities of the Church of God in Na Mawn. Persecution comes in many forms and from many sources. This is a Buddhist country under the rule of a military dictatorship, but the persecution is coming from other "Christian" groups! So much for the "ALL CHRISTIANS ARE BROTHERS" idea. This has NEVER been the case. There has been more blood spilled by Christians at the hands of other Christians than I want to even think about. Anyone who has had any knowledge at all about the "Christian" history of this world knows this.

There is a very strong ecumenical movement right now in every part of the world to bring all Christian groups together and join hands in brotherly fellowship. But under whose leadership? Even in remote Kachinland, the Baptist groups and the Catholics are joining in a cooperative effort and moving steadily in this direction. Where will this all lead? And what if a non-traditional Christian group doesn't want to join them? Anyone, who reads and understands their bible, knows the answer. Someday, all Christians WILL be together under a single leadership. But that will not be accomplished by human hands. In the meantime, more blood is sure to be spilled!

We observed the eight days of Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread with the Kachinland members in peace. But for how long will we be able to do this? We can not know. In the meantime, there is much work to be done. More and more people are coming to the knowledge of the truth of the bible through the evangelistic efforts of Lazum Brang and the Kachin church brethren. Yet there are many obstacles. One of the greatest obstacles is a lack of bibles. We were shocked to learn that few Kachin members even own bibles! For many, the truth they had learned was by word of mouth. This situation is completely alien to us. We live in a society where practically every household owns a bible (even if it remains unopened).

Bibles in the Kachin and Burmese language do exist, but few can afford them. We found out that the price of a bible in Myanmar was about 3 dollars. This is a very small amount to us, but a very high price for many in these mountains who live in a subsistence economy. One of the projects we now will implement is getting Kachin and Burmese language bibles into this part of the world. Lazum Brang is only one man. If the preaching of the gospel is to be carried out in the remote Kachinland mountains and valleys, it must be done through the published word. Many can read, but have no bibles or bible truth literature to read. This must be changed. Legacy Institute will make every effort to support distribution of bibles and the publication of bible literature in their own languages. We have already begun this effort. But much more must be done. Those we have met among the Kachin and others in Myanmar are starved for the Truth. We who HAVE the privilege of God's Truth now must make every effort to deliver it to them.

One of the highlights of the festival period was the return of Seng Mai, the little girl who was trapped in a kind of slavery. Her mother had arranged for her to receive room and board with a wealthy family in the capital city of Kachinland so that she could go to school. It turned out that this family was forcing her to work as a servant every day including the Sabbath. Seng Mai was unhappy and wanted

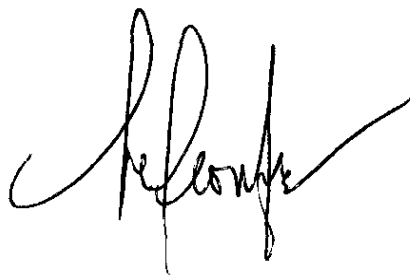
to return home – but the family she was staying with refused to let her go. Lazum Brang sent his younger brother to negotiate her release. It was a wonderful homecoming for her family and she was able to arrive home in time to spend the entire Feast of Unleavened Bread with her family. Her homecoming was symbolic of the release from slavery of the Israelites and our own personal release from slavery to sin. It was a touching reunion and made the feast even more meaningful to us.

- 3 -

Unleavened Bread ended too quickly for both Gloria and me. We had gotten to know old friends better and made many new friends. It was time for us to return to what some people call “civilization.” We had stayed in a village for 8 days that had no electricity, no TV’s, no CD’s, no telephones and no computers!! During the evenings, we spent our time visiting and talking with our new Kachin brothers and sisters. We had more time for fellowship and we had more time for bible studies and worship services than any time we could remember! I think we have a lot of bible knowledge we can teach the Kachin. But there are things we can also learn from them.

Soon we were on a flat bed truck winding our way back over the mountains to catch the train back to Mandalay and our flight back to Bangkok. As I sit here typing this on my laptop, memories of the journey take on almost a dream-like quality. Our lifestyles are so very different. We come from different races, cultures, backgrounds, economies, etc. But we are bound by our common goal – the Kingdom of God. And we are united by the same common Spirit – the Holy Spirit of God. It is this Spirit that binds us in brotherhood. The Kachinland Church of God was not called to the Truth BY the efforts of any of us. This church fellowship was raised up and worked with by God separate from us. Now God has seen fit to bring us together. Are we willing to recognize that God CAN and DOES work with people SEPARATE from our own church history and experience? Are we willing to acknowledge that God is BIGGER than our particular Church of God fellowship? Or do we hide ourselves from our brothers and continue to pretend we are the “only” people God has chosen? Sometimes I think God has raised up these small groups in places we have never heard of before in order to teach us all some very important and humbling lessons. Are our ears too dull of hearing? Are our eyes blinded by our own pride and arrogance? Time will tell. May God grant you all discernment. Until next time,

In service to Our Lord and Savior,



Leon Sexton

#### WHAT IS LEGACY INSTITUTE?

LEGACY INSTITUTE IS NOT A CHURCH. *Nor is it affiliated with any human church organization. Legacy Institute seeks to serve and help mankind in the spirit and example of our Lord Jesus Christ. His instructions were to freely give. This means without discrimination and without prejudice. Your donations to Legacy Institute are tax deductible in the USA.*

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