



Jeff & Diane Brown working to lengthen the list of tribes, peoples, and languages that worship God



Diane & Daniel - Loy Krathong

"Whatever Floats Your Boat" ... this weekend the Thai people will celebrate Loy Kratong, some would say the Thai version of Thanksgiving and New Year's Eve rolled into one big party. People will be making beautiful rafts (kratongs) from banana leaves in order to float (loy) their sins down the river. (For more information see:

www.thailand.com/travel/festival/festivals_loykratong.htm.)

The goal of our recent trip to one of the few cities in our people's three-country territory was to discern God's direction for our work – where/when to locate, how to proceed, with whom to partner, strategy, assess resources, etc. It accomplished all those objectives at least in part.

Many of the men from our tribe left home in 2001 to take up arms against the US invasion. The customs there are very traditional, especially as regards women. Rather than going into that now, the following will be Diane's thoughts upon returning to Thailand.

Here they are:

It was really, really overwhelming. The lostness is so great, the darkness so black, and the oppression so overwhelming.

I was thinking of all the images I had in my mind of everything I had seen and felt and smelled and touched while in this out-of-the-way corner of this Muslim country. I couldn't wait to leave that place. I would have burned the clothes I wore, if they had been mine, as a symbolic gesture of the bondage and extreme oppression of women they represented to me. It was such a difficult part of my journey – the hardest so far, I think. Talk about messy. We don't want to be confronted by things we wished didn't exist. No one really wants to see what I've seen, and be held accountable to the knowledge of the suffering and injustices that millions of women and children endure each and every day of their lives. It makes us uncomfortable, and we squirm in our seats. We generally don't want to expose ourselves, and certainly not our children, to the reality of the hardships that most of the world understands as a normal way of life. We would rather talk about the weather, or baking, or the latest fashion, or what's on T.V., or how to be more spiritual or something. I'm still trying to come up with a way to describe what I felt...fear, loneliness, isolation, fear...

I went about covered head-to-toe in local dress, head covering and all. There are hardly any women found on the streets there; it's about a 1000 to 1 ratio of men to women. People stared at me, a lot. I was like a freak show, even though I was covered completely, only a small area around my eyes showing. And I even had on sunglasses! It was SO HARD! I certainly didn't have any words for them. In my head I prayed for them – for peace, for God's grace and mercy to be upon them. I kept repeating Jesus' Name, over and over inside my head. He is my only strength.

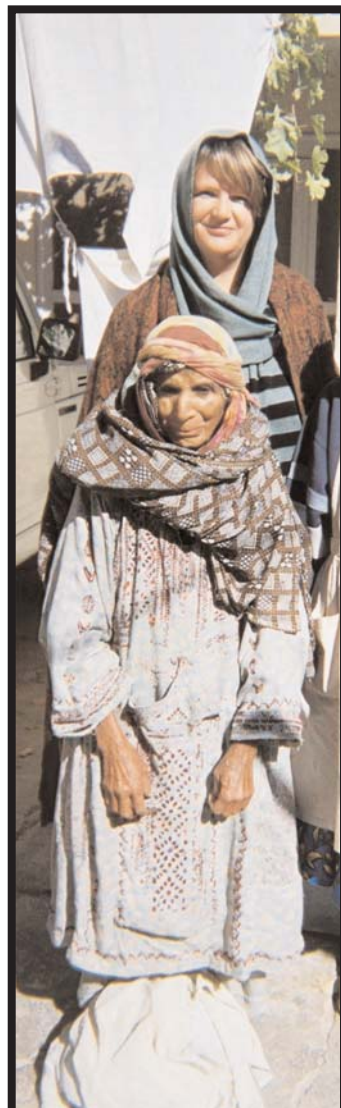
The plight of these people...of the women. I wish I could say I was strong and bold and courageous. I wasn't. I was overwhelmed with grief. The oppression was tangible. I would love to think of myself as one who stands strong, yet I know myself to be so different than that. I wanted to run, to hide, to get away from the staring eyes. Can I believe

God is at work in a place where I am sure He is not? Have I divided the things in my world into clean and unclean? Am I willing to have my life reshaped and reoriented? Am I willing to go where I think, "Surely God wouldn't ask me to go there"? Is God at work in the people in whom I'm convinced He is not? Am I willing to go to the unclean people who look, smell and act differently than I do?

I have no answers. I do know the One who does, though. This is my only hope. And He is big enough. But why in the world did God send such a simple person as myself there. There was this sense of feeling honored, and petrified, all at the same time. "Does God know what He's doing, sending me, here?"

I've now walked those streets, and had those eyes gazing into mine. I've held the hand of a woman...I'll never forget how it felt. It was so cold, so old, so wrinkled and worn. How am I so blessed with smooth warm hands? I wondered if those women ever even had more than a sponge bath. Why am I so privileged to have a soft bed, nutritious food, an understanding husband? Is it all the will of Allah, as they claim? How can we all live in the same reality? Truly it felt like a time warp, like I was transported to another galaxy, far, far away.

How can I not be changed forever? I long to be comfortable again, yet my world has been forever altered, a gnawing realization that there are those without freedom. Who will speak for them? Who will live among them and give them the Message of Hope? How can I say Thank You to Him who freed me, and then turn my back on those He's revealed to me? ...Unto the least of these.



Diane & a tribal woman



Friday afternoon mosque service

In the Book of Acts, a man named Cornelius "had a vision". That vision prompted him to action: "to send men to get Simon". Simon Peter didn't take the initiative; he responded to the initiative of Cornelius. Cornelius "led everyone in his house to live worshipfully before God, was always helping people in need, and had the habit of prayer".

It happened before...it could happen again, eh? One Muslim author defines a Muslim as a person who submits to God's will and obeys His laws. Furthermore, two of the five biggies of Islam are giving to the poor and praying five times a day. Sounds kind of like Cornelius...

Cornelius was not Jewish, and for all his goodness and spirituality, he still needed a savior. There weren't exactly hordes of Christians lining up to leave Judea to go to Samaria and tell Cornelius' people about the One. God used a vision to bridge those cultural and geographic barriers, and to supernaturally prepare this new culture for the good news.

Several centuries ago Islam came into central Asia uninvited. The religion of the people at that time was changed without their willing consent. We, and others like us, come to central Asia to offer an alternative, an option, to people who haven't had options for centuries. This time, if they change faiths, it will be willingly. Like Cornelius, it will take somebody from outside their culture to get things going - to begin to expose them to the alternative - Jesus. Like Cornelius, there are geographic (or geo-political) barriers involved. And like Cornelius, nobody is lining up to tell these people about the Son.

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