

Saturday 27.08.2011

Eschau, Germany

Performing as Volunteer for the “Gift of Happiness Foundation”

I'm back in Germany but the memories of the experience to play for the migrant children of Mae Sot/ Northern Thailand is very much with me.

Monday 8.08.2011

We went to Mae Sot “Saw High school”. A very simple structural building which looked more like a cattle shed of a market town in Ireland in the 1970's is where these Burmese migrant children receive their school lessons. I suppose there was about 200 children which huddled up in front of us on the concrete floor while we were starting to set up for the play. They were excited and very noisy at times which in turn made us more and more excited. Finally the show started with our Clown play called “The Clown and the Dancer” followed by Clown Eekie’s Solo Clown performance. There was lots of laughter for nearly one and a half hours. At the end of the show we had to get changed back into our street cloth. There was no hope of the privacy we were used to back in Germany but we didn't mind for some of the children to come quite close. Their curiosity was so heartfelt and friendly, it felt like this was still a part of the show for them. Without saying anything they helped us to bring our stuff back to the vans. Soon we were ready to go and before we carried on a small number of children surrounded us for a “photo session”. They were holding our hands and wanted to make contact with us. A small child about 3 or 4 years old stood next to me for the photograph but it was too small to be seen in the picture, so I just picked it up to hold it in my arms. These children are so open and friendly that only some minutes afterwards it occurred to me how vulnerable they are.

In the afternoon we went to the “Sky Blue School” some miles outside Mae Sod. It is a migrant school at the dump of Mae Sod. Burmese migrant families live and work there to separate the rubbish. The children are working also at the dump. They finished work early to come to the show. We arrived at a muddy school yard in front of a very colourful, child friendly painted school building. The inside wasn't as child friendly though. There was a terrible smell from the dump. The building has got no windows and not a single fan for a bit of cool air, never mind fresh air! We picked a cloudy day and it wasn't as hot that day but the smell was still overwhelming. The care workers of the school seemed quite proud of the improvements since Eddie had been there before but I'm sorry to say there shouldn't be a place on earth for children to be and learn some school lessons at a place like this. We are human beings and God gave us senses for a reason. My nose very clearly told me to try and get some fresh air but it was not possible in this building. The children already gathered sitting down on the floor when we arrived. It was fairly quiet. One could feel these children hadn't got much to laugh about and living as working children on the dump is not much fun. But our shows did brighten them up even so it was a lot harder for me to perform in this environment. After our Clown play was finished, I could sit and watch Clown Eekie who did his job very well to also make some adults laugh which had arrived meanwhile. Afterwards we handed out jellybeans to the chewing children. It seemed to me like Christmas had arrived for those children. We left some tables full of donations of the “The Gift of Happiness Foundation” which were received very gratefully and for sure the people there can really do with help of material needs.

Tuesday 9.8.2011

In the morning we went to the “Best friend school” a migrant school about 40 km north of Mae Sot

on the road to Umpang. It was raining this morning and when we arrived at the school we had to walk up the hill on slippery red earth ground to get to the building where we performed. Quickly we were accompanied by the children helping us to bring our gear for the show. Getting ready and set up was now more of a routine and therefore I had time to worry whether they were able to supply us with electricity needed to power up our computer for the music of “The Clown and the Dancer”. I saw them climbing up to a fluorescent light on the ceiling putting tables and chairs on top of each other in order to reach the light and tape an extension lead to it. Wow, what an effort they made to supply us with power but everything got done and my German straight thinking and organized mind set couldn't quite believe this is really happening. Anyway it did. There was more than one hundred kids sitting on rough earthy ground covered with bamboo mats and waited full excitement for us to start the show. There was also several staff and volunteer care workers from Europe. One could always tell when the children were more open, friendly and smiling, that they received more care and love. Usually this was the case when some charity organisations are involved with enough stuff for a school. The shows were perceived well. Again there was lots of laughter and smiling faces and charity workers asking us if we could come back again. We had to move on to the next school and left the donations which were thankfully taken by responsible staff. Again the children helped us to bring gear back to the vans and of we went to the next school.

The “Nam Tok School “ (Waterfall school) is a migrant school for displaced families from Burma. Often there is just one parent with the children or an older siblings taking care of the younger ones. The “ Nam Tog School “ was reached quickly on our way back towards Mae Sod, after a lunch break at one of many food stalls by the side of the road with delicious Thai food. Eddie was very well known here and he was pleased to see growth and progress had been made at this place. He pointed out a small cow shed which was the start of the school and now they have a few buildings including a small Community Centre with a concrete floor. I have to mention those buildings are still very, very basic buildings to be called a proper school for children. When we arrived the headmaster invited us for some food which some of our helper crew of volunteers enjoyed while Eddie, Aom and I put up the gear for the show. We decided to perform the Fairytale “The Frog prince “ this time to see how the people here would perceive this. These Burmese migrants have very little Thai and English or none at all. In order for them to understand the story we had a young teacher translating. We had about 60 children and 10 or more adults for an audience. They enjoyed the active and very expressive parts of the play and had a good laugh. But it was difficult to get the timing right with all this translating which left sometimes a question mark in peoples and children's faces. Unfortunately because of my personality I got somewhat frustrated because of this but still they enjoyed the show and were thankful for the play. Because of the simplicity of Clown Eekie's show the children and people here just fully enjoyed to laugh their heads off and afterwards there was great excitement to get the beloved jellybeans. Young and old happily received the sweets and there were many smiling faces that afternoon.

Wednesday 10.8.2011

It was our last day of performance on this journey. But it was supposed to be a big one. Eddie told us we would go to a big school and it could be an audience of over one thousand pupils. I was rather nervous the night before. Never had I performed in front of such a large crowd. But it turned out to be different after all. Because of a big official ceremony at the school with many important people from the government visiting, we changed the venue and instead of one thousand kids, we played for about 30-40 children of a kindergarten. I couldn't tell should I be relieved or disappointed. When we arrived, the children sat on the floor and hardly moved looking very serious. Suddenly there was like a relief in the room. The children started to move and smiled at us. They thought we were health workers sent to give them some injections and so they were very afraid of us. Because the children were very small Eddie decided to only do a small part of his “Clown Eekie show” which made them laugh a lot. I had the feeling they didn't understand the story of “The

Clown and the Dancer” show but they enjoyed silly dancing and movements as well as the Clown chasing after the dancer. The staff of the kindergarten was very thankful of this unexpected visit and it was a joy to see everybody of this place happy and full of smiles when we left.

Wednesday afternoon and the next morning we also visited the Mae Tao Clinic, a Men’s Health Centre for HIV infected migrants and a women’s refuge for abused women and children. We handed out donations and food at those places. It is badly needed for those people and children to receive just the bare necessities but more so they need hope. We should not ignore anymore the existence of such poor and sick people and children living in countries where we like to spend a lot of money to have what we think is “a good time”.

I want to thank Edward Haworth and his team for the efforts to help and to take us to a journey which allowed us to learn in a small way about giving. After this experience I truly believe we can only receive in life what we are able to give.