

Reflections from Keith's visit with us...

Visiting a Refugee Camp

I live so far from war, from dictatorships and from the world of refugees both in distance and also in experience.

Visiting the Mae La camp *feels* almost like visiting another planet – a place where the people are all there because they fled their homeland out of fear for their lives, where forced dependence is a way of life, where the children born there have never known another life and where they are not permitted to grow their own food.

Indeed, I am very interested in why some suffering and oppressed people never become bitter.

In some ways, the camp is like a big outdoor prison where each family has its own house but in this case there are lots of additional children without parents.

No one is allowed to leave the camp and visitors come only by permission.

We were told that officially there are 42,000 people in the camp but unofficially the numbers ranger from 50-60 thousand. Half of these are children.

This is a great injustice.

Time and space do not allow me to talk about what I am learning about human dignity, hope, human rights – a right to be safe and a right to an education (a United Nations declaration for children), and the Karen people.

In the future, I would like to write more about how a people robbed by war and the unjust lack of education do not allow their suffering to make them bitter.

I want to talk about the lack of privacy, the need for blankets over toys, the lack of art in the

camps and how the people put posters on their walls to create beauty, to insulate and to provide privacy. What must it be like to grow up in a place with no privacy?

There is so much that can be said about the contrasting worlds I have experienced and how this journey awakens my soul to what matters in this life. On another day, I will write about landmines, bamboo housing and my feelings about the way the children looked at me when we visited. But that is another day.

Love is still a verb, *Keith*

Keith's head peering around a group of orphaned Burmese refugees from the Lisu Tribe.

To the right are the bamboo houses of refugees of Mae La Camp located between the borders of Myanmar and Thailand.

