

Happy Sweet December, Merry Christmas and Happy New Year! I am crawling out from behind the rock of crazy and hoping to get this written before I need to add an Easter greeting! I know that Christmas was different to how many people hoped and planned, but I trust that you have had a restful and enjoyable Christmas and New Year.



– Covid style with a small group of 30. The boys were well behaved, and I only had to stop Phoenix twice from making a run at the teddy bear cake with demented eyes that sat on the small table in front of our Pastors wife. Following the service, we stripped the boys down and let them attack their cake. It took a little while for them to get

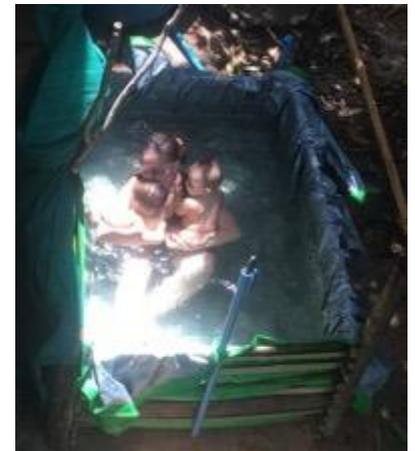


This past year has had skates on, despite all the COVID restrictions that we have all encountered, clinic continued and so too did being mother to two fast growing boys! These fast-growing boys turned 1 in November. They have spent the year tag teaming on meeting milestones, taking it in turns with each other. After threatening to walk and taking random tottering steps at 9 months, they started walking at 11 + months and running by their birthday! We celebrated their first birthday with a thanksgiving service



into it -but they eventually worked it out and Phoenix accidentally fell over on the cake. This both amused and horrified many people, but the boys had fun. They love to explore and play in the dirt, Phoenix loves to get dirty, and Orion likes to wash his hands – they both loooooove to be involved in everything. They are water babies – we had started taking them swimming early on back in Australia and we grabbed a construction tub when we got back, and they had a large bathtub that due to the weather they often had alfresco baths! Eh Hsu is rather innovative, and he made us a small pool out of bamboo and a tarp. They loved this – but sadly they have outgrown the pool. They will

take any opportunity to climb in any bucket or tub of water. They are adventurous and inquisitive and like to investigate and climb everything. I love their sense of wonderment as they see new things that excite them. A few weeks ago, they had their first haircut, this was something I was not prepared for and a few tears were shed as their baby curls hit the dirt, and they were transformed from babies to little boys. They are babbling away and throwing in words both Karen and English. They have their own language and seem to understand each other! They make my heart mush on a daily basis.



COVID has shaped everyone's world quite dramatically. For me, it has kept me firmly in Kyaukkyi for most of the year. Last time I wrote we had experienced few cases of COVID in Myanmar, however around August cases started picking up and accelerating, both in a conflict zone in Rakhine State in the west of Myanmar and in Yangon. Yangon went into a strict lockdown. It was hoped that this measure would contain it all in Yangon and not have it spread throughout the country. This was initially successful but inevitably the number of cases increased and spread throughout the country. Miraculously, since the new year the daily number of positive cases has dropped below 1000 and is consistently sitting 500-600 cases. Restrictions have stayed in place, and despite things like a curfew from 10pm- 4am and shoot on sight orders people seem to routinely disregard the curfew and instruction to wear a mask. Our clinic has implemented Covid safe practices and have expanded our waiting area to enable social distancing in the waiting area. The past few months saw a decrease in numbers of people accessing the clinic – but the numbers in the midwifery clinic have remained high. Thankfully the Karen have been able to keep Covid out of their control areas.

We have had another national election that I would not term free and fair, it saw the NLD [National League of Democracy] re-elected as the leading body here. Areas under conflict were banned from voting, it was announced it was due to safety, but the reality is that those areas had next to no support for the NLD. Now the military is trying to have the election investigated for fraud etc. They have said “we are not saying we



will stage a coup, but we are not ruling it out either”. They are being ornery (this being the politest I can be for the newsletter) and have commenced fighting with the Karen despite the National Ceasefire Agreement. Peace in this country seems like something that will never come. There are more than 1000 people hiding in the jungles of Karen State now. 3 of the babies we support with milk formula due to their mother’s deaths are among those hiding. I am not sure what this means for their nutrition – were their families able to carry formula with them when they fled? We don’t know. We just know that they fear lighting fires as that will give their location away, they are running short on food and it is cold, and this is not what is supposed to be happening. Pray for them, it’s complicated and dismal and it’s hard to hold onto hope as the fighting resumes.

The year was completely turned upside down for most of our program. I would say that our clinic in Kyaukkyi was the thing that didn’t really change despite all the hoops we that we encountered and had to jump through. We had interviewed our new batch of students and were preparing them to go for their first year to Chiang Mai when the border to Thailand closed. We kept hoping it would reopen and we would be able to get started even if late in the year, but that has remained firmly closed. Thailand was proud of their low case numbers but have experienced a surge in cases since December. We are hopeful that in the coming months we will be able to bring last year’s first years to Chiang Mai to commence their first year of study. We will most likely need to start the year in Kyaukkyi while we apply for visa’s, obtain insurance and all the other things that are now necessary. Please keep this in your prayers as this would mean transporting 14 young Karen who have never travelled out of the country on a flight to Bangkok on their own to undergo 2 weeks of quarantine in a hotel before being able to meet up with someone from the EMA team. So, this will require some preparation. The New Grad Physician Assistants and the student PA’s are making such incredible impact in the areas they have been already, so it’s vital we don’t let Covid completely stall the program.

In November our remote clinic got a call to go to a village there was a pregnant woman, bleeding and in bad shape. Three of our senior students climbed onto the trusty motorbike and as fast as a dodgy jungle path, darkness and rain would allow them sped towards this village. They arrived and sprang into action, it was clear that she was in critical condition, so a general assessment was made, and IV fluids started while one of the guys pushed everyone to get men to carry her in a hammock. While our team were able to reach her by motorcycle it was impossible to transport a woman in shock and still bleeding via motorcycle. One of the students made the decision to send one of their team back to the clinic to prepare for her arrival and to



notify the rest of the team. The other two hurried by foot with the villagers. The whole team back at the clinic sprang into action and made me proud. Despite such catastrophic blood loss and worrisome condition of the mother, the baby at 32 weeks was hanging in there, this fuelled the already urgent push to get mama to the hospital and surgery. Then 9 people piled into the back of the clinic truck – let’s not worry about the poor wheel alignment for now or Covid restrictions and headed the 3 hours to the nearest surgical facility which is also the nearest government hospital. They crossed rivers and motored through thick boggy

areas and finally arrived at the hospital. There were hairy moments in the back of the truck, one moment of being unable to obtain a satisfactory BP reading and mum becoming nonresponsive. The fact that this mama

was alive when they arrived was no small feat and 100% attributable to our team. Sadly, the baby didn't make it, but Mama did, and she was able to return home to her 2 small children – they did not lose their mama. I am so impressed with our PA's – this is just one case in many. This case has inspired the idea of a mobile blood transfusion kit to take to calls such as this one. So Eh Hsu and I are working on two kits to pilot. We are yet to give it a snappy name, but the Jungle Jim and Transfusion Timmy are leading contenders.



Right before Christmas we had our first group of PA's finish the program. We had a completion ceremony complete with Covid regulations. So, it was special guests numbering 30 and mostly socially distanced. It seemed in some ways a little anticlimactic – but those students were so excited and proud of themselves and we were for sure proud of them. They are our test batch – and they are impressive. This final year was



upended but we managed to pull off a good teaching plan for them despite various internships being cancelled. I had the opportunity to teach them all pregnancy ultrasound, and to specifically invest in one of the students Lay Lay Poe. She is heading up the maternal child health area at Raintree Clinic this year, and it has been our aim to get them an ultrasound the same that I use at the clinic. Lay Lay Poe was able to do 200 ultrasounds in a number of months, and I have great faith in her ability to perform an accurate pregnancy ultrasound. She has become adept at picking up breech babies on palpation and gives me great hope for the improvement to maternal health services in her area. Sustain

Projects had the opportunity to apply for a small grant from an Aussie company. We jumped at the opportunity to request 2 pieces of equipment for the Raintree Clinic, an ultrasound and a solar vaccine fridge. It was with great excitement that we found that we had won the grant. I had hedged my bets and ordered the only solar vaccine fridge remaining in a locked down country. I was able to put our application in for the ultrasound to a specific program that refurbishes a particular ultrasound and offers them to clinics and programs like ours for a fraction of the cost. We wouldn't be able to afford this machine otherwise. I had gotten the quote in September, and by early November we were notified we had won the grant and we immediately put in our application to find that due to Covid the program has been suspended. They hope to have it up running again early this year, I have become like a small child in the car "are we there yet?" instead emailing regularly asking "have we started again yet?" Please pray that we are able to get the ultrasound soon. Added to the complexity of accessing the ultrasound is the complexity of transporting it internationally to Myanmar in times of COVID.



We made the decision to stay and wait out COVID, I think it's fair to say that while we didn't anticipate that it would go on as long as it has. Australia has made it exceedingly difficult to return home. There has been an indefinite hold placed on visa applications to Australia from Myanmar. This is relevant, as Eh Hsu would need a visa in order for us to return. The next complication is the lack of flights to Australia. The current pricing puts a one-way ticket at \$7900 USD, two of those tickets converts to around \$22,000 AUD. There is no way we could pay that kind of money for a one-way ticket. I commented to my family that we could build a reasonable house for that kind of money. They said - do it! Build the house and come home when its reasonable. So, we started looking into it but have decided to try to buy a house instead at this stage. We have our eye on land in Kyaukkyi that has a house on it. It is a renovator's delight. It currently has a jungle for a yard that will need some TLC, but there are 3 mango trees in the yard and the potential for a good garden and room for the boys to run and play. As with many things here there are complexities, and the first complexity is getting the money here. It is a logistical challenge that has required many favours and

assistance from a number of friends. Due to Australian banks not allowing direct transfer of money to Myanmar accounts, and the limits placed on institutions like Western Union, as well as Covid lockdowns we



have needed to send the money via Thailand to a friend and we are hopeful that in the next week or so to have it arrive to us. We started this process back in November. The next complexity is ensuring that the owner really owns the place and that it will indeed be deemed to be ours. It is common here in order to avoid land tax, to leave the land in the previous owner's name, to hold the paper and technically own it but not have it in your name. This is bound to be easily contested in court I would imagine. We have asked the Land Department to look into it for us. We will only purchase if the original owner comes to sign it over to us. So, there

is much still in the air at the moment. It has had its moments of stress and considerable frustration. We would appreciate prayers for the next steps!

I am about to go through the process of getting my Myanmar Nursing and Midwifery registration, I understand there is a test involved! I am not concerned about knowledge, but often the Myanmar to English translation is confusing. Eh Hsu is looking forward to helping me with preparation.

Christmas was quiet – no carolling this year, which is sad it's my favourite thing about Christmas here in Myanmar. People coming to your door and singing Christmas songs. On Christmas Eve we randomly planned



a Christmas lunch, and we weren't sure how many family were coming – but we bbq'd ducks, pork ribs, chicken wings and roasted chicken, potatoes, corn and of course – rice! We had most the family and a few cousins. The week before Christmas, Eh Hsu asked me to make a gingerbread house for us to put together. We had no lollies to put on it – so we trawled the little stores downtown and came up with a few random options, we then melted down some cooking chocolate and smeared it flat on a tray and then covered it with 100's and 1000's that we cut out with a tiny round cutter making our own home-made freckles. So, we showed the girls how to assemble and decorate. It was so much fun. We had the family deconstruct and eat it on Christmas day. No one had seen anything like it. Phoenix was crouched up on the table and was gently breaking off pieces and handing them out. We served pavlova and cheesecake slice for dessert. Our family rolled back to

the village that afternoon. It was declared a great event and thus our Myanmar Christmas tradition has been born.

Tomorrow (29th Jan) Eh Hsu heads out to run a training in the jungle for a few days, it will be the first time away from us at night. He will be back for a week and then he will head out again to provide the same training at a different location. He is a fabulous teacher, and I am thankful he can share his skills. There are so many stories, and so many wonderful moments to share, and it taken me almost 3 months to get this written. I will do my best to post things more often on Facebook and will continue to aspire to being a regular writer. We do love to hear from you, even though I am slow to reply. You are all such great sources of encouragement to us and we are thankful. We are so thankful to all our friends and their generosity when we were in Australia, it has meant that we can do things like purchase a generator to get us through the frequent and extended power outages and still have fans, cold food and clean laundry! We purchased the generator and got it up here to Kyaukkyi the day that they locked Yangon down. It was a huge logistical adventure for our friends who helped us achieve it. It's been a year of new things, learning to make sausages, hams, regular baking of sourdough, hoping to start making cheese this year! Ha!!! Keep us in your prayers.



Now I always save something exciting for the last page! This deserved a page of its own – and with such a long newsletter I hope you have reached this point. You all know I have been asking for prayers and support for years for a birth unit. There has been roadblock after roadblock. We have tried to be pragmatic and embrace what God has put in front of us but its been a challenge! Now we are looking at being able to start the building in the next few months. We have the whole hospital complex designed and the first 2 building phases are the Birthing Unit! The designs have been completed by architects and have been signed off on

by a Myanmar Engineer who is responsible to the Ministry of Health. There is a Burmese architect currently tidying up the design and adding Myanmar aesthetics to it. This first picture is what we are anticipating the finished product to look like from the outside. We are literally waiting for the Land Department to rezone our land in order to start. They have confirmed its possible it's simply a matter of paperwork that will get permission here locally, then at a state level and finally at a national level. They have anticipated that with COVID delays and standard



governmental delays this process should take no more than 3 months.

This second photo is what we plan for the first phase of the build. This will get us started and allow us to provide full services from antenatal care through to birthing and post-partum care. The second phase will see us expand and have staff areas, nursery, isolation room and more. This is a dream coming true – it is just coming true in slow motion!



The third picture is what the layout of the final phase of the project will provide us with. It's not the design I would naturally lean to – but it's the design that will satisfy the standards of the Ministry of Health. In the design process I showed our team a photo of the birthing room I was in when I had the twins. Lismore hospital has large spacious rooms with a beautiful big bathtub in the middle of each room! Our local Medical Director laughed and said "Theramu that is a hotel room not a birth room". I laughed and reassured him it was indeed a birth room! Myanmar is not yet ready for such extravagant space, but this design

will allow for some incredible changes to the facilities and care that women receive here. I am looking forward to being able to welcome support people for the women delivering and so much more in an aim to bring safe, dignified and compassionate care to the women in our care.



We are praying and hoping that we are able to start the build before rainy season! God has answered so many prayers to get us to this point. Please give thanks that we are at this point and pray that things will move forward smoothly. Please pray that the building process would be able to start, that money would continue to come. Please consider donating to this incredible project. We have a good solid start thanks to a lot of Aussie generosity last year, it would be amazing to see Australia get right behind this project. There will be some fundraising with a difference this year, so stay tuned. Please sign up to the Sustain Projects Myanmar Facebook and Instagram pages to keep up to date on progress. Thanks again for all the ongoing love, encouragement and support. It is most valuable and appreciated.