



Once again it has been way

newsletter. We have been back in Australia for several months now and it's been a time of trying to work out which way is up. It was such a heartbreaking thing to leave Myanmar in the way we did. While it was a relief to finally get on the plane, and the hoops that were necessary to jump through were crazy and stressful. We were not guaranteed of being able to get into Australia. DFAT was telling us to leave and yet where were we to go? Thankfully at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour when we had decided it was time to go back up to Kyaukkyi if we couldn't get to Australia, we were given a kind of permission that still required us to convince the airline that we were really allowed back into Australia. We were accused of being queue jumpers and the like. It was mentally exhausting. We had heard so many varied stories about people getting out, so we were not sure what to expect. For sure there was a certain amount of increased awareness as we headed through the highly militarized lead up to the airport with multiple checkpoints and then the bedlam once at the airport. I didn't realise at the time, but our good friend who was driving us that day and was required to show his national ID at every check point was on a list of people that the military wanted to arrest and imprison due to his role in anti-coup actions. He is responsible for more than 60 vulnerable people reaching liberated territory and achieving safety. He took huge risks to help us leave. He has since fled the country to Thailand for the safety of himself and his family. He is effectively stateless now.

too long since our last

Finally in Australia – only it was Melbourne and not a great time to be there and well, we were confined in quarantine. It was actually a good way for us to start to process the things that had taken place. The boys also decided it was a time to toilet train – who is to argue with that? We spammed Facebook with daily posts of what we got up to! We made friends with the nurses who called daily and the team who regularly swizzled our nostrils. The boys would also be ready saying “my turn now” for their covid tests. They became famous for not flinching and not screaming and for just being generally happy little guys when the knock came at the door!



We celebrated the boy's 2<sup>nd</sup> birthday with most family days after getting out of quarantine. We had decided to bypass Sydney and head straight to Nat's place on the far north coast as the flights were too good to pass up. There was no time to admire or appreciate Melbourne as if we stayed longer in Melbourne we would have been required to quarantine again in NSW. This was a shame, as my primary school Teacher and Headmaster (John and Andrea Metcalfe) the only people we knew in Melbourne had reached out and it would have been lovely to meet up with them. There are also people from Eh Hsu's village in Myanmar who now live in the greater Melbourne area, it would have been so wonderful to catch up with them.

It was such a wonderful thing to have Christmas with our family, to meet our new sister-in-law and to just have some pretty wonderful family time. We are still processing all that took place and trying to work out where we are going from here. The only sure thing is that we will be going back. Ideally, we want to go home, however for that to happen, the revolution needs to be won. I am ashamed that I have failed to continue to keep you up to date on the situation in Myanmar. Its bleak, however, not without hope. The military continues to wage war against the people of the country. The people continue to resist and resist well. The West continues to offer platitudes of support that amount to little more than words. The people of Myanmar feel betrayed by the west. The comment has been made many times, that if even a small fraction of the arms that are being provided to the Ukraine had been sent to the Ethnic

Armed Organisations in Myanmar, the revolution would be over by now. This is not to say Ukraine should not be supported. Myanmar people are very vocal in support of the Ukraine.

The situation in Kyaukkyi now is distinctly different to when we left. The fighting in the general township has had many villagers flee. The booming and shaking of mortars and rockets and general fighting are shaking the town daily. To leave the township you need to apply to the military commander in charge of Kyaukkyi Township. He is a truly evil man. This has made it very difficult for patients to be able to come from outside of the township to the clinic and to also return home to their village before the security gates close. Munitions are landing within 1 -2 km of Kyaukkyi Town, and our land out of town has shells and mortars zipping around and landing on surrounding farms. Despite all this it really is difficult to not be there with our family and friends. It seems somewhat selfish to have left for our safety when that is not an option for the rest. We had originally thought we would be standing with them all throughout this season. It wasn't until we were targeted and given no choice that that thought changed.

T-RAD continues to offer essential care, and Naw Moo Law Eh the nurse I trained in sonography continues to scan the pregnant women of the area. A few months ago, she was able to diagnose triplets! The triplets have since delivered at about 35 weeks and are doing very well. The midwifery staff were able to join the family for a thanksgiving when they were 15 days old. They were all born weighing about 3lb 3oz. They are simply beautiful.



This year [so far] I am supporting 4 babies with milk formula through the midwife project, due to the deaths of their mothers. The coup has increased displacement as well as decreased opportunity for access to essential health care. Sadly, from what I am hearing from various sources it sounds as though the maternal deaths are increasing rather than decreasing. In May, a woman who we had previously looked after and had arranged a c section for due to severe pre-eclampsia, did not feel safe to access health care from her area and decided that as she was a community health worker and with friends who were trained medics, she would be safer to stay at home despite having signs of pre-eclampsia in her second pregnancy. A week ago, I was notified that she had passed during labour with her second baby. Her husband and daughter lost wife/ mother and daughter/sister. The costs of this are too high and the military must be stopped. There are many families grieving, but grieving a loss of a mother is exceptionally difficult, please remember these people in your prayers.

In February we were getting ready to have an epic celebration of Mum's 70<sup>th</sup> birthday and subsequent family team at the Sampson Challenge in Lismore on the Saturday and Port Macquarie running festival on the Sunday. Instead, the rivers burst, and Lismore flooded first and then the surrounding locations. Luke's then fiancée Stacey's house had flood water enter the house; thankfully only about 30cm deep. Deep enough to need to pull the house apart and renovate though. In the surrounding areas it went further, and Nat's house which was never meant to flood not more than a few cm's in the area below the house in a 1 in 100-year flood, flooded. The house went under almost to the roof. Nat and Bob lost pretty much everything as well as their two cars (well one was my old car). They are still trying to get the house in a position to start again more than 3 months later. Eh Hsu and Mum went up for a week when it first happened to try to help in whatever way they could.

My brother Luke married Stacey in April and it was so good to celebrate with all our family again and welcome Stacey to the family. The boys were the ring security and minus a meltdown prior to taking the rings up they did wonderfully! They were so bored with all the prelude to the rings ha-ha. Sadly, I didn't take a single photo of us at the wedding- epic Mummy fail!!



2 days prior to us traveling to Lismore, I was putting the boys to bed when I heard Eh Hsu calling me urgently. He had his arm up and was applying pressure and blood was spilling onto the table. He had been fishing off the pontoon and had caught a stingray – it isn't the first one he's caught and usually he has a way of removing the hook and making sure the tail doesn't flail. Well, this surly stingray didn't like the process and lashed out. We were soon heading up to the hospital leaving Grandma in charge of 2 little boys who were not yet asleep and suddenly very wide awake.

We got to A&E and the lovely triage guy said, "ah stingray – did you hot water it?" ah no! So, we spent the next 20 mins at the sink with hot water streaming down his arm and working as some epic pain relief. An x-ray showed that the spike of the sting ray was deep and about 1 inch in length. We



were sent home to come back the next morning for an ultrasound and consult with the ortho department. Long story short 30 mins later Eh Hsu was on his way to operating theatres for removal of a stingray barb. He now has a rather awesome scar on his forearm. We are now waiting to see if the insurance is going to cover his hospital trip! Prayers are appreciated.

A few weeks ago, we were able to take a little holiday and we stayed on the central coast and enjoyed the rain and bitter cold prelude to winter. It was so exciting after so many months to finally catch up with a few friends. We got to see most of the Aussie crew who came to our wedding a few years back. Such good times spent, but sadly we couldn't catch up with enough people. We were able to take the boys for their first ferry ride (Ettalong to Palm Beach) and first train ride (Berowra to Town Hall) to go to the aquarium. We need to come down to Sydney again to keep catching up with people. It was so soul restoring to see friends that we hadn't been able to see prior to this. Despite this – no I didn't manage to take photos of catching up with said friends! We are so thankful for this time.



We submitted Eh Hsu's spouse visa a few weeks ago, and so now we have a 6 month to 3 years wait I believe. When his current visa expires in October a bridging visa will take over and this would allow him to work or study if we are still in Australia – until then he is not eligible to work which seems crazy. We can leave but need to apply for an exit visa for him or his spouse visa application is invalidated. We are so thankful for the team of people taking care of this. Prayers are appreciated for this process. Thanksgiving that it has been submitted but prayer for timely completion.

It's been a bit discouraging to be living in limbo these past few months, yes, I know we have so much to be thankful for and life is safe here in Australia, but discouragement has hit several times. In recent times I have applied for a few grants for the work in Myanmar, specifically in the jungle clinic where things are going from strength to strength despite the evil forces around. Sadly, we were declined for both grants, this seemed unusual as we ticked the boxes on each specification, but what is becoming apparent on a global face is that people are reluctant to invest into Myanmar due to the coup and subsequent perceived instability. So, at a time when the country is its most vulnerable people are holding back. This does sadden me, and on one hand it is understandable but on the other hand no its not understandable – this is the whole purpose of aid and its relationship with development. Prayers for this are appreciated.



Now time to be encouraged and be thankful. Look at what we have achieved. Yes, I do mean a corporate WE! To all who have walked and supported the journey to better birthing services for a seriously marginalised population WE together with our Karen community have achieved this. Thank you to all who have contributed to the dream of a birth unit for Karen women. This picture is where we are at with that. After many false starts we are significantly ahead in the building. The original unit had been designed for being built in Kyaukkyi. For obvious reasons this plan was seriously

derailed. So now we are building in the jungle at our remote clinic. The coup while getting in the way of some plans enhanced others. With the collapse of the government health system thanks to the Civil Disobedience Movement [CDM] we have added to our jungle clinic 2 surgeons, an internal medicine doctor and a theatre Nurse. For close to a year, we have been doing surgery. There are so many incredible cases that our remote clinic has been able to manage without the patient needing to enter dangerous conflict territory. Women now have access to necessary c sections, and there have been several c sections done that were distinctly lifesaving. For example, 2 nights ago a woman about 38 weeks pregnant came in bleeding heavily. Our team scanned her and saw that she had a complete placenta previa. They were able to safely deliver the baby and save the mums life. The case got rather hairy, and mum was bleeding heavily, the team narrowly avoided doing a hysterectomy to control the bleeding. It's not hyperbole to say that our team saved that Mama's life. She would have bled too much by the time they could get her to the major city of Hpa An. So that picture above is the Surgical and Birth Unit. We have had women coming from all over Northern Karen state for care, and the complication factor has risen significantly – but this is the population we need to be available to. At any one time we can have more than 5 women waiting for labour or waiting for their pregnancy to come to term so that they can deliver safely and then go home. So, while big donors worry about investing in Myanmar – we are seeing the power of those who haven't given up. Thank you for the constant support of prayer, finances, and

encouragement. We would be unable to do what we are doing if we didn't have each of you in our corner. We are at the point of outfitting our birth unit. Gosh it sounds so unreal that that's where we are. This has been a dream for 13 years now. If you would like to contribute to the outfitting of the unit, head to our website at [www.sustainmyanmar.org](http://www.sustainmyanmar.org) and see some suggestions. Now is the time to donate as we head at an alarming pace towards the end of the financial year. Please be praying for this. Give thanks for all that has been achieved and pray that we would be able to get the necessary support to complete the process.



I also need to thank all of you who have continued to support me in this in-between time. We are working towards getting back to the Thai side and continuing to support our team from there. It's been an adjustment – nothing dramatic, but having 2 small men to reorientate and focus on has taken quite a bit of my attention not to mention the floods, random trips to the hospital emergency room.... We are living with my 92-year-old Grandfather and my mother. Being a 4-generation household has been good for all of us, we wouldn't have been able to survive without the ongoing support and being able to live with family. Orion recently needed specialist dental surgery in Newcastle for teeth that hadn't developed properly. This and Eh Hsu's visa

and potential hospital bill as well as some potential medical costs for myself has increased the money going out side of things despite saving for some of it. So later this week I will be having an interview to pick up casual shifts at Port Macquarie hospital. This will be to help us get ready for heading back to Thailand. Being back in Australia my support has taken a small hit and I hate mentioning this – but I will need to increase support before we return. If this is something that you feel led to – we are very appreciative. Please pray for this time, for getting enough shifts, for getting things ready to head back including increasing support level. I also need to have some medical appointments, this has been a slow process, and prayers for appointments and resolution of issues would be appreciated. I am so thankful for our healthcare system despite the stress it is under, it is truly amazing.

For those of you wondering why I haven't been active in posting on Facebook about what is happening in Myanmar – and the reason is to do with security. Facebook and messenger are incredibly non secure platforms, and I cannot say anything that will put my family, friends, and our projects into potential danger. This was not only a personal decision but also an organisation decision. It has been particularly frustrating as social media can be a really great way to create awareness. I came back to Australia determined to continue with regular emails to update you on the happenings. That sadly has not happened. Things kept changing and the context of it all is intense and complicated. Planes were flying overhead in Karen State daily in the leadup to rainy season and the military had issued the threat that they would destroy in totality the 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade of Karen State with a combination of air attacks, artillery, and ground troops. Thankfully this has not happened. The fighting though continues to come closer to Kyaukkyi town. Eh Hsu's family remain safe; the clinic is under some stress and tonight we were discussing if we should move our things to Eh Hsu's village. If the KNLA [Karen National Liberation Army] do gain control of the area, which is looking a distinct possibility, the likely response from the military would be to bomb the town. More analysts are conceding they were wrong and are now agreeing with the people of Myanmar; that the people will win. The military are committing every desperate and evil action they can to try to stop it, but I do believe it is only delaying and providing utmost trauma in the meantime. Pray for an end to this. Pray for justice for the people of Myanmar, a land free of a terrible military.

Myanmar is in serious need of support and encouragement and action. I pray that your prayers lead you to affirmative action, be it through advocacy, promoting awareness, support of IDP's, support of our projects or support of vulnerable people in our communities. One thing to be actively aware of is Sean Turnell still incarcerated in Myanmar. Charged with the most farcical crimes, write to Senator Wong request action, pray for him and his family, pray for his release.

Thanks again for walking this journey with us and for your enduring encouragement and support. We are thankful for you.

