



A Historical Step Forward

This year for the first time 10 girls from the Rshi ethnic group project villages in Phia Lor cluster have come to town to study in middle school.

Until three years ago no girls in that area had completed primary school but now there are nine who had the determination to come to town to study. The tenth girl is Pher, the younger sister of a World Renew staff member who is from the Rshi ethnic group. Pher completed middle school equivalency in the non-formal education classes that our project supports in her village and is now continuing in upper secondary school in town. She also comes to the office to work as an intern/volunteer after school. World Renew provided these girls with uniforms, school supplies, and money for renting textbooks amounting to about \$25 for each student.

During their first week we met to encourage them and give advice. Eu Pia, a Rshi high school junior who began interning with the project last year but is not from a project village, joined us to share how she felt when she first came to study in town. She said it took her two weeks to dare to ask another girl in class her name (most of them speak only limited Lao and are terribly shy around others). Eu encouraged the girls not to be afraid to speak up and not to give up. The Rshi staff and the three artist interns encouraged the girls to make the most of this opportunity since they themselves had wanted to

study but had to drop out after only one or two years of secondary school (one artist after first grade).

The girls come from troubled homes. Two of the girls' fathers are deceased and the remaining eight fathers are all addicted to opium, as are half of the girls' mothers. Just three of the fathers and one of the mothers attended primary school and only for a few years. In most cases the parents only reluctantly let the girls come because the loss of labor for the family household and field work is significant. The parents also do not have extra funds to help with living expenses for the girls. Our project is now in the process of building a student dorm for girls like these who need somewhere safe to stay if they are to continue their studies beyond primary school. In general, parents in a number of villages in ethnic minority areas feel there is not much point in letting their daughters study since soon they will be married and not able to help with the family workload. Many of the parents have chronic illnesses which is why they began smoking opium. One of the mothers has given birth to 11 children and only 5 have survived. The project helped her begin treatment for tuberculosis and provided her with vitamins for anemia and has since given birth to her last child in the hospital because of her many risk factors.

Our group of ten new high school students all agreed that their goal is to at least improve their Lao and learn enough about life in broader society to be able to help themselves

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Fennema Family and World Renew Laos Recent and Upcoming Events:

- On December 25, we were at the end of a long hike through the mountains in northern Myanmar (Kalaw) when Mike tripped on a stone (on a relatively level road surface) and fell on another stone, breaking his kneecap. Fortunately, no operation was needed, just rehab for stiffness and lack of mobility around the kneecap — and to build the muscles back up after two months of inactivity!
- During May and June, Mike will be in Canada for his Connections Tour (new name for home service or deputation). Moe Moe, Maria, and Matthew will join him when school is out on June 14. We look forward to catching up with many of you, as well as spending time with extended family back in Canada. We are also eager to spend time with Monica, who will have completed her first year of university by the time we arrive.
- Matthew's class had a recent school assignment to design a game that had an approximate 30% probability of winning. Pairs of eighth-graders spent many after-school hours and time on the weekend building their games out of wood. On Saturday, February 24, the international school had a fun-fair where all the children from the community had a chance to play the games and collect points for prizes. Meanwhile, the students collected information on winning percentages to determine if they had reached their 30% goal. Matthew and Sonam's game, called "I am Speed" resulted in a win rate of around 34%. Well done!! Here is a what Matthew wrote in reflecting on his experience: "Creating my game for the Funfair event was a very long, hard, and grueling process. I had three in-class lessons a week working hard on the game plus 1-2 hours every single day after school. Even on Saturdays we were dragged into school early in the morning to work. This was a very humbling process because my classmates and I realized how much work we have to put into just get a working game together, let alone an aesthetically pleasing one. This was an amazing experience and it was actually fun for me. I loved the creation of the games, the cutting of the wood, the drilling and painting. Just having access to these cool tools was a blessing and I made sure I used all of them."



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and their children, even if their husbands end up addicted to opium, clearly a legitimate and sadly common concern. At this point, less than half of the girls are anticipating being able to continue beyond this year. But project staff will continue to encourage them, talk with their families, and provide support with the hope that momentum will continue to build not only for these girls, but for many others from their villages and beyond.



by Carolyn Dean
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What's that for?

Take a close look at this photo. What could this item be used for?

Don't hesitate or be shy, but send your best guess to Mike at fivemfamily@gmail.com.

The mystery will be revealed in the next newsletter!



Mystery Revealed

Your Guesses were:

- Firefly bundles for street lights
- Collection of snacks (maybe peanuts or lychee) ready to be sold at the roadside to hungry travelers
- Onions or plums being sold on the roadside



And the correct answer is: snacks sold along the roadside. As you travel around Laos, there are many places with small roadside markets selling interesting products. In this case, it was some kind of nut, quite similar to a chestnut, but I am not sure on the actual English name. The taste was very good!

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