



## A Boy's Desire to Learn *The Story of Tao Huk, Dropout*

It had been a grueling motorbike ride to Nam Naen, a Thaidam ethnic village in northern province of Phongsaly, Laos. Our six-member World Renew team was greeted and graciously hosted by a family in their home on stilts.

As we prepared our dinner on the open-hearth fire, a young boy was reading aloud to a younger boy, using a dim, overhead flashlight and the light of the fire. His determination to read to the younger child was moving.

We learned that his name was Tao Huk. Now thirteen years old, Tao Huk had dropped out of school the year before when his parents divorced. Tao Huk's mother had left and his father needed his young son to help plant rice and do household chores, a common scenario for many Lao children, especially in remote villages.

The next day, as we spoke with students to better understand the reasons for high levels of school dropout among 4th and 5th grade learners, we spied Tao Huk

standing just outside the doorway, now with a baby cousin in his care.

When asked why he was standing in the doorway rather than joining the group of learners in the room, Tao Huk replied "I am not a student." "Would you like to join and be a student?" we asked him. "You are welcome to join even if you're not enrolled in school."

Immediately, Tao Huk's eyes brightened and he entered the classroom with the baby in his arms. To our delight, Tao Huk was very eager to learn and engage in the discussion. He was even appointed by his small group to share the children's remarks at the conclusion of the session!

It was an empowering moment for Tao Huk — given permission and deciding for himself! It was also a moment of opportunity for the young learners and community adults to see the preciousness of the desire to learn both inside and outside the classroom. The community could see this boy's desire to be a learner, despite his current circumstances. At the end of the school dropout reflection session, World Renew's team

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encouraged the community members to explore ways they could help Tao Huk and others like him can continue their formal education.

The low level of government investment in education in Laos (only 3% of GDP) particularly limits education for the ethnic people in remote areas. World Renew's mission in Laos is to help these most vulnerable people. We are grateful to God for the opportunity to make a difference in the life of Tao Huk of Nam Naen village and in the lives of over 2300 other children from rural communities. In 2018, we built 2 five-room schools in remote villages as well as dormitories for over 200 students. We also supported teacher training for teachers from 34 villages. In 2019, we hope to begin working in 12 new villages.

If this is a ministry you feel called to support, please pray with us and for us and help us financially as you are able. The desire of our heart is that all children remain in school and that, if they do dropout, they would find their voice and their way back to the classroom. The privilege of being a lifelong learner is for everyone in Laos!



**Chiraphone Khamphouvong**  
Program Advisor  
World Renew Laos



*Tao Huk presenting reasons learners drop out of school to the people of his village*

## 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](mailto:fivemfamily@gmail.com).

The mystery will be revealed in the next newsletter!



## Mystery Revealed

### Your Guesses were:

- A concept for a Herman character
- Some kind of vegetable
- A gourd growing on a termite mound
- A "scare-horse" (instead of a scarecrow)
- Halloween decorations
- Cocoa pod on an ant hill
- Some kind of bird trap



### And the correct answer is:

a sponge gourd. Also called luffa, this gourd is growing on an old burned out tree trunk in a upland rice field that is part of the slash and burn agriculture system. This gourd is called a sponge gourd because once the sponge gourd is dried, the skin taken off, and seeds removed, it can be used as a sponge!



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# Fennema Family and World Renew Laos Recent and Upcoming Events and Prayer Needs

- We are all looking forward to our Christmas break and the opportunity to visit friends and family back home.
- Moe Moe has now completed all the 25 radiation sessions (the last one was December 5); she will continue taking oral chemo for about 5 more months. We are thankful that she continues to be strong and healthy and thankful also for friends and family who were able to be with her during the 5 weeks of radiation treatment in Bangkok.
- Moe Moe and Mike joined Maria and Matthew for their trip to Phnom Penh, Cambodia for a swim competition. It was great to be together in the same place and also great that Maria and Matthew and the whole school swim team did very well in the competition — Maria and her girls' 15+ freestyle relay team won gold! In what is likely Maria's last competitive swim event, she swam the fastest she has ever swum and I did not capture the moment on video!
- On October 10, we met in Phongsaly with government stakeholders about plans for continuing our work in Mai district. The meeting went very well with government officials at village, cluster, province, and ministry levels all supportive of our continuing work in the Mai district. Now we begin to plan the project in detail and get official approval for those plans.
- December will be a busy month as World Renew Laos staff will be in both Phongsaly for the work described above and in Xieng Khouang for a project evaluation from December 11 to 24. An important meeting with all stakeholders is planned for January 22, 2019.
- We are still in the process of recruiting for a new Lao project manager to bring the Xieng Khouang project forward into its next phase. We appreciate your prayers to find the right person with a vision and heart for working in remote communities.



▲ Matthew doing the butterfly (he has "SUPER POWER" written in marker on his arms for the meet)

➤ Four of our family in Phnom Penh



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# God's Faithfulness

I have been working in Laos for the past four and a half years, and as I sit down to reflect and write this article, I am grateful for life, love, and the care that God has shown me in his own way.

I came to Laos a young, vibrant 26-year-old Kenyan girl with hopes and dreams and my faith in the One who made all things. On this journey of learning to practice my faith, I have been pushed to all lengths; sometimes I think it's the enemy trying to kill my spirit, but I also know it's the Father working on me like a goldsmith.

I had a motorbike accident on September 5, 2017. Since then, I have gone through a healing journey that has taken me through depression, sometimes wanting to give up, not knowing if God is listening, praying and asking questions.

I am glad to see another day, to experience His faithfulness. This October, I was able to travel to the US for my first Connections Tour with World Renew. The highlight of my trip was meeting with colleagues from the World Renew US office and from the field in Uganda. I spent time with the team and visited four churches as well.

However, healing and confirmation of God's faithfulness — an answer to my inner question *"God, why would you let this happen to me?"* — came from a statement made to me by colleague Joseph Mutebi when he said "Marrion, do you know that most people who do community work get into motorbike accidents? It is a weapon that the enemy uses to steal our hope and discourage us from God's call."

My eyes were opened immediately. We have had several accidents in our office with so many broken bones, not only for Mike and me but also for two of my colleagues in Xieng Khouang. We prayed with the World Renew staff at the head office, friends from Princeton Church, and with the Mutebis, for God's favor and protection as we do His work in Laos.



Dinner with Joseph and Robinah Mutebi

Now, I am back in Laos **"being confident of this, that He who began a good work in us will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus,"** for He is able and faithful. [Philippians 1:6]



Marrion Omanyo  
Project Advisor  
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The beauty of autumn at the CRCNA office USA (L) and With new friends at Princeton CRC (R)

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