

New Western Cuisine.



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Eyes on the Street

Will You Save Us?

It is 10:30am on a warm, cloudy day in Bangkok. Her mother sleeps. The little girl, her head very large in proportion to her tiny, skeleton frame, maybe thirteen or fourteen months old, but who knows from her malnourished body, nurses on a small bottle next to "Ma". Their dirty, plastic alms cup is prominently displayed. They lay on a green towel at the edge of the sidewalk, street-side. One can pass without going around them, just barely. The flies have found an easy mark; neither attempts to shoo them away: They are otherwise occupied with their desperate condition.

I slow as I approach them, reaching into my pocket for 100 Baht. It's what I give on the street, unless I sense desperation and then I do more, based on what I have to give. The little girl sees me approaching and her black beauty eyes instinctively rotate towards the top of her head. I look at her; she looks at me. And I can see what she is thinking: Are you just helping us for today or Will you Save Us? I'm not sure.

I lean down and deposit the 100 Baht note in their cup. The little girl watches to be sure it is safely in the cup. She stares at me, still nursing on her near-empty milk. She wonders if I will do more. Her mother continues to sleep. I smile and gently touch her head, stroking her thin hair twice, reassuring her that I really care; that the money is not the extent of my compassion for her, her mother and the rest of her family unseen. She is intrigued, but not impressed. Their need is too great to settle for just so much.

I now see that her mother is pregnant, maybe six or eight months. Apparently she does not practice birth control. It saddens me. I decide to move on about my business. I slowly straighten-up, smiling and keeping my glance on the little girl's eyes. She continues to watch me and wonder if I will be the one who comes to help them forever or just the day. Her mother still sleeps. I slowly begin to walk away, waving and smiling at the little girl. She is expressionless. I turn and am on my way.

On my return I find them, again. It is 11:45am. Her mother still sleeps. The little girl is now across the sidewalk from her mother, sheepishly leaning against the cement building wall...she is bored to death, but she knows she must care for her mother, until she is awake. I am very sad.

I smile, I wave, but she just stares at me, expressionless. She is wearing nothing but cotton underpants. I return to our apartment building. I have to say something to somebody. The Thai ladies at the Front Desk in the Lobby will know. I tell Khun Pui what I have seen, that I am concerned for the little girl...just down the street. That way, I point. Pui and the other Thai ladies seem concerned and confused. I repeat what I told her and I point, once more, emphatically. Now Pui gets it. "Oh, I know who you mean!" she says. "I think it is a business...ha, ha, ha". She sees I am not satisfied with her indifference and her attempt at street humor. "And she is not Thai...I think they are Cambodian" she adds defiantly. I imagine she feels the Thai people have enough problems without sheltering

refugees from the north, who have been smuggled south to find work or beg on the streets. I look at Pui and the other ladies, but the jury has voted unanimously, these people are not their problem; there is no room in their hearts for these unfortunate Souls from another country, whether near or far. Yet I protest, "but something should be done!" I add, "can't somebody help them?" I look at everyone. Pui adds, "yes, and last week, one of the tenants called the police to come and take them away...and now they're back, again!" Their hearts are closed. Compassion is not for everyone they reason, as though it was a commodity in short supply. They stand and sit, staring back at me, arms folded, nothing more to say. I tell them "Well, I am going back in a little while. I want to see if they are alright". I hear their thoughts: They think I am foolish. Just another "farang", who doesn't understand our ways. Let him waste his money on them. If you want to be so generous, we could use some of your Baht: Our families are also in need; maybe not as much, but we work long hours for very little and we just seem to be falling further behind every day. But they won't admit it to me, because they would lose face. It troubles me that I am so fortunate and the little girl and her family are so unfortunate. I vow to return to them as often as possible. Time passes.

It is now 45 days later; I have been traveling to the U.S. and around Asia Pacific on business. I venture onto the sidewalk in front of our condo/office: I am going to see if the mother and her little Princess are on the sidewalk today. I hope so. I hope they are okay. I mean surviving. And yes, Ma is there with her little one, but they now take refuge along the sidewalk in an open telephone booth without a door, the cement floor barely large enough for Ma to squeeze inside with her green towel carpeting and her few small plastic bags of belongings, her little girl sitting just outside the comfort of the booth on the edge of the sidewalk. And Ma is no longer pregnant, her newborn daughter lays next to her, a knit cap on her head and only a small disposable diaper for clothes. She is crying at the top of his lungs. She is very tiny. Ma and older daughter recognize me immediately as I approach and kneel down in front of the family. "Ma!" I say... "Baby!" She smiles, proudly. These poor people I think...I shed a tear for them.

I know if I had the funds, a trip by taxi to my local hospital for physicals for both children by one of the staff pediatricians would be invaluable; no doubt the girls would need several vaccinations, medicines, vitamins and aftercare. But this must simply wait until I have more credit in my card. My finances are kind of low at the moment: Yet I want to do it as soon as I can do so. It is for sure my next goal for Ma and her two little people. I will not stop until I can help them in this way. I will need to make appointments for them over the telephone and then take them all to the outpatient registration desk at the hospital to get the girls outpatient hospital cards before the doctors will see them. But that will be a day worth living. I can't wait to do this for them, for truly, our paths have intersected for a purpose and it is clearly an opportunity for me to help them as best I can. I am **Red Owl**, sadly, over & out.