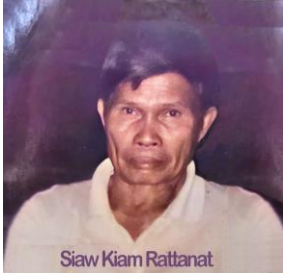


Siaw Kiam:

My Language Tutor, My Friend, and My Burden
By Ron Myers (God's Word for Isan: www.IsanBible.org)

After spending a year in Thai language school in Bangkok in mid-1974, Cheryl and I, along with our two toddlers, David and Angela, rented a six-wheeler truck and moved our meager belongings some 500 miles up to the furthest area of Thailand's most impoverished and densely-populated provinces, the Northeastern or Isan Region.

As young career missionaries, we would begin the next phase of our ministry, i.e., more language and culture learning, befriending people, fitting in, evangelizing, teaching, and eventually planting new churches. As missionaries to the unreached tribes, our desire and primary goal at that juncture was to establish a work among the village-dwelling Nyaw people, in their own language, and within their own primitive village surroundings. This, we did, by God's Grace.



To begin, we needed to conduct extensive surveys to locate these Nyaw villages, which another missionary and I did, riding hundreds of kilometers each day on a pair of 100 cc trail motorcycles for weeks on end, travelling over mostly unimproved roads, both during hot and dusty days, as well as damp and muddy conditions. Meanwhile, our wives and children were living in nice, comfortable Thai-style homes that we had rented in the adjoining provincial city of Sakhon Nakhon, where we would return, usually before sunset each evening. (Note: *Siaw* means close friend)

Through the survey process, we were able to locate a friendly, medium-sized Nyaw village located beside a not-too-bad dirt road, ten kilometers (six miles) from the local district town of *Tah-U-Tehn*, which was on a paved main road, which ran alongside the Mekong River. This was the 200-home village of Ban-Nah-Nai (meaning "Inner Field Village"). When I say "friendly," I mean that the village headman was quite positive about inviting us into the village, claiming that if he gave the word, all the villagers there would "enter our religion." We sometimes referred to him as the *Bantam Rooster*, because of his small stature and boastful crowing.

Later on, we discovered that the village headman was only positive towards us initially, because he was hoping to gain personally from our presence. He turned out to be very corrupt. As soon as he realized this would not be the case, he turned on us behind our backs, trying in every way he could to get us to leave. These ways included spreading a huge campaign among the villagers—who didn't pay much attention, since they liked us and knew his tendencies.

The man also reported us to the government district leader, claiming we were CIA and KGB spies, and Communists. The district leader saw through everything and sent him back home. Meanwhile, we committed the situation to God's care. Soon, the village elders appointed a four-man petition committee. They went throughout the village in teams, getting the required amount of signatures to remove the troublesome village headman from office—which eventually happened.

One of the men on the petition committee was Mr. Kiam, my close friend and language tutor. When the corrupt headman was finally removed from office, the villagers elected a new headman? In a great turn of events, they chose my close friend, Mr. Kiam. Kiam was a carpenter by trade, so our first meeting was when I enlisted his help to finish a few details on our village home. Our friendship then grew.

This is a prime example of how the Enemy often overplays his hand in attempting to delay or prevent us from preaching the Gospel. In this case, seeing churches planted among the Nyaw people and their neighboring Isan villages. Later, the former headman's own son even came to faith in Christ, confessing Him as we sat conversing one day on my village home porch.



The bittersweet part of all this was when Mr. Kiam informed me after a language lesson that, "I really don't understand very well yet, but I know the message that you bring is very important." Later on, proving his interest, Kiam called a village-wide meeting of all the men, and invited me to present the gospel to them, which I did with them listening intently. Unfortunately, my ability in the Nyaw language was still quite halting, and I hadn't yet fully developed the creation-evangelism method.

I continued to work with and pray for Kiam. A few years later, I left the village ministry to begin the Isan translation project. Yet, I returned to visit village friends at times. On one occasion, I walked up to Kiam's house, as I usually did, and called out, "Friend! Friend! Are you there?" All was quiet—no friendly welcome in return. A moment later, Kiam's neighbor called out to me from across the road saying, "Ron, you're too late! Your friend died last month for no apparent reason!" My heart sank. Even now, I often ponder, had Kiam ever truly understood the Gospel? ...enough, that is, to receive Christ before passing unexpectedly?

My only consolation is, our merciful, all-knowing Lord certainly knew Kiam's heart, and his sincere interest in seeking to understand the Gospel. Yet my heart grows heavy even now, years later, as I write about him. My hope is that Kiam came to a more complete understanding later on, and had opened his life to receive Christ before he passed into eternity.

Conclusion: How important is preparedness? That is, how important is it to develop a clear and understandable, scripturally-accurate and well-thought-out Gospel presentation? "Faith cometh by hearing [the Gospel Message]." Rom 10:17

NOTE: I used to have photos of Kiam, but they were in a trunk that was stolen, along with other irreplaceable valuables.