

## Myanmar Adventure

*Kathy Boyland is a secondary school teacher from Rangiora in New Zealand. She recently visited friends in Myanmar who are serving at Tahan Theological College. She shares her experience with us.*

There's a bit of controversy over short-term mission trips these days. Questions about whether a visiting team building a house takes jobs away from locals, or whether a short term stint in an orphanage disrupts children who become attached then lose their friends again.



*Kathy and Helen with some of the B.A. English staff on the in-service training programme.*



*With Wayne and Helen at the local market in Tahan.*

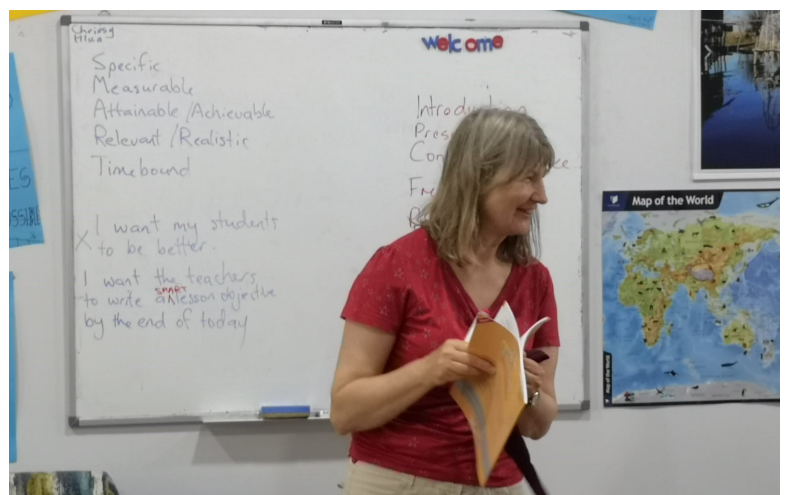
My trip to Myanmar during my October school holidays was not a "mission" but an adventure to visit my long-term friends who really are missionaries there. They've committed years, not days, to their post-ing- doing the hard yards of adjusting to what is culturally alien to them, being tactful in their partnership with Tahan Theological College to bring sustainable income and skills to the team of lecturers and students there.

Helen, currently developing and heading up a BA English programme with several staff to manage and a range of classes, had already paved the way to make sure I could be useful. She had set up a block course to coincide with my visit so I could "teach the teachers".

This was a fabulous opportunity to meet locals from a range of schools and, of course, Helen's wonderful staff who are the exact ages of my three sons. We adapted and greatly simplified some fabulous material developed by the Myanmar Ministry of Education and aimed for interactive and inspiring sessions to provide a pedagogical model for the teachers to follow.

I got at least as much as the teachers from the experience - as I said to them, "It's so wonderful to have people who want to hear what I say!" (My current teaching role is in a secondary classroom!)

Because of the rules in Myanmar, I had to stay in a hotel - which made the whole thing a wonderful holiday for me. Much needed air conditioning, free cooked breakfast, daily room service meant a whole fortnight without doing housework, and all for \$35 a night! The restaurant was also a fabulous place for networking with other visiting Christians - and I had a wonderful day exploring with two women from Volunteer Service Overseas as a result.



*Kathy in full flight during a teacher training session.*



The best part of the trip had to be connecting with the people of Myanmar. The district where Helen and Wayne live is right on the edge of the Chin State. It is full of Christian churches and the people are mainly Christian or Buddhist - both religions cherish kindness. The kindness of the people, the smiles and waves as I travelled on the back of a scooter or by tuktuk, the depth of faith of the TTC faculty and of my friends made the whole experience a spiritual shot in the arm for me.

*Right: Kathy, Wayne and Helen with some of the staff of Tahan Theological College.*



*Wayne and Helen Harry have been serving in Tahan since mid- 2018.*

And the difficult parts? Long term I'd find the heat oppressive. You have to start really early to be able to spend any time outside at this time of the year. (But I hear the Winter - our Summer - is much better). Fortunately NZ is seven and a half hours ahead of Myanmar so early starts are not difficult. There were a few bugs (I got a couple of nasty stings), but nothing like the plague Helen and Wayne had experienced earlier in the year. There are no footpaths - just broken up edges of roads and open drains - and the traffic rules are rather different - so walking or being driven is harder for the faint-hearted. And most people only understand Burmenglish. It has been so long since native English speakers lived amongst them that the English they learn bears little resemblance to the English we speak. Google translate to the rescue!

Other than that, and the long flight to get there, I'd recommend this kind of visit. Helen and Wayne value the help of those with teaching experience or willing to lend a hand on the land, who can slot in and help out, look after themselves and relish the differences. And the people of the Chin State still treat foreigners as VIPs!

*If you are interested in learning how you can support our partnership with the Presbyterian Church of Myanmar, email Global Mission Coordinator Phil King, [phil@presbyterian.org.nz](mailto:phil@presbyterian.org.nz)*



*The staff on the B.A. English programme who participated in Kathy's training programme, with their certificates.*