



*Dining for Women*

## ***Making Connections September 2007 Thailand***

*Chapter Leaders, please see MC Preview on the Program Schedule for chapter meeting ideas using MC and other resources: [http://diningforwomen.org/?page\\_id=12/](http://diningforwomen.org/?page_id=12/)*

Each month, we deal with serious issues affecting women in developing countries and this month is certainly no different. Or is it? Sex trafficking can provoke particularly strong emotional and psychological responses in us. We're quick to want to see it stopped—and rightly so. We're horrified by the perpetrators—even more so when we learn they come mostly from our own or similarly privileged cultures. We're also horrified at the idea of parents selling their daughters into sexual slavery and even more when we realize that simply buying girls out of it doesn't mean they're free or they won't go back. PHI has provided a wealth of information on its website about the reasons why this happens. Basically, poverty and lack of economic alternatives drive the sex trade and keep women and girls in it. But knowing that alone may not help us “connect” to the people of northern Thailand who we are supporting this month through the work of PHI. So our FYI feature this month aims to tell us more about some of their communities. There is much more to them and they have even more to lose than we might have suspected. To look behind the desperation to see the repeatedly threatened dignity, tradition, and possibility of the people of northern Thailand may help us have more empathy for them. We cannot forget that girls are the primary victims here, but behind them is generally a long line and history of victimized people trying to survive.

### ***FYI: Ethnic Communities of Northern Thailand***

PHI works in the province of Chiang Rai, the northernmost region of Thailand that borders both Laos and Myanmar (Burma). Much of it is breathtakingly beautiful, primarily mountainous, with tropical and pine forests, scenic waterfalls, and a tiny wild sunflower found only there. For much of its history, the area belonged to Burma, although it was the ancient capital of the Lannathai kingdom. It is home to some of Buddhism's most sacred relics and important temples.

Over the centuries, various peoples have come and gone across this borderland—invaders, colonizers, refugees, tourists, pilgrims, profiteers. But among those who have come and stayed are a number of ethnic groups, known collectively as “hill tribes” (although a few prefer to live in the river valleys of the region). Most came in the late 19<sup>th</sup> through the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, repopulating the region after political upheaval. There are seven main ethnic groups among the hill tribes, with myriad sub-groups, each having its own language, customs, tribal dress, and religious traditions. Several came originally from southern China (Yunnan) or Tibet, others from Burma (or China via Burma), or Laos. While distinctive, most share certain characteristics. They live in single-

level houses raised off the ground on poles. They keep to themselves but are known for their hospitality. They are craftspeople—silversmiths, weavers, embroiderers, woodcarvers, potters, makers of lacquerware. And they farm vegetables (cabbages and greens, corn), fruits (peaches and pineapples), and rice. Most have ancestral religions that focus on spirits than inhabit nature or people and that may have blended over the years with Buddhism or Christianity. The major characteristic they all share: they are distinctive cultures under threat.

They are threatened economically, environmentally, culturally, and politically; and it is impossible to separate all those factors as the interplay among them is complex.

Traditional modes of farming, such as swidden agriculture (the practice of deforesting an area, farming it a year or two, then allowing it to reforest for several years to restore fertility), are threatened by population growth, ambiguity about or lack of property rights, and environmental policy. (Swidden agriculture can be environmentally sustainable—but not when population outgrows the capacity of the land). The drug-based economy that grew up on the borderland practically overtook other types of farming, replacing it with opium production in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. A country-wide economic crisis in the late nineties left even fewer options for those in rural farm communities—but created enormous opportunity for sex traffickers as young people desperate for work left jobless villages for cities, only to find few options there and practically none of them good. Politically, the hill tribes have been treated as suspect, especially since the 1950s when population increase, poverty, and insurgency threats prompted the government to take measures to control these independent people. Sometimes it resorted to forced relocation. Sometimes it provided economic alternatives to opium cultivation. What it has not done is give legal status to half of the approximately 1 million hill tribe people. And even those who do have some legal rights find claiming them difficult in Thai society.

The flow of people into Thailand from Burma has been ongoing for a very long time. But in the eighties it became a panicked rush as an anti-democratic military regime seized control of the government (renaming the country Myanmar) and systematically terrorized minority groups. Rape was one of its tools. Thus since, another 1 million people, Burmese refugees of primarily minority ethnic heritages not unlike those of the hill tribes in their distinctiveness and independence, have crossed into northern Thailand. Most are undocumented, having no legal status.

What must it be like to be someone who has a distinctive identity and yet no status in society at large? A report issued just a few years ago by Physicians for Human Rights underlined how the “lack of legal status” affects hill tribe and refugee women. Basically it renders them powerless and vulnerable. Education and work opportunities through legitimate channels are denied them. Health care through Thailand’s universal health system is inaccessible to them. Forced to live an underground existence, they are at the mercy of unscrupulous and abusive employers and landlords or they live in danger on the streets. Refugee women particularly may have experience repeated rape and abuse on their journey across the border. Their children have no status. Hill tribe women who’ve lost land and Burmese refugees who’ve lost a country have also lost their rights as human beings. As the report concludes, “Women and girls from these two vulnerable groups are frequently subject to trafficking and sexual violence and abuse. This denial of fundamental human rights and dignity renders them at an unaddressed, elevated risk of HIV/AIDS, among other serious consequences.” Having a distinctive identity and no status, as history has sadly told us again and again, often leads to early death—for a people, for its women.

There is hope in naming victimization for what it is and even more in empowering victims and potential victims to overcome what otherwise might be inevitable. Let’s make hope happen by knowing and naming, by empowering with support, by recognizing human worth.

## ***Recommended Book***

*The Lioness in Bloom* (Susan Fulop Kepner, ed., University of California Press, 1996) is a collection of translated short stories about Thai women, written by male and female authors. The stories span the centuries. Some are sad, some funny. Together they offer a multi-faceted picture of women's lives. It's well worth seeking out. But once again, I turn to a cultural bridge-builder for our recommended book this month. In her early twenties, Canadian Karen Connelly won a Rotary scholarship to northern Thailand. *Dream of a Thousand Lives* recalls her year there and how it shaped her. There are memorable characters from many walks of life: "middle class" Rotarian families, the village girls who work for them, beggars, indomitable women entrepreneurs, refugees trying to find a place, a stalwart schoolteacher, and the amazing landscape itself. Her lyrical but down-to-earth prose belies the fact that Connelly subsequently became an award-winning poet. Her reflections on being a *falang* (foreigner) and making connections are poetic. In many respects, this is love song to Thai people and a wonderful introduction to the culture. ***Karen Connelly, Dream of a Thousand Lives: A Sojourn in Thailand (Seal Press, 2001).***

## ***Socially Responsible Shopping***

Hand-crafted paper and cards, decorative items such as votive candleholders, teapots, jewelry, kitchen items, and intricately embroidered clothing that reflect ancient traditions of the northern Thai hill tribes are available through Ten Thousand Villages ([tenthousandvillages.com](http://tenthousandvillages.com)) and Global Exchange (<http://store.gxonlinestore.org/>). Many of these products come from women's cooperatives that, like PHI, are based in northern Thailand and exist to provide alternatives to the sex trade or support those who are HIV positive as a result of human trafficking. Alter Eco Fair Trade Thai Jasmine Rice and other organic/fair trade products are available via [amazon.com](http://amazon.com) or [www.worldpantry.com](http://www.worldpantry.com). And check out <http://www.herhands.com/> for more craft sources and wonderful photos of women artisans in northern Thailand and elsewhere. Christina, PHI's founder, also recommends the following sources for cards and children's items and for Cambodian crafts: <http://www.nancyhandler.net/> and <http://www.tabithastore.com/>.

## ***Dining with Women***

While hunger often drives women and children into the sex trade, food production can be a way to stop it. Asparagus farming is one of the types of businesses that PHI supports. According to a July report on the Fresh Plaza website (a produce industry news source), Thai asparagus, especially organically grown ones, are in "high demand" for export. A seasonal vegetable in most places, Thailand can grow asparagus year-round. And since, according to the article, organic farming of asparagus costs the farmer less than conventional production, she profits more.

While Thais are feeding the rest of the world asparagus these days, they've always fed themselves very well when they had access to the bounty of ingredients that can grow in Thailand. Incorporating the techniques and traditions of myriad peoples who have come there over the centuries, Thais have developed a complex, vibrant cuisine. In other words, we're in for a treat as any of you who have a favorite Thai restaurant already know.

To eat a Thai meal is to experience a kaleidoscope of colors, flavors, textures and cooking methods. Rice is always at the center of the meal—indeed of the culture. As in some other Asian cultures, Thais greet each other not with "Hi, how are you?," but with "Have you eaten rice today?" Accompanying rice may be vegetable and meat stir-fries and noodle dishes (brought originally from China), curries made from fragrant spice and herb pastes (showing Indian influences often), and always a balance of sweet/sour/salty/spicy flavors. Not all Thai food is spicy hot, but a lot is to North American palates. It doesn't depend, however, on heat to give all the flavor. You can certainly tone down a Thai dish and still experience interesting, tasty food. Thai food reminds us in amazing ways that we eat with our noses (most of what we call flavor is really odor) and our eyes. Lime and lemon, basil, coconut, greens, reds, yellows—you won't get bored.

Thais use chopsticks only with noodle dishes. Otherwise, they eat from spoons and use forks to mix things and push bites of food onto their spoons. Northern Thais are often the exception. There, where sticky rice is favored over the very fragrant Jasmine rice that is daily fare for the rest of Thailand, people use their hands. (See more on rices and eating in the Sticky Rice recipe below).

Thai cooking does involve ingredients that may be unfamiliar: the slightly medicinal galangal root, pungent fish sauce and shrimp paste, brightly acidic lemongrass, extravagantly perfumed kaffir lime leaves, teeny round eggplants, Thai basil, curry pastes, coconut milk, rice noodles, etc. Twenty years ago, they were hardly known at all in the U.S. outside of large cities with significant southeast Asian populations. Today in Greenville, SC, I can buy them all in a little Asian store a quarter mile from my house. I can buy most of them a couple of blocks away in a supermarket.

I can even get three of them in my backyard. Gardeners take note: Thai Basil grows like weed in summer. Lemongrass is a wonderfully fragrant plant to put anywhere you'd like a grassy mound; and a kaffir lime tree is fun to grow in a pot to bring indoors in winter--with a couple of bonuses. It's one of the few plants my cats don't eat (it has some rather serious-looking thorns). And the Cambodian grandmother who gave me mine told me it would keep cobras out of my yard. Thank goodness, so far she's right.

I've given some explanation of unfamiliar ingredients and suggestions for substitutions in the recipes. A good glossary of explanations and photos of ingredients with suggested substitutions is at <http://www.thaikitchen.com/ingredients.html> . Use this as an opportunity to explore Thailand at home—check out an Asian store or a Thai restaurant if you can and haven't.

Fortunately, we have another cultural bridge-builder to help us enjoy Thai food this month. North Carolina native Nancie McDermott was a Peace Corps Volunteer in Thailand and lived there three years, part of the time in the North where PHI works. It left her with a passion for Thai food that she has developed into a career. Among her many books on Thai and other Asian cuisines is *Real Thai: The Best of Thailand's Regional Cooking* (Chronicle Books, 1992). “Real” in two senses, that is: the recipes are both authentic and translated realistically for our kitchens. You can read more about Nancie's experiences in Thailand, her books, and recipes at [www.nanciemcdermott.com](http://www.nanciemcdermott.com). You especially might want to check out two other books of hers, *Quick and Easy Thai* and *Real Vegetarian Thai*. All of our recipes this month come from her website or *Real Thai*. Nancie was “moved, honored, and delighted” to learn of DFW and PHI and gracious to allow me to use her recipes.

All the recipes this month are potluck portable and can be served at room temp or easily reheated. For those who love a little kitchen adventure or love Thai food and would like to learn some authentic dishes to make at home, I've included a couple that are more involved but still not difficult (making your own green curry paste is sooo worth it!). Most are easy and go together quickly—you just may find yourself using a few new ingredients. For the kitchen-phobic or frantically-scheduled, there are alternatives. You'll find easy/quick-to-prepare Thai food kits or products in many supermarkets (Thai Kitchen is a widely available brand.) And if there's a Thai restaurant in your area, think take-out. Or look through the recipes and make something more familiar with an ingredient common to our and Thai kitchens. Asparagus and peaches work!

Even for those of us who frequent Thai restaurants here, northern Thai food may be unfamiliar. I've included two northern specialties. One uses mushrooms (plentiful in northern Thailand's forests). The other is a pork dish (the meat of choice in the North) influenced by the large number of people there of Burmese heritage.

Nancie says that northern Thailand is known particularly for its hospitality. In a northern home, you'd be offered a warm welcome and a drink when you arrive. At mealtime, you'd share sticky rice and several small dishes of the variety I described above while seated on a woven floor mat at a low round table. For dessert, you would be offered fruit and perhaps a little Burmese-style cigar.

We'll skip the cigars, but a fruit salad (mango, coconut, pineapple, banana) would be nice or maybe something not so Thai but still in keeping with the hospitality and flavors appreciated by Thai people. Nancie's newest book is both a departure from her usual expertise and a return home for her—it's called *Southern Cakes*. The cover photo is of a coconut beauty. If sticky rice won't get you to eat with your fingers, this frosting surely will. The book has just come out, so you may not find it in bookstores yet. But for a preview and that coconut cake recipe, see <http://www.latimes.com/features/food/la-fo-cakerec2aug22,1,3797779.story?coll=la-headlines-food>

### **Menu**

Recipes for the following can be found at <http://www.nanciemcdermott.com> (click on “recipe box” on the left side):

***Thai Fried Rice with Pineapple and Shrimp***

***Meatballs in Penang or Red Curry Sauce***

Note: This is a great, easy, quick dish but about a 6 on the 1-10 spicy scale. (I used Thai Kitchen Red Curry Paste.) I love it, but if you don't take the heat well, cut back on the curry paste. You can always add a little more later....

***Thai Spinach with Black Pepper and Garlic***

***Yellow Curry Chicken with Potatoes***

***Thai Iced Tea or Coffee***

The following dishes (recipes below) are adapted from *Real Thai: The Best of Thailand's Regional Cooking*:

***Kai Leuk Koey*** (“Son-in-Law” Eggs)

***Gaeng Kiow Wahn Gai*** (Green Curry Chicken)

***Paht Heht*** (Sauteed Mushrooms with Pepper)

***Gaeng Hahng Ley*** (Burmese Style Pork Curry with Fresh Ginger)

***Kao Niow*** (Traditional Northern Sticky Rice) or Jasmine Rice

***Thai Fruit Salad and/or Coconut Cake*** (see intro for recipe link)

***Thai Iced Tea or Coffee*** (recipe at Nancie's website)

***Limeade, Thai Beer*** (Singha is widely available)

### **Recipes**

***Kai Leuk Koey*** / “Son-in-Law” Eggs

Popular at weddings in Thailand and nice change from deviled eggs here. The eggs are traditionally duck and fried after having been boiled. But I find the sauce and accompaniments work nicely with plain hard-boiled chicken eggs.

*for the Tamarind Sauce*

1/2 c Tamarind Liquid (from Tamarind pulp or concentrate—see below)

1/4 c brown sugar

3 T fish sauce

3 T water

Note on Tamarind Liquid: You make this quickly and easily in one of two ways.

1) Soak a 1/4 c tamarind paste in 1/2 c warm water for 15 minutes. Strain through a fine strainer, pressing on the pulp to extract some of the thicker liquid. 2) Soak 1T or so of Tamarind concentrate in 1/2 c warm water, stirring to dissolve. Strain as above.

You can find tamarind pulp/concentrate in some supermarkets and in Asian (Indian or Latin American) stores. I find the concentrate a bit easier to work with and it keeps a long time.

Bring all the ingredients to a boil in small saucepan, stir to dissolve the sugar. Reduce heat and cook about 10 minutes, stirring occasionally. The sauce will become syrupy but if it becomes too thin, add some water. (You'll want about a teaspoon of sauce per egg half.) Set aside at room temp.

*for the Eggs*

6 hard-cooked and shelled eggs, room temp, halved  
12 pieces of Boston (or loose leaf) lettuce to "wrap" the egg halves  
1 c thinly sliced shallots, separated into rings (see note below)  
4 thinly sliced garlic cloves  
chili flakes (opt)  
vegetable oil  
1/2 c chopped cilantro (opt)

Note: In a pinch, you can use Larsen's natural fried onions, crumbled up a bit, for the shallots and garlic. (They come in a plastic jar, blue label. I've seen them at Whole Foods and some supermarkets. Far superior to the stuff in the cans.)

Heat the oil in a skillet to the depth of 2-3 inches to 350 degrees. Drop a piece of shallot in the pan; if it sizzles, it's ready to go. Add the shallots and cook until just browned, 1-2 minutes. Remove with a skimmer or slotted spoon and drain on paper towels. Do the same with the garlic, cooking only about a minute, just to golden. (Both will crisp as they cool.)

To serve: Place a lettuce leaves on a serving tray, top each with an egg half. Spoon the sauce evenly over all the eggs halves. Sprinkle with the shallots, garlic, and chili flakes (if using). Sprinkle the cilantro over the plate. Serve room temp. Diners pick up the eggs in the lettuce, wrapping it around the egg to hold everything together.

***Kao Niew/ Traditional Northern Thai Sticky Rice***

This is a long-grain rice that is sometimes called sweet or glutinous rice and as Nancie puts it, is the "daily bread" of northern Thailand. It was popularized there by Laotian settlers. You'll find it in Asian stores; don't confuse it with short-grain Japanese sushi rice (much more widely available). If you can't find it, make the wonderfully fragrant Jasmine Rice preferred elsewhere in Thailand instead. Just cook it as you would any long-grain rice. Thais eat sticky rice and curries with their fingers. They pinch off a bite-size lump, roll it into ball, dip it into a curry and retrieve it along with a bite of meat or vegetable. You can use a fork if you'd rather.

2 cups Thai sticky rice, soaked at least 3 hours or overnight in water to cover by 2 inches.  
a pot with a lid and a colander or steaming basket that fits over or inside the pot  
cheesecloth

Line your steaming basket or colander with cheesecloth, allowing overhang all around ( a lot of overhand on at least two sides will make things easier later on). Put water in the bottom of the pot—enough so that when the steaming basket is inserted, the water is about 1" below the basket (it should not touch the basket). Cover the pot and bring water to a rolling boil over high heat. Uncover and insert the basket (be careful of the steam; it can burn!). Reduce the heat, but only enough so that you still have a steady flow of steam. Cook the rice until it swells and glistens and is sticky enough to be squeezed into small lumps, 30-45 minutes. Add boiling water to the pot to maintain the original level as needed.

Turn out the rice onto a large baking sheet. Wet a large spoon or spatula and spread the rice out with it quickly. When cool enough to touch, gather the rice into a large lump and put in a basket (bamboo is traditional) or on a serving plate. Serve it hot, warm, room temperature. Makes 5 cups--- should serve 6 or 7 at a potluck of Thai dishes.

### ***Gaeng Kiow Wahn Gai/Green Curry Chicken***

The curry is “green” because it uses green chilies, whereas most other curries used dried red ones. It’s from central rather than northern Thailand but I’m including it because it’s quite popular throughout the country, many of you will know it from Thai restaurants here, and it’s my favorite. I’ve included directions for making your own curry paste. If you can find the ingredients, by all means give it a try; you’ll be surprised at how much brighter and fresher the flavors are. All but the lemongrass shouldn’t be difficult to find in a well-stocked grocery or Asian store--- check the freezer sections of Asian stores for lemongrass if they don’t have fresh. Of course, prepared green curry paste is perfectly acceptable--- Thai Kitchen brand (in little glass jars) is usually easy to find in supermarkets. However, I’d recommend starting with half the amount (2T) if using prepared curry paste. (See my note in the paste recipe about heat.) Limes leaves aren’t eaten but are essential to the aroma/taste of the dish. You’ll find them frozen in Asian stores. If you can’t find them, add a couple of teaspoons of lime zest and a squirt or two of lime juice where the recipe calls for lime leaves. You may want to add more juice to taste at the end to balance the sweet and sour flavors and brighten the dish.

1 lb boneless chicken—breast alone or breast and thigh, cut into bite-sized pieces  
2 cans (14-15oz) unsweetened coconut milk--- don’t shake or stir it yet. You can use one can of “lite” coconut milk and one can of regular, if you prefer. Please don’t confuse with sweetened coconut cream.  
1/4 c Green Curry Paste (see recipe below or note above)  
1 1/2c eggplant in 1” dice (zucchini also works)  
2 T Thai fish sauce  
1 T brown sugar  
1/2 t salt  
12 kaffir lime leaves or a couple of well-scrubbed limes  
1/2 torn basil leaves—Thais basil is nice, but Italian will do  
1/2 c thinly sliced strips of sweet red pepper

Open one regular can of coconut milk. At the top of the can you should see very thick coconut cream. Scoop this out—you should have about half a cup (if some of the “milk” comes with it, that’s okay). Now, stir the remaining milk in the can and measure it. Shake or stir the other can and add enough to make 3 cups total.

Place it in a large non-stick frying/sauté pan and heat on medium until it boils gently. Cook 6 minutes or so, stirring occasionally (it will thicken some and become more fragrant). Add the curry paste and stir to dissolve it in the cream. Cook 1-2 minutes until it too is pleasantly fragrant.

Add the chicken and stir-fry 4 minutes, coating the pieces well with the sauce. Increase the heat and add everything up to the lime leaves. Stir to mix. Add half the lime leaves and adjust the heat to maintain a gentle but active boil. Cook 8-10 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the chicken is done and eggplant just tender. Taste and adjust seasonings, adding a little more fish sauce, sugar, curry paste or some lime juice if needed. (You can make the curry a day ahead to this point and reheat it gently.) Add the basil and the rest of the lime leaves just before serving. Serve hot or warm with rice or rice noodles. Serves 6 as part of a multi-dish Thai meal.

### ***Krueng Gaeng Kiow Wahn/Green Curry Paste***

1 T whole coriander seed  
1 t whole cumin seed  
5 whole peppercorns  
3 stalk fresh lemongrass (or 5 frozen)  
1/4 c coarsely chopped fresh cilantro (stems and/or leaves)  
1 T coarsely peeled and coarsely chopped fresh ginger  
1 t finely minced (or grated) lime zest (scrub lime well first)  
3 T coarsely chopped garlic  
2 T coarsely chopped shallot  
1/2 c fresh green chilies such as Thai kii noo, serrano, or jalapeno, stemmed and coarsely chopped  
1 t salt  
1 t shrimp paste (note below)

Note on shrimp paste and fish sauce: Okay, these take a little adjusting, but are worth it. Shrimp paste is a pink-colored, very pungent paste that comes in jars (Nancie suggests buying one made in Hong Kong as the available Thai ones here are usually not as good as ones there.) I promise, you will not detect it in your finished dish. But you will surely miss it if you don't use it because it provides blending, depth, and balance-- a little like anchovy paste (and you can try that as a substitute if you can't find it). Same goes for Fish Sauce—it works like Worcestershire Sauce (which has, by the way, anchovy in it; but don't try to sub it for fish sauce).

Note about heat: If you want a mild curry paste, remove the seeds and white membrane from some or all of the chilies before chopping--- and wear plastic gloves while handling to the chilies. I took the seeds and membrane out of half of my chilies and wound up with a curry that was just a little too mild to my taste the first time I did this. But chili heat varies widely—one jalapeno can be hot and another not. So take a tiny taste if you want to be sure. Unless your chilies are exceptional, this should make a spicy but not scorching curry paste.

Toast the seeds in small heavy dry skillet until they begin to pop and darken a little—watching carefully because they can burn fast. Remove from the pan as soon as they begin to pop and cool. In a spice grinder (or clean coffee grinder), grind the seeds and peppercorns to a fine powder.

Trim the lemongrass stalks to about 3” and discard the grassy tops. Trim the bottom a little. Remove and discard any tough outer leaves (basically, until you reach the lighter colored section inside). Slice the stalk crosswise very thinly.

Put the spice powder, lemongrass and everything else in a mini-food processor or spice grinder (you may need to do this in two batches if your spice grinder is very small). Begin to chop, pulsing at first and then keep processing until you get a pretty smooth paste, stopping occasionally to scrape down the bowl. Add a little water occasionally to help make the paste. This could take a few minutes. I found that starting with the food processor to grind everything and then moving to the spice grinder, about a third at a time, helped me get to a smooth paste faster (it won't be totally smooth, but you shouldn't see any distinguishable pieces of chili or fibrous bits of lemongrass or ginger). If you think this is involved, remember that traditionally the paste would be made by pounding the ingredients until smooth!

This makes 1 cup of paste. You'll need 1/4c for the recipe. You can keep the rest in the fridge for a week or freeze it in 1/4c portions for three more delicious curries later on.

### ***Paht Heht/ Sauteed Mushrooms with Pepper***

Nancie got this recipe from a Mrs. Wongkiow who lives in Chiang Rai, where PHI operates. The original recipe contained pork as well as mushrooms, but I wanted to include a vegetarian option. This is delicious either way. Mrs. Wongkiow makes this with oyster mushrooms; I used a mix of oyster and shitake. You could use almost any kind (plain old white button) but portabello.

2 T vegetable oil  
2 T thinly slice garlic  
2 T thinly slice shallot (cut the shallot in half and slice the half lengthwise)  
1 small onion, thinly slices (as the shallot)  
3/4 lb mushrooms or 1/2 lb mushrooms and 1/4 pork (a boneless pork chop).  
2 T fish sauce  
3 T water  
1/2 t white pepper (black works too, freshly ground)

Cut the mushrooms lengthwise in bite-sized pieces. If using the pork, cut in thin strips. Heat a wok, add the oil and swirl. When the oil is very hot, drop in a piece of shallot or garlic—if it sizzles, the pan is ready. Add the garlic, shallot, and onion, stir-fry 1-2 minutes until the garlic is golden and the onion translucent. Add the pork if using and fry 2 minutes. Add mushrooms, toss, and cook 1 minutes. When they begin to soften, add the rest of the ingredients and toss. Stir-fry for 1-2 minutes until the sauce is glossy. Best serves hot; you could reheat it easily in the microwave for a minute. Feel free to double the recipe but you won't quite need to double the water and fish sauce—1 1/2 times should do it.

### ***Gaeng Hahng Ley/ Burmese Style Pork Curry with Fresh Ginger***

As discussed in *FYI*, many Burmese are living in northern Thailand and the food has adapted to their traditions—like using water instead of coconut milk in curries, coloring with turmeric, and enhancing with lots of fresh ginger. The original recipe called for 12 of the small dried Thai chilies. That makes a tasty but quite spicy dish (I'd say 7 on a 1-10 scale), so adjust according to your taste. And please trust Nancie and me on this one. When you put it together you may think “yuck”—North American noses just are not acclimated to shrimp paste and the combination may seem very alien. But this turns out to have a well-balanced sweet, spicy, fragrant (not fishy) smoothness that is very, very good. Do make it a day ahead and refrigerate it. You can scrape off some of the congealed fat on the top of the dish before reheating if you like. Serve with sticky or Jasmine rice. Serves at least 6 with other Thai dishes.

1/4 c finely slivered, fresh ginger (peeled)  
6-12 small dried Thai or Asian chilies (find in an Asian store or some supermarkets)  
3 T thinly sliced fresh lemongrass, sliced crosswise (see Green Curry Paste recipe for sources and method) or substitute 3 T lemon zest if lemongrass is unavailable  
2 t finely diced peeled galanga (found fresh or frozen in Asian stores or substitute ginger)  
1 T shrimp paste (see note in Green Curry Paste recipe)  
1/4 c brown sugar  
1 1/2 lb. boneless pork butt with some fat attached, cut into pieces  
1 1/2 c water  
2 t ground turmeric  
1 t dark soy sauce  
1/4 c thinly sliced shallots  
2 T minced garlic

2 T Tamarind Liquid (see Son-in-Law Egg recipes for method and sources)

Place the ginger in a small bowl, cover (barely) with warm water and set aside. Stem and coarsely chop the chilies. Place the chilies and next 4 ingredients in a small food processor or spice grinder and process to get a dark brown grainy puree. It will smell fishy... don't worry.

Place the meat in a heavy bottom pot and add the curry paste. Stir to coat. Put over low heat. In about 10 minutes, the meat will begin to hiss and steam. Stir is occasionally until all the meat has changed color and rendered some of its fat and the paste is fragrant—around 10 more minutes.

In a large measuring cup, mix the water with the turmeric and soy sauce and add to the pot. Bring to a simmer and cook uncovered on med-low heat until the meat is tender and the sauce is dark, thick, and smooth, about 40 minutes, stirring just occasionally.

Add the shallot and garlic. Drain the ginger (save the water) and smash it a little just to loosen the fibers (it should retain its shape). Add the ginger and soaking water to the pan. Add the tamarind liquid and mix well. Cook to heat through, remove from heat and allow to stand 20 minutes. You can serve it then, but it's best reheated the next day.

## ***Voices***

*What follows are episodes in the life of Malisa, or "Saa" as her family called her when she was little. Saa's story is fictional, but it is all too true. Thai author Preechapoul Boonchuay told it in the short story, "A Mote of Dust on the Face of the Earth," in the seventies; but it is just as real and relevant today. Still, for too many little girls and boys in Thailand, the lure of "a good job" is "only the start." The projects we are supporting through PHI are helping to change the story, to break the cycle.*

### *Only the start*

We all know the feeling of hunger. The hunger that Saa and her family so often felt had nothing to do with the pangs that remind us that we have forgotten to eat breakfast or the growling stomach that tells us it is time for lunch. This was the hunger that flashes and tears, hunger that twists the gut, that makes one almost forget to breathe.

When Saa was ten years old... a stranger came. (T)he pretty lady had once lived in their village. She had gone to Bangkok many years ago when she was very young, and she had done well.... Now she was looking for a little girl... to take to Bangkok and to help her find a job, so that she would have a chance to make something of herself, too. In fact, she knew of a job that Saa could get right now.... And that would only be the start.

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### *Father speaks*

...(S)he woke earlier than usual and slipped quietly from under the shabby mosquito net. She saw her father, sitting and smoking in the doorway, in the half-light. He had been here when she went to sleep. Had he been there all night?

"Saa—come here, child." He drew her close to him, put an arm around her, and bent his head to hers until his nose touched her hair. She nestled there, grateful for his strength and warmth.... "I love my Saa," he said in a soft voice. "And Mother loves Saa. But Saa knows how very poor our family is. Yet to know is not to understand. I know you cannot understand now. So I must simply tell you. People cannot live without money; that is a fact. If you go to Bangkok with the pretty lady,

you will have pretty clothes and money to buy things.... That is a fine thing.... But it isn't only that, Saa. I swore that I would never sell one of my children to go and work in Bangkok... but today we are desperate for a certain sum of money. If we cannot get it somehow, in a few days we will not have even this house. My poor Saa, you are not old enough to understand. But you are old enough to work...."

"I know that you wonder why you must be the one to go. It is because your elder brother must help me and your little sister is too young. You are the only one who is able to help us all, Saa." Her father swallowed hard. "Sometimes we must sell our life to give life."

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*Years later, Malisa speaks*

"Now I understand my father's words.... But tell me...what is it that makes one person's life valuable and another's worthless? Can you explain to me why some people are so rich that they can buy even another human being? Please, tell me why others are so poor that they must sell the lives of their children. Or sell themselves.... One day, I will go home. But I won't go back poor. And if I have a child, that child will run and play happily in the fields. My child will not be a slave.... I can't talk anymore. Here comes one of my best customers...."

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*Malisa returns...only the start*

"Don't be afraid child, Miss Malisa is going to take you to Bangkok and help you to get a good job. Why? Because Miss Malisa was once a little girl just like you. She wants to help you, just the way someone once helped her."

*Excerpts from the translation and edition of Susan Fulop Kepner, The Lioness in Bloom (University of California Press, 1996).*

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## ***Resources***

Besides the sources noted in the text and the extensive resources on the Prevent Human Trafficking website, the following were consulted in preparing *Making Connections* this month:

<http://www.thailandguidebook.com/>

[http://www.freshplaza.com/news\\_detail.asp?id=4289](http://www.freshplaza.com/news_detail.asp?id=4289)

<http://thailandforvisitors.com/north/maehongson/karen/index.html>

<http://www.thaifocus.com/tribes.htm>

<http://www.asiatour.com/thailand>

<http://gvnet.com/humantrafficking/Thailand.htm>

<http://www.ichiangrai.com>

<http://physiciansforhumanrights.org/library/news-2004-07-14.html>

Leslie E. Sponsel, ed., *Endangered Peoples of Southeast and East Asia* (Greenwood Press, 2000)

Victoria Armour-Hileman, *Singing to the Dead* (University of Georgia Press, 2002)