



## Dining for Women

### ***MC Preview September 2007 Thailand***

This will be a brief Preview, but hopefully full of information and ideas you can use in planning your meetings. Thailand is a new place for us and a fascinating one... but then, aren't they all?

#### **What to Expect in Making Connections**

##### ***FYI: Women and the Cultures of Northern Thailand***

We are fortunate that Prevent Human Trafficking provides so much information about the background to their efforts to stop the sex trade in northern Thailand on its website and in materials you'll receive via mail (I understand they're going out by the 2<sup>nd</sup>). Even when PHI's experts tell us, however, about the root causes of why girls go into the sex trade or families sell their daughters (and sons sometimes) into it, I think it's hard on a psychological level for us to feel connected to them. Sex trafficking evokes horror in us on a very emotional level. So in FYI this month, I'll attempt to introduce another side of the lives of northern Thailand's people. We'll examine their ancient tribal cultures and traditions, how these are specifically threatened today, and how going back to tradition may indeed be one key to preventing sex trafficking and empowering women.

##### ***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 tribal 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 "foreign" 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.

### ***Dining with Women***

Thai food and foodways are fabulous, so we're in for a treat. Again, we're fortunate to have a cultural bridge-builder. North Carolina-native Nancie McDermott was a Peace Corps Volunteer in Thailand for three years. It left her with a passion for Thai food that she has developed into a career. Among her many books on Thai food 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. Great stuff. I'll be adapting some recipes from the book, especially some northern Thai dishes to be eaten with the "sticky" rice preferred there. For now, check out the recipes on Nancie's website: [nanciemcdermott.com](http://nanciemcdermott.com). Many are potluck-portable.

### ***Voices***

I'm still waiting on materials from PHI, which should include some stories and quotations from women in its programs. You should receive the same document in your mailing. If I can do something creative with those in Voices, I will. Otherwise, I'll choose some passages from the books I've mentioned above.

### ***Ideas for Meeting Programs***

- 1) ***A little ritual...*** Auspicious occasions—from weddings to ordinations of monks, visits of dignitaries and birthdays of teachers—in Thailand (particularly in the North) are often marked by a string-tying ceremony. The original meaning had to do with binding one's spirit so that it couldn't stray, but its come to mean many things, including resolve of a group, friendship, and welcome. So in modified Thai fashion, you might provide a bowl of white ribbons and tie one around the wrist of each of your members as she enters. Or you could pass the bowl during introductions in your meeting and ask each member to tie the member next to her. Tables on which the strings are kept often have elaborate displays, but a simple bowl of fresh flowers and banana leaves if you can find them would do nicely. The ceremony is often related to food, so another idea is to do the tying while our dinner affirmation is spoken before you eat together.
- 2) ***Visual impact...*** At <http://www.herhands.com/virtual/virtual1e.html> you'll find amazing images of northern Thai craftswomen involved in projects aimed to prevent human trafficking by providing sustainable employment. You can also see the images in a wonderful book by Paola Gianturco and Toby Tuttle, *In Her Hands: Craftswomen Changing the World* (Monacelli Press, 2000). It's the result of a project that involves several of the charities we've supported in the past.
- 3) ***More visual impact of a different sort...*** Anthropologist Nicolas Lainez has collaborated with PHI. He's also a photographer and has created a slide show of images that shows the

stark reality of human trafficking. You can see it at [http://www.fondationscelles.org/index.php?option=com\\_expose&Itemid=48](http://www.fondationscelles.org/index.php?option=com_expose&Itemid=48). It can run as a continuous feed or you can stop on each image. Very powerful. It would make a very impacting contrast to set up the slideshow on one computer and the *In Her Hands* photos (either on another computer or from the book) side by side on a table (perhaps with a few Thai crafts on display as well) so that members can view them when they arrive.

- 4) ***And video...*** PHI is trying to complete a brand new video on its work in northern Thailand in time for most of you to use it. (It will be on-line and we'll alert you when it's up.). But PHI already has two videos that would make good program presentations. Both are short interviews with Christine, PHI's founder, and are on the PHI homepage: [preventhumantrafficking.org](http://preventhumantrafficking.org). The first video is an introduction to the organization and focuses on the project we're supporting. The other I recommend is down the page a bit and called "Addressing root causes of human trafficking." In that video, Christine mentions the "savior syndrome" that many well-meaning individuals and nations have adopted in to fighting human trafficking. (She refers to a popular article by NY Times journalist Nicholas Kristof, who purchased the freedom of teenagers he met only to realize later that he probably didn't help them that much.) Typically it means stopping the trade cold or buying a girl out of slavery but not doing anything to provide alternative forms of livelihood or support. It usually results in worse victimization, re-trafficking of women, and perpetuates the cycle of human slavery. You might show both of these interviews together.
- 5) ***Gift a gift that gives...*** Sometimes its nice to provide members with tokens that remind them of our work together, of the women we're connecting to, and that they might pass on as a "witness" to our work. See the websites listed under Socially Responsible Shopping. You can purchase cards made by Thai women's cooperatives rather inexpensively through some of them. You might give each member a card—leave it blank and ask her to pass it on to a friend and tell the friend how she got it or write something inspirational that relates to our mission, to empowering each other and other women.

**Making Connections will appear on the DFW website by September 5. If you need materials (recipes, FYI, etc) before then, please let me know via email.**

**As always, comments, questions, ideas welcome... [corrienorman1959@yahoo.com](mailto:corrienorman1959@yahoo.com)**