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Background Research

Case Study and Literature Review

The case study and literature review grounded Scholarships for Burma and provided most of the direction and forethought that went into the campaign. I discovered in the researching of the literature review other organizations providing funding for Burmese refugees, their reach, scope, and impact. The largest organization found was George Soros' Burma Project, a philanthropy branch of the much larger Open Society Institute. Smaller funders of Burmese refugee education included the Indiana State University (through the State Department), Bracket Refugee Education Fund, and Prospect Burma.

The case study was a useful exercise in developing a plan for how I might expand Scholarships for Burma to reach more refugees than just Ying. It concluded that should Scholarships for Burma turn into a standalone non-profit and expand, it would need to distinguish itself more from the existing organizations. As of now, all the previous organizations already mentioned send Burmese refugees to school and provide scholarships (only Indiana State University does full scholarships). I decided that the best way Scholarships for Burma could distinguish itself would be to become a highly select program instead of just funding scholarships. Students accepted would be from a small group of motivated and talented students, and would spend their undergraduate degree confronting the problems Burma faces and how they might help begin to make positive changes. This would, of course, require more work hours for staff and would limit its scope to reach more. But if the right leaders and future changemakers of Burma were selected it could also reap huge returns to help the people of Burma.

Reaching Burmese Refugee and Migrant Communities through Education

U.S. and UK-based funding agencies and
Scholarships for Burma

Kirk Acevedo

3/1/2011

Professor Nanette Levinson
Social Entrepreneurship

return on investments obtained from providing access to higher education—positively driven individuals who ultimately contribute to a brighter, future Burma.

Where Scholarships for Burma departs, however, and what is missing from Table 1.0, is any organization’s mission to target key demographic groups, such as women. Although scant data exist, it could be said that based on the numbers given from the 2005 refugee camp survey data and Prospect Burma’s scholarships’ gender breakdown, it is clear women do not have the same access men do for education.

Further narrowing the field, Scholarships for Burma would aim solely to extend scholarships to women of minority status. By doing this Scholarships for Burma would be targeting historically the most neglected and disenfranchised group in Burma, and arguably the most vital demographic group to the country’s future solutions.

Scholarships for Burma would seek to educate those who would orient their studies towards inclusive solutions to the ethnic minority problems facing Burma instead of confrontational or conflictive solutions. Scholarships for Burma would also only select applicants who dedicated a certain amount of time to take what they learned in college back to their respective communities, in the hopes of multiplying the positive generational effects.

To add another row, Scholarships for Burma might look something like this:

Organization	Objectives/Principles	Mission	Outreach
Scholarships for Burma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Educate women ethnic minority leaders who have demonstrated previously an interest in the politics of Burma * Seek women ethnic minority fellows who orient their degree around confronting Burma’s problems and finding inclusive 	Empower women of ethnic minority backgrounds through higher education in order to foster inclusiveness and a future stronger, more equal, Burmese	N/A

	solutions. * Find ethnic minority individuals dedicated to using their college degree to benefit their community.	society.	
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Table 1.1

5.0 Finding the potential role of ethnic minorities outside of Thailand

Much is missing from the literature on education along the refugee and migrant communities along the Thailand-Burma border. A crucial gap in research is those of ethnic minority groups engaged in Burmese politics, particularly women. There are dozens, if not hundreds of these organizations based in Thailand. One could do an assessment based on the number of political organizations formed by concerned ethnic minorities, or those who formed organizations to raise awareness about the ethnic situation in Burma, and list who the heads of the organization are.

There needs to be consistency and updates to the current research as well. A large, comprehensive survey on education from the refugee camps in Thailand, for example, has not been updated since 2005. Much has changed in Burma since then—in 2008 Cyclone Nargis hit the Irrawaddy Delta affecting over 2.5 million villagers, many of whom became refugees and fled into Thailand.²¹ Last year, amidst clashes between ethnic rebel groups and the *tatmadaw* over Burma's first elections in two decades, over 25,000 Shan refugees fled Burma for Thailand.²² Refugee populations and the camps in Thailand are not static and it's important to keep comprehensive data on not only headcount data, but also education data (e.g. enrollment and retention rates, fees, teacher-student ratios, curriculum, etc.)

6.0 Conclusion

²¹ A. Kazmin. "U.N. Chief Tours Burma Ruins." *Washington Post*. 23 May, 2008.

²² S. Mydans. "Myanmar Refugees Flee to Thailand." *The New York Times*. 9 Nov., 2009.

Burma's minority situation is violent, conflictive and fractious. Educating Burmese is the best offense to find a solution to ethnic minority inclusion, but because Burma spends so little on education, those best able to access education are refugee and migrant laborers who have left or fled Burma. Unfortunately, over 2 million migrants and refugees living in Thailand are not being reached, and are hard to identify and track. Social entrepreneurial organizations have been identified in these areas, however many form around common ethnic ties, a possible pitfall as this form of education may directly and indirectly reify and highlight ethnic differences. U.S.- and UK-based Organizations like Prospect Burma, OSI, and the BREF have formed in response to this need. As the most able to access legitimate institutions are those outside of Burma, research should focus on identifying strong individuals and channeling energies into finding these leaders and educating them, especially ethnic minority women. Should Scholarships for Burma become a non-profit, it would differ from the others' approach by seeking these leaders and focusing efforts on what is believed to be the most fruitful investment to a future Burma—educating ethnic minority women.

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CASE STUDY

SCHOLARSHIPS FOR BURMA

*The challenges and
opportunities of
scaling up and out*

Report prepared by:

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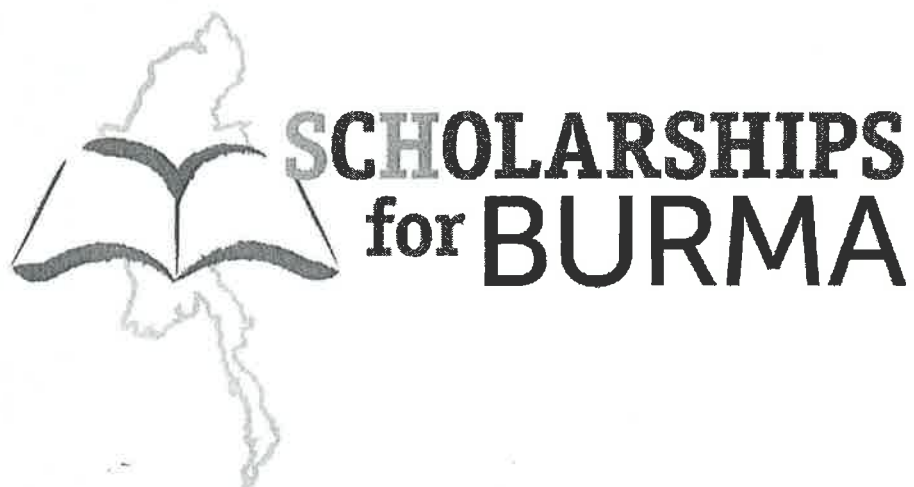


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Executive Summary

In October, I will walk 450 miles through Burma in order to raise \$26,220 to send Ying Kawn Tai, a Burmese refugee to college in Thailand. Scholarships for Burma is a non-profit organization of the Human Rights Actions Center centered on my story of meeting and being inspired by Ying, and my 450 mile walk through Burma for her education.

This is a self-reflecting report and looks at Scholarships for Burma two weeks after its launch, and projects what the organization might look like should it decide to expand in the future. It looks at the organization through six lenses: 1) an environmental assessment of the organization based on Sharon Oster's six forces for social entrepreneurial organizations; 2) an analysis of the organizational culture; 3) an analysis of Scholarships for Burma's way of communicating its goals to stakeholders and diffusing its 'big idea'; 4) Kellogg's theory of change logic analysis; 5) how Scholarships for Burma measures its impact and accountability; and 6) what scaling up and out might look like in the future.

I suggest in the recommendations section that as it stands now, Scholarships for Burma does not differentiate itself enough from other organizations providing scholarships to Burmese refugees to go to college. If Scholarships for Burma is to expand, it would be wise to consider modifying the organization into a highly selective and rigorous study program rather than simply a scholarship fund, broadening its mission and values, and taking the steps necessary to become a standalone non-profit.

Environmental Assessment

Oster's Six Forces

1) Other organizations

Four organizations—three private, one government-sponsored—fund specifically Burmese refugees to go to college from the United States. By aim and mission, the closest to Scholarships for Burma's is Indiana University's program. Prospect Burma, OSI, and BREF all focus primarily on education in general instead of higher education.

Indiana University – Burmese Refugee Scholarship Program

Mandated by the US government in 1990 and funded by the Department of State, Indiana University today provides full scholarships to four Burmese refugees every year to come to the United States and study.¹

Prospect Burma

Prospect Burma is based in the United Kingdom, but has a non-profit affiliate in the United States called 'Friends of Prospect Burma.' The organization was established in 1992 with the prize funds from Burmese Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi. Prospect Burma funds college scholarships to Burmese students who look to use their degrees to benefit Burma someday in the future. Between 2008 and 2009, Prospect Burma funded 170 refugees from a pool of 900 applicants. 113 of these students were male, 57 female.²

¹ "Burmese Refugee Scholarship Program," *Indiana University*

² "Annual Reports and Accounts 2008-2009." *Prospect Burma*. 2009, 6.

Open Society Institute (OSI) – Burma Project

Started in 1994 by George Soros, OSI's Burma Project is located in New York, and seeks to fund individual projects, scholarships, media groups, and NGOs working toward the ultimate goal of a more transparent and democratic Burma. Individual breakdowns of scholarships are not given in their annual budget report, but in FY2008, Burma Project directed \$10.2 million into organizations and scholarships working toward its stated mission.³

The Brackett Education Fund (BREF)

Started in upstate New York in 1997, the Brackett Education Fund (BREF) was established by missionaries Tom and Liz Brackett. The Brackett Fund in 2009 supported 142 scholarships and 36 school projects in Thailand, India, and Burma, and operated on a \$293,997 budget.⁴

2) How easy is it to enter this education niche?

It seems to be a curse that the longer the regime in Burma has been in power, the more effective the military government has become at stomping out democratic mechanisms like free press, speech, and political opposition, and overtime less attention is attracted in the foreign media. Given three rounds of sanctions from the United States since 1997, a xenophobic Burmese government, and the far distance and little impact Burma has on U.S. affairs today, the community of NGOs, scholars, and activists based in the United States working for better conditions in Burma is relatively small when compared to countries with similar problems on the same scale (e.g. The Save Darfur Movement).

³ "Soros Foundations Network Report 2008." *Open Society Institute*. 2009, 76.

⁴ "2009 Annual Report." *BREF - Brackett Refugee Education Fund*. 2010

This is a potential advantage because the obstacles to entry are relatively small considering Burma's tremendous need. It can also be a barrier; however, as it is considered even among some activists a small 'cause' and finding donor sources can be difficult. It is no secret that many U.S.-based NGOs working on the problems of Burma compete for the same funding sources.⁵

3) What kind of substitute activities could there be and could they draw away funders, suppliers, etc?

To branch away from anything besides sending Ying to college would be to grow the organization. A possible activity that has been entertained is seeing if Ying will be accepted to other scholarship funds like Indiana's refugee fund, Prospect Burma, BREF, or OSI after her first year of college. Because her first year is paid for, these scholarship agencies are more likely to fund her after the initial work is done getting her through her first year.

Although this may detract future donors who expect their money to send Ying to college, in the long run the leftover funds could be used to send more refugee leaders like Ying to college. Since the ultimate mission of Scholarships for Burma is to invest in a better and brighter Burma through Ying, the funds will still be used for the same end goal—educating ethnic minority women leaders of Burma. This of course means that there will have to be an application and formal selection process to find future students. For donors, the only difference will be that their gifts will have made a much larger and more sustainable impact than solely in Ying's life and those she reaches in her future.

⁵ As an intern with US Campaign for Burma, I witnessed USCB staff wondering if a \$10,000 grant would go to a competing organization as it had the year before (whereas in previous years USCB had been awarded the grant).

4) Who are Scholarships for Burma's clients or users? Is the organization attracting them & meeting their needs?

To answer this question it helps looking at what Scholarships for Burma might look like should it decide to expand. Because Scholarships for Burma would be based on selecting only ethnic minority women leaders, attracting students to the program and making sure they get the most of their education could be one of the most difficult challenges. Many of these women live in communities literally off-the-map outside of Burma, and many more are not qualified to go to college. Still, others may not want to go to school. The pool of applicants to draw from should be expectedly narrow, and to find them will require extensive networking in the countries surrounding Burma with large migrant and refugee communities.

5) Who are Scholarships for Burma's current or possible suppliers? What are their roles?

The largest funding sources for Burma-related causes today come from the Open Society Institute's Burma Project (although Burma Project is also in the unique position to be a competitor and supplier), the U.S. government, and private donors. As listed earlier, Open Society Institute spends a little over ten million dollars a year on various people and groups,—both in and around Burma and in the U.S.—working towards a freer, more democratic Burma.

Currently, Scholarships for Burma is operating strictly off a donor base. If the organization expands, it will need to not only expand its base, but also heighten its visibility amongst funders and compete with non-profits like BREF and Prospect Burma.

6) How many donors and to what degree are they committed? Are they Scholarships for Burma's primary cause?

Two weeks into officially accepting donations, Scholarships for Burma has reached close to 60 donors. Seven donors thus far have contributed amounts over \$250, and once the fundraising committee is underway over the summer months (6 members each raising a minimum of \$2,500 for Ying's education), more large donors are expected.

As an infant organization, it is hard to say yet whether Scholarships for Burma is a 'primary' cause for any individual donors. When explained to individuals and groups, the idea of sending Ying Kawn Tai to college excites, but there is a noticed difference between excitement and willingness to contribute. As the organization matures, it will need to excite-to-donate instead of simply enthusing an audience.

Organizational Culture and Strategy

A. Culture Analysis

Three main points have guided Scholarships for Burma's organizational culture: low cost and low overhead, connecting the donor to Ying and Burma through me, and being creative while learning and staying motivated.

- 1) Low-cost and overhead. Scholarships for Burma is run on a shoestring budget (\$2,000 for four years). A \$200 grant from the Honors program helped defray initial operating costs and American University's Student Campaign for Burma generously paid another \$300 in printing costs to launch the campaign. Printing is done at a local printer below normal rates, and the only expenses reimbursed are for fundraising mailings and the purchasing of stationary needed for mailings.
- 2) Using my personal commitment to connect the donor to Ying and Burma. If a number were put on who Scholarships for Burma was about, it would fall close to halfway between me and

Ying. Why? To put it simply, talking about Burma and raising awareness is not easy to do on its own. There are a lot of causes in the world competing for attention and funds. But donors who know me are more likely to respond to my walk through Burma for Ying. This creates the space which allows me to introduce them to Ying and how I met her which ultimately allows me the opportunity to talk about Burma and raise awareness of its various issues. In its current design, the website, writings and presentations have been based on this simple model. Those on the fundraising committee have been instructed to use a similar method. They explain to those they are closest to how they know me, who I am, and why I'm trekking-through Burma for Ying, and then explain a little bit about how Ying's story relates to the macro picture of Burma today. These are simply degrees of separation that are brought closer together through personal stories.

- 3) Learn, be creative, get excited, stay motivated—with the exception of those advising the management of Scholarships for Burma, the volunteers working on Scholarships for Burma have never been a part of a new start-up organization. In addition to a committee of six committed to raising a minimum of \$2,500 each for this campaign, there is a web designer, photographer, graphic designer, new media coordinator, and communications director who have spent considerable time making this project successful. I repeat constantly that this project is a learning process for all of us and if there are new ways to help raise the money to give Ying a full scholarship then we could pursue them. This had led to the suggestion of creating a newsletter; adding to the website a 'ways to get involved' section instead of simply asking for supporters to 'donate;' and posting a fundraising meter to the website so followers can track Scholarships for Burma' progress. Above all though, this campaign stresses that we're changing Ying's life *forever*, and the lives she touches throughout her lifetime will be in no small part influenced by her college education. The idea that her degree will enable her to reach hundreds, if not thousands

of others, has been the inspiration and motivation driving this campaign and there is no reason why anyone else shouldn't feel inspired and motivated by that idea.

If Scholarships for Burma expanded, there would need to be a modified organizational culture to think bigger and broader. Right now the focus is on my trek through Burma and Ying's story and her education. This is good for sending Ying to college—and could even be used in the future as part of the organization's original and first story—but would need to expand its focus on the situation of Burma's education system rather than on individuals alone.

Rewards

Because Scholarships for Burma is run on a small budget, the rewards and incentives are mostly gifts without a price. I asked Ying to write a thank you letter to all the donors which they receive with my own personal thank you letter for contributing. The night before the official launching of Scholarships for Burma, I invited a few volunteers, workers, and neighbors over to celebrate the launch by having a barbeque. At night, the group was surprised by a phone call from Ying that she and I had planned earlier in the week. Her thank you over the phone to everyone who had worked hard leading up to the launch was worth more than anything that could have been purchased as a 'thank you.'

B. Innovation Diffusion/Communication Strategy Plan

Scholarships for Burma has used five main tools to 'diffuse' the idea of the campaign and craft a communications plan: new media, the case statement, public speaking, networking, and letter campaigning.

- 1) New Media: It seems that the first and most important step in creating any legitimate organization today is a website and logo. Before Scholarships for Burma was officially launched,

the logo, map of the trek through Burma, and website underwent a series of drafts before officially advertised. The logo itself underwent five different designs and two color changes, the website through three large updates, and the map of Burma through four revisions. The point behind the revisions is that those three communicate as much (if not more) legitimacy to Scholarships for Burma than the words written for the site. As proof to that, within the first two weeks 1,200 people visited the website though messages were initially only sent out to 400. Within 72 hours, the website had been reposted as a status update on Facebook on over 200 different profiles. There is also a Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, and YouTube page for Scholarships for Burma. To keep the accounts live there is a New Media Coordinator responsible for updating the pages and responding to questions, comments, and concerns on the site.

- 2) Case Statement: the case statement is the cornerstone of Scholarships for Burma. It is a small booklet that tells my story, Ying's, and what the purpose of the organization is, and asks for support at the end. The statements were by far the largest investment into this campaign, but the books are meant to be read as a training document (for Scholarships for Burma), as well as to be sent to high profile donors. The idea behind the case statement is that it should take less than twenty minutes to read, be light and informative, and make a compelling argument why sending Ying to college is a smart investment for Burma and why donors should care. Each committee member receives a handful of copies of the case statement before beginning solicitation of donors.
- 3) Public Speaking: one of the most effective ways of asking for support for Ying's education and raising awareness about Burma has been accomplished by public speaking. In the first two weeks of launching I gave presentations in four classes, one sorority chapter meeting, and one to a group of about 100 at Hoff Theater at the University of Maryland. Talking at these locations

thus far has raised just under \$1,000 toward the \$26,220 goal. Over the summer, the goal is to give presentations to service clubs like Rotary, Lions, and Kiwanis.

- 4) Networking: another effective way of communicating and asking for help has been through informal networking. Scholarships for Burma became officially sponsored by the Human Rights Action Center (HRAC) over coffee with a friend after one of my classes. The Burma Global Action Network—one of the supporting organizations—came out of a lunch over a weekend conference on Burma.
- 5) Letter Campaigning: sending out letters to friends and family adds another dimension to raising awareness about Ying's story and Burma. This last piece to the communications plan is accomplished by sending letters out every few months to the donor base (currently at approximately 60). The hope is that each letter can inform the reader about Ying, how her story relates to Burma, and what can be done about it.

Should Scholarships for Burma expand, it will have already built a base of knowledge among existing donors about the education system in Burma and various problems the country faces. The hope would be that through Ying's accomplishments during and after college, Scholarships for Burma could reinforce that knowledge and awareness about Burma.

C. Kellogg's Theory of Change Logic Analysis

On the following page is a diagram of Kellogg's change logic model. It looks at how Scholarships for Burma is envisioned if it expands to send more women leaders like Ying Kawn Tai to college abroad. What became clear using Ying as a model for Scholarships for Burma is that the effort and preparation going into sending women leaders to college is based on the assumption that they return to their communities and use their skills to help their people. In other words, women leaders can be selected on the most stringent criteria, but there is no guarantee they will stay after graduation. Based

on the diagram, to fill this gap of uncertainty, Scholarships for Burma should consider attaching conditions for students to return to their community for a period of time after finishing college.

D. Measuring Impact and Accountability

Impact

Scholarships for Burma could be evaluated on its product (educated women leaders of Burma) and also itself. For the pilot program, the impact of its success through Ying should be evaluated as a model to expand in the future. For the current purposes of this pilot program, impact could be defined as how Ying impacts students' learning before and after college. Since Ying is already a teacher (though not legally certified) who wants to become a better teacher who reaches more students, simple metrics and evaluations could be created to test the impact she has before and out of college.

One method could be based off the same evaluations and assessments teachers go through in the United States—their students' scores on standardized tests. Although evaluating teachers based on their students' test scores has its critics, it remains a popular metric of measuring a teacher's performance. A simple standardized test administered twice a year—once at the beginning, once at the end—to students before Ying entered college, and again in the same grade with a new group of students after Ying graduates college would be an easy and simple way to measure Ying's college degree's immediate impact on her teaching effectiveness. Should Scholarships for Burma expand to reach more women leaders who become teachers, this method would be an easy and efficient way to gauge their impact before and after graduation.

Impact is not limited to teachers, however. For students that decide to study in other fields to help their own community, impact could be measured on a much simpler scale—could the student

selected be doing what she is without a college degree and does it make a \$26,220 difference? (This also applies to teaching. With a college degree Ying can finally be a certified teacher and teach more students at once.) Since the criteria guiding Scholarships for Burma's selection process is narrowly defined and targets the most disenfranchised demographic group from Burma, the organization's impact and progress could be placed on where its students end up after graduating and what they do with their degree.

Lastly, measuring impact could come from the recognition associated with the students that come out of Scholarships for Burma. Because the organization targets minority women leaders, after the first few students complete college and begin working surveys and questionnaires could be sent out to those who know or work with the students to begin tracking how their performance after college reflects Scholarships for Burma's selection process. As time goes on, a system needs to be established to track students 10, 15, even 30 years after graduating from the program.

Accountability

Ultimately, as a non-profit, Scholarships for Burma must maintain fiduciary responsibility and social accountability to its stakeholders. Right now these parties include the Human Rights Action Center, donors, volunteers, partners, and most importantly, Ying Kawn Tai. For every stakeholder an annual report will be sent out to show how Ying's college funds are being used (how much is spent on operating costs, books, tuition, food, housing, etc.) Since her college fund is strictly based on incoming donations, it is essential every penny counts towards Ying's education. Overhead must be low and savings should be made public when possible to show how costs are being reduced.

Ying Kawn Tai should also be held accountable to Scholarships for Burma just as Scholarships for Burma is responsible to her. To date, Ying has written a thank you letter to donors explaining why their donation matters and what she plans on doing with a college degree. Throughout her degree

she will also update donors at least once a semester (twice a year). This will be accomplished by simply publishing a bi-annual newsletter to send to donors.

Scaling up

Should Scholarships for Burma expand, the easiest and likely most effective way to scale up and out would be to go through an established organization. The US Campaign for Burma (USCB) would make an excellent partner to help get Scholarships for Burma off the ground. USCB is based in Washington, DC, was started by an American University alumni in 1996, and today is the largest organization in the United States dedicated to influencing US foreign policy towards Burma (grassroots base of 60,000). USCB keeps grassroots outreach and awareness an integral part of their business strategy, and it would be useful to partner with them at their larger events, in the US and abroad (they have partners in the UK, Spain, Germany, and Thailand). Because USCB does not have an education component to the organization, they might even consider taking Scholarships for Burma under their organization until it is ready to stand alone. An introduction by USCB at events (large or small) would give Scholarships for Burma the legitimacy it needs as an infant organization, as well as help direct new volunteers, donors, and supporters to a more focused goal than influencing US foreign towards Burma through grassroots activism.

Recommendations

First and foremost, if Scholarships for Burma is to grow and expand, it needs to distinguish itself from other organizations like Indiana University's refugee program, Prospect Burma, OSI, and BREF. As it stands right now Scholarships for Burma is only slightly different from these programs. To the author's knowledge, the other four organizations provide funding for schooling but not additional programming or curriculum. It would require additional staff and resources, but

Scholarships for Burma could grow into a rigorous, highly selective program that requires students to meet additional requirements before graduation. In this case, the goal would be that the student feels she is not only graduating from college, but also from the Scholarships for Burma program (e.g. similar to honors programs in colleges around the U.S.).

Requirements could include completing a minimum number of internships, additional coursework, working on projects together, and even housing together. The vision would be to bring together high-caliber women from different ethnic minority backgrounds who are leaders in their community and who care about Burma and its future, and begin creating and fostering a strong network dedicated to working on the various problems and issues Burma faces. In the future, if Scholarships for Burma has trouble finding the right candidates to send to school, it could also expand to reach both men and women.

Ultimately, Scholarships for Burma should see where it leaves off with Ying's education. Seeing her through college is a four year endeavor and will present its own challenges along the way. If sending Ying to college is a success for Burma (meaning she uses her degree to effect positive change and it's a noticeable difference) and worth the \$26,220 needed to get her through it, then Scholarships for Burma should consider professionalizing and expanding.

The first step towards this would be to create a board, secure substantial funding through grants and donors, and become a standalone non-profit. Doing this would require broadening the vision of the organization and changing the website and case statement to reflect those changes. There would also need to be a methodology behind evaluating prospective students of the program, as well as a way of measuring students' progress during and after school, and Scholarships for Burma's success rates of choosing these students and their impacts made after college. Abroad, it would require

establishing reliable networks in Thailand which help identify women leaders of ethnic minority backgrounds.

These recommendations will require a lot of work, but if the end result of educating ethnic minority women leaders of Burma is worth the initial effort of getting them into college, then it is well worth the time and costs to expand the organization to reach more students.

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Designing Scholarships for Burma

Logo:

The logo was created with simplicity in mind. The designer incorporated the map of Burma, open book, and the title of the non-profit project to accomplish this. Originally, there was also a rough outline of a silhouetted figure with a walking stick and trek marks leading into the horizon line of the logo. This was meant to communicate my trek through Burma, but we decided against the concept because it cluttered the logo and detracted from the ultimate message which was sending Ying to college, education, and Burma.

Book—symbolizes education and the pursuit of knowledge

Outline map of Burma—focuses the campaign geographically

Title—“Scholarships for Burma” as the title is simple to understand and easy to communicate.

Case Statement

The case statement tells the stories behind Scholarships for Burma, its mission, and how donors may help contribute. In less than twenty pages, the case statement provided detailed stories about my experience along the Thai-Burma border, how I met Ying, who she was and what she was doing, and how she related to the macro picture of Burma and the problems the country faces and will face in the future. Case statements were given to committee members (see section 4) to distribute to potential pacesetting donors.

Website:

The website serves as the most legitimate part of the campaign. In each letter and case statement sent out the website was listed as a reference for the potential donor to learn more about me, Ying,

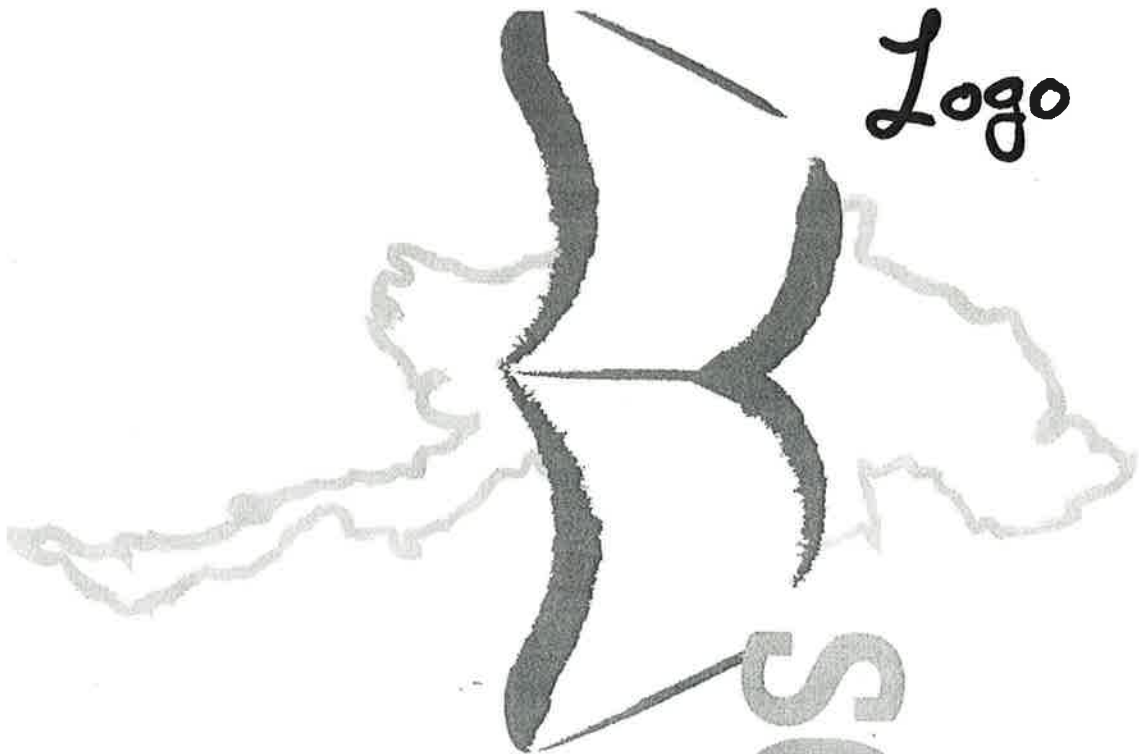
and what I was trying to do for her. Though I only sent 20 letters to donors in the first month alone, 1,648 visitors trafficked Scholarships for Burma's website. This, I believe, is largely due to the utilization of Facebook and Twitter. In the first week alone the website had been reposted as a status update on Facebook 254 times.

The concept of the website was to communicate the stories behind the campaign as well as to act as a portal to contribute. I anticipated the majority of the website traffic to be from friends and family, so we created the website with that in mind. The opening page is short and meant to capture the visitor's attention and to compel them to read on. It ends on a question and makes the reader want to read-on.

The rest of the website is meant to introduce the reader to Ying and Burma through me. The ultimate idea was for me to introduce Ying through my visit to Thailand in 2009, and then to explain how Ying is one of thousands from Burma with a similar story. This links the reader from me, to Ying, to Burma.

Then, to loop it back to me, I explain how we can help her and, slowly but surely, begin to help Burma too. This is the story line behind the entire campaign. Through me, the reader, visitor, listener is introduced to Ying. Ying then introduces the reader/visitor/listener to Burma. This outline is used in each piece of literature, media, and talks.

Logo

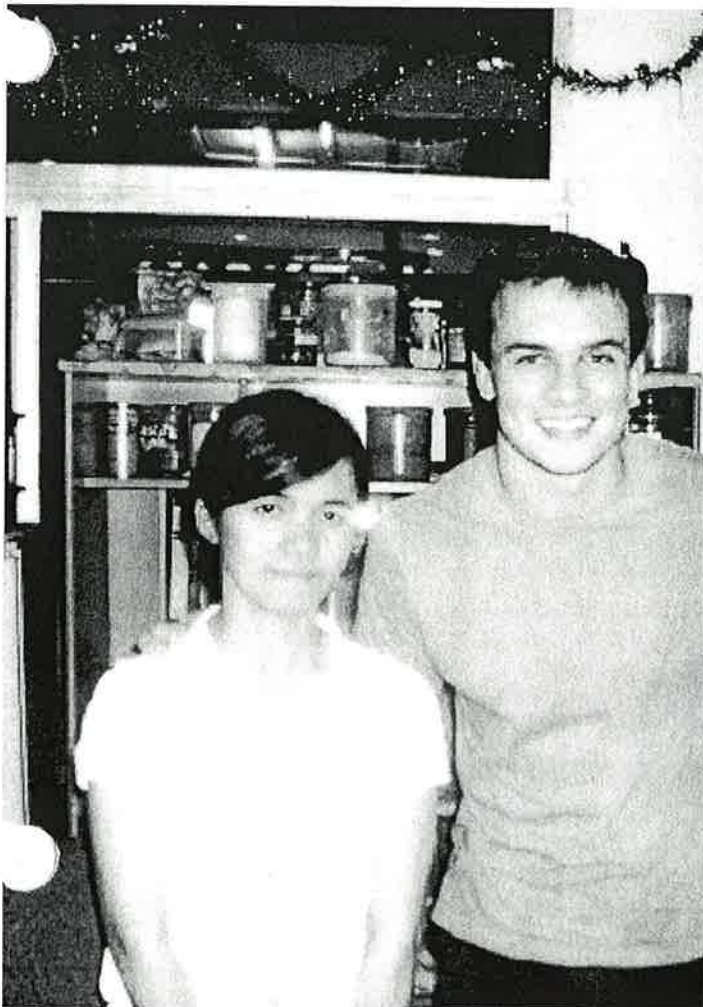


SCHOOLARSHIPS
for
BURMA

Case Statement



SCHOLARSHIPS for BURMA



**"The future of my
country lies in the hands
of the younger genera-
tion."**

**~ Aung San Suu Kyi,
Nobel Peace Prize Laureate,
Burmese Political Prisoner**

**Written and Prepared by:
Kirk Acevedo**

**Scholarships for Burma is a non-profit project of the Hu-
man Rights Action Center, a 501(c)(3) non-profit charity.**

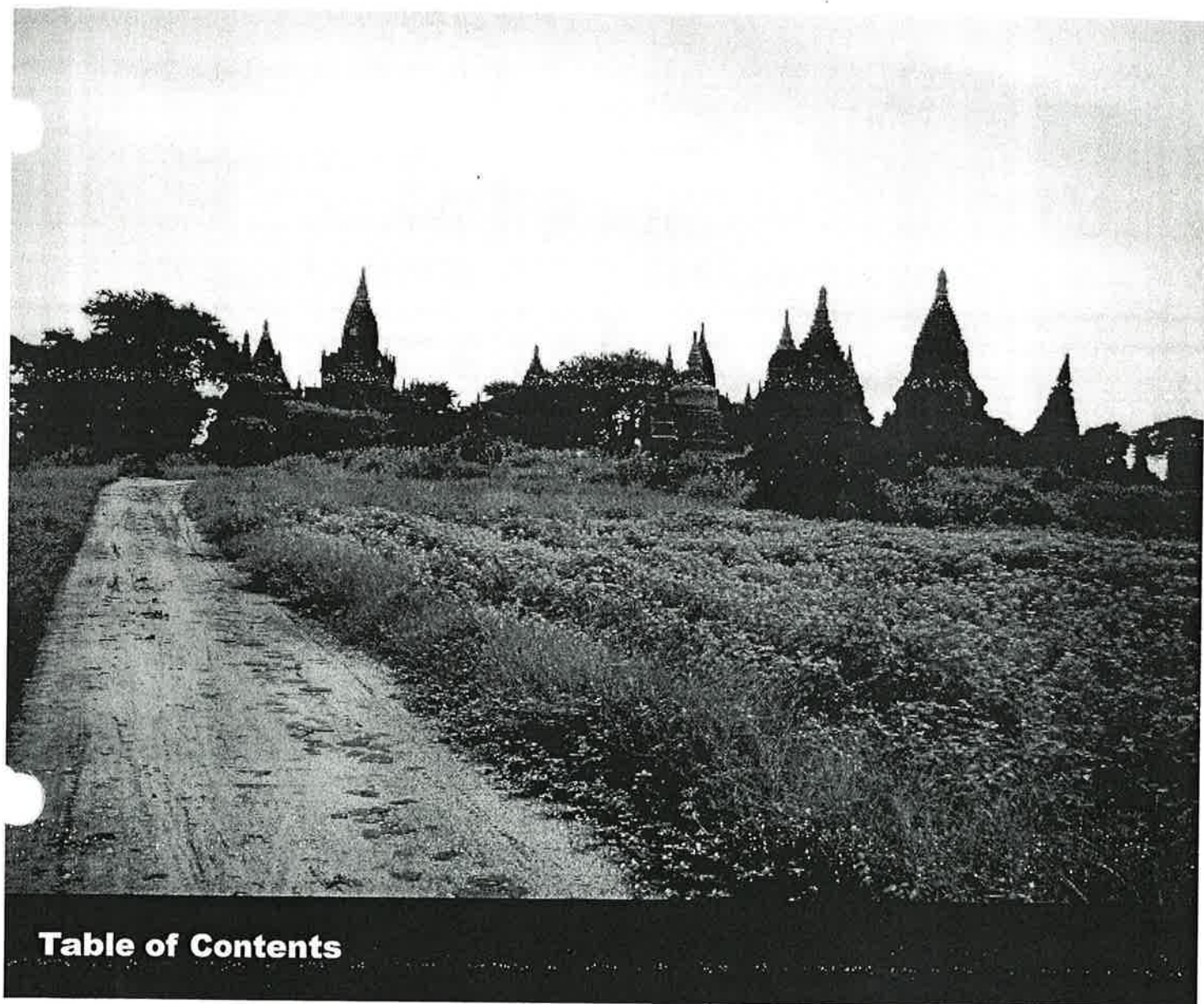


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SCHOLARSHIPS for BURMA



Dear Friend,

My name is Kirk Acevedo, and this is my story of how I met a Burmese refugee named Ying Kawn Tai. I hope by the end of reading this you are as excited as I am to get Ying into college. I cannot think of a better investment for the future of Burma.

Although Ying's story is detailed in the following pages, it is enough to say here that by the end of middle school she had gone through more than most do in their entire lives. A glimmer of hope for Ying was that she wanted to go to college someday. Her drive for an education turned into a passion to educate her own people. But because she was simply born in the country of Burma, receiving an education was never possible.

Her story taught me that the simplest, most expected thing - like an education - is a golden ticket out of extreme poverty and oppression, and unfortunately only a dream. But to Ying, it was a chance to confront the problems of Burma, and educate the largest ethnic minority in Burma which she comes from - the Shan. I found this incredibly inspiring.

When I came back to the United States I created this campaign - Scholarships for Burma - to combine my academic interest in Burma with making Ying's dream a reality. I cannot afford the \$26,220 needed to give Ying a full college scholarship, but I can give her education my time and energy.

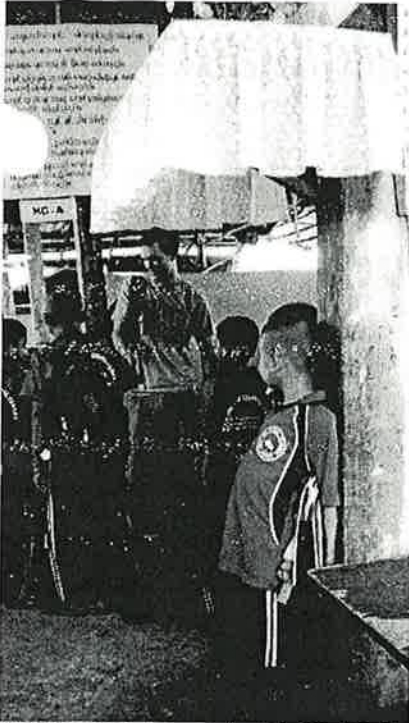
Starting on October 15, 2011, I will spend 30 days trekking 450 miles across Burma's countryside, from Rangoon to Mandalay. I'm choosing to trek for personal reasons, but I am dedicating the walk in honor of Ying's education. A brief description of my trek can be found in the appendix.

As much as I would like to, I cannot rewrite Ying's past, or many of the people of Burma's. But with your help this campaign can change Ying's future and impact hundreds, if not thousands, of other Shan Burmese. Together, this is our chance to make it happen.

Sincerely,

Kirk Acevedo

P.S. My website and detailed information about my trek can be found at
www.scholarshipsforburma.com



With Burmese migrant students in Mae Sot, Thailand

My Story...

Thailand

I've often been asked - *why Burma?*, or sometimes even, *what is Burma?* Even if some know Burma is a country, most cannot point it out on the map. I don't blame them, neither could I three years ago.

My interest in Burma started with Thailand. In the hallway before one of my fall classes, I saw a poster that advertised for the "Thailand-Burma Border Alternative Break Trip." I didn't know anything about Burma, but registered because I thought if anything Thailand would be an exotic vacation. By December 27, 2008, I was on a plane to Bangkok for two weeks with twelve other students from American University.

The trip was anything but a vacation. Our group met with influential leaders and organizations working to change Burma from the outside, from the U.S. Embassy in Bangkok to a parliamentary member of the National League for Democracy, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi's party in Burma.

But out of everyone we met, the story that stuck with me and changed my studies in college, was from a young 23-year-old Shan woman, named Ying Kawn Tai.

I met Ying at the Alternative ASEAN Network on Burma (ALTSEAN), a selective education center for women refugees in Bangkok. The organization trains young women leaders before placing them in organizations that help refugees from Burma living in Thailand.

Ying told our group her story in a small house in the heart of Bangkok. In 8th grade Ying's mother died from what is believed to have been malaria. Her father could not support Ying and her sister in Burma, so Ying dropped out of school and left with her dad to Thailand. In Thailand, she took on three jobs, selling lottery tickets and produce in markets and cleaning houses.

Within a year of her mother's death her father died from Tuberculosis he had contracted in Burma. Ying called for her sister to come to Thailand, and, after some miscommunication, they were reunited in 2001.

Ying continued working three jobs for nearly a decade, earning enough money to keep her sister in school. Ying's sister excelled and was accepted upon graduation for a full scholarship through Child Dream to Bangkok University in Thailand. It was great news for Ying's sister, and Ying was incredibly proud (she has told me on more than one occasion it was the happiest moment of her life)—but Ying had sacrificed her own education to make it possible.

I will never forget when Ying broke down and cried in front of our group, saying, "all I want is to go to school."

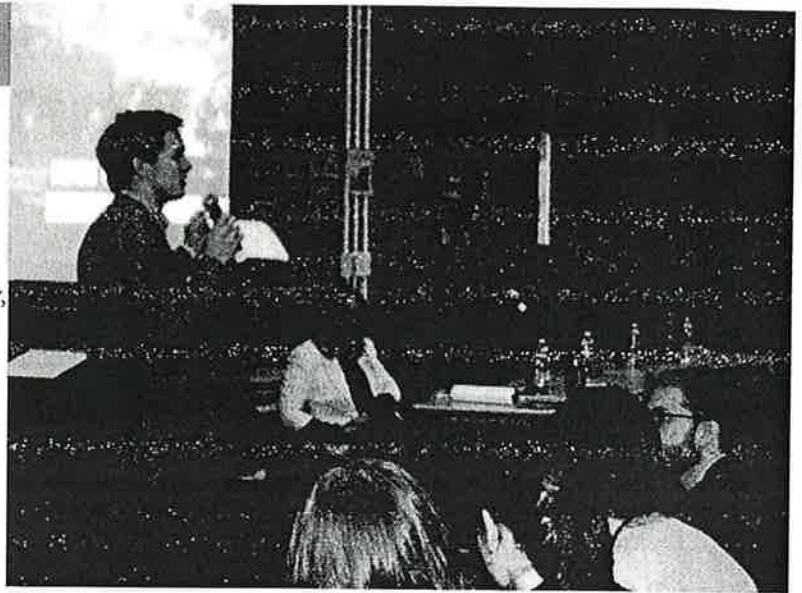
This shocked me. My parents spent thousands of dollars for me to fly halfway around the world just to hear Ying tell me her story. How privileged I was; how lucky. I took a college education for granted. Yet, here was Ying, a girl who had forfeited her education for her sister to enjoy a life she always wanted.

Ying's story had a tremendous impact on me. Her story is similar to hundreds of thousands of other people from Burma. But her story was no longer a statistic to me; she was a friend. I wanted to learn more about why Ying left Burma and what I could do to help her.

Back in the U.S.

When I came back I started asking questions, began reading everything I could about Burma, and made the country the focus of my studies at college. I contacted the US Campaign for Burma, an advocacy group based in Washington, D.C., that supports freedom, democracy, and human rights in Burma. I asked them how I could get involved.

A few weeks later I was interning as their Grassroots Organizer. I represented the US Campaign for Burma at STAND in Washington, D.C., a student-led movement against genocide and mass atrocities around the world.



I escorted Burmese monks with the US Campaign for Burma's advocacy director around the House of Representatives where we met privately with the Foreign Affairs Committee and congressional office staffers. I also helped mobilize hundreds of volunteers around the U.S. who collected over 10,000 signatures at U2's 360 tour concerts to sign a petition asking President Obama to pressure the United Nations to create a Commission of Inquiry into human rights abuses in Burma.

In my free time, I facilitated discussions with students from American University's Student Campaign for Burma on different issues facing Burma, and coordinated one of the largest events of 2009 at American University where four monks who led the Saffron Revolution in 2007 came to speak about their experiences.

I am currently a senior in the Honors Program at American University studying international economic relations in the School of International Service. I have spent most of my research the past two years on the sanctions the United States has on Burma, their efficacy, and their effects on the relationship between the ethnic minorities and the military regime.



My activities have been featured in *Voice of America*, *Democratic Voice of Burma*, *Agence-France Presse*, and *iTunes*, and I have written about Burma for American University's *The Eagle*.

In 2010 I worked with the editors of the book *Nowhere to be Home: Narratives from Survivors of Burma's Military Regime*, and assisted Benedict Rogers on a part of his forthcoming book *Burma: A Captive Nation*.

In addition to my course work at AU, I am taking one of two classes on Burma in the English speaking world at Georgetown University, taught by former U.S. diplomat and eminent scholar on Burma David Steinberg.





Ying with her sister in Chiang Mai

Ying's Story...

After a few drafts trying to write Ying's story, I realized I can't: it's too personal. Ying needs to. Below is a transcription of an hour long conversation I had with Ying on Skype over my Spring Break.

Background: Ying currently teaches for Shan Youth Power (SYP), a nascent but growing non-profit organization founded in 2002 that gives schooling to ethnic Shan youth whose parents are migrants working in Thailand. SYP is located on a construction site and currently reaches over 300 students a year. It is growing not necessarily because of excellent services or education, but need—over 80,000 Shan live in the area, most not reached by any form of education.

I grew up in Leikhe. Leikhe is a small Shan village of about 300 people. I have neighbors, but outside my house there is just a small road. Leikhe in Shan means 'place where you post'—like where you tie a horse—except in Burma we have cows, not horses. There are many mountains and monkeys in Leikhe. Everywhere you look there are mountains. Most people farm. They plant rice and garlic and fruit—mostly garlic, but also a lot of rice.

My family experienced forced labor because they worked for the government for free. The SPDC [State Peace and Development Council—military government of Burma] made my family plant a new crop, which they make into petrol. It didn't work and destroyed the soil. Also, all the village was forced to build the railroad near my village. We had to work for free. This was not our job, this was their job. We got no money. And my family still had to work for them.

It hasn't stopped. I have a book that tells of human rights abuses in Burma. I show people what they do to the Shan people. In my own home town there have been young women raped by the SPDC.

After my mother died, I walked with my father to Thailand. My sister stayed with my uncle. After two days walking we came to a road and a car took us to Thailand. In Thailand I helped my father sell produce and lottery tickets in the market. I also worked as a janitor for a long time. I woke up at 4:30am every morning to do this. When I worked, the day passing was just passing—that was it. I just wanted to make money. You know, stay one or two years, and then go back to Burma.

My father died from Tuberculosis. After my father died I tried to contact my sister. In Burma there are no phones so I had to write a letter. I told her I would come back to Leikhe and to wait for me. But my letter missed and she came to Thailand in 2001. When I went back to Burma. This time I told her to stay in Thailand and so I came back to meet her.

[In Thailand] I worked and she went to school. In 2008 she received a complete scholarship from Child Dream to attend Bangkok University. Right now she is in her second year. She likes school a lot. She studies News Media. She comes to Chiang Mai to visit me when she has school breaks.



From left: Ying's sister with Ying

