

Flood Update – by Patricia Dewit – November 2011

Peter and I had been walking through this area near the Prakhanong dam for the last few days. I had to see for myself that the walls were holding the water back. The government had been ‘munjai’ (confident) too many times about other water barriers throughout Bangkok that had since broken under the pressure of an unstoppable flood. This flood was outsmarting everyone and even the designated safety zone for evacuees was lost under almost two meters of water.

<http://www.twitvid.com/RZSXR>

We found that there was a community of people living in the low-lying area beside the canal. Shanties that looked like slave’s quarters had been home to these people for a generation, a place where children share play space with the chickens, where the old men drink beer in the morning and clothes-lines hang between rubbish heaps.

<http://www.twitvid.com/BGR5H>

We kept meeting the same folk along our path, kept asking the same questions, “Are you worried about the flooding? Do you think the dam will hold?” Each day they answered “No problem, it won’t flood here. The dam will hold”. We drilled every official we saw at the dam, every worker, every sweeper, every fisherman “Are you afraid the walls will break?” Every time we got the same answer,

“No.”

And then Friday happened. It was a normal morning until Peter got a phone call from a friend telling us that the dam had broken. The flood was coming our way. Peter grabbed the car keys; I had to run back upstairs to get my red plaid rubber boots and socks. We took off in the car but stopped a short way from home.

Our neighbour's house was filling with water. "Can we help?"

<http://www.twitvid.com/3VFN9>

"No, we're okay, thanks. All our things are on the second floor. We'll just pump the water out as it comes in." These guys were prepared. They'd been watching the news.

I had to move fast and started running up the road, stopping from house to house, asking if they needed help. Once I was sure they were okay I knew I had to get to the homes beside the canal, beside the dam. The main street was filling rapidly with water. I kept running and splashing filthy water onto myself, hearing the Thai people calling out 'farang glua' meaning 'the foreigner's afraid.' I wanted to shout 'I'm not afraid for *me*, I'm afraid for the people living near the dam!'

As I approached the homes near the dam I was shocked to find everyone going about business as usual, drying chilies in the sun, rolling cigarettes, and my new friend, Prem, was fishing behind his house. Fishing! Then I saw one lady whom I was sure was aware of what was happening right that minute out on the main street. She was hammering boards together. She's building a boat, I thought, not unlike the make-shift boats we'd seen in the already flooded streets. Finally, I thought, someone was getting ready for the flood. She smiled at me as she looked up from her work, 'I'm building a table. I have too much stuff on the ground over there.'

Not wanting to start a panic as I passed through, I calmly explained that the dam had broken, that the streets nearby were flooding, all the while still walking toward the dam, looking for some sort of rushing water coming toward us, silently wondering 'Am I in danger? Could I swim with these boots on much less rescue anyone?'

Then, sweat dripping, heart beating, boots sloshing, I saw it with

my own eyes. The people were right to be 'munjai'. It wasn't the cement dam beside their community that had broken. It was a sand barrier a little farther down the canal.

Sand.

I should have known.

That same sand barrier was repaired, only to break again every day after. The water rises, and then subsides. The lady on the corner still sells noodles standing in eight inches of water. I still go out to the streets every day, asking if everyone is okay, trying to encourage them to 'suu suu', hang in there. And then something beautiful and divine and supernatural happens. **They** encourage me, saying 'Don't be afraid. It's actually kind of fun. Here, sit down with us and have a coffee while we see how deep the water rises today. By the way, where did you get those boots?'

## Patricia DeWit

Matthew 7:24-27  
The Message (MSG)

24-25"These words I speak to you are not incidental additions to your life, homeowner improvements to your standard of living. They are foundational words, words to build a life on. If you work these words into your life, you are like a smart carpenter who built his house on solid rock. Rain poured down, the river flooded, a tornado hit—but nothing moved that house. It was fixed to the rock.

26-27"But if you just use my words in Bible studies and don't work them into your life, you are like a stupid carpenter who built his house on the sandy beach. When a storm rolled in and the waves came up, it collapsed like a house of cards."