



**Domestic Workers are Care Worker,
who cares for them?**

Base on 10 True Stories
from Network of
Domestic Workers in Thailand



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Created by
the Foundation for Labour and
Employment and Protection
(FLEP)

PREFACE

Most of domestic workers in Thailand are migrants, either migrating from a small town to a big city; or from a neighbouring country to Thailand. They are mostly women. Living with employers, it is challenging for them to access rights and welfare protection. Sometimes they are at risk of physical and mental harassment.

In 2010, the **Foundation for Labour and Employment and Protection (FLEP)**, also known as **HomeNet Thailand**, started to organize domestic workers into a group called the **“Network of Domestic Workers in Thailand” (NDWT)** with an aim to be a self-help group and to advocate for laws and policies to protect domestic workers.

To publicise domestic workers’ stories and struggles in securing employment and taking care of their family, FLEP in collaboration with NDWT, has published **“Domestic Workers are Care Workers, who cares for them?”**.

We hope that the stories will contribute towards employers and the government acting to guarantee that the rights of domestic workers are protected.

The book portrays domestic workers’ migration for employment; their working conditions; as well as

deep connections between domestic workers and their employer's family. The stories are from ten Thai and migrant domestic workers. FLEP and NDWT are grateful for them, all the writers, and all the contributors. We would like to thank the Global Fund for Women and Porticus for their financial support on publishing the book.

We also extend our appreciation to the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Organization on Migration (IOM), and United Nations for Women (UN Women) for their continual support for the FLEP and NDWT.

In Faith and Trust,
Poonsap Suanmuang Tulaphan
Director of Foundation Labour
Employment and Protection
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Domestic Workers
are **Care Workers,**
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HOPES AND DREAMS

:Tikamporn Boonmee

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The Moei River is peculiar. Instead of flowing from north to south as normal, it flows northward, passing Mae Sot in Tak Province before flowing through mountains and forests further and meets the Salween River in Mae Hong Son Province. The 300-kilometer long Moei forms a natural borderline between Thailand and Myanmar, providing livelihoods for people on both sides and also serving as a transportation route for goods between the two countries. From Mae Sot, one can see Myawaddy, the Karen city about 500 meters beyond the Moel river. Owing to Thailand's flourishing economy and chronic political turmoil in Myanmar, its people like to cross the river searching for better lives in Thailand.

Twenty years ago, **Jue** also had a dream. Her family was not really in a bad situation. Her father was an official, her mother a seamstress. Jue went to school and had some knowledge of English language. She was the oldest one among many siblings. Her dream about studying in a university seemed to be far out of reach. She therefore decided to give up school and became her mother's

assistant in order to increase the family's income and support her siblings' schooling.

Jue remembered that she had decided to travel to Mae Sot in August 1998 after hearing from friends in her village talk about opportunities for work sewing school uniforms there, with good income and close to home. She and other villagers, about nine people, went there together.

It was not an easy journey from her village to Thailand. During that time roads in Myanmar were very bad. Both sides were still jungle and surrounded by high mountains. Most parts were dirt roads and muddy ways. In order to get the closest to the border, Jue and the others had to travel in an agent-organized hired vehicle, which took one whole day to drive to Myawaddy. After that, it still took two more days waiting in town for an appropriate time to cross the border.

One night Jue and ten others, with a common fate, got on a little boat to cross the Moei River under strong, destructive currents. After the successful crossing, they were driven to a village and had to wait there once again.

The darkness of the night made it hard to identify who they were altogether. Many people had already been waiting long before her group came. The whole number of people there was around 70. Not long after, they resumed their journey. They followed their leader along the pitch dark ways, further away from the village gradually. Walkways suddenly became bare earth surrounded with woods and mountains.

9 Tears began to pour down June's cheeks. She had never been this far from home. She cried quietly and tried not to sob openly. Everyone was supposed to be quiet. No noise should be made during the journey according to the group leader. Her weakened body, due to excessively long marching without rest or water, and the lack of communication based on their different languages, made her feel homesick and weary. But her wish to go back was nevertheless impossible. The group of nearly a hundred people followed each other quietly through the forest not knowing their own destiny.

The leader led them across a huge stream flowing through the forest. The sound of water smashing down the stream below was louder than their footsteps. Most women in sarongs and blouses were totally soaked with

water while wading through waist deep water.

Rocks and high mountains were also obstacles for the journey. Jue and the whole group had to climb rocks up to the mountain top with tiring and wet bodies. Strong grips and careful steps on slippery and wet rocks required full alertness. A fall would bring only disaster, either through immediate death or serious injuries that would lead to a person being left behind, alone in the forest.

Jue arrived at the top with difficulties. She let out a long deep sigh, having conquered death. Glancing down from the high mountain, she saw about ten people below, still coming one after the other.

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The four-day long journey from Myanmar to Thailand, with only one night rest, was not yet finished. Each weakening body was put in a boat crossing a river which, as discovered later, was somewhere in Nakhon Sawan. Later on, Jue and the rest got on an arranged vehicle. In order to avoid any Thai official inspection, Jue had to lie in a tight box, which was punctured with tiny breathing holes. Alas, they arrived in Bangkok, an unexpected destination for her. Jue's first job was a

domestic worker, rather than a seamstress as agreed upon departure from home.

Though many years went by, Jue's memories about that journey were still so vivid. She was not sure if such a decision was right or wrong but she knew and clearly saw that, risking her life to seek a job in Thailand did help her siblings and their children further their education up to university level, like her own dream once in childhood. Today she also got a chance to study English in Myanmar's university.

Every time she got to tell someone about her journey to Thailand, she would smile proudly.







ESCAPING VIOLENCE TO SAFE LIVES

:Tikamporn Boonmee

“The gang rules, guns in hand,
tyrant hands kill brothers, sisters
and the people”

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That is a text from “Aung San Suu Kyi” song created by “CaraBao”, a famous Thai rock band with socio-political viewpoints. The song portrays Myanmar politician Aung San Suu Kyi’s battles and political situation in the hands of the junta regime.

Aung San Suu Kyi regained her freedom again in 2010 owing to continuous international pressure on the junta. She then traveled around the country to meet her supporters. Visits from this female icon were like rains falling during drought periods. People in all directions welcomed her arrivals and hoped for a new democratic ruling government once again.

Gee Gee, a 20 year old Kachin woman, living in a village situated in the northern part of Myanmar, recalled how brutally the military government exploited and forced villagers, including children and the elderly, to work for free and used threats and night-curfews frequently. Hope came to Gee Gee and all people with Aung San Suu Kyi's visit. She volunteered to prepare food for the entourage in the name of the village.

After those visits, the military arrested people who came to welcome Aung San Suu Kyi, accusing them of being dangerous to Myanmar's internal security. Many people were hunted down and put in jails as political opponents. Many people in Gee Gee's village were arrested and sentenced to 10-20 years in jail. Some of them unfortunately died there and some had to escape towards the Indian border, which is the closest to the village.

Gee Gee's family, consisting of husband and a three year old daughter, had to live in fear. Having a young child made it hard to escape far away. For that reason she decided to move to Mandalay and stayed with her husband's cousin for a while. Although the cousin was a government official, her safety could not be guaranteed.

Gee Gee still heard about being tracked down from time to time. With her niece's advice, she then thought about fleeing to Thailand.

She chose to go to Myawaddy in Karen state first, hoping to cross the border to Thailand later in Mae Sot. She traveled alone. Her child was looked after by the cousins in Mandalay. Inland travels were also not easy. Because there were many ethnic groups living in various states in Myanmar, each identity card needed to state which ethnic group the holder belonged to and their residential address. Gee Gee told an official that she had come to visit her cousin, who was also an official working in Karen state. Luckily she was not stopped and managed to travel further to Myawaddy. She found that crossing the border at Myawaddy to Mae Sot was very strict and difficult to pass through. Instead, she decided to move down south to cross over to Kanchanaburi instead.

Several days were spent on the journey in order to keep her life safer. Gee Gee missed her only child so much that she risked seeing her once more in Rangoon. She hugged her child tightly and very long, wanting to remember her overwhelming feelings from that moment as long as possible. She could not foresee when she would be able

to hug her daughter once again. Time passed by quickly. She had to leave her child in the morning. One relative put a paper slip with a telephone number into her palm and said that the owner of the phone number could help her to cross the border. That was her only hope. She did not hesitate to pick up a contact. Not long after that she was able to travel further, very well guided and taken care of by the owner of the phone number. She had to stay with a Mong family for around two weeks before crossing over.

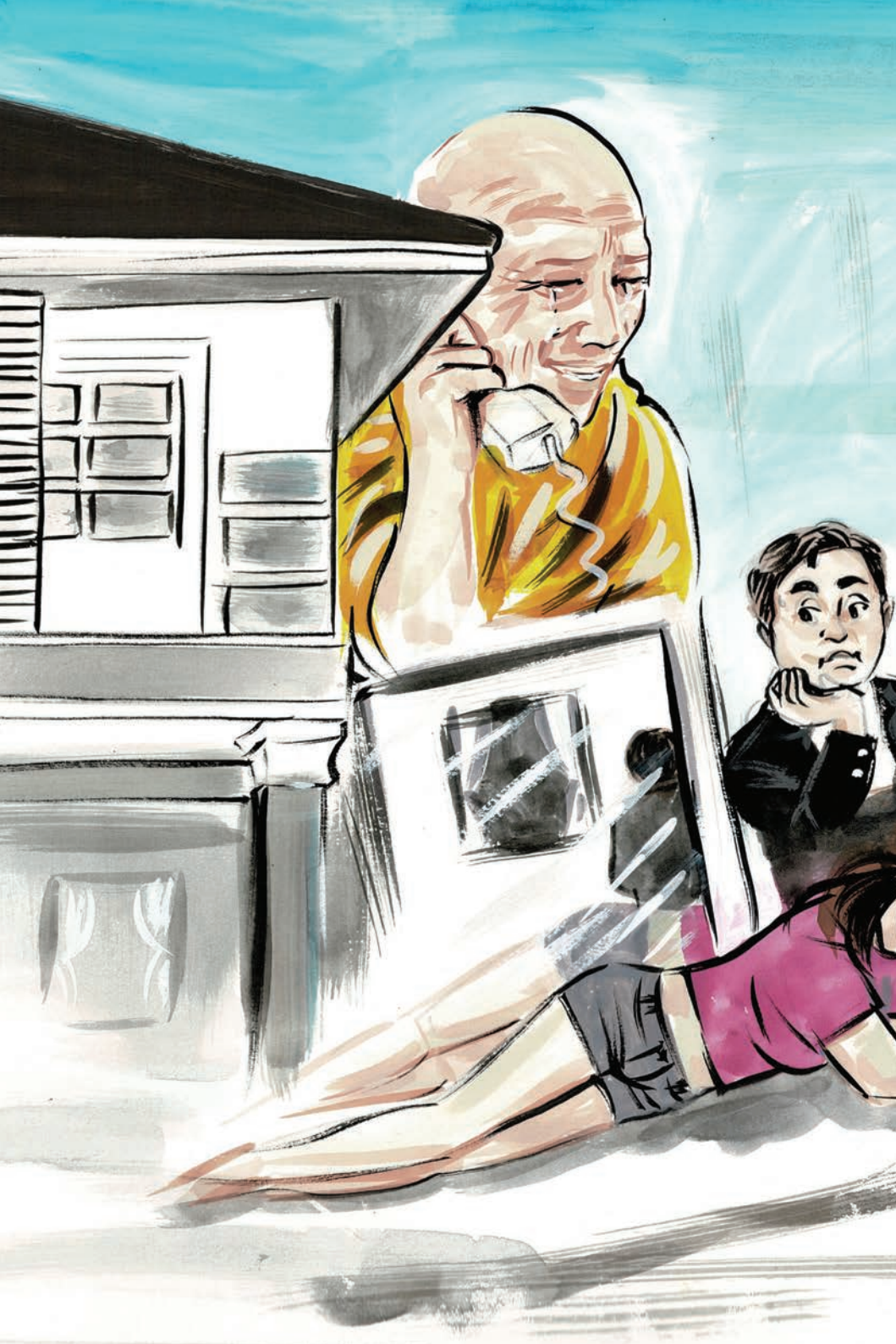
The way to cross the border between Myanmar and Thailand in the area of Kanchanaburi was different. People did not walk across the river like in Mae Sot. The place here was surrounded by mountains. Gee Gee had to walk into the forest with three other people and was led by a guide. Shoes were torn apart, wounds occurred from twigs and thorns. They could be considered as her long traveling logs. Food to fill their hunger was a small amount of snacks given by their guide. Drinks were only stream water along the way. It took over four days to cross over into Thailand.

In the new country, Gee Gee first got a job in a factory. Several years later she brought her child along and met her husband, who she'd been separated from for so long. Up until now she never forgot those times, starting from fleeing

state officers, the very long enduring border crossing, until the beginning of her new life in Thailand.

By this time Gee Gee had returned to visit her homeland three or four times already. She was unsure whether her name was still in the junta's list of wanted persons or not. By this time it had been more than ten years already but politics in Myanmar had not changed. This new land gave her and her family more opportunities and safety than her homeland.







LAST PHONE LINE

:Tikamporn Boonmee

23 A telephone rang repeatedly in a two-story house. Its doors and windows were closed and properly locked from outside. If there was any living thing inside, it would never be able to see the outside world anymore. And here was the place where **Som**, a young Karen girl from Myanmar had been abused for freedom by her employer since day one. Som had to pick up the phone because there was no one from the family at home. Usually she was not allowed to do that. The employer feared that she might make contact with someone and get help from outside to allow her to escape.

“Is that Som? Som right?” Questions in her own language sounded so familiar and so full of hope came from the line. Som could not utter any word, only tears burst out and a sobbing sound followed the same as the other end.

Som’s family comprised of father, mother, one younger sister and Som. The parents were rice farmers with

no adequate income. They had to send her to live in the temple as a nun when she was nine years old. Som spent her life in an unfamiliar place and grew up on her own. Every time her father came to visit, she would jump up to hug him with lots of tears. She missed him so much. Her father cried too. It showed his love and worry for her and their strong attachment.

Not long after that, bad luck struck the family. Her father became depressed and was sent to Rangoon for treatment. Later on he decided to enter the monkhood and remained living in a temple. Her mother became the breadwinner.

“I wish for Som to go and look for a job in Thailand.” Her mother told Som’s aunt. Such a wish was normal there, as many families in the village had already sent their children to work in Thailand. Many of them came back with much more money than what could be earned in their homeland.

Som realized her mother’s wish and prepared for it, with hope and determination to bring prosperity back to the family. Nevertheless, she had to wait for a while till she got bigger, and strong enough to conquer a big journey into the outside world.

But bad luck blew over her family once more. Her mother died unexpectedly. Som became the head of the family at the age of fourteen. After organizing the funeral on her own under immense pressure, she then got herself ready, as in her mother's last wish, for Thailand. Som came to say goodbye to her monk father at the temple. Som and her relatives decided not to tell her father about her mum's death. They did not want to make his depression worse. She mentioned only that she would go to find a job in Thailand.

Som went into the forest, climbed over the mountains and crossed through the wild water of river Moei during the rainy season. Life or death was everywhere. She traveled with two cousins, a big sister and a big brother. She held tight to the big brother, hoping that his strength would help her go across the wild running river safely and get onto the other side, on which hopes and opportunities for better lives awaited.

After crossing the river successfully, they moved around several places and provinces in order to avoid policemen and bad employers. Subsequently, Som arrived in Bangkok and started to work in the aforementioned two-story house..

Som worked here as a housekeeper or domestic worker. Her employer never let her go outside. She was locked in her room after finishing her job. All kinds of communication were banned, even picking up phone calls. The employer kept her monthly incomes and paid her for necessary things only.

The loft part of the house was a place for her to sleep but was not safe at all. One side of the room was a glass wall, which her male boss could check on her with questionable glances all the time. She had to find a piece of cloth to cover it. Although she felt very unsafe she could do nothing about it.

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Som recognized the voice on the line immediately. It was the voice of her father, who loved her most and raised her up from birth. She missed his warm hugs. Suddenly her heart fell apart and tears ran down followed by a light sobbing sound. Like in the past, whenever she cried her father would cry, too. She heard a relative told him repeatedly in the background that the person he was talking to was not her. "That was not Som. It was not her". Som did not get a chance to confirm to him that it was Som, his dearest child, whom he was talking to. That was the last time she heard his voice.

Many months later, Som got terrible news from a sister, who tried to contact her for very long time. Som needed to go back home urgently. Her employer reluctantly allowed her to go.

Som learned what had happened to her father when she arrived home. He had traveled to town in order to talk to her on the phone number he had just received. There were only a few places he could phone from. He tried for many days until the day Som accidentally got a chance to answer the phone. Her father did not believe that his daughter was still alive, that's why he asked repeatedly whether it's Som on the line. Tears ran down her cheeks after hearing what actually happened. This time there was no father to cry with her.







RATHER FORGET, NEVERTHELESS REMEMBER

:Walee Naksuwan

Sang was born in the Northeast region of Thailand. Her family was affluent from a duck and chicken farm but ruined by an underground lottery business. Sang had one elder sister, two elder and two younger brothers. She remembered she once had a nanny when she was about four or five years old and there was also a black and white television at home. Sang did not like doing household chores for her brothers, who often showed violence and oppression towards women. Sang also did not like school. She hated to be forced or hit by teachers. A male teacher used to scold her publicly in front of the flag post for her braided long hair, which came from a belief to subside her regular illness. The teacher did not want to know the reason but preferred to punish her with toilet cleaning and trash collection duty. She did not follow those commands all the time. She was quite stubborn. She was often teased by her peers, even the ones who she paid to do schoolwork for her. When she was 13, she wanted to go to Bangkok. She strongly believed that her mother did not love her because she always let her own daughter

serve all her sons. Sang asked her father once, “ May I go to Bangkok?”. He answered “What for, want to be sold?”. Sang did not listen and fled to Bangkok.

In Bangkok, her relative, who lived in Wongwian Yai helped her to find work. She got a job as a live-in nanny for an eight month old baby with a 600 Baht salary. She worked there for seven years. Her employer let her stay in a store room in his house. There were actually many houses in the compound. The first one belonged to her employer, the second one his younger brother. This guy was about thirty years old. He did not work apart from chauffeuring his wife around. He liked to come close to Sang, who was then a teenager. One day while Sang was washing dishes near water earthen containers, he approached her from behind and tried to grab her and drag her to a room. Sang kicked and elbowed him in vain, he did not stop. At last when she started to bite and threatened him about reporting this incident to his wife and elder sister, he halted and backed off.

He tried the same thing again and again with Sang. The second time was when she came out of the bathroom but luckily there were some people nearby. He failed. The third time happened when she was alone in the house she

worked for. With a 500 Baht banknote in his hand, he said “I have something for you”. He tried to hug and kiss while pulling her clothes off. Sang wriggled and scratched and screamed. “Let go, I don’t want it, I won’t accept it”. Sang bit his hand when he tried to muffle her. Suddenly another house-maid came by and Sang caught that moment to free herself, tore the banknote and ran away from him. Sang reported what happened to the employer. He, who warned Sang to avoid his own brother and talked about the case of a Laotian girl who was sent back home after getting pregnant by his brother, did not let Sang go to police. Apart from those hassles, the employer did not keep his promise to support her in getting into a hairdressing school. He was afraid that a 19 year old like her would, with a bit of freedom, get a boyfriend instead. Sang decided to go for a new job brought by her friend with 800 Baht monthly.

The new employer was from a muslim family in Bangkok area. The employer’s family still stayed in her mother’s house. Sang looked after her two year old son and two month old daughter. She had to sleep with the children and was not allowed to lock the door in case the employer wanted to check on the baby. The employer’s brother often had friends come for a visit. They usually

had food and played guitars together. One night one of her brother's friends sneaked into the room and lied down next to Sang. She was woken up when he tried to hold her hands. Sang only asked to let her hands free for the sake of her employer's brother. He refused and said that he had liked her for a very long time. She found a way out by kicking the boy sleeping next to her. His scream would make the parent come and check. That guy got startled and left. She did not tell her employer about it but they probably realized something. Anyway, Sang had to move to her husband's house and sleep in the same room with his older sister and younger brother.

Sleeping in the same room led to sexual harassment conducted by the younger brother to Sang twice. The first time, he said that he liked her and tried to embrace her. She pulled herself away and shouted "No, I don't want to be Muslim." He then stopped. The second time, he started to hug and hold her hands. She felt so disgusted and tried to elbow him out. She did not want to scream but asked him to let her free. He did the opposite thing by hugging her tighter. He stopped his harassment while his sister woke up.

After working for two years in this house, Sang

decided to go working abroad like in Malaysia, Spain and the US. Sang also encountered sexual harassment there many times. In America, the employer liked to leave x-rated films running on screen while his wife was not at home. He also liked to touch, embrace or get closer. Sang never allowed all that. Back in Thailand, Sang worked for many foreigners. An Australian harassed her verbally and physically. Some even offered her concubine status. Sang never agreed. She stood her moral ground.

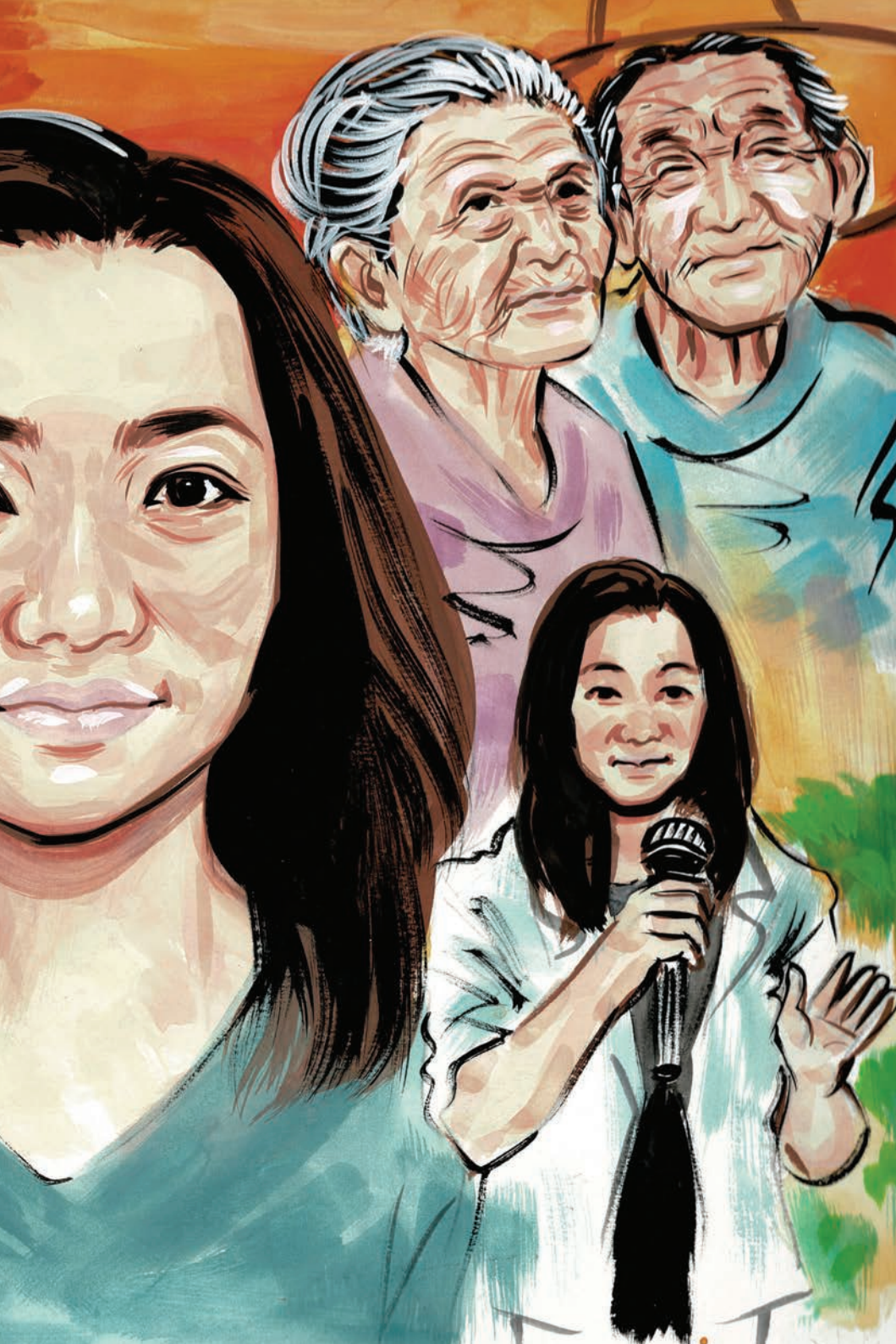
After experiencing so much harassment, Sang felt disgusted and started to hate men. Whenever male employers came closer, she would withdraw. Top hit question from relatives was “Why no husband?” During that time Thai society adored mixed race children. She also dreamed about having children: one girl, one boy. Her dream never came true, although she had already opened herself for love and relationship with men.

Sang decided to work as a domestic worker until the age of 60. She planned to work abroad like the US in order to save enough money for retirement. Sang still remembered several sexual harassments upon her since teenager time very well. Though she wanted to forget,

all such incidents still stuck to her memory. Luckily she could save herself every time, but psychological effects on her mind remained as obstacles to having tender feelings for men in the long run. Sang thought that an employer had to guarantee safe zones from sexual harassment for domestic workers. Providing private lodges for them, not putting them with the employer's family member anywhere preferred. There should be awareness campaign among employers that sexual harassment causes not only bodily harm but also mental effects for employees. Those deep, long memories could make them incapable of developing love and healthy relationships (as a good family's foundation) for building their own family lives.



สถานีวิทยุโทรทัศน์ไทยทีวีสี



ZARNI'S DESTINY AS BREADWINNER

:Walee Naksuwan

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Zarni came to Thailand in 2002. She was 16 years old and had already finished secondary school level. She had to wait for two years before entering a university. At that time she dreamed of being a nurse. Her family's incomes earned from their small grocery store was not enough to support her further education. She was the first child with four other siblings, who were all still in school. A cousin who was working in Thailand encouraged her to look for a job there for the time being. Many of her friends had already gone. She considered doing as her cousin suggested, hoping to come back for studying later.

According to Myanmar law no one under the age of 18 was allowed to cross the border. Zarni had to turn back home in the middle of her journey. She needed to hire an agent to bring her over there and that costed a lot. She was brought to Mae Sot through a natural route. The journey already took many days but she had to wait for

another two weeks to be brought to Bangkok by another agent. She borrowed 6,000 Baht from a cousin for traveling expenses. She traveled from Mae Sot to Bangkok assisted by an old woman. The woman asked if it was her first time in Thailand and brought her to a house in the Sukhumvit area, where her cousin was working. Before that, Zarni had tried calling the phone number of that house many times but couldn't reach her cousin.

Zarni cousin taught her how to iron clothes. When her employer was out, she could watch TV to learn some Thai. Later she worked in a factory for counterfeit goods for 2-3 months. After it was raided by police, she decided to quit out of fear. She did not want to be repatriated or sitting in jail. After staying with her cousin for two weeks she got a temporary job, as a substitute for a Myanmar domestic worker on home-leave. Beforehand Zarni was trained how to do her job properly for a week. Zarni's employer lived in Praram 3 Road area, where a lot of her countrymen worked. During that time she could not speak Thai but tried to communicate with a little English.

After that, Zarni moved to work in Pattaya. Being alone brought her depression. A week later she was

then sent to another employer in Bangkok. Whenever she was not paid, she would change her job. She tried a hand-sewing job for a month, earning 4,500 Baht salary and discovered that it was not for her.

Another cousin relayed a message to her about a vacancy for domestic work, with 6,000 Baht salary, in Udom Suk area. She worked there for over two years and was registered as foreign labour for the first time. She usually sent her whole salary back home through a paid agent, who would come to fetch it from her working place and deliver it to her family. Zarni kept only little money for paying telephone calls back home. An old gardener from her employer's house usually took her on his bike to a public telephone booth and let her wait in a queue. When his son got himself a mobile phone, she would pay him 100 baht each time for letting her call home. She also had to book a line long beforehand because there was only one telephone in her village. Zarni sent money home this way without any visit.

Zarni started to look for a new job again when she heard from a friend, working for a foreigner, that her salary was more than 10,000 Baht. She got a nanny job

with a Philippine employer with 7000-8000 Baht a month. She spent her free time on Sunday's English learning at the Oversea Karen Refugee Social Organization (OKRSO). She became a volunteer there and got to know lots of people, obtained information about jobs and incomes.

During that time there was a university admission period in Myanmar. She applied for it at once. Somehow, she put a halt to it after realizing that her family still needed help from her in many ways. It was her priority to support them. She felt a bit sad about her own fate. With 2-3 years working experience made her see life differently. She saw most of her peers work hard to support their families. She then made up her mind not to study but work diligently for her family, too.

Zarni aimed to earn more money and volunteer for the OKRSO. There were a few organizations which provided scholarships for ethnic workers, so that they would go back and make new developments in their own communities. Zarni decided not to pursue the scholarship, even though she applied and gone for an interview already. There were usually two ways for her to choose, study or earn money for family, and she always ended up choosing her family first.

As the eldest child, Zarni had to take care for debts and any other problems in the family. Her younger brothers and sisters liked to take advice from her. She knew all things happened in the family and the parents trusted her and believed in her decisions. Three of her siblings also came to work in Thailand. Some had their own families and did not depend upon her anymore. Since then she divided her income in three parts, one for paying family debts, another for her own expenses, and last one for saving. She started to save money for emergency since five or six years ago. Sometimes she wondered why so many responsibilities seemed to belong to her alone.

Now she has been working for an English employer for nearly seven years and receives almost 30,000 Baht a month plus free time on weekends. She still takes care of her family's debts. She likes working for people, that's why she still volunteers for the OKRSO and networks for domestic workers in Thailand.

Zarni has planned to study short courses about community development while working. She hopes to return home with some knowledge and be able to improve and

change her hometown one day. She is also happy to help out whatever she can as a person living in Thailand. She always tells herself “I’m proud of myself, though without graduation, without anything great.”





IRENE: LIFE FOR FAMILY AND HOMELAND

:Walee Naksuwan

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After graduating from a university **Irene** asked herself what to do next. Many people wanted to know what kind of job she liked. She herself believed studying was a life passage not just means to find a job. Her family suggested a vacancy at the immigration bureau but she refused because of its bad reputation. Even if she could pass the entrance test there, she still could not work under such a corrupted system. It took her a while to realize that she was not capable of anything and there was not much work in her hometown. Her mother, who was a domestic worker in Thailand for 30 years, wanted to quit now. Her earnings were not much, not enough for looking after a big family and a very old grandfather. She always borrowed some money from her employer. Irene thought it was time to help her mother take care of the family.

Irene believed, one should not think to do only what one liked in life but also what one should or had to. Growing up as an obedient child and duty oriented, she decided to

depart for Thailand and find a job there, domestic work obviously. Irene loved children and could speak some English not Thai. Therefore, she preferred to work for a foreigner, who usually paid much better. Her mother paid dearly for her travel with a proper passport to Thailand.

Irene began to work for an Italian employer at the age of 23. Though lacking working experience but with English efficiency, she received 10,000 Baht monthly around 10 years ago. She gave her salaries to her mother and got back 1,000 Baht each month for personal expenses. Her mum would pay when they went shopping together. After working for three to four years, she began to keep her own salaries because her chronically ill aunt and grandfather had already passed away. She used the money for her eye treatment and helping many relatives.

Irene worked for many employers with constantly rising salaries. She gave her mum some money once in a while. One part of the salary was sent to her dad and her polio ridden older sister, the rest was set aside for buying land. Her sister also came to look for a job in Thailand, but her condition made it difficult for her. Nevertheless, her mother's employer, whose health had deteriorated in old

age, gave her a job. Irene knew that she needed to make a plan for the family's future. Hence, she collected some money from her own, her sister's and her mother's salary altogether and bought a piece of land, about 60 square feet, for building a house in Myanmar.

During that time, her mother was diagnosed with a critical stage of cancer. The treatment expenses were very high. Although her mother's employer covered some of them, she had to take care of that, too. She also took leave for seven months in order to look after her. Most of her savings vanished. After her mother's treatment Irene took her back home.

Nowadays Irene works for her seventh employer and earns around 30,000 Baht monthly, not including overtime pay. She works a regular schedule: morning till late afternoon. She and her sister, who came back from home recently and is supposed to get a job soon, rent a room to live together. Irene still sends some money to her father. Her mother wants her to keep more of her own money for looking after herself. Irene started to have problems with slipped disc over nerves. Her whole year's savings has been spent for medical treatments within a month. Irene is worrying about oncoming high expenses. More than

5,000 Baht have been spent on nourishing medicine and food supplements to keep herself fit. Parts of her earnings have been spent on looking after her sister and mother, supporting networks in Myanmar and some struggling friends. She always thinks that it is her duty for her country.

Irene tries to save 10,000-15,000 Baht monthly for taking her mum to see a doctor and for furnishing her not yet finished house. She must pay a lot of money to help her younger brother not to be conscripted into the army and spare some for her troubling friends. With all these expenses carried alone by her, she cannot even save a thousand baht a month for herself

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Irene's dreams are: building another house for renting out, obtaining a large piece of land and turning it into a sports ground for kids. That will encourage the youngsters to do some sports, be useful for the community and bring her some income, too. Probably it will never happen because building costs are so high. Though she has only mum and her unfinished house to be taken care of for now, she still cannot return home.

Irene can't see her wishful future now. She has been working very long and earned very well but there is not

much left in the end because she helps others a lot. At the moment, her deteriorating health does not suit her responsibility job as a nanny. She has to endure it further, when she has no capital to start with anything else. When she turns 60, with bad eyesight and less strength, she may not be capable of looking after kids any more.

Irene concludes that since she cannot rely on anybody but her own, she needs to be strong and never fails. She never spent money luxuriously for clothes or trips. All the burdens she had taken for a long time made her unhappy and sleepless sometimes. Now she has learned how to relax and let go. She is proud of her work as a nanny and domestic worker. Her earnings helped and took care of many members of her family and friends. Sometimes she asked herself how she did all that, not only physical but also mental support she gave to them. She knows she will go on helping as long as her body can stand.





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MALEE, THE BEST NANNY

:Jantana Ekeurmanee

Malee is a farmer's daughter in Thailand. Her family has so many children that they had to earn some money to help the family. When she was 18 years old, she traveled to Bangkok to work as assistant to her sister, who was a domestic worker. After being trained in this occupation she started to work for a new employer. As a young girl, she loved to have friends, socialize and enjoy life, which made her decide to work in a factory instead. She found out that her wages could not cover all expenses like renting, food and travel costs. With no money left for sending home, some months she even begged for money from her sister. Since then, she went back to being a domestic worker again and kept on working like that for 30 years now.

Most of Malee's work was looking after children in foreigners' families who worked in Thailand. She gained so much job experience that several employers put her in recommendation letters and from mouth to mouth as the

best nanny. Malee always got a job as a nanny. Looking after children for Malee is an attractive job with different perceptions according to age. When her age was around twenty, she liked it as a good way to save money on rent and food. She had even enough money to send back home. When she was about thirty, she became a single mum, looking after her two sons alone. Being a nanny provided enough money for her to feed the kids and send them to school. Apart from that, she also got chances to follow her employers' families to different places in and out of the country. They were like dreams. Travel made her happy and learn new things, although more tiring than being at home. She was adored and loved by her employers. Some caring gestures like employers' questions: "Are you tired? Was the kid stubborn?" made her much happier. She often felt overwhelmingly pleased if the employers respected and appreciated her valuable work. Some employers wanted her to go for nannying their kids when they moved to another country, some recommended Malee to their friends as the best nanny. Sometimes with a strong bond between them, the kids begged their parents to let them stay with her in Thailand instead of moving away with them. All these things felt like ambrosia for her soul and made her work even harder.

Although Malee is happy with her nanny job but sometimes worries come to visit as well. Most foreign employers stay in Thailand for 2-3 years before moving to somewhere else. Good feelings and attachment always bring sorrow to her. Then with a new employer, she has to adjust herself and her working patterns to satisfy the new family again.

Taking care of other people's children is much more difficult than raising her own children. She must raise them according to their instructions and must make them feel happy to be with her. A lot of skills needed to apply. Once, the parents wanted their children to eat steamed vegetables with eggs as breakfast. The child refused it. Malee then prepared different food instead so that the child would not be very hungry at school. The father insisted that the child had to eat whatever food which had already been prepared, her or his hunger should be ignored. Malee did not agree and tried to explain, however she had to follow his order. He is the child's father after all.

In one family, Malee had been looking after their child as long as six years. Her salary was never raised and she never requested it because she was happy raising that

child. Later, her happiness was gone when the child was sent back to their homeland.

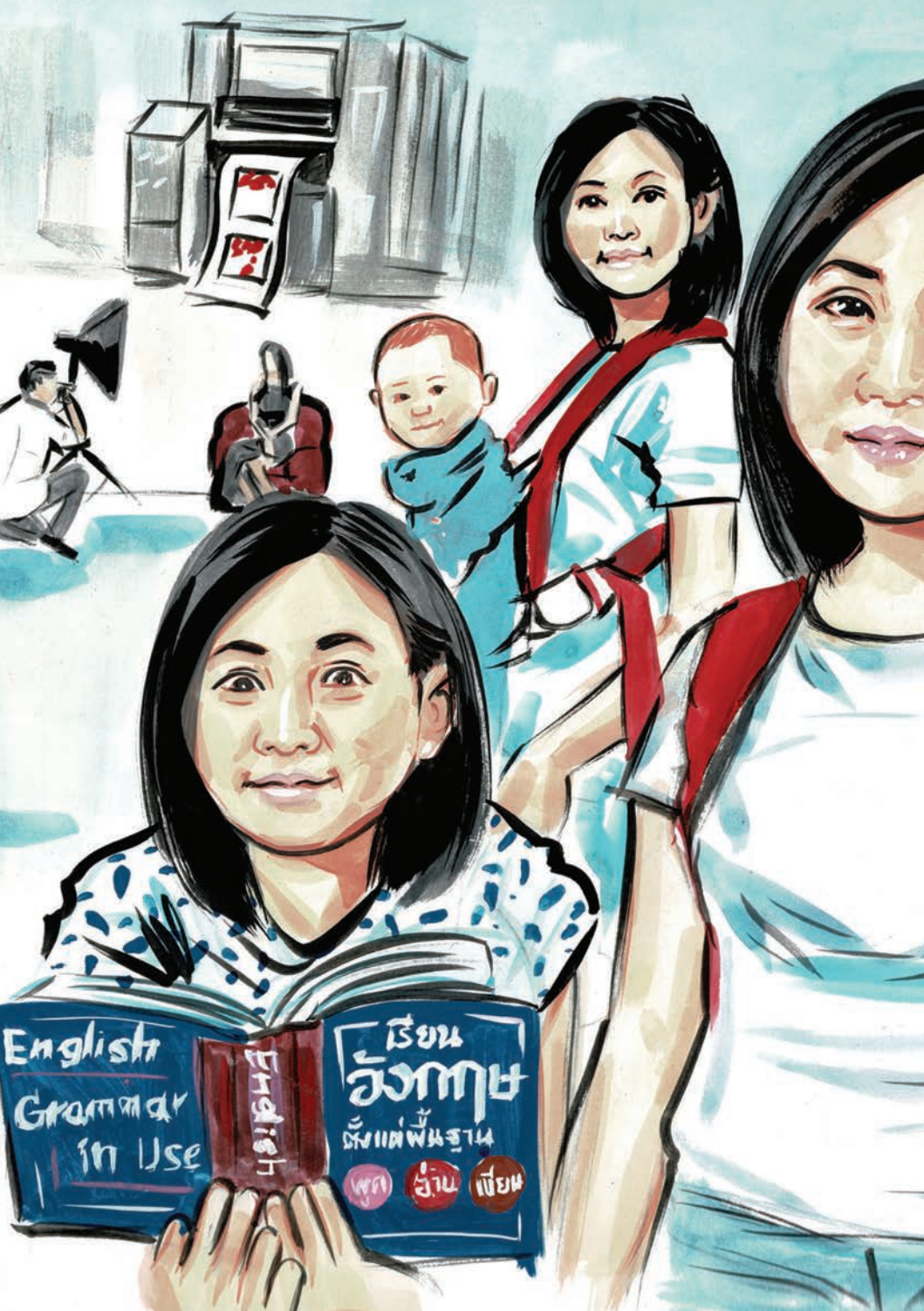
The parents didn't want to deal with the hassle of changing school for the kid every 2-3 years anymore. Malee got paid less after the child left. When asked, the employer referred to less work for Malee without a nanny job. Malee felt very unhappy. She didn't want to take advantage of her employer but felt it unfair. She started to take care of the household completely, cleaning, washing clothes, ironing and cooking as well, although she had not done it before. Anyway the employer was still not pleased with her. She felt bad about less salary but worse than that was no discussion ever took place between them, which might lead to an alternative such as reduced working time down to three days a week and other three days allowed to work somewhere else.

Working as a nanny became less attractive and she nearly quit this occupation once. It was not easy when you had to choose between the children you loved and had dutifully taken care of and the love for your own children. A nanny job demanded far too much time from her, Malee had to send her children to live with her relatives in Korat and

visited them twice every month. Sometimes the employer was busy on weekends, so she would be asked to help out. Malee had told the parents once that she looked after them five days a week already. The remaining two days should be the parents' responsibility. The alternative was to let her friend in the same occupation take over. Malee's employer and their child both nevertheless were not satisfied with it. Such demands put her in a bad situation; she had to break a promise with her own children over weekend visits. Malee knew that they were disappointed and too young to understand her necessity or reason. She was as sad as them, especially when they were sick and wanted mum's care most. Malee cried sometimes in bed feeling depressed about her own life. She was not rich enough to raise her own children at home and watch them growing up happily. She had to look after other people's children instead. After waking up the next morning, Malee did her job as best as she could anyway. Nowadays, Malee will refuse to follow the employer's family as a nanny abroad. Though this would allow her to keep her job and give her a chance to see the world while also increasing her income, she prefers not to be so far away that she can't see her children for many years.

Malee is 50 years old now and still a nanny. This

occupation gives her chances to develop herself, build up skills and increase her ability to manage different sorts of situations, and deal with people differently. Taking care of kids makes her calm and patient, and she can fully utilize her capabilities. Now she can convince her employers they should exchange ideas with her for at least half an hour a week, in order that she can provide quality care for their children. The work starts to be systematic and easier. Entering the age of fifty reduces her strength. She does not have enough energy to run after children around a house. She is not strong enough to lift a trolley up and down on a sky train while carrying a bag full of milk and water bottles, diapers and snacks in order to take children to play in a park. Malee began to think that she should stop doing the work she had loved since a young age. She should spend more time for her own family now as a compensation. She is sure that there are people who are attracted to a nanny job and would love to step in her place.





PHI SU : PERFECT LIFE BUT LONG FOR EQUALITY

:Panjit Kaewsawang

Phi Su was born in Dejudom District, Ubon Ratchathani, Thailand. She was the eldest child with a younger sister and brother. She was rather small but always helped her parents grow rice in a rented piece of land. After finishing elementary school at level four, she had to quit school. She was so good in school that she would easily get financial support from a teacher. Her father refused that offer because he wanted her to help look after her siblings. She agreed and stopped going to school at the age of ten, in order to help her parents earn some money to pay for her siblings' schooling.

Su's first job was nannying and housekeeping for a teacher in her old school. She got 50 baht a month. After two years she got sick, with a life threatening state of liver disease. The teacher sent her back home immediately. It took her a very long time to recover from the illness. The teacher wanted her back for the same job again but her father didn't let her. He said his child was hired when still

healthy but not cared for when sick. That was unusual behavior among decent people.

When Su turned 13, her village friend suggested a housekeeping job that included nannying twins for a university lecturer in Bangkok. She had worked there for three years before returning home to help in her parents' rice field. After experiencing some hardships in her family, she decided to go back to work in Bangkok again. This time her job was to look after kids for the owner of a printing company. The printing company produced English song texts, books about unhappy lives of people, and magazines that displayed fashions and stars during the 1960s. After finishing house work and sending the kids to school, she went to help in the printing house. She was called "the little one". There she came across songs in English texts and arranged sets for photography, getting to know many singers and actors/actresses as models for magazine covers or posters. Those four years were the most colorful time in her teenage life and inspired her to learn to speak English. She even bought a self-teaching book of spoken English within 79 hours to practice.

When the Kuekrit government brought up the new

policy of siphoning money to rural areas in 1975, Su went back to work in the village. Her family situation however did not improve, so she decided to work in Bangkok once more. This time she worked for a university lecturer with an American husband living on Petchaburi Road. After finishing her house work and bringing the kids to bed, she still went to work in a restaurant, cleaning dishes from 9 - 12 p.m. for 15 baht a night. Her colleague advised her to apply for a new job with a foreigner's family in Sukhumvit area.

Su's dream was working with a foreigner's family. Her friend, who worked for a foreigner's family, told Su that English proficiency and middle school certificate were necessary for applying for a job with a foreigner's family. With that advice in mind she learned and practiced speaking English on her own intensively with a tape recorder. In the end she was interviewed by a Korean missionary and got accepted. She was allowed to learn English at the church in the morning while working and staying with that family. When her boss moved to teach religion to the hill tribes in Chiangmai, she went along and worked for them until they went back home. Later on she started her new job with an American man and Thai wife.

Su was determined to work only with a foreigner's family in order to improve her English further. She felt very successful in getting jobs she wished for at her young age of 19. Her next employer was a Swiss man who spoke English and German. After one and a half years he had to move back to Switzerland. Su had just gotten married and did not anticipate going and working for him abroad. Three months earlier, the boss had sent the head housekeeper to prepare his house beforehand. When the departure schedule arrived and the head housekeeper could not make it, Su then became a substitute. Considering a better income, from 2,500 up to 7,000 Baht, made her agree to take that job. After three months passed by, her boss asked her to stay on for six more months and again for two years, with permission for home leave every six months.

When Su came back, she got a new job working for a Swiss family, which allowed her husband to live with her. He worked as a messenger for a company, which imported perfumes to Thailand. After working there for two years, both of them gained more trust from the boss, who realized that they didn't have a child after a long marriage. He then offered them to be checked and tried a GIFT. She got pregnant at last and gave birth to a boy in the year 1992.

Su did not look after him since she had to follow her boss to Singapore and Germany for three years and in Poland for four more years. Her husband and mother raised the child for her. She herself felt very attached to the boss's family, especially their children whom she looked after like her own children. During her time working abroad, her boss once gave her some money to buy a house in Bangkok. She paid up the credits in the year 2002. Another boss also gave her a car when he went back. Su worked once for an American family and followed them to America and worked there for five years. She got a working permit as a nanny and domestic employee from the beginning but later a new permit she received was changed to a caretaker for elderly people. For that reason, she decided to go back to Thailand.

Her daily task as a housekeeper plus nanny usually began with preparing breakfast for the children and taking them to schools by foot or driving a car by herself. During daytime there were many chores to be done: cleaning, dusting, mopping around the house, washing and ironing clothes, and food shopping. Sometimes she had to push a child stroller or carry a child on her back while shopping. In the evening it was her duty to take them to bed and

waited until they failed to sleep. Some of the employer's children were very attached to her. They asked especially for her when they were sick. One family even called from Singapore, asking her to come over and take care of their sick child. Some families sent her tickets to go and visit them. She still keeps in contact with some families nowadays.

Su loves a solitary life. That's why she didn't feel lonely while living alone abroad. Her world was connected with her employers' families and their children. She sometimes forgot that she had her own child and family in Thailand. Even after coming back to Thailand and starting a new job, the nostalgic atmosphere of working abroad still lingered on.

In Thailand Su got to know the Network of Domestic Workers in Thailand and became a member of the group around the year 2014. She made many new friends. Since she was a sensitive and sincere person, she was deeply hurt by accusations from some trusted friends. Her depression made her suicidal. She saw that she had everything now due to her hard work in the past. She had a house and enough land to live on. There was no need for her to carry

on working. She felt all existing properties were burdens. Luckily both her son and husband understood and consoled her out of melancholy and depression. They took her to temples, let her worship, meditate, pray, walk consciously and listen to Abbot Cha's teaching.

Su, aged 58 still worked as a housekeeper for an American family. She had a three year contract and worked on a daily basis not to live in any more. The employer's children were teenagers. They went to bed on their own. Su had not thought of retirement yet. What she regretted most in Thailand was inequality and divided classes among people. Privileged ones did things without caring about effects on the whole populace. She would like to see order and respect among people. People should be equal like she experienced in foreign countries.



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DOKMAI, THE BEAUTIFUL

:Jantana Ekeurmanee

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Dokmai was a Burmese girl, who came to live in Thailand when she was 16 years old. As she decided to part from her beloved family, she had no idea about Thailand. She knew only that the village girls who had gone to work there, came back with very nice clothes. She wanted to own them, too. They also gave large sums of money to their parents. That made her decide quickly to follow some older sisters to Thailand. She was a general wager for a while before turning to be a domestic worker. She had been working like that for 30 years now. At the beginning it was hard for her. She felt unhappy, homesick, and lonely when living separated from friends. She chose a nanny job because she loved children. She thought children would help reduce her loneliness and homesickness. Sometimes she accepted a job because she liked that particular child, even though she would earn less compared to another job.

Sometimes the love and attachment she gave to children brought her problems. Parents got so worried if

their children loved and were too attached to her, that she was forbidden to see the children on weekends or holidays. The parents wanted the children to stay with them more. Dokmai reaffirmed to them that she was only an employee, who loved their children. The children belonged to them, so they should not be worried that she could ever take their children away. On the contrary, some parents took advantage of her love for children. They asked her very often to take care of them on her free days without pay. Lack of resting time or overtime money did not make her quit the job. She was worried that another nanny might not be good enough.

Child caring was not an easy job. It required fondness for children and not seeing work as a duty. She came across children who refused to talk to her or could not be touched. It took a long time to make them love and trust her. Although her working foundation was based on love, problems still occurred. Children sometimes cried because they did not get snacks they liked. The parents did not allow them to eat unhealthy food. Dokmai had love but no power to give orders. She thought about ways to make them stop crying and smile again. Sometimes she had to give in because they didn't stop crying, not because she wanted to be loved more than their parents.

During that whole period, Dokmai took care of many children. She loved them and looked after them wholeheartedly but sometimes she got hurt by them as well. There were two incidents she never forgot. First one was when the children took some friends home and referred to her as a servant. She was very sorry because she thought she should be worthier than that for them. The second time, the boy she looked after attentively called her a dog, a real black one because she asked him to stop playing and go to bed. She was rather angry for the first time and tried very hard to keep her temper down.

Now, Dokmai has been working as a nanny for nearly 40 years. She thought that she was lucky enough to go through all good things, which encouraged her to go on working in her beloved occupation even when she didn't need to send money home anymore. Good experiences with many families she worked for kept her heart full of happiness while doing her present job. For instance, an Indian family with a lovely and talkative little girl, whom she looked after since she was three years old. She devoted herself in every way to taking care of this dear child, so that she stayed happy with smiles and laughs and grew up beautifully. She kept her eyes on the girl all the time. Her heart ached when the family moved to another country. Nowadays she still checks on her regularly.

Whenever hearing about her call, she would hurry to call back, wondering if she was sick or got into trouble. The family came to visit Thailand recently, which made her happy to see such a lovely young girl she became. She was even happier when she knew that the girl brought along the dalmatian dog toy, resembling a character of her favorite cartoon, which was a goodbye gift given to her by Dokmai. It was very old but she kept it well by her side all the time. This thing just made Dokmai very happy. There was another family she happily remembered. Every day before the boss went to work he would kiss his wife and kids. One day he said that Dokmai should also be kissed because she belonged to the family as well. Hearing that brought so much joy and happiness to Dokmai.

Dokmai was deeply impressed by a nanny job, though it was not the best but the dearest one so far for her. The best thing was to meet the children and be allowed to take care of them. She loved them wholeheartedly, therefore there was a lot of sorrow when they parted. Anyhow there was happiness along the way. She was lucky that the work she got to do in order to earn money brought happiness to her life. She still hopes there will be many more children coming to receive her love and caring while bringing happiness and meaning in life to her, too.

Network
of Domestic Workers





NUM'S HOPE

:Panjit Kaewsawang

Num, a Pa-o girl, lived in Hpa-an town in Karen state, situated in southeast Myanmar. She was the second child among nine children in the family. The parents worked in the fields. She was not in school for many years and left for a job at the age of fifteen. In the year 2002, Num and her three close friends crossed over Mae Sot border to Thailand with a smuggling agent. The trip was full of hardships. They were sent to work in different places. Num got a job at a restaurant in Nakhon Pathom. Her first two months' salaries were seized by the agent.

She had to start working early in the morning at four o'clock. She needed to endure so much hardship that she wished to flee. She tried to use a public phone to call her family but was not successful. At the beginning, she had to avoid Thai labor officials because she had no work permit.

Her father, who had come to work on a construction site in Thailand a year before, tried to ask about Num's

working place from the agent. One day he came to take her away and brought her to work in Onnu area in Bangkok. The employer was Thai and her husband was French. Num's salary was 1,200 Baht. Her employer and children helped to teach her Thai until she was able to speak and read Thai better. Her salary was increased to 1,500 Baht in the third month. Her daily work consisted of sweeping and mopping the house, washing dishes and cooking. She lived with the employer, who let her register and obtained a non-Thai pink i.d. card with thirteen numbers. Her father returned home after she had worked here for over a year. She then went to work with her brother in a restaurant on Pattanakarn Road. She did not work there very long, she had to quit because most workers there were men.

Num went to work temporarily in a house on Sukhumvit Road as a substitute for her friend, who was on seven months maternity leave. After that she went with her friend to work in a restaurant in Soi Nana Tai. The work was very hard and more tiring than housekeeping work. So, she resigned and went back home to look after her father, who was terminally ill with cancer. She was his darling. She traveled back and forth between Hpa-an and Bangkok for 4-5 years until her father died. She was then 20 years old.

Num got married during this time. Her husband belonged to the Pa-o tribe. He was working as a house-keeper for a Spaniard three days a week. She gave birth to a son when she was 22. They rented a place to stay as a family near her working place. Now her son is 15 years old and going to school in Phra Khanong. She wishes for her son to study in a university in order to get a good job, not such a labor job like his parents.

In 2017, her Nepalese friend persuaded her to learn about the Domestic Workers' Network in Thailand. She joined in some activities with friends and Home Net. She felt warm and was encouraged. Apart from that she also gained knowledge and understanding about protected rights for domestic workers. They exchanged experiences among friends in the network and shared news concerning extra work available. Num got some extra jobs every Sunday this way.

Num wanted to improve her English and asked some friends to join in. They hired a teacher, who used to teach her employer's children, to teach them every Sunday for two hours. Everyone paid the teacher 100 Baht per lesson. This lasted for three months due to unavailable spaces.

Nowadays she works for two houses from Monday to Friday. In the morning she travels with a hired motorcycle to work at the French employer's house in Nang Linchee Road. Her salary here is 12,000 Baht. In the afternoon she works for an Australian in Yen Akart, with 10,000 Baht monthly. Living on her own makes it easier to join in some activities with friends on free days. She also met some Pao people on some religious and traditional occasions. She and her relatives sometimes travel together in a hired van to the Bangsaen seaside. They all came to work here and all nearly became Bangkokians.

There was good news for Num and her friends now. The labor ministry issued a decree number 15, effective from 30 April 2024, in order to protect domestic laborers the same way as other laborers, with appropriate working hours and various labor rights. She and her friends thought that all activities and movements from domestic workers in Thailand, internationally collaborating networks for domestic workers, and Home Net helped push this law to be established. Num and her friends hope that one day they will have rights for social security and have retirement money like other employees. They also believe that bad conditions for foreign laborers, who earn under minimum

wages and have long working hours, will be eliminated soon.

Num, with over ten years of working experiences, is now 37. She knows she prefers being a domestic worker than a factory one. Although she has no working contract like some friends in the labor network, her well organized working schedules give her freedom to live with her family in her own place. She is not sure if she will return to her homeland, Hpa-an in the end or not. The country is still in turmoil, fighting is everywhere and getting worse. Freedom is still far away, she thinks Bangkok is her home for the time being.



APPENDIX

The Ministry of Labor endorsed the Ministerial Regulation no. 15 (2024) under the Labor Protection Act 1998, to be enforced from 30 April 2024 onwards. The regulation enshrines protection for all domestic workers regardless of nationality. The regulation shall apply to employers employing at least one domestic worker to perform domestic work which does not involve business operation. Regardless of nationality, a domestic worker shall be protected by the legislation. Domestic work includes, among others, cleaning, washing, ironing, childcare, elderly care, gardening, guarding, driving, cooking, pets care.

Under this regulation, domestic workers shall enjoy equal protection as many other types of workers in several areas. They are protection for their working hours; not longer than 8 hours per day with one hour rest. They are entitled to annual leave, sick leave, maternity leave for 98 days with 45 days paid. Pregnant domestic workers are protected from having to work during 10 pm - 6 am. Employers are not allowed to terminate domestic workers on the ground of pregnancy. Domestic workers, aged under 18 are allowed to take leave for training and be paid for 30 days' wages.



MINISTRIAL REGULATION
(ENFLISG SUBTITLES)



MINISTRIAL REGULATION
(SOUND BURMESE)

**"mostly women care woker. Living with employers,
it is challenging for them to access rights and
welfare protection. Sometimes they are at risk
of physical and mental harassment."**

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