

The vacation that nobody wanted. How could that be?

Reports of flooding in northern Thailand started to trickle into the news several weeks ago as the rainy season came to an unusually heavy end. The swollen Chao Praya River was pushing south, and already one dam had broken. What parts of Thailand would be next? Relief donation boxes appeared in schools and stores for the worst water disaster in Thailand since 1942.

Then the Bangkok governor issued warnings for residents of northern Bangkok to be on the alert as floodwaters headed toward those districts. Downpours had mixed with the rising river to create miserable working conditions for the Thai military helping residents. Waters recently engulfed the older domestic airport. The government warned of the potential of once-a-year high tides pushing back on the river's run to the sea, combined with more rain. Political nerves tightened to a snapping point. "Nahm too-um" ("flood") was on everyone's lips.

Government leaders clashed over how to handle the water. Blast channels through major highways? Siphon water around the city center, and sacrifice the edges? Who would be next? It was suddenly fashionable to have layers of sandbags around every front door and gate. Later, temporary cement brick walls 2-5 feet high took the place of sandbags; sometimes trucks and cars were parked inside those walls.

Rushes ensued in stores. People bought out dried noodles, bottled water, eggs, driving rations onto these products and on rice. Our customer loyalty at one grocery store prompted the manager to grab two dozen eggs and packs of garbage bags when she saw us, then rush to put them in our shopping cart before they were snatched up by others. Some people were able to buy bulk, and hawk packs of water at the streetside. Clarisse commented, "at least it's not alcohol."

Greater anxiety produced greater precaution. The audio equipment warehouse located on the klong (canal) a block from our house put up dozens of sandbags in front and back. Someone reported the overland flood waters were moving south at 4 km/day. That put us at 5 days to prepare (this was 14 days ago now!). We bought various supplies, and measured 1 meter from the street level to our front step. Hmmm; half-way up our borrowed truck. Where should we park it if waters came? How quickly would they enter our southwest neighborhood?

Friends had to evacuate their homes in northern Bangkok as waters came dirty and disease-laden, with a potential for escaped crocodiles from various farms (1000 baht reward, a mere \$33 to risk your life to return one). Mall car parks provided parking for hundreds of double-parked cars, and closed early to put up sandbag walls every night. The stationery shop that we frequent, a few blocks away, had earlier waved off the threat of flood. Now, all the lower shelves were noticeably cleared and mouths had tightened into thin lines.

We stocked our balcony and wrote out step-by-step flood plans. Krista had a nightmare that we would be forced to go to the beach, and leave pets behind. Our tap water began to have a different odor. We felt stretched between two extremes: missionaries being evacuated by their organizations, and Thai neighbors along the klong, having a party and planning for their sister's wedding. Amid news analysis and speculation and more loss of life, that wedding kept us here in Bangkok on the high-tide weekend. Then, we went ahead with family celebrations of three birthdays in our family. It seemed strangely surreal.

ICS, our school, had ordered in 1200 sandbags and several hundred water bottles in case floods came so suddenly students were stranded at school. Scott attended school leadership crisis meetings. Other educational conferences were cancelled. Would it come to our area in three days? Four to six weeks? After much debate, the government at last mandated a holiday for all businesses and schools. North Bangkokians paddled streets in boats, scrambled to second stories, and 14,000 factories shut down. Neighbors in our area put their couch up on the dining table every night before going to bed.

Electronic school began; a vacation nobody really wanted. Teachers are sending out assignments via the web and e-mail. It went to November 7, then stretched to November 14, then possibly back to November 9. And that's where we are now. It's like waiting for an overdue baby, much like my nerves were three years ago at this time when Susanna was nine days late! We're still high and dry, wondering how to help others or if we'll need to help ourselves. Pray for us not to bite off too many nails, but to have God's peace that passes all comprehension. And pray for Thailand. Thank you!