

Kristin Kaschak, '06
Khao Lak, Thailand

Karen, Joe and I had the opportunity to spend six amazing weeks in Southern Thailand doing Tsunami Relief work. While the setting was paradise, the work was challenging and far from anything that would be considered a vacation (unless you typically pour concrete foundations on your vacations!!)



I started out by rebuilding some of the homes in a small sea-side village called Laem Pom, where over half of the villagers had died in the wave. This picture was taken along the entrance to their village. It is a picture of the debris piled up that had once been their entire lives. It reminded us why we were there each morning as we drove into the village.



It was rewarding to be rebuilding their homes with them though. This is the "old blind" man's home we worked on from start to finish (we called him this because he couldn't see 3 feet in front of him). We were even able to get him glasses before we left! (of course that wasn't until after he laid the

bricks for his foundation crooked because he couldn't see where to put them. Luckily, his house is still fairly level.)



The village's new puppies liked to keep us company while we worked.



For the last 2 ½ weeks, I had the opportunity to teach English to school children. Sadly, most of the English speaking population in the south worked at the tourist resorts which were right on the coast and they were killed in the wave. The volunteers are working hard to teach the next generation the English language so as to aid in the reconstruction of the tourism industry, the corner-stone of their economy.



The teaching system in Thailand is very corrupt, with most teachers being the wives of wealthy or influential men in the country. Sadly they are very unqualified to teach, especially the English language. My partner Dustin and I were the first white English-speaking foreigners the children had ever met, clearly shown by their attachment to us and their desire for anything we had; even just a signature, but especially pictures.



This is Bookpa and her friends. They didn't want me to leave and followed me to the car on my last day. The only way they would let go was if I promised to take one more picture of them to bring back to America , so here it is:



Towards the end of our trip, Joe and I took a trip to Phi Phi Island , true paradise and site of filming for the movie The Beach. Sadly, that paradise was barely remaining when we arrived. Being a tiny island in the middle of the sea, the wave completely overtook the island, essentially flattening anything that wasn't higher than at least 25 feet. Even the palm tree tops didn't make it. It was one of the harder sites to see, and even harder to meet the sweet Thai's living there who were trying to rebuild their lives.



Our time finally came to close, and we were sad to leave such a beautiful culture. But we had rebuilt many homes and put smiles on many children's faces. While it was hard to tell the Thai people we had come to know and love that we were leaving, we promised to one day return and bring others with us to this paradise on the other side of the world.

