MAY 2016 MISSION STORY:
Crossing the Sea of Disapproval;
GOD proVides an InStant Answer
By Sulad Joyce & Hannamel Canilao

Everybody we guess was already excited and a bit anxious for us going to Thailand. Excited in the sense that we will be going there as family for the first time and a bit anxious for we did not know if what will happen to us during our appearance at Thai Embassy and Immigration since tight measures were gradually observed in the immigration even with complete documents.

We were supposed to take the ship which meant 2 days and 3 nights in the sea going to Manila but right there and then God intervened by providing an affordable air fare, slightly expensive if we’ll take the ship but more convenient and efficient for us to get to Manila just in time for our Embassy appearance. Sir Chlowe made the necessary arrangement for our air fares since Sir Jhun (with Monique) was still at SULADS Campus, MVC. We were prayed for in the church together with Tata’s two sisters who will be assigned in Tawi-tawi as SULADS volunteers too. We felt we were ready for the great battle but we’re totally clueless as to what’s ahead of us.

May 9 at 4pm was our flight, Davao-Manila with Sir Ranny. It was first time for our 1-year –old- and-2 -month baby to travel, good thing she quite liked it. It was almost 10 years since I’ve been to the same airport, that was when I was still single assigned as 27th batch missionary for South Korea under 1Thousand Missionary Movement and now for SULADS Thailand. We experienced some turbulence on our way but nearing Manila, it was but a relief to finally land and start with the tough wall of Jericho.

We were fetched by the family driver of Sir Ranny’s brother and be heading straight to Laguna for two weeks’ time processing.
With us was Mam Liz Ang who will be processing her citizenship at Manila as well. At least, we will be far from the bustling life of Manila. Laguna was a haven for us all having got used to country living. Thank God! We opted to rest for a day to recharge for a big day ahead of us.

May 11 came. We left early and were able to arrive at Makati an hour earlier from our two-hour bus ride from Laguna. We rested outside the nearby cozy restaurant while Sir Ranny scouted for a place where we could have breakfast. We were dazzled and amazed at how foreign Makati seemed to be for us strangers. We got in exactly 11 a.m. at the Embassy and filled in the application form for our Non-O Visa and finally submitted all necessary documents (Invitation Letter from the Thailand Adventist Mission and Certification from SULADS Philippines) just before the office closed. We were scheduled to go back on May 13. A sigh of relief so we thought! After lunch at Pasay where our Sanitarium was located near the bus station bound for Laguna, we went ahead of Sir Ranny. At around 4pm, somebody from the Embassy called informing us directly that our visas were temporarily denied as they need to email TAM for confirmation regarding the authenticity of our documents. After then will they process and call us if our visas will be approved. We held on to that assurance. With all the prayers poured on in our behalf and trust to His mighty will, we left it all to His disposal.

We then informed Sir Jhun about the matter who in returned called Sir Chlowe relating to him the whole thing. In a flash, off he went to TAM’s office and shared our ordeal to TAM’s secretary. Just in time for Thai’s Embassy email to TAM to which the secretary replied about the authenticity of our documents that indeed they invited us for a religious purpose and they will shoulder all the responsibility for our whole stay in Thailand. That was quite fast! And so we expected that by the next day or the following days, the Embassy will really call us as they promised.

May 13. A day passed by quickly without a word from the Embassy so we thought that maybe today they will give us a call. The day ended without a call. We texted our families, friends and co-missionaries about our concern. We thought, this is God’s work not ours, so He will take care of it. Anyway, there’s still another week. More prayers uttered, more prayerful friends joined in praying. At least, we had a refreshing Sabbath out of town, undisturbed from our visas’ approval because we were rest assured that the following week would be the week of victory.

May 16-May 19. Sir Chlowe advised us to call the Embassy instead of waiting for the call. But we held on to the Embassy’s employee’s assurance of calling us instead of us initiating the call. We can relate to the awe-inspiring experience of Moses together with the Israelites in crossing the Jordan that the Lord will fight for them and all they have to do is simply to keep still. Sad to say, days bid farewell without any word from the Embassy and in those days we’re hopeful that they will call. So we decided to go to the Embassy on Friday, May 20, three days before our scheduled flight. We were very much prepared and excited that day, confident that we can finally take hold of the passports and visas, finally…We arrived just in time for lunch, just convenient since the Embassy will have its office at 1:30pm. After having our lunch, we waited just across the street. Our feet were already itching from the sweltering heat of Makati and from our excitement, so we proceeded at 1:00pm instead. But to our dismay, it was the official holiday of Thailand. We took pictures outside kidding that if ever we couldn’t make it at least we had some remembrance with us. I was holding my tears back. But our battle was not yet over. Monday is the day then. We pleaded to God that we waited this for so long to be back in His field and SULADS Thailand spent a lot already, so please let Him grant our petition. Some of our friends said that maybe it was not meant for us to go, BUT for us this meant NO TURNING BACK. He will finish what He started in us. So Lord perform your miracles in us and through us, we prayed.

May 23. We packed our luggage so we could proceed to the airport approved or if not, we’ll just proceed as tourists. Monday is the day of our victorious journey! So we thought. We arrived at 11am, same time, when we arrived for our application that very same building more than weeks ago. We waited for about ten minutes and chatted with Adventists applicants who were also visiting Thailand. When our queue number was called out, the employee asked if we’re the family applicant, and then asked us to claim our passports with stamped visas in the next window. Simple as that! Our bodies were suddenly shaking and shed some tears. It was quite unbelievable but God made it clear. The date of approval was May 16, 2016, that was a week from today. We lingered for couple of minutes and texted our families and friends of the praise-worthy news! Now, we’ll have the Immigration to cross. We rushed for lunch and be making sure that we’ll be at the airport at 4pm to avoid traffic hours and be waiting for Sir Ranny to pick up our old passports sent from Davao at a separate terminal.

Checking in time came. We couldn’t concentrate having our dinner yet though our stomachs were clamoring for hearty meals. We got time to meet some OFWs and shared some snacks with them. Almost there, but the Immigration was still to be won. Sir Ranny with Mam Liz made sure that we could pass by the Immigration before they will leave us officially. Filling in the needed information for Immigration, our hearts were pounding. Oh, Immigration officers were all younger-looking to which we thought this was favorable. We chose a male officer who bombarded us with suspicions as to our real intentions of going to Thailand for religious purpose and for that long. In short, he temporarily denied our passports and we need again to fill in another information sheet for further clarifications and interview. We had our SULADS i.d.s , old passports, TAM’s invitation letter, SULADS Certification and return tickets. Good thing, the assigned Immigration Officer was very friendly and even wondered why the previous officer questioned our entry since we came as family, which was less prone from disapproval. Finally, approved! We rushed going to the departure area for our 9:25 pm flight. That was already past 8pm. We had dinner within the departure area. We had a long day but it was all worth it facing all the walls, giants, and mountains in our lives.

Looking down as we approached Bangkok area, we couldn’t believe it that we’ll be landing soon. Lights were brighter, cheering us up, waiting for our arrival. Though we waited for hours at the airport since I lost contact with both Sir Jhun and Sir Chlowe and need to look for the internet shop on the fourth floor to communicate through facebook, amidst all of those minor and major hardships we were never left forsaken by God. When everything seems unbearable, let’s just remember the experience of the Israelites crossing the Red Sea “The Lord will fight for you, and all you have to do is keep still.” Genesis 14:14.

**MISSION STORY:**
**Learning the Language of the Kingdom**
When the learning gets tough, go back to His Words.
By Sulad Joyce & Hannamel Canilao

Yes, we learned Thai alphabets for like two months in the Philippines but learning how to speak it with the Thais was another story. We arrived here at Phayao last May 26 for language immersion for more months. Sir Jhun would spend time to teach us reading, writing, spelling, speaking and more just to equip us with the whole Thai language. We were only two students supposedly but praise God Sir Orval and Sir Marvin willingly joined in with the addition of Mam Melai lately who already stayed for longer years in Thailand. While we study, our HEIAGGY was a time busy on her own, crying or trying to speak just to become part of the Thai Language class. At first, Sir Jhun taught thanksgiving prayer, simple ones and will have spelling test after few days. Mastery was the key, he always emphasized. He also gave spelling test competition. It was really fun, hilarious and nerve-racking especially during time of the test. We were like elementary students who sometimes compared and made fun of test scores at times and even made some friendly jokes on how a words or phrases was pronounced.

For the last one week or more, he taught four kinds of Prayers for the Food in English and in Thai spelling and transliterations. We practiced speaking it for a week and then came the oral test. That was rewarding to know that we were improving. We also listen to the four recorded Prayers for the Food of SULAD Monique and Aliw, a Mien native. It did not stop there. We were requested to pray for dinner every Sabbath evening using the Thai version.

Lately, we had a test on the four Prayers for the Food-a Written Test! Sir Jhun printed portions of sentences or phrases from our memorized four Prayers for the Food and we will write it in Thai. The key on this was to write down the prayers over and over again to get it right. Though no one got perfect, but everybody is doing their best to improve. More Thai lessons are coming, the one where one will preside Sabbath programs in Thai.

If the weather is good, we sometimes went out and put our learning into practice with the Thai vendors and some locals who will laugh at how we asked for discounts. We also made friends with Teacher Kong who was very persistent in teaching us Thai lessons in exchange for English conversation. Thai children are also effective resource persons of the language. The basics of learning the language will lead to far-reaching results too. When we go out, we tried to read Thai words along the way and figured it out what it means by asking some friends and with the help of the dictionary.

We also practiced reading Thai Bible and Thai songs from the Church Hymnal. Hopefully, more students especially from our church members here at Phayao will show interest in studying Thai Language for even in Phayao more people need to hear God’s Word. Our simple prayer each day that God will infill us with the Holy Spirit to feel the need of heavenly wisdom and interest for learning. And a healthier bodies to learn for more and accomplish for the best. As for us, we rely to His promise found in the Book of Isaiah 55:10, 11
"My word is like the snow and the rain that come down from the sky to water the earth.
They make the crops grow and provide seeds for planting and food to eat.
So also will be the word that I speak- It will not fail to do what I plan for it; It will do everything I send it to do."