

Anne Snowball, 669 Grand View Terrace, San Francisco
Boomee and Me

I had been a busy TTOUCH practitioner for 15 years sharing my knowledge for the betterment of animals and people in my hometown of San Francisco as well as across the United States. One evening as I was sitting out on my deck overlooking the Bay I began to address a restlessness and longing for an adventure of a lifetime. I asked the universe to bring forth my teachers in this quest - however that manifested, - and that I would be patient!

Sure enough, not even a month later I awakened with a bold start looking forward to volunteering at the annual African wildlife conservation symposium highlighting species on the brink of extinction. Standing by the elephant table a young woman approached me and asked why we were not doing anything for the Asian elephant. I replied that we did not know anything about the Asian elephant. She introduced herself as Windy Borman, the writer and producer of a documentary entitled "The Eyes of Thailand" - the saga of the first prosthetic limb ever fit to an elephant who had suffered amputation from a land mine explosion. She was planning to return four months later to finish the film at the hospital where this extraordinary endeavor was underway.

Friends of Asian Elephant Hospital, ("FAE"), was the site of her project. Founded in 1993 by a native Thai woman, Soraida Sowala, she had devoted her life and passion to ending the needless suffering and abuse of the Asian elephant. The hospital was the first of its kind in Southeast Asia located in the northern jungle near the Burmese border. Totally a non-profit venture FAE was exclusively supported by donations, 80% from the Thai people, 20% from international sources.

Drawing back in awe I realized instantly this was the quest for which I had been searching. Without hesitation I blurted out, "I will come with you on your next trip." We introduced ourselves quickly as she, too, was taken aback by my response! "What do you do?" she asked eagerly. I explained that TTOUCH develops trust between animals and their people in adapting confidently to any new situation mentally, emotionally, and physically. I further advanced my idea of how I would teach the caregivers (the majouts) of these injured elephants TTouch body work aiding in the release of any pain and tension in the animal. Would TTouch not play an important step in preparation for the fitting of this "new situation" - an artificial limb? Windy was definitely intrigued having never heard of TTOUCH. She gave me Soraida Sowala's email to introduce myself, and I assured her I would follow up soon.

I was SO excited I could barely speak! My mind was racing beginning with how to present myself and TTOUCH in my email to Soraida. Supplying her with all references, etc. about the method Soraida replied several days later. She was frankly curious and *cautious* about such a project. Thereafter, I devised a plan incorporating the touches and how we might work with these elephants in need. She designated the two mahouts whose elephants had lost their legs in land mine

explosions, one of them the featured “star” of the film. Soraida was enthusiastic, intrigued, and encouraged about my visit.

At this time there was quite a fervor over the use of land mines in the notoriously turbulent area of Miramar in Southeast Asia. The Burmese were planting this deterrent along the border it shared with Thailand to discourage illegal logging in their country as Thailand had banned Teak logging several years earlier. The impact was devastating to the impoverished Thai logging mahouts whose whole livelihood was based upon cutting down trees. Thus, they were forced to sneak their elephants across the border at night to perpetuate the only industry they knew. FAE Hospital was the closest if not the only hospital that could accommodate the injured elephants who had fallen victim to this tragic situation.

Too many lives and livestock were lost by the end of 2011. Protests and marches all over Laos and Thailand by the citizenry finally subdued the onslaught. However, since 2013, no land mine incident has occurred in the area.

My first trip to FAE occurred in 2010, at the height of retaliation by the Burmese government. I met up with Windy Borman in Chiang Mai at a small local Air B&B. The following day we rode by car into FAE with another American girl who had resided several years in Chiang Mai and was acting as Windy’s assistant. The drive was almost 2 hours. For me it was an endless two-lane highway that wound further and further into the impenetrable forest region of northern Thailand. Finally, we turned off onto a gravel drive with large signage welcoming us to FAE. My feet hardly hit the ground as I disembarked from the car following our fearless leader, Windy, making her way towards a sizable, open-air meeting center nestled in between the huge compounds housing the patients. Not even 200 feet away a large tourist group was photographing two baby elephants who were cavorting across the lawn captivated by all the cameras, thrusting their trunks right into the protruding lenses exploring this rare moment! A smile spread across my face so delighted to partake of such frolic and observe an animal so revered, so young and carefree!!

We then began a tour of the grounds, starting first with Motala, the matriarch of the herd and star of the film. She had been 40+ years old at the time of her accident when she was rushed to FAE. She struggled for 10 years on three legs having survived the operation that removed most of her leg up to her left knee. The fact that she had made it to her 50th year spoke highly of the fastidious care of FAE and her mahout who remained her devoted, steadfast caregiver. Her leg was wrapped in white sterile gauze and plastic wrap to ward off infection. The prosthetic mold being prepared in the factory just adjacent to her stall was going well. Reports were that the final mold had been fitted satisfactorily matching the exact length of new leg to her natural leg allowing. Such measurements had to be precise for adequate proprioception and coordination in navigation.

My thought was ...would TTouch have made a difference?

Soraida soon joined us approaching Motala with an outreached hand to caress her trunk in greeting. The connection between these two did not go unnoticed. Together they had supported each other through the travail of mutually failing health, but salvation had finally arrived for Motala in the form of the prosthetic. No longer would

she have to balance her trunk against the pillars of her stall to relieve the stress of 3 legs maintaining a 3000 pound frame.

Our next introduction was Mosha, only 7 months old when her mother and mahout died instantly on impact with a land mine. She had a very comical glint in her eye and was clearly the comic relief at the hospital. Her mahout was "Jon" who would be in our TTouch class the next day.

I was becoming overwhelmed by the sight of these enormous, lovable creatures who seemed to be enjoying all the attention we lavished upon them but who remained just beyond our physical reach. I only hoped that next day we would be touching and teaching these glorious beings another option of accepting their lives without stress or fear with a new leg!!

We climbed a small hill to another quadrant of stalls - each one 700 - 900 square feet - some with large sand boxes - and large foam crash pads - as elephants do lie down to sleep if given the choice. This was the emergency room of the hospital where the newly arrived patients were immediately attended to by full staff and 2 resident veterinarians. There were three standing in concrete pools of disinfecting solution fighting against the threat of infection - the latest victims of land mine explosions. These eles were the lucky ones.

Suddenly we were escorted to an open air space where in front of us stood a young, 7 yr. old female who had been under 24hr. care for two weeks. Her right foot padding had been blown off. She had lost her Mom and her mahout had deserted her hours after her admittance to FAE. At first I thought she could have been a statue so stoically she stood. One could barely see her breathe. I never truly understood despair until that moment I met her. She didn't bother to look up as the others had. She was enveloped in grief, sadness, and what I could only imagine relentless pain. She seemed to just want to die. I took a deep breath and knew at that instant my purpose at FAE - yes, to teach, but more importantly, to meet BooMee - (in Thai - which means Beautiful One.) - wherever she was and make whatever choice she wished more acceptable. But nothing would happen if trust wasn't established - the sooner the better!

The next morning was overcast and humid. Julie, our driver, arrived to take us to FAE extra early as it was a huge day of filming for Windy. I sat in the far back of the van musing about BooMee and contemplating what I hoped would be one of the most memorable days during this odyssey. Everything was so peaceful as we crept down the driveway. The mahouts were already well into their morning care routine, but all my being was focused on one elephant. Grabbing my work partner we made our way to BooMee. There she stood as we had left her the day before appearing to not have moved an inch. Her mahout was at her side bathing her and trying to encourage a little eating. I just stood there and watched in fascination trying to figure out my next step. Then I turned to Patty and said, "ok, let's begin."

Watching my first step Patty exhaled with me. It was almost a magnetic path that guided me forward. I hesitated slightly to see if she was going to protest! NOTHING! I glanced at Patty and breathed out slowly. With no further resolve we slowly raised our arms spreading our hands across her brow bone.

And we waited...

There was still no response from her - only an absolute stillness surrounded everyone in her midst. My eyes closed as I felt a swirling and sucking pull of my hands plunging down through her skull and the cavernous interior of her brain to her vortex. Mentally I kept myself present by tracing the circle and-a-quarter TTouch.

And we waited...

Suddenly I felt my hands were enflamed as I started reeling backwards with my arms overhead. What happened?? My eyes flashed open - I caught my breath as she slowly raised her head. Her eyes flickered open as she gazed into my eyes as if she was just awakening and began moving her trunk. My body was prickly and all the skin hair was on end!! This was the moment I had hoped for BooMee. A connection and consummation in that one moment - the release when her life force ignited like a forest fire coursing through her body and awakening every cell in its wake. O.M.G.

As I looked around me and at Patty the staff were all smiling - I could hear Windy in the background loudly asking, "What was that?!?"

The next few moments filled the air with relief - her will to live had been witnessed by us all and we were joyous!!!

Epilogue

My friendship with BooMee grows stronger every time we meet. In subsequent visits she allowed me to ttouch her entire injured foot. When she hears my call to her and sees me she trumpets and then waits patiently raising her trunk to reach my face and feet in greeting - always nuzzling my right foot first to remind me of my duty to work with her injury. Now standing almost 12 1/2 feet from the ground she nudges my hands and rests her trunk by my hands wherever I am working on her body. Her mahout will ttouch her when she is being bathed or cleaned but oh, how she remembers the first time we met and the comfort she received at such a critical time in her life.

BooMee will forever be my consummate teacher and beloved buddy who believed in me when I questioned it all, supporting me to be the practitioner that I am today.