

# From Severed Roots: Journeys of Abuse to Empowerment at Thailand's Wildflower Home

Sarah Van Buren '13



Suddenly, I saw a small, fragile body on the ultrasound monitor. I blinked, and then my eyes filled with tears.<sup>1</sup> Mai's<sup>2</sup> small frame faces a circle of mothers and two social workers, her soft-spoken words washing over the hour-long Morning Circle – a safe space at Wildflower Home for victims of domestic abuse to share their stories.

"My baby may have come from a place of hate, but my baby didn't know anything. I knew. It was my decision, not anyone else's. I decided not to have an abortion." Mai says, smiling, her arms filled with parting gifts.

"I'm ready to start my own new journey. Just me and my baby."<sup>3</sup>

Wildflower Home stands as one of 5,357 global organizations that serve as shelters for female victims of domestic abuse.<sup>4</sup> Many of these shelters institute empowerment programs to guide young women through stages of healing, from acknowledging the abuse that they've endured to building a future that no longer dwells on the past.<sup>5</sup> These programs reflect specific cultural nuances that may have perpetuated domestic abuse in these women's lives.<sup>6</sup> In other words, these programs seek to bring victims through a positive journey, from reticence to speaking out.<sup>7</sup> By being able to break a silence maintained in the face of domestic violence, rape, sexual abuse, incest or molestation, these victims enter a healing process.<sup>8</sup>

I spent my summer working in one such organization: Wildflower Home, a non-profit shelter in northern Thailand for mothers-in-crisis and victims of domestic abuse. Bringing with me an interest in health education, I arrived at the Home with a purpose to teach a women's

health education course, conveying empowerment by stressing the importance of prioritization of one's health. Health access is just one of the undermined aspects of a female's status in Southeast Asia. Wildflower Home is located in a focal point of Southeast Asia, a region of the world where 60 to 70 percent of women have reported experiencing some form of domestic abuse in their lifetimes.<sup>9</sup> Finding itself in the heart of a culture that makes room for gender-based violence,<sup>10</sup> Wildflower Home stands as a unique beacon for voiceless victims of domestic abuse in Southeast Asia.

In this paper, I will present four of Wildflower Home's empowerment programs, each holding a specific intent in challenging domestic abuse in Southeast Asia. First, there is an organic farming program, teaching women the value of community support. The second is community-building through an hour of television, which serves as a space for women to separate their identities from a community that ostracized them, as they adopt a new identity through a community of mothers. The third highlights an educational course on disciplining children without abuse – this method of empowerment seeks to end the transgenerational nature of familial abuse in Southeast Asia. Art therapy is the fourth program, in which the Home helps each mother explore her individuality beyond the abuse she was forced to endure.

In each of these four programs there is a young woman's story to be told, showing the powerful effects that these programs have. These are observations of growth: a young pregnant girl arrives at Wildflower Home from a background of abuse and learns to become a strong, empowered woman who carries the weight of two people on her back.

### Planting the Seeds of a Community

I never thought I would love the smell of pig shit. But over my time working in the farms at Wildflower Home, it was the smell that lingered most in my mind. A scent that starts off misleadingly sweet then turns to a nasty sourness once it invades your nostrils. To me, it's thick with nostalgia. As I think back to the use of organic gardening as a means of empowerment for women at Wildflower Home, this is the most real sense that I can grasp onto.

“So, if I understand you correctly, we're supposed to get the piglets from *that* bamboo-enclosed hole in the ground to *that* bamboo-enclosed hole in the ground?” I asked, trying to suspend for a moment the flowing rivers of sweat from my brow.

The framework that the organic farming and livestock project utilizes is a common element observed in empowerment programs in other shelters for victims of domestic abuse.<sup>11</sup> The commonality

observed is the measurement of success of a community in tangible markers.<sup>12</sup> This approach provides a means of demonstrating accomplishment and in doing so highlights the capabilities of a woman within the context of a group, further shifting the focus away from the abuse she has suffered. In the case of Wildflower Home, an organization that works with a demographic in which 85 percent of mothers had come from farming communities,<sup>13</sup> utilizing organic farming and raising livestock as marks of achievement is a natural fit. Many of the women arrived at Wildflower Home equipped with skills in farming and agricultural work. In introducing an organic element, this program was able to teach sustainable development, allowing women to cultivate and receive Mother Earth's abundant gifts without harming or polluting the environment.<sup>14</sup>

Each day, I was involved in organic gardening in some capacity, a tangible reminder of the strength of community-based development. Yet this moment with Pa-Ailani, Wildflower Home's head gardener, in the pigpen was a vibrant one for me; it demonstrated the success of the organic farming program as a method of teaching the value of the parts of a community in the holistic sense of the Wildflower Home.

“So, if I understand you correctly, we're supposed to get the piglets from *that* bamboo-enclosed hole in the ground to *that* bamboo-enclosed hole in the ground?” I asked, trying to suspend for a moment the flowing rivers of sweat from my brow.

“Yup. Well, at least that's what my two semesters of Thai understands,” responded Anna, an American volunteer at Wildflower Home. Pa-Ailani had been funneling messages to me through Anna, who studied some Thai in college in the United States. Now Pa-Ailani's

instructions, according to Anna's rendition, were to transfer a dozen piglets from a dirty pen to a newly-prepared clean pen. Neither Anna nor I had ever lived on a farm before, let alone handled livestock. The two of us watched in dismay as Pa-Ailani and Mai See, a Hmong mother, worked ankle-deep in pig filth. Before either of us had time to overcome our culture shock, one of the piglets wriggled into the pen where two adult pigs – its parents – were resting.

There was a dark, unintentional symbolism in the organization of these pigpens. Early in their lives, the piglets had lived in the same pen as their parents, suckling at their mother's teat and learning how to walk unstably around the pen. But within several weeks, the father pig had begun to harass his piglets, nipping at them in more than a playful way. It wasn't until the father pig had mauled one of the piglets to death that Pa-Ailani decided to transfer the piglets into the separate pen. The adult pigs, seeing this attempted intrusion, began to attack the piglet violently. The father pig had shredded one of the piglet's ears off, and blood had started to trickle heavily from the wound. The piglet emitted a shrill squeal as it cowered in a corner of the pen.

“Mai See! What will happen to that pig? Anna, ask her what'll happen to that pig!” I demanded as the shrieks got louder. I had never been in an environment where there was such urgency, such a definite line between life and death. Mai See shrugged and Anna turned to me.

“She thinks that it'll die.”

Tension was building to a deadly fever pitch, and I slowly backed away from the situation. I was not accustomed to things like this, and I mumbled something along those lines to Anna. The smell was getting to my head, so overwhelming a stench that

it burned as I inhaled. *They're just going to let that poor thing die! Well, I don't want to see it get hurt anymore; I'll just walk away from this,* I justified to myself and I turned to leave.

Pa-Ailani grabbed a piece of bamboo from the ground and called out to Mai See.

Mai See gave an exasperated sigh, but straightened her posture when Pa-Ailani threw her a stern look. In a sudden jerk, Pa-Ailani jumped into the adult pig's pen carrying the bamboo stick.

"Yahhhhhh!" she howled at the adult pigs, which in turn clambered together in a huddle near the pen. Mai See snuck in behind Pa-Ailani, tossing the shrieking creature into the safety of a neighboring pen. Pa-Ailani gave one more chilling look to the adult pigs and hopped over the fence. Wild noises that had just moments ago sliced the hot, sticky air now hung in a dull silence, punctuated only by the pungent scent of pigs.

Pa-Ailani turned to Mai See and spoke in brittle bursts. Anna translated what she could as we watched the muscles in Mai See's face crinkle into a tight ball. She wore shame in a red flush on her cheeks. Pa-Ailani spoke about the wrongs of disposing of resources, no matter how insignificant they might seem.

"The importance of each pig, of each chicken, of every grain of rice is not one by one. It's in the way that they all come together – we need each thing in order to feed ourselves and live." *Each component has importance. Each component has value in the bigger picture.* Through a dense fog of a smell of pigs, I could see that Mai See understood for the first time.

Organic gardening and raising livestock is the largest empowerment program that the Wildflower Home currently implements. The primary goal of this program is to

reinforce the notion that a functioning community is composed of unique parts; each individual has a vital role to fulfill in order for a group of people to succeed. While this may seem a simple lesson at first glance, it is a difficult theory for many of the mothers to grapple with. Many mothers at Wildflower Home had been sent there by family members, boyfriends or other trusted figures in their lives once their pregnancies had begun to develop. Faced with an inconvenient shame that had surfaced within the fabric of a society,<sup>15</sup> these women had been ejected from their past lives on the basis that their being was no longer essential to the success of their community.

### Individuality in Art Works

"I am a sunflower." Mai's<sup>16</sup> chin jutted out as her tongue emphasized the rising and falling tones in the Thai word for sunflower, *dòk taan dtà-wa*.

Mai stood strong, her posture unyielding, as she held her painting of a golden sunflower out for everyone to examine. Mai's small frame faced a circle of mothers, two social workers – and me. I was trying in vain to keep up with the circles of Thai dialogue pooling around me.

Today's session centered on having the mothers draw a flower they felt best described them. Giggling at how childish the assignment seemed, the young mothers drew their flowers on mulberry paper, dabbing lightly at the pots of primary colors laid out in the middle of the table.

Art therapy is a distinct approach to redefining an individual's identity – an integral component to the healing process for people affected by domestic abuse.<sup>17</sup> For many victims, cycles of abuse have caused personhood to denature into a sense of self tied to their perpetrators.

It becomes difficult, at times impossible, to reconfigure their past selves prior to their abuse.<sup>18</sup> In this sense, the goal of art therapy is not to recreate the self of the past but rather to create an identity that has grown from abuse: the identity of a survivor.<sup>19</sup>

This idea is strongly conveyed in an analysis of art therapy conducted by Richard Hycner, a psychotherapist critiquing methods of healing after trauma; the first step in healing is in accepting where you are, even if where you are is not where you want to be.<sup>20</sup> Wildflower Home utilizes art therapy as a means of addressing this level of healing; to provide the mothers a way to address how abuse affected them and from this root, to begin establishing a new form of personhood.

When the paintings were complete, the social workers asked those who felt ready to talk about their drawings with the group. An often-timid Mai was the first to raise her hand to present her drawing.

"A sunflower – very beautiful, Mai," a social worker offered, seeing that Mai had sealed her lips in assertive conclusion. "Sunflowers are a wonderful example, because they are bold and stand so proudly in front of the sun..."

"No!" Mai exclaimed, her words cutting thickly into a dense wall of heat, diffused from mid-afternoon in June. "That's not why I drew a sunflower." She took a deep breath in through her nose. "I am a sunflower that the sun doesn't care much about; a flower that the sun never really looked upon or tried to help make strong. The sun didn't shine on me when my husband hit me, or when he burned me with cigarettes and or when he made me feel sad. It didn't shine on me when my family left me here, alone. So now, I have to try my best to get the sun's attention."<sup>21</sup>

“I am a sunflower that the sun doesn’t care much about; a flower that the sun never really looked upon or tried to help make strong. The sun didn’t shine on me when my husband hit me, or when he burned me with cigarettes and or when he made me feel sad. It didn’t shine on me when my family left me here, alone. So now, I have to try my best to get the sun’s attention.”

I observed as Mai’s bold stance tested the limits of her new identity for the first time. Under the swollen June sun, she disdainfully spat out stories of her abuse-filled past. In doing so this young woman had begun to establish her grounding, not as a victim, but as a survivor of domestic abuse.<sup>22</sup>

### Watching Television With an Outsider

*Whack!* Nanda smacked a mosquito against her leg and a splatter of her blood stained her skin. She furiously rubbed her dirty palm on the bamboo floor and returned her focus back to her pocket-sized mirror covered with Minnie Mouse stickers. With great precision she plucked a stray hair from her upper brow, conducting a full inspection of her face with all of the self-absorption of a 13-year-old girl. Without raising her gaze Nanda barked orders in splintered Thai

at eight-year-old Trung, who continued to painstakingly adjust a television antenna to the precise frequency. Static on the television screen was sharply replaced by a drooling monster as the children’s favorite television show came into full view.

Seven o’clock on Friday night marked the beginning of two hours of television-induced escape. Wildflower Home, an institution whose income is dependent on daily organic gardening, reserved only two hours on Friday evenings for leisure. Nanda and I, both still new to Wildflower Home, were beginning to find our places in this weekly routine. An image came into full view as a soft glow from the television’s light washed over our faces.

One significant obstacle for women at Wildflower Home is overcoming the pain of having been ostracized by their communities. This similarity in the trials of healing that lay before women at Wildflower Home suggests a third means of empowerment: building a kind of new community through a sense of camaraderie between the mothers. The definition for this community at Wildflower Home is based in this unfortunate commonality amongst the women: the manner in which they arrive at the Home. A woman’s beginning at the Home is often marked by a parent, a family member, a tribe elder – someone she trusted at her young age – leaving her at the gates.<sup>23</sup> Unlike in Western communities, where women seek domestic abuse shelters of their own accord,<sup>24</sup> or are placed there by social workers, coming to Wildflower Home is not the woman’s choice.

I sat behind eight children, ages two to 15, trying with every inch of my college education to figure out what the heck was going on in this children’s show. A monster was engulfed in a puff of glitter and emerged as a pineapple. The children nodded their heads in comprehension.

I threw a glance at Nanda, her keenly plucked brow furrowed over her eyes. Neither Nanda nor I spoke any more than bare fragments of Thai, making even a basic children’s show difficult to understand. Nanda’s native tongue of Burmese was a distant cousin of a language to her new Thai surroundings. Nanda had immigrated to Thailand as a 12-year-old, one of the 75,000 children that are a part of the flow of human trafficking into Thailand annually.<sup>25</sup>

The children all sat at a slight distance from me, a symbolic spacing indicating that their mothers placed an outsider status on my forehead. Being an American college student, my all-too-temporary status at the Home dissuaded my neighbors from developing strong relationships with me. An apparent “other,” my inability to integrate myself into this culture of mothers-in-crisis mirrored Nanda’s furrowed eyebrows pointed flashing images on the television screen. While watching a pineapple masterfully present a traditional Thai dance, Nanda and I were riding a bewildering and turbulent wave through the rises and falls of tones in Thai dialogue and cultural nuances. I extended to Nanda an exaggerated shrug, a signal to bridge our common confusion.

*Don’t worry;* I tried to convey, *I don’t know what’s going on either.* Nanda narrowed her eyes at my gesturing.

I smiled, and her face grew even tighter.

When the seven children laughed, there was a beat before Nanda’s laugh saturated the room.

When the other children gasped in shock, Nanda watched their horrified faces before covering her own mouth with her hands.

When a gecko landed on the television antenna, consuming the screen in a flood

of static, Nanda was the first to start dishing out orders; *Fix that! Good! Bad!*

She caught my eye as younger children acted on her vague declarations to readjust the antennas. The crease in her brow was no longer apparent and a gleaming smile sent me a message; *I am not the outsider you are.*

A community of mothers is a strong step towards empowerment. Yet the creation of an inclusive community unintentionally creates a population of outsiders. The women at Wildflower Home had grown closer in their common responsibilities as single, young mothers. Who was I, after all? A privileged young undergraduate from America *volunteering my time* at the Home. I certainly was not a young woman betrayed by her community and faced with a burden of unwanted motherhood. Perhaps it was because of this that I was not welcomed into their inner circle with open arms, an outsider with an expiration date of two months. I was not someone that deserved an immediate extension of friendship.

The little analog clock in the corner of the television screen marked eight. Mothers poured out of their bedrooms with their suckling infants, bustling into the bamboo hut where the television sat on a pedestal. Credits began to roll for the show about the pineapple that I ultimately failed to decipher, as more fidgeting with the television antennas revealed flashes of a high society mother-in-law clawing at her high-heeled daughter-in-law. Seven of the children were shooed out of the hut as the mothers watched in sinful glee a smoldering kiss between a strapping billionaire and his thin wife. Nanda and I were the only two left from the earlier group of children watching television. Now a romantic comedy aired that was reminiscent of late night dramatics in *telenovelas* I would watch with my

Nicaraguan friends back in the States. I could follow the none-too-complicated plot lines of adultery, murder and outrageous fashion in this show – themes universally appreciated by young women. Nanda's heavy brow was replaced by wide eyes at the sight of the kiss. "Ehhh, Nanda!" A mother snapped her fingers in front Nanda's unwavering fixation. "Your baby is awake."

Nanda was a 13-year-old mother. Placing these two descriptors – 13-year-old and mother – into one person was difficult for me to internalize. Placing myself back into a 13-year-old's body, I could not fathom the weight of carrying a child on me. I could not think of the struggle of being abandoned by my community. Though I was a foreigner, like Nanda, I was not the outsider she was. Here I was looking into a community of mothers, a world they had created for themselves, built on a foundation of a common betrayal.

*I've held the passion of a thousand suns for years. Always, I've ... loved...*

The program cut to commercial break.

The mothers and I shouted out in agony at the abrupt ending of the segment. Some of the mothers screamed obscenities at the television screen, while others again shooed away the seven children who so desperately wanted to be a part of the adults' television hour. Watching the commercials saturate the images of the last scene, Nanda let out a small sigh of awe as she nursed her baby. I leaned over and tested out some English.

"Do you like the television show?"

She narrowed her eyes again at me, testing the waters between us. She broke into a mischievous grin.

"Sometimes, I pretend he is my husband."

Though I was a foreigner, like Nanda, I was not the outsider she was. Here I was looking into a community of mothers, a world they had created for themselves, built on a foundation of a common betrayal.

She giggled and I laughed. Nanda jiggled her nursing infant on her lap, as she reexamined her face in her Minnie Mouse pocket mirror.

The end credits began to roll. *Tomorrow is Saturday*, I thought to myself. *I will have the whole afternoon and Sunday off. I can leave the Home and eat good food. I can talk to my friends and family on Skype. I can connect back to my former life.*

The mothers began to slowly file out of the bamboo hut, carrying their crying babies in their arms. They had to get to bed at a reasonable time in order to greet an early morning. Such is the life of a manual laborer. This pattern of work and childcare was old hat to them, and the chatter died down as they returned back to their own bedrooms. Nanda lingered, waiting until the last of the credits was finished. I sat and waited with her, watching to see if she might saying something further to me. But she didn't. Instead she sat patiently with her child, eyes glued to the screen, trying to decipher in the credits an answer to her two pulling identities: teenager and mother. Her quiet resolve showed she had grown towards accepting the latter, yet she remained unwilling to forsake even a second of what was left of her two hours of freedom.

## Learning Motherhood

“Mama! Mama! I won’t eat it!”

Two-year-old Bao stood up from his worn plastic chair and he stamped his foot down on a dirt floor. Whirls of dust clattered through dense humidity as Bao’s pint-sized upheaval disrupted a humid frenzy. Sumalee, Bao’s mother, put down her spoon patiently and took a deep breath, a gulp of air that was half heat, half water. Sitting on the opposite side of an open pavilion, I could see deep wrinkles on Sumalee’s 19-year-old face. A patience worn thin.

How could I justify interfering in an interaction between mother and child? Sumalee was 19, the same age as I – how could I pretend that I could handle a situation with a child better than she could?

Lunchtime on weekends was always a struggle at Wildflower Home. In a group of 20 infants and children who all needed to be fed in a 30-minute time span, there was always at least one child who decided to cause a little more trouble than the rest. Today, it was little Bao.

“Bao, sit down. *Now.*” Sumalee’s lip curled. A spoonful of rice was gripped tightly in her hand.

“No, no, no, no, no!”

Loud chatter from conversations between other volunteers and mothers bubbled over in the pavilion; it seemed that no one

had yet noticed droplets of sweat forming on Sumalee’s brow or a shaking spoon nestled in her hand spilling grains of rice. Flies sat on Bao’s plate, simmering in a hot broth. I had one eye on my bowl of food, my other on Sumalee and Bao. Each falling grain of rice thudded onto my mind in a nagging thought, *I should interfere, take over feeding Bao for a bit, give Sumalee a minute to breathe, do something.*

“No, no, no, no...”

**BANG.**

A dull silence sat for a moment, followed by a child’s sharp squeal. A tin plate that had recently been filled with hot soup and rice clanged viciously on the floor, its contents flowing down Bao’s head. The spot on his temple where a metal plate had struck glowed a flush of crimson. Bao’s mouth was open in a vast gaping wail, an eternal cry that seemed to echo throughout his “terrible twos.” I swooped down onto Bao’s tiny frame and hoisted him onto my hip, brushing grains of rice from his hair.

“Sumalee, wait – ” a social worker called out.

Sumalee was already gone, running away from the open pavilion that contained a lingering shame of her motherhood.

Cycles of domestic violence are often transgenerational.<sup>26</sup> Fathers against sons, mothers-in-law against daughters-in-law, families against daughters. In Southeast Asia, abuse can run in circles around generations of families because there is cultural tolerance. All participants remain silent in the face of a bad situation, as their predecessors did and theirs before them. When victims become adults, they might make a proactive decision to end the perpetuation of abuse. But more often than not, those who were once victims

find themselves standing above their children, striking with the hands of their perpetrators.<sup>27</sup>

Without formal intervention, generations’ abuses have the chance to ferment and multiply. The fourth empowerment program implemented at Wildflower Home speaks to this notion of perpetuating cycles of abuse. In teaching the importance and the means of disciplinary measures for children without abuse, the Home seeks to stop abuse at this generation of mothers.

I bounced Bao on my hip, gently rubbing the growing swell on his head from where his mother had struck him. I felt a burn in my face, shame in not having acted faster. *Why did I remain silent when I could see that something bad was about to happen?* I had been hesitant to act. After all, Sumalee was Bao’s mother, and I was an undergraduate volunteer scheduled to live at the Home for just two short months. How could I justify interfering in an interaction between mother and child? Sumalee was 19, the same age as I – how could I pretend that I could handle a situation with a child better than she could? But witnessing child abuse was something new to me, something so dark to me that my first instinct was to grab little Bao and take him away from his perpetrator. And I did just that, right before Sumalee’s eyes.

“You shouldn’t have done that!” one of the social workers snapped at me as she came back into the pavilion. She had been unable to pull Sumalee out of the garden where she was hiding, furiously weeding.

“What was I supposed to do?” My first hesitant step over a cordial boundary between my coworker and myself. “You wanted to do the same thing!” Tightened muscles in the social worker’s face unhinged. “I know, I know... when someone hits a kid... it’s hard for us Americans to sit and watch. But you shouldn’t have grabbed

him so fast, Sarah. She needs to deal with things like this herself. You took that time to think away from her.”

Wildflower Home teaches motherhood. It's a topic that is taught primarily through demonstrations, rather than in a classroom setting. As many of these mothers come from backgrounds of domestic abuse and violence, Wildflower Home places an emphasis on ending this cycle, utilizing both one-on-one and direct work with the social workers on Wildflower Home's campus. The mothers learn techniques of instructing their children without having to rely on the methods their parents had used on them.<sup>28</sup> For instance, how to use a “time-out” instead of a beating. How to use a warning system before instituting some kind of punishment. And how to step away from a difficult situation, allowing the community of mothers to step in to take care of the child for a little while. The social workers exhibit these appropriate, non-violent measures of discipline for the children, actions of love that they encourage the mothers to mimic. “A mother's strength,” the social workers would say, “is measured in her patience to teach her children.”<sup>29</sup>

“Mama! Mama!” Bao shouted brightly and he wriggled rebelliously in my arms. I put him down on the ground gingerly, and he ran over to his mother. He hugged her legs and she gave him a worn smile. Sumalee is one of Wildflower Home's success stories. Sumalee recently began attending vocational school in Chiang Mai city, training to become a tour guide. She attends classes during the day and works the Wildflower Home's gardens in the evening. Sumalee hopes to someday earn enough money to buy an apartment off of Wildflower Home's campus, just for her and Bao.

Sumalee is by no means a perfect mother, and her angry youth lashes out at her

son on occasion. But as she took up a spoonful of rice to Bao's mouth, I saw a change from the scared 16-year-old whose ashamed parents had dropped her off at the gates of Wildflower Home. As Bao gleefully took in a mouthful of rice, Sumalee's face broke into a small, crooked smile – showing an element of pride that she now carried in her motherhood.

## Conclusion

A path of healing is an undeniable struggle, one that defines the lives of women at Wildflower Home each day. With an image of women striving towards freedom from their demons of abuse, I came to the Home to empower women in both body and in mind. Like so many American college students, I am an idealist. Empowerment. Empathy. Education.<sup>30</sup> That became my mantra, something I packed in my suitcase when I set out for Wildflower Home. On the plane over from Boston to Thailand I had read *Half the Sky*, a collection of anecdotes gathered to inspire privileged youth to make a change in a world where women are not valued in their communities. I came equipped, intellectually and idealistically, to tackle domestic abuse in Thailand. But when I arrived at Chiang Mai in late May, my good intentions reflected off a kind of vibrancy within the community of mothers at Wildflower Home. What I witnessed during my experience was a community characterized by unrelenting resilience.

I cannot describe these women as battered, as ruined, as *victims*. The young women I met carried themselves proudly, not as women haunted by their pasts but women who have survived and grown beyond them. I learned that the methods of empowerment utilized at Wildflower Home manifest themselves in gentle, beautiful smiles, in the way the women greet one another, in their renewed vigor for their work, in their renewed commitment

I came equipped, intellectually and idealistically, to tackle domestic abuse in Thailand. But when I arrived at Chiang Mai in late May, my good intentions reflected off a kind of vibrancy within the community of mothers at Wildflower Home. What I witnessed during my experience was a community characterized by unrelenting resilience.

to family – both their own and that of Wildflower Home. Some days were easier than others; some days were very hard. But the eternal optimism of the mothers at Wildflower Home made it so I could never find a day where I did not smile at least once.

My internship is one of many steps that still need to be taken. Future research should focus on identifying more victims of abuse. NGOs like Wildflower Home serve as a safe space for women to shed the burden of a cultural stigma of shame and ultimately develop into strong, empowered mothers – but these women are only brought to Wildflower Home once they become pregnant, once they begin to show their community's shame. Countless women and girls remain victims without a voice, victims who do not visibly carry their shame through pregnancy but carry this burden nevertheless. These are the unheard stories that must emerge from this community. These are the silent voices that need to be given a chance to soar.

## Notes

1. Anonymous Social Worker. "Informal Interview with WF Home Social Worker." Personal interview. 30 July 2011.
2. All names are pseudonyms.
3. Thaibinh, Elizabeth, and Anonymous WF Home Mother. "In My Likeness." *Wildflower Home*. WildflowerHome.net, 2011. Web. 30 Oct. 2011.
4. CaNetiq. "International Directory of Domestic Violence Agencies." *Hot Peach Pages*. 2011 Aug. 9. Web. 15 Oct. 2011.
5. MacDonald, K., I. Lambie, and L. Simmonds. "Counselling for Sexual Abuse: A Therapist's Guide for Working with Adults, Children and Families." *Oxford University Press, London* (1995). Print.
6. Pothukuchi, K. "Effectiveness and Empowerment in Women's Shelter: A Study of Working Women's Hostels in Bangalore, India." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* (2001). Print.
7. Shange, N. "An Awareness and Visibility Project around Issues of Domestic Violence in Various Communities." *Speaking Up, Speaking Out Against Domestic Violence*. 18 Apr. 2007. Web. 5 Nov. 2011.
8. Raine, N. V. "Silence: Breaking the Silence on Sexual Violence." *After Silence*. 2003. Web. 14 Nov. 2011.
9. World Health Organization, Regional Office for Southeast Asia. "Combating Gender-Based Violence in the Southeast Asian Region." *Gender, Women and Health (GWH) World Health Organization South-East Asia Regional Office (WHO/SEARO)*. WHO, 2008. Web. 13 Nov. 2011.
10. Bounxouei, K. "Domestic Abuse Among Southeast Asian Women." *Laotian Teacher: Learning About Life through Personal Experience*. 7 Jan. 2008. Web. 13 Nov. 2011.
11. Datta, Bishakha, and Geetanjal Misra. "Advocacy for Sexual and Reproductive Health: The Challenge in India." *Reproductive Health Matters* 8.16 (2000): 24-34. Print.
12. Goodman, Lisa A., and Deborah Epstein. "Listening to Battered Women: A Survivor-Centered Approach to Advocacy, Mental Health, and Justice." *Psychology of Women Series* (2007): 184. Print.
13. Thaibinh, Elizabeth. "Wildflower Home, A Commitment to Nature." *Wildflower Home*. WildflowerHome.net, 2011. Web. 13 Nov. 2011.
14. Thaibinh, Elizabeth. "Wildflower Home, A Commitment to Nature." *Wildflower Home*. WildflowerHome.net, 2011. Web. 13 Nov. 2011.
15. Lebra, Takie Sugiyama. "The Social Mechanism of Guilt and Shame: The Japanese Case." *The George Washington University Institute for Ethnographic Research* 44.4 (1971): 241-55. Print.
16. Thaibinh, E., Anonymous Wildflower Home mother (2011). *I Am a Sunflower*. Retrieved from Wildflower Home [Chiang Mai, Thailand] 2011.
17. Appleton, V. "Avenues of Hope: Art Therapy and the Resolution of Trauma." *Journal of the American Art Therapy Association* (2001). Print.
18. National Center for Victims of Crime. "Perpetrators of Domestic Violence." *National Center for Victims of Crime Online*. 2011. Web. 12 Nov. 2011.
19. Behera, Subhakanta. "Phakirmohun's 'Rebati': Empowerment, Identity and Feminism." *Economic and Political Weekly* 34.50 (1999): 3505-507. Print.
20. Hycner, Richard, and Lynne Jacobs. *The Healing Approach in Gestalt Theory: A Dialogic/Self Psychology Approach*. Gestalt Journal, 1995. Print.
21. Thaibinh, Elizabeth, and Anonymous WF Home Mother. "In My Likeness." *Wildflower Home*. WildflowerHome.net, 2011. Web. 30 Oct. 2011.
22. I feel comfortable including this story in my narrative as it was deemed acceptable to be published on Wildflower Home's website.
23. Anonymous Social Worker. "Informal Interview with WF Home Social Worker." Personal interview. 12 June 2011.
24. Shange, N. "An Awareness and Visibility Project around Issues of Domestic Violence in Various Communities." *Speaking Up, Speaking Out Against Domestic Violence*. 18 Apr. 2007. Web. 5 Nov. 2011.
25. Hughes, D.M., L.J. Sporicic, N.Z. Mendelsohn, and V. Chirgwin. "Factbook on Global Sexual Exploitation: Thailand. Thailand – Facts on Trafficking and Prostitution." *Coalition Against Trafficking in Women*. 12 Oct. 2012. Web. 13 Nov. 2011.
26. Valent, Paul. "Interrupting Transgenerational Violence: Treatment of a Victim of Domestic Violence." *ISTSS Presentation Washington* (1998). 21 Nov. 2002. Web. 20 Nov. 2011.
27. Atkinson, Judy, Jeff Nelson, and Caroline Atkinson. "Trauma, Transgenerational, Transfer and Effects on Community Wellbeing." *Working Together*. 135-44. *Telethon Institute for Child Health Research*. University of West Alabama. Web. 15 Nov. 2011.
28. UNICEF. "Child Protection: Discipline and Violence." *Teachers Talking About Learning*. 2008. Web. 13 Nov. 2011.
29. Anonymous Social Worker. "Informal Interview with WF Home Social Worker." Personal interview. 16 July 2011.
30. Kristof, Nicholas D., and Sheryl WuDunn. *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009. Print.