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Thu Thu's Saving Journey

"My stepfather was shot to death in broad daylight by Myanmar military and police forces in 2021. I almost lost my mom at that time too if it wasn't for him who protected her until his final breath and consciousness. My heart sank with disbelief and my entire body went numb." Thu Thu May Oo

Meet Thu Thu May Oo, from Myanmar, who is currently completing MS Nutrition Education at Teachers College, Columbia University, aiming to attain her Phd in Public Health Nutrition. She also serves as the consultant and editor-in-chief for the Spring University Myanmar, the interim education program that provides continuous learning opportunities to Myanmar people all over the nation from the cities to war-conflicted and refugee camps at the border regions during this tumultuous time. Thu Thu is also currently conducting graduate research on the qualitative study of food and nutrition insecurity among the civil disobedience movement participants in Myanmar.

Thu Thu grew up in Mawlamyine, Myanmar small town in a military dictatorship surrounded by poverty and ethnic conflicts while witness to bloodshed at 14 years of age when military soldiers started beating civilians and attacking with tear gas during peaceful protests. In 2021, the Myanmar military staged a coup, overthrowing the elected democracy and detaining President Win Myint and State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi. Thu Thu has endured a tragic few years since the military coup in Myanmar; her stepfather was killed by military that very same year. This coup has not only threatened many rural communities in Myanmar but contributes to the country's long standing corruption reputation on human rights issues.

In the last few years, Thu Thu has engaged in grassroots activity in the communities in Myanmar to help support refugees who are fleeing Myanmar. She and a few of her colleagues have organized events and campaigns around supporting the refugees in Myanmar. We take a saving journey with Thu Thu as she advocates for her people through building grassroots programs supporting refugees through arts and poetry exchanges. Thu Thu and her team on the ground in Myanmar help to provide support

and aid to the local Myanmar people fleeing from rural areas due to the brutal military junta committing political violence against ethnic and religious communities.

In this documentary series, we take a look at the compassionate and committed advocacy work that Thu Thu and her colleague in Myanmar, Kyaw Lin are doing with The Spring Revolution, the Civil Disobedience Movement in Myanmar as well as with Spring University Myanmar; in addition to their current grassroots campaigns for art exchanges. Through each episode, we will meet another citizen of Myanmar struggling for aid and help, whether that is financial, housing, or any combination of basic aid for human survival. The stories of each character unfolds through the journey that both Thu Thu, her colleagues, and the refugees share and experience. The stories are told through Thu Thu's lens. In each episode we see a human arch and co-creation between Thu Thu, the grassroots communities and citizen or refugee they are working to aid; every circumstance with every person or community requiring aid becomes urgent from military dictatorship regime pressures.

We travel with Thu Thu virtually as she visits these communities with her colleague Kyaw Lin based in Myanmar to bring education, nourishment, and saving grace to these communities desperate for aid.

In episode one: *Fireflies along the Revolutionary Road*, we journey with Thu Thu and Kyaw Lin to meet Ma Zarli. Zarli makes bags, and she used to have a successful bag-making business called Ochityar in Yangon. Ochityar initially gained recognition for its customizable products, and Zarli and her team used to paint portraits and caricatures on their bags according to the customer's instructions. They participated in exhibitions that promoted small scale handicraft businesses, and they sold their products at various events organized by The Secretariat, Sule Square, and Times City.

After the Spring Revolution started, Zarli and her team employed Civil Disobedience Movement civil servants in their bag-making business. They provided them with training and assisted them with anything they needed. They were found out by the junta's security forces, and their homes and shop were confiscated. They had to leave behind everything and escaped to Mae Sot, Thailand for their safety. They recently resumed their bag-making business with CDM civil servants in Mae Sot, and they now sell their products under the name CDM Unity.

Zarli referenced the junta forces confiscation in stating, "I could hear the dogs barking as I stood by the side of the road in Mae Sot. I gripped the bag on my shoulder tightly and pressed my hands to my pounding heart. I did not know where to go, and I did not know what to do. I was overwhelmed with emotions, and I could not stop the tears that

started to run down my cheeks. I looked back at the homeland I left behind as I wiped away the tears. I have left behind my home and my family.

Thu Thu and Kyaw Lin in the second episode, *The Golden Land in my Mind* take us through Ma Ei's conflicts in Myanmar through her own story. Ma Ei used to work in community projects that create job opportunities for the youths in Myanmar. When the military took power on 1st February 2021, she got involved in the pro-democracy movement. She had to flee her home and arrived in Karen State in June 2021. She then attended a three-month training course organized by PDF . She realized the need to help young children in that area have access to education, so she decided to help the teachers with their teaching.

She hopes to have a free and fair society where all ethnic nationalities in Myanmar can have equal opportunities . She also hopes to do development work in ethnic minority areas. She currently lives in a Karen village and helps the students with their education with what she can afford. She now owns three chickens and considers herself to be rich.

These episodic stories help to make an impact and create awareness around the difficulty of the current situation in Myanmar. Whether Kyaw Lin and Thu Thu are working to help craft support through business initiatives through CDM or aiding educational pursuits to a community that has had to endure fleeing from their homes while hiding in rural areas from the military regime in Myanmar, they have developed a small support system to gather aid for fleeing victims who seek to continue their livelihood and build community in their fight toward pro-democracy.