

## A WATER WELL

By Nang Lao

In my hometown, in Burma, where I was born and raised, there is an ancient well. I don't know how many years the well has existed and who made it. I tried to ask my dearest grandmother and the other elders in the village, but there was no answer. Our lives depend on this well. It is located in the center of the village, allowing people living around to settle around the well. The water always tastes natural, sweet and cool. This taste is unforgettable no matter where I am.

The water in the well continues year after year, but there is also seasonal decrease. In the summer, the water we experience is very limited. People have to get up early and draw water back and forth from there with two buckets tied to a pole. And because the water is mixed with yellow sand and muddy when it rains, we have to take it home and it must settle overnight before it can be used for cooking.

The children in our village must learn to take care of housework from a very young age. Learning to draw water from the well by yourself is a must. My childhood memories always revolve around the well. The well is in a large, flat-topped mountain above the ditch. We must climb up with a burden like climbing a mountain. There is a large open space around the well.

People are washing clothes every day at the well. My friends and I often carry a load with a big basket made of bamboo on one side and a bucket on the other to wash the clothes of all family members by the well. We always pack lunch. After all the clothes are washed and dried on the surrounding small bushes, the packed lunch will be laid out and shared together. When we are full with taking the sweet well water, we play and pick edible wild fruits. We will always pack a bag of peppers, salt, and fried garlic, prepared to be served as a condiment for wild fruits. The wild fruits are always there for picking from the mountain. They are the most delicious snacks in our childhood. We will stay until the clothes are dry and pack them up and get ready to go home.

Every year, people in the village collect some money or materials according to the family living conditions and repair and maintain the well. They do this without the need for professional maintenance personnel. They work with the village chief as if people naturally know what to do.

We are all very grateful to our predecessors who built the well with rocks and stones. Their work has allowed the people in our village to not worry about precious water, so important for life.