



question everything

The Conscious Media Network

Sangduen "Lek" Chailert
Rehabilitating Elephants
June, 2009

RM: In a moment you will see what I, and many others, consider to be a hero. She is tiny in stature, but bold and courageous in her actions on behalf of the Earth's record keepers, elephants. She grew up with elephants in a hill tribe in Thailand, and grew to have an extraordinary ability to understand them. Some even call her *the Elephant Whisperer*. Her mission is to save abused elephants, and her ultimate dream, to return all of Thailand's elephants to the wild, where they belong.

RM: Is it OK to call you Lek?

LC: Yeah.

RM: OK, Lek, tell us a little bit about how you fell in love so deeply with the elephants from such an early age.

LC: You know when I [was] young I spent time with elephants. I never think about the time that my family allow me to spend time next to the elephants. I feel that elephants are not animals; I feel they are like us. I just all the time believe that the elephant is a person like us because when I was young I would get a nap with the elephants when I was in the jungle. I would lie down and lean my head on the stomach of the elephant when she was asleep in the afternoon. And, that is wonderful! I feel very safe. I feel her very beautiful and gentle, and in my heart I can trust them. I know that elephants have a feeling for people who are dangerous to them, and who are not dangerous.

RM: Yes.

LC: So, this is when I fall in love with elephants because it was the elephant who had shown me that even though she is giant, she is very gentle and a beautiful heart. This is the way I first fall in love with elephants.

RM: As time went on after you went through school, and so forth, and you came to do this, rescue them for a living, tell us about the condition of the elephants when they come to you; what they have been doing, how they have been trained, and what kind of shape they are in by the time they come to you.

LC: First of all, when I had an elephant at home I believed all elephants would be happy, like the one we had. And then when I was sixteen I had the opportunity to follow the **missionary** to the logging area. And, at that time I didn't have opportunity to work with elephants at all, but I dreamed that some day I wanted to have elephants myself. I went with the **missionary** because I wanted to exchange the English language with them. But, then I first saw the elephants in the logging, I couldn't believe it myself. I saw the elephants suffering, cut in the neck with rope, forced to do the work over and over, again, and the rope cut deeper and deeper. Many of them blind, still forced to work lame. Not just pulling logs easy, from easy [places], but pull up logs from a steep hill.

RM: Pulling logs up a steep hill—so, they use them for harvesting timber.

LC: Yeah, big timber. Some timber is nearly [as big] to the elephant, and some of them are lame with broken legs. They force the elephants not just to work, but they hit them or use the knife to stab them. When I saw that, you know I was shocked; I couldn't believe my eyes! This thing is—I *don't believe that!* I came back from that trip; that picture followed me like a shadow. The memory followed me and I saw many of them wounded, wounds never treated.

I came back. I started to work and I worked to bring the medicine back to the jungle every time I had the money to buy medicine. The more I went into the jungle deeper and deeper, I found more suffering animals, suffering elephants. And that day I couldn't turn my back; I couldn't turn my back to them. Then one day I talked to my mother. I said, "Mom, I want to rescue the elephants." My mom looked at me with

a big question mark in her eyes. Because, for myself, I come from the Kamu hill tribe. In the hill tribe forget about education. A woman is born to be a wife at home looking after the kids and going to the farm. Education for a woman never has time to go and have that. My mother, she never had education. She pushed me to go and have education. I am the first generation of our family, and of our village, the first woman to come out for study.

So, when I went back and told my mother I want to rescue elephants, my mother looked at me; she didn't say any words, but she smiled. I know her smile means, *No way baby!* But, you know, I said to her, you might ask me how? I say to you, I don't know yet today, but I think I can and I will. I'll never drop my dream. The more I go the more I fall in love with them. I never drop my dream. From a zero background I have so many friends around the world who come to work with me and volunteer. They fulfill my dream all the visitors who come every day now to give and put money for the project. I put the money toward the elephants and I start to work my own business. Before I would start the sanctuary, I decided to do the business, and I have enough money to go and support the project.

RM: It's beautiful that dream that you have such commitment to. For how many years now have you been doing this?

LC: To do for the first Jumbo Express--I did for the first to go really carry the medicine back [in] 1985, to do Jumbo Express. Now, this means automatic, Jumbo Express, but the first elephant I rescued was in 1982. And, also, to completely [be able] to go I had a car. Before, I used to walk, go by bus or motorcycle and hire a porter to carry the medicine. Later I bought an old jeep to go to the jungle.

RM: Now you have a car, so that makes it a lot easier.

LC: Then we can have more flexibility to take the mobile clinic. This started from a mobile clinic, first before I would go to rescue the elephants. And, then I saw so many elephants [to rescue], tortured elephants. Which one would I select? I often have people ask, how I can select the elephants? What stands out to choose which one to be rescued? I always take the most needed, like this one (shown on video) [with a] broken leg, she was still forced to work; this one both eyes blind, still forced to work. She is one, I never turned my back. Some elephants it takes me five months to go and try to rescue. The owners play the game; the owner doesn't want to sell this one; the owner, you know, is confused. Some elephants I use police; I use help to go and try to talk to them, and it takes a long, long time to get one elephant to take back to the park.

RM: That's interesting--you recently you've had a situation where you had to let two or three of them go back to the owners. And, can you talk about what the owners do with the elephants? What were the elephants doing before, and what are they doing again, because I know this made you all very sad that they had to go back after a few years with you?

LC: You know most of the elephants come from the Trekking Camp. They come to us because of many conditions. Mostly they have a mental issue. Many mother elephants kill their babies the first minute they are born. I think all around the world no one knows what is going on. I have used many of them to do a Case Study. In 2005 we had a very important case that happened in one Elephant camp. Seven mothers successfully gave birth in the same year . . .

RM: Seven mothers gave birth?

LC: In one camp only, which is very, very unusual because in the number of 70 elephants, seven mothers have a baby in two years, they gave birth in 2005—five of the mothers killed their babies the first minute the baby dropped.

RM: They killed their babies?

LC: They killed the babies. When you see a mother elephant [in the wild] *they love their babies*. Five mothers out of seven successfully killed their baby the first minute the baby dropped. In one second the mother [gestures lifting the baby high], BANG, killed [the baby]. The two mothers—this doesn't mean they did not want to kill [their babies, too]. They [both] tried to kill [their babies], but the Mahout stabbed

[the mothers] with a knife and rescued the babies. Even when they put the baby in the trolley and run, the mothers tried to pull the chain and grab the baby; they want to kill the baby.

RM: That's not normal elephant behavior.

LC: Yeah. As I work with elephants, as I do the case study with the wild elephants, I spent years and years with wild elephants in the jungle, I found that is *very unusual*. So, I decided to go and ask the owner to allow me to have permission to go and do a case study [in the camp]. Every mother of the seven mothers [who were] pregnant never normally reproduced—not naturally—they forced the mothers; I'll show you a photo of the mothers. They tied the mothers to a tree and tied her legs [apart]. And the man had a knife to threatened the mothers to stab them in the (motioning the side of the head in the brain).

RM: Why were they stabbing the mother?

LC: To force the bull to rape her.

RM: Oh, it's almost like a rape!

LC: Yeah, it's the breeding program.

RM: Oh!

LC: Some of the elephants who stay with us have been [through this] 40 times, and now in the park they become a mental issue. They walk like a zombie, you can see. And, when they see the bull—you can see when the bull is next to them they pee right away; they can't stand it.

RM: They are frightened.

LC: Yeah, they are frightened. They don't want the bull to touch them. Some of them never allow the other bulls to touch them again.

RM: So, they really—they forced reproduction on the female. She became mentally unstable, and then when the baby is born she wants nothing to do with the baby. Is that what you have found?

LC: Yeah, and I'll tell you later why they don't want the baby. They make the female elephants to have babies because for the breeding program the babies are a lot of benefit to the camp. I found that I followed every case—the life after they kill the baby, that elephant no soul. They stands up, eyes empty; they don't know themselves that they are elephants. Even the mother who has had two baby elephants never accepts the baby again. And, in my opinion, after I followed that case, I think the nature of the elephant knows if they see that the life is not so safe, they don't want their baby [to be] like them; they decide to kill them.

RM: Yes, that's what I was wondering is if they intuitively know it is not a safe world for that baby.

LC: Yeah. This is only my opinion. I can't say [more than that].

RM: Yeah, but I was thinking that as you were talking. They seem to have such a delicate sense of life.

LC: Yeah. Now, when you asked me why I have to lease the elephants . . .

RM: You are talking about a leasing program, where you lease the elephants from . . .

LC: The Trekking Camp . . .

RM: Why? Because they have been injured or are psychologically troubled? How do you talk them into leasing the elephants?

LC: When some mothers [are in] pregnancy, the Mahout—the owner of elephant-- knows that if they keep [her] in the Trekking Camp they will lose the baby. So, when they come and talk with me, “Can we leave [this] elephant with you?” When they come [near the end] of the pregnancy, three months before they give birth, they [the elephant] live with us. We don’t pay anything [for the elephant]. We pay the Mahout to come and stay with us. We have a policy. The Mahout must be the owner only to come and stay with us, and when they stay with us we decide when the mother gives birth the baby is safe. And, then after that the Mahout can live with us at least one year. We use this opportunity to train Mahout and make them understand how to go on positive reinforcement, but the culture is hard. Then, we use our one year opportunity to go and stay with the baby elephant to make sure they trust humans. Because the baby does not belong to us, one day they will walk out to work in the Tourist Industry. If there is not fear for people, and the people can trust, then the owners don’t train them the hard way as other elephants can do.

So, we use that time to educate the owner of the elephant, as well, to go and make sure they are there. One day when they have to leave and stay away from us, that baby will be in more pain from the training. That’s why we do what we can do now. It is just painful, you know, to see them lose their freedom of living in the park, to walk out and become a slave working. [It is] very confusing for the elephant, as well. But, we have no choice, you know. One choice [is] to say “no” for the first time and that elephant won’t survive, or the mother will kill the baby, again. Or, they accept them and I have to use this opportunity to educate them.

RM: When this happened recently and the elephants went back to the Trekking Company, I was reading on your website that it was emotionally very troubling for one of the elephants. They knew what was going on.

LC: Yeah, she didn’t want to leave and was screaming. It’s so tragic and brings a tear to us. And, you know, after they take her to train, she is falling down. We haven’t put it in the newsletter, yet, and she is falling down after training. They had to take her to the hospital. We can now rescue her from the hospital back to the park—unbelievable! When she arrived, all the herd welcomes to her, but she is totally changed, (motions head down in depression) like that. It takes time. It makes my heart . . . You know, it’s not all elephants that are like her, to come back to stay with the herd, again. But, to see her totally different. She started to talk to the other ones to tell her experience, what was going on when the owner took her. She refused to eat. That’s why she collapsed and they bring her to the hospital. And the owners know they have lost her because she is freedom. They (the owner) tried to bring her over there, tried to chain her and tried to make her do tricks. She can’t accept. When she came back today she listens to me and my . . . , to me as a woman who stays with her and never beat her, never train her. But, the Mahout who trained her in the village, now she refuses to listen to him.

RM: When you say “Mahout,” what is “Mahout”?

LC: The owner who looked after and takes her to train. When she is with us she feels safe. She has started to refuse him and is against him. She swings her trunk (motioning the elephant swings her trunk at the Mahout) to get away. But, when she comes to us [she is] so gentle. She just puts her head [to touch their chests], she puts her eyes down [to theirs]. *Mommy, help me.* And I had conversation with the owner, “Please let her come back to us.” She won’t listen to him. And, you can see, tomorrow I will show you how different. She is not confident like when she left before. When she came back she had become mental (emotional challenges). So sad.

RM: What are some of the other, besides trekking, do they have elephants that they train for circuses and other things too, or is it mostly all the trekking and the logging industries?

LC: I rescue from the circus and I rescue from street begging, rescue from the logging. One of the circus elephants, when I first rescue her, her name is Fasai, they chained her to a small roof and beat her. One day she stopped eating [until] she was starving to death. And then the owner knew that they would lose her. When I first found her she was tied at the legs (shown on video), and she jumped all around like a Kangaroo, all around the room. When the owner gave her food she grabbed the food and smacked it [hard to the ground]. And, her eyes were going blind. So, I had a conversation with the owner, and I wanted to rescue [her]. The owner, at first, said, “No, this elephant is only three and a half years old; we [will] still make money.” But, somehow they (the owner) gave [her] up.

I gave the food to her; she didn't accept the food from me. Her anger was over, like too much. She couldn't believe a human is her friend. So, when we take her to the park and we released her off of the chains she couldn't use her legs (shown on video). Every time when she walked following other baby elephants—they took her to run—she kicked her own [feet].

RM: She wasn't used to walking.

LC: Her legs were free but [she crossed them up trying to walk] and kicked her own leg all the time. Then, one day she turned and decided to lie down screaming like *I give up! I don't want anymore!* We take a long time to let her [be] free with the herd, and the herd was healing her; they touch her, comfort her. It is beautiful to see the way the adult mothers treat her, and they take her to the Mud Bath. When she went to the Mud Bath, other baby elephants climb up the river bank, mud bank. She (Fasai) stood up and sees *wow, they use their legs!* Then, she put her two legs together and jumped like she had the chains on her legs.

RM: The shackles.

LC: Yeah, she never learned how to use her legs like that (other baby elephants). For three and a half years she used them (her front legs) to jump. Traumatized. I think it was still in her mind.

RM: Mmmhmm.

LC: It took a long time, [but] today she start to be happy. And, then, when we rescue any baby elephant who comes from abuse to the park, and that baby is screaming and talk, she (Fasai) is the one who most understands. She will touch, comfort and kiss them, and stay with that baby for weeks talking, and talk in low sounds to the baby elephant. It is beautiful, you know, and the other baby elephants ask Honjan, but never pass Honjan. She touch and walk away; she not really feel. [Talking about an elephant in the herd who doesn't really "get it," because she was not so abused.] Mostly I find that elephants that get passed abuse will understand each other.

RM: Yes, they understand, like people who have been through abuse understand others who have been abused.

LC: Yeah.

RM: There is something that goes around the Internet, a video that has been going around the Internet showing an elephant painting with its trunk. And, everybody sees this and thinks *oh, it's so beautiful! Look how intelligent the elephant is.* But, then we heard later that there may be some abuse going on in training the elephants to do this. What's really going on with that program?

LC: It's a lot of things. Normally, I work for the elephants; I see what happens. And, the training for the baby elephants, when they start to work from the first step [of training], the baby elephant will go [be] forced to grab the brush.

RM: To grab what?

LC: Grab the brush. I was in that proceed before; I had a company from America come along, an expert on Elephant Painting, because I work with elephants and I want to be with them to learn. I don't refuse that; I want to go and see what's going on. Then, when they start to go and force—many of them don't force them—many give the brush [to the elephant]. The elephant uses the brush broken (motioning in half)

RM: Oh, they stomp on it and break it? (chuckling gently as cheering)

LC: By stomping with their feet or chewing and throw it away [with their trunk] over their heads. This is the thing that happens. Some people who train, they give up. The nature of the elephant is *no way are they going to get that.* I learned later how they force that. They (the trainers who don't give up) will go and start to really stab the baby elephant [who] does not listen. Some babies [are] terrified because they are passed from the person who gave up, and a new person comes to start to train. When they start to train . . .

I think I better show you a picture; I can't explain on this, and also, I recommend you to go and see how someplace they use baby elephants to paint. When you go and confirm it, don't stay on the audience side; you have to stay on the other side [where the baby is]. You know when in the camp they show you, say the baby elephant have to stand here (motioning with posture).

RM: Yes.

LC: The man stands at the other side—the audience on this side. (Audience cannot see what man is doing with the elephant.) The man will put a nail under here (motioning up into roof of mouth).

RM: A nail?

LC: Yeah, under here, and, all the time the baby elephant will pee before they paint.

RM: They pee. They are afraid.

LC: They can't control themselves.

RM: Yeah.

LC: They know that right away *I have to paint!*

RM: Yeah.

LC: It's beautiful. When you see the elephant painting it is amazing! If you investigate behind [it], you will know what is really behind it.

RM: Yes, they are being forced to do this.

LC: Even when I see it, I don't blame the people who buy elephant painting, or the people who go and do business with elephant painting if they didn't know that. But, if people know that, they will never do that.

RM: Yes.

LC: Because for myself I have many conservationist friends who work around the world who, when they see that painting in the documentary or on a website, they write to me and say, "That's amazing how intelligent the animal can do!", because they (the documentary or website) don't show all. Or, even the people who send that picture—the elephant painting with the trunk—but, who knows [what's going on] behind [what cannot be seen in the picture], before the picture.

RM: Yes.

LC: That's why it is time for us to stop it; *Elephant Painting is not necessary!*

RM: That's why I wanted to ask you because there is a lot of confusion because people are so enamored with the intelligence of the elephant and I had heard that there was a lot of cruelty. Thank you for clarifying that.

After all these years of living with the elephants and being with them, how do you see them as a Spirit? First, let me say this. One of the things I know you are trying to do is stop the practice of crushing the Spirit of the animal, and this is a 6,000 year old practice. What happens when you break the Spirit of the elephant? How do they do this? What do they do?

LC: They take the baby separate from the mother. When they take the baby away they make sure because the bond between mother and baby is *so strong*—I believe it is stronger than human can be—the mother can die for [missing] the baby, and, also not just the mother, the nanny.

RM: The aunties and the nannies.

LC: Everyone. You can see from us, the symbol is not wild elephant. Just see the elephant in the sanctuary who gets abused and has mental [challenges] when they join together, they way they show it. And, in freedom like in the jungle you can see the bond in the wild even more stronger than that. So, when they come into captivity, humans also can take some part of their sub-ritual; they can take some part of the elephant habitat. But when humans want to break the bond between mother and baby, they have to make sure that the baby forgets the mother. The way they train—I also will show you in documentary—the beaten and abused babies are seven days in the Training Crush, until the baby is totally insane.

RM: Seven days in what?

LC: In the Training Crush.

RM: The crush is where they train them and they beat them?

LC: Oh yeah.

RM: Because I've heard the word "crush" many times, and I assumed that might be what it is. Is that a training pit, or camp or something, or room?

LC: They have a station for that (shown on video). This is what they prepare for the baby elephant. But, after the abuse, totally the baby fears. It is emotional and *everything*, you know. The baby fears humans, and the baby forgets the mother. I couldn't believe I saw that. When the mother walked past her baby, come and touches her baby, the baby's eye looked at the mother, but don't know mother at all. After seven days the baby looks at the mother in front *empty*.

RM: Because they are so traumatized.

LC: Yes, and that is so sad. And, 40% of babies die in [the] Training Crush.

RM: Absolutely! Broken spirit, broken heart, no reason to live.

LC: I have—I worked with one baby which makes me feel guilty. I found that baby elephant because in Thailand we have no law. To see the baby elephant training, you can't complain to anyone. I saw that baby train, and then the next day I thought the baby was asleep. I found that baby died in the crush. When I saw they baby train the night before she used her trunk to pull my arm, and I could look into her eyes, you know. She just said *please help me*. You know what I told her? I said, "Baby, I will take this picture to go and help you. I will go and help you and promise that. Please be patient with your freedom; for the next couple days be strong. I will use my picture to speak for you. And, the next day we see her, she laid down and died. She pulled my arm, *please help*. This follows me; I feel guilty on that. I feel *why I didn't help her? Why I didn't pull her out? Why I didn't bring enough manpower to help her?* And, I feel so angry about that, and I promised myself I will never—I will stand up against them about this abuse thing! You know, that this happened, yeah!

RM: Good for you, yeah!

LC: That's why I stand up and speak every day now: *No more elephants in cusps! No more Elephant Painting!* They should [cut it] out. It is not necessary for humans.

RM: It is not necessary. It is a novelty item, and in truth, if you had people who were kind and loving to elephants, like you are, won't the elephants very happily be there, and if you need something would they be willing to help you, if you needed help? Or, is it best . . . I'm just trying to look at it a different way. If they didn't abuse them, is there a way they could get there cooperation on certain things in life? I know they have been used for thousands of years for work, for pulling logs and things like that. Is there a way that can be done humanely, so they can still work? Or, should they just be left alone completely?

LC: I think what has happened is, first I'll talk about the Tourist Industry. The Tourist Industry with elephants brings a lot of money for Thailand. Then to go and change the idea of this is like I walk against the wall because they just say, "This is the way we make money; you don't come and tell us what to do." As well for logging. I try to go and educate different businesses like the Tourist Industry. I try to do it many ways, you know, like I stand up against the cruelty, then I moved back to be soft, go back again to be their friend. In the Tourist Industry now I try to work with the government to work on how to pull the baby elephant out from the street. There is a lot of thing you go and do, but it seems very difficult because the money and benefits made from elephants is bigger than anything else—bigger than one voice like me can speak when the government supports that.

RM: What/who supports it?

LC: The government. The government supports it. If you go and see it now, the Thai Government, in the Thai T. T. like Thai Airways, if you come, they will show documentary about Elephant Painting. The Tourist Authority also has a promotion about Elephant Painting. Organizations like me, when I started to go and do that my voice was (motions tiny with fingers). That's why I started to have Education Program. I believe Education can change the future of elephants. We have a Volunteer Program. This volunteer comes like 20 (people) a week. I have hope from them. They will help me to go and speak Education with more friends and family. The more we speak out, the more elephants are saved. I do every day; I tell the volunteers you will be the Friend for Elephant Protection. Every day when I speak to people I believe I build friends more and more and more, and I am the gatekeeper.

RM: Yes, absolutely.

LC: This I build now to protect elephants. This - I changed my way; before I used to stand up and fight. I stand back and changed my way to fight for the elephants.

RM: Your strategy, yes, mmmhmm. Let's talk a little bit about the elephants, themselves, and the magic that you have seen in them all these years, and their finest traits.

LC: What do you mean?

RM: Like, the very best you see—kind of the magical aspect of being around elephants—the best parts.

LC: OK. Oh, I have a story of how wonderful elephants [are]. The tale never ends, but one thing I see about elephants is their love between each other. This, I could not find from any Human Being. When an elephant submits to love someone else, they really love and [have] loyalty. I have seen like Mepurm and Chokia, the blind elephant. One elephant adopted the blind elephant; she became the eyes of that blind elephant. They are never apart, even when Chokia walks in the field, and some buck comes to her, Chokia calls Mepurm. Sometimes Mepurm, she has good eyes, she goes and sees something, when Tokia calls her just a little bit she runs (to Chokia), and she is talking and taking care. They touch each other and comfort each other. And, one time I found around Chokia, [she] had a bunker—a big hole around Chokia.

RM: Mmmhmm.

LC: I was surprised. Why Chokia had dug so many holes around her?

RM: She had dug all these holes around her.

LC: Yeah, not just her (she did not dig them herself). Mepurm help dug the holes to protect Chokia at night. Then, they move to another place and go and do it, again. And, I wondered what is going on. Something is wrong about that. During that they started to grab the grass and weeds and put a cover on that to make sure it is like that is no hole. Then, as I started to go and ask what's going on, I found out Chokia's Mahout fight with other Mahout, and then other Mahout said . . .

RM: When you say Mahout, what do you mean?

LC: Mahout is the elephant keepers, (and/or owner from earlier definition)

RM: Because Chokia had fought with the elephant keepers before?

LC: No, her Mahout, her keeper fight with the other elephant keeper, and then—I'm not there—but, the other one said, "I will revenge you! I will come and hurt you by stabbing your elephant!"

RM: Oh! So, she was protecting . . .

LC: Mepurm start to build the thing around Chokia, so that if that man come the Mahout is really gated (trapped). And, after I found that out—unbelievable, the way they love each other is amazing! And, one thing I said, the humans are not the same; [elephants are] more polite. The more they stay together, the more polite; opposite from humans. They might argue over things (motioning a little physical tug of war), but when they submit to be friends, they are polite; and they love each other; they care for each other.

RM: They help with child rearing with each other; all of the females come together, the aunties and the nannies, they all help raise the babies?

LC: Oh yeah. Yep. And, even when I see the great one elephant, she is the old grandmother; she is falling down—her friends screaming. Then we run to the shelter; we saw the friend had pushed her up to lift and the Mahout lifted her up, and then after she was lifted as well they walked together to the field. *If you're going to fall, not to fall in the shelter; but in the weeds and the soft grass.* Then, during that time when that elephant fell because she is old she did not die in one day . . .

RM: But, this is a big deal when they are old and they fall down, sometimes it is very, very difficult for them to get back up, right?

LC: Yeah.

RM: And, the other elephants will help her to get up?

LC: No. She gets up only in the shelter because of the cement. Then they walk together to the field and they fall down, and then she stand up (the one helping the old one). And we tried to pull her away because we didn't understand. We said, "Come out." *No.* We had to bring food for her, and even when we bring the food, she would take the food and bring [it] in front of her friend (the old one). In the hot Sun she grabbed the sand and throw to her friend, cover her friend. She wanted her friend to cool down and be comfortable. We had to bring water to her, bring food to her. She didn't move for 12 days. She didn't move for 12 days in there. Normally, I would want to go at night and make here sleep. But, I wanted to see what was going on. And, they talk with each other. Amazing, on day number 13 . . .

RM: The what?

LC: The day number 13 after falling down, the friend (that was helping the old one) who has not eaten stands up, walks to an old dirt shelter, walks there and dies—to die in the shelter.

RM: To die in the shelter.

LC: Because the friend she stand in the Sun too much, she walked and died in there. You wouldn't believe every day after that friend died, (the old one) sniff, sniff wherever she had been to stand up there and mourn for a long time, and after that she died—not long after that.

RM: Ooohh, such loyalty!

LC: Yeah, she died after that and it was heartbreak for us. She [would] not accept any new friend, again, but she died after that. So sad.

RM: They were like friends to the end. What is the highest potential for the friendship between humans and elephants? It seems that you exemplify that. They love you; you love them. Is there a place for friendships between humans and elephants?

LC: Yes, I think if the human try to do, but the humans refuse that. The human always believes *I am the boss*. I think the humans build a wall to block their feelings.

RM: They build a what?

LC: They build a wall between that feeling . . .

RM: Yeah, they build a wall.

LC: Between that feeling, between that relationship. Elephants have the heart for that, but human doesn't accept. Humans always [think] *I'm better than you*; humans want to command elephants, and that is so sad because we can't have feelings from both sides. So, elephant not trust humans. Most elephants come to the park already they have abuse by Man. And, when they arrive in the park sometimes it is very difficult for us to make them trust us again. And, I'm not blaming the elephants. If you see in what [ways] they have been abused, you will know that these animals are very, very "for keeps". For me, if I'm young and someone abuses me like that, I won't accept food from the hand. I think if people have experience with the tiger bite, people will be afraid of tigers for life.

RM: Sure.

LC: Imagine that elephant abused by Man, that elephant come to the park and *still for keeps, accept the other humans to go and touch and feed*. That's amazing! And, also, I have an example. I had received an elephant from the trekking that had a mental issue, and she came with a baby. When she first arrived she was quite sick and we treated her. She got much better, and her baby grew up. Then, she started to reproduce, again, with Najer, our bull in there, and her (grown) baby start to go and take here milk. [The] mother didn't want the baby to take her milk. She started to want to put the baby out of the herd. So, we made an announcement for the new Mahout to come. Many Mahout came to like an interview. Then, I accepted one young boy. He seemed like he had a lot of experience for the elephant. During this time, this elephant, she was very friendly. Every time when the people see her she would open her mouth waiting for food—she opened her mouth like a hippopotamus ready for food.

RM: Like a hippopotamus, yes. (laughing together)

LC: Then when I gave the bread and the banana to the boy, "Go and see her."

RM: He was feeding her a banana.

LC: Yeah, because she loved two things: banana and bread. "Give banana to her first." When she saw this boy, this Mahout, she closed her mouth. The boy said, "Oh, she doesn't want; she is not hungry." I said, "No way! This elephant 24 hours [is] hungry." I walked to her with the banana and she opened her mouth wide for me. And he said, "Because I am a stranger she didn't accept me." I said, "Alright, I'll show you." I called the people who just received a day pass, [visit] for one day to come stand up and [I] put the banana for them, and put the boy in the middle of the line. Everyone walked [up], she opened the mouth for them. When she saw that boy she closed her mouth. She [would] not accept. "Why?" I said. "Tell me. Did you know this elephant before?" "No, I didn't know." "Alright, if you don't know her, take her to the river." She had the rope (motions around neck). He had the rope to take her to the river. She pulled the rope and ran screaming. She [was] not just screaming; she was screaming for other elephants to run, including her daughter.

RM: Warning them.

LC: Warning them. And I said, "Tell me. I know elephants never lie. You tell me the truth and then I might give you another job." [He said], "If you give me another elephant I will tell you I have know this elephant before." "How long?" "I know this elephant [from] 12 years ago, when she was teenage I was

her Mahout.” And, she liked to open the mouth, and he [was] teaching her when he ordered her to open the mouth he put her own poop toward her mouth.

RM: He put her poop in there. So, after what?--a dozen years she remembered that that boy put her poop in her mouth! And, elephants are renowned for their incredible memory that lasts throughout their lives. How old do elephants live to be? What is the lifespan?

LC: Same as human. If they are happy some of them can stay for 90 years. Average is 70 to 90 years.

RM: What happens to the ones who are abused and they are overworked, as such?

LC: Some of them, it's too bad, they say about 50 years, you know. It just depends. Many of them are falling down younger than that. And, I just had a list; I just read recently in the Elephant Graveyard, in the cemetery two days ago; 89 elephants [were] of an average age of three months to ten years. There is a lot of them that die, and the reason is no reason but sickness, starvation, and a lot of them have no ["reason"] why they die, but I know it is from human abuse. And, it's too bad, you know, to see the baby elephants falling down like that.

RM: So, tomorrow we are going to join you out at the Elephant Preserve, and I can't tell you how excited we are because you have a new baby. And, this comes right after the loss of one of the old bulls. And everyone was very sad to lose Max.

LC: Yeah. Same day.

RM: Same day.

LC: The baby was born the same day we lost the boy, our old boy. But Max, you know, when I first rescued Max, it's amazing, I had a couple from the U.K., one who wanted to rescue elephants and they had money. They followed me to the Elephant Cusps. They had about 300 elephants marching on that field that day. There were many elephants ready to go, and you know, they (keepers) wanted to sell away. Some of them were very beautiful. And then I saw Max walk very tall like a robot—slowly, very slowly and skinny. And, I talked to the people who want to help me to buy an elephant. I said, “I want that elephant.” They looked at me; they said, “That elephant is going to die the next day if you buy it.” I said, “Please help me. You know I want to help that poor boy. Even if I take him to the park one day and he dies, I want him to die [with] dignity and happy; die [with] freedom.” And, I [did] not expect Max to stay with me a year, but I expected a month. And Max stayed with me since 2002; his falling down in 2009, six and a half years.

RM: So, seven years—six and a half years—he was with you. How old was he when he died would you guess.

LC: I guess about 75.

RM: 75 years old!

LC: Since we rescued him every day he made me so afraid. He couldn't wake up in the morning because he his legs could not . . .

RM: His legs were bound (memory), yeah.

LC: Then, one day he walked all around the park and was very famous with the girls; all the girls liked him.

RM: All the girls liked him; he was a ladies man. (laughing together).

LC: He [was] not aggressive; he [was] gentle.

RM: Yeah.

LC: And he is the one who balanced with the other boy, so the girls who are afraid of the other bull, they started to walk him (Max) because they know he was not well.

RM: He was a gentleman and so the girls were comfortable with him.

LC: Yeah. When Max [was] on musk (ready to mate)—normally [span] for the musk sometimes it can be between four to seven months. Max on musk only a month, maximum two months. All the girls came along; the baby elephants go and touch him and not long Max come off of musk because he had become non-aggressive. He did not remember the Mahout, keeper. But, all elephants they gave him plenty [of] love.

RM: That's wonderful. So, I guess the next thing is tomorrow.

**Video of Elephant Nature Park
Chiang Mai Province**

(Approximately 5 minutes. Truly magical!)

RM: If you have an interest in spending time among these amazing elephants, you can contact Lek's organization in Chiang Mai, Thailand. It is called the Elephant Nature Park, not to be confused with all of the other elephant parks offering trekking, Elephant Painting, and the like. The website is at www.elephantnaturepark.org. The experience is life-changing, and Scott and I felt particularly honored to be in such close contact with the baby, now too heavy to play with. Two big "thumbs up" on this one. Until next time, thanks for watching CMN.