

THE VILLAGE NEIGHBORHOOD

By Rachel Kramer

Down the street from the huge open space in front of the temple stands the largest home in the community. At the corner, on the brick wall are the characters and an arrow that let one know that down the lane behind the walled home is an "old style" convenient store shop. Its open front and friendly owner make it a place where neighborhood people drop by for a bottle of tea from the old refrigerator. In the late afternoons a group of people circle tables for the gambling game. In the morning people come and go, purchasing a tea, a cola, or a beer. Some buy and leave, others sit in one of the old plastic chairs and chat, or just sit. Whatever is fine.

One day a small group of thirsty outsiders saw the faded sign of the store down the lane and walked over to pick up beverages and to find some conversation. A couple of people from northern Taiwan, a pastor from rural Iowa and the mission office secretary found the owner warm and willing to talk. So they sat. And they talked, in Taiwanese, Mandarin, in English with translation. They were Christians looking for God's direction to share some good news with out-lying villagers in the poorest county in Taiwan. What they found was a woman who once was coerced into baptism although she didn't understand. As they talked, one told her more about their faith. They told her words from the Bible. They prayed.

The following day they returned. This time the owner called her aunt who was discouraged and down. This visit led to a revelation that this aunt, with property problems and limited finances, did not like to go to the local temples to make requests of the gods. She didn't have enough to give back to the gods in response to her requests. She didn't want to be indebted to them. The outsiders told her about this God who gives freely to those who ask.

Several weeks later, the secretary makes a phone call. The following day she returns to the shop with a local international worker. The owner and her aunt are there, expecting them. They wonder why the visit. But it's to get to know each other, to sit and chat, to understand the life and to hopefully share more about the God who cares. They talk. They drink tea. People come by. Some are curious. Most are older and weathered from hard work in the fields. Another international worker drops by on his scooter. Chants from two nearby funeral tents run in the background.

An old man comes in and sits. As we visit, we notice tears in the old man's eyes, and the owner explains. His son is a drunkard, and he comes home to his Vietnamese wife, children and family and treats them poorly. The wife is a good wife but she has threatened suicide. People express concern, he wipes his eyes and one man gives him a beetlenut as a gesture of sympathy. The man sits and the people talk. The aunt goes to get her twin granddaughters to introduce to the visitors. A dressed up Indonesian older woman drops by on a scooter, is in and out, and heads out to a KTV.

A group of kids buy some drinks. The secretary inserts testimony into conversation and the international worker plays with the twin five year old girls. They have thirteen year old sisters, twins too. Soon it is noon, time to leave, and a Scripture portion and Dandelion magazine are left in the hands of the owner....until the next visit to the place where the neighborhood drops by.