

## *The SEARLES in THAILAND*

**Field:** P.O. Box 21, NakornNayok 26000, Thailand, [searles4thailand@gmail.com](mailto:searles4thailand@gmail.com)

**Board:** C. M.C., PO Box 219228, Houston, TX 77218-9228, Phone: (281) 599-7411, [contact@cmcmissions.org](mailto:contact@cmcmissions.org)

**Home Church:** Lighthouse Baptist Church 14251 Chancellor Blvd, Port Charlotte, FL 33953, (941) 624-6462

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At least 20 years ago, a fellow missionary named David Speights traveled to one of the northernmost regions of Thailand. There, he met a young man who had just accepted the Lord and was eager to study. The national's name was SomBoon. It was initially David, followed by Tim Ekno, who taught SomBoon, but instructing this man of God required little effort. SomBoon was passionate about knowing God! He became an enthusiastic witness and sought to help his people learn about Jesus Christ. Over the years, Dave moved from the North, and Tim returned to the States, but SomBoon remained faithful. On Tim's many trips back and forth from the States to Thailand, he was always involved in SomBoon's projects, as many of us were. No matter how unconventional they were, their core purpose was to spread the Gospel. His aim was to establish churches throughout the North. SomBoon suffered from gout and later diabetes; he lost a leg, yet despite these challenges, his mission was to share the gospel and serve God. A few Sundays ago, I learned that SomBoon had gone home to be with the Lord. I heard the news on Sunday, was on a plane on Monday, and SomBoon was buried on Tuesday. I'm sure there were 200 people at the viewing and then at the gravesite. The Thai preachers who conducted the service were all individuals whom SomBoon had influenced. In honor of Dave Speights, they requested him to deliver the final message at the gravesite, although at least ten Thai preachers could have done as well. As missionary Ricky Salmon and I sat by as they closed the grave, we reminisced over the past 45 years. From no independent works to at least 40, from everything relying on missionaries to nothing needing to be done by them. What a blessing!

I attended the funeral in ChingRi to pay my respects to SomBoon and the people who loved him. However, the main reason I wanted to go was to gain some perspective for myself. What we are blessed to witness is "the end of the beginning." The church would continue even if all the missionaries were expelled tomorrow. It truly doesn't get much better than that.

Thank you for letting us see this!

Tim & Maureen