

## Listening and Learning by Steve Goode

Humility means that we can listen and learn from anyone, literate or illiterate, urban or rural, rich or poor, male or female, young or old, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, or Animist.

The late Tom Brewster, a quadriplegic from a swimming accident, had an indelible impact upon us in YWAM Thailand during our ministry to Indochinese refugees in the 1980s. He, his wife Betty Sue and son Jed made a big impression in the camps along the Thai-Cambodian border. The refugees had never seen a motorized wheelchair nor met a person like Tom with his tape recorder and 'endless loop tapes.' Tom learned basic phrases in Khmer and quickly was giving proficient greetings to other refugees in their own language. They were amazed!

In the world's eyes, Tom was severely disabled and would be dependent upon someone else for the rest of his life. From Tom's perspective, however, he was simply "paralyzed from the neck down."\*

He was a learner, an observer, inquisitive to know and understand about different peoples, their languages, their cultures, their worldview and how missionaries might bond with them, develop relationships and communicate in word and deed the good news of Jesus. Tom shared this attitude of learning primarily in the area of language and culture but this attitude applies to every aspect of our lives.

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In the process of serving the poor and needy, we have developed relationships with people who have been rejected by others and who thought they had also been rejected by God. They felt that poverty and rejection was their fate in life: to be born, to eke out a miserable existence and then to die. That was it!

However, we have come to learn that through observing, asking questions and getting next to the poor in a variety of circumstances, there is something in this process that affirms dignity, self-worth and value. It produces hope because someone takes time and believes in another person.

We often think that a poor, rural Muslim mother has very little to contribute because she is illiterate, or an animist slum dweller will always be dependent or needing assistance, or someone forced into prostitution will never break free. Is it possible that some of these needy people are just missing an opportunity, a divine chance?



We have a relationship with an infinite God who sought us when we were not seeking Him, don't we? The poor and needy have much to give and simply need some opportunities to break out of their closed systems and to see their dreams come true. There is suffering along the way, but it is possible.

Listening to someone else is a powerful tool of both learning and influencing. One of the ways God usually teaches us is through others, and in working with the poor we have learned much more than we have ever contributed. Author Stephen Covey has stated that "Listening is one of the most significant ways that we influence people." Have you ever noticed how many questions Jesus asked in order to listen?

Listening and learning are keys in the foundations of YWAM's work in Mercy Ministries. More workers are needed to serve the poor, people who are listeners and learners, people who can make a difference in the lives of those forgotten, rejected or exploited. If you want more information, contact us at [ywammi@loxinfo.co.th](mailto:ywammi@loxinfo.co.th).

*Steve Goode is YWAM's International Director of Mercy Ministry. \*A recently published book by Tom Brewster's brother Dan gives more detail to Tom's amazing life. Called, Paralyzed from the Neck Down, it is available from World Christian News & Books ([www.ywam.org](http://www.ywam.org))*

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