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The loss of our beloved King, His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej:
The public response to The King of Thailand Birthplace Foundation (KTBF)
By Cholthanee Koerojna, President

On Wednesday morning October 12, I heard on the radio on the way to work about the illness of the late His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej. All day, I watched news on Internet until 2:00 AM Thursday, October 13 to hear updates on HM's health condition, wishing he could recover.

Early Thursday, I was awoken by a sobbing voice on the phone. Although the person did not say a word, I knew ... my head was pounding and I was not feeling well. We lost our beloved king. I got up and went on my computer right away.

Ever since, calls and emails poured in, from out of the U.S in Asia, Middle East and countries whose names I had not before known. I told them that as I did not feel well, I preferred not to talk, as I needed time to be calm. But requests for interviews with press and media kept coming all day. One repeated question was what the foundation planned to do for our loss. My answer was I was unprepared for this, and my mind was still lost, my heart was deeply sad and my brain was empty. I lost my heart and soul during this time.

Calls and questions from local people kept pouring in "what, when and where will we be doing"? After interviews with about 10 press/media reporters for several hours, I decided to email the foundation's committee members, the historic homeowners and Thai community leaders to spread the news of our loss and plan to meet: "We will be meeting at 7:00 pm tonight at King Bhumibol Adulyadej Birthplace Monument at the King Square in Cambridge."

Although I had to go to work, media requests kept flowing in all day. I emailed the President and Vice President of Mount Auburn Hospital to inform our loss and alert them of the people's visit for the king's mourning. I called Cambridge Police Department and Executive Director of Charles Hotel to alert them of the evening gathering, and I emailed the Cambridge Department of Public Works to inform them that we did not have time to submit an application for a permit to block the Harvard Square sidewalk area due to the urgency. Everyone was very cooperative.

After the message went out, I received calls from our staff that many people went to gather at the King's square. Our staff was there with them guiding them to place flowers and borrowed a table from the hotel. The people, Thai and Americans were flowing in non-stop.

I arrived there at 7:00 pm, with a heavy heart and an empty mind. The square was so packed it overflowed to the Charles Square area. There was no space to stand or walk, so it took me a long time to walk through the crowd into H.M. King Birthplace monument, which is a central place for people who love the king to come to honor and pay respect to His Majesty.



Our staff, Somnuk Pulling did a great job comforting and guiding people. So many beautiful flowers were laid in front and around monument with shining candlelight. Our MC announced the evening agenda. I thanked people for coming to join us and gave a mourning speech. I also invited people to talk. We performed a vigil candle lighting and moment of silence. The people did not want to leave, wanting to stay with H.M. at his monument. Many of us felt that he still lives because he is in all of our hearts. I estimated that over 500 people were in attendance.

This group of people started moving out after 10:30 pm. A second large group of people started coming in after 11:00 pm till pass midnight. This group included more than 200 people.

Also that afternoon, at the two Gloucester historic sites of Trail of Thai Royal in Massachusetts, and the third Gloucester site where KTBFB installed a plaque at the former summer residence of the Siam Legation, Amy Shapiro-Kaznocha and Ed Kaznocha placed two yellow roses and a remembrance cards by each plaque to pay respect and to honor the king, and share in our loss.

I barely slept on Thursday evening because of the condolence messages from many people by phone and email. I also received messages about people placing flowers at the king's historic home and the hospital. There was a big pile of flowers at the monument that evening.

On Friday October 14, I contacted Cambridge Department of Public Works (DPW) to inform them of the gathering and the amount of flowers and candles on Thursday night and to request that they be allowed to remain there for a week. Wat Nawamintarachutis called to inform us that the monks would do religious ceremony for the King at the temple in the morning and at the King Monument at 3:52 pm on Saturday. I coordinated with the community to join us at the monument on Saturday afternoon.

Meanwhile, I was informed that so many people continue going to the King Monument and placed a lot of flowers there. I contacted Cambridge DPW again to request extending the time to leave flowers until Sunday October 23. The city was very cooperative allowing our request, if we could keep the area clear for public to pass. I promised not to disturb the public and agreed with the city that we will monitor activities and manage the area every day and night, and we did.

We visited 63 Longwood Ave and hospital area at the historic plaque and historic wall to observe activities. We found flowers, pictures and items related to the king placing before his picture and the plaque. We managed the flowers and items that people placed there, to ensure that mourning the king will not cause a privacy problem to the historic home owners, the hospital employees and patients.



We stayed at the king birthplace monument until late on Friday evening and met many people who came long way to pay respect to the king. The pile of flowers had doubled by Friday evening. We arranged the flowers to make path for bicycle and people to walk by.

On Saturday October 15 we were at the King's square to watch activities, arrange flowers and candles. People kept coming till late evening. Many people returned from Thursday evening. We chatted with many people until late evening. Some came from as far away as New York, New Jersey, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New Hampshire and Thailand. We were informed that many people also went to Mount Auburn Hospital. I was concerned when hearing that a group of people went to sing for the king at the hospital. Good intention may turn to bad reflection to our beloved king by disturbing patients or hospital employee privacy. I urged people to respect the privacy at the hospital and announced if any group has an idea to perform any activity, to contact us so that we can make arrangements and coordinate it for them.

One especially interesting group of 5 teenagers and men were from Texas. While we were managing flowers and candles without asking for help, these young men sat and bent around the flowers piles, rearranging flowers, filling in and relighting the candles as we were doing. They continued this for nearly an hour, patiently and neatly. I thanked them and asked where they came from, as I always asked and thanked the other people. The group leader said they came to be with the King.

As they did not appear to be Thais, I asked how he knew the king. He said, “*Call me Deshay*” and showed me his driver license card. My husband Mana spoke with him earlier while the young man helped Mana arrange flowers and candles. Deshay is a son of Thai mother and Burmese father. The 4 teenagers are his nephews who came to accompany him. He drove with his relatives from Texas after hearing of the passing of his beloved king on Thursday. He said his mother is now in Bangkok. He told his mother that he must come to meet the king in Cambridge. It took him 2 days to arrive in Massachusetts. He stayed at the hotel out of Boston and drove to Cambridge. He was not familiar with Boston/Cambridge and got \$100 parking ticket fine.



Left: Cholthanee & Deshay Right: Deshay's nephews

On Sunday we joined Wat Nawamin for religious ceremony at the temple in the morning and went to the King Square in the afternoon. There was quite a large group attending as usual. Many repeated people come every day just having the feeling to be with the king.

We did routine work rearranging flowers and candles as usual and went to do the same at the hospital. The group from Texas came back again and stayed with us helping on our routine work as usual after most people left. Deshay told us that he would be leaving Cambridge to Dallas that evening. I thanked him and the rest of four teenagers and encouraged him to take off.

On Monday I gave Mount Auburn President and Vice President an update of the hospital visit during weekend and sent them pictures of two mourning areas, the historic wall and plaque at the hospital. I also spoke with the Vice President, who appreciated our reminding the community to

respect the privacy of the hospital community. I was informed that the mourning was peaceful that day and the traffic had increased.

At the same time I also reported to Cambridge DPW and Cambridge Historical Commissioner of the status of the King's square.



On Monday after work we went to perform routine work at the monument and hospital again as usual. Somnuk Pulling volunteered to stay at the monument that evening. We met many people from long distance again including the people from Thailand who happened to visit the area at this time. We took some of them to the hospital. We met a few people who came every night again. More flowers and people still come every day and night.

During this evening I received an email and a call from Deshay, the young Texan, informing me that he and his nephews arrived in Dallas safely. He said he is very happy to have an opportunity to meet his beloved king at King Birthplace Monument. Amazingly he believed that the king was here. He thanked us for giving him and his relatives an opportunity to be helpful at the monument and do something good for the king. He said he is a Muslim, but he will go to the Thai Buddhist temple in Texas to pray for the king. He said he knew a very large temple there.

We were asked to organize a gathering again and leave flowers even longer. Someone suggested leaving for 100 days, a Thai cultural belief. A frequent question was, since we had come to the King's monument on December 5th every year in the past, what will we be doing this year?

I decided to schedule a gathering at the King Monument every Saturday evening at 7:00 pm and 11:00 pm for a month. We will decide after the KTBF annual meeting to perform a special event on December 5th and on the 100th day of passing. I will coordinate and request permission from the city.

These experiences have proven how much people love our Thai King and are sad to lose him. The Trail of Thai Royalty in Massachusetts and King Bhumibol Adulyadej Birthplace monument are places of focus and of stories for many people including the press and media. Inquiries are

still flowing in every day. Because people feel in their hearts that the King is at the Birthplace Monument of the King, that is where they want to bring their hearts, to meet the King there.



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