

**New Years 2013:
Conflicts Are a Powerful Tool... If We Embrace Them**



Julien Gryp is the co-director of New Life and in charge of the everyday management of New Life. Julien is the longest-standing staff member at New Life so he has also the deepest knowledge about the changes New Life has been going through. He has seen how New Life has evolved from a small recovery community with only a couple of residents into a much larger community sometimes hosting even 20 residents and 20 volunteers at the same time.

We all know the story of a small rock band playing in pubs for many years. Finally it begins to get more famous and to have more audience. It will evolve into a stadium band playing to large masses. This doesn't necessarily mean that its music will become better or worse. It just shows how a life situation is always changing and evolving. New Life also follows this basic movement of life and we wanted to interview Julien and hear how he sees these changes in New Life.

Hello Julien! Could you tell a little bit about your history, where were you born, how many years did you spend in a monastery and how many years have you now been the co-director of New Life?

I was born in Belgium and lived there most of my childhood. I was drinking and using drugs from the age of 15 until I was about 24 years old. At that time I was doing badly, I was a junkie, I was an alcoholic, I was a terrible liar and manipulator and a thief. Then my father gave me one last chance, he proposed me to come to Thailand because he had found out that there was a monastery which was also a detox center. It seemed to be some kind of last resort for addicts. I was not motivated but the moment I entered the monastery I was immersed in the whole lifestyle of the monks and the nuns, the atmosphere, the meditation, the chanting, the work. So I gave it a chance and afterwards I thought it was a wonderful program. After 30 days I decided to stay longer and learned to work without expecting anything in return, learned to support the community. So I stayed there 8 years as a Buddhist monk after which I came to New Life in April 2010. The first resident came in June 2010.

Do you miss your home country anymore? What are the things that you most love about Thailand?

I miss my parents, I miss my friends and there are days that I feel I miss my home city and the culture in Belgium. But that is quite rare, I love Thailand, I loved being a monk, I love Thai people, I love Thai food, I love Thai culture, I love everything about it and I have loved it since the very beginning.

At the beginning there was far less people here at New Life. The atmosphere must have been quite different compared to the current situation. What would you say is the biggest change in the atmosphere of New Life?

This is a difficult question because I have been here every day for 2 and half years, it changes every day and I am part of that change too. So for me it's difficult to recognize this change in the atmosphere of New Life. It would be much easier for somebody who was here 2 and half years ago and who came back today. Nevertheless, I would say that the main difference is that it has become much more mature, the atmosphere, the program, everything is better and more professional.

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There is so many different personalities at New Life that sometimes it will inevitably create personality crashes. Also sometimes we hear sad news about former New Life residents and volunteers. What is the best way for you to forget the past and live in the now?

One of the main lessons of mindfulness is that everything we encounter in life is part of our path, part of our growth, and especially all the conflicts and all the difficulties and the pain and the suffering and when the things really start going wrong. These are actually the most important lessons in our lives, they are a powerful tool, but only if we have the right attitude! We have to embrace them and learn from them and then the attitude is right. Of course we don't always succeed in this, it is not an easy task, but we can try.

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When you look at the situation of New Life, right now, what would you say is the best thing about it?

Oh, this is an easy question! The best thing is the people of course, all the people that have come here. The people are our greatest asset, that's why we have grown so much, because of all the people that have come here to support and to share and to work together in this atmosphere. It's so peaceful and serene here but the people are definitely the best thing!

Now let's take a look into the future. New Life has now almost reached its accommodation capacity and the financial side of New Life looks good. As a co-director, what is the closest thing to your heart that you would like to improve?

Yes, there are a couple of things that I feel are very important. The first thing is to move towards sustainability and self-reliance. This is an important part of our mission in the coming year 2013. It's a big step because there is so much involved – the food, the energy, everything. I feel also that our program hasn't improved enough from the beginning. We should implement more and more mindfulness into everything we are doing: the work, the way we brush our teeth, the way we listen to each other. It's wonderful what we learn in the meditation but we have to also use it all day long!

Has it always been important for you that New Life would have a meaning on a global scale?

To become something really important globally is not part of our mission, but we are still affecting people all around the world. Every minute of the day we are spreading goodness. If even one person here gains something spiritually, then the whole world gains something. The community spirit here is to care for each other. Whether it is a resident, a volunteer or a staff member, they all care very much. Yeah, this is what makes this place special!