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Michael Castelbuono
Andrews University

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A Radical Transformation

BY MICHAEL CASTELBUONO

I never really wanted to teach, and I'm not one to pursue adventure. But after spending a year as a student missionary in Thailand, I can easily see how the power of God was working in my life. He worked through me to give me the strength to do things I've never done or that I thought I wasn't capable of.

I arrived in Bangkok unsure of what to expect. To my surprise, I found 14-story shopping malls, western buffet-style restaurants, 7-Elevens and movie theaters at every corner. At first I was disappointed. This experience was supposed to free me from materialistic pleasures and take me away from the kind of world I was already familiar with. I wanted an experience isolated from the secular world, so I could have more time for spiritual matters. But God had a plan.



Michael Castelbuono (center) recalls, "They looked harmless, but the eyes staring back at me in the classroom were [some] of the scariest things I've ever had to face."

At the Seventh-day Adventist Language School, I primarily taught English to students ranging in age from five to 50, from the beginner to the advanced. At first, I thought I would really enjoy teaching kids and dreaded the pressure of teaching adults intent and dedicated to learn English. When that first day of teaching adults arrived, I was nervous. Four students walked through the door. They had smiles on their faces, but I knew I was under a microscope as they tried to figure out this foreigner standing before them.

After introductions, I was pleasantly surprised to find myself thinking, *This is actually going pretty well!* All too soon my confidence crumbled. A student raised her hand and said, "Teacher, can you slow down, please?" I was so accustomed to speaking in English, trying to slow it down to a

teaching pace was a foreign concept. I felt the stares. I feared they each had hopes of seeing me fail. Luckily, I had to go make copies and was able to escape the stares for a few brief moments. A few moments was all I needed to ask for God's help for the class to go smoothly. I walked back into the classroom with a whole new outlook on those four sets of staring eyes: *These are people with a genuine interest in learning.* Before I knew it, God erased my fears. Looking

back, that was my favorite class.

I didn't spend my time as a student missionary going door to door or preaching or building churches. Instead, God gave me unique witnessing experiences while teaching. Through my actions, I showed my students God's love, and that often led to one-on-one conversations about Jesus Christ, His sacrifice and Christianity. Yet, not only was I able to affect others' lives, but I experienced a radical transformation as well. It was during my time as a student missionary when fears caused me to rely solely on God for strength and guidance. It was then—amid the noise of a modern city and fast-paced lifestyle—when I heard more answers to prayer than I ever had in my entire life.

Michael Castelbuono is a senior at Andrews University. He is studying computer science and math.