

Christel Chappell

I'll preface this by giving a bit of background about myself. I grew up on a farm in a tiny town in southwest Georgia that no one's ever heard of. In fact, when I say the name of that town, I'm often asked to repeat it a few times. Later, I attended the University of Alabama. (At least people have heard of *that*.) Yep, this means my entire life has been spent in the rural southern part of the United States.

And there you have it. Not much, I know, but I believe it's enough information to get you thinking, "This girl hasn't seen much." And you're right... or, you *were* right.

For a bit more info, I'll also tell you that I majored in English. I remember being told countless times that it was the stupidest major to have, ever. (I've gotten incredibly good at stonewalling my face as I'm blatantly insulted, by the way.) I remember being told I would be unemployed over and over... and over. (Yay, more insults!) I remember being told I should get comfortable with the idea that I will be back living with my parents in no time. (No, just, no.) I also remember that every time the person I was speaking to found out that I was seeking a degree in English, I was then always (and I mean, ALWAYS) asked, "Oh, are you going to be a teacher?"

Since this is a testimonial and I don't want to perjure myself, I'll be straight about my answer. My answer was always (and I mean, ALWAYS), "God, no!" This was typically followed by a gagging sound.

What did I really want to be? A writer, an editor, a wine connoisseur, a chocolate connoisseur (I don't know if those exist, but that would be epic.), a lawyer (Yes, I know, but it was legitimately something I was considering at the time.), and maybe I wanted to pursue my MFA in fiction. The list goes on. It's not that I didn't know exactly what I wanted to do. I just figured there were so many things happening in life, so why limit yourself to doing just one?

Tangent.

Well, to keep my newly graduated self out of my parent's house, I had to work. A lot. Like, a lot, a lot. I worked 60 hours a week at two dead-end jobs. I figured I'd give myself a year of it and make a move after that.

Skip forward.

There I am. Just over one year later. I can either continue down this path, or I can change directions. Nothing excited me. Nothing scared me. The apathy I found myself developing was just a big, fat NO. So, I decided to branch out. Granted, I believe I branched out a bit more than most people do, but hey, if excited and scared were two things I was looking for, I believe I found them.

Anyway, here I am in Thailand being a teacher, which poses the question – Why?

Well, after lengthy talks with a friend already living and teaching in Thailand, as well as talks with my sister, I decided to go for it, to give teaching a shot and apply for these jobs abroad. I logged hours of research and applied to several postings. All I knew was that I wanted to start in Asia, and Thailand sounded pretty good. So, after a response to one of my applications, a Skype interview, and an acceptance, I began getting things in order. It was basically a chaotic snowball from there.

To a kid who'd never been out of the country, or really, who'd never been very far around her native country itself, this was BIG.

But I pulled it off. Before I knew it, I was navigating airports on my own for the first time. I kept repeating my father's words to myself to stave off anxiety – "Life is an adventure."

Thankfully, my adventure has been a pretty cushy one. I signed with the company Super English, and I'm glad I did. Once I hit Surat, my nerves went into overdrive. I was afraid of being dropped off in a foreign country and left to fend for myself. That didn't happen, just like Peter promised it wouldn't. I was greeted by him at the airport (with his adorable son in tow, who welcomed me with a much needed hug). I was then taken into town, treated to lunch, and introduced to Mam, one of the girls on the Thai staff at Super and also one of the sweetest people I've ever met in my life.

After being taken to the house and given an overview of things, Peter left Mam and I to it so we could get me settled in. She was the perfect hostess and helped me get everything I needed. Getting settled took a while, but afterwards, she took me to the night market, where I met some of her friends. They helped me try all kinds of new foods. The next night, a few of them invited me out to dinner, where I learned how Thais dine, as well as a few of my first Thai words.

Over the next few weeks, I got myself a motorbike, which I have yet to wreck or fall off of (fingers crossed old Smalls and I continue this way), and received training to assist me with teaching. This training was monumentally helpful. Not only did Peter give me training sessions one on one, but he also had me set up a schedule where I could observe veteran teachers in action, which was entirely invaluable.

Shortly after that, I began work at Noonoy, which has got to be one of the cutest, happiest places I've ever seen. The kids are wonderful, the staff is superb, and the atmosphere is always cheerful.

After I got my bearings at Noonoy, I wanted to gain more experience. Peter was more than willing to get me started with some classes at Super English during my off time. The additional classes and supportive staff have given me incredible guidance.

That said, Super English has given me more than an excellent work environment and friendly staff; it's given me a home away from home. In the short time that I've been abroad, a lot has changed for me, but Peter has always made sure that my questions are answered and that there are ears available for any of my concerns. When I initially signed on, he assured me that I was part of a team and teammates take care of each other, and so far, that's been entirely true. I have enjoyed my time with Super English and look forward to spending more time with this group as I continue my life in Thailand.

Now, if people ask me what I think about being a teacher, I'll say that there's nothing I've done that's felt more rewarding.