



Meet a reporter!

Johanna Hallin is one of the travelling reporters for The Globe magazine. One of her trips was to report about Child Rights Hero Cynthia Maung and the Burmese children who she helps. Johanna interviewed the children and Cynthia. She travelled to Cynthia's clinic, in the city of Mae Sot in Thailand, along with a photographer called Tora Mårtens. Tora took photos and film footage.

How did you prepare for the journey?

The biggest part of the preparation was the research - finding information about the people and places I was going to visit. Cynthia fled from Burma to Thailand, so I read books and articles about Burma too, and about the situation for refugees in Burma and in Thailand.

I looked at maps to see where the city of Mae Sot is located, where Cynthia lived when she was a child, and what route the children take through the jungle to get to Thailand. I found out facts about Burma and Thailand, mostly online.

I also read novels about life in Burma. Even though the stories are made up, I still think it's exciting to read about what the country looks like and how people feel in the stories. It's just like a ghost story one of the children told me. Even though the ghost didn't really exist, it's fun to hear an exciting story.

But there were lots of other things to do too. I booked flights, from Umeå, where I live, to Stockholm, from Stockholm to Bangkok, and from Bangkok to the small city of Tak. And bus tickets from Tak to Mae Sot.

I went to see the doctor for vaccinations, and I got three different injections. I bought insect repellent at the chemist. Since malaria is spread via mosquito bites, I wanted to avoid getting bitten.

I also got in touch with Cynthia and with several other people who work at her clinic. We sent letters, e-mails and phoned each other. I tried to explain what Tora and I wanted to do when we got to Thailand. They promised to help us.

The last thing I did before setting off was to check all the equipment. Tora had two cameras with her, one video camera, one tripod, and loads of camera film. I took pens, an iPod to record the interviews, a computer and a small camera.

What were you most nervous about before you went?

That nobody would want to talk to me! But of course I met loads of children and adults who wanted both to answer my questions and to ask questions of their own.

I was also worried about transport. Cars there often don't have rear seat belts and I was a bit scared of what could happen if we were in a car accident.

What was the most exciting thing once you were there?

It was really exciting to visit the refugee camp where many children live. On the way there we saw two elephants on the back of a truck, zooming past us on the windy road.

It was also great fun to walk around the rice fields with a group of children when they swam among the rice plants and jumped from the path down into the water of the rice plantation. I really wished that I was a child and could join in and play in the water, instead of being a boring, grown-up reporter who just stood and watched.

Do you have any good tips on how to interview people?

It is important to be well prepared. For example, it was important for me to know as much as possible about why people flee from Burma to Thailand. That way, I didn't have to ask every person I interviewed about the political situation – I could ask people about their own stories instead.

I also think it's important to write down questions before the interview. This is a way of thinking through what I want to talk about during the interview. But when I'm doing the interview, the most important thing is to listen carefully to what the person says. That's much more important than asking all the questions on the paper. I might get an answer that surprises me or that I want to know more about, and in that case I ask more questions about that. These are called follow-up questions.

Many of the children, and the adults, who I interviewed in Mae Sot had experienced terrible things. I think it's important to talk, both about difficult experiences and about things that are fun. It's often easy to talk about the fun things. The bad things can be hard to talk about, and that's why the reporter has to be extra attentive and listen carefully. The person being interviewed should never have to talk about something they don't want to talk about.

Is it difficult to interview people who speak a different language?

Yes, it can be a bit difficult. I did the interviews with the help of an interpreter. I ask the question in English, and the interpreter translates it to Burmese or Karen. Then the child answers in Burmese or Karen, and the interpreter tells me what the child said in English. It is really important that the interpreter is careful, and says exactly what the child says. And the interpreter shouldn't make any changes to the question either, because then the child is answering a different question. That can lead to confusion and misunderstandings, which means that the magazine article comes out all wrong.

I was lucky - I got to work with really good interpreters, who listened to the children carefully. They helped me to sort out misunderstandings, helped me to joke with the children and helped the children tease me.

What did you do with all the material when you got home?

I came back from Thailand to Sweden with a whole case full of notebooks, recorded interviews, film and video footage.

Tora went through and fixed all the pictures and edited a short film. I went through and edited the stories of the children and Cynthia. Only a fraction of the material ended up in the Globe magazine and online. It's important to be able to summarise things and

pick out the most important parts of the stories. I try to write about the children's lives in a way that helps the people reading the stories feel like they are 'there' – that they can be in Mae Sot in their imaginations. It is really difficult, but I do a lot of practice and I think I'm getting better and better at it.

Another important thing is to double check all the facts, like dates and the names of cities. I do that by going back to the information I gathered at the beginning. I can also get in touch with an expert. For example, I talked to a man at the Swedish Institute of International Affairs who is an expert on the situation in Burma.

What do you think are the most important qualities for a reporter?

I think it's important to be curious. If you are an inquisitive person, working as a reporter is a great opportunity to ask all the questions you wonder about. "Why do you do that? What does this mean? How did that feel? What does your house look like?" I love being nosy!

I think that being careful and accurate and being able to listen are also important.

Why did you become a journalist?

Because I like telling stories and because I really wanted to show my teacher that I could become a journalist, even though I was rubbish at spelling. And I made it!

When I started writing articles, I noticed that it's not the actual writing that I like most. It's getting the opportunity to meet and talk to children and adults from all over the world. I also think it's both important and fun to learn more about the things I write about, for example the rights of the child.