My home is a place where moist thick air fills my lungs,
As the rain leaks through our wooden roof.
It is a place where the teachers leave burning red prints
On your skin with a bamboo stick
When you disobey the rules that keep you protected
From the outside world.

My home is a place where the men in green come take my safety.
It is a place where my village goes down in dark flames,
and turns into my past.

I walk from the place that kept me warm with laughter of those around me.
I run from the place I called home, The place where my memories and childhood is stored.
I leave the place where my friendship lays With the abandoned volleyball.
I leave my responsibilities of the household, Of the pots and pans I would cook the family tradition in.

I come to a place where I sit in the dirt and watch
The hunger around me eat people alive.
I live in the dirty camp where children’s stomachs Are just full enough
That they don’t starve, And the taste of Thailand swirls around me
Until I give it the thing it so desires, The feel of home.

I leave the camp where I was raised, But never thought of as home.
I fly from the camps that healed my deep wounds, And my thoughts That tortured me.

I come to a place where I don’t lose anyone, Where only good thoughts come to mind.
I live in America, But it is not the home that kept me warm and happy. It is the home that keeps me safe.
By Zoey Hills and Paw Kee Lar

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A Karen women in traditional dress.

ZOEY HILLS, left, is a 9th grader at Boise Junior High.
PAW KEE LAR is a Burmese Karen refugee from a UN camp in Thailand.