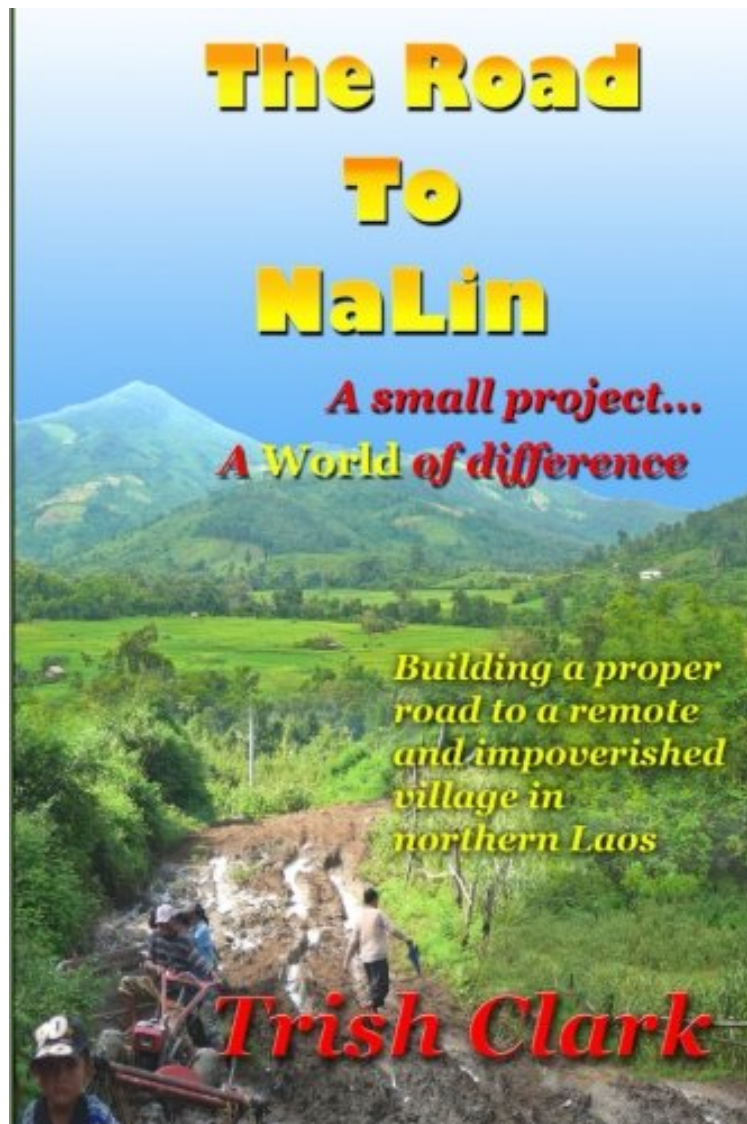


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## **The Road To NaLin: A Small Project...A World of Difference: Building a proper road to a remote village in northern Laos**

*Ms Trish Clark*

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**Ms Trish Clark : The Road To NaLin: A Small Project...A World of Difference: Building a proper road to a remote village in northern Laos** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Road To NaLin: A Small Project...A World of Difference: Building a proper road to a remote village in

northern Laos:

This is the inspirational story of how an older Australian couple, Trish Clark and Iain Finlay...both authors in their seventies... built a proper road to a remote and impoverished village in Northern Laos. While working on an internet project of their own in Luang Prabang, the World Heritage-Listed former Royal Capital of Laos, they befriended a young waiter, Chanthy, who was studying at night school. They began helping him, first with his English, then with his college fees and accommodation. His parents, relatively poor subsistence rice farmers, pleased at this unexpected boost for their son, asked Trish and Iain to visit their village, NaLin, about three hours south of Luang Prabang, down the Mekong River, or four hours by dirt road. After a brief weekend stay in the village, during which they were treated to a traditional baci ceremony in their honor, they came away wondering what they could do to help the villagers, whose average daily earnings were little more than three dollars. At the time there was no electricity, no running water...except for that from a mountain stream to three or four outlets in the village, no health facilities, no proper sewerage system and a fairly under-resourced primary school. But worst of all, a shocking five kilometer quagmire of a track was all that provided the only connection to the outside world in the rainy season, either to the Mekong River, or to another dirt road in slightly better condition, leading to the District Center of Muang Nan. So Trish and Iain decided to try to tackle something in which they had absolutely no knowledge or expertise. They decided to build a proper road to the village of NaLin. This book traces more than two years of the trials and tribulations experienced in their efforts to raise funds in Australia and elsewhere in order to build the road...of the setbacks and disappointments as expected sources of funding did not eventuate or dropped away...of elation when generous donors came up with substantial, no-strings-attached contributions...of optimism as they engaged a Lao senior Roads Engineer to carry out a preliminary GPS-based assessment and a survey of the road...but also of caution as they made first contact with Lao government bureaucracy in the form of the Department of Public Works and Transportation, as well as with a road building contractor who undertook to build the road into, through and beyond NaLin village. Throughout all of this, as Trish and Iain shuttled back and forth between Australia and Laos, the young Chanthy, now working as a salesman in a Luang Prabang handicraft shop...his English improving all the while...became the linch-pin of the whole project, working with his father, as well as the village headmen...not only of NaLin village but of two other even poorer villages, Houayhe and Phujong, further up the track, which were keen to benefit from the planned improvements to the road. Then, in early May 2013, they finally had enough money in their fund to do the job, and a contractor who could do it. So on May 9th, after a flight to Laos and an all-day session signing contracts in the Department of Public Works in Muang Nan, the big equipment; an excavator, a grader, two 10-ton trucks and a water truck rolled out on to the road to NaLin and began work. But there was drama developing, as a replacement for a broken part on another piece of equipment, the heavy roller, did not arrive and all the work done on the road was threatened by the fast approaching wet season rains. But when a replacement roller is found and leased from another company, the work resumes and the road is finished on time, just before the rains set in. With a traditional baci ceremony to thank the spirits of the netherworld, there are celebrations all round, as smiling villagers take in their new road and the changes it will bring for them. A small project... a world of difference.

About the Author Trish Clark has been a journalist all her working life, a period of over fifty years, in which she has worked as a newspaper columnist, a feature writer for major magazines and newspapers, a radio broadcaster and television reporter, as well as a producer of radio and television programs that have been broadcast nationally and internationally. She helped to found and set up the internationally successful science program for television, Beyond 2000, which was aired by the Discovery Channel for more than a decade. She was associate producer for the program over all of this period, shooting hundreds of stories, in scores of countries on six continents. In 2003/4 Trish spent 18 months working, with her husband, Iain Finlay on the Voice of Viet Nam Radio network, as Editors and Radio Programmers, while training local Vietnamese reporters in English usage, editing and on-air presentation techniques. Together, they also did a daily broadcast on VOV's English language FM service the first regular daily broadcast in Viet Nam in English by non-Vietnamese. Trish is the author of ten books, which include a biography, as well as fiction and non-fiction publications, five written jointly with her husband, Iain, on Africa, South America and the South Pacific, Viet Nam and Central Asia. She and Iain have children and grandchildren and, when not traveling, live in Australia on the far north coast of New South Wales.