



# ISB NETWORK NEWS

VOLUME 51

JULY 2007



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**Purpose:** The ISB Network Foundation, Inc. is a not-for-profit, 501-C-3 organization, dedicated to bringing Alumni of International School Bangkok together to support, maintain, and create contacts between people who shared similar experiences in Thailand. We serve as the Official Alumni Association for International School Bangkok.

**Dues & Benefits:** Membership fees are \$40.00 for 2 years and are tax deductible. Our goal is to provide you with three newsletters per year and access to contact information of all known ISB Alumni. You do not have to be a member to be listed on the website/directory or to attend a reunion.

Your paid membership helps support the activities performed by the all-volunteer Board of Directors responsible for maintaining the database, publishing the newsletters, maintaining presence on the web, and planning the biennial reunions.

Join online or by mail. Click on **Join ISBN** on our website <http://isbnetwork.com>. Or write us at the above address. When you join, you will receive a password to gain access to the Members-only areas of the website.

## Apple Pie and ISB

By Chira Iamsuri '83 ([ciamsuri@yahoo.com](mailto:ciamsuri@yahoo.com))

I arrived in Thailand from Hong Kong in January 1980. I was 16 at that time. My dad took me to visit three international schools – Seven Days, Ruam Rudee, and ISB. We picked the most expensive one – ISB – thinking the more expensive, the better in most cases. I found out later that it was a right choice.

I enrolled at ISB as an ESL (English as a Second Language) student for that remaining academic year (about 4 months). The following academic year I became a sophomore. In an environment like ISB, even the guard at the gate was a farang, so we ESL students picked up English at the speed of light. During my Junior year, most of us spoke English non-stop like our American counter-part.

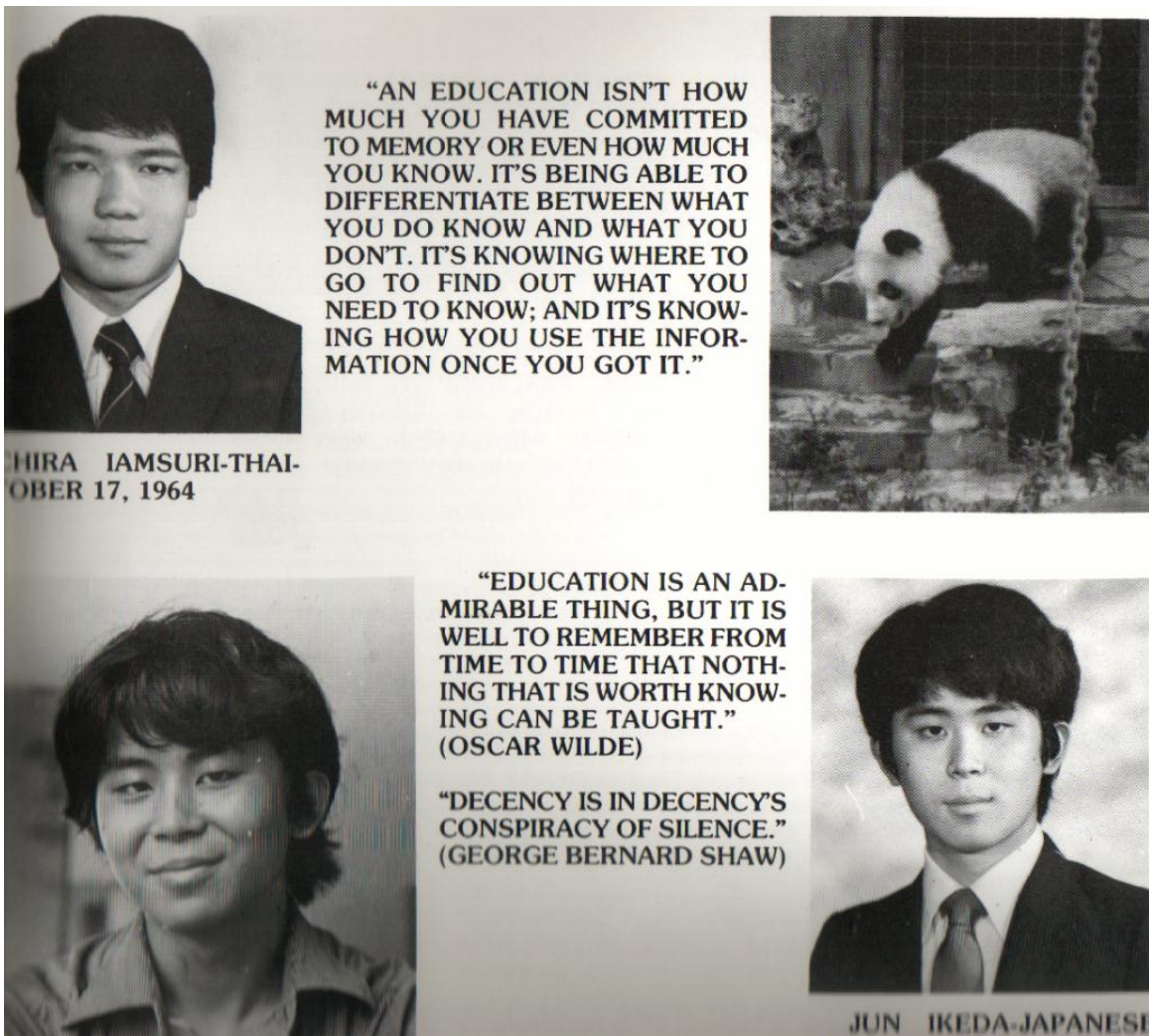
However, it wasn't always easy. On the first day at school, the bell rang for lunch break; as a kid from an Asian school system, I waited to see if anyone would come to me to show me around, kind of like an escort. But this is an American system – "be on your own" is the bottom line. It took me some time to appreciate this value, which now I can tell my kids about the importance of it. Anyway, no one came, so I followed the other students to the canteen. Most of the students queued up at the main dish line. It was a scary line as you had to tell the staff what you wanted to eat in English. Being shy and conservative, I didn't even bother to try. But going home and telling everyone that I did not eat lunch would really have made me look bad. So I wandered around the area for 10 minutes, 15 minutes, 20 minutes. At last, I saw an American kid go to the dessert line; no one else was there, only the American kid and me. I saw the golden opportunity coming. Standing very close to him, I heard him ordering "apple pie", which was something I understood. I immediately ordered the same thing; undoubtedly, it was the best apple pie in my life. I continued to order the same for about one week. During the apple pie era, I did not forget to peep at the main dish line from time to time, figuring out how it worked, how to read the menu. Eventually one day, I gathered all the courage and guts I had, lined up at the main dish like everyone else, using the same trick, I ordered the same thing as the guy in front of me did. Nevertheless, I was so proud of my first hot meal at an American school. Most importantly, I did not go back to the apple pie line for the remaining years.

Mr. Westgate was my first teacher. Since this was my first time at an American school, Mr. Westgate not only taught me the ABC's of the English language, he literally taught me the ABC's of American culture. Other teachers who had a great influence in my life then and after were Ms. Carolyn Saluja, Ms. Betty Yugala, and Ms. Diana Kerry. Ms. Saluja taught me English writing (workshop); she was one of toughest teacher I ever had anywhere. She wouldn't allow a punctuation mistake. The disciplines I learned from her resonate much beyond one semester. I now learn she passed away few years ago; her two sons are still in Thailand. Ms. Yugala taught me

Comparative Governments. It's the first time I became acquainted with "check and balance" of the U.S. government and presidential election. Ms. Kerry showed me some aspects of philosophy of life that shaped my mind to some extent. Of course, there were others teachers and counselors who gave me numerous assistance and advice that I am still indeed grateful for today

Students in the ESL class were from different backgrounds – Cambodia, Japan, China, and others. I was in a group of friends that would hang around together to go to Pizza Hut, movies, Patpong (once...). They are Thant Myint U, Ming Xia Fu, Hardy Wang, and maybe 2-3 more friends whose names I might spell wrong. At school, I spoke to William Ashwell the most perhaps. He was from New Zealand and I admit that I did a lot English practice with him through chatting.

Jun Ikeda '83 had just arrived at ISB from attending a Japanese school on Rama 9. He and I were both shy and spoke very little of anything, so we naturally became friends. The only language we had in common was English, but when we got stuck trying to speak to each other, we would write Chinese characters, since many are similar to Japanese. With Chinese writing and some spoken English, we could communicate in depth. Jun and I now both live and work in Bangkok; we actually live one block from each other. We lost contact after ISB, then with the help of internet, he found me on the ISB address book 4 years ago. We still write some Chinese nowadays, but not as much as before.



*Chira and Jun in the 1983 Erawan ...*



... and at the ISB get-together in Bangkok January 2007



## Mrs. Rhodes Turned 91

*By Val Philbrick Sherman '67 ([valsherm@yahoo.com](mailto:valsherm@yahoo.com))*

In February 2007 Mrs. Rhodes celebrated one more birthday – her 91st – and the doctors tell her there will be several more! She is doing great except for her eye sight. She remembers everything! And if she doesn't remember something, Verna will. So if you stop to visit, don't be surprised when they tell you all you did as a kid at the Polo Club. If you have kept in touch, Verna will tell you how many kids you have and when they were born.

Visiting with Verna and Mrs. Rhodes is definitely an experience you will never forget. My brother and his wife really enjoyed their visit with me; however, they have only one regret about their trip to Thailand – they didn't spend enough time with Mrs. Rhodes and Verna.

Puki is always able to put a wonderful party together. Grandsons, Peck and Peat, 8 grandchildren, Seiko (Japanese friend) Mao (she is Thai, rides 3 days a week and is being groomed to take over for Verna), Puki, and I enjoyed a wonderful dinner and cake.





## Chapter One – Thailand

*By Carolyn Anong Pennington Williams '72 ([cawill@sandia.gov](mailto:cawill@sandia.gov))*

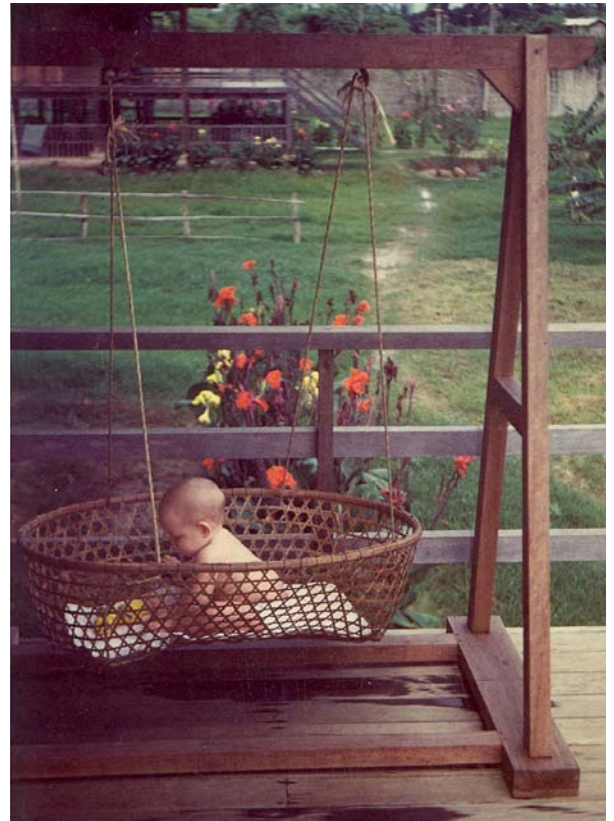
When my Father got his first assignment overseas, he was working for the Thai government. He was hired to build a dam upcountry in a town called Chainat. My parents had just purchased a new home in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and everything in it was brand new. My mother was hesitant, but so became enthusiastic about their new adventure in Thailand, which seemed to her to be “a million miles away from home.”

On their way to Thailand, they spent a few days in Hong Kong, which in 1953 they were still using rickshaws as an option for taxi service. My parents had several trunks and suitcases, which were piled high on two different rickshaws and were quite heavy. As most of you are aware, Hong Kong is like San Francisco with lot of hilly streets. My parents were warned to pay close attention to their belongings so my Dad was keeping his eye on the two rickshaws that had the suitcases and trunks. When the poor little rickshaw men started down one of those hills, the weight of their cargo became too heavy and they kept going faster and faster. My Dad thought they were trying to take off with his suitcases, so he jumped out of his rickshaw and started chasing them. The last my mom saw of him was when they rounded the corner at the bottom of the hill then out of sight! When my mom caught up with them, the poor little rickshaw men and my Dad were very relieved to unload their stuff and catch their breath.

Their next stop was Thailand and the train up to Chainat where they were met by the Thai site manager and taken to their new house. It was a wooden Thai house up on stilts and the kitchen was “furnished” with two hibachis for cooking and a very small refrigerator. When my mom saw her new kitchen, she started to cry because she remembered her brand new kitchen in Albuquerque. My dad consoled her and told her he would make sure she had a real stove to cook on. He kept his promise and she learned to cook everything from cream puffs to pot roast. She took her *Woman's Home Companion* cookbook to the local market (in a dump truck, as it was her only means of transportation) and showed the meat man which part of the buffalo she wanted based on the cookbook's cuts of meat chart. She said he thought she was crazy, but he did it for her anyway. My father told my mom that someday he would buy her a Cadillac to drive and he kept that promise, too. At the site manager's request, my mom actually prepared a dinner for the King and Queen and their whole entourage; she even made ice cream in the colors of the Thai flag. After the meal, the King presented my mother with a bag of gold Thai coins, which she had made into a charm bracelet in later years.

A year later, I was born in Bangkok. My dad was in the waiting room and was called into the delivery room to lift my mother onto the delivery table as the Thai nurses were too small and the doctor was pregnant. Mom said I was one of two Anglo babies in a sea of Thai babies.

Life resumed back in Chainat and my dad had his shop carpenter make all of my baby furniture. My swing was made out of a Thai basket tied to a wooden teak structure. I still have my baby trunk some 53 years later. Mother decided to give me a Thai name and in 1954, Miss Thailand's name was Anong so my mother gave me Anong as my middle name. The Thai people had a hard time with Carolyn so everyone called me by my Thai name and so it has been my whole life.



Mom had started to learn the Thai language, but sometimes got the tone incorrect and really confused everyone. One evening they were having dinner and I was fussy so my mom asked the cook, in Thai, to take me outside and give me a flower. The cook repeated her request and my mom said yes. So the cook took me outside in the garden and gave me a cucumber!



*My dad RC "Preach" Pennington with my older brothers Dan '68 and Ron '66.*

We had a gibbon named Zippy who played with us as one of our playmates and used to ride around on my brother's head. Occasionally Zippy would get a wild hair and run through the house creating havoc wherever he went. One afternoon my mom had an iced birthday cake sitting on the dinning room table. Zippy ran through the house and as he passed the table with the cake, up he went onto the table and scooped off a big handful of icing as he passed by.

When my Dad's tour was over we returned to the States. When we landed on U.S. soil, my mother set me down and had me kiss the ground saying, "Honey, kiss the ground of your own country."

Next stop was Sri Lanka...Chapter Two.



*My mom Vivian holding me at our house in Chainat.*



*My brother Ron with our gibbon Zippy.*



# The Forgotten Stateless People of Thailand

By Val Philbrick Sherman '67 ([valsherm@yahoo.com](mailto:valsherm@yahoo.com))

Remember the Hill tribe people who wore the rings around their necks and had long necks? Only a few tribes do that and one of them is the Karen people. Because they have been fleeing Burma for years, nowadays the Karen are considered International Displaced Persons (or IDPs). So many of the families are without fathers. Thailand – being the great country that it is – has allowed the Karen to stay, but they are in Refugee Camps along the border. The UN has stepped in and provides them with rice, charcoal, fish paste, salt, oil and dahl. They depend on their surroundings for everything else, such as bamboo for houses, and big leaves tied together for roofing that must be replaced every year. They walk far to grow other food. If you work, you will make 1000 baht (less than \$30) a month, but very few people have jobs.

When you drive by a Camp, it is so beautiful that it takes your breath away. You see rows of bamboo houses along the mountain side or up between the mountains. Inside the camp it is also quite clean, but looks quite crowded. The camp has no electricity or cars. They carry water from the river, if the river is running; if not, there are wells. However, during the dry season each family will receive 10 gallons of water a day.

The Karen people have their own language and writing, which is more similar to Burmese than Thai. They have no last names. They eat with their hands.

They have no hope for a better life unless they are chosen for resettlement by the UN. Or they are able to purchase a Thai ID from a family that has lost a child but did not report the death to the Thai government.

An Australian friend of mine named Helen runs a school in the Camp and a boarding school beside the Camp. Last year I moved into her house when she went home as she also had 10 kids living in her home. These are the kids who have Thai ID cards and have gone to her school. They will be able to continue on to college and then return to teach for her in her schools. Helen wanted someone to keep an eye on them as well as help them with their English and Bible studies and I was able to do that. I was there for almost 2 months last year and will return again this year.

It's so different to be around people who are not allowed to travel in Thailand or Burma and who have been exposed to so little. (They have never heard of McDonald's!) Thailand does provide schools for these people, but many must walk so far and Helen is not allowed to pay her teachers more than the Thai teachers get (4500 baht), even though her teachers teach English. Because of their English skills, some of Helen's kids are able to get jobs on cruise ships around the world.

Thailand is truly like America when you compare it to Laos, Burma, or Cambodia. I was in the Camp above Mae Ramat, which is above Mae Sot, west of Tak. Another one I visited is down by Um Phang by the world's 6th largest waterfall, Thi Lo Cho.

Refugee camp above Mae Sot:



## Ruam Rudee Alumni Reunite

*By Rachnee Kiattinat Keirse, Ruam Rudee Class of 1972*

<http://www1.rism.ac.th/2005/Alumni/index.asp>

I had information about your website passed on to me from a friend who had attended both RIS as well as ISB. My name is Rachnee Kiattinat Keirse and I graduated from RIS (Ruam Rudi School of Bangkok) in 1972. I now live in Englewood, Colorado.

Formal RIS reunions have only started in 2000, with the first one in Bangkok, a second one in Las Vegas in 2002, and another one in Thailand in 2005. There is another one being planned in Anaheim for July of this year.

In addition, for the last 6 years a girlfriend, Sally Lin Chin ('72), and I have organized informal RIS get-togethers. The average number of people who have attended have been between 20 to 45. Our first RIS mini get-together was in Carmel, California in 2001. Here is the group photo from that.



**Standing:** Archito '71, Violeta '71, Greg, Ben '71, Beverley '71, Cesar '71, Raymond's daughter, Sally '72, Mark '71, Mark's Wife, Raymond '71, Pamela '72, Louis '72, Manny '69, Fred '72, Edwin '74

**Sitting:** Evelyn '70, Emilyn '70, Emilyn's friend, Rachnee '72, Usha '72, Mrs. K, Kanya '72

For the next one, we met in 2002 at Berkeley, California.



**Standing Back Row:** Manny '69, Ben '71, Caroline '77, Willy '74, Sam '71, Norman '71, Jorge '74, Nap '71, Joseph '70, Gary '69

**Standing Middle Row:** Sally '72, Barbara '75, Usha's son, Usha '72, Karen's daughter, Karen '71, Roger '70, Evelyn '70, Joseph's girlfriend, Emily '70

**Sitting Front Row:** Barbara's son, Rachnee '72, Roger '70, Louis '72, Archito '71, Sophia's daughter, Sophia '70, Sophia's daughter, Tom '77



In 2003 we met in France in Paris, Provence, and Nice. This picture was taken at Ben Tahyar's vacation home in Provence.



- 1) Anja '72, Cornelia '73, Laurent '74
- 2) Rachnee '72, Sally '72, Jitendra '72, Prena '72, Norman '71
- 3) Mireille '72, Kathrin '72
- 4) Sam '71, Violeta '71, Ing Tien '71
- 5) Ravi '71, Karen '71, Ben '71, Hardas '71
- 6) Archito '71, Mrs. Jane, Vicky
- 7) Roger '70, Evelyn '70, Sophia '70

In 2004 we met in Portland, Maine.



**Standing:** Evelyn's husband, Archito '71, Mae Thich '70, Mae's brother, Beverley '71, Beverley's husband, Karen '71, Karen's husband, Phil '72, Mark '69  
**Sitting:** Prena '72, Evelyn '71, Jack '72, Rachnee '72, Win Win '69



In 2005 we met in Thailand and we also visited Cambodia. This picture was taken in Kanchanaburi in front of the bridge over River Kwai



**Standing Back Row:** Usha's son, Evelyn's friend, Raymond '71, Archito '71, Karen '71, Rosa's daughter, Rosa '76, Rosa's son, Rosa's husband

**Standing Middle Row:** Rachnee '72, Usha's daughter, Sophia's daughter, Usha '72, Mark's wife, Evelyn '70, Gunjan '72, Sally '72, Evelyn's husband, Anja '72, Norman '71, Anja's husband

**Kneeling:** Cesar '71, Cesar's wife, Cesar's daughter, Cesar's daughter, Mark's daughter, Mark's son, Mark '71

*Editor's note:* Rachnee heard about our next reunion being in San Diego in July of 2008. Coincidentally, they have also planned to have their 2008 get-together there as well. On behalf of the ISB Network, the Board of Directors has invited Rachnee to extend an invitation to all RIS alumni to join us at our 2008 San Diego reunion. I was especially pleased that Rachnee contacted us. Thanks to her, I was able to get in touch with an RIS friend I hadn't heard from in over 33 years.



***Tsunami Project Update:*****Construction at R35 Is Complete**

***([http://www.isb.ac.th/Tsunami Project Update](http://www.isb.ac.th/Tsunami_Project_Update))***

As of mid-May the children at 35 Rajaprachanagroh are back in school after their summer break. This year opened with an enrollment of 1189 students (up from 800 at the end of last semester) and a finished campus complex. Except for a few finishing touches, all of the dormitories, classrooms, auditorium, and the magnificent new library are complete.

The ISB Tsunami Relief Network classroom building is the hub of R35 now that the new administration offices, the language laboratory, and the new ESL teacher's room are centered here. The administration office, a complete set of sewing machines, and a state-of-the-art industrial mixer for the home economics department were the most recent contributions to R35 by the ISB Network. A special thanks to Alan Munn '75 for donating the money for the mixer.

The ESL Volunteer program has become a model for the region. The principal, Khun Prasit and his assistant, Khun Sasima (Jan) are very proud of the progress of their students. When compared to other schools in the region, the administrators have noted that the R35 students are comfortable presenting information, communicating with foreigners and other Thais outside of their school community. Although these students are emerging English speakers, their pronunciation of the English language is clear and understandable. The students are enthusiastic about learning English and see that this skill is important in their future development. Steps are now being taken to integrate the program into the R35 School to ensure long-term success.

The ESL Volunteer program began a new phase this school year. A Thai national with a Master's degree in education was hired by the Tsunami Relief Network to head the English language department at R35 and will be responsible for the continuity and development of the department by integrating the ESL volunteers and the Thai co-teachers. ESL teacher training for the Thai co-teachers is one of the department goals for this year.

The R35 campus is turning green as the R35 students take responsibility for planting gardens, bushes, and flowers. The students followed the direction of ISB Week Without Walls students, who initiated the landscaping program in February 2007. This is only one of the student-directed initiatives at R35. Recently, students in the ISB community have collected classroom supplies and used athletic shoes, as well as raised money through a jump-a-thon and a bake sale.

The most recent Tsunami Relief Network project is a new, donated, state-of-the-art playground. The designs are complete and the equipment, for multiple ages, has been ordered. The construction of the playground, along with benches and landscaping for an outdoor gathering space will begin in late summer.

We are excited and proud of the devotion, dedication and commitment of the ISB Tsunami Relief Network volunteers and supporters who are truly making a difference in the lives of the R35 students.



*ESL Classroom*



*In the new dorm*



## ***Financials as of April 20th, 2007:***

(<http://www.isb.ac.th/Financials>)

The ISB Tsunami Relief Network has received 459 donations to date. Thousands of students and their parents, individuals and organizations throughout the world have contributed with their fund raising efforts and activities to the ISB Tsunami Relief Fund.

### **The total funds raised so-far have been:**

**Thai Baht  
44,886,613**

### **The expenditures so-far have been:**

• Transfer to the Rajaprachanugroh Foundation for the construction of a school building	19,880,372
• <a href="#">Administration Offices</a>	1,321,210
• Transfer to the Electricity Authority of Thailand to upgrade the Electricity infrastructure of the R35 School:	1,401,785
• Transfer to the R35 School to fund the costs of additional teachers and 1 administrative staff:	1,678,848
• <a href="#">ESL volunteers program</a>	1,954,367
• <a href="#">Language lab</a>	1,202,000
• <a href="#">Washing and drinking water areas</a>	854,318
• Instruction and other equipments	233,680



Many other activities that occurred in the last 24 months – such as visits, exchanges, delivery of materials, chairs, desks – have been self-financed through other sources.

Now that the school construction is finished, The ISB Tsunami Relief Network will review new needs. They will provide updates after their next visit.

**[As our commitment is a life long commitment, the fund raising efforts will continue.](#)**

**On behalf of the R35 children and staff:**

**THANK YOU, THANK YOU, THANK YOU**

## Return to Paradise

By Kate Johnson '76 ([isbkate@yahoo.com](mailto:isbkate@yahoo.com))

There are two things alumni traveling back to Thailand want to see while they are in Bangkok: the ISB campus (both old and new) and where they lived. It's not always possible to see your old house or apartment. After more than 30 years, things change. Buildings are torn down to make way for new ones.

I've been very lucky on my trips back to Bangkok because Paradise Court, my old apartment complex off soi 71, is still intact. I stopped by on my last trip to Bangkok and wandered around the complex taking pictures. I was wondering if my landlady Mrs. Raj would still be there. She was pretty old when I lived there as a teenager and I was trying to guess how old she'd be now (80s? 90s? would she even still be alive?). As I was walking around, a middle aged woman approached and asked why I was taking pictures. I recognized Mrs. Raj right away and she was surprised that this foreign stranger knew her name. When I told her who I was, she remembered my family. (Come to find out, she was only in her mid-30s when I lived there and she's in her late 60s now. Funny what "old" is to a 15-year-old – and what's "middle aged" now to an almost 50-year-old.) She and her family now live in the apartment where my family used to live, so she invited my husband John Colclough and me up to see "my" apartment. It was amazing to sit in "my" living room once again after more than 30 years.



My old apartment building. My family lived on the top floor. Other ISBers who lived here at various times from 1970 to 1974 were Lynn Bougan '75, Dean LeBourdais '75, Francisco Almazora '76, Bruce '77 and Steve '78 Schwarz; the Brown family: Darci '78, Kristi '76, Joni '74, and Patti '72; and the Ashmore family.



All of us kids used to spend hours at this pool. There used to be a slide and a diving board; both are long gone. They are talking about taking out the pool since no one uses it anymore.



Photo right: View from "my" balcony. Back in the early '70s this building was also full of ISBers, such as Terry McCown '71; the Bankheads: John '73 and Steve '76; the Mays: Stanley '72 and Kathy '77; and the Kaness: Sue '75 and Tom '79. In the shorter building on the right lived the Robertson family: Terre '71, David '77, and Dale '77; and the Smith family: Paul '74, Rob '75, Bruce '77, and Stacie '80.





Kate with Mrs. Raj



Kate and John in the living room. The décor may have changed, but otherwise the room is pretty much the same.



My front door



John, Kate, and Mrs. Raj on the balcony



The dining room

## The Rare Parrot Flower of Thailand

By Kate Johnson '76 ([isbkate@yahoo.com](mailto:isbkate@yahoo.com))

A friend of mine sent me these photos. They've been going around the web, so you may have seen them already. According to the email, "The plant was identified at the Royal Botanical Garden Kew in 1901 and was discovered in 1899 in the Shaw States of Burma. It is only found in portions of Burma and northern Thailand and as such is quite rare. According to the grower it is very difficult to cultivate and requires a local natural pollinator to produce seeds. It also requires very specific soil pH in order to prosper and produce the 'blue' coloration."



...เขตรักษาพันธุ์สัตว์ป่าดอยหลวงเชียงดาว

จ.เชียงใหม่...



...เขตรักษาพันธุ์สัตว์ป่าดอยหลวงเชียงดาว จ.เชียงใหม่...

In all the years that all of us have lived in Thailand and traveled back there, have any of you ever heard of it? Frankly, I thought this was some kind of a hoax. I've seen lots of photos circulated on the web and can usually tell when something has been photo-shopped. I wasn't sure about this, so I decided to do a little research and see what I could find out. First of all, there was nothing about it on [www.snopes.com](http://www.snopes.com), which is the first place I always check for debunking urban legends. Then I found [www.ExoticRainforest.com](http://www.ExoticRainforest.com) and read what they had to say about it. They are a private botanical garden in Arkansas that collects various plant species; however, they don't sell any plants. Those poor people! They have been



inundated with requests to purchase the parrot flower from them, although they state over and over again on their website that they don't sell any plants, let alone the rare Thailand Parrot Flower.

The following information is from their website [www.ExoticRainforest.com](http://www.ExoticRainforest.com). It was written and researched by Steve Lucas. It is copyright protected text. Copyright 2006 Steve Lucas, the Exotic Rainforest. Printed here with permission from Steve Lucas.

## ***Known on the Internet as The Rare Thailand Parrot Flower***

***Impatiens psittacina* IS NOT in the Exotic Rainforest collection!**

**We do not sell this species!**

**Sometimes incorrectly spelled *Impatiens psitticana*, *Impatiens psitticina*, *Impatiens psitticine***

So you've convinced yourself you want to grow the Thailand Parrot Flower? I receive at least 5 requests for this plant every week, and I tell everyone we don't have the species. We don't sell it. We don't grow it. We can't get it! So, are you wondering why a rare plant collector with a large collection can't find one? Are you curious why you can't easily purchase the Thailand Parrot Flower? Well, answer six simple questions first and I'll try to explain why you just can't find or buy it:

- 1) Would you like a 6 foot tall ugly weed with pretty flowers in your yard?
- 2) Do you believe this pretty little flower that looks like a parrot can easily be grown?
- 3) Do you think this plant is just like any "dime store" impatiens?
- 4) Do you live in a tropical rain forest?
- 5) Are you willing to pay the \$8,000 to \$10,000 to obtain a small bag of seeds?
- 6) Would you enjoy doing time in a Thai jail?

Perhaps you need to know just a bit more about where *Impatiens psittacina* grows and just how rare it really is in nature. Once you know more about the very rare species you will likely change your mind. Especially when you figure out a tiny bag of illegally collected seeds could cost you \$8,000 to \$10,000 in airfare and hotels. And that does not count the cost of a few years in a Thai jail.

I frequently receive email asking if this plant can be grown in the United States, especially South Florida, California, Louisiana, and South Texas. First, *Impatiens psittacina* is very rare and grows only in Northern Thailand, Burma, and a small portion of eastern India. Second, the plant gets tall. It reaches a height of 6 feet (1.8 meters). Third, like many rare impatiens, it is not a small garden impatiens like you buy at the local nursery. (Some species are even known to climb trees.) And fourth, the plant looks like a very bad garden weed with beautifully odd flowers. Now, does that sound like a plant you want in your front yard? Unless you are a rare plant collector with the facilities to maintain humidity, temperature, soil conditions including pH and numerous other factors you probably would not want this species.

Take a look at the photo on the right. The woman is standing among a 6 foot (almost 2 meter) tall plant. Most people aren't aware but there are more than 500 impatiens species in the world, many very rare. Many look nothing like what you know of as an impatiens. This plant is one of them and is not the species you think of when you think of the pretty little flowers that line your sidewalks. If you were able to find one, which is extremely unlikely, you would need to live in a hot, very uncomfortable, humid jungle to make it grow.



*Impatiens psittacina* is a tropical plant that requires wet rain forest conditions to survive. We're talking lots of rain! And sorry, Florida is not tropical enough. Florida is sub-tropical. If you live there, you may believe you live in the tropics, but you really don't.

Another major problem to growing the species is nature's way of natural pollination. Seeds are difficult to obtain, even in Thailand. Many plant species require a specific insect pollinator to reproduce. Without that particular insect species the plant just does not produce seeds. It is strongly suspected this is one of those plant species. If you go to the main page on this plant (find the link at the bottom of this page) and read botanist Hooker's original work (bottom of that page) you will learn he could not get the plant to produce seeds at the Royal Botanic Garden Kew in England. The suspected reason? The natural pollinator was not present. If you don't have the pollinator you cannot grow seeds. If you can't produce seeds, you can't keep the plant growing year after year. And we apparently just don't have the natural insect that pollinates this species here in the United States.

Not a single botanical institution in the United States I can locate grows or displays the species. I have located one person in the United States who went to Thailand and brought back seeds. One person! That person could not make the plant grow past one year. And the cost of the airfare and guide in Thailand to collect the seeds was expensive. And sorry, please don't ask for that person's name. They don't want you to contact them! I had to work through an intermediary.

So why can't you just go out and buy the rare Thailand Parrot Flower? The major reason is it is illegal to export the Parrot Flower from Thailand. The best information available from the government of Thailand is they are serious about this ban. Why? I can't get an answer for that question from the Thai government. It is just the way things currently are done. However, information indicating how to grow the plant was printed on the cover of a Thai garden magazine, so apparently a few people in SE Asia are growing the plant.

Although one seed seller has been trying to find seeds to sell, the Parrot Flower is simply not available within North America or Europe. I am aware of only two rare plant collectors outside of Thailand (one in Florida and one in Europe) who have attempted to grow the species. Both went to Thailand and collected their own seeds at great expense and neither could grow it past the first year.

In Thailand the plant blooms only in October and November right at the end of a very wet rainy season. The plant itself is not attractive. It is notoriously difficult to grow due to the humid and wet conditions it demands. Are you willing to build a \$30,000 greenhouse with special conditions to keep this species alive? Well, I did! And I still can't obtain seeds!

The species is truly rare in nature and won't likely ever be available at your local nursery. But you can join a tour to go see it and perhaps collect your own seeds if you are willing to take a chance with Thai law. I understand Thai jails aren't too pleasant. Information regarding that tour can be found at <http://www.tourdoi.com/>.

*Impatiens psittacina* is real. It does exist. You can join a tour and see it. If you go when the plant is producing seeds (late November and December), you might even be able to bring some home, but that is illegal. In the fall blooming season the plant can only be seen near Chiang Mai in north Thailand or portions of Burma and extreme eastern India so be prepared to spend a few weeks getting there and back. The cost of your small envelope of seeds is likely to be quite high.

One interesting side note. If you have a local Thai restaurant ask the proprietor if they are from Chiang Mai. If they are, you may be surprised to find they know all about the plant. Apparently it is well known by the people of that region. A friend called recently to tell me the lady who runs their Thai eatery described it perfectly. And yes, I asked if they could get me seeds. After a few weeks of sending email back and forth to Thailand I was told politely, no.

If you would like to read more, go to:

<http://www.exoticrainforest.com/Rare%20Thailand%20Parrot%20Flower%20SP.html>





**Do you remember how to *wai*?**  
**Even the Michelin man and Ronald McDonald know how.**



*Tire store on Sukhumvit soi 71*



*McDonald's on Pleonchit Road, next to the Erawan Shrine*