



# ISB NETWORK NEWS

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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.

## Growing up Russian in Thailand

### Part 1 – My Grandparents

*Sid Gerson '72 ([s.gerson@att.net](mailto:s.gerson@att.net))*

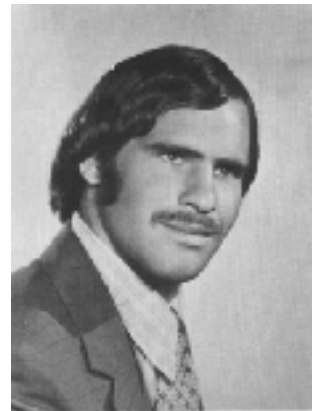
Being an educated person or what is known as a White Russian, my grandfather, Henry Gerson, ran away from Russia during the revolution in 1917 to avoid persecution from the communists. Not only did he have a degree in architecture, but he was also an officer in the army, so he really had little choice. He lived in Odessa on the Black sea so he escaped through Turkey and made his way to Italy. The firm he worked for in Italy had a contract to build the King's Theater in Bangkok, which would be the first air-conditioned theater in Asia. He arrived in Thailand with his first wife, Hanna, in 1921 and immediately fell in love with the country and its people.

After three years, when the contract was completed, he was recalled back to Italy, but he had decided he wanted to stay in Thailand. He quit the firm to continue his new life in his adopted country. To make a living, my grandfather did anything he could, such as performing maintenance work and painting houses.

He also made pencils and he would sell them from his push cart in front of Chulalongkorn University. He once told me he made enough money to pay for a place to live and buy his rice. He said he would fish for his protein.

One house he was painting belonged to a person that worked with the East Asiatic company and the man asked him why he was doing coolie work. Maybe this was how word got back to the King that the person who had done the architecture and wood work in the King's Theater was still in Thailand. The King sent his messengers to find my grandfather and grant him a Royal Audience because when the King had presided at the grand opening he was so impressed by the architecture in the Theater.

When my grandfather was to appear before the king he did not know how to pull himself along on one hip as was proper when approaching his Majesty. He decided that he



*Sid Gerson,  
Senior Photo*



*Sid's Grandfather  
Henry Gerson  
in 1960*

would crawl on all fours and this started the Royal Court laughing and making remarks about the foreigner crawling like a dog. Trying to communicate with the King was another occasion for the Royal Court to be astonished. Not having English or Russian in common, the King asked my grandfather if he could speak Thai. My grandfather's answer was that he could only speak coolie Thai. The King then stated that coolie Thai was the Thai of his people and he could speak it so the King and my grandfather communicated in coolie Thai and since no Thai would dare address the king in coolie Thai the Court was in an uproar. My grandfather was then commissioned to re-do the whole interior of the Royal Palace. During the restoration my grandfather worked with the royal carpenter and once the job was complete my grandfather started a second-hand furniture company with the ex-royal carpenter as his first employee. I'm not sure what his real name was because I always respectfully called the carpenter "tao gah" or "elder" in Thai.

Around this time is when his first wife and child died during child birth. She and his first son are buried in the Bangkok Christian Cemetery on New Road. After a while he wrote to his brother in Russia to help him find a wife. This started a pen pal relationship with my grandmother. After sending pictures of each other they decided to get married. My grandfather sent money so Clara could pay her way out of Russia and travel by ship to Singapore. Singapore had the nearest rabbi to Thailand and since Clara's father was a rabbi, she insisted on a rabbinical wedding. My grandfather traveled to Singapore to meet her so they could be married there before he brought her to Thailand. My grandfather had arranged two hotel rooms so they would stay separate before the wedding but this was not good enough for Mrs. Kaminski who was horrified that two people would stay in the same hotel before their wedding so she insisted that my grandmother come stay at her house. Many years later I stayed with the Kaminskis on a trip to Hong Kong and Mrs. Kaminski showed me all over Hong Kong. In 2003 a very old lady waved me over at my cousin's wedding in New York and asked if I was Sidney. I could not believe she remembered me and she said I looked exactly like my father and that is how she knew it was me.

My grandmother told me about her first years in Thailand and how they lived almost at the poverty level. Their room was over a shop on New Road and there was a ladder that they used to get up to it. When my grandfather was sick with diphtheria she would go into the workshop and work with carpenters and take care of the business. It was many years later that my grandfather was able to afford a nice house for her on Nana South and the house-warming gift he gave her was a huge teak dining room set. For many years my grandmother made pickles for sale. She would keep enough money to cover her expenses and all her profits she gave to charity. One of the most touching experiences I have had in my life is going to my grandfather's grave with my grandmother. She always brought flowers for Hanna, his first wife, and when I asked her why she said that Hanna must have been an incredible woman if my grandfather married her.

My grandparents had 4 children, my father being the eldest. My late uncle (who I never met) died in a BOAC plane crash in Bahrain. He was on his way to England for school and the pilot came in too quickly. My grandparents were informed of the crash in the wee hours of the morning by a man from BOAC yelling up to their bedroom window. When my grandfather went to the window the man just blurted out "Mr. Gerson, your son is dead" and walked away.



*Sid's Grandmother  
Clara Gerson  
in 1960*

My late aunt, who I also never met, died after World War II in Hua Hin from typhoid fever. My uncle, Mike Gerson, still lives in Thailand and also attended ISB. He later went on to Yale where he received his Masters in Civil Engineering. A funny thing occurred at a cocktail party in the early 1960s. My grandfather was talking to a Thai man about their respective families and my grandfather mentioned that he had a son going to Yale. The person he was speaking with then gave his condolences because he thought my grandfather said he had a son in jail!

Being raised in Thailand before there was any major western influence in the country meant that my father grew up very Thai. He read and wrote Thai better than English since he did not attend an English-speaking school until he went abroad. He told me many stories of Thailand during World War II when he belonged to group of teenage rebels that used to sabotage the Japanese by stealing their equipment and munitions and burying all of it. I've always wanted to go searching for this buried treasure with a metal detector, so maybe one day I'll get around to it. When we would go to Hua Hin his childhood friends would show up and they would sit around talking about old times and I learned that they buried all their acquisitions in the . . . yeah right, wouldn't you like to know!

Although my father was quite rich and considered upper class he was more comfortable sitting on the floor in a pair of baggies just being able to relax with his "poor" friends than going to fancy dinner party all dressed up. My father did a lot of charity work with numerous organizations, but his major work was with the lepers. Every year he would arrange a trip for children with leprosy and bring them to Hua Hin where he would give them a weekend of fun recreation where they could

be themselves and not worry about what other people saw them as. When my father passed away the Masonic Lodge made a major donation in his name to the Phud Hong Leprosy foundation in his name. I think he would be very happy if he knew that leprosy has almost been eliminated in Thailand.

Next time: Part 2 – My parents.



## Cannon Beach Redux for 60's Kids

*By Carol Pettigrew Hallman '62 ([hallmanc@speedtech.com](mailto:hallmanc@speedtech.com))*

The 60's Kids had such a great time on the Oregon coast in 2003 and 2005, we went for the third round in August 2007. Ellen Ehle Schaefer '62 spearheaded our event and Cannon Beach merited our return with its proximity to Portland's airport, pet-friendly lodging and beaches, shopping, plus various Lewis & Clark Trail sites on the Columbia River. This year, we were also rewarded with the Clatsop County Fair, complete with livestock, FFA exhibits, and a kid's tractor pull!



*60's Kids on the Beach*

We had a Thursday night meet & greet at Mo's restaurant, adjacent to our lodgings at the Tolovana Inn. Friday and Saturday were spent with visits to the tide pools at Haystack Rock; the charming village of Cannon Beach; the outlet mall in Seaside; Cape Disappointment on the Columbia River; Tillamook for its famous cheese, ice cream, and the air museum; a climb up the Astoria Column; and, of course, the county fair. Friday and Saturday evenings found us on the bonfire-friendly beach, watching the sunset and cooking hot dogs, burgers, marshmallows, and all the trimmings. And to prove we are not technologically challenged, we had rock 'n roll via a portable Ipod player supplied by Gail Loudermilk Kirk '61. Did I mention there were libations aplenty?

We had the usual early 60's ISB "suspects" many with sidekicks (including canines), and one or two with grown children in tow. In addition, we were thrilled to see, for the first time, Virginia Acosta Bisagno (CA) '60, Lynn Garber Barclay (MD) '61, and Cricket Fluker Lanza (OR) '67, whose husband, Len, became our open-fire-chef extraordinaire. Bob Gleason '62, Chuck Kugler '62, and Ellen's husband, Dennis, were our Costco Ckings and mega shoppers for all supplies. ISB'ers can really choose some great spouses!



*60's Kids organizer Ellen Schaefer and Network Board member Maureen Salahshoor*





*Tattoos were available at the county fair*

Living in Australia, Mike Morris '62 retained his "came from the furthest" crown. NW and West were represented by Ellen Ehle Schaefer '62, Bob Gleason '62, Maureen Lockhart Salahshoor '75, Gretchen Schmader Batton '64, Noel Ragsdale '62, and Bunny Close Liebow '60. From the Midwest, we had Chuck '62 & Ann Monroe '63 Kugler, Brian Hanson '60, Tom Slemmons '59, Tom McGlasson '61, Jim Gill '61, and Janet Flesch Libby '63. East coasters were Jill Green Rench '61, Gail Loudermilk Kirk '61, and Carol Pettigrew Hallman '62.



*First-timers Ginny Acosta Bisagno and Lynn Garber Barclay with Columbia River and Astoria Bridge*



*Brian Hanson and Mike Morris fly planes from the Astoria column*



*Haystack Rock with Chuck Kugler, Gail Loudermilk Kirk, and friend*



*Cricket Fluker Lanza and Gretchen Schmader Batton sporting ISB caps*



*Soi Sisters in new headgear at Cannon Beach*



*Remembering absent friends with sparklers on the beach*



*Those who refused to go home shared Thai dinner in Cannon Beach*



We all had a superior time! We tentatively set our 2009 off-year gathering back at Cannon Beach, but there is a suggestion to go to the central California coast instead. Negotiations are ongoing. We hope to see as many 60's Kids as possible in San Diego/2008. I believe our attendance at the last California reunion (Long Beach 1998) was exemplary and '62 alone had about half of its class there. If you've never attended a reunion, you have no idea how much fun you will have! Come join us.

Now I know the 60's Kids are old by many standards, but I would like to respond to Tom Reynolds' '69 recent post on the ISB Network BB concerning his fearlessness at being "next to the Elders' party suite" in San Diego. Don't challenge our partying capacity; we are frisky geezers after all!



## Old New World

*By Helen Tinson '85 ([WrldGirl8@aol.com](mailto:WrldGirl8@aol.com))*

I had just moved to New York City for a new job. It was the early 90s and to me, the Internet was just a handy tool for work (okay...and for finding great recipes on Epicurious.com!). But one evening, after having just bought my first home computer, I was "surfing" around, and thought: "I wonder if ISB has a website?" So, I started with "ISB"...nothing. Okay, how 'bout "International Schools?" Hmmm...okay, let's try "U.S. Department of State." Jackpot! That led me to a listing of schools, which led me to the ISB Network!

Now, it had been almost a decade since I'd left Thailand, the only country I ever lived in where I truly felt at home. But I hadn't done a good job of keeping in touch with anyone over the past 15 years. University, jobs, career, and the painful integration into a country that has been, even to this day, more foreign to me than any other all got in the way. But that all melted away as soon as I saw so many familiar names pop up on the screen! I suddenly felt connected again to a past life that I almost let go of as a distant memory. Well, thank God for the Internet! I immediately started e-mailing as many old friends as I could get address for and was thrilled to hear back from them...their lives, marriages, kids, careers. It was so great to have this new, but old, world to connect with again!

I remember the day when we first found out that we were moving to Thailand. It wasn't like we weren't used to this. My father worked for the Royal Bank of Canada and we had lived overseas from the first year I was born...Saudi Arabia, India, England, Canada, Lebanon, back to England again, Greece, and back to Toronto, our "home town"...or at least the place where my brother and I tell people that we're from because the real story takes too long!

I was starting the 8th grade at St Christopher's Catholic School outside Toronto and my parents were plotting where I would attend high school. The front runner being discussed was St. Mary's, an all-girls school, and by far the worst possible punishment I could ever imagine. As I was contemplating my revolt, the phone rang. It was dad's boss asking him if he would accept a posting to Bangkok! Woo-hoo! **Surely** there were no all-girl Catholic high schools in Thailand!?

So, several months later, some tearful goodbyes to my temporary Canadian friends, and the longest flight of my life, we landed at Don Muong. Stepping off the plane and into the heat, I felt that a new adventure was definitely beginning. I remember going to the Soi 15 campus for a tour and meeting a few kids. We hung out at the RBSC and the British Club until school started back up again. I remember living quite poshly at The Oriental Hotel for the first few months until our house was ready to move into. And by-the-way, the Oriental has the best French onion soup I've ever had to this day!

When school started up, I was immediately taken under the wings of the "new student welcoming committee" and by the end of 8th grade, they became some of my best friends for the next 5 years. And in those 5 years there were a lot of really fun memories. By far, some of my favorites were of the New Student Getaways to Hua Hin where I learned about all the subtle cultural dos and don'ts of living in this amazing kingdom. I loved riding around all over Bangkok in tuk-tuks, sampling the exotic treats from street vendors and, of course, indulging in the exotic nightlife of Patpong. I still think fondly about our trips to Chiang Mai on the night train to perform the annual school musical at a Thai orphanage, shopping at the night market, the umbrella factory...and Jareds, where we chilled out over freshly made smoothies...my favorite was banana and lemon.

It would obviously be impossible to write about those 5 years in detail...and even when I think about the highlights, I couldn't possibly capture them in an article. For instance, capturing the grown-up feeling of your first champagne at an embassy party at age 16? Or dancing all night at Superstar, or soaking up the sun (illegally!) at a posh resort hotel pool in Pattaya. Okay, maybe that wasn't very cool but we never tried to charge drinks to other people's rooms...I swear! Maybe it was because we were young and brave, but where else can you convince a local Thai band to let you sing with them for hotels guests – just because you think you're that good!? Only in Thailand!

But in the end it doesn't matter how young or old we are, how out-of-place we may have felt in our lives since, because there's a confidence that comes with our past that secures us. It doesn't matter what campus we attended, whether we hung at the shack, Superstar, Soi Cowboy, PanPan, Haus Munchen, Crown Pizza, Central, Thai Diamaru, The Montien Hotel, Pattaya, Chiang Mai, or Diana's, we are all bound by our unique connection to a Kingdom, a Land of Smiles, to The International School of Bangkok. And that's the one thing you know for sure.


I hope to see you all in San Diego in 2008!

## Some ISB “Small World” Stories

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


Carol Dickinson Daniell '66 ([cdaniell@satx.rr.com](mailto:cdaniell@satx.rr.com))

A few years ago, maybe 15 or more, I was a circulating nurse in the operating room on the obstetrical floor in a San Antonio, Texas, hospital, working with a Nurse Anesthetist student who was rotating through our unit. Somehow, he and I determined that not only did we both go to ISB, but we were there at the same time, when I was a senior and he was a freshman; however, we didn't know each other at ISB. As we were taking a patient to the recovery room after the surgery, we were talking and laughing about the coincidence. When we got to the recovery room, a very groggy patient says to us, "Are you talking about International School Bangkok?" Come to find out, she had been in my Biology class! Her first name was Bonnie, but I can't remember her last name. That was one of the wildest coincidences I've ever run across.



Bill Scheible '67 ([wscheible@cox.net](mailto:wscheible@cox.net))

Here's my ISB story: My second child, Clark, graduated this year from Oakton High School in Vienna, VA. He and a group of seniors were doing the usual limo/dinner/prom night stuff. My wife Jill and I arrived for the usual pictures. There were some kids there I didn't know; same for some of the adults. About the time my son told me that he had forgotten his prom tickets and that I had to run back home, a very harried Doug Arendt '66 showed up. He'd just run home to get HIS son's forgotten prom tickets. I'd seen Doug maybe one or twice before in the area, but I had no idea he had a son (Kent) or that his son was part of this prom party. I looked at Doug, shook hands, and told Jill, "This is Doug, he can tell you about Bangkok, and he is probably the only person you will ever meet that actually took Typing classes from my mother". Then I had to run. Clark later told me that he and Kent couldn't believe that here they were, eating dinner in Oakton, Virginia, about to graduate from high school, and NOW they find out their fathers knew each other in high school. Not just any High School, but one that is in Bangkok, Thailand, some 40+ years ago. Clark had also never met anybody who actually took a course from his Grandmother. Anyway, it is still a small, small world.



Gregg Larson '69 ([glarson@fairfield.com](mailto:glarson@fairfield.com))

After getting into the business world after college, I ended up with an oil company that moved me around quite a bit. Actually more often than when I was growing up as an army brat with my family. After one move to Ohio in the 1980's, actually the day I moved into my new house...



I was telling the movers to put several boxes in the basement with the idea that I would get to those boxes in time. Well, the rains started coming that afternoon and by the next morning, I discovered that my basement was flooded. In one of those boxes were all of my ISB yearbooks. I had lost the memory pictures of all that time in Thailand. But, life went on and I kept saying to myself, that was your old life, and as the Soprano's say it, "forget about it".

After several moves later, which brought me to Houston, Texas, in the mid 90s, I was looking through a USAA magazine and saw a Website listed as [overseasbrats.com](http://overseasbrats.com). I had some time on my hands and I had finally become internet savvy, so I went to that site and found a link to the ISB high school. Going to the ISB site, I found a link to an alumni association.

As I was looking through the alumni site, I was recognizing names of people that were in school with me in Bangkok. I saw a link to class representatives and lo and behold, I saw the name "George Ferguson".


I couldn't believe it was one of the guys I used to run around with, Sandy...my heart started racing and I hoped it was the same person. I emailed Sandy and in a couple of days, he got back to me. He also sent me emails of some of our mutual friends. It was great, we were all emailing each other and catching up on our lives and old times.

This rash of emails, spurred all of us to create a 30<sup>th</sup> reunion for our class in Atlanta. It was great, I couldn't wipe the smile off my face for the entire reunion and I haven't missed a reunion since that time. It has rekindled old friendships for me and I am just sorry that I didn't become internet savvy sooner.




Thomas Reynolds '69 ([reynoldsthomas@hotmail.com](mailto:reynoldsthomas@hotmail.com))

I found out about the Network via my little brother ... via a soccer Mom when he was stationed at the Pentagon, in DC. Then it took several phone calls to the published DC phone number of whom I thought was my old high school girl friend, when I "happened to be" in DC. And then voila ... I was FOUND!!!




Maureen Lockhart Salahshoor '75 ([mo\\_sal@comcast.net](mailto:mo_sal@comcast.net))

In December 2003 my husband was hospitalized at Seattle's Virginia Mason Hospital in his final days of his year-long battle with lung cancer. When he suddenly started having difficulty breathing his nurse, seeing he was distressed, summoned the critical care staff from the ICU. In no time, a team of at least a half-dozen doctors and interns came rushing in to his aid. After a period of chaotic activity until he was stabilized, two young female doctors stayed with us to discuss future options to facilitate his breathing. I noticed that the name tag of one of the doctors barely had enough room to hold her very lengthy last name. Obvious to me, it was Thai. I asked her if she was from Thailand while I told her that I had attended ISB in the 70s. Somewhat surprised, she smiled, and replied she had graduated from ISB in 1992! This young, very competent doctor, Sunisa Chanyaputhipong, brought comfort to my husband and a poignant "small world" moment to me that I'll always remember.




Mary Ann Hurst '75 ([mahurst123@earthlink.net](mailto:mahurst123@earthlink.net))

I was teaching Chinese language classes at Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas, when in 2005 I was mobilized, as were many reserve officers after 9/11, to Pacific Command Headquarters in Hawaii. Jeff Spencer '71 was assigned there on the same very busy and large staff as I was, but we never crossed paths during the more than two years I was there until, during my last week, I attended a retirement party for a certain general one afternoon. I ended up talking to Jeff and happened to mention high school years at ISB. Well, it turns out we had been there at the same time and moved in similar circles. He was close to Amy Hindman '71, whom I had been best buddies with in choir, in the *Oklahoma* production, and in general gadding about Bangkok, which we did those years ('67-'69) with fellow classmate Jim Roemmer '71. Jeff connected me with Amy via email after having lost track of her years earlier. It turns out that we've both pursued music in some way since, she in a more folk music realm and me in the jazz realm. We've caught up a little on email after all those years thanks to that chance meeting with Jeff in Hawaii. I am now living in South Carolina.



Betsy Cook Yohai '76 ([Betsy.Yohai@adecon.com](mailto:Betsy.Yohai@adecon.com))

I live in Seal Beach, California, about 15 minutes from where the reunion was held in Long Beach in 1998. That in itself was such a bizarre story. Short version: I am a recruiter and I was interviewing a candidate in the local Starbucks at 8:00 AM on a Saturday. I was spotted by Tessie St. Clair Webber '78 who recognized me (20+ years later!) and asked if I was there for the ISB reunion, which I knew nothing about! SOOO, I walked outside and ran into Don Drew '75 who was a good friend in high school. I went home, got my husband and daughter, and came back for the reunion. Now, how random is THAT?! I was so happy to see some familiar faces from way back when. It's a story I love to tell people.





## Nancy Connelly, A Story

*By Maile McCoskrie Lindley ([isbmaile@sbcglobal.net](mailto:isbmaile@sbcglobal.net))*

### Chapter 1 – A School Girl in Bang Sak



I first became aware of the R 35 School in Bang Sak when information was posted on the ISB website in early 2005. As the current President of the ISB Network Foundation, an ISB alumni organization with a world-wide reach that is based in the USA, I am compelled to build a relationship with ISB – the students today will be the alumni of tomorrow. I go to their site often to follow what is happening on the campus.

My husband Brian and I traveled to Bang Sak in southern Thailand in January of 2006 to see the school for ourselves first hand. We returned again in January of 2007 and followed that visit to the R 35 campus with a visit to ISB to find out more about what our alumni group could do to participate and to hear about the programs in place and the progress being made. We were told about a project done by the ISB Middle School in the spring of 2006 called Friendship Weekend. A group of ISB students, teachers, administrators, and parents spent a weekend on the R 35 campus interacting with as many of the students as were interested in various sports, arts and crafts projects, games, dancing activities and the like.

Getting a conversation going was not all that easy as few of the ISB students spoke Thai and the R 35 students had only a very limited English vocabulary – except for one, Nancy, a 12-year-old girl who has a Thai mother and a Canadian father. Once she was discovered she helped to interpret for both groups and the ISB students formed a quick bond with her. When it was time for everyone to say good-bye a few tears were shed by many. A bit of this was caught on a DVD that was produced by the ISB students after the event. ISB gave us a copy of this DVD and when we returned home and I watched it I wondered, who is this girl named Nancy and how is it that she is at R 35?

Brian and I made the decision to return to Thailand and R 35 to help in the rebuilding of the lives of the R 35 students starting in July of 2007. The vast majority of the students are attending this school because their lives have been very disrupted by the Tsunami that struck the country on December 26, 2004. We arrived on July 15, 2007 and one of the first people that we came across was Nancy – we were not sure where to go, so she was called over by some of the students and directed us to the office we were looking for. Nancy continued to cross our path as we made our way around the school and in talking with other members of the ISB sponsored ESL program we began to get some answers to our questions as to how a student here at R 35 had the name of Nancy and spoke English so easily.

Nancy has only a Canadian Passport. Her parents, Brian and Maem, met in Phuket, Thailand, moved to Alberta, Canada, where Brian is from and got married. Nancy was born on September 26, 1993 in Canada. Nancy completed Kindergarten to 3rd grade in public school in Canada, where her father worked in the construction industry. During 4th grade her parents moved back to Thailand to Phang Nga Province where they were going to join Maem's sister in opening and running a local resort. Nancy was enrolled in a Thai school in the town of Takuapa and was immediately put into the 1st grade as her Thai language skills were very basic. The business relationship did not work out and then sadly Brian and Maem separated. Brian and Nancy moved to Phuket City where Nancy was enrolled in a Thai International bi-lingual school, and she went there for 4th and 5th grades. Her mom stayed in Phang Nga Province and Nancy visited her on weekends. During 6th grade (2004-05 school year) the faculty at the school Nancy was attending began to fall apart and it was decided that she would live with Maem and again attend the school in Takuapa.

Nancy spent Christmas Day 2004 with her father in Phuket City. Early on the morning of December 26, 2004 they started north as Brian needed to renew his visa in Ranong (a Thai city on the border with Myanmar) and Maem's home was right on the way. Her father dropped her off at 9 AM and continued north. Not long after her dad left the tsunami came ashore. She describes the scene as follows:

"Foreigners were yelling about a big wave. I saw the wave coming in the distance. My mother had a motor bike out front and we raced up the mountain. I have an older half brother who was working at a local resort. My mother was very scared because we didn't know what had happened to him. Had it been a normal Sunday at my Dad's I would have slept late and if I had still been in my bed I would have died. My friend died. I was lucky – I was okay and so was my brother."

Soon after the tsunami, it was decided that Nancy should return to Canada with Brian and live with his mother, her grandmother, and he would visit as often as he could as he worked out of the area on construction sites. This situation did not work as well as everyone hoped and in June of 2005 Nancy arrived back in Thailand and very soon thereafter started at R 35. She would have gone into 7th grade in Canada but was put into the 4th grade at R 35 because of her still limited knowledge of the Thai language. She has only been able to stay with her mother who now lived in Khao Lak (about 30 minutes away) one weekend a month and holidays as this is a boarding school for all that do not live in the very immediate area.

Nancy has a good relationship with her parents and misses both of them. Life in this boarding school is not as it would be in the west. The culture at this school is not that of the west where she has spent most of her young life. Nancy has adjusted but it hasn't been pleasant.

R 35 does a fine job of educating Thai students that have grown up in their school system, but an assessment of Nancy against western standards finds that she is quickly falling further and further behind the academic background that she had started in Canada. She is a survivor in the true sense of the word – a less strong child well might not have made it this long. The best learning environment for her in this country would be in an International school where English is spoken and the children understand what it is like to be bi-cultural. She is an able and willing student – she simply needs the opportunity to be placed in a school where she can quickly catch up and continue to strive to be successful.

Without financial help she will have to stay where she is, continue to be taught in the Thai language, graduate at almost age 21 and with luck qualify for a Thai university. With financial assistance for tuition she can transfer to the British International School in Phuket City where she can be allowed to catch up and graduate at 19 with an International Baccalaureate degree that will allow her to go to University anywhere in the world. She and her mother can live in Phuket with the support of Brian's father, Denis Connelly who is retired in Phuket City and her father Brian. We are in the process of getting Nancy moved to the British International School (BIS), and we have made a commitment to her that we will find others to help with her school expenses or simply pay them ourselves. We care about Nancy and her future, and are currently looking for sponsors to help fund this change to save her mind and change her life. She has the language background for a first rate education, just not the financial resources. We believe she deserves more.

## Chapter 2 – A Big Change

Nancy ended the first half of the 6th grade at R 35 on October 5, 2007. She was pleased with her test scores with a not surprising 100% on her English exam. Her mother, Maem, picked her up for what we all hoped would be the last time that morning. Her test date had been set for Monday morning October 8 and in order to get her records she had to withdraw from R 35. There was no turning back now without losing a lot of face. Nancy was nervous on Monday as we drove to what we all hoped would be her new school. She met with many of those that would be her teachers should she be accepted as they needed to talk with her to judge her English proficiency. She impressed them all. Next she had to complete a series of written examinations – overall intelligence, English Comprehension, and Math. My husband Brian Lindley had been helping her with her math skills for the past two weeks. It was a long morning for all of us. When she was done we were given verbal acceptance much to the joy of all of us and in some small part to Nancy's disbelief. We did not get the final written notice for three more long days.



We spent Monday, October 15, getting her school uniforms and supplies together. By that evening she was ready to start attending classes the next day, which she did. She graciously posed in her new school uniform with her mother and her grandfather before we left her on Monday night.

She has been placed in the 8th grade (BIS calls it Year 9 – Kindergarten is considered Year 1) where she is one of the oldest but still within her age group. She is in a small group of now eight for the remainder of this term as she works to get her math and language skills up to grade level. She has two friends going to the school that she saw the day she was there for testing. She and Maem will stay with Denis Connelly in Phuket City until her father, Brian, arrives in late November. Her father will find a home for just the two of them to provide the best environment for her to study. Maem will return to Khao Lak and Nancy will stay with her Dad during the week and with her mom on the weekends.



When her Dad returns to Canada in the spring, her Mom will move into the home that Nancy has been living in with her Dad. Everyone involved is working together, and she is on the right track. She knows she is the one who can best define her destiny.

This is just the beginning of Nancy's story.

*Photo left: Nancy with her mom Maem and grandfather Denis.*



## The International Online!

*By Andrew Davies, High School Principal*  
([andrewd@isb.ac.th](mailto:andrewd@isb.ac.th))


ISB's High School student magazine *The International* is now published by our students online.

Hard copies of the monthly editions are still distributed during lunch on distribution day, but now parents, alumni, and the ISB community will have access to the magazine via the ISB website.

You can find the online version of *The International* on the High School homepage of ISB's website: go to [www.isb.ac.th](http://www.isb.ac.th) and click on High School. The link is at the bottom of the High School homepage.

Alternately, the direct link is: <http://www2.isb.ac.th/TheInternational/index.html>

The International Staff hopes you enjoy keeping up to date with High School student views and perspectives in *The International*.





## It Was One Heck of a Beach Party! And Jolli and Greg Got Married, too!

*By Tom Reynolds '69 ([reynoldsthomas@hotmail.com](mailto:reynoldsthomas@hotmail.com))*

A marriage proposal at the San Antonio Reunion in 2006 culminated in an ISB wedding at Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, on October 13, 2007, between Jolli Sidon and Greg Merritt, both Class of '71.

For those not familiar with “the rest of the story,” Greg had planned to propose to Jolli at the San Antonio Reunion, but could not get away from his job and he could not attend the reunion. But with true alumni determination, such a minor issue was not insurmountable. Jolli's ISB Sisters were recruited to provide an “absentee proposal”. On Saturday night the proposal acceptance was documented on videotape with Jolli holding up a sign saying “YES”, witnessed by a host of Reunion attendees!

While the wedding was scheduled for Saturday, October 13, attendees began arriving on Tuesday with some planning on staying through the following Wednesday (we NEVER can just party for one day). A house that slept 20 people was rented on the beach front so there were plenty of places to sleep, easy access to the ocean, and lots of room to party. The festivities began on Thursday night and decorating began in earnest Friday night (time was running out). Bamboo wedding arches were erected and bamboo flower holders fashioned and filled with flowers grown with painstaking care by Joe Myers – all done, of course, to the sounds of Motown music.

As the sun slowly crept up from the depths of the Atlantic Ocean on Saturday morning, the house awakened to the sounds of the Young Rascals singing, “It's A Beautiful Morning” ... at full volume.



Final preparations were completed and the 9:30 AM ceremony, officiated by Mr. Dave Elder '69 began. Participants in the wedding ceremony were Bonnie Geiffess Avery '68, Lora Yount Keating '69, Dee Medlin James '70, Lynn Brookley Schrack '71, Kris Stahlman '71, Deb Twing Thomson '72, Mary Lee Marchant Roberts '72, Kat Stahlman '74, John Dammon '69, Jed Davis '70, Mark Brandes '71, Joe Myers '71, Sid Gerson '72, and Willy Sidon (Jolli's son). The ceremony was concluded with an ancient Buddhist ritual to celebrate new beginnings – honoring the preparations and that which is to come, including everyone in the fabric of the community. In this case the bride, groom, attendants and wedding guests were joined together by the unwinding of a saffron string among all attendees, symbolizing unity, friendship and love. Afterwards, the string was wound into a wedding keepsake to remind them of this joyous time and the friendship and love of all participants.



After the ceremony came the dancing, conga line, and a thorough dunking of the wedding party in the pool (newly weds excepted). Then the real partying began, including copious amounts of “beverages” including multiple “Singha sightings.”



Sunday was departure day for many, but many more could not bear to leave their ISB friends, so for those the day was spent socializing and lounging by the pool and ocean. Ala a scene from *The Big Chill*, Sunday night dinner for 20 was prepared, headed up by Sid and Joe in the kitchen with assistance by as many hands as were needed. All were treated to a shrimp and steak dinner with all the accoutrements. No finer meal was served anywhere on Myrtle Beach's entire Grand Strand that evening! And after a “group clean-up,” Mary Lee stirred up several batches of home-made cookies – with few making it past the oven door! And to no one's surprise, the partying then began again, but only lasted until around midnight after all the sun, libations, and festivities of the previous few days.

The majority of those who had remained on Sunday regretfully departed on Monday morning, amongst lots of hugs and kisses, and promises of “See You In San Diego”!!

***CONGRATULATIONS GREG AND JOLLI!***

## Returning to Thailand with my Family

*By Marge Naglee Rassel '77 ([LargoMargo@aol.com](mailto:LargoMargo@aol.com))*

**Bangkok, July 28, 2007 – August 10, 2007**

When I left Bangkok in 1973, saying good-bye to my friends from ISB and the Polo Club was one of the saddest events of my life. However, as many of us have found out, friendships have endured, and the memories are alive and well when those of us who experienced living in Bangkok get together and start “remembering when”.

The last time I had visited Bangkok was on my honeymoon with my husband Charles in 1989. I remember being surprised at that time by the presence of the fast food restaurant McDonalds and the breezeways that connect the giant department stores of Pratunam.

Fast forward 16 years...I am “blown away” by the tremendous progress the Thais have made!

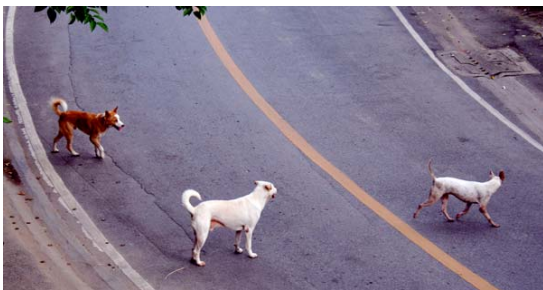
Beginning with the ultra-modern Suvarnabhumi airport! This airport is modeled like Hong Kong International Airport. In fact, Bangkok kind of reminded me of Hong Kong. It has the feeling of a major city with a lot of money. However, when driving into Bangkok from the airport, I kept expecting to see some sort of skyline of downtown buildings like you see in Hong Kong. Instead, the whole city looks spread out as far as the eye can see and the skyscrapers are everywhere. I wish I could describe just how huge the city looks! The wats are nestled in amongst the tall buildings and shopping malls and are visible from the freeways if you are driving slowly. I kept looking for landmarks, but it was difficult. Only the street names rang a bell. The Silver Spring Apartments on soi 43 where I used to live is now a Toyota dealership.



*The Rassel Family at the Grand Palace:  
Mali, Charles, Marge, and Sophie*

### Off the Beaten Path

Upon arrival at the airport we were met by William Rudd, an ex-pat from Canada. William and his lovely Thai wife Samon run a bed and breakfast called IN2SIAM in the Talingchan district of Thonburi ([www.in2siam.com](http://www.in2siam.com)). Just minutes from the train station and the bus stop, it reminded me of the Bangkok I remembered leaving 35 years ago. I wanted my daughters Sophie (17) and Mali (15) to experience an “authentic” side of Thailand and the Rudd’s B & B delivered! Samon makes a fantastic Thai food breakfast and William is a willing tour guide. Talingchan has its own floating weekend market where you can dine on the barge sitting down on a cushion while the vendors in their boats fry the catch of the day. It is very quaint in Talingchan. The Rudd’s took us to a fabulous Thai restaurant complete with an Elvis impersonator. Karaoke seems to still be quite popular in Thailand.



*Soi dogs outside the In2Siam B&B in Thonburi*

Soi dogs protect the homes where the owners feed them and the ratio of male dogs to female dogs is about 6 to 1. I am still bothered by the overall health of the soi dogs, but euthanasia is against the Buddhist faith, so it is what it is. Samon reassured me the plight of the soi dogs is an ongoing issue with the government and it has gotten better for dogs in general.

(Ed. Note: The situation of the soi dogs seems to be improving thanks to organizations such as Soi Dog Rescue. For more information, click on [www.soidogrescue.org](http://www.soidogrescue.org).)



We got the hang of the Thai bus #79 that took us into Bangkok from Thalingchan. We learned that you don't get ANYWHERE fast. When you finally reach Siam Square you get your STARBUCKS and transfer to the sky train. From there, you can get to almost all the old haunts! We window shopped the high-end boutiques in Siam Square and Paragon, but had the most fun at Chatuchak market and in the evenings, Khao San Road. That is THE happening area at night with bands playing, kids getting "dread locks", outdoor noodle shops, hip clothing vendors, and gorgeous silver jewelry. I loved it! My husband is not a shopper, however, and he was DONE with shopping when I was just getting started.



*Drinking Starbucks at Siam Paragon*



*Shop 'til you drop!*



*Wishing Tree Talingchan*

### On To Kanchanaburi

We elected to take the Thai train to Kanchanaburi rather than the air conditioned bus. The train was an hour late to our station due to an unfortunate accident at the stop before ours. Someone had gotten hit by the train. We had been warned that there would be a Thai rate and a farang rate if we purchased the ticket at the station so we purchased the tickets on the train. It is true, farangs pay more. We also experienced that when we went to Muay Thai at Lumpini Park. The farang ticket price was 10 times more than the Thais pay. And, it is so posted. Anyway, back to the train ride. We loved the rice paddies, wats, and new home construction going up in the central Thailand country side.

We were greeted at the train station by Mrs. Rhodes' grandson Piet and his wife. We then boarded a hired truck to take us to the River Kwae Family Camp where Mrs. Rhodes sat waiting on the bench at the big tree.

She (Mrs. Rhodes) seemed tiny! With the help of a walker she stood and hugged me and I could not hold back the tears. I made introductions to my husband and daughters and they went off to explore while I "caught up" with Lee. And then Miss Verna arrived. More tears and a light hug. After a tour of the grounds (so little has changed!), my daughters saddled up and Puki gave them a riding lesson.

We spent the evening hearing about Mrs. Rhodes' early years in Thailand. My family was fascinated! Much of what Lee told us can be read in her manuscript KATJA: The Story of a Horse and a Riding School during World War Two 1939-1945. It was way cool to hear her narration!



*Mrs. Rhodes giving a riding lesson*



*and with Panda*

The Family Camp offers a free program for autistic children to ride the ponies. It was heart warming to witness the smiles and squeals of joy these children made. The children who were able to, even wai'd the ponies at the end of their rides. You could see what a positive impact the program has on some of these children who show little or no emotion with humans. Puki took us to the night market and we ate several vendors' delicacies. Lee still teaches the advanced riders although her commands are spoken with the help of an amplifier. Verna sits alongside her on the improvised John Deere they use to get around on. Lee's other companion is a feisty Dalmatian named Panda. It is a lot of work for the women to keep the camp up and running, and it is unfortunate that more Thai and International children from Bangkok do not have the desire to commune with horses and nature. I left the camp feeling bittersweet and thanking the women for the memories. We spent two and one half days at the camp and did some touring of Kanchanaburi and the War Museum.



*Dining Hall*



*Girls' Dorm*



*Puki with autistic child wai'ing after lesson*

We took the train back to Bangkok and regrouped for a day before heading up country to Chiang Dao. That night was the night we went to see Muay Thai at Lumpini Park. It was kind of cheesy in that it was amateur night...younger men and novice boxers, but it was fun to watch the crowd and hear the Thai band.

### Chiang Dao

We booked the Chiang Dao Nest online ([www.nest.chiangdao.com](http://www.nest.chiangdao.com)) and then read about it in Lonely Planet. The description in the book didn't do it justice. The drive from the Chiang Mai airport is of course picturesque, but once you get close to the mountain, the area transforms into the scenes one sees in the travel posters for Chiang Mai. There are rivers (not klongs), and elephant farms, and in the hills temples peek through the trees. Stuart and Wicha are the proprietors of the Chiang Dao Nest and their property is breathtaking! There are private individual bungalows and a common area where guests dine on gourmet food. The staff is wonderful and Stuart and Wicha are experts in arranging tours and trekking adventures for the entire area. My husband and daughters had a blast riding the elephants, rafting the waters, and being chased by the long neck women wanting to sell them trinkets.



*Chiang Dao Nest*



*Chiang Dao Mountain*



We spent one night in Chiang Mai at the Yang Come Village right next to the Night Market. What a darling “boutique hotel” that turned out to be!



*Karen Hill Tribe Children*



*Yang Come Village (Chiang Mai)*

My daughters and I shopped 'til we dropped, and the next morning we headed back to Bangkok and spent our last night in Thailand.

The next time I come to Thailand, I'll spend no more than two or three nights in Bangkok and then head for the south. There is so much to see and we just did not have enough time to see it all! It was great to go back, but I am hanging on to those old memories. I look forward to sharing them with friends at the 2008 reunion.



## River Kwae Family Camp Update

*By Verna Voltz ([verna1918@hotmail.com](mailto:verna1918@hotmail.com))*

Dear Friends around the world:

I am about to go on home leave, Aug. 8, 07, to be on time for the wedding of my grandnephew Brian Steele (Bruce's elder son) on the 18 August on Long Island, NY, for a happy family reunion to meet the family of Brian's bride, Nicole Parlapiano. Living half a world away for half a century, I have tried to be there for one wedding of my sister Mary Ann's family one of her grandchildren's high school and one college graduation and now one wedding.

At the River Kwae Family Camp we continue to give a good riding experience to whoever comes to us (80 miles northwest of Bangkok) with 35 ponies and horses and lots of experience to do it. Old campers do come back to reinforce their earlier experience with us, from Asia, Europe, and the USA. Coming regularly on vacation and weekends are children from the Japanese School in Bangkok and from other international schools or Thai schools. Since December we have been doing a special program each Thursday morning with about 20 autistic children from a school in our town Kanchanaburi coming with some teachers to ride in groups of 6 or 7 for a half hour each. Parents and teachers are commenting about helpful changes in attitude and behavior of many. Some autistic children are coming with parents from Bangkok and other towns after hearing about us. A former rider has sent us from Australia some very helpful written material from their experience in this area. Autism is being recognized as a problem without cure but which can be dealt with.

In July and August 2006 we had a request from a Bangkok TV channel to interview us about our program. They have a very popular program every Tuesday evening featuring older people who are doing interesting projects. So Lee Rhodes qualified age-wise (she was then 90) and experience-wise especially! They filmed over several days, even filming us in our living quarters. It was a 2-hour program with ads from supporting firms for showing September 19 and 26. After 10 minutes



it was interrupted by a coup d'etat! They returned with our show the next two Tuesdays. They even gave us a gift of the equivalent of \$900 for the privilege. A most interesting result is the number of people who have come to visit to see for themselves if it is really true that our concern about horses and riders' attitudes is real. Visitors usually contribute a gift, which has added up to the equivalent of \$1,100. Lee and I meet strangers in a Bangkok supermarket or on the street who recognize us from the movie! Lee was shown teaching advanced riders and visiting horses in their stables as well as being interviewed about her philosophy. She drives a little buggy made by her grandson Peck, a bit like a gas-driven golf cart (no brakes, no reverse gear, motorcycle engine) so since I ride with her I got into the act a bit (also qualified on age, then 88). Puki was shown teaching beginners and inexperienced riders (qualified at age 66).

Family-wise, we have developed a team of great-grandchildren, seven between the ages 9 – 18 plus one close friend to make a team of eight riders, who ride well enough for drill riding, game playing and working on equitation. Lee gives direction while Puki using a double microphone does correction. They ride Sunday afternoons. Peck has 3 boys, Piet has 3 girls plus one age 5 who rides but not quite up to older standard. Two of the girls are now training two of the youngsters born in our stable. Pear the oldest at 18 has just entered university in our city, interested in tourism and languages. She has had 3 years of Japanese and her English is good with chance to practice at home. Two boys and one girl have reached middle school.

One of our riders in the 1970s now has a riding stable 3 hours drive away from us, who last year gave us 2 geldings, a welcome addition to our stable. They are both 19 years old, well experienced. One of them is named Charley Brown. An Irish lady 4 years ago gave us an elderly mare named Zoe because the lady was returning to Ireland. Zoe and Charley Brown had lived in same stables. Zoe's owner wanted her to be ridden quietly at her advanced age. This year Zoe said her legs were tired so we retired her to be turned out all day where she enjoyed a far corner returning at 4:30 on her own. We just discovered that each morning Zoe goes first to visit Charley, then if he is turned out finds her, refusing to return without her. She came to us in 2003, he in 2006. They must have been friends at their old stable and are happy for the reunion. People ask if horses have feelings!

Another of our horses, Promchai, came to us in 1994 retired from racing at age 4. He has served us well, though not for beginners. In late 2005 he developed an eye swelling. Our veterinarian, Dr. Siraya, operated on him in our stables in December, removing evidence of cancerous growth from the eye frame. Several months later the eye became swollen again, as our doctor had expected. So Dr. Siraya took him to her "horsepital" in northeast, and had one of her vets remove the eye, sewing the eyelid shut in July 2006. He returned quite happy, not being bothered by being blind in one eye. In December 2006 he was ridden on a Tuesday, and was completely blind by Thursday. Again Dr. Siraya was not surprised. In the late summer of 2005 we had the gift of an Arabian stallion, Hassan, age about 9. The owner had stabled him at his beach house in Hua Hin on the sea. He was very fond of the horse, enjoying riding him on the beach. When the man was diagnosed with terminal cancer, he searched for a good place to retire his horse. Upon recommendation of a friend who had already given us three polo ponies, he decided to give us Hassan. The man died a year later.

We have lost a few of our elder 20s as they come to the end of life naturally. Ninta born in our stables in 1976, Ngam DA who came in 1995 at around 15 years of age, and Tueta a retired polo horse given to us have died in last two years.

Over many years we have acquired some dogs that were walk-ins who come in announcing they want to stay. Some are loving, some are a nuisance. We still keep them since we don't have the heart to turn them out on the road. Lee acquired a Dalmatian named Panda Bear. He and his sister were given to Peck's 3 boys when puppies. Both suffered from acute diarrhea, Panda survived. He was getting to be too much for the boys who are in school and not free to care for him. They asked Lee to puppy sit, which went on several weeks till they finally gave him to us to keep, then about 4 months old. From day one he has always asked to go out when needed, never soiled our apartment. We both enjoy his companionship in our apartment. When he goes out we don't need to call him; he always returns on his own. He enjoys riding in our little buggy.

When Sandy McCoskrie Blanchette (riding with us in late 1960s) visited us in 2005 with her husband Rolly, she worked out a plan with us to communicate with alums of our program since the 1960s to suggest helping us with some financial support. Since we moved permanently out of Bangkok to camp in 1981 we have had to work hard to continue to find children to come from Bangkok with or without parents during holidays and weekends. Sandy has recruited 33 alums since she started early 2005, some of whom contribute monthly, or twice yearly or annually, or perhaps once at the beginning. We call it the Sandy Fund. They send contributions to Sandy Blanchette, 89 West High St, Avon, MA 02322-1251. She forwards it to Verna's sister, Mrs. Fred Steele, who deposits it in Verna's bank account in Rochester, NY. I transfer it ATM to Kanchanaburi. I made a summary in my letter sent summer 2005 telling how we had spent it to then.

We had received February to August 2005, a total of \$4,800. Since August 2005 to May 2007 another \$3,670, totaling \$8,452. (We had also received in baht February to July 05 the sum of 28,000 (about \$718 at exchange rate then) from 2 alums who visited us at camp. Our September 05 report listed projects paid for: outer and inner fence repair, girls' dorm roof, tetanus for horses, rabies shots for dogs, calcium for horses that year. Since October 2005 to May 2007 we have spent on the following: redoing girls and boys dorms (April 07) calcium for horses this year (May 07); repair stable roof (Oct. 05); camp office at end of boys dorm (May 07) special farrier equipment for hooves (Feb 07); sprinkler system for camp and stable area (May 07); pump motor (April 07); saddle repair (Feb 06). In October to November 2005 the equivalent of \$1,600 which was over one quarter of total hospital bill for major colon cancer surgery including 5 weeks in hospital for Lee Rhodes (age 89 then). We have still remaining in Verna's account not yet spent. \$1,000.

When we had the reunion in Boston in October 2005 organized by Sandy, I had copies of some of Lee's memoirs which Lee has been working on. Her story about Katja and the riding school during the war 1939 to 1945 several of you ordered and I mailed to you later. Also some stories of some animals of her childhood in Thailand. She has since finished a successor to Katja story about the Polo Club time 1945 to 1981 when we moved permanently to camp. It is "Never A Dull Moment". Catharin Dalpino and Alison Sommers Kennedy have volunteered to edit that for possible publication. We have sent copies of photos of the period. Lee is now working on the camp story from 1962 on.

Sandy and I are working on having a reunion in Boston again during September while I am there. It was fun when about 15 came to look at pictures and share memories.

We are happy when you really come to visit. Marge Naglee of the 1960s will come with husband and daughters early August; Pete Iber is due about then, too. The Tokuda parents and university-attending sons came end of July as they have done before; they were here just before year 2000. Several of our Japanese alums plan a reunion at camp this August. Another member of my own family had 4 days with us end of June after he had a term abroad in Australia.

Some of you have not given me an email address so your copy goes by snail mail. Email and cell phones make the most difference in our lives, who have lived long enough to appreciate their convenience! We enjoy your letters too.

Love and best greetings to all,

Verna Volz, Lee Rhodes, and Puki

Verna Volz address:

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PO Box 20  
Kanchanaburi 71000 Thailand

Website: [www.kwaehorsecamp.com](http://www.kwaehorsecamp.com)

Email: [kwaehorsecamp@hotmail.com](mailto:kwaehorsecamp@hotmail.com)

Email Verna: [verna1918@hotmail.com](mailto:verna1918@hotmail.com)

Cell phones: Lee 089-049-6319; Puki: 089-806-7418

# The Thai Royal Family: Reigns and Ranks

By Mom Bongkojpriya (Betty) Yugala ([mombetty@yugala.com](mailto:mombetty@yugala.com))

Unlike the short-lived Sukhothai kingdom, the kings of Ayutthaya wanted to ensure that their *muang* (city-state) would rise to predominance, unite with other Thai city-states, and be far greater and longer-lasting than Sukhothai had been. Taking its example from the Khmer Empire, Ayutthaya completely absorbed its methods of succession, kingship, ranks, customs and court language, all of which are encompassed under the principle of *devaraja*. A king, who was considered to be a god, held divine sanctity and legitimacy, thus making other city-states more receptive to control by Ayutthaya. Practically everything royalty did was to enhance the appearance of divine power, as well as to create a sense of awe and majesty surrounding the person of the king and his family. The development of the *devaraja* principle of the “god-king” has had a profound effect on the practices associated with kingship in Thailand, especially on the methods of succession and the assignment of ranks and titles within the royal family.

To a god-king, the practices associated with succession were essential to protect the purity of the bloodline, so that the claim of divine descent could be maintained through successive generations. Hence, it was the practice of the kings of both Angkor and Ayutthaya to marry only royal ladies of the highest rank, who might also be half-sisters, making them their queens. This practice was also carried out in other societies where a king's legitimacy rested on his divine origins, such as in ancient Egypt, various states in India, as well as among the Incas and Aztecs. Only a king was high enough to marry ladies of exalted rank, and marriage to kings in other countries, or to princes in other *muang*, was rarely, if ever, an option.

As a result of this practice, a son born to a mother who held the highest rank among the royal wives had a strong chance to succeed his father as king. But so did a son who was the eldest among his brothers and half-brothers. Both methods of succession, one based on the rank of the mother, and the other based on the child's age, were practiced in Ayutthaya and later in the *Rattanakosin* (Bangkok) period. Though the former method of succession was necessary if the bloodline was to remain pure, claims to the throne through the latter method often led to conflicts over succession and civil wars during the Ayutthaya period. The Burmese frequently took advantage of this unstable situation by invading Siam. The fact that 24 wars with Burma took place during the 400 year Ayutthaya period, partially attests to the frequency of conflicts over succession and their ensuing instability.

Although the two conflicting methods of succession were continued into the *Rattanakosin* period, the civil wars that plagued Ayutthaya were fortunately prevented by a series of measures begun during the reign of Rama I. A Council of Accession with binding decision-making power was set up to decide the succession of a new king upon the death of the previous one. In addition, the position of *Uparaja* (deputy king) was established to allow powerful older brothers or uncles to have some authority alongside that of the king. The palace of the Deputy King and his line is today the home of the National Museum Bangkok.

For example, just prior to the death of King Rama II, the Accession Council named Prince Chetsadabodin (Rama III) as king, while the future Rama IV entered the monkhood so as not to be involved in court intrigues that would appear threatening to his elder brother. Rama III succeeded to the throne largely because he was 16 years older, possessed more of a following, and had some experience in government work. Thus, even though the mother of the future Rama IV, Queen Suriyendra, was higher in rank than the mother of Rama III, succession by age won in this instance, and it occurred peacefully without civil war.

Furthermore, it was during the reign of Rama V that the unprecedented step was taken to name a successor long before the death of the king. This succession practice came about after the death of Prince Wichaichan (also known as George Washington), the Heir Presumptive, in 1886. With memories of the Front Palace Crisis of 1875 still fresh, the position of *uparaj* was abolished and Prince Maha Vajirunhis was named Crown Prince, as in the Western style, obviating the need for an Accession Council.

Moreover, Rama V was the last of the Chakri kings to have numerous wives and children in order to ensure succession, show power and virility, and cement alliances, as the practices of *devaraja* dictated. All wives, except for queens and royal wives, were called *chao chom*, a word that is usually incorrectly translated as concubine, the connotations of which in no way fittingly describe the various wives and consorts of the king. A wife's importance was determined by the number of children, especially sons, born and surviving. Of the 153 wives of Rama V (the first five were queens and half-sisters; wives 6-8 were sisters and daughters of Prince Ladavalaya, a son of Rama III), 36 bore 77 children. Once a *chao chom* gave birth, she was then styled *chao chom manda* and her influence and position in the Inner Palace increased.



It is important to note historically, that the infant mortality rate within the palace was high when compared with the present day. Whether premature death was due to in-breeding, poor hygiene and the constant epidemics of cholera that raged through the country during the dry season, or a combination of all three factors, is hard to say. But, it did reinforce the need for many wives and children in order to ensure that potential heirs to the throne would be available. The high infant mortality and short lives of those princes and princesses that did survive is shocking to modern eyes. Of the nine children of the first queen, HM Queen Saovapha Phongsri, four died as infants, three died in their 30s and two, Rama VI and VII died in their 40s, outliving their siblings. Of the eight children of the second queen, HM the Queen Grandmother, three died in infancy, two sons, including Prince Maha Vajirunhis, died at the age of 17, and the King's Royal Father, Prince Mahidol, died at the age of 37.

Though the practice of naming a successor, or Crown Prince, had begun with Rama V, Rama VI did not continue the custom of having many wives, and so he had no male heir through whom the royal line could continue; his only daughter, Princess Petcharat, was born two days before he died. But before his death the question of a successor was moot, as there were only seven half-brothers and one full brother living at the time of his death. Of these, Prince Kittiyakara Voralaksana was the eldest, but his mother was ranked as the 17th wife. The next eldest, Prince Paribatra, was the most powerful of the princes, having held office in the Privy Council and other important posts, and was a son of the 4th queen. Prince Mahidol Adulyadej, the Prince Father, was 10 years younger than Prince Paribatra, but his mother was the second of the queens.

Here again, as at the death of Rama II, a possible conflict over the two methods of succession could have occurred upon the death of Rama VI. In order to forestall a conflict, or possible civil war, and to ensure that his youngest full brother, the future King Prachadhipok, Rama VII, could accede to the throne, King Rama VI caused the *Act of Succession* to be passed in 1924. This act stated that should there be no male heir of the reigning king, the choice for succession to the throne would fall upon the next surviving son of Rama V, in the order of the ranks of the first three queens of Rama V (not counting Queen Sunandha). This act thus ensured the succession of Rama VII, a full brother of Rama VI.

However, when Rama VII abdicated the throne in 1935 he also had no sons, and the succession question became further complicated. Prince Paribatra was the most senior and eldest of the surviving sons of Rama V, and there were no more half-brothers still alive from the highest ranked queens and wives. Prince Mahidol, the Prince Father, had died in 1929, and Prince Yugala, the next living son, from the 8th wife, had died several months before the Revolution of 1932. According to the Act of Succession, Prince Paribatra should have then succeeded to the throne. Fearing that a powerful prince on the throne would be a possible threat to the newly created democracy, the 10-year-old son of Prince Mahidol was invited instead to ascend the throne as Rama VIII. The precedent was then set for the descendants of the highest ranking sons of Rama V to be in the line of succession, should there be no heirs from a reigning monarch.

However, should the unlikely situation arise that there are no heirs to succeed after HRH the Crown Prince or HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn, as was guaranteed in the Constitution of 1978 and by Parliamentary act, the line of succession should fall to the descendants of the Yugala family. But that, of course, will depend on how many *Mom Chao* (MC) in that family are still alive at the end of the future reigns of both HRH the Crown Prince and HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn. However, all this is moot since the birth of a son to HRH the Crown Prince.

It should also be noted that the descendants of the Paribatra family are no longer in line for the throne, but not because Prince Paribatra was passed over in favor of Rama VIII and IX. To explain the reasons for this, it is necessary to describe the various royal ranks in descending order, down through the generations. It is also part of a system unique to Thailand's royalty that after two or three generations the descendants are no longer considered royal, and after four or five generations the descendants of kings' sons no longer hold any titles.

Whether the descendants gain the rank of *Mom Chao*, the lowest of the royal ranks, in either two or three generations, depends on the ranks of the wives of princes who are of His Royal Highness (HRH) or His Highness (HH). Here too, in following *devaraja*, it was reasoned that if the wives of the highest princes were also of high royal rank, the bloodline would be "purer" and more generations would pass in descending order before the rank of MR was reached. The sons and daughters of a king, whose mothers are either queens or royal consorts (who hold the rank of *Mom Chao* or above), are called *Chao Fah* (Celestial Prince) or His/Her Royal Highness (HRH) in English. The children of the next generation will be styled "*Phra Chao Worawongse Ther Phra Ong Chao*" (also HRH), and the subsequent generations will be known as MC, *Mom Rajawongse* (MR) and *Mom Luang* (ML).

If the mother of a son of a king were non-royal (ranked below MC, or of no royal rank), her children would be known as "*Pra Worawongse Ther Pra Ong Chao*" or His/Her Highness (HH) in English. In addition, if that same HH prince also married a non-royal wife, their children would skip the rank of MC and become MR, as did happen in the case of the

Paribatra family. Prince Paribatra's first wife was royal; his second wife was not. His eldest son, Prince Chumbhot, was the son of the first wife and hence gained the title HRH. Prince Chumbhot married MR Panthip Devakul and their daughter is styled MC (Her Serene Highness, HSH, in English). Prince Paribatra's youngest son, Prince Sukhumaphiman, was born from his second wife who was not of royal rank. Hence, his title became HH. In turn, his children only bear the title MR. One of his sons is MR Sukhumbhandhu Paribatra, the present owner of Suan Pakkad Palace and a former Minister of Foreign Affairs.

And herein lies the reason the Paribatra family is no longer in the line of succession should there be no heirs from the Mahidol family. MR Sukhumbhandhu is also not eligible because his rank is no longer considered royal. However, the Yugala family still has members of the rank of MC and therefore high enough to be considered for possible succession, again depending on the discretion of Parliament. Prince Yugala, a son of Rama V, held the rank of Celestial Prince (HRH), and his mother was a royal consort (wife number 8) with the rank of HH. He then married a princess, with the rank of HRH (a daughter of Prince Bhanubhandu, a younger brother of Rama V from the same mother). Their three sons also held the title HRH and the 15 living children of these three princes all hold the rank of MC. Succession among the seven men in this family with the rank of MC would fall in order of age. In turn their children all hold the rank of MR.

Though much of the upheaval resulting from the two methods of succession, by age or by the rank of the mother, was averted during the *Rattanakosin Era*, there was a terribly high infant mortality rate and many princes did not live beyond their 30s and 40s. Furthermore, after King Rama V the Thai kings no longer had large families, nor did they have any male heirs until Rama IX, the present king. That, along with the system of descending ranks over the generations, has made it difficult to find royal heirs with high enough rank to succeed to the throne, after the Crown Prince and Princess.

## A Sad Farewell to Mrs. Lois Elder

We were saddened to hear that Mrs. Lois Elder passed away in August 2007. She was a familiar face to those who attended the Soi 15 Bangkok campus. Mrs. Elder worked in the office from 1968 to 1972.

Our sincere sympathy to her family, Dave '69, Elaine '68, Jan '74, and Paul '77, on the loss of their mother.

