



The Thai That Binds

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Message from Maile

By Maile McCoskrie Lindley '67, isbmaile@sbcglobal.net

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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.

As 2008 draws to a close, I'd like to share some thoughts with you.

First, my thoughts on this past reunion. Judging from the many complimentary notes and emails that we received - some with good suggestions for making 2010 even better - it seems that those who were able to attend had a great time. This has been confirmed by the more than 144 who have made hotel reservations for 2010, an unprecedented number two years out. We hope this trend will continue and we will be able to "take over" the hotel property. We are already working on 2010. Our Theme Contest is soon to launch if it hasn't by the time you read this, and information about our Saturday night band is already posted on our Home Page. We have started to form committees to work on individual tasks. I have the list and if you would like to help us we would love to have you. Send me an email at isbmaile@sbcglobal.net and I will get right back to you. Also, anytime you have questions, thoughts, comments or suggestions take a look on our website (directions below) and contact the BOD responsible for your area of inquiry. If you aren't sure send your question to our webmaster (webmast@isbnetwork.com) and she will forward your message on to someone who can help you.

For the first time we did a post reunion survey. A summary is already posted on our website for all to review. We were surprised to learn that about half of the respondents did not feel as if they knew the BOD members. Immediately we would like to direct anyone wanting more information to our web page and the "About Us" heading on the Homepage in the Gold Band on the left hand side. After clicking there please page down to "DIRECTORS" and then click on "Your Board". All of our names appear along with our titles and by clicking on each name you can go directly to our profiles. Additionally we will include information that is a bit more extensive in each of our upcoming issues so you get to know us even better. Featured in this issue are our two newest Board members, Peggy Allison Snow and JoHanna Ewing. While you are on the "Board Members" page take a look at "Board of Directors Job Descriptions". We are always looking for individuals to help us grow our ISB Network and should you be interested in an open BOD position please fill out the application found at the bottom of that page. Should you want to simply help an existing Board member contact them directly. We have many tasks that we just

cannot ever seem to get to that can easily be assigned to individuals that have some spare time. The more we have helping the stronger we will get and the better each reunion will be.

We are already thinking about our 2012 reunion that is scheduled to be in the middle of the USA. If you are located in a spot that you think has some promise let me know so I can discuss this with you.

Second is some new information about our ISB Network Cares Scholarship Award. This monetary award is to be presented on January 12, 2009 at the High School assembly at ISB and will recognize two Thai National students who are achieving academically and are also involved in local community service endeavors. The students selected will donate their award money to an organization or activity that both appeals to them and that is recognized by ISB as an organization that supports members of the Thai community who are less privileged than they. After the students have made their choices, they will then be further recognized by the ISB Network Foundation. The two students are selected for these awards by the High School faculty and administration on our behalf. The effect that this change in our award policy will have is to direct the dollars to those that are truly disadvantaged in Thailand. The money to support this effort has mostly been raised by our "Free Room Night" raffle at our reunions and by individuals, and we want you to know where your money is going.

Third, we encourage you to spend a bit of time looking over our website. It contains a wealth of information that is constantly changing, most notably individual profiles are being added and updated. We encourage you to update yours, especially if you change your email address. There are lots of links to information about ISB, Thailand and what is going on in the country. Use our website as a resource as you plan travel to Thailand or just dream about going back

Last, we would like to encourage you to attend regional Thai dinners planned in your area as we find this is a great way to stay in touch between reunions or just to have an evening with fellow alumni. Should you be interested in planning a Thai Dinner or any kind of social event please let us know as we are happy to help you. Start with our Webmaster (webmast@isbnetwork.com).

Treasurer's Report

By Todd Lockhart '77
tlockhart@att.net

S&P Down; ISB Network UP!

As we measure our progress from one reunion to the next, the ISB Network continues to extend its reach and make positive strides in achieving our goal of reuniting long lost friends from ISB.

Each year we add, on average, 175 new alumni to our database which now includes contact information for more than 6,680 of us. In the five years since July, 2003, we have found 865 of our classmates.

Of course, none of this would be possible without your involvement and financial support.

Your support enables us to maintain our website presence, reach out to find old and new alumni worldwide, keep us connected with news and topics of interest, and to give back to the country and the people who welcomed and nurtured us during our youth. And, of course, your support enables us to gather together in groups large and small, the highlight of which is our biennial reunion.

The ISB Network currently has more than 640 dues paying members compared to 450 members in 2005. We have gone from awarding one scholarship of \$1,000 to two scholarships of \$1,500 each. With your support, we banded together with ISB in December 2004 to provide financial relief to the victims of the tsunami. Since that time, you have donated almost \$30,000 to help build a state of the art school in Kao Lak and start the long road of rebuilding the lives of hundreds of children whose lives were shattered in an instant.

Our reunions every two years continue to be the highlight for many of us. The success of San Diego with 380 in attendance reminds us of the strength our common bond. Following is a financial recap of the San Diego reunion:

Registration fees received	56,334
Reunion expenses (band, food, etc)	48,438
Credit card fees	1,948
Insurance	1,340
Administrative charges	<u>213</u>
Total expenses	51,939

The surplus of \$4,395 enabled us to pay \$3,000 in deposits so far toward the 2010 reunion to secure our contracts with the Cavalier hotel and the FAB band in Virginia Beach. The remainder will go toward making 2010 our best reunion ever.

Additionally, in San Diego, we raised \$3,380 in the raffle, the Shack netted just over \$12,000, and the silent auction raised \$700, all in support of the Foundation's charitable activities.

So, the ISB Network is growing and yet, despite the financial success, our most valuable asset is and always will be YOU, our "long lost friends." That is, after all, what we are about. And until we are all together again, our work is far from over.



Meet Our Newest Board Members

Peggy Allison Snow '67

Director of Communications and Newsletter Editor

isbpeggy67@gmail.com



1967



2008

When Maile asked me to join the Board as Newsletter Editor, I was somewhat surprised. I have no experience as a desktop publisher, nor am I a grammarian. What I do have is a tremendous love for the ISB Network, and I want to give back in small part just a little of what has come my way since I began coming to reunions, finding old friends, and making new ones. My only regret is that I didn't find the Network sooner, because it sure has been a fun ride since then!

My childhood was spent living in a French chateau and traveling all over Europe as my Air Force father was stationed in Chateauroux, France. I spent those school years in a French immersion program whereby I split my time equally between attending a French school and the American dependents' school. Subsequent stateside assignments left me dazed and confused as I just simply couldn't relate to my classmates' blank stares when I ... well, you know the drill. On to Thailand in 1965 and ISB, where I graduated in 1967. The rest is history.

If you hang around me for just a little while, you will see that I still love to laugh and have fun. I also discovered early on about myself that I'm very Eastern. I spent several years in Japan learning to play the shakuhachi, a bamboo flute used for meditation purposes. I'm also learning to play the Native American flute. I love bonsai and watching the deer in the woods around my house outside of Charlottesville, Virginia. I'm originally trained as a psychotherapist and a hospice worker. Now I do a lot of volunteer work. I also work at University of Virginia School of Medicine as part of a team that teaches medical students. I'm the "fake patient" part of the team, and although it's a fun job it's also serious, and it's nothing like the episode that you may have seen on Seinfeld.

The great part about being the Newsletter Editor is that I have an opportunity to meet ISBers from all different years, not just the ones that were at ISB when I was. We all have such great stories to tell, not just about back then, but about who we have become and who we are today.

I hope that you'll share those stories with us through The Thai That Binds, the ISB newsletter. I would love to hear from you. Email me and let me know what you would like to write about. Short articles, long articles, one line memories—all are welcome.

Hope to see all of you at the 2010 Reunion, or before. I'll be there with bells on.

Peggy

JoHanna Ewing '69
Advisor to the Board of Directors
johannaewing@gmail.com



1969



2008

Like so many of us, I grew up “around.” My father was “The Colonel,” one of many, as we all know. Born in my mother’s ancestral home of Texas, I moved with my family (“The Ewings”) usually every two years. We lived in the Mid South, the Midwest, and Europe prior to moving to Bangkok in 1967. From German kindergarten to ISB with 9 schools in the interim, the Thai experience is still affecting my life in positive ways.

After returning to the states I did manage to keep up with a couple of folks from ISB, namely David Elder and Sueanne Colbran. It wasn’t until the early 90s that David convinced me to attend the first San Antonio reunion, a life altering event. I was living in Dallas, Texas, had changed careers to nursing, and was single. Over the last decade I have gotten more and more involved until I inherited the Archives. I must say that my favorite part of the ISB Network is working at the Reunions with my sisters and brother. We always have such a great time rekindling old friendships, reacquainting with folks, and helping those fortunate few who have finally decided to attend their first ISB reunion.

Living in Austin, Texas 16 years, I work for a national home health care company as a corporate nurse whose duties change on a weekly basis. I am getting resettled in new digs close to downtown, and I cook, write, drum, pursue my art, and am active in my community. Now I am a Board member, so my dance card is full. I am excited about being on the Board and working with friends to enhance the ISB Network. So many of us have gained so much from the Network and associations derived there from. I am still looking for additions to the Archives so that everyone can appreciate those pieces of our shared history. Let me know if you have something that you want to add. I am in the process of putting together a Panther Locker, a la the Brats traveling footlockers. There are many items that have been donated that are perfect for a locker such as jerseys, unique worn clothing, shoes, and sport paraphenalia. Let me hear from you if you have an addition to the locker that represented our lives at ISB.



I Eloped to Laos on the All Night Train

By Cheryl Geyerman, '66

This is a story of *intrigue, romance, war, and betrayal*. It was 1967. I started dating John, a former Army guy who worked in the same Bangkok office as I did at USOM, the name they used in Thailand for USAID. He was older—5 whole years. Actually, I'd been seeing a fair number of guys, since, well, there was a war on and Bangkok was an R&R center. I wrote to a few other guys, some back home, some in Vietnam, and some from back home who were in Vietnam. I met a couple of Aussie soldiers—one of them gave me a silver cross with a star sapphire stone. I still have it. I think I inspire religion in some people. I mean, I think they feel I am in need of it or something. You'd have to know me to think about that one.

In any case, I wasn't home much. Isn't it great how you only need about 4 hours of sleep when you are 19? It was probably sometime after Christmas of 1967 when John proposed to me. We were playing gin rummy at my parent's house on Soi 24, Sukhumvit Road, sitting on the floor in the living room with the ceiling fan going around and around, the geckos on the wall whisking up the mosquitos, our icy gin and tonics sweating puddles on the marble-topped coffee table.

John was generally quiet, painfully so sometimes, and when he said, in a long, drawn out sentence—I swear, with ellipses you could hear between the words, “Will...you...marry...me?”—I was stunned. I had never considered getting married—it seemed kind of for old people, for one thing. But, it somehow seemed really mean to say no. After all, he wasn't the worst guy in the world.

Intrigue

We decided we would elope to Laos on the all-night train.

I told my dad I was going with some friends up to Laos. No problem there. At least my stepmother wouldn't be nattering at him about my late nights. You can't blame her, really—she's Thai, and well-bred girls just don't go out on their own at night, or alone with a date, for that matter. I guess in America well-bred means something else.

So, come February and George Washington's birthday, we would take the long weekend to accomplish our nuptials. Of course, I worried about it for the next two months. Not about what I would wear, what we would say, where I'd get flowers. Mostly, about what in the Sam Hill was I doing? I reasoned that he wouldn't be able to pull it off. John wasn't a “can do” guy.

Romance

The big weekend arrived. We had booked a compartment on the train to depart from Hua Lampong Railway Station in the evening. It was so cool. The car was German-made with lots of dark mahogany, and all kinds of handy built-ins—a small shiny stainless steel sink with a mirror, a little table, brass light switches, a buzzer for the conductor. Windows that opened. And a wonderful engineering feat—seats that turned into beds with starchy white linens. I just couldn't believe that my exotic and untame-able Thailand could have something that seemed so fabulously well organized. I know it was German, but somehow it seemed so Japanese. Every tiny thing had its own tiny place.

While I was taking in the details of the compartment and looking out the window, I saw the crowd in the train station suddenly stop moving. I couldn't see what they were looking at, but then I heard the national anthem. Then--play ball!--the clamor started again and the train left the station. We were headed for Nong Khai, up on the Mekong River, across from Vientiane, Laos.

John and I went to the dining car to eat, and we got into a card game with a mixed group of Thais and *farangs*. Laughing and cheating, everyone was in high spirits. We forgot to mention this was our bachelor party. I would have, but I didn't know as much about wedding rituals as I do now.

Eventually we all retired to our compartments, morning came, and a few hours later we arrived in Nong Khai. Meeting us at the station was John's former sergeant, Dick, who was now on loan from USAID to the "Company" that ran Air America. How disappointing to see him. I knew Dick, and he was a "can do" guy. This whole marriage thing actually might happen.

Dick hustled us off the train and to the river where we hopped a boat to Laos. From the boat, we took a taxi to our hotel, the then-classy Lane Xang hotel right on the Mekong River. We left our luggage there, and Dick spirited us off to the airport. We were going to take a little trip up north.

War

At the airport, sitting on the runway was a huge and ugly airplane—a C-130 cargo plane, all round and fat on the outside. Inside, strapped to the floor of the plane, taking up almost the entire interior was a mammoth weapon—a Howitzer, someone said. We strapped ourselves in on the floor on the sides of the plane. We were headed for Moung Soui in north central Laos, on the *Plaine des Jarres*, 9 miles from the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

Looking out, I could see only jungle beneath us. When we approached Moung Soui, I could see flashes of fire where bombs were being dropped in the distance. A thought flashed through my head, "I must be really crazy. I could get killed here." No one would ever have known because we were not officially on that plane, and the Company had secrets to keep. But, as we all know, 19 year olds are immortal, especially when headed to a wedding they never thought actually would take place.

We landed on a tiny airstrip—at least it looked tiny next to our big roly poly C-130—and went to Dick's—a rustic cabin-like place with a kitchen, living room, bedroom, and bath. We walked around the village. A few houses were scattered here and there. Much later--years later--I was told it was a Company-created village for the purpose of gathering intelligence, defeating the Pathet Lao, warring on Vietnam. The main residents were those employed by the Company and women employed to keep them happy. I can't say that was true; I have no idea.

In the late afternoon, we went to the assistant lord mayor's house. He was performing our wedding ceremony. He got out 3 forms with carbons, and typed them on an old black typewriter with information we gave him. The form was a civil wedding contract in Laotian and French. I was ranked as the first wife. Who would have known that my year of French with Mrs. Hairston at ISB in 1962 would come in so handy?

We signed the document, and that was it. No vows. No "kiss the bride." Outside several Laotians had gathered around a big fire. They were there to celebrate our wedding. Each person tied strings around our wrists while reciting a Laotian proverb that an interpreter translated. "To keep your husband, keep him on the bed," for instance. Or, "May you have many children." The wishes were bawdy and hilarious to the crowd, so apparently something was lost in the translation.

We poured each well-wisher a shot of Mekong whisky, and drank a shot with them. I followed those shots with draws on an Ahai beer as it just might have been the first whisky I had ever drunk, and it was the kind that ripped out your throat. After 8 shots or so, I told Dick that I really had to eat something.

We all walked back to Dick's house--it was very dark--only to find out that others had come before us and had eaten all the food. I was very disappointed, and very drunk. While they were content to drink more, I decided to go to bed. The only bedroom was Dick's. I didn't really trust him, so I carefully locked the door before I took off my black stretch pants and blouse, put on a sweatshirt and crawled under the big fur comforter. What kind of fur was it, anyway? I have no idea.

Romance again, or was it War

The next morning I woke up very sorry. Very sick. John was next to me, very angry. "I'm mad as hell at you." Oh, great. The honeymoon is over.

Apparently, when he decided to go to bed, he couldn't wake me up to unlock the door. A small window about 6 feet above the ground looked into the bedroom. Somehow he got up to the window and after incurring a large bloody gash on his side, he dropped into the bedroom.

One of his concerns was that I could have been kidnapped. Sometimes the Pathet Lao would creep into the village and grab someone or put a bomb under the house. I was so glad it didn't seem important to tell me any of this the day before. I didn't really apologize since I didn't think it was my fault about anything. I just wanted to be done with this hangover. The only thought on my mind was to get to the bathroom to throw up. Oh, the charm of a young bride.

I don't know much about the rest of that first day of wedded bliss. I think Dick was singing around his little kitchen, cooking eggs and bacon, and drinking coffee. What kind of person can drink late into the night, and spring out of bed, whistling and rustling up breakfast? No one I ever married.

After about two centuries of waiting, a helicopter arrived before dark. We strapped in, and I prayed I wouldn't vomit all over everything. Those copters don't have air sick bags. We headed back to Vientiane.

As we walked into the Lane Xang in all its old French colonial glory, John reached into his pocket and said, "Oh—here," and tossed me the heavy gold band we'd picked out some weeks before. I dug around in my purse, picked off the lint, and handed him a similar ring. We put them on. I laughed to myself. We were a couple of romantics.

Okay, so I left out the betrayal. That would come later. It wasn't as fun as the other stuff.



Timeshare or Retire in Thailand with ISBers

Get the latest update

By Brian Burleigh '73, tygretwo@hotmail.com

What is The Chinchuck Resort?

Sawadi! Thanks to everyone who came together for our meeting at the San Diego reunion to discuss the concept of "The Chinchuck Resort". I hope everyone enjoyed our discussion and had a great time at the reunion. Special thanks to Dan Grandi, '73, for his expertise on living in Thailand today and owning/managing property there.

So, just what is a "Chinchuck Resort"? It is a concept to put together a group of interested ISB'ers who want to pool resources to buy, lease, or build a resort-like facility that is exclusively ours to use like a timeshare or your full time retirement residence.

You have all probably heard talk such as 'wouldn't it be cool to have some ISBN retirement facility'? This so-called "Chinchuck Resort" effort is a work in progress in that direction. As you might imagine, any visit to Thailand is always going to be a great vacation. But an annual vacation or retirement at a comfortable, possibly

beach front property is a very worthy effort. You can't beat the price, location or the company!

A vacation in Thailand is great. A long vacation in Thailand is terrific. But, going to a place you love for a few weeks/months or more every year, where you are guaranteed to be in the company of your ISB friends for fun, sport, relaxation, boating, shopping, charity work, cooking, eating, beaching, swimming, sailing, diving, or just being on your own knowing you're in good hands, is priceless. If you come up with a better sales pitch and more reasons for doing this, let's hear it!

As you might guess, there is a lot of excitement and interest in this concept. At this stage we are trying to get a dialogue going and grow our group. If you are 'in' or just 'in-terested', join up! Each of us needs to advocate for the idea with our ISB friends to get more people added to the email list. The more the better.

Please JOIN our Google discussion group, post a picture and tell a tall tale or just lay out your ideas:

<http://groups.google.com/group/ISBNTimeshare>

I am also forming an email list, so please email me with your contact information, phone, etc., at tygretwo@hotmail.com and I'll add you to the list. For the time being we don't have a lot of activity, but as things develop we will pick up the pace. It's numbers of the interested *and* willing we need to develop to make our dream come true.

Someone asked what website they could browse to look at the possibilities. I was using <http://www.siamrealestate.com/> and I'm sure there are others with great listings. If you want to run your own calculator to figure what amount of money buys how much time in a property purchased for so much money with X number of units and owners and so on, here are a couple of general descriptions in USD:

\$1,000,000 for 10 units = \$100,000 per unit. 30 investors divided equally = \$33,333 each.

10 units times 51 weeks (one week maintenance) = 510 weeks. Every investor owns 1/30th.

510 weeks divided by 30 = 17 weeks or 4.3 months use per investor.

A \$10,000 purchase into this scenario would result in 1/100th ownership. 510 divided by 100 = 5.1 weeks use per year. You just might eat a lot of great Thai food in 5.1 weeks.

Another way:

\$1,000,000 for 15 units = \$66,666 per unit. 30 investors divided equally = \$33,333 each.

15 units times 51 weeks = 765 weeks. 1/30 of 765 = 25.5 weeks or nearly 6 months.

\$10,000 in this scenario is still 1/100th ownership. 1/100th of 765 = 7.6 weeks... an extra two weeks every year to gorge on Thai food and Singha, making the prospect of enduring a 20+ hour air transit to BKK far more palatable for the spirit and gullet.

If anyone can build a calculator for this, please do.

Obviously everybody has a different budget and different goals. Some will want to be full timers in one spot.

For some a brief stay will be just the right medicine while others will want to start looking for an additional property in another place to add to your pleasure. Keep in mind as you pitch the idea to 500 of your best ISB friends that a cruise every year compared to what this costs each member - we should come out ahead in just a few years.

Don't forget to add a guestimate for start up costs, forming the necessary legal entities, monthly maintenance fees and possible reserve for the unexpected. I would expect the monthly fees to be pretty low per owner. This is not an investment 'flip' for profit. It's an owner/user for as long as it works - all those details (entrance and exit strategies) are yet to be drafted and discussed among the members.

To help get people doing more calculations, Ann Marsden '74 sent this my way:

Bob Waun is a business contact of mine that heads up a company that does this type of lending for condohotel fractional ownership <http://www.vacation-finance.com/articles.htm> He may be able to be of help (either in sharing experience or in contacts).....

Mark Epstein '73, with international real estate experience, put it this way: It should be a pretty straight forward deal: 1) you identify how many folks are 'in' and what size place to target; 2) get commitments for the amount of baht required; 3) establish an ownership structure with time share aspects agreeable to all; and 5) go shopping for existing product and develop a short list; 4) submit purchase offers on the short list and negotiate one to a close: 6) head over there with your suitcase and appetite. Simple enough - but simple and 'easy' are entirely different things.

It really is simple enough, but with your help to build this effort it might even be easy!

CHEERS!

Brian



That Was Then, This is Now

By Peggy Allison Snow '67 and Tony Grady '73

None of us are the same people that we were at ISB. We keep some parts of ourselves and change others. In this new feature, Peggy interviewed Tony Grady as he offered his thoughts on his life since ISB.



Tony in 1973



Jasmine, Benjamin, wife Donna, Tony, Holly
(missing, John)



Tony with daughters Jasmine (L) and
Holly

Peggy: What do you remember about yourself back then?

Tony: I was so sure that I had all the answers. I thought I could solve most problems.

Peggy: How do you think your friends remember you from back then?

Tony: Confident, friendly and very gregarious.

Peggy: Is there a quality or characteristic about you that hasn't changed throughout your life?

Tony: I'm still very friendly.

Peggy: What's important to you?

Tony: Contributing. Making things better. Leaving a job or situation better than I found it.

Peggy: What has deeply influenced you in some important way?

Tony: Longevity. When you've seen more of life, and have undergone experiences like the death of your best friend, it sobers you. We are not indestructible. Therefore live life fully in the moment and don't wait until later, don't put things off. Be mindful of the important and not coerced by the urgent. Say what needs to be said and do what needs to be done and take time to think today, for tomorrow may never come. Be thankful for each day regardless of what may happen. My best friend from college died in an airplane accident when we were 22. That forever changed me. Life has been much more sober for me since that time. I had the privilege of

escorting his remains to his final resting place. I named my firstborn after him. His memory lives on, but the interaction I have sorely missed.

Peggy: What makes you laugh out loud?

Tony: My very funny wife. I'm Mr. "Sour Puss" when it comes to humor but she loosens me up.

Peggy: What would we be surprised to learn about you?

Tony: We homeschooled our four children and I helped.

Peggy: What are you most looking forward to?

Tony: Seeing all of my children out on their own, contributing to society.

Peggy: What is your happiest or proudest moment?

Tony: The first time I soloed a jet. It was exhilarating!

Peggy: When are you at your best?

Tony: When taking care of someone else.



Time Passages

Marriages-



Nick Lim '74 to Kathy, lucky new ISB spouse

Leon Kalbfleisch '75 to Esther Williams '75, joining a long list of married ISB couples

Birthday-

Dec. 5-H.M.K.Bhumibol Adulydej's 81st birthday

Death-

Kevin Murphy '71, 7/8/08

----And the goodbyes make the journey harder still.

Cat Stevens



Déjà Vu All Over Again

From time to time, we'll be bringing back stories that have been published in past newsletters. This story originally appeared in the November, 2005 edition, but it's such a great and timely article that it's worth a reprise.

Loy Krathong (ลอยกระทง) Thailand's New Year Celebration

By Maria Bennett Hock '70 (mhock@cox.net)



Loy Krathong is one of Thailand's most beautiful celebrations. Rich in culture and ancient traditions, this celebration has taken place for centuries. For many years Thailand – located in Southeast Asia – was known to outsiders as Siam. Siam was governed by a monarch, but in 1932 a coup changed the country from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional one, and the name Thailand was officially adopted. The royal family is highly revered, which is evident in Thai culture and reflected in festivals like the Loy Krathong.

In Thailand, *loy* means “to float” and *krathong* refers to a boat made of banana leaves in the shape of a lotus (Kislenko, 2004, p. 142). The celebration means “to float one’s offering.” The offerings, such as wishes and hopes along with prayers, are set in the boat made of banana leaves, which are folded and pinned together to make a beautiful vessel. The boat is traditionally decorated with flowers, lit candles, and incense sticks. In recent years, more elaborate designs have been created such as a bird or a traditional boat. Another item that is often added is a coin. The coin is a symbolic offering to the water spirits, but in recent years they have been regarded as a donation to the poor, who often search the floats for coins (Gerson, 1996, p. 44-47).

The festival usually falls in the month of November. Loy Krathong is celebrated on the full moon night of the twelfth lunar month. Because the moon is full during celebrations and the river is high and full of water after the rainy season, the moon’s light makes the river look clear and clean in the night when the boats are set off with

candles lit as they float down the river. This year, 2008, it is held on Thursday, the thirteenth of November. The festival celebrates the New Year and the end of the long monsoon season. Thailand gets most of its rain in the monsoon season, which falls between the months of May to October. Because rice is one of the main crops grown in Thailand, rain is needed to sustain rice paddies in order to produce an abundant crop. After the strenuous labor of plowing and planting rice for the last three months at a stretch from dawn till dusk, for the country-folk, the heavy work is finally over. When the heavy work is finished, the Thai people have a month or so before they will have to begin harvesting the rice. During this period the Thai people celebrate with various festivals and celebrations because October and November are traditionally a time to relax, re-energize, have a good time, and enjoy dry, warm weather.

The tradition of celebrating Loy Krathong dates back about seven hundred years in the ancient kingdom of Sukhothai. The legend explaining the beginning of the celebration is that a young queen named Nang Noppamas was the originator of the celebration. She made a small boat in the shape of an open lotus flower with candles lit upon it. And as an act of respect, she offered the krathong to the King, who then accepted the gift and set it afloat down the river. Her reason for doing this was because she wished to honor the water spirits during the festivities that marked the end of the rainy season. Because this was such an honorable act, the people of Sukhothai repeated the festival annually. As should every annual event that matches a culture's tradition, Loy Krathong became integrated into Thai culture.

Along with the tradition of sending off the krathong boats, there is a beauty contest that takes place. There is not one winner, but there can be many in which one beautiful lady is selected at different universities or cities for example. The reason for selecting a beautiful young lady is to have her represent the original creator of the event, Nang Noppamas. Old documents refer to her as the chief royal consort of a Sukhothai king named "Lithai."

There are other legends rather than the one just described. For example, as Nang wished to honor the water spirits, there is another legend that is more popular, of Loy Krathong beginning as an expression of gratitude to the Hindu goddess of water, Kaileshvari (Chao Mae Kongkha in Thai), for blessing the countryside with rain to help the rice crops that Thailand deeply depended on in their economy as well as symbolizing a "floating away" of old sins on the krathong. Still another legend says that the floral krathong is an offering to the pagoda (a temple) that holds the Lord Buddha's topknot. Young men in Thailand ceremoniously cut off their topknot when they come of age, usually around thirteen or fourteen years old. The Lord Buddha's topknot was cut off at his self-ordination and placed in a pagoda. Other legends say that the celebration of Loy Krathong is a way to honor one's ancestors. No matter what the reason for celebration, once a person has seen this beautiful celebration, it will not be forgotten. Today people take the opportunity to celebrate and make wishes for the future when they come to Thailand as a tourist, passerby, or resident.

The Loy Krathong festival can be very competitive. There are contests to see who can make the best krathong. In recent years the designs have become more elaborate and creative as opposed to the simple banana leaf with a single candle and a flower. Loy Krathong is now a major tourist attraction. Those who have heard of the celebration find a way to arrange their travels to take advantage of seeing this wonderful and unusual way of bringing in the New Year and celebrating the end of the rainy season. The Beautiful Queen contest is still an important part of the festival. In November 2000, there was a big controversy regarding the beauty contest. The first runner up for the title of queen was a man, or a man dressed as a woman (กะเทย). During the competition, a few ladies complained that one of the contestants was a male, but no one believed them. The man, Kesaraporn Duangsawan, won Miss Media. A few days later his lie was discovered and he had to return his prize money, but he kept his Miss Media runner-up sash as a memento. In Bangkok, Thailand, major establishments such as leading hotels and amusement parks organize their Loy Krathong Festival, krathong contest, and beauty contest as major annual functions. There are also many private celebrations attended by families. If they are not near a major river, regular swimming pools or ponds substitute for the river.

I was able to participate in the magical Loy Krathong festival when I lived in Bangkok. I lived in a house that was situated along a waterway. In the 1960s the waterways were used as a means of transportation, even through the city. During the Loy Krathong festival, I would go out into the backyard and watch my neighbors place their lighted krathong boats in the water. When important or especially ornate boats were unveiled, the crowd would applaud politely. By the end of the evening the whole canal was lit with small boats carrying wishes, hopes, and dreams off into the darkness only lit by the moon. Some people believe that if the candle remains burning until the krathong is out of sight, then their wish will come true.

As people are setting off their krathongs, young children often set off water fireworks to pass the time. They also sing a song that goes:

*November full moon shines,
Loy Krathong, Loy Krathong,
And the water's high in the river
and local klong,
Loy Loy Krathong, Loy Loy
Krathong,
Loy Krathong is here and
everybody's full of cheer,
We're together at the klong,
Each one with his krathong,
As we push away we pray,
We can see a better day.*



The krathong usually doesn't float for too long because as it floats away from its starting place, children further down the stream will swim out to snatch a beautiful krathong once the candle has gone out to get the small coin, if any, from the krathong. Some believe that if you put a small lock of hair or a piece of your fingernail in the krathong, anything bad in your life will float away with the boat. When it is dark, everyone gathers down by the waterside. There is usually some sort of pier made especially for the occasion. At the ends of the pier people gather to send their krathong down the waterway. By the time everyone's krathongs are in the water, the whole waterway is lit with a warm glow of good wishes.



If you go to the market a few days before the festival begins, all the supplies are in stock to build personal krathongs. Biodegradable krathongs are suggested when making krathongs because they will float away for nature to take care of and it would take away the meaning of the festival because it is an event to thank nature. In recent years foam cups have been used because they float better, but because of the expensive cost of having to collect them after they all are sent off is huge it is strongly suggested to not use anything that is not biodegradable. Instead of foam cups people have been seen using bread to make their krathongs. Also, in order to better protect the environment, some people celebrate in small canals or swimming pools to help prevent pollution of the waterways that are so important in Thailand. The markets sell ready-made krathongs or leaf cups that are specially made for people participating in the festival.

Making a krathong requires a lot of patience because working with the banana leaves can be very tedious. There are directions online (<http://www.pattayacity.com/pattaya/loikrathong2000.html>) and if you are a native of Thailand it should come natural in the ability to make them from directions being passed down from generation to generation or you should have many resources at your fingertips.

In order to make a Krathong you need:

- banana tree leaves
- banana trunk sections
- assorted flowers
- pins
- incense
- candles



First you will need to fold the banana leaves and pin them to the outside and top of the banana trunk. There are many different styles to folding; some like the leaves to flare out and others like them sticking up towards the sky, or whatever suits one's preference. Once the "boat" is created flowers, candles, and incense are added in any arrangement that is desired. After finishing the krathong, it can be taken to the riverside, to make a wish or prayer upon it and set it off into the night. It is said that the krathongs float down the river to the temple to take care of people's wishes and prayers. Also, any bad luck is said to be sent away and hopes of good luck and prosperity for the next year is also sent away.

Some people would say this is a religious event, but others call it part of the culture of Thailand; it would be a matter of opinion because there are so many legends associated with the annual festival. Loy Krathong is a beautiful ceremony that has developed into an event for the traveling tourist to participate in or marvel at.

References

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It's a Small World

Finding Other ISBers "By Accident"

By Maureen Lockhart Salahshoor '75

Here's a real Small World Story:

Last night my girlfriend Kim invited me to go have a drink and listen to music at the bar down in Juanita that we frequent. She was going to bring her new friend Denise, who is a parent on her son's baseball team that she wanted to introduce me to.

Denise was a hoot just as Kim said and we were laughing about the plight of middle aged women trying to find middle aged men that were not stuck to the remote and had the energy to keep up with us. Slim pickings! ;-)
Kim was trying to introduce Denise (who was divorced) to men we knew from this "Cheers"- like bar.

Anyhow by 11, I was growing weary as I had been up since 5 am and was about ready to say goodnight when Kim and Denise started talking about growing up in Seattle. Denise said "no, I lived in Africa, and was born in India."

Tired, I wasn't much up to chatting about living overseas as a kid and going into my story of ISB and was gathering up my car keys to head home, but when I heard Kim say, "Maureen lived in Thailand too!" I looked at Denise with renewed interest and asked, "Did you attend the International School Bangkok?"

"Yes", she replied. WOW Small world!

Denise Haase '79 arrived in 1974, the year after I left, and attended Eighth and Ninth Grades. She lived on Soi Asoke and yada yada yada--had no idea we (ISBN) existed. Well, of course I told her about the ISBN and got her information to set up a profile for her. Go figure!



Thai'ing up Loose Ends

- Want to read about today's ISB? Go to <http://touchstone.isb.ac.th>
- Be sure to read the Bulletin Board on the Website. It's full of "what's happening".
- Please forward suggestions, constructive criticism, or comments regarding this newsletter to isbpeggy67@gmail.com
- This is your newsletter, and it can't exist without your input. Send stories, memories, current news-anything that would be of interest to the above email address. I'll help you with editing, etc.
- When the time comes, renew your membership in the ISB Network. You'll be glad you did.
- Have you had a "Small World" experience, in which you've by chance run into an old ISB pal or found someone that went to ISB? I'd like to hear about it. It doesn't matter if it was yesterday or many years ago. Send Peggy an email.
- Check out this 1968 ISB football game on YouTube <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ofeRtZyiuX4> How many guys can you identify? Put your answers on the Bulletin Board.
- Our webmaster, Maureen Lockhart Salashoor, needs an assistant. If you have mySQL/PHP skills and have some time to lend a hand, contact her (webmast@isbnetwork.com).

In Closing...



Confetti and streamers to Kate Johnson '76, without whose help and unending patience this newsletter would not have happened. Khop khun mach ka.

Peggy

