



PERSPECTIVES

This text was presented with the ISB historical video August 1994 in Clearwater, Florida in celebration of the 10th anniversary of The ISB Network.

By the end of the 1940s, the world was a rapidly changing place. World War II had left its mark on much of the globe. The parties to this conflict awoke to a Cold War and to steeper levels of international activity. Two emerging superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, were busy vying for the hearts and minds of peoples from Eastern Europe to Central America; from the Horn of Africa to the jungles of Southeast Asia.

Our tale concerns the children of this new world whose parents of many nationalities found their way to an obscure land nestled in a fertile river basin in tropical Southeast Asia - a nation called Siam. By 1949 the Kingdom of Siam was officially renamed the Kingdom of Thailand.

The children and adults you will see in this recollection lived in this social and political melange. People the world over know the story of "The King and I." However, our story is a twist from that plot - we are students from OTHER lands on Thai soil.

To our Thailand and to the Thai people...our presentation is dedicated.

By the end of World War II, Bangkok held a small but growing foreign community. The wife of the pastor of Christ Church played a key role, along with a group of parents, in founding a private school for children up to 10 years of age. A large part of the influx was composed of American diplomatic, commercial and military families. They needed good elementary schooling for their children. On October 27, 1950 the first of many meetings was held to discuss plans to establish a formal school providing both primary and secondary education for English-speaking children in Bangkok.

The United States Embassy offered the use of a building located on embassy grounds off Rajadamri Road. It was earlier used by the Japanese occupation forces as an officers club. With facilities for handling about 70 students, this school, known as the International Children's Center or ICC, opened in May of 1951. ICC steadily grew with the foreign or farang community. By 1953 there were over 200 students. The tenth, eleventh and twelfth grades were soon added. In 1957 six seniors received their diplomas. This was the first graduating class.

That same year ICC changed its name to the International School of Bangkok, when an International School Association was formed to receive legal recognition from the Thai Government. The school wanted to further promote scholastic achievement and encourage extra-curricular activities. By the close of the 1957-58 school year, ISB had more than 500 students. Despite the school's stunning growth and legal recognition, for nearly a decade the students attended classes in barely adequate wood framed buildings, now aging and decaying swiftly in the tropical climate. The library and half the classrooms were transformed into wading ponds during Bangkok's downpours. And school assemblies, ceremonial events, and athletic competitions had stretched the grounds to its limits.

Although adjacent to the American Embassy, the school was considered quite a distance from the newly developing residential areas in Bangkok and Bangsue. Clearly, the need for a new school location was pressing. The Wattana Wittaya Academy, a girls' boarding school, offered to lease a corner of its property to ISB. That land was located between Sois 15 and 19 off Sukumvit. Road. The offer was accepted and new construction was financed by income accumulated from ISB's own excess operating expenses. The new campus cost nearly 3 million baht. It included 2 buildings - a classroom building and a gym. The architects for the new school were from the Ministry of Education of Thailand.

On a drizzly Bangkok morning, September 1, 1960, the International School of Bangkok officially began classes at its new location on Soi 15. With over 650 students representing 25 nations, ISB was a truly international school. Its board membership drew from government, religious and private industry leaders. But student population and curriculum took on a distinctly American flavor. With such influence, ISB became fully accredited with the American Secondary Board of Education, with the Middle States School Association and became a member of the National Honor Society and the International Quill and Scroll Society.

Incredibly, before the first year was over at the new location, the increasing student body had once more outgrown the facilities. In 1962 and again in 1963, the U.S. Government donated funds to construct 2 additional classroom buildings which were both completed by 1964 when student population exceeded 1,200.

In early 1965, the Vietnam War accelerated and many American Government dependents were evacuated to Bangkok. And the escalating American forces in Vietnam boosted the number of families to Bangkok - and their children to ISB. A fourth multi-story classroom building was completed by the end of that year. Enrollment soared to 3,500 at the end of 1967 and a second campus for grades four through eight was soon opened in Bangsue. The largest enrollment in the school's history occurred in 1969 with 3,650 students.

Family related activities were important to the foreign community and much civic and social life in Bangkok revolved around ISB. A school supported Christmas charity drive, dubbed Operation Santa Clause, collected food, clothing and toys for the less fortunate children in the Chiang Mai area and every year the U.S. Air Force transported the toys and some ISB students to Chiang Mai for the event. Fashion shows featuring clothing designs of the local Thai silk and cotton companies abounded using ISB students on the fashion runways. Theme dances—Sadie Hawkins in the beginning of the year to break the ice, the Homecoming dance later, and the Junior Senior prom at year's end became bigger and bigger events. Many of these events quickly moved from the gymnasium at ISB to the many deluxe hotels that were sprouting up around the city.

Also into the picture came a sleepy little fishing village in Chonburi Province called Pattays which for many years had been a retreat for wealthy Bangkok people. Weekends saw families loading into their vehicles for the 4 hour expedition to escape the heat of the city. Several new hotels sprouted up and many private bungalows were full almost every weekend. Families enjoyed the relaxing break from Bangkok, the serene atmosphere of the bay and offshore islands and fabulous fresh seafood at many local restaurants.

The Teen Club, a facility supported by the U.S. Government, was straining in its facility on Wireless Road a few blocks from the American Embassy. The Friday night movies and Saturday night dances brought in so many people they overflowed into the parking lot. Soon a new club was built on Soi Asoke (21) within walking distance of the school featuring a swimming pool and huge dining, dance and movie hall facilities. At times there were as many as four band groups playing in rotation at the Teen Club.

The school too during these boom years took on a new look. The former open air sala was enclosed to make way for the art, music and industrial arts departments. Its original snack bar overwhelmed, the Foremost Company constructed a new facility with all the latest technology. Later, the gym and many of the classrooms were airconditioned. Larger student orchestra groups could be assembled and the music department grew rapidly.

The massive athletic field of ISB was a constant headache. Many a morning would find the indomitable patriarch of sports at ISB, Mr. P.E. Rajendra, walking its length checking for snakes before the first period of gym. Every year the track would be built up with sand and ash only to see it settle again after the monsoon. It was a constant battle with the elements that was not won until the 1980s when the entire area was backfilled and lights for evening events were installed. Intramural sports competition was an important aspect of school life in these days. Owing to the lack of local competition within the students age groups, the school was divided into four teams or "houses" each with a name, flag and color. But the crowning

athletic event of the school year was the Singapore Games in which ISB athletes challenged the teams from the Singapore American School (later the Singapore International School).

With the ebb of American military involvement in Southeast Asia and the fall of Saigon in 1975, the number of American families living in Bangkok declined. In 1976, the Bangsue campus was sold and the Intermediate School was moved to the Bangkok Soi 15 campus. For more than 10 years ISB's enrollment hovered around 1,200 students until the boom years of the late 1980s. Thailand then began to emerge as a newly industrialized nation bursting with development and foreign investment. With that came foreign nationals from all over the world to live and work in Bangkok.

Enrollment began increasing once again. By 1988, the school's board of directors decided to move to a new campus in the northern sector of Bangkok, four times the size of the Soi 15 campus. In January 1992 the 1,900 students representing 52 nationalities moved to this new campus. It is fitting that ISB made its new home on Soi Samakee for samakee in Thai means togetherness. For more than four decades, ISB has seen many nations, many races, many religions and many cultures coming together to learn. So many people have brought success to ISB — the board members, the administrators, the teachers and most of all, the students.

For you nostalgia buffs....The Soi 15 campus is now a school operated by the United Nations, the Shack has been torn down and the site of the Soi 21 Teen Club is now a highrise condo.