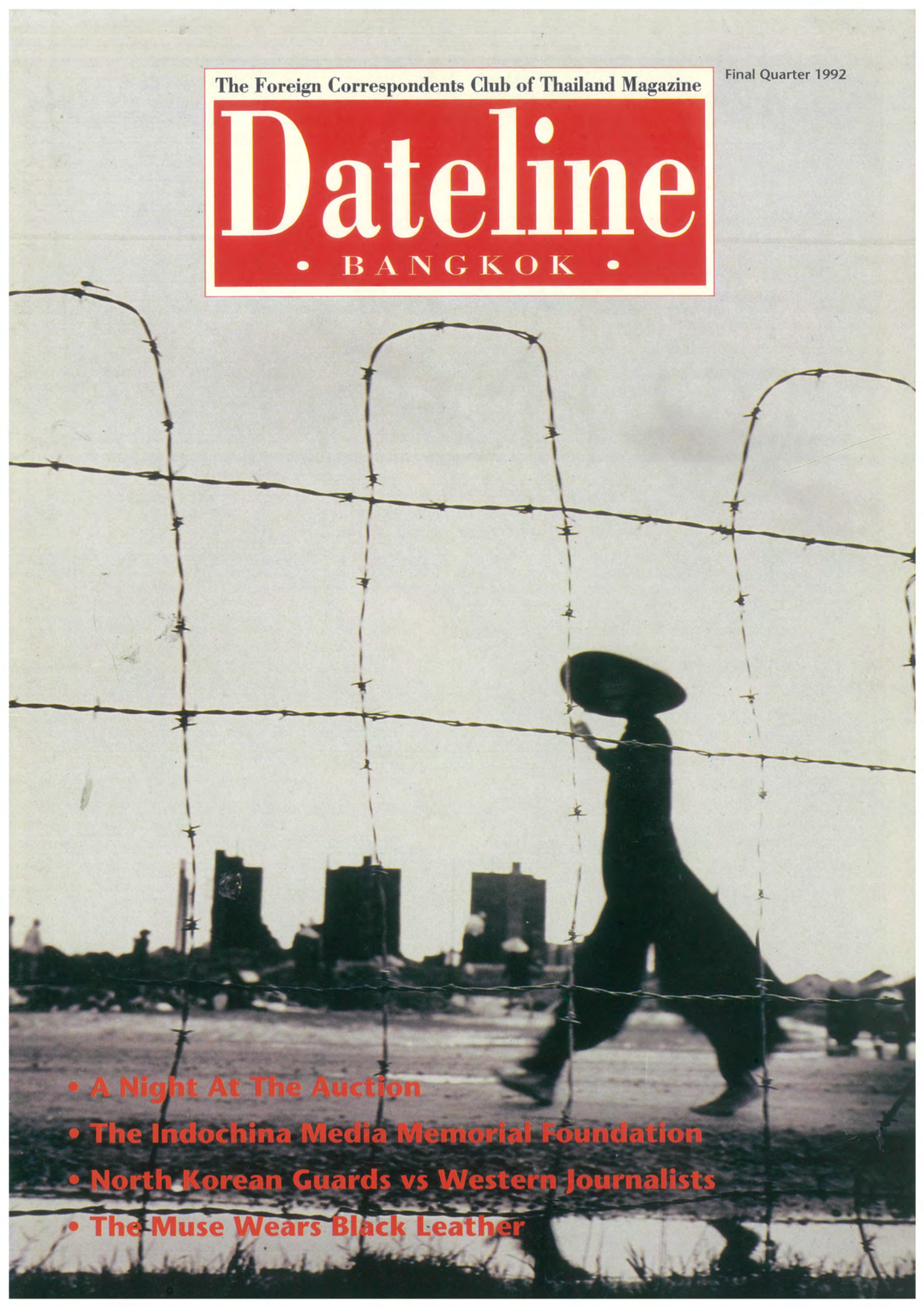


The Foreign Correspondents Club of Thailand Magazine

Final Quarter 1992

Dateline

• B A N G K O K •

- 
- A Night At The Auction
 - The Indochina Media Memorial Foundation
 - North Korean Guards vs Western Journalists
 - The Muse Wears Black Leather

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The IMMF



Club Highlights

CONTRIBUTORS

Dateline Bangkok, the FCCT's quarterly magazine, welcomes story or photo essay contributions from our journalist and associate members. Please contact Peter Janssen on 238-4142. Payment is in FCCT chit books.

Front cover shows Dong Ha, Vietnam, 1966 by Lance Woodruff which was recently auctioned on behalf of The IMMF.

A Letter From Your President

BY TAN LIAN CHOO

Well, almost before we realised it, the year was nearly out. We ended it with a jolly Christmas party for our children - it had just the right sort of mix between the orthodox and the modern, and, in many ways was a fitting wrap-up to the many creative and worthwhile activities organised by the Club this year.

Our children were treated to the unusual appearance of Batman. But the traditionalists among us were also reassured when Santa Claus came around and had a little word with each of our children.

The party spread, which included a colourful gingerbread house, a basket of rosy apples, Christmas cakes and cookies, was one of the most attractive ever put out by the FCCT.

For the first time too, the Christmas party was held on a Sunday. This proved to be a great boon for parents who would otherwise have had to battle with the weekday traffic. It was a good move, but it again proved that a Club opening on Sunday is only interesting to members if a special event merits it. The Board thus believes that the Club should be closed on Sundays unless a major event or attraction like the Christmas party takes place.

Club members Delia Oakins and Mazal Sidler, with inputs from programme directors Panadda Lertlum-Ampai and Annabel Anderson, deserve special mention for their energetic and creative efforts in organising the children's food, entertainment and gifts in this highly-successful Christmas party.

Pepsi Cola joined our illustrious group of Club sponsors for this occasion. Prior to this event, Tuntex had stepped in to sponsor a lively New Members' Night. Like American Express, which earlier in the year sponsored a Meet-the-Thai-Press-Night, these companies have been receptive to our call to more Club members to come forward and help us organise worthy networking functions.

So if you are one of those interested in sponsoring our activities, do step forward without hesitating. You can also help by taking up future advertising in Dateline Bangkok, a quarterly journal now published in colour and designed professionally. It is distributed to every member of the FCCT and to other press clubs in the region, many of which enjoy reciprocal arrangements with the FCCT.

Our Club's membership base is about a thousand - it fluctuates, sometimes exceeding a thousand. However, every non-renewal forces total membership down below this near-magical thousand members' mark. If you ever care to read the membership listing carefully, you will see that it reads like a "Who's Who in Bangkok". I can assure you that many



forum for such matters. We must remain filial to what we are about and what we offer best - a meeting place of lively minds, and discussion programmes that are informative and even illuminating.

No doubt, the tragic events of May drove these points home. Had we not been beneficiaries of an existing Club, we would not have been able to have such a commendable forum for an exchange of views as well as information about the tragedy.

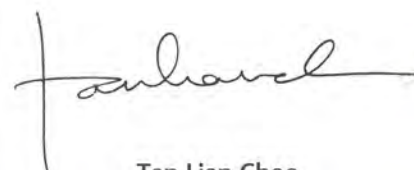
Good publicity of our activities, under the charge of Publicity director Peter Janssen, and a high degree of professional journalistic concerns, looked into by Immediate Past President Dominic Faulder, also helped us to steer the course set out by our initial directions.

Correspondent and journalist members were thus able to enjoy an informal dinner with Thai Foreign Minister Prasong Soonsiri as part of the year-end celebrations.

Board members this year were enfocused early on the need to co-ordinate the professional and social aspects of the Club, in order to generate encounters of a pleasant and intellectually stimulating kind. We looked into new and flexible formats to take in a variety of proposals, and we also delved into little details such as improving the Clubhouse menu and cutlery! We removed old and discoloured table cloths, replacing them with simple, elegant white ones. Even the wilted roses on our dining tables were replaced by more fresh-looking flowers.

After nearly a year, we can all look back with some satisfaction that our activities helped to restore the Club's finances, which now enjoys an anticipated year-end operating profit. We know that the next Executive Committee, which is to be elected at the Annual General Meeting on 29th January 1993, will be able to carry out its work under less pressure than this outgoing Committee started with in February last year.

On behalf of the 1992 Executive Committee, I would like to thank you for your support during this past year. We would urge you to continue your support of the Club and to extend your hand to the 1993 Committee. So, do make a note in your new diary to attend the FCCT's inaugural dinner and dance on 27th February. I do hope to see you then!


Tan Lian Choo

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Club Highlights

BY PETER JANSSEN



SOME OF THE MOST MEMORABLE PROGRAMMES WERE:

SEPTEMBER 23RD "The Realities of Investing in Indochina"

At which three business pioneers painted a surprisingly upbeat outlook on the sub-region's economic prospects, despite their mandate to be "realistic."

OCTOBER 7TH "Meet Thailand's National Security Chief."

A night with NSC Chief Charan Kulavanija, who made several interesting comments even though moderator Paul Wedel warned that Khun Charan is a tough man to get a good quote out of.

OCTOBER 21ST "The Chuan Government: How will it work?"

At which the renowned Thai economist Dr. Ammar Siamwalla quipped "This country has a powerful economy, but a weak collective will to do anything."

NOVEMBER 18TH "Burma: An enlightening update on the 'Golden Land of SLORC'"

by Bertil Lintner/Far Eastern Economic Review and a panel of journalists recently in Rangoon (that's Yangon.)

NOVEMBER 25TH "The Indian Ambassador"

Whose stellar performance has inspired other ambassadors to sign up to address the FCCT.

DECEMBER 9TH "HH The 14th Dalai Lama: A Profile"

At which Alan King, correspondent for Gamma Liaison News Agency, proved to a packed audience that the Dalai Lama is indeed a nice guy. One of Alan's photos that raised a laugh was of the Dalai Lama, in full regalia, working out on his exercise bicycle.

Senator Gareth Evans, Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, won the FCCT 'Luncheon of the Year' award on September 9th when his appearance un-expectedly packed the clubhouse with members and non-members eager to hear the articulate minister's (this guy used to be a journalist) words of wisdom on APEC (eh?). The Clubhouse managed to repeat the miracle of the seven fish and the multitude by making a buffet for 50 go a long, long way to satiate the horde of starving journalists and Evans groupies. Never has the FCCT buffet enjoyed such popularity.



And while we're on the topic of hungry or thirsty journalists let's take our hat off to Lee Miller, FCCT Correspondent Director of Membership, who had very little to do with the organization of the very successful "Get-to-know-the-Thai-Press Nite" of September 25th. This was a "first ever" for the FCCT, and wouldn't have been possible without the generous sponsorship of American Express (Thai) Company, that picked up the enormous bar tab for the evening. The crowning glory of the net-working "nite" came when The Nation's Editor Thepchai Yong broke family tradition and became a member of the FCCT. Mr Miller, a perennial absentee member at Board meetings, graced the evening with his presence. (Continued page 27)



1. Haungjee Sae-Chia and Tan Lian Choo welcome new member, The Nation editor Thepchai Yong
2. National Security Council Chief Charan Kulavanija with moderator Paul Wedel
3. Amex's Graeme Burns, inebriated Lee Miller, and mild-mannered Peter (Batman) Sidler at Meet-The-Thai-Press Nite

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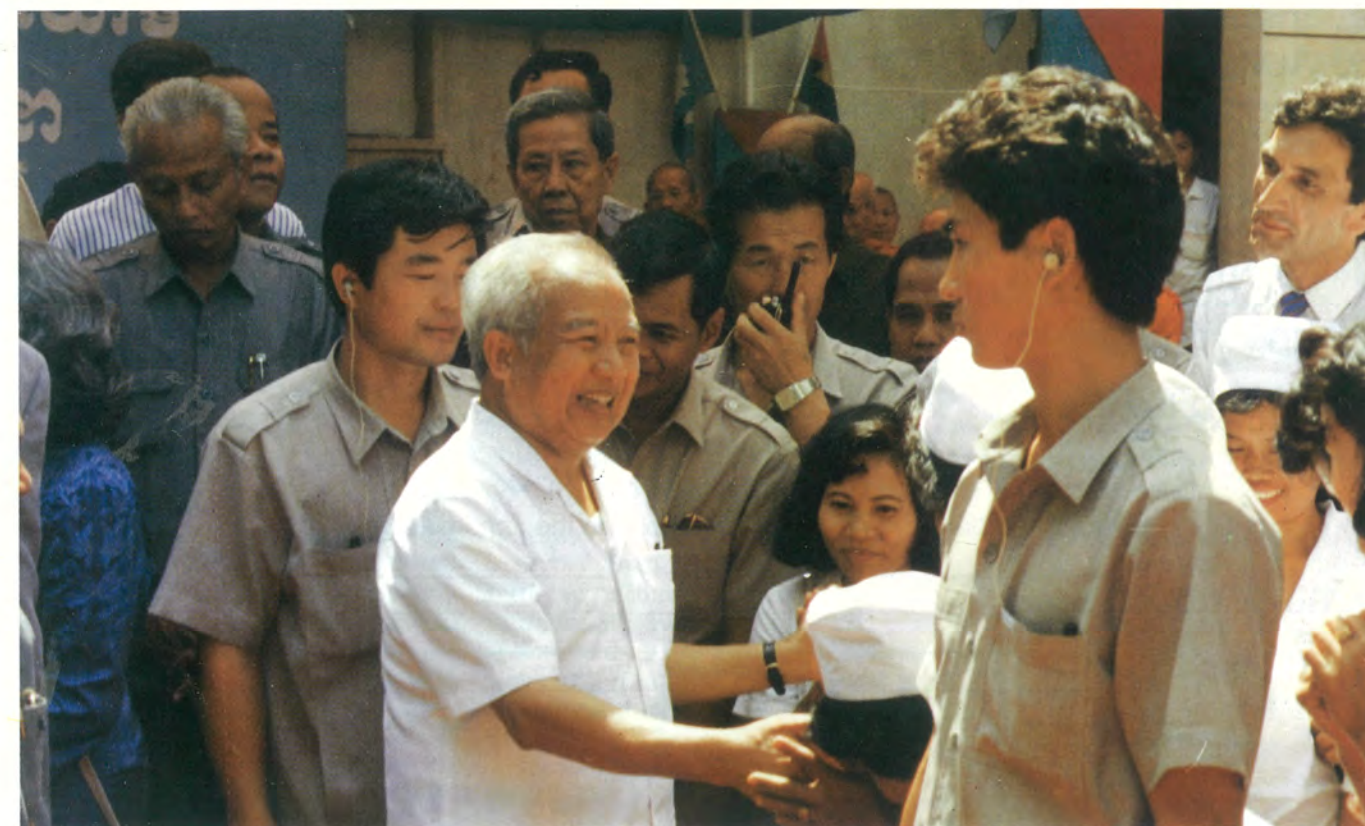
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North Korean Guards vs Western Journalists

BY LEO DOBBS

PHNOM PENH, DECEMBER

CAMBODIA'S PRINCE NORODOM SIHANOUK IS A MAN WHO LOVES TO COURT THE INTERNATIONAL PRESS BUT HIS FEARED NORTH KOREAN MINDERS HAVE BEEN DOING THEIR BEST TO POISON RELATIONS WITH THE MEDIA.



Prince Sihanouk, glad-handing while his sullen Korean guards look on

The surly, aggressive bodyguards arrived as excess baggage when Prince Sihanouk made a triumphant return to Cambodia on November 14 last year after almost 13 years as the exiled head of the Cambodian resistance alliance.

Security on that day was left in the then unskilled hands of the Phnom Penh government security chiefs, who were completely overwhelmed by the hundreds of journalists on hand from around the globe.

But the Koreans, all highly trained military who spend hours smashing

bricks with their bare fists, soon showed the local lads and the hungry hacks who was boss.

Uniformly clad in steel-gray polyester safari suits with sinister wires hanging out of their ears, the Koreans were liberal with the use of the elbow and knee in pushing back eager photographers intent on recording Sihanouk's first days home.

Veteran photo-journalist Philip Jones Griffiths, was one of the first to feel the wrath of the human robots when the prince went walk-about during the annual water festival.

A hefty shove from one the

unsmiling bodyguards sent the former Magnum Chairman sprawling, but with lightning reaction honed by covering wars around the globe, Griffiths hit back with a well placed back-kick to the groin.

All was filmed for posterity by David McKaige and the former Visnews camera crew on the spot.

Mind you, it works both ways and some self-important, aggressive and at time hysterical members of the press covering major events here in the past year have deserved a thrashing.

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North Korean Guards vs Western Journalists

communist North Korea's despotic President Kim Il-Sung, who has ruled his country with an iron fist since the 1950-53 Korean War.

"Prince Sihanouk said, 'Your bodyguards are so good - when I go home I'll take some,' " a palace insider said, adding that the Koreans only provided security services when the former monarch is in Cambodia.

Things could have been worse as the prince reportedly wanted to have Thais guarding the perimeter of his palace - the idea was shot down by Phnom Penh Prime Minister Hun Sen.

Journalists suffer most from the suspicious Koreans, most of whom cannot converse in any language known to their royal charge, but no one seems to escape their arrogance and insensitivity, including Sihanouk.

At a New Zealand army demonstration of mine clearance techniques earlier this year, Sihanouk bumped into an old friend from the Australia media.

As they started chatting amiably one of the prince's minders unceremoniously started to drag the television journalist away. When Sihanouk, still regarded as a god-king by many Cambodians, started to protest another of his protectors pulled him away to his waiting limousine.

The Koreans have even used their strong arm tactics on the bulldog bodyguards of the head of the massive U.N. peace-keeping operation here - Yasushi Akashi of Japan.

When Akashi arrived at the prince's Khemarin Palace shortly after taking up his post on March 15, the humorless Koreans barred entry to one of his burly American security men.

"We'll work it out so that there's no fighting - it would be very messy," the bodyguard said, later adding: "This is their playground - when it's my playground (U.N. headquarters), I'll be calling the shots."

"They're animals ... they deliberately step on my toes when they see me," said Agence France-Presse correspondent Sheri Prasso.

Sheri, who was recently left in tears and gasping for breath when one over-zealous guard elbowed her in the solar plexus, added that whenever

journalists tried to door step Sihanouk a posse of the Koreans would descend on the offending hack, point a finger and demand in pidgin English: "Speak no, no speak."

No one can deny the professionalism and true dedication to their business of the free mercenaries and their toughness is also impressive.

According to one story the sentry posted outside Sihanouk's bedroom stoically put up with the mosquitoes that were turning his face in to a blotchy mess night after night.

When the prince found out about the man's unflinching suffering he ordered his staff to provide him with a mosquito net.

But despite their fierce reputation it appears that there are human hearts beating somewhere behind the polyester suits - and vices too.

"They drink beer like it's going out of fashion ... they drink a lot of Chinese beer," the palace mole said.

The Far Eastern Economic Review's Nate Thayer might be the only Western journalist to have seen the Koreans on their home turf, when he visited Pyongyang during the 80th birthday celebrations of Kim Il-Sung's birthday last year.

Nate said the security men seemed quite surprised and even pleased to see him and were perfectly charming and cordial.

But then again, he noted that most North Koreans were a bit like the bodyguards of whom one senior Cambodian foreign ministry official said: "These guys, they're trained to kill a water buffalo with one punch."

SHERI, WHO WAS RECENTLY LEFT IN TEARS AND GASPING FOR BREATH WHEN ONE OVER-ZEALOUS GUARD ELBOWED HER IN THE SOLAR PLEXUS, ADDED THAT WHENEVER JOURNALISTS TRIED TO DOOR STEP SIHANOUK A POSSE OF THE KOREANS WOULD DESCEND ON THE OFFENDING HACK, POINT A FINGER AND DEMAND IN PIDGIN ENGLISH: "SPEAK NO, NO SPEAK."



A Korean body-guard in his polyester suit with mysterious wires

Leo Dobbs is a Phnom Penh-based freelancer working for the Daily Telegraph and Deutsche Press Agentur among others.

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A Night At The Auction

BY DOMINIC FAULDER

"VER IS ZE NAPALM GIRL?"

IT WAS JUST THE KIND OF QUESTION ONE DOESN'T WANT TO BE BOTHERED WITH AT NINE IN THE MORNING. THE FACELESS TEUTONIC INQUISITOR AT THE OTHER END OF THE LINE SAID HE HAD BEEN COLLECTING IMAGES OF VIETNAM SINCE ABOUT THE TIME OF DIEN BIEN PHU. "VUNDERFUL PICTURES. VEN CAN I BUY ZE BOOK?"

VUN DAY, MAYBE.



1. IMMF Treasurer Dominic Faulder checks the bottom line beneath the disbelieving gaze of De Nerciat
2. Nick Cummings-Bruce of The Guardian inspects a Dana Stone being 'walked' by MR Usnisa Sukhvasti
3. Associated Press stringer Julian Camp walks a print
4. Anchor Auctioneer Tony Baynes, left, with guest auctioneer David Frost
5. Clare Clifford, aka Mrs Tim Page, walks a Lance Woodruff original

In fact, the Indochina Media Memorial Foundation's board in Bangkok had reluctantly abandoned the idea of an exhibition catalogue. The threat of a 500,000 baht plus printing bill was simply too great. Much to the concern of FCCT manager Eric Brighton, the IMMF's modest war chest of 150,000 baht was pretty rigorously napalmed during preparations for the ten-day exhibition in the opulent Krungthep Wing of the vast Shangri-la hotel. Framing alone cost almost 50,000 baht. The gala dinner and auction in the Naphalai Ballroom of The Dusit Thani on 4 November also had to be underwritten.

By the final fraught weeks in October, it had become apparent to some that the IMMF would either live or die on the auction night - at least as far as Bangkok was concerned. Had bankruptcy not killed it, failure would assuredly have destroyed the will to continue. It lived because of the kindness of more people than can be mentioned, people who for whatever reason gave something of value - time, talent, resources, contacts, money, friendship, advice, criticism.

The German businessman who called had not realized that the exhibition was never intended to be in any way definitive. Plenty was missing. No napalm girl. No Eddie Adams, Larry Burrows, Philip Jones

Griffiths or Don McCullin. No Japanese, Cambodian, 'South' Vietnamese or Lao contributions for that matter. It was not for lack of trying.

But what was donated proved ample. With the exception of eight pictures bought from the Vietnam News Agency 'archive' in Hanoi by Denis Gray and Jeff Widener of the Associated Press, the 139 pictures that made up the display on the final night were donated free by 42 journalists and photographers or their estates.

Contributors were simply asked to give original prints of photographs they liked of Indochina, preferably signed. The result spanned four

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VC women guerillas and South Vietnamese POW's,
Vietnam 1971 by Luong Nghia Dung



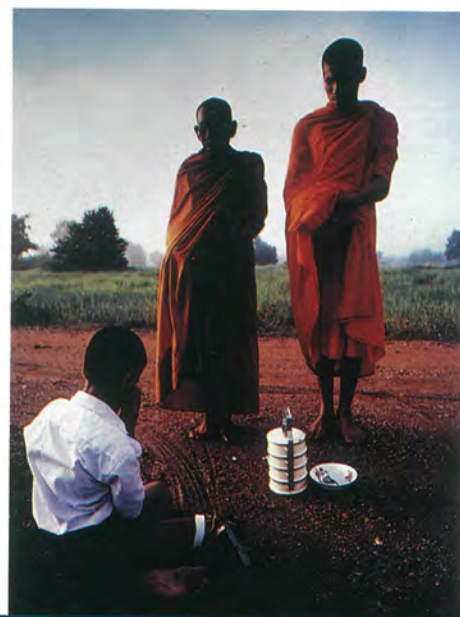
SOLD BAHT 17,500

Helicopters over the Pain of Jones,
Vietnam, 1965 by Tim Page



SOLD BAHT 23,500

Forced civilian exodus from Phnom Penh,
Cambodia, April 1975 by Roland Neveu



SOLD BAHT 13,500

Thai boy gives alms, Thai-Cambodia border
by Peter Charlsworth



SOLD BAHT 15,500

US Marine and Vietcong WIA prisoner,
Vietnam, 1968 by Sean Flynn

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An injured 1st Air Cavalry trooper and his wounded
colleague, Vietnam, 1966 by Henri Huet



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Fleeing Vietnamese marine, Vietnam, 1965
by Horst Faas



SOLD BAHT 13,000

Women and Fans, Vietnam
by John Everingham



SOLD BAHT 22,000

Dong Ha, Vietnam, 1966
by Lance Woodruff



SOLD BAHT 31,000

Last helicopter evacuation from Alliance Francaise,
Tu Do Street, Saigon, Vietnam, 1975 by Hubert Van Es

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A Night at the Auction

decades and embraced everything from the indescribable mayhem of Hamburger Hill to tranquil lilies at Angkor. It was an extraordinary collection by any standard. Celebrated images from Horst Faas, Hubert Van Es, Tim Page, Henri Huet, Francoise de Mulder, Rol and Neveu were showcased against a variegated backdrop of forgotten and new material. The forgotten included work by Sean Flynn, Dana Stone, Luong Nghia Dung and Lance Woodruff. Some of the contemporary photographs had been taken just months before by the likes of Pongsak Chaiyanuwong and Gary Knight.

This distinctly al fresco collection had the great advantage of catering to all tastes through its very lack of thematic focus. Being so broad in range and inherently unstructured, almost everyone who viewed the final display in the Naphalai Ballroom - there had been room to display only about 80 at the Shangri-la - found photographs to love, loathe, admire or forget.

Journalists, especially photographers, seldom agree about much. Breaking with this hallowed tradition, the IMMF board had managed to agree that every photograph donated should be displayed on the final night irrespective of opinions regarding its merits. A simple slip system was used to ensure that anyone in the audience interested in bidding for a picture could be sure it would go on the block.

The board had hoped that perhaps 50 pictures would be called for auction in this way. Nearly twice that number eventually went under the hammer, and net income from the evening exceeded the targeted 300,000 baht by more than threefold. Every contributor also had the pleasure of selling at least one photograph, and only three sales failed to better opening reserve prices. Many went for three or four times their reserves, the lowest of which was set at 2,000 baht. The highest price was paid by a senior Bangkok entrepreneur and FCCT life member, Bill Heinecke, for Hubert Van Es's historic shot of the last helicopter evacuating people from the roof of the Alliance Francaise in Tu Do Street, Saigon - not the American Embassy as folklore firmly has it. The photograph fetched a cool 31,000 baht.

Despite some jitters over the wisdom of attempting to auction such pictures in Bangkok, the evening was well attended - well over 300 people sat down to dinner. The exact body count from the mixed seafood salad remains classified information, but IMMF President Charles Antoine de Nerciati was among confirmed casualties next day.

His distinguished guests included Foreign Minister Prasong Soonsiri for the opening cocktails (who minutely scrutinized pretty well every photograph); Prince Norodom Ranariddh (who made an early purchase but was initially given the wrong picture); keynote speaker

Dr Suvit Yodmani; Laotian Ambassador Bounkeut Sang Somsak; ESCAP Executive Secretary Rafeuddin Ahmed; and Nguyen Dang Khoa of the Vietnamese Embassy.

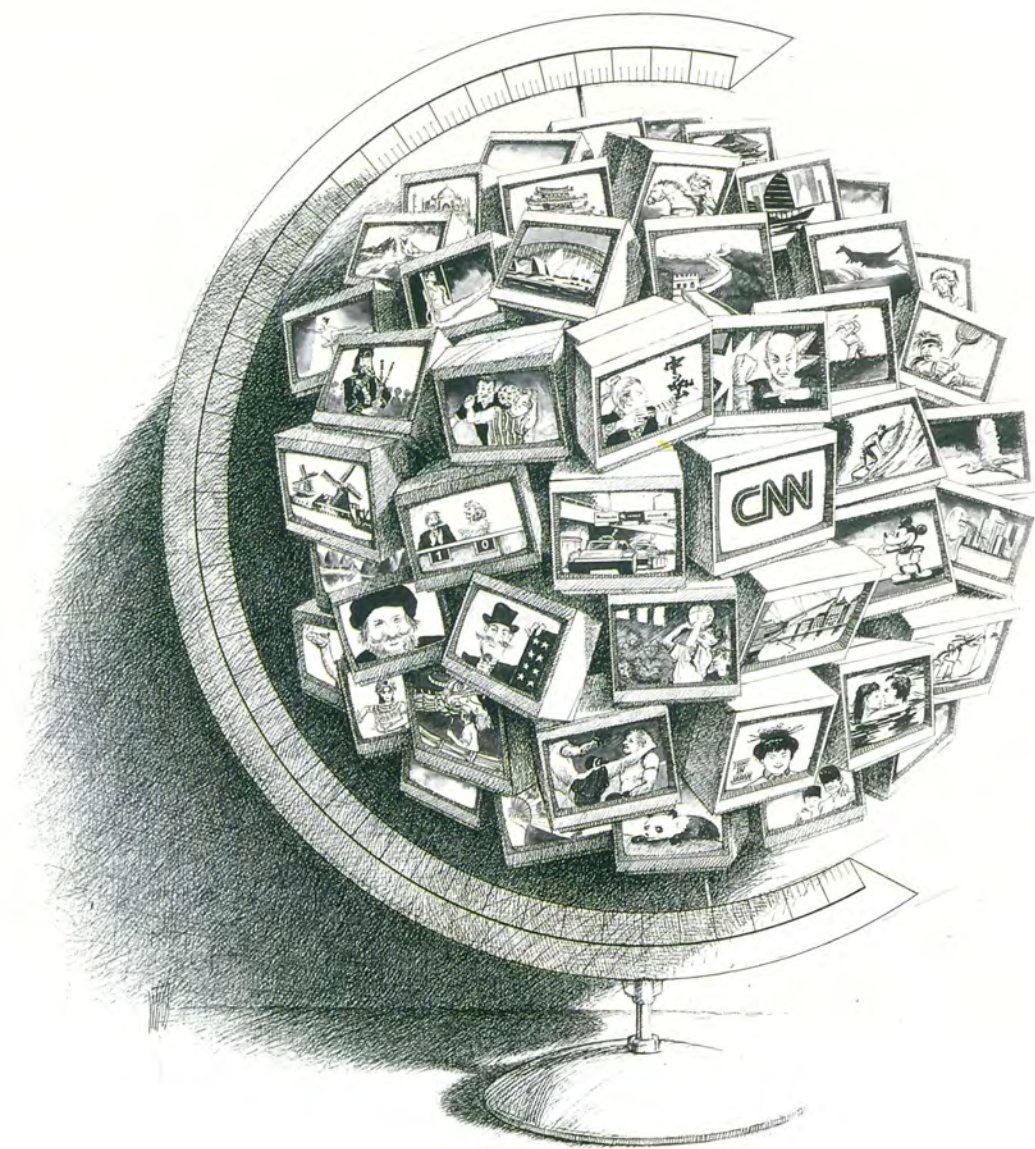
Australian Ambassador John McCarthy paid his own way and was one of the evening's most serious bidders. All the members of the FCCT's Executive Committee who attended, led by Presidentissima Tan Lian Choo, generously honoured the spirit of the evening by buying their own tickets. In a tired and emotional moment, Second Vice President Bertil Lintner came within a whisker of spending all his pocket money for the next six months.

The IMMF's Man of the Night Award went to Tony Baynes, purloined from the Coca Cola Export Corporation, for the superb three-hour job he did as anchor auctioneer. Runner-up awards went to freelance photographer Philip Blenkinsop for finally kick-starting the hotel's defective projector; Associated Press stringer Julian Camp for agreeing to 'walk' the prints at ten seconds' notice when the projector failed; David Tuck for wrapping more photographs than he would ever care to see again; the FCCT's Panjavilai Song-Im for imposing her inimitable cool on the chaotic documentation process; MR Usnisa Sukhvasti, Jane Purayananda and Wendi Ellis for always helping; and Eric Brighton for going well beyond the call of duty in his assistance to the IMMF.



1. Foreign Minister Prasong Soonsiri dwells on the mayhem in Hubert Van Es's shot of Hamburger Hill
2. De Nerciati consults with IMMF Founder Tim Page
3. IMMF PR consultant, MR Usnisa Sukhvasti of NOW, takes charge of the gong

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A Night At The Auction



1. "I wanna make ya an offa", Page buttons Dr Suvit
2. De Nerciat with keynote speaker for the evening Dr Suvit
3. Prince Norodom Ranariddh with IMMF President Charles Antoine De Nerciat and Dr Mary Sun

The walking wounded of Rajadamnoern Avenue should also be mentioned in dispatches. Pornvilai Carr (Daeng) of the Associated Press, Belgian freelance Thierry Falise and Pongsak Chaiyanuwong all gave up an entire night helping IMMF board members hang pictures in a mosquito-infested car park at the Shangri-la. During the May disturbances, Daeng nearly lost an eye at Phan Fah Bridge, Thierry was hospitalized for months with a serious leg wound, and Pongsak was badly roughed up a couple of times. Without their help, the opening of the exhibition at the Shangri-la would have been reduced to an utter shambles. On the eve of the exhibition, every single display board was delivered to the hotel so badly damaged that a complete black repaint

was needed before hanging could even begin. This was not completed until late the next afternoon.

What next? Armed at last with a serious budget, and with organizational affairs in Bangkok pretty much consolidated, the IMMF is already mapping out training courses for journalists from Indochina for the second quarter of 1993. Redoubled efforts are being made to build a network of sympathetic contacts, particularly in Vietnam, in order to learn more of the real and immediate needs of Vietnamese, Cambodian and Lao journalists.

IMMF Founder Tim Page's inspiration was to honour the memory of the 320 journalists, some of them close friends, who died

during the Vietnam war. Whatever permanent memorial is eventually erected to them with the permission of the Vietnamese authorities, priority will first be given to honouring the dead by helping the living. Monuments, after all, last for ever. People don't.

Dominic Faulder is the Managing Correspondent of the Bureau Bangkok.

The Muse Wears Black Leather

BY COLLIN PIPELL

CONTRARY TO POPULAR BELIEF, WRITING FICTION CAN BE EASY.

PROPERLY UNDERTAKEN, IT HARDLY REQUIRES ANY SELF-DISCIPLINE AT ALL.

Most people think of the Muse as a sweet young thing. She (he/it, I suppose, depending on the writer's proclivities) comes draped in lengths of diaphanous cotton and smelling of soap, an apparition in soft light who gently massages one's creative faculty, smiling and whispering excellent suggestions in one's ear. But that's malarkey. Properly courted, in fact, she comes stalking at you in black leather boots and carrying a whip. The Muse is a disciplinarian bitch.

The hard part is attracting the Muse in the first place (always supposing you really want to mess up your domestic life in this way). But once you do, writing can be more like demonic possession than work. When the spirit seizes you, like it or not, you write. Something outside or beyond you begins to direct proceedings, dictating additions and deletions, legislating revisions. The stories start to appear as though by magic. In this state, it takes no self-discipline whatsoever to write.

Lots of writers have talked, for example, about the point at which a story can take on a life of its own, where the characters start saying and doing things that

seem just right, somehow, but which nevertheless were no part of the writer's conscious design. Rather than working from any preconceived plan, enjoying instead the surprise of real discovery, the writer seems at this juncture to be merely an amanuensis for some higher inspiration. Indeed, it is at times such as these that the activity of writing is most satisfying, almost magical. This is the Muse at work. (I speak from the perspective of the writer, of course; in my own case, some readers may wonder where all this magic, where all of these autonomous, practically flesh-and-blood characters have got to in my stories. Never mind; subjectively the experience is still a magical one.)

Ninety-nine percent of the people who claim they're going to get around to writing a story one day never will. And that's at least partly because they never reach the stage where they have an affair with the Muse. From time to time most of us feel certain vague urges, an almost erotic hungering to create. But don't mistake this for the real thing. Sitting down with nothing but one of these spurious rushes of creativity, only to be faced then with the enigma of the blank page, you'll be lucky if you get beyond a single pointless paragraph. The infinite possibility represented by that expanse of featureless paper can quickly drain any passing creative lust.

And it is at this point that most people quit, usually for the rest of their lives. How can it be that one's very soul is swollen with the passion to create, inflamed with all this inchoate meaning and beauty, yet nothing comes? In fact, this is the moment of truth. The people who go through the rest of their lives announcing their intention to write a novel, just as soon as they find the time to sit down and await inspiration — these are the ones who feel the urge pass for the moment, then shrug and turn on the TV. They decide to wait till they're "in the mood."

Those who recognize the necessity of getting something — anything — down on paper, on the other hand, stand a chance of becoming a writer. The first hurdle any writer faces is that of actually starting something.

Inspiration is ninety percent perspiration.
And I make it a point to be inspired at
9:00 every morning, without fail.

Some famous writer, I don't remember whom, said.

It might help to remember this: It's a mistake to think you must know what you're going to write before you write it. You always know more than you think you do, for one thing; the trick is in coaxing it out. Writing is a process of communing with the page. A story emerges through the evolution of the text as a critical dialogue between the writer and that text as it emerges. The essential thing, initially, is to begin the dialogue by getting something down in writing. It doesn't matter what; anything will do so long as it starts the process. Don't think; write. (At this point the Zen writing master hits you with a big stick.)

But this is only the beginning. So far you are on your own, real inspiration yet to come, the gods willing. What may follow is days and days of long hours spent in frustration, doubt, and despair at ever seeing the story come to life. You suspect that the story is not really a story, that you are not a writer. You think of a hundred more constructive ways to spend your time. You flail about, to all appearances a complete loony. This is where discipline is truly needed, although "pathological orneriness" may be closer to the mark. The whole procedure can seem just as creative and almost as enjoyable as banging your head against a wall. But that's as it should be. You can't simply wait for the Muse; you've got to go after her, offering whatever tribute she demands, seducing her with much earnest head-banging and tearing of hair.

Then one day you get up and, right

The Muse Wears Black Leather

in the middle of your morning shower, you are abruptly mugged by inspiration, dragged by the ear into your study, dripping suds all the way to your computer. By lunchtime you may be given time to rinse off before eating. Lunch itself will as likely as not be interrupted by an idea or two which demand noting down before they evaporate. And this state carries over from day to day, with you now making notes in the middle of dinner parties, scribbling away in taxis, wondering whether your lover would mind if you interrupted proceedings, just for a moment, to write down a sudden notion which has occurred at this most awkward of times.

Everywhere you go, bits of everyday experience start to take on new significance, as you find yourself interpreting much of what you perceive in terms of story material.

Well and properly seduced, now, the Muse obliges by making your work even easier. When you awake in the morning, so long as you can get to your computer before too many distractions arise, the story which finally seemed so intractable the day before pours out onto the page by some process akin to automatic writing. As a Graham Greene character, a writer, once put it, this morning gift of the Muse is more like remembering than actually creating something new. You find that some part of your mind has been busy all night, and the story has worked itself out even as you slept. With any luck, then, the Muse welcomes you in the morning with that day's episodes ready for dictation.

This state is the ultimate reward for many writers. (I say nothing of Hollywood contracts and suchlike.) It is not, however, considered a total gas by family and employers and other people with claims on your time.

And, having once achieved union with the Muse, this is by no means necessarily a permanent arrangement. In my own case, for instance, I have to admit there is still a problem of discipline. There is a conflict between the demands and temptations of my bread-and-butter work as a professional writer of non-fiction, and my desire to develop whatever talents I have as a fiction writer.

Writing short stories and novels requires assiduous courtship of the Muse. This campaign, however, is constantly interfered with by the seductive promise of almost instant gratification and (relatively) instant money as a non-fiction writer. With fiction, the pay-off is slow in coming even if you write something good. Even if a publisher decides to pick it up, it can be years before it sees print. And then it might not sell. In the meantime, writing fiction is a lonely business, one viewed with considerable suspicion by your peers (unless of course you are already established and rolling in money, in which case it seems quite sensible to everyone).

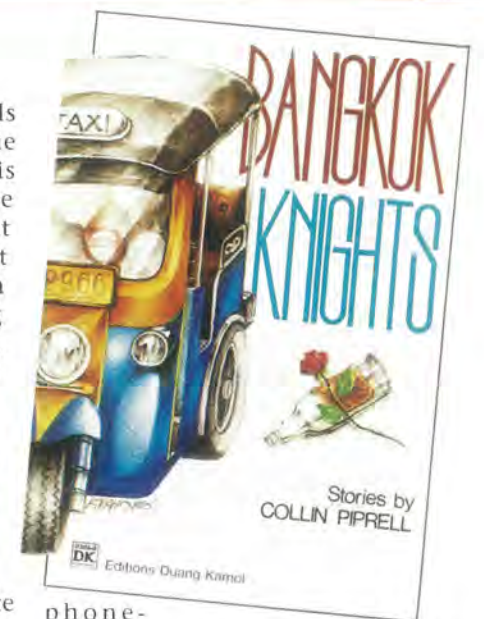
Concentrating on non-fiction allows you to see the product in print within a reasonably finite time-span. People are actually reading what you write, and you get to enjoy a certain recognition. You get invited to cocktail parties; you are offered freebies in hotels. You get to go on cruises. More importantly, perhaps, the money normally follows within months at the outside, and you get to eat. In submitting to the demands of the Muse, on the other hand, you flirt with divorce, starvation (unless you are of independent financial means) and, to outward appearances at least, a thoroughly boring existence.

But what precisely would a book about yours truly be about? Not life, since no writer really has a life unless, in the American manner, he succumbs to block and becomes a dipsomaniac

Anthony Burgess, talking about his first British biography

When I decided to go fulltime as a freelance writer, I told myself that I would do both — I'd earn my bread and butter with non-fiction, and I'd write my stories and novels for the intrinsic satisfaction and the chance, however slim, of bigger paybacks down the road. But it doesn't work very well. The Muse is a jealous and demanding companion, and I haven't heard from her in months.

These days I wake up having dwelled all night on the wrong things. Instead of being obsessed by stories, instead of rolling out of bed and heading straight for the computer, I'm caught up in endless trivia. I get mornings that are solid



phone-calls — trying to set up interviews; taking assignments; calling other writers to assign them stories; calling editors wondering where my money is; writers calling me wondering where their money is; and so on. I have been deserted by the Muse and, in my desultory attempts to work on my next novel or to start a new short story, I find I have grown cold as cold can be. I fear I am back where I started, as a writer.

Still, I have learned from past experience that, if only I can make the time — if I can find the self-discipline to disconnect the phone, ignoring both wolf at door and all invitations to cocktails — it will take no more than four or five twelve-hour days of head-banging and anguished self-doubt before the Muse deigns to return. But return she does, as formidable and as welcome as always. And it's easier after the first time. It's a bit like shooting pool — to do it you've got to believe you can do it; and at least now I know I can.

Collin Piprell is a Canadian writer and editor living in Bangkok. Aside from the many magazine articles that he has had published around Asia, he is the author of *Kicking Dogs*, a novel, and *Bangkok Knights*, a collection of short stories. *Bangkok Old Hand*, a collection of essays previously published under the name "Ham Fiske," will be coming out soon. He has written books on scuba diving and on the natural history of coral reefs. He is also co-author of *National Parks of Thailand*. Currently, he is trying to make time to court the Muse once more, hoping she'll stick around long enough that he can finish another novel.



Club Highlights

Similarly successful was our New Members Nite on November 27th (for our impressive New Members list please turn to page 28) that even pulled in a flock of old members. The lead attraction of the evening was sultry vocalist "Miss Supaporn" and her backup band "The Fame Trio" who might have given new members the wrong idea of what kind of a club we are operating here. The large turnout proved once again that somewhere out there are FCCT members hungry or more than just intellectual stimulation. A special thanks is due to TUNTEX (Thailand) Company, who sponsored Madame Supaporn's appearance, and Huangjee Sae-Chia, FCCT Associate Director of Membership, who organized the event.



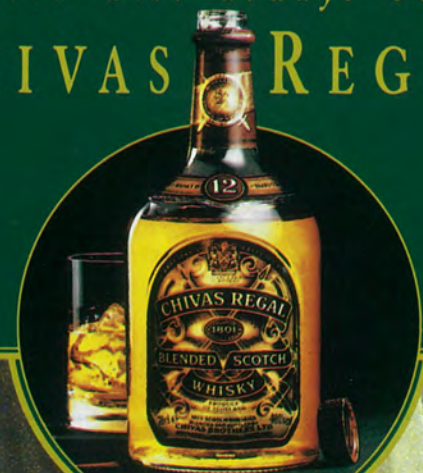
1. Singer Supaporn with Ian Rush
2. Foreign Minister Prasong Soonsiri dwells on the photographs displayed by The IMMF
3. Batman upstaged poor St Nick at the FCCT



BUT LETS NOT GLOSS OVER THE FACT THAT THE FCCT IS, AFTER-ALL, A SERIOUS AND THOUGHT-PROVOKING FORUM FOR BANGKOK'S CEREBRALLY ELITE, AND PROGRAMMES REMAINED THE AMBROSIA IN WHICH OUR ILLUSTRIOUS MEMBERSHIP CAME TO FEAST. THESE LAST THREE MONTHS OF 1992 PROVED NO EXCEPTION IN TERMS OF DISHING OUT STIMULATING NEWS AND VIEWS JUST ABOUT EVERY WEDNESDAY NIGHT.

AS LONG AS NEITHER ONE OF YOU
NEED TO SAY A WORD
TO SHARE A TWO-WAY CONVERSATION...

There will always be a
CHIVAS REGAL.



New Members Night

NOVEMBER 12, 1992

THE COMMITTEE WOULD LIKE TO EXTEND A WARM WELCOME TO THE FOLLOWING
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Mr. John Charles Clewley
Mr. Yoshisuke Yasuo
Mr. Ronald E. Corben
Ms. Chanita Gurdapsri
Mr. Ishikawa Junichi
Mr. Alwyn Scott
Mr. Kevin Cooney
Mr. Michael R. Smith

Australian Broadcasting Corporation
Asia Inc. (Manager International)
Kyodo News Service
Australian Associated Press
TV Asahi Bangkok Bureau
Jiji Press Japan
AP-Dow Jones International News Service
Reuters Ltd
TV2 Denmark

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Miss Wing Sie Cheng
Mr. Charles Vanpraet
Mr. Anders Widen
Mr. Gerard Kersten
Mr. Songkram Kraisonthi
Mr. Sommit Thongdee
MD. Masud Hasan
Ms. Susan Dupree
Mr. Michael D. C. Forrer
Mr. Jermy W. L. Rush
Mr. Pasi Simonen
Mr. Toni Mullen
Mr. Charlton Thomas Bruton
Mr. Tracy Chmelavskas
Mr. Steinar Maehle
Mr. Kuang - Hsun Huang
Mr. Igor Akimov
Mr. Wong Chow Ming
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Mr. Winston Baltasar
Mrs. Shao-Chun Huang
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Ms. Vipa Sandy Ngow
Mr. Vernon C. Brooks
Mr. Khongrit Termwatanangkul
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Mr. Timo Jokinens
Mr. Appelbom Jan Bertil Thomas
Mr. Russell Edward Mcclain
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Mr. Michael Eric Allin
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Ms. Kate Mulvey
Mr. John M. Reid
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Ms. Diane Kellner
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CCOP/Statoil

The New International School
Continuing Education Center
United States Information Service

First Services Asia
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Committee for Coordination of Services to
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New Members Night

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2. Lian Choo, Sanguan, Lee, Kuno
3. Mohd Noor Hjsafri and E. Lu
4. Dr Yuangrat Wedel and Mohd Noor Hjsafri
5. D Butler and Karl Albert
6. John Clewley and Charles Hyland
7. Mohd Noor Hjsafri and Karl Albert
8. Kate Malvey and friend
9. Mr Gerard Kersten
10. Kate Mulvey and Paul Wedel
11. Mr J Harrington



Letter from Ban San Um

BY TIM SHARP

BAN SAM UM IS ONE OF A HUNDRED OR SO VILLAGES THAT YOU DRIVE PAST UNAWARE OF ON THE ROAD FROM CHIANG MAI TO CHIANG RAI. FOR YOU JET-SET DEADLINE-OBSSESSED TYPES, IT IS JUST BELOW YOU TO PORT ABOUT THREE MINUTES BEFORE YOU LAND AT CHIANG MAI AIRPORT COMING IN FROM CHIANG RAI.

These two poles are crucial to northern Thailand. For instance, King Mengrai, the region's most important historical figure, founded both cities - Chiang Rai first - about 700 years ago and then, in a kind of leisurely life-cycle commute, had his remains returned to the family base at Chiang Rai after spending most of his time in Chiang Mai.

Ban San Um is atypical, at least within the Doi Saket district, in that its tight-knit, traditionalist community of some 150 households has a reputation at the district office for conservatism. One consequence of this is that officials are constantly torn between frustration and approval for this quiet stubborn village that for some strange reason likes its headmen to be honest.

Because of our reputation we were some years ago singled out as an 'under-developed village'. That meant we got our loudspeakers free and before anyone else. We also got basic health, veterinary and agricultural support, as well as a community library, grafted with varying degrees of success onto our existing resources and infrastructure.

The worst bit - and possibly the most ephemeral - were the loud speakers. We were given four to cover the whole village. They were installed before the service for which they were intended (hot tips on when the vet was coming, what to plant this season, village announcements, etc) was ready. But it was deemed bad to leave all this high-tech equipment idle and therefore liable to be ridiculed. So we got daily for several months and on direct instructions from district office the 6 am news, the 8 am flag raising and the 6 pm flag lowering, all at maximum decibel, plus whatever the abbot felt was good for us. On one occasion this was a half-hour evening homily.

The village, fortunately, gradually

decided that loud speakers were better seen than heard, a view that now seems to be shared by district office. So they perch there gleaming, largely silent.

But even we have our Young Turks. At the most recent election for village headman, several contenders advocated faster growth. We needed more paved road, street lights, community facilities, it was urged. One hopefully even went as far as organising a village sports field on common land that was previously a temple compound. We still have our field, but he lost. In the end, the village chose the the headman's son as his successor, a kind of Ne Win solution in reverse in that we still have our Steadying Hand, but the situation was engineered by the community for its own good. And they claim we need to be taught about democracy!

And it's working. Last year we all chipped in to buy our street lights - neon tubes in angled holders that sometimes fizz but nevertheless disperse the gloom. We strapped the holders to existing power poles and volunteers of varying willingness allow each light to be run off his or her meter. Earlier this year we finished paving the approach road.

Of course not everything is roses. Chiang Mai's urban sprawl has already thrown up one (tasteful) housing estate nearby. Others are being developed. The village at present is celebrating the loot from land sales, but consternation at the looming influx of strangers is never far beneath the surface. How will we manage our affairs then?

More immediately, the new money is translating, not only in San Um but across the Chiang Mai valley as a whole, into massive motorcycle and pick-up sales - new toys that are too often driven by the totally untrained. The most tragic recent consequence was the deaths of four out of six youths riding three up on two motorcycles side by side after dark.

The bikes collided, spilling the kids all over the road. Just then a 10-wheel truck came over the rise. Not a hope. I happened along just after the ambulances got there but it was not until the following morning that I learned that some of the kids were from our village. As a cure, development is sometimes far worse than the disease.

To make matters worse, this tragedy occurred only a few months after the village had withstood a string of natural deaths, some premature, some not. The consensus then had been that something was definitely wrong. So the whole village participated in a propitiation ceremony to put it right but to no avail. More deaths followed, then the tragedy. A society can hardly be told more forcefully than this that the old ways belong to earlier, less frenetic times. But where is the new rule book?

The temptations to fear that the village and its ways will be swept away in the storm of development. No doubt it will, externally. But a continuous puzzle to me has always been the strong family ties that exist between this cautious, supposedly hermetic community near Chiang Mai and a similar village hundreds of kilometres away near Chiang Rai. Every so often people drop out of sight for days, weeks or months. Invariably they have gone to see their Chiang Rai relatives. At one point I began to suspect that the explanation was euphemism, something to tell the children and ignorant foreigners, but then the other week the penny dropped: this is much the same pattern as Mengrai's. Now is this tradition, or what?

Tim Sharp, a veteran free-lancer in Thailand for the last three decades, has spent his past ten years in Ban San Um.

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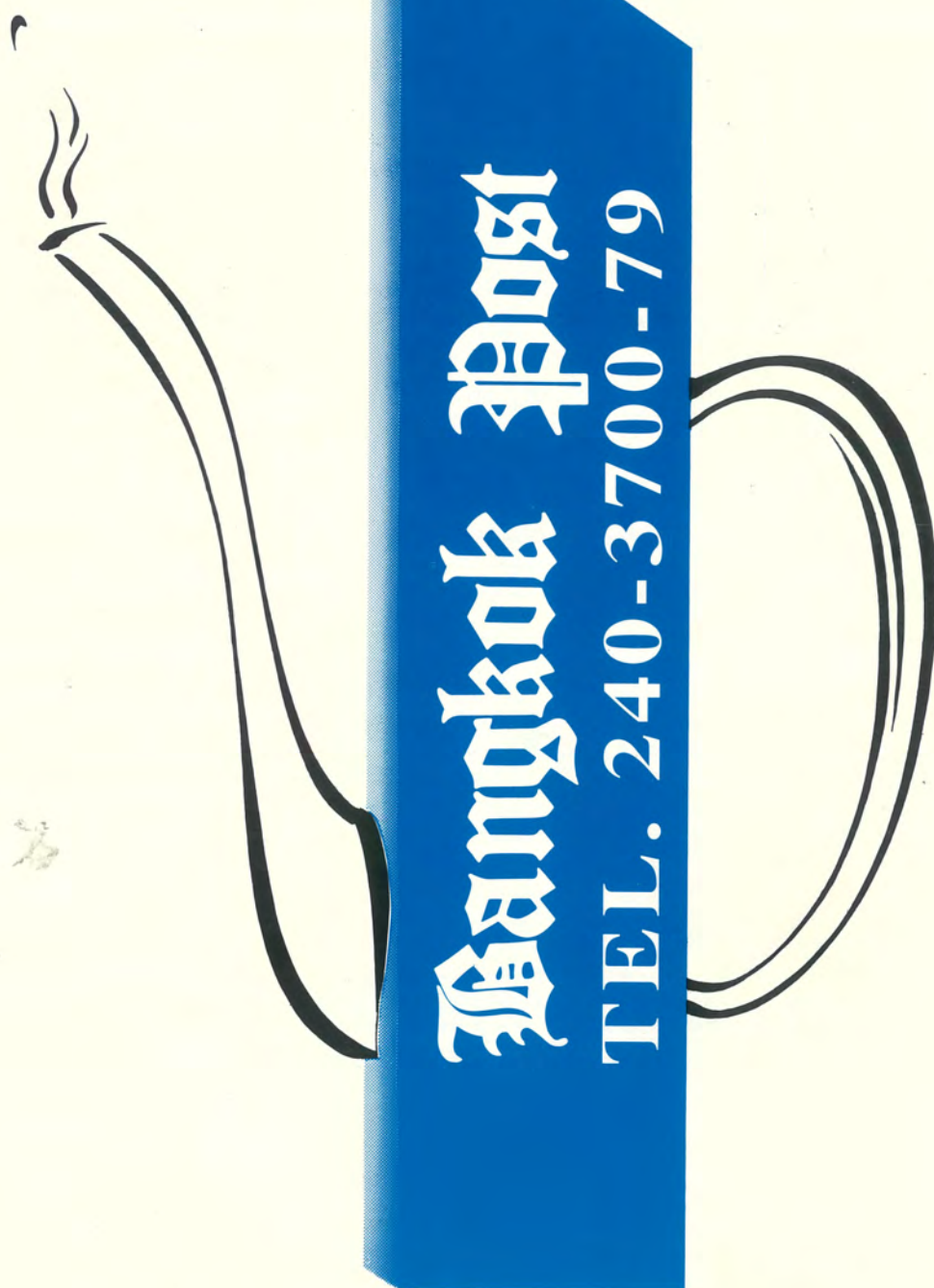
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