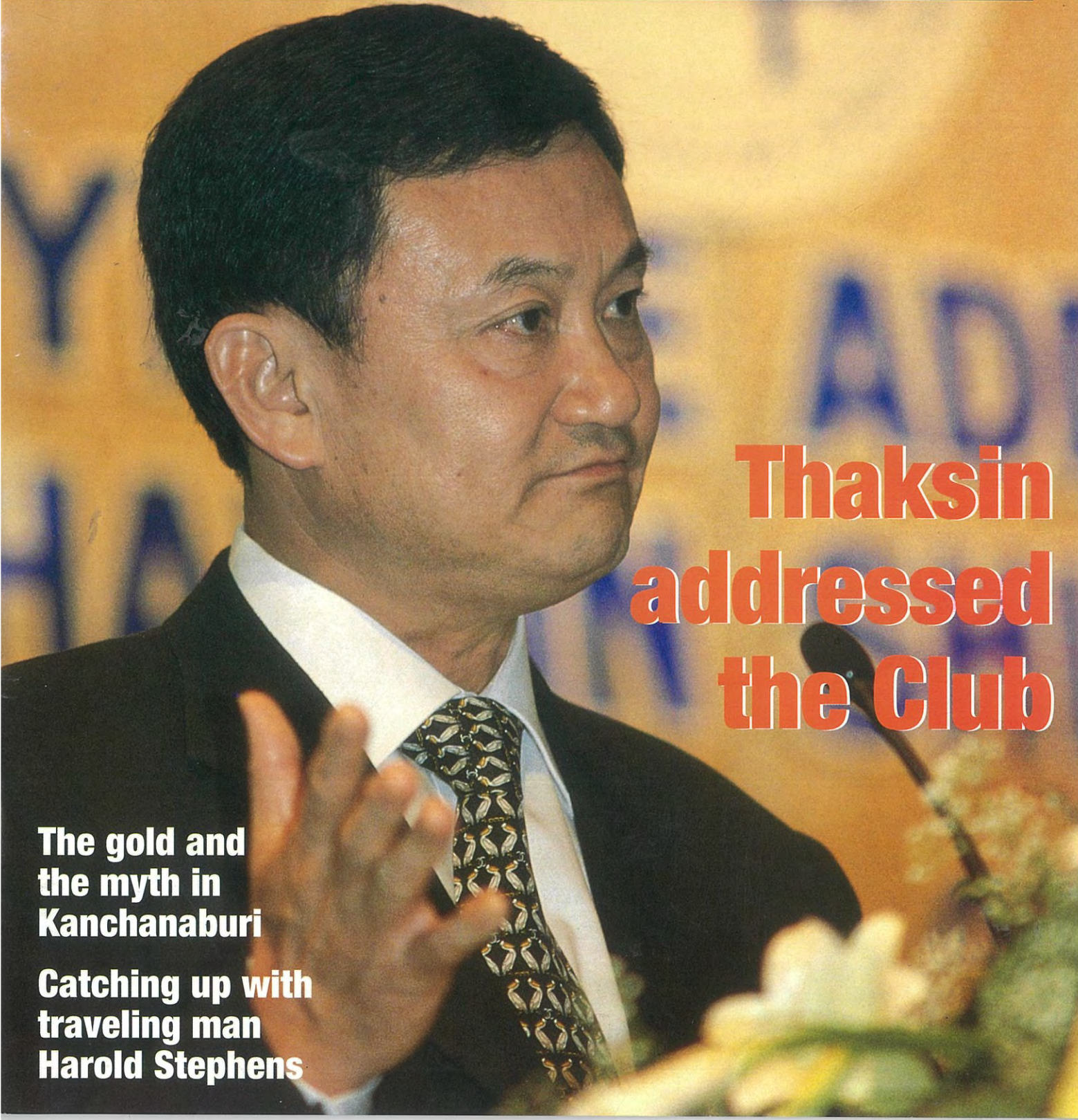


DATELINE

BANGKOK

FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS CLUB OF THAILAND MAGAZINE

SECOND QUARTER 2001



Thaksin addressed the Club

**The gold and
the myth in
Kanchanaburi**

**Catching up with
traveling man
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The opinions expressed by writers in Dateline Bangkok
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Join Us

You don't have to be foreign and you don't need to be a correspondent to become a member of the Foreign Correspondents Club of Thailand. Membership has its privileges: The club frequently hosts breaking news panel discussions with the leaders of government, private sector and non-governmental organizations. Each month the club exhibits work from a different photographer or artist, and the last Friday of each month there is live jazz music at the bar. Each member also gets a subscription to this magazine for absolutely free. So why aren't you a member? Don't forget that the Foreign Correspondents Club of Thailand is one of Bangkok's most prestigious addresses for press conferences, social gatherings and product launches. The club is outfitted with all the latest techno-gizmos, from wireless microphones to remote control television cameras, and can provide all types of catering, from light snacks to full meals. Impress your guests with the well known hospitality of the Foreign Correspondents Club.

Got a tale to tell?

This is your club's magazine and we welcome letters to the editor, articles, photographs, drawings, poetry or just about anything to help us fill up each issue. Submissions should address journalism or the story behind getting the story. All ideas considered, but please contact Mick Elmore before doing too much work. Submissions are paid for with glory and bar coupons.

Because the land of Tongsai Bay was so pristine and heavenly beautiful when we bought it, we did not dare change anything mother nature has so delicately given us. Instead of cutting down trees to make way for spectacular sea view, we simply blended our Cottage and Beachfront Suites in with the surrounding nature. Not a single tree was downed where our cottages stand. You can still see coconut trees sticking up through the terrace of Chef's Chom Thai Restaurant and some of the suites. In order to enjoy and appreciate the nature of Tongsai Bay, one must be in touch with it.

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Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra will not list it as one of his achievements during his first few months in office, but the FCCT sure does. The night of June 4 when the Prime Minister was our guest of honour at the Plaza Athenae Hotel was a huge success, with some 600 members and guests packing the grand hall.

The event was probably a record in terms of club turnout for a Prime Minister, or anyone else for that matter. It also confirmed our stature and prestige as the largest foreign press club in Southeast Asia. And, of course, it gave a much-needed boost to the club's sagging finances and morale.

A word of thanks here both to public relations company MDK and the United States Embassy for offering kind help. MDK provided volunteers to give valued help with reception on the night, and the United States Information Service – particularly Kathy Schalow – came to the club's rescue at the last minute by loaning us audio breakout boxes so that TV crews could plug into audio.



The FCCT can now look forward to the future with greater confidence, and always

with our members needs and hopes firmly in mind. For a start, we have Jeff "Pickle" Fehr's catering service onstream at last. His cuisine has attracted praise from all quarters, so come and enjoy at either lunch or dinnertime. Try his cakes and key lime pie for size.

But there is still no room for complacency. While new members are steadily signing up, we still need more. Lots more. And we sincerely hope that renewal of membership will be an automatic process. As you may be aware, members who attract new recruits win themselves clubhouse chits as a bonus. The club is still by far the best value in town, considering its status as an essential venue for those who want to know what's happening around them from the people whose job it is to find out first.

I'm certain the FCCT is on its second wind after a faltering start to the year. Don't miss out.

— Rodney Tasker



SOI WHISPERS

Did that headline suck? There were a few old and new hands out there who were rather disappointed to learn Thaksin was speaking in Thai when he said *THAI sucks*. Most assumed he said it in English but when they learned otherwise they said the translation, well, kind of sucked.

But not so said Bangkok Post Editor Pichai Chuensuksawadi who told *Soi Whispers* it was a good translation and the paper stands by it. There are a number of bilingual jurnos who agreed with them.

As for journalists, most fly economy and the seats and entertainment that being eating your knees - is pretty much the same as economy in all airlines.

Enough of this.

The Nation managing editor Kavi Chongkittavorn is soon off to a year's study at Harvard University. He was named a Nieman Fellow in late page. Check page 8 for details.

And Agence France-Presse bureau chief Philippe Agret moved on in late June. Well his farewell party was held at the club in late June. AFP took the dangerous step of hosting an open bar in fact.

And speaking of the bar.

Last issue *Soi Whispers* mentioned James Eckardt was due to be a grandfather. Well it happened. He is the proud grand pa of a healthy little girl. Or was it a boy?

One night in early June James was waiting at the FCCT bar to meet sometime Bangkok-based photographer Philip Blenkinsop. Philip had gone hiking in Nepal and walked out of the mountains to find one of the biggest stories of the year right there in Katmandu.

He delayed plans to return to Bangkok to photograph the trauma in Nepal.

Another former Bangkok-based photographer ran into a bit of excitement in another part of the world.

Some might remember Gary Knight from the early 90's in Bangkok. Palestinian militants in the Gaza Strip held him Joshua Hammer, the American head of Newsweek's Jerusalem bureau for several hours in late May then released them unharmed. Embarrassed Palestinian leaders said they had nothing to do with the incident and denounced the group. He was released unharmed.



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New girl on the block. The FCCT welcomes Porntip Prommart who took the reins as manager in April. The FCCT is on an upward swing and Noi, as she prefers being called, is the main force behind it.

Past experience includes two years as a Peace Corps trainer, teaching English to Khmer refugees in Thai border camps, and two years with Fuji Xerox in their Singapore office. The Executive Committee extends a warm welcome to Noi who is doing a big job.

The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) demonstrated why the Land of Smiles is a leader in tourism when they hosted a lively party at the FCCT on May 16. More than 100 turned out for the music and festivities hosted by minister to the PM's office and TAT chairman

Somsak Phepsutin, and TAT director, Pradech Phayakuichien.

For the second year running the TAT brought the popular band Boy Thai known for their fusion of traditional Thai with jazz and latino music.



The Nation managing editor Kavi Chongkittavorn was named a Nieman Fellow in late May by Harvard University.

Kavi will join 11 other international and 12 American journalists at Harvard University later this year. He will study humanitarian law and development for East Asia since the end of the Cold War.

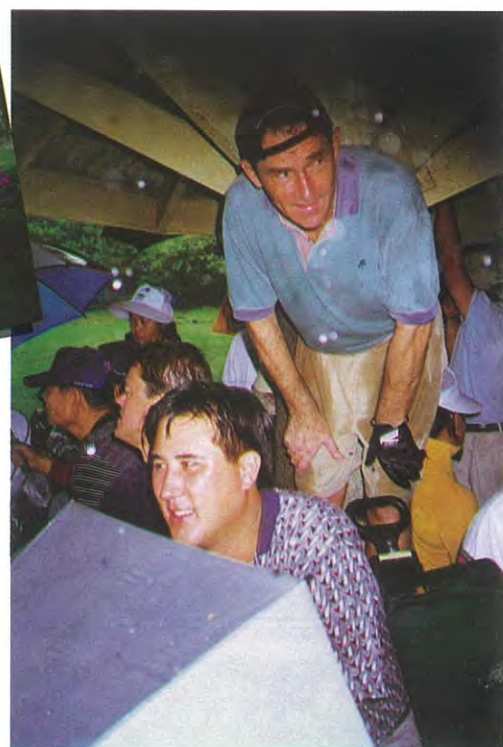
The Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard set up the Nieman program in 1938 and is the oldest journalism fellowship in America.

They award fellowships to working journalists with promise.

The fellowship gives Kavi a year of study at part of Harvard.

Swinging in the Rain. Just Swinging with the Swingers. Yes golf with the FCCT. The Swingers invite golfing FCCT members to have a friendly game with them. They play the first Saturday of every month, tee-off at the crack of noon. And despite that early start as many as eight have been showing up. And it doesn't always rain.

For details contact Jeremy Colson on mobile (01) 837 5434, or email: jerjc@bigfoot.com



It's your Club

"Ask not what your club can do for you, but what you can do for your club," JFK.

It's true, the FCCT needs you. The Club thrives on participation and all members are welcome, encouraged, to actively participate. One way to really help out is join one of the working committees headed by the executive board members. The committee members stay in touch generally via email and meet once or twice a month and discuss ideas and make plans for the club in the various areas.

Committees include Programs, Publicity, Membership and Club House. If you're interested in helping with one of them send an email to the Club on:

fcct@asiaaccess.net.th

Are you eating?

Jeff and his magic Pickle Factory are now providing the best food the FCCT has had the pleasure of serving. But the magic doesn't include guessing how many people will turn up for buffet on program nights. So we ask for your cooperation when you plan to eat. Please book by calling the club. It is a big help, down right crucial, to call and book if you plan to eat the buffet. We need to know how many people to expect so there are enough pickles to go around.

Cambodian trips planned for late this year

Master of the FCCT trip Don Philippe is planning two to Cambodia late this year.

On an early November weekend the Hotel le Royale chefs and housekeeping will cater an extravaganza camping trip with

tents and camp-beds provided by the army at the doors of Sambo Preah-Kup, a fantastic ancient Capital of Cambodia built centuries before Angkor Wat.

Then in early December the club will once again ride the magic rails in Cambodia, this time the Cambodian Express from Phnom Penh to Sihanoukville on the coast. Asian Trails will organise the rail journey.

The rail line has new track and the train will pull some new cars for a comfortable journey.

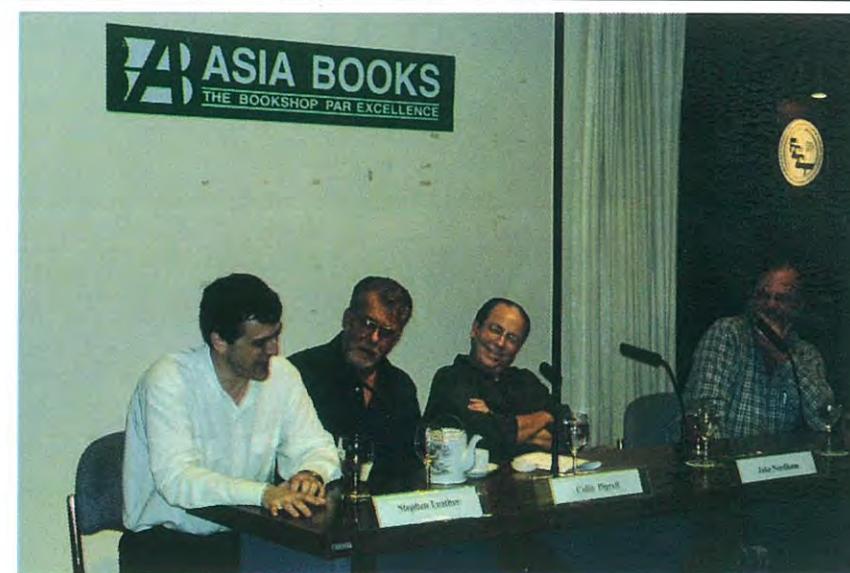
The Cambodian ministries of information and tourism, and Thai Airways International will also be involved in the adventures.

Keep an eye on the weekly Bulletin for details

S'aya John O'Kell taught Burmese at the FCCT

World-renowned Burmese language instructor John O'Kell who recently retired from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London taught a two-week intensive course at the FCCT in April.

The nearly 20 mature-age students were pleasantly pleased with how much they could learn in two weeks. The class was a success and S'aya John plans to return in 2002 to offer another beginning class and an intermediate course for those who mastered the class in April.



On April 18 the FCCT got literal with a novelists night co-hosted by Asia Books. From left, authors Stephen Leather, Colin Piprell, Jake Needham and James Eckardt spoke of their writing routines and answered questions from an inquisitive audience.



HAVE CAMERA, WILL TRAVEL

And always carry some good books

Bangkok is home for photographer Voja Miladinovic, but he as found himself living out of a suitcase in Indonesia most of the past three years.

It's the biggest news story in the region, he says. Photographers can't sit next to the telephone waiting for an assignment to call, he adds, they need to go where the news is going to happen and be there when it does. Waiting for news in Indonesia doesn't take long these days.

Originally from Yugoslavia and a photographer for 30 years with the past 20 of them in Southeast Asia Voja has become a fan of the archipelago. But it does offer its challenges. He has chased photos from the southeastern end of the country in Irian Jaya to the northwestern end in Aceh. The size and diversity of the country makes it difficult to cover.

Ache is one of the hot spots now and has only opened up for journalists during the past few post-Suharto years.

"During Suharto's time for over a decade Aceh was a military operation area. In the 80's no press could go there, in most of the 90's, too," he said.

Once it opened he was there and has returned many times and finds it a sad situa-

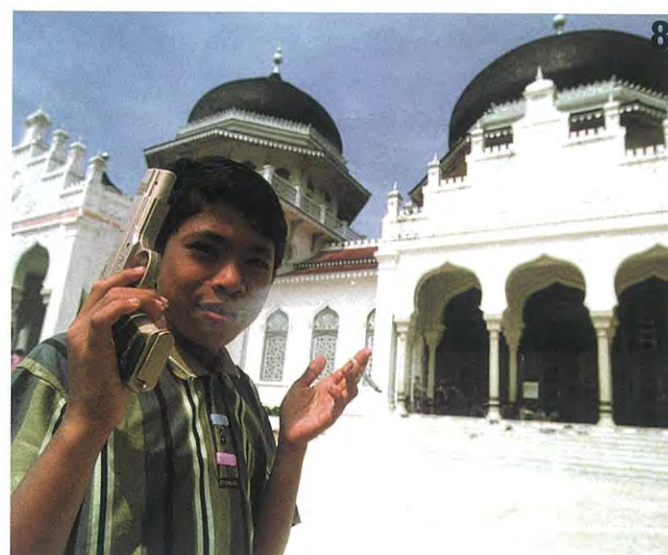
tion. "The situation there is deteriorating. Everyday it is getting worse," he said. "The authority of the Jakarta government doesn't exist today in Aceh. Most of them in the countryside left last year because it got too dangerous," he added.

The difficulties have lead to some poor journalism, too. Journalists have reported some crime as violence due to fighting between Jakarta authorities and rebels. But often the crime is individuals taking advantage of the anarchy.

"When all authority collapses law and order doesn't exist. So everyone is trying to fish in this muddy water," Voja said.

One trick of the criminal trade is stealing land. "They go to the house and say, 'okay you sign and transfer your land to me.' They beat the shit out of you all night then in the morning if you don't sign they put one bullet in you and throw you on the road," he said. Then the authorities say they were killed by rebels, and the rebels say they were killed by the army.

The two sides know when it is a crime killing but blame each other. But fighting that crime is the only thing they agreed on at the most recent Geneva meeting, Voja said. In



a sense the authorities are partly responsible because the crime rate is much higher due to the lack of authority in the region. The security situation is fluid, too. During one recent visit Voja was stopped at 14 check points between Medan and Banda Aceh. Three weeks later he was not stopped at all. Voja shoots colour prints, has them developed at a shop or does it himself if need be, scans them then sends them over a phone line or via a mobile phone.

Ache offers its problems but has proven easier than East Timor where Voja once spent a whole night sending a single photo. But Aceh is difficult, too. "It is not an easy place. The food is shitty, it has shitty accommodation but you have to survive to do the story. There is no five-star hotel at the end of the day. At the end of the day you go to a shitty place and eat shitty food," he said. And arranging to visit people and take photos in Aceh takes time. He waited two weeks in Banda Aceh to arrange a visit with the rebels. So he takes a lot of good books.

1. North Aceh, March 28, 2001. GAM (Free Aceh Movement) rebels in their base camp.
2. Banda Aceh, March 26, 2001. Indonesian police patrolling the city streets.
3. North Aceh, March 27, 2001. GAM rebel assassination squad with commander 'Jack'.
4. Jeuneub district, Aceh province, March 29, 2001. Members of GAM rebels 'Widow platoon' checking their arms. GAM rebels are using woman soldiers for patrolling and collecting intelligence on the movement of Indonesian troops.
5. Jeuneub district, Aceh province, March 29, 2001. Members of GAM rebels 'Widow platoon' on patrol.
6. Banda Aceh, March 9, 2001. Indonesian Aceh independence activist Muhammad Nazar, charged with sedition and facing up to 7 years.
7. March 10, 2001. Police road block in Pidie district, Aceh.
8. Banda Aceh, Indonesia, March 6, 2001.



Bangkok based photographer -
Voja Miladinovic

Man With The Midas Touch

by Micool Brooke

Remember Humphrey Bogart as the prospector stricken with gold-fever in the Hollywood classic *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*? Playing the hard-luck Fred C. Dobbs, Bogart embarks on a wild adventure in Mexico, where he eventually finds "gold in them thar hills". But in doing so he literally loses his head (after a run in with banditos) before he can enjoy the good life.

This Bogart classic reminds me a lot of recent events in Kanchanaburi where Senator Chaowarin has again lost face but not his portfolio. It's ancient history now that this was Chaowarin's second treasure-hunt in Kanchanaburi and that this time around he was the victim of a Filipino bond scam.

As a decade-long treasure-hunter myself, what fascinates me the most is why the second treasure hunt – five-years after the first one in Dec '95-Jan '96 – conned more people, particularly the local and international media.

Although *Bangkok Post* archives are jam-packed with stories of Japanese treasure-hunters returning to Thailand to retrieve their war-booty, many people including the international press corps were initially slow to react to Senator Chaowarin's claim of having found gold at several places in Kanchanaburi including Leija cave.

Chaowarin's claim – as fantastic as a script for an Indiana Jones adventure movie – that an old "comfort woman" had given him a treasure-map given to her by an ex-Japanese soldier aroused only minor interest with local and international newshounds.

However, in 1995 a couple of us did bite hard only to be taken for a ride hook, line and sinker by Senator Chaowarin. APTV's Mark Jordan, DPA's Mick Elmore and myself spent a couple of days at Leija cave during the initial gold-rush when police with M-16s kept free-lance treasure-hunters away from the site. It was a fun story to cover because of the greed factor and the remote possibility that Chaowarin just might emerge from the cave as the Man with The Midas Touch.

However, that was not to be and after exploring the cave ourselves we beat a hasty retreat back to Bangkok with nothing to show for our efforts but tales of adventure in a crypt that reminded me a lot of the Tunnels of Cu Chi. The treasure-hunt petered out a couple of days later but Senator Chaowarin was able to set the scene for the



sequel by blaming the Forestry Department which slapped a freeze on the dig-site.

However, in between treasure-hoaxes rumors of a curse that stalks treasure-hunters was fuelled by the deaths of six Thais who suffocated in Leija cave (in July 2000) which compelled the provincial authority to threaten imprisoning all treasure-hunters.



This incident helped convince the treasure-hoaxers that Leija cave could help them sell the con of the war bonds (dated three years after the end of WWII).

The stage was now set for Chaowarin's sequel, "The Return of the Treasurehunters".

But the news that Chaowarin was again

Micool Brooke has written two books about the Thai-Burma Railway and has spent many years researching myths and legends of treasure buried in Kanchanaburi.

The myth and the gold

by Aiko Doden

"Too embarrassing. Let's not talk about it any more," said my Thai friend when I asked too many questions about the story of legendary Japanese gold of World War Two. Yet the story made the headlines in Thai papers for several consecutive days. Some even told me that perhaps the retrieved gold and bonds should contribute to settling the Thai fiscal debt.

Then Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra personally visited the site and the story became difficult to simply dismiss as ridiculous.

The same story made almost no headlines in Japan. Those who have closely followed news in Asia may be able to recall several similar incidents in the region.

For the majority of Japanese, it was the kind of the story that many would simply dismiss as totally ridiculous and unreliable.

Did Japanese soldiers really leave something behind somewhere in this region when they withdrew? Maybe they did. Maybe they did not. To me, that does not seem to be the point anymore.

The fact that the legendary Japanese gold story keeps coming out makes me think. The belief among the locals, the embedded sentiment in the region, that "the Japanese soldiers must have left us treasure in Asia when they left," seems to speak for itself.

More than half a century has passed since the termination of World War Two. There are generations who barely have memories of the war itself. Perhaps, the story keeps appearing to be a reminder, of a war which

was once fought in the region.

The story reminds us not only of war, but also of the following years which lead to what Asia looks like today.

How politically and economically stable is the region? What is the perception among the people towards Japan? How sound and durable are relations between Asia and Japan? What do people expect from Japan, to be a friend, or only to provide assistance?

The legendary gold may never be found, and we may be surprised by similar stories in the papers again. The Japanese gold story should remain a legend, to always be a reminder of how close to animosity Japan and the region once were in history, and of how people endeavoured to renew a strong bond of friendship.



government, he says. He is on the left with a Korean-American actor who played him in a BBC docu-drama based on Richard Lomac's *The Railway Man*.

Photos by Mick Elmore

1 Thailand refurbished a few old steam engines and on special occasions run them on the Bangkok to Kanchanaburi route.

2 Author Micool Brooke finds some of Kanchanaburi's gold mine of bamboo.

3 The bridge over the River Kwai has become a tourist gold mine of sorts, although its history is nothing to celebrate.

4 Nagase Takashi was a young interpreter with the Japanese forces on the Death Railway during the Second World War. He says there is no gold, but some retreating soldiers did bury personal effects along the railway route. Many returned in the 1950's and 60's and retrieved them. Nagase wrote *Crosses and Tigers* about his experience after the war. He has also funded several temples in the areas where Japanese soldiers are buried in northern Thailand and Kanchanaburi. Soldiers forgotten by their

Aiko Doden is an NHK (Japan Broadcasting Corporation) correspondent based in Bangkok.

close to the motherlode caused me no real excitement because I had already invested many years searching the abandoned section of the Death Railway (between Namtok and Thanbyuzhat). Elmore is witness to this having joined me on a couple of those journeys.

But news that another treasure hunt was again underway in Thailand did capture the imagination of my publisher, Harper Collins (Australia), who were then reading my latest book proposal *The Treasure of the Samurai*. Talk about great timing (for me!)

And just to prove that fact is truly stranger than fiction – particularly in Thailand – the publisher has proposed some changes. I've had to add the Filipino treasure-hoaxers as the bad guys but remove the prime minister's brother as the hero who helps in the arrest because the publisher said this was too much a stretch of the imagination. And with an eye on the success of *The Beach* the publisher has suggested changing the book's title to *The Cave* or another the like because it will boost marketability.

Anyhow, as the dust from the last treasure-hunt finally settles on the graves of the six

hapless Thais who died looking for Chaowarin's golden egg at Leija cave, I'm left asking myself why this tale of fool's-gold was all the more believable the second time around?

With this in mind I can't wait until "treasure-hunt number-3" (*Treasure-hunters Strike Back*) in the coming years.

PM THAKSIN Takes The Stage

by Craig Knowles

A crowd of around 600 people gathered at the Plaza Athenee Hotel ballroom on June 4 to hear Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's long-awaited address and Q & A at a special FCCT dinner.

Arriving half-an-hour early, Thaksin and his entourage mingled in the VIP room before being officially welcomed by FCCT President Rodney Tasker. At the dinner, Thaksin appeared relaxed, in good humor, and caught some members of the press off-guard.

Indeed, the Prime Minister even drew a few laughs, suggesting the recently dismissed Bank of Thailand governor had run the institution like a "Shan state." *The Nation* newspaper, not exactly known for its pro-Thaksin stance, said the Prime Minister had "charmed" the foreign press with "witty comments and straightforward answers on a variety of topics."

Were we too soft on him?

"It was embarrassing, we should have been tougher on him," said one correspondent. "In hindsight we were too accommodating.

Questions that one would expect from a foreign press corp. to a newly-elected Prime Minister were noticeably absent." "The questions were asked, he just didn't answer them," said a journalist at the dinner. "He (Thaksin) was big on style, but rather lacking in substance."

Others had a different take on the evening. "I think news-wise, it wasn't hard-hitting but it was a good-natured Q & A which gave us more of an insight into who he is and what makes him tick. Both sides got to understand each other a bit better," said another correspondent.

Tasker conceded Thaksin had an easy ride, but added: "I think it was a chance to see what he was like as a man, as a human being. He was relaxed, very reasonable and rather impressive as a person. Politicians never really answer questions so that was to be expected."

In the question and answer session, Thaksin, using the official ASEAN line, said his government supported dialogue with Burma but would not interfere with the country's internal affairs. He denied a claim that one



- 1-4 Thaksin explains his golf and other things to guests before his speech.
5. Freelance journalist Karen Emmons listens to Thaksin.
6. Deputy Government Spokeswoman Dr. Nabathai Theuphaingarm all smiles after the speech.
7. Prime Minister Thaksin with FCCT board members from left, Rodney Tasker, Costas Paris, Dumras Rodjanapiches, Chris Johnson, Jeanne Hallacy, and Laurent Malespine.
8. Former Foreign Minister Prachaub Chaiyasarn. And the FCCT's Santana Paengbom discussing wine with Far Eastern Economic Review editor and former FCCT president Michael Vatikiotis.
9. Lin Neuman of the Committee to Protect Journalists with freelance photographer Paula Bronstein.
10. Deputy Prime Minister Pitak Intarawitayanunt signs a FCCT guest book for Dumras Rodjanapiches.
11. The event before the main event draws a crowd.
12. A circle of journalists have Thaksin's ear.

of his Cabinet members was involved in narcotics, saying the Cabinet was free of corruption. Thaksin said there had been no foreign policy shift towards China, and laughed off suggestions his government was supporting the ethnic Shan struggle.

Questioned about his dismissal of Chatu Mongol Sonakul as central bank head, the Prime Minister appeared to stumble,

prompting Finance Minister Somkid Jatusapeitak to take the microphone to assure the audience the sacking was "not personal." Controversy aside, Thaksin's appearance certainly helped promote the FCCT. The three English-language daily newspapers carried front-page articles, with *Business Day* featuring a photograph of Thaksin and Tasker.

The wire services also ran stories which were picked up in international publications

such as the *Asian Wall Street Journal*. Club Secretary Porntip Prommart said around 10 people had signed up during the evening and another 25 had left business cards seeking further information on the club. "I think it was probably something of a record night. It was a bigger turnout than for any other Prime Minister, in my experience at least," said Tasker.

Photos by Mick Elmore



Keeping a Blue Ear to the Ground

My father once asked me, in exasperation, "Why do you always have to do everything the hard way?" My answer is that the hard way - against the grain of received wisdom or prevailing assumptions - is the way most things worth doing get done.

I learned a lot the hard way during my five years (1993-98) as a freelance correspondent based in Bangkok. To come here at all was to do things the hard way; I could have stayed in America and become a lawyer, or for that matter a local reporter or desk-bound editor.

That's one thing that unites all of us expat journos: we all left wherever it is we came from. Other things divide us, though.

Some of us get salaries and full expenses; some get a retainer and/or partial or occasional expenses; some are on their own. During my Bangkok years I was firmly in the third category.

In early 1994 I quit a desk job at the *Bangkok Post* to go freelance, precisely in order to be free - and I learned that freedom, like anything else, has a price. One pays the price of being a free(lance) journalist in financial insecurity, lack of institutional and logistical support (including even things like phone lines and office supplies), and sometimes dubious and grudging acceptance by colleagues and sources.

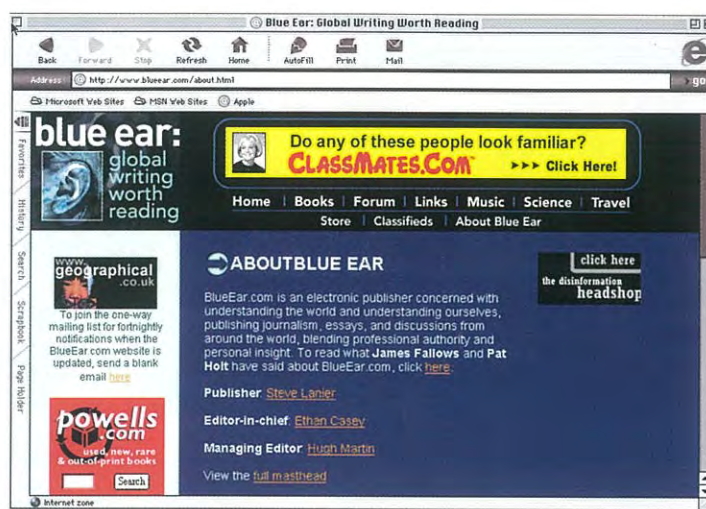
A staff correspondent enjoys whatever deference his or her employer's reputation commands; a freelancer has to earn respect story by story. My purpose in being a journalist - the reason I consider journalism important enough work to make it my work - is to acquire and communicate an accurate understanding of the world and of human events. This purpose is in tension with the need we all share to make money. It's that tension, as well as the conventional world's proclivity for punishing individuals who

choose freedom, that makes journalism hard work when done properly.

Circa 1997, I burned out. I was sick of Thailand, sick of the freelance treadmill, sick of the constant stream of cheap hotel rooms. More than anything, I was sick of butting heads with editors. I came to see my high-mindedness - the *raison d'être* of my career - as at once an asset and a problem, since it left me vulnerable to being exploited and patronized by editors and publishers whose motivations were more businesslike.

Writers, I concluded, are like Third World countries that export "primary commodities" like grains and unprocessed ores. If you're, say, Vietnam, and your major export is rice, then you have to compete, from a position of weakness, with the United States and Thailand, both of which export better rice and have been doing it longer. Though I presume to believe that I exported - and still export, albeit now less often, more judiciously - pretty good "rice", I got tired of perpetually being pitted against innumerable other writers, all vying for the limited and fickle attention of Western editors.

Why Western editors in particular? Because, silly, the West is where most of the money is. And he who pays the piper calls the tune. Along came the Web, changing everything (sort of). Financial barriers to entry into publishing suddenly were drastically lower. Sensing the



new medium's potential for reaching readers around the world and for tempering what I considered the myopia of the Western-led media agenda, and appreciating the opportunity to move one rung up the publishing food chain, I threw my hat in the ring.

At the end of 1998, my partner Steve Lanier and I launched BlueEar.com: Global Writing Worth Reading. Steve's the business guy; I'm the editorial guy (otherwise known as the editor - though I've certainly learned a lot about business over the past two years); and our optimism about our own dot-com future is, I think, justified because, unlike e.g. *Salon*, we've kept our costs low and have no debt.

In his book *What Are Journalists For?* (Yale University Press, 1999), Professor Jay Rosen of New York University points out that "on the Web, every reader is also a writer, every consumer

a potential producer. Everyone there is in potential reach of everyone else who is there. These are new conditions for journalists." Drawing a distinction between "journalism" and "media", Rosen argues: "The point of having journalists around is not to produce attention, but to make our attention more productive." One thing the Web hasn't changed is the solipsistic fact that most of the world's money is in the rich countries. How does a publisher get money from the relatively few people who have it to spare, in order to serve the need of everyone everywhere for genuine journalism (as distinct from purely profit-driven "media")? I don't yet have an answer, but I do know that it's the right question to ask.



Ethan Casey, formerly based in Bangkok, is co-founder and editor-in-chief of BlueEar.com: Global Writing Worth Reading. He writes journalism regularly for US and UK publications, including *The Financial Times*, *Geographical* magazine, and *the Boston Globe*. He writes two regular columns on issues in electronic publishing: "The Online Editor" (<http://www.conent-exchange.com/spotlight>) and Casey's Briefcase (<http://www.internetcontent.net>), appearing on alternating Mondays. About Blue Ear: <http://www.blueear.com/about.html>



Jaras water colours.

The FCCT will feature water colour painting by Thai Artists Jaras Srikuot in September. The launch date will be announced in the weekly FCCT bulletin.

Jaras can be contacted on Tel: 01 278-2670.

Email: jaras_s2000@yahoo.com



HELLO MY BIG BIG BOOK TOUR

Fear and Touring with my Big Big Chick

SAN FRANCISCO, California - A switchblade to the throat, a former CIA *Apocalypse Now* paramilitary leader, and a warning not to say "chicks," greeted us during our three-week book signing tour in San Francisco. And who were those "Trotskyite feminists"?

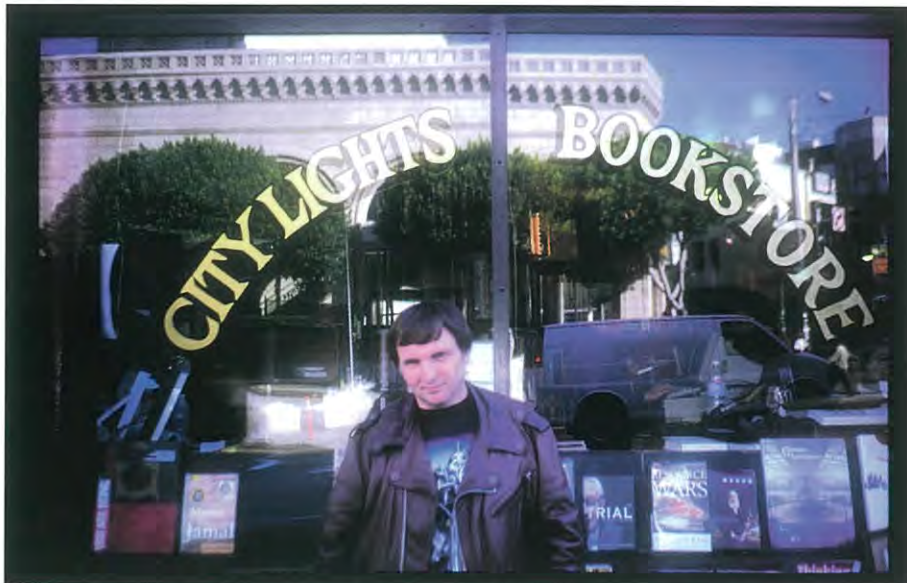
Our non-fiction book of documentary journalism, titled, *Hello My Big Big Honey! Love Letters to Bangkok Bar Girls and Their Revealing Interviews*, had finally gotten published in America, after being on sale only in Thailand for the past several years.

Co-author Dave Walker and I were invited to fly to San Francisco, where our publisher planned a dazzling book signing tour of the Bay area. We stalked into bookshops, art galleries, bars and the University of California, Berkeley. Schmoozed for two days at the Oakland Convention Center. And inspired Pacifica Radio's listener-sponsored KPFA-FM staff to read live excerpts on their *Cover to Cover* literary review broadcast.

First on our tour was the respected, leftist-intellectual Modern Times Bookstore where we were given a podium and microphone to converse with serious-minded customers. They wanted to know if the Thai bar girls we interviewed were exploited by super-power men. So we described the Thai women who appear in the book and related their difficult lives. When we returned to the bookshop a few days later to ask how our appearance was interpreted, we saw *Hello My Big Big Honey!* perched in shop's window, front and center, amid other new arrivals.

The next day, we carried boxes into the Oakland Convention Center to sign copies at our publisher's annual booth during WonderCon 2001. The convention offered plenty of kitsch icons and commercial memorabilia, billing itself as "northern California's largest comic book and pop culture convention, featuring comics, TV, video games, 60,000-plus square feet of sales and exhibits, a Japanese animation festival, and summer movie previews."

Upon seeing the crowd, we wondered if these collectors, fans, nerds and Star Trek geeks would want a book about men and women falling in love in red-lit moonlight on the other side of the world. But after button-holing them for two days at the convention, we sold a bunch of signed books, and



Canadian screenwriter and Big Big Honey co-author Dave Walker in front of the beatnik, s-fables City Lights Bookshop in San Francisco.

also made friends with hip-hop cartoonists from Oakland who promised to spread the word among their inner-city friends - a "demographic" we hadn't considered.

The convention, however, brought out some strange characters. The actor who played "Radar" on the TV series *Mash*, and an actor who was the "Hologram" on the cult classic *THX* were signing autographs for money.

Further down the food chain were Playboy center-fold women from - can you remember back that far? - 1978. Polyester guys were paying to be photographed with the rabbits.

Weirder things happen in San Francisco, especially at night, as I soon discovered after we later emerged from a "benefit" book signing at the Minna Street Gallery in which

all profits went to the Saint James Infirmary, providing free medical and legal assistance to San Francisco's sex workers. The gallery was suitably decked out with paintings by various artists, including Sharon Leong's masterpiece, *The Dangers of Sex: Eating Pussy*.

That's when our publisher, San Francisco legend Ron Turner, introduced us to S. Clay Wilson. Some of you may know the name of the "underground comic book artist" Robert Crumb who did Zap Comix, Fritz the Cat and other radical animation which came to symbolize much of the late 1960s and early 1970s counter-culture humor in America.

At our publisher's warehouse we eventually met Crumb, who now lives in self-exile in France. But one of his competitors, S. Clay Wilson, also churns out freaky comic books,

albeit heavier on crudeness compared with Crumb's often profound lines. When Turner introduced us to Wilson, I instinctively pulled out my camera and shot a photo of him in the street in front of the gallery, while we were moving on to our next venue.

I heard the horrific metal click of Wilson's switchblade just as it reached my neck. Wilson was drunk, laughing and leering. He angrily shouted about not wanting his picture taken. As soon as I realized my fate, he pocketed the blade. Stunned, and not wanting to provoke him again, we continued the evening as if nothing happened, mostly because he began "speaking in tongues," as Turner later dubbed Wilson's incoherent babble.

On another night, our tour took us to Francis Ford Coppola's Italian restaurant in North Beach where a table of cultural elites and one of mayor's officials toasted us with wine from Coppola's vineyard, though alas, the film director wasn't there. Our hosts were in a generous mood. One of them opened the menu, selected an expensive Italian meal, called the waiter and, when the delicious dish arrived, placed the plate of pasta underneath our sidewalk table so his pet dog wouldn't go hungry.

Our biggest coup, meanwhile, came after we mailed a copy of the book to KPFA-FM Pacifica Radio. They received the book on a Friday and telephoned us on Monday to say they rushed it to the top of their list and had already read excerpts live on Sunday.

Back in San Francisco, while passing a Mission Street storefront organization proclaiming itself as, "Radical Women - a Socialist Feminist Group," we flashed the book and talked about the angst experienced by Thai bar girls and their foreign lovers. We also knew what not to say. Earlier in our tour, one wise guy took us aside and warned, "When you talk about the women in your book, remember, this is San Francisco, so don't say 'chicks'."

As it turned out, no need for a politically correct sell. One of the radical women exclaimed: "I saw that book in the window of the Modern Times Bookshop!" With street cred like that, the revolution clutched us to its bosom and even promised to tell their "Trotskyite feminist" comrades to buy our tome.

Among the luminaries we met who put a

copy of our signed book in their personal libraries was Tony Poe, the former CIA paramilitary leader whose tribal guerrillas fought in Laos during America's Vietnam War - and who was portrayed as "Kurtz" in the film *Apocalypse Now*.

We also went to bookstores and met their buyers, who immediately stocked us on their shelves. Beatnik-rooted City Lights Bookshop put us in their "Evidence" section. Some of the best news we discovered

on our tour, however, was the popularity of Thailand among Americans. Men and women regaled us with their memories of holidays along Thailand's beaches, or their insatiable appetite for Thai food or their longing desire to travel to Thailand because they heard about its amazing delights. They wanted to come with their families. And yes, they all knew Thailand wasn't a place where you might get your throat slit while taking a photograph.



A charter from Star Wars shows off a copy of the book at the Oakland Convention Centre's WonderCon 2001 exhibition.



Richard S. Ebrlich is a Bangkok-based correspondent for international media who has reported from Asia for the past 25 years. His website is <http://ebrlich.tripod.com/> -

Aids is Still a Story

Story and Photos by: Karsta Straub, a German lawyer working for an NGO in Bangkok

For journalists it's a time to report on the hip-hop dot.coms losing other people's money, the importance of Shanghai Chic, sexuality in Asia and how the mixed up Eurasians fit into the trend of globalization.

But not more stories about Aids. I spent some weeks with people dying of Aids and have written an article on how it may feel to have that lethal disease in Thailand. I could only get it published in magazines no one has ever heard of. The kind of magazines which need to fill pages and are distributed free. But at least some people on the street got to read what I learned about those who turn into ghosts in the Land of Smiles. A few readers wrote back to me. They liked it.

I felt encouraged and tried to offer my "news" to publications that are actually sold, and read by those who lounge in the business classes in airplanes. I geared toward World Aids Day, naively thinking that perhaps, once a year, a little reminder of what is now officially called an epidemic might have a good chance to get published.

One editor was kind enough to send me back a short note, asking me if I had discovered anything new I want to let the world know about, whether my photos show anything which we haven't seen before. No. The "Been there, done it" thing. Hey, of course they need something new. I blushed with embarrassment when I read his note. How naive can one be and waste these people's time? We don't need more stories about Aids, instead we need to learn more about the Asian stock markets, the most recent comments on nationalism by Mahatir, or another recent Japanese fashion trend.

Perhaps if another slum built on a mountain of garbage collapsed, burying Aids patients under pornographic videos, perhaps then we could fit it in? That would be a story, wouldn't it? Or isn't there anyone dying of Aids in East Timor? That might work as a so-called new angle for a horrible but unfortunately common way of leaving this world. A decade ago, no journalist could possibly afford to ignore this old enduring disease. At that time, HIV was still news. At that time we were still prepared to panic. These days, dot.coms and Chinese chic style require our attention.



"This is not in memory of anyone you would like to emulate but for the millions unknown so that their death won't be emulated."

Most of the few successful journalists I have met are smarter. They have a good business sense and understand the market, the psychology of their outlets. They are the ones who find new stories, all these exciting hot spots in Asia. And if there is nothing going on, then they invent a little here and a little there, especially the so-called human factor to frame the "hot spot" nicely. And who says we always want non-fiction? I guess it should sound like fiction; we need to quench our thirst for excitement.

Now, I have been asked to come up with some reasons why we should still write about Aids. And after considering the plight of publishers and journalists, I find it hard to justify. It is true there is not much new about it? Yes, recently some commercial and political interests were involved in South

Africa. That was not new either but the outcome was. Maybe in Africa, they write more about a whole generation slipping away, thereby putting some pressure on the money making pharmaceutical multinationals. Who knows? Maybe.

But for those who only need news, I must admit there is no reason to waste an extra page on the roughly 100 Thais daily who catch HIV in the Land of Smiles. What about a number like one million? That many have already been infected, according to a conservative estimate.

Does that number make sense? I know, it's not as many as in Africa, but Asia at least is a runner-up. Is that news enough? Well, the number of newly infected Thais is increasing or decreasing, depending on the economic situation and the measures taken by the government in any given year. Perhaps that's worth a note for people who like to follow statistics?

And what about non-fiction which sounds like fiction? Any reader looking to read about things he wouldn't want to see can be assured that those who die of Aids really look like ghosts in the end. Some even call them the "zombies" when their plate-big eyes twinkle a bit in bald-headed faces. The smell in the hospitals and temples where they hide from discrimination is deadly sweet. TB ridden bodies shiver in cold sweat and wet diapers, their wrinkled skin glued to green leather mattresses. They are often fed by strangers. And hey, there are quite a few of them who die in a day, their corpses carried out for cremation in paper coffins.

It's a long story of dying which has become a daily routine. There is nothing really new about it. They were not beheaded nor shot down but they all die a terrible and mostly humiliating death.

Perhaps the way they were infected could interest a reader who has time to care about others. And there are many more to come who will turn from sweet looking boys and girls into friendly rattling skeletons. What about them? They will be dropped in front of gates by an uneducated and embarrassed society. Are they worth a page? Do they really need to be looked at from that "new angle"?



Vipaj Vichit-Vadakan, journalist and editor, answered the question "why write about Aids?" as follows:

"Personally, I think Aids in Thailand should be written about because Thai society and culture are in a denial mode over the issue. It is a social and moral dilemma without an easy exit. Sweeping this dilemma under the rug is what society is doing, so there is a need of conscience for the journalist to stir things up."

I have no responsibilities arising from journalism. I make my money in a boring way because I haven't done well on the "new angle thing". I wrote something for a reason which has nothing to do with news or all those considerations journalists are so aware of. I wanted to do something on World Aids Day in memory of those who die young, who are ostracized and humiliated despite so many "boring" years of articles on Aids.

There are things which need to be repeated, things like; "Be aware HIV is still partying here". And apart from that, we commemorate the Kennedys and Jackies and even Pol Pots over many pages every year. Why not a page, a familiar photo for the ghosts? Perhaps in an annual column with the title: "This is not in memory of anyone you would like to emulate but for the millions unknown so that their death won't be emulated."



A Modern Day Marco Polo

by Scott Murray

He has been a stand-in for Marlon Brando in *Mutiny on the Bounty*—you can catch a glimpse of him in the famous keelhaul scene. He met Ernest Hemingway. He's climbed the Matterhorn, most of the major peaks in North America and he even briefly joined forces with one of Sir Edmund Hillary's climbing teams. He was imprisoned by the Chinese Communists and escaped by swimming to a passing junk. He's driven a motorcycle across Australia, a jeep across Russia, and a land cruiser around the world. He's sailed the major seas of the world. I mean, really, what hasn't Harold Stephens done? Indeed, shortly before James Clavell died he told Harold if he were to write a modern day saga he would base it on Harold's life.

During all this, Harold has found the time to write 22 books.

But how does Harold keep track of the people he meets and the places he goes?

"Even when I am going into jungles, or when I'm sailing out at sea, I try to capture the moment because, you know, you can't always depend on your memory. I keep a journal and even if I'm at sea and a storm is approaching, I try to capture the feeling right there at the time," he said.

How about his interview process?

"I'll go out and meet someone and sit down with them for two hours and I won't say anything. I let other people talk and I never argue with them. I'm out to capture people as they are, I just let them ramble."

Growing up.

He was kicked around in school in Bridgeville, Pennsylvania, because he couldn't play ball, he couldn't shoot a basket and was called a "sissy". So he would escape back to his farm

and create his own world by playing Tarzan. He always thought he would make his revenge by coming back a great hero and he attempted to do so by lying about his age and joining the USMC at age sixteen. The year before his farm had burned down and he had to quit school halfway through grade nine to go work in a coal mine.

In April '45, three months after he enlisted, Harold ended up in Okinawa, where he finished out the rest of the Pacific campaign. After being evacuated to Guam, the Marines shipped him to China, and along the way he picked up a book on spoken Chinese. So he started practicing phrases. Later, an officer hearing him yell expressions in Chinese, asked where he had learned to speak the language and Harold said he came from a missionary family. So the very next day, he was off to Peking on a six-month course to study Chinese at the University of Peking.

As the Communists advance grew, Harold and a group of fellow marines were sent on a mission to rescue a group of nuns who ran an orphanage in the Laoshin Mountains but the nuns refused to leave. Then on the way back a number of the Marines were captured and killed by the Communists. They were hung up by their feet and their tongues were cut out. Luckily, the fact Harold spoke Chinese saved his life, but he was taken as a POW. First, he worked lugging coal then he was assigned to work in a fishing village where he escaped by covering himself in grease and swimming to a Chinese junk.

Harold eventually made it to Shanghai and then back to San Diego where he faced a court-martial because the military had no idea what had happened to him. When everything was straightened away, he became part of a group of 200 Ma-

lines that were being sent to guard American embassies around the world.

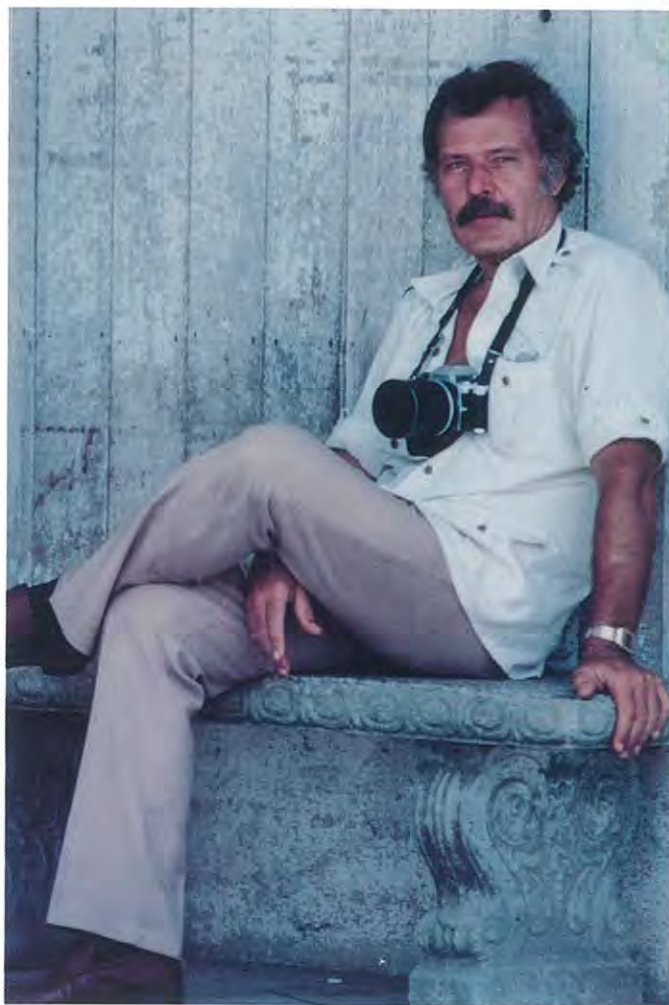
In 1949 Harold went to Paris to be American Ambassador Jefferson Caffrey's bodyguard. And meeting him was really the turning point in Harold's life. He would go everywhere with the Ambassador because someone had threatened Caffrey's life. The Ambassador encouraged Harold to go back to school and with his help he did. Stephens, with a reduced workload, enrolled at the Sorbonne and studied French and French history. He then proceeded to enter Georgetown's School of Foreign Ser-

vice where he managed to take a four-year degree in two-and-a-half years by attending school day and night. The university was furious because Stephens only had a grade eight education but they had to enroll him because of the Ambassador's recommendation.

While he was in Paris, Harold married a French-American girl. His novel, *The Tower and the River*, is loosely based on his life there.

After several years and two children Harold and his wife divorced and he set off traveling. He thought about settling in Spain, but in 1959 he settled

"You can do everything you want to. Once, you get rid of this idea that you need money, you can do anything."



for the ultimate haven - Tahiti, because he wanted a place where he could write. He got waylaid along the way, however, and ended up rafting down the Amazon River.

But when Harold left America, he hardly had any money, so how did he do it?

"In 1960, I could live on \$150 a month, one could sail across the Pacific or Europe on a cargo boat for \$7 a day. You could get a cheap hotel in Singapore for \$3 a day, or in Tahiti for \$2.50 a day."

"It's not the doing it (adventure), it's the trying to work for it, that's the fun part of it. I have realized my shortcomings though. While training with Sir Edmund Hillary, I knew I would never become a great mountaineer, but it didn't matter, what mattered was just taking part in the adventure."

What's next?

"I have practically done everything there is to do, so I would like to do things over again. However, I would not like to ride a camel caravan across Afghanistan again, but I would like to outfit a 4WD and go across the Australian outback. I would like to sail the South Pacific again but not in a schooner, where you really have to work, that's why I'm heading toward a big mechanized boat. I want to see some of the islands and the people I knew. I want to get back into Tahiti, I want to do Tahiti in style this time and I would like to do a book on Tahiti. I met all the great ones that were living there in the 50s."

Thai pirates have a pretty nasty reputation, so how did Harold deal with them while sailing through Thai waters and when he was out at sea?

Normally, he kept his boat dark colored so pirates didn't know who he was or what he was doing. He also reinforced his cabins, so they would be bul-

leproof. Women on board were not allowed on deck when unknown ships passed by and definitely not in any shorts or any provocative clothing. He says the best thing was just not to acknowledge what could be a pirate ship: never wave or show any bit of friendliness towards it.

If he was in a cove, and a number of Thai ships moved in, Harold would immediately lift anchor and move, and he just wouldn't invite them over to his boat, because once they got drinking Thai whiskey they could so easily get out of control.

"As long as you are moving, you are relatively safe. And remember the other ships are worried about you too, they don't know what your capabilities are," he said.

For decades Harold sailed the seas in the boat he made himself *The Third Leg*. "It became an emotional thing for me. I had complete, honest trust in that boat. It became so much of a living part of me and then when I wasn't there when it went down: I feel like I deserted it."

In 1991 Harold left *The Third Leg* in Honolulu with two people when he went back to California for a visit. A hurricane came

up and they left the portals open and it just went over and broke up. A tragic end to his boat but Harold's adventures continued.

"I'm not out to change the world but I do influence a lot of people, especially from my yachting book, *The Last Voyage*. I literally get hundreds of e-mails and letters where people tell me they want to just chuck it all away, build a boat and sail around the world," he says.

Harold is currently working on a book titled *Take China*, based on his experiences while serving there.

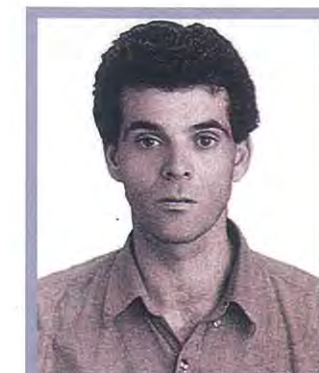
In his life Harold has mingled with Legong dancers and painters on Bali, rubber planters in Malaysia, cargo boat captains on the Rejang in Sarawak, Iban chiefs in Sabah, stone-age natives in Mindanao in the Philippines, holy men on the Ganges and negritos in the tropical rain forests of Malaysia.

He's seen the red sails of dhows on the blue-green waters of the Nile, the Taj Mahal by moonlight, the blazing Sahara sunsets, the majestic snow peaks of the Himalayas rising over the valley of Kathmandu.

So how can he do all these

things?

"What the Marines taught me was that you can do anything. If it's there, you can do it. You can do everything you want to. Once, you get rid of this idea that you need money, you can do anything."



Scott Murray is a Bangkok-based journalist.

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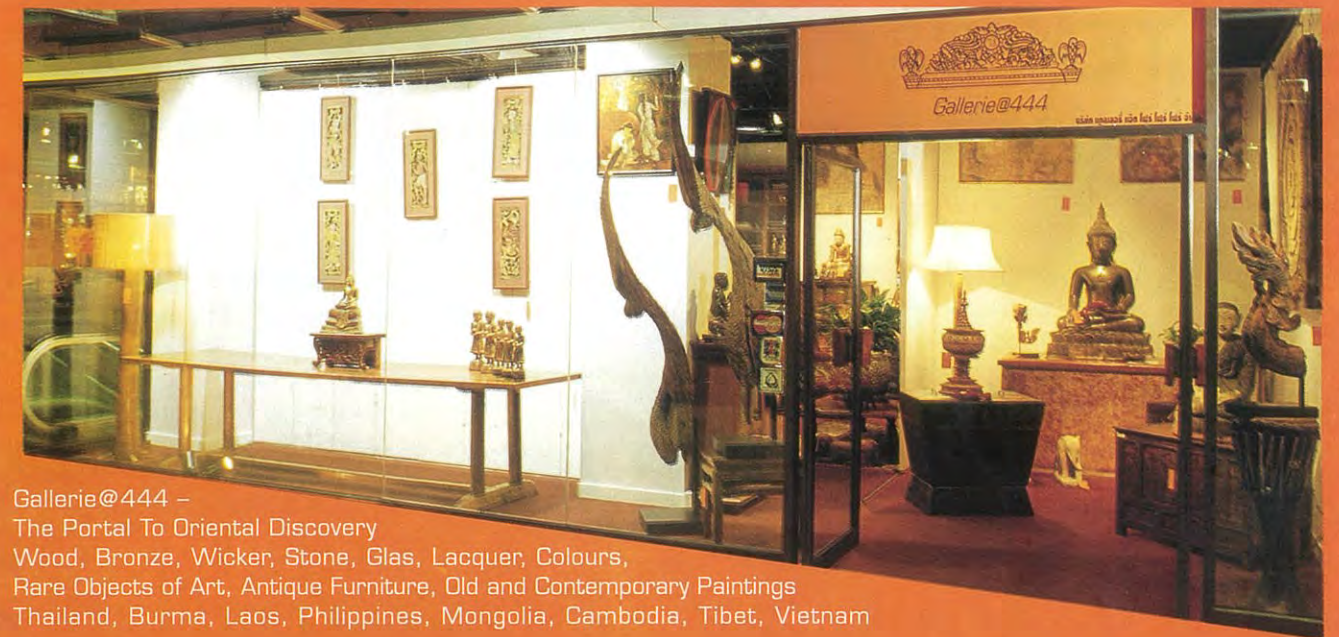


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THE TEN WAYS JOURNALISTS AGE (Considering your options)

by Eric Weiner

Okay, so you're approaching 40—maybe you're even surpassed this milestone—and you're wondering: How long can I keep doing this? How long can I keep covering upheavals and insurrections, currency crises and financial meltdowns? How long can I keep criss-crossing the Globe? And, most important, how long can I keep stuffing my pockets with those little bottles of Johnnie Walker from the Mini-bar?

Don't fret. You are not alone. Others have crossed this junction before you and survived. Thus, we present, their collective wisdom in: The Ten Ways Journalists Age. (Okay, so we only came up with Eight Ways but "Ten" makes for a better headline.)

1) THE JOURNEYMAN a.k.a. "How old did you say you are?"

This option is the simplest. It requires no change of course, no soul searching. You just keep going. Just keep humping.

On the upside, you avoid options 2-8, and can rest assured that continuous mental stimulation has been proven to aid in longevity. On the downside, you have to endure a perennial sense of déjà vu, not to mention snickers of "Gramps" from younger colleagues.

2) MANAGEMENT a.k.a. "My office is bigger than yours."

This is the most popular option. Tired of criss-crossing the Globe, you settle into a corner office in New York (or London or Toronto) and direct a staff of young, eager reporters as they criss-cross the Globe. Your office is adorned with Persian carpets, exotic bric-a-brac and a picture of you standing shoulder-to-shoulder with Arafat back in '84. You spend your day in meetings, and telling reporters in the field how much better the business was when you were out there.

You also dispense unsolicited advice about everything, including which drinks you MUST order at which bars. Your vicarious life is supplemented by occasional phone calls to your old pals—now immersed in their own corner offices—during which you reminisce about the time back in '86 when you almost got your asses shot in Gaza.

On the upside, you now enjoy normal working hours. No more late night phone calls from editors with inane questions. In fact, you now initiate such calls. On the downside, you can no have the thrill of a

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byline to look forward to, and your staff thinks you're a washed-up weenie. Oh yeah, one more drawback: neckties.

3) COLUMNIST/AUTHOR a.k.a. "The Thomas Friedman" option.

This is the primo option. The Gold-plated Rolodex. You leave the daily stuff to the young bucks. You are now a Big Picture Guy. You have long lunches with really interesting, powerful people. Then you write about these lunches and call it "A Column".

Or, alternatively, you have a years' worth of long lunches with really interesting, powerful people. Then you write about these lunches and call it "A Book."

The upside is significant: creative fulfillment, lucrative speaking engagements and the obvious envy of your colleagues. The downside? The grim possibility that you may run out of ideas after a dozen columns.

4) PROFESSOR a.k.a. The "Those who can do..." option.

Fed up with surly editors and unreasonable deadlines you find refuge in the Ivory Tower. You now have time to actually READ books (as opposed to skimming) and indulge your secret passion for tweed.

On the upside, you are contributing to the development of young minds—AND you get summers off. On the downside, you most likely have an "inappropriate relationship" with one of these young minds (Most likely a 19 year old coed named Suzie) and are forced to resign in disgrace.

5) P.R. a.k.a. "The sell out" option.

This is the most treacherous option. Your are lured by the Big Office. The Expense Account. The "home by 6:00 p.m." lifestyle.

On the upside, you may land a job with UNHCR or some other well-intentioned organization. You may even get to travel to places like Rwanda and interview refugees. Just like a journalist.

But—here comes the downside—you know that in your heart of hearts that you are just a flak.

6) The BARFLY a.k.a. The "They named a barstool after me" option.

Your time is up in Bangkok (or Hong Kong or Delhi or Cairo). Head office says it is time to come home. You say no. Head office says you are fired. You find work as a stringer for the National Enquirer and ensconce yourself at the local FCC, drinking yourself silly and relishing in club politics. On the upside, you're still in Bangkok (or Hong Kong or Delhi or Cairo). On the downside, you have become a parody of the washed-up hack gone local.

7) BED AND BREAKFAST a.k.a. The "Berkshires" option.

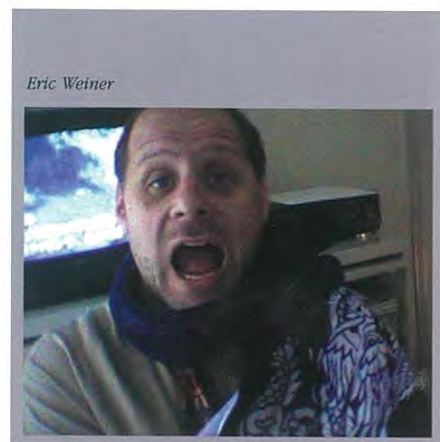
In this option, you catapult yourself clear of the entire profession, landing safely in the Berkshire, or Napa Valley or the Cotswolds. You buy an old handyman's special and turn it into a fine B and B. You change the rhythm of your life. You invite all of your old friends and even throw in a 20 percent discount.

On the upside, your blood pressure is lower than it has been in...well, EVER. On the downside, your pulse is way too low. You miss the excitement.

8) DEATH

This is, of course, the most extreme option. One that you do not choose. IT chooses you.

On the upside, if you are cut down in the line of duty, you will most likely have a scholarship named after you, and all of your friends who found you insufferable will sing your praises. ("TK just wanted to tell the story of the poor suffering people of Ugabugu. With TK, it wasn't about ego.") On the downside, you are, well, dead.



Eric Weiner

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