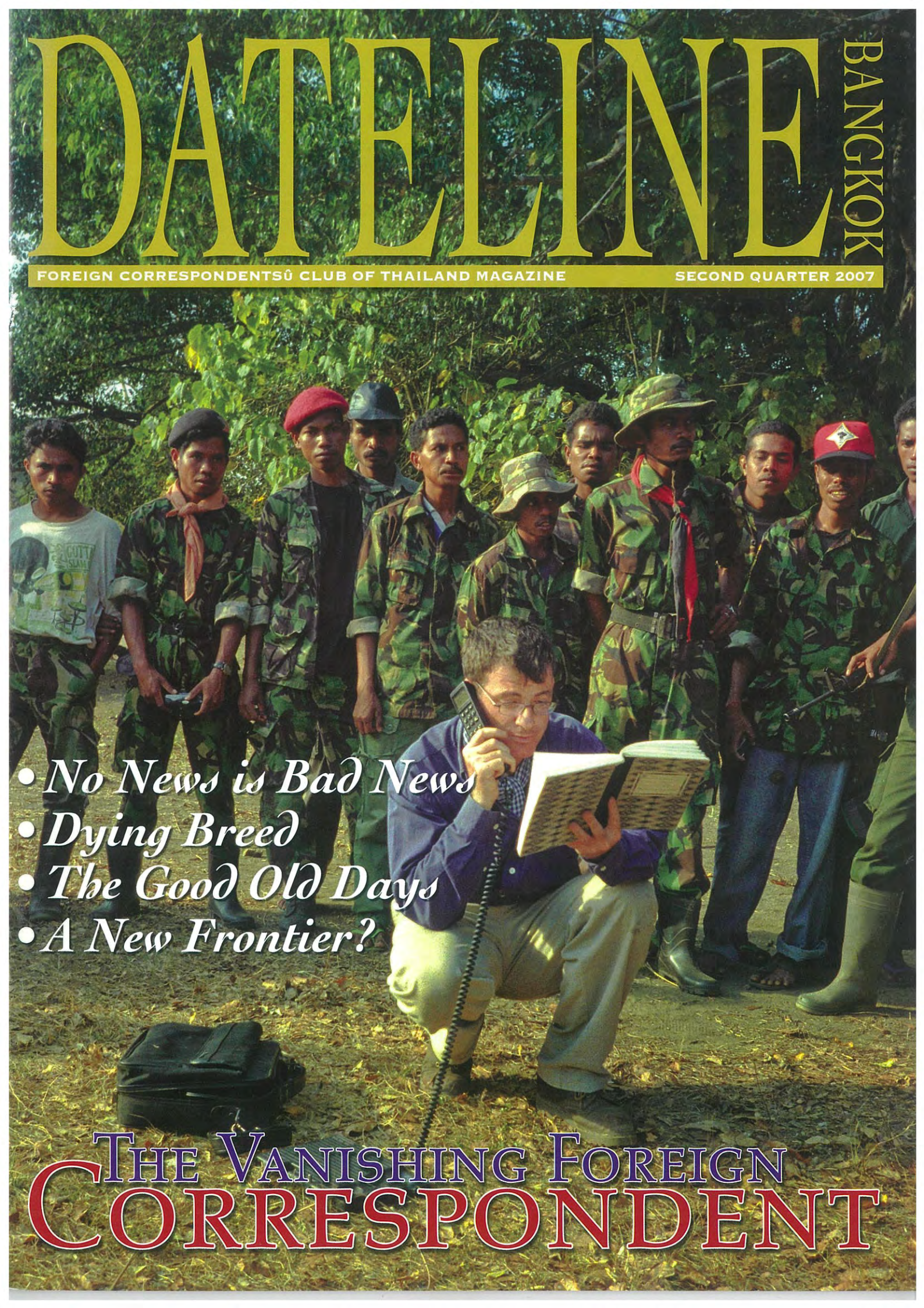


DATELINE

BANGKOK

FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS' CLUB OF THAILAND MAGAZINE

SECOND QUARTER 2007

- 
- *No News is Bad News*
 - *Dying Breed*
 - *The Good Old Days*
 - *A New Frontier?*

THE VANISHING FOREIGN CORRESPONDENT

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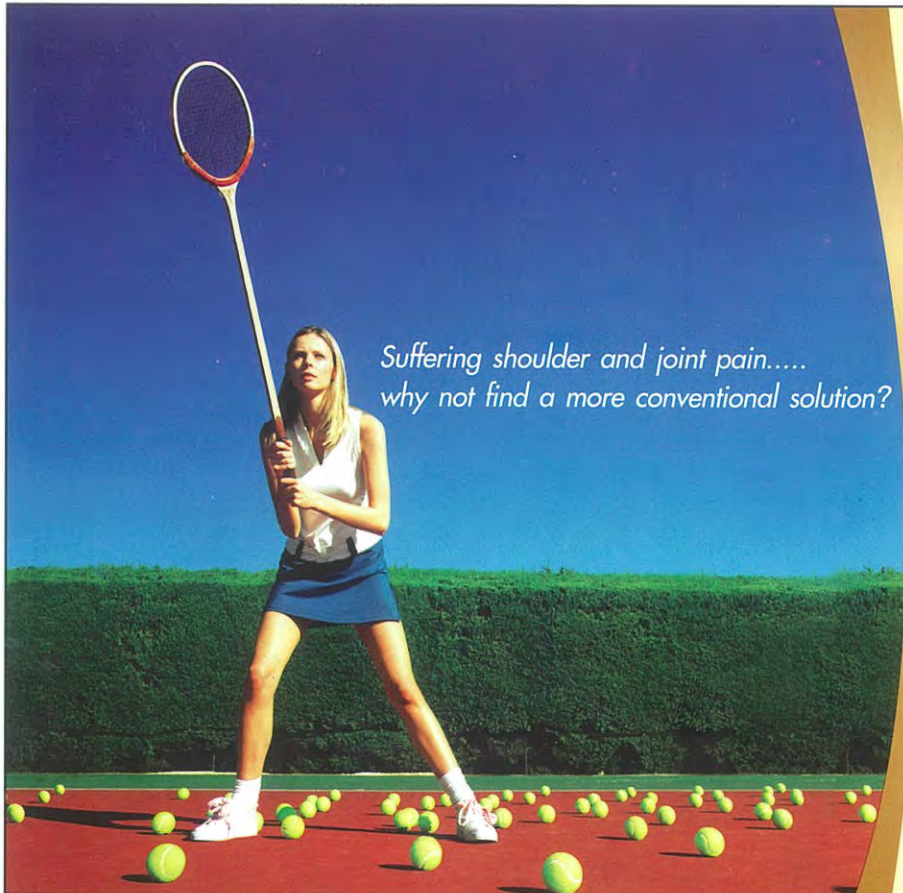
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FEEDING THE MACHINE

Dateline magazine looks at the stories behind the stories. All offerings will be considered, from articles and photo essays to letters, essays, haiku or sonnets. How you covered a story, what you think about how journalism works, or even some gossip for the Soi Whispers column – send it all in, to editor Patrick Barta (Patrick.Barta@wsj.com) or deputy editor Marwaan Macan-Markar (marwaan@ips.org). Submissions are paid for with glory and bar coupons.

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In his 1998 book "The Greatest Generation," veteran journalist and news anchor Tom Brokaw coined the idea that the Americans who came of age in the Great Depression, then made extraordinary sacrifices during World War II, exemplified the virtues of heroism, courage, honour, commitment and achievement.

For foreign correspondents, though, the 'greatest generation' for our particular tribe seems to be the likes of the late David Halberstam and Kate Webb, both of whom have been lost to us in recent months, but whose work and bravery shine on as examples and inspiration for us all.

The post-World War II "Baby Boom" generation of Western foreign correspondents came of age at a time when the world was divided into two camps – the so-called "Free World" and the "Communist Bloc."

In this milieu – of a perceived battle for the heart and soul of the world, journalists like Halberstam, Webb, our own Jimmy Pringle, Denis Gray, Derek Williams, and the late Neil Davis, travelled to what were then still "far-away" places to the front-lines of the superpower conflict. There they often discovered unpalatable, bitter truths about their own governments and the causes they supported, and the humanity of those on the other side.

Nowhere was this truer than in the Vietnam War, the crucible that forever changed relations between Western correspondents and their governments, from cosy trust to adversarial suspicion, especially in conflict zones. And each of these journalists took great personal risks, which is why so many were killed.

In this light, parts of this issue of Dateline can make for rather depressing reading. Jimmy Pringle's recollections of three weeks unfettered (by his editors) travel around Poland without pressure to write a single word hammers home the intense demands on today's overworked correspondents. Pamela Constable of the Washington Post laments a dramatic dwindling in the numbers of foreign correspondents, reflecting what she calls the surrender of an honourable profession to the bottom line.

There is little doubt that the nature of being a foreign correspondent is changing. In a shrunken world of mass tourism -- with non-stop flights between the U.S. and Asia, and ubiquitous McDonalds and Starbucks -- newspapers may not feel that they require expensive foreign correspondents to gain privileged entrée and insights into lands that are no longer out of reach for readers and viewers back home.

Without that Cold War sense of the world as a giant board in a game of high-stakes chess, foreign affairs have lost their sense of urgency for many media organisations, though the current war on terror seems to have rekindled some recognition of the relevance of trends and threats that can fester, undetected, in faraway lands.

Even then, risk aversion by our employers means colleagues in conflict zones, notably in Iraq, find it hard to leave their heavily-secured compounds, and then only for limited periods, with armed body guards-- conditions unimaginable in Vietnam forty years ago.

But package tourists watching North Korea's mass gymnastics and the plane-loads of French and Italian temple-goers flying from Bangkok to Burma are no substitute for dedicated foreign correspondents, looking deep below the surface of a country's surface eccentricity or charm, to tease out and report on the political, economic and social realities below.

And while the troubles of Paris Hilton are still granted far too much airtime and column inches, reports of the death of the foreign correspondent – or at least of meaningful foreign journalism – may be premature.

In an increasingly complex world, where threats and dangers are not just political, many media organisations now rely on specialist writers, with beats such as health or the environment, who often travel to far-flung corners of the globe in pursuit of stories on these topics. The stampede of Western science and health writers to Vietnam at the height of the bird-flu crisis should reassure us that editors still do recognise the world as a global village.

And while the general public's interest in foreign news may be waning, many foreign correspondents, especially here in Asia, now face rapacious demand for information

and insights for a new, increasingly demanding audience: foreign investors, whose money is tied up in global markets. Today's breed of foreign correspondent is as likely to work for Forbes, Fortune, and Bloomberg, Reuters or Dow Jones, as for a general interest U.S. or European paper. These business-oriented journalists are often covering political, economic, and policy developments to a degree that would perhaps be unrecognisable to some of their predecessors.

Some may rue this trend. But if we are honest, we should admit that journalism has always been local. The intense media interest in the Vietnam War reflected the vast quantities of blood and treasure the U.S. was sacrificing for the struggle. It also reflected the belief that South Vietnam was the 'domino' whose fall might precipitate the fall of all Asia into Communist hands, with disastrous consequences for the West itself. It was that sense of the immediacy of the threat that underpinned editors' interest.

So it is perhaps ironic that in this era of globalisation and the shrunken world, editors apparently consider the problems and issues of foreign countries as too distant and far removed for the home audience to worry about. Perhaps reversing that trend – and making apparent the links between us in the modern world – is the challenge for our generation.



Photo: Paula Bronstein

EVENTS

August – Burmese Group Exhibition Paintings

Burma has been more or less isolated for over thirty years, and its artists face strong censorship. But that hasn't kept Burmese painters from producing an incredible body of work. The FCCT offers members and guests a rare opportunity to view contemporary Burmese paintings outside Burma at the FCCT Clubhouse in August.



September – Nowhere People: Photographs by Greg Constantine



It is estimated that some 13 million people worldwide are affected by 'statelessness'. They are denied the fundamental right to citizenship, have no recognized nationality, are refused most social, civil and economic rights and have been forced to live in the margins of society. FCCT is proud to present **Nowhere People**, an on-going photography project that has documented some of the most desperate stateless groups in Asia.

CLUB NEWS

FCCT Photo contest update: Dozens of photographers from across Thailand and Southeast Asia submitted works for the first annual FCCT Photojournalism contest. Judges will soon be reviewing the photos and winners will be selected soon, in time for a gala awards event in early November!



GOODBYE TO TARN!

FCCT has had to say goodbye to our beloved Patcharin Areewong, or Tarn, who left the club in May to take a new job with Google in Singapore. At one of her many going-away parties, Tarn asked her friends to bring her food after she moved — she was afraid Singapore's local fare wouldn't match up to Thailand! Tarn was a huge part of the Club's success over the past few years and we all wish her the best in her new career. We know she will do well.

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Communication

Breakdown: When Sitthichai Pookaiyudom, Thailand's Minister for Information and Communication Technology came to speak at the Club in June, guests were in for an odd night. Among the tidbits he revealed: His sex life is "non-existent" and he lost his virginity in the U.S.; he hates his Chinese relatives; he is so embarrassed of his balding hair that he prefers to wear a baseball cap; one of his aides — who he referred to as "Dr. Shit" — has worked on research to turn excrement into oil; he believes he'd be a good agricultural minister because he likes to drink with farmers. No one can accuse FCCT of failing to address the issues of the day!

KATE WEBB: 1943-2007

Southeast Asia has seen its share of legendary foreign correspondents. But none of them were like Kate Webb, writes former FCCT president, author and Burma expert Bertil Lintner

There can't be many who have lived to read their own obituaries. Kate Webb, however strange it may sound, was one of them. On April 21, 1971, the *New York Times* reported that she had been found dead in southwestern Cambodia, where she had disappeared two weeks earlier. "The body bore a single bullet in the chest...and was cremated on the spot in accordance with Cambodian military procedure," the report said. "The death of Miss Webb brings to at least 10 the number of correspondents killed in Cambodia since Prince Norodom Sihanouk was ousted in March 1970. Seventeen are listed as missing."

Ten days later, when a memorial service was to be held in Australia — where most of her family had moved from their native New Zealand — she and five colleagues who had been captured by Vietnamese Communist forces walked out of the jungle. "Miss Webb, you're supposed to be dead," an astonished Cambodian army officer said when he spotted her and her friends on a remote country road near the town of Kompong Speu.

She later wrote a gripping account of her time in captivity called *"On the Other Side: 23 days with the Viet Cong"* — and went on to cover the rest of the war in Cambodia, the fall of Saigon, the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi in India, the Tamil Tiger rebellion in Sri Lanka, the 1986 "People Power" revolution in the Philippines, the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, and the 1999 vote for independence in East Timor. That was her last major assignment before retiring in 2001, and her health was already then beginning to

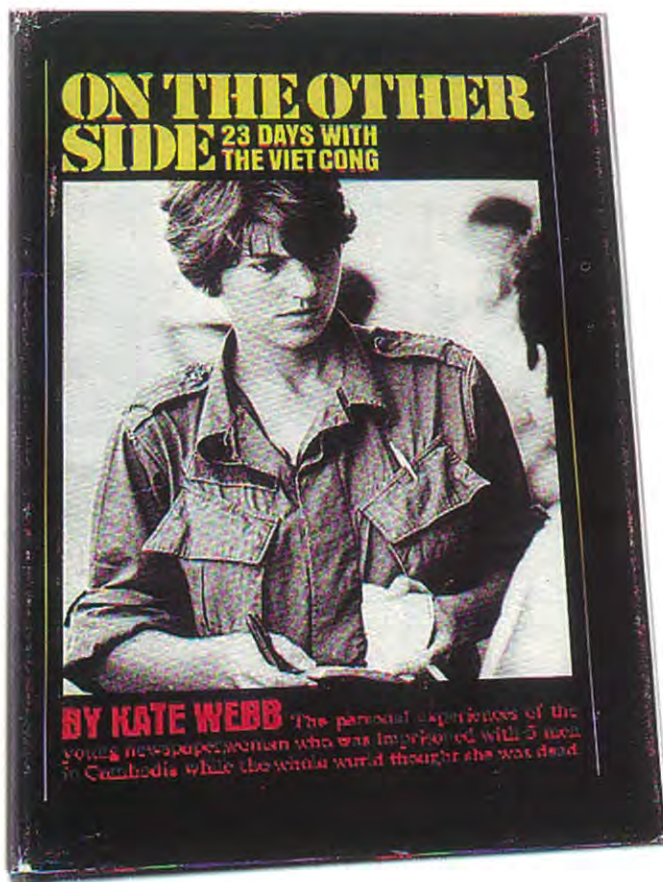
deteriorate. But she was as cheerful as ever, and dropped her walking stick on the floor to give me a hug when we ran into each other at a UN press briefing in Dili.

I first met Kate during the upheavals in Burma in August 1988. The story was too big for the *Agence-France Presse* office in Bangkok to handle, so reinforcements had to be brought in. Kate, who had worked for *United Press International* in Indochina, then had become a star reporter for the *AFP*. She rang me and we met at the FCCT, which at that time was located on the top floor of the Dusit Thani Hotel.

We got on immediately, and continued our rather wild drinking session at the long-gone *Front Page* pub around the corner. It was there I got used to what seemed to be her distinctive feature: a cigarette in one hand and a glass of beer in the other. And she was great fun to be with. A friendship was born, which lasted for nearly two decades. I was profoundly saddened when Michael Field, another Kiwi journalist, told me about her death over breakfast in Auckland in mid-May this year.

She was famous, a genuine press legend, but having arrived in Southeast Asia after the Indochina war — and been brought up in Sweden, far away from the Asia's conflict zones — I didn't, at first, know much about her background. And she didn't tell me; like any correspondent who had seen serious combat, she was not gung-ho about it. When someone — I can't remember who — told me about her capture in Cambodia and the book she had written, I was astonished but not surprised. She was obviously a real journalist.

I found out that the book was out of print,



“That Cambodia thing? Not a big deal”

wander to where they might be and whether there'll be any chance in the future of us sitting down and talking — over beer, not rifles.”

I tried to persuade her to have the book republished, perhaps with a new introduction or epilogue, but in vain. She didn't think anyone would be interested in reading about her time in captivity during a war that was long over. But another of the very few who had survived captivity in Cambodia, Robert Sam Anson, had in 1989 — 14 years after the end of the war — published a book about his experiences, *War News: A Young Reporter in Indochina*, which had sold extremely well. But Kate did not want to dwell on the past; she had more important things to do, she said.

This remarkable woman was born in Christchurch, New Zealand, in 1943, but her family moved to Australia when she was eight. At the age of 18, she tragically lost her parents in a traffic accident, but somehow managed to finish her studies — in symbolic logic — at a university in Melbourne. But academic life was not for her. She bought a portable typewriter and landed in Saigon in 1967, only 24 years old. That was not unusual for correspondents covering the war in Vietnam, most of whom were very young. But she was the only woman in a man's world, although she never saw gender as an issue.

“Only later did she come to realise that she had been an inspiration for many young women to follow in her footsteps,” was how one journalist wrote about her when she retired six years ago. But, like most other writers, she never really retired, and she once described herself as a “geriatric teenager.” She never married, and never settled down anywhere.

But now she is gone, and rest in peace, Kate. We miss you dearly.



so I e-mailed her asking if she had any author's copies left, and if I could buy one. She wrote back saying that she didn't have any books at all, not even one that I could have photocopied. She had given them all away.

“That Cambodia thing? Not a big deal,” was typical of her admirable modesty and professional integrity. Anyone else would have bragged about an experience like the one she had been through.

I did, in the end, find a copy in a second-hand bookstore in the United States. It was a great read, and, there again she displayed her remarkably humble attitude: “I reject entirely the word ‘ordeal’ to describe the experience. I feel it was an ordeal for the people who were trying to find out if I was still alive. But for me now, the little insight I got into the army of the other side was, in retrospect, rewarding... When I remember our captors, my thoughts always

No News Is Bad News

For years, Bangkok-based correspondents have watched with dread as Western news organizations slashed their budgets for foreign news and shut down bureaus overseas. But are the good old days of the globe-trotting foreign correspondent really ending? *The editors of Dateline* report.

Bangkok-based correspondents can be forgiven for wondering if they're part of a dying breed. *The New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Newsweek* and a host of other foreign news organizations have trimmed payrolls across Asia in recent years. *Reuters* and others have outsourced coverage to Bangalore-based writers who never visit the countries they're covering. And everywhere in Asia, newspapers and TV producers are cutting travel budgets to rein in costs.

The trend is part of a global phenomenon, led in part by the U.S. A Harvard University paper last year found that the number of U.S. newspaper correspondents overseas declined to just 249 in 2006, from 304 four years earlier. Moreover, the percentage of articles related to foreign affairs on the front pages of American newspapers has dropped to its lowest level ever. The last U.S. newspaper correspondent in Canada just went home, meaning American readers will now get all their coverage of that country from wire services.

And yet even as these disturbing trends play out, a new generation of news outlets is emerging. At latest count there were more than 71 million blogs in action across the world, and many major news organizations, including BBC, have added jobs for online reporters and editors living overseas.

In Asia, a crop of new online offerings, like the *Asia Times* and *Asia Sentinel*, have given writers new opportunities to say their piece and earn a paycheck (albeit a modest one). *Al Jazeera*, likewise, is cranking up production and offering work to a host of reporters and producers in the region.

What all this means for the future of journalism and foreign news remains to be seen.

It's clear that Western audiences still care about news from Asia. Indeed, for many foreign correspondents here, the last year has been one of intense demand for copy, especially in the weeks following the latest coup, proving that when there's news in Southeast Asia, the bosses are still hungry. News from China and India also continues to fascinate foreign editors, and some major news organizations have even added staff in the region, including NBC News.

But all that doesn't mean life is getting any easier for foreign correspondents. News organizations have maintained their staffs in part by trimming benefits and travel budgets. Meanwhile, TV channels and newspapers are far more reluctant to let their reporters roam for the long periods of time it takes to bring back good stories. Gone are the days when a reporter could disappear into the jungles of Laos or the back streets of Bangladesh for a few weeks at a time; these



days, an editor can find those reporters quickly by mobile or email — and demand a quick file for the webpage.

Moreover, the nature of foreign reporting is changing. Audiences are becoming more fragmented, as they migrate away from general-interest publications and get more and more information from websites and niche publications. It is far from clear whether blogs and other new carriers of news will be able to generate enough revenue to pay their contributors a fair return. Freelancers might have more editors eager to take their work — but that doesn't mean they're making more money.

With print newspaper circulation declining in major markets like the U.S., it's hard to see how the larger news organizations will be able to afford the kinds of wide-ranging foreign correspondents they used to bankroll. But that doesn't mean there won't be a role for intrepid foreign journalists. It simply means reporters will have to change, and at times the adjustment won't be easy. The editors of *Dateline* hope the following stories serve to start a useful debate on where the industry is headed.



DYING BREED

In the old days, Western news organizations were willing to pay the price for large overseas bureaus because they knew the importance of foreign news, but not anymore, writes Pamela Constable of the Washington Post.

When I think back on the most momentous events of my professional life, they include scenes of both devastation and deliverance. The boulevards of Manila, flooded with peaceful demonstrators chanting for Philippine dictator Ferdinand Marcos to abandon power. The slums of Port-au-Prince, Haiti, where a joyful, gyrating mob of slum-dwellers is celebrating the election of populist priest Jean-Bertrand Aristide as president. The highlands of Guatemala or Peru, where grave sites conceal the victims of atrocity.

If the Boston Globe had not sent me abroad as a foreign correspondent in 1983, and allowed me to spend a decade in Latin America and other regions of the world, I would never have been able to witness these historic changes – and bring them alive to readers back home. Even then, the Globe was one of only a handful of American newspapers willing to invest in the luxury of its own foreign staff, and I was keenly aware of how privileged I was to do all this while drawing a steady paycheck.

Today, Americans' need to understand the struggles of distant peoples is greater than ever. Our troops are fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan, countries that we did not know enough about when we invaded them and that we are still trying to fathom. We have been victimized by foreign terrorists, yet we still cannot imagine why anyone would hate us. Our economy is intimately linked to global markets, our population is nearly 20 percent foreign-born, and our lives are directly affected by borderless scourges such as global warming and AIDS. Knowing about the world is not a luxury; it is an urgent necessity.

But instead of stepping up coverage of international affairs, American newspapers and television networks are steadily cutting back. The Globe, which stunned the journalism world recently by announcing that it would shut down its last three foreign bureaus, is the most recent example.

Between 2002 and 2006, the number of foreign-based newspaper correspondents shrank from 188 to 141 (excluding the Wall Street Journal, which publishes Asian and European editions). The Baltimore Sun, which had correspondents from Mexico to Beijing when I went to work there in 1978, now has only three. Newsday, which once had half a dozen foreign bureaus, is about to shut down its last one, in Pakistan. Only a few U.S. papers – including the Journal, the Los Angeles Times, the New York Times and The Washington Post – still

keep a stable of foreign correspondents.

It takes a lot of money to maintain an office in a foreign capital. A typical newspaper bureau overseas costs at least \$250,000 a year, according to foreign editors, and a large, security-conscious news operation in a city such as Baghdad can hemorrhage four times that.

But today many readers are switching to other information sources – including Web sites and even blogs – that have left newspapers struggling to survive. Many family-owned papers have been acquired by corporations that see foreign coverage as an indulgence they can't afford.

In an effort to cut costs, newspapers are replacing bureaus – which require staffs and cars and family housing – with mobile, trouble-shooting individual correspondents. The erstwhile bureau chief in New Delhi or Cairo, chatting with diplomats over rum punches on the veranda, is now an eager kid with a laptop and an Arabic phrase book in her backpack. Freelancers can help cover more remote or incremental stories, and newswire agencies can cover breaking news in global hot spots – but neither is enough.

Television, meanwhile, continues to bring us instant images of the latest Baghdad market bombing or flimsy refugee shacks in Sudan's Darfur region, but its coverage of the world is increasingly selective as well as superficial.

Although more than 80 percent of the public obtains most of its foreign and national news from TV, the major networks are also closing down foreign bureaus, concentrating their resources on a few big stories such as Iraq.

In the 1980s, American TV networks each maintained about 15 foreign bureaus; today they have six or fewer. ABC has shut down its offices in Moscow, Paris and Tokyo; NBC closed bureaus in Beijing, Cairo and Johannesburg. Aside from a one-person ABC bureau in Nairobi, there are no network bureaus left at all in Africa, India or South America – regions that are home to more than 2 billion people.

In a speech at Columbia University recently, veteran TV news anchor Walter Cronkite warned that pressure by media companies to generate increasing profits is threatening our nation's values and freedom by leaving people less informed. In today's complicated world, "the need for high-quality reporting is greater than ever," he said. "It's not just the journalist's job at risk here. It's American democracy."

Even at their best, newspapers are also a limited medium. I have always been acutely aware that no matter how deeply I

burrowed into a society or how many people I interviewed, I was only peeling back the most superficial layers of complex, murky worlds in which people routinely lied, every incident had a contradictory version, and no 1,500-word article could possibly do justice to the truth.

Yet newspapers can also fill an important niche between television and academe, offering an accessible way for busy people to learn about distant events and an outlet for writing that captures the essence of a time and place without polemics or pedantry. They can put events in context, explain human behavior and belief, evoke a way of life. Foreign correspondents can burrow into a society, cultivate strangers' trust, follow meandering trails and dig beneath layers of diplomatic spin and government propaganda.

As a young reporter, I devoured the work of famous foreign correspondents and yearned to follow in their footsteps as they chronicled human travails and endeavors: the flight into exile, the search for work, the upheaval of war, the pilgrimage of faith. Joe Lelyveld, accompanying black workers on their daily bus commute into a South African city. Michael Herr, following a psychedelic trail of tears through the jungles of Vietnam. Freya Stark in the 1930s, following the great frankincense road: "On its stream of padding feet the riches of Asia travelled; along its slow continuous thread the Arabian empires rose and fell." Some may call this highbrow tourism, but I agree with the late Polish correspondent Ryszard Kapuscinski: There is something more valuable and more enduring than facts.

The best work that I produced over the years, and that resonated most with readers, were the stories that took the time and space to portray an alien world in detail. The road trip across Afghanistan during Taliban rule, where veiled women told me they finally felt safe from marauding militias. The train ride across India with a family to baptize their son in the Ganges, which they fervently believed would protect him for life. The portrait of a poor Afghan village where tiny children begged me not to destroy the family's opium poppy crop. The trial of the Pakistani man who carved up his wife's face in a jealous rage, and then told me with great satisfaction that he had avenged his family honor.

Although many people have a glamorous image of foreign correspondents, theirs is a lonely, gritty and often dangerous way of life. During my years on the road, I have landed in capitals where I knew no one, all hell was breaking loose and I had 10 hours until deadline. I have lain in sweltering hotel rooms staring at spiders, outrun drunken soldiers waving pistols, interviewed hysterical teenagers who vowed to murder all Americans, inhaled tear gas with angry mobs, gone weeks without a hot meal or shower.

I never regretted a minute of it – and I never thought I'd be a member of a dying breed. I know that change is inevitable, that fewer people are buying our products and that the news business must adapt or sink. But putting aside my nostalgia for literary nomadism, I am convinced that cutting back on first-hand reporting from abroad and substituting cheaper, simpler forms of overseas news delivery is a false economy and a grave mistake.

Don't we learn more about Islam from Anthony Shadid's wide-ranging Post interviews with thoughtful Muslims in Egypt and Turkey than from images of the latest bombing in Baghdad? Don't we identify more with Sharon LaFraniere's New York Times portraits of village customs in Malawi and Mozambique than with dry reports about the grim toll of AIDS across Africa? If newspapers stop covering the world, I fear we will end up with a microscopic elite reading Foreign



Affairs and a numbed nation watching terrorist bombings flash briefly among a barrage of commentary, crawls and celebrity gossip.

Even amid the broader wave of newspaper cutbacks, the announcement that the Globe was shutting down its foreign bureaus hit a special nerve among newspaper journalists. Somehow it seemed a watershed in the inexorable surrender of an honorable craft to the bottom line.

Many of us knew and admired Elizabeth Neuffer, a Globe correspondent who spent several years searching for mass killers in Rwanda and Bosnia, and later published a riveting book about her findings. Elizabeth, who died in a car accident in Iraq in 2003, believed in following the truth to its source, and the paper she worked for gave her the space and resources to do so. Now I fear we are witnessing the demise of the kind of journalism that permitted such quests at all.

Pamela Constable has reported from more than 35 countries. (c) 2007, The Washington Post. Reprinted with Permission.

THE GOOD OLD DAYS

A lot has changed over the years – including the size of newspapers' expense accounts. But for intrepid journalists, there are still plenty of adventures to be had, writes Vietnam War correspondent and FCCT veteran James Pringle.

The consul's suspicions were understandable, because it looked as if the Soviet Union was about to invade its Western neighbour. The year was 1981, and my employer, *Newsweek*, whose Southeast Asian staff correspondent I was, had asked its reporters around the world to try for Polish visas, so that we would have someone on the spot if the tanks rolled.

I tried to crank up my brain for a convincing reply. I noticed that the consul had a picture of the great Polish composer, Chopin, on the wall behind his desk.

"You know, Mr Consul, I have always been a great admirer of the music of Frederic Chopin," I said. "I have some leave from my business, and I thought how pleasant it would be to attend a few piano recitals in Warsaw."

A recital with guns, I might have added, more like Tchaikovsky's 1812 overture.

The consul's cagey attitude immediately changed. He became charming. "You are a man of culture, Mr Pringle!" he beamed. He took my passport, and promised me a three week visa within two hours.

I felt a bit of a heel, telling such a whopper. I believe in truth in journalism more than anything else, but – whether in Poland or Burma – one's obligation is to get in and see what is happening on the ground, instead of writing blindly from the outside.

Not to be pretentious, but if I have one journalistic motto besides "tell it as it is," it is, "go to the source."

I was the only *Newsweek* correspondent, as far as I knew, who managed to get a Polish visa, so the next day I was on a Soviet-made plane of Lot Polish airlines to Warsaw, not as relaxed as I might have been as a Lot airliner had recently crashed, and its safety record was in doubt.

My foreign editor had shown smart forward thinking on the visa idea, and my instructions were unusual.

"Hire a car at the Warsaw airport, and spend your time traveling around Poland, staying here and there in hotels, and getting to know the situation first-hand, so that you can be ready if the Soviets invade," he said.

"If they don't invade, we don't want you to file anything, even when you come out, because we don't want the Poles to know we had someone there, er, 'unofficially,'" the editor said.

In other words, the perfect assignment, with none of the chores of actually writing anything – unless Moscow



attacked, as seemed likely.

I had never been to Poland before, and criss-crossed the country, going to Auschwitz and the Czech border, picking up ordinary Poles, who with poor public transport, hitch-hiked as a matter of routine. Some spoke halting English. Soon, I felt I knew something of the mood of the country at this perilous moment – it was not their first invasion, after all. The Nazis and the Russians had both occupied Polish territory in living memory.

But having worked full-time in other Communist countries, like China and Cuba, I soon became aware that I was, in some way, under vigilance, even maybe had a tail.

It was some time before the truth dawned. Some in the Polish intelligence agencies WANTED Western reporters to be there in case the Russians invaded, so that the world could

be told by the small band of 'legal' foreign correspondents based in Warsaw, and perhaps by people like myself, what was happening to their country.

So, in Gdansk, I went to see Lech Walesa, the shipyard worker who founded Solidarity, and listened to him as he talked and puffed away on his pipe.

I also saw John Darnton, an old friend who was the *New York Times* resident correspondent in Warsaw – I recollect he won a Pulitzer for his Polish reporting – and he introduced me to other important figures in Solidarity.

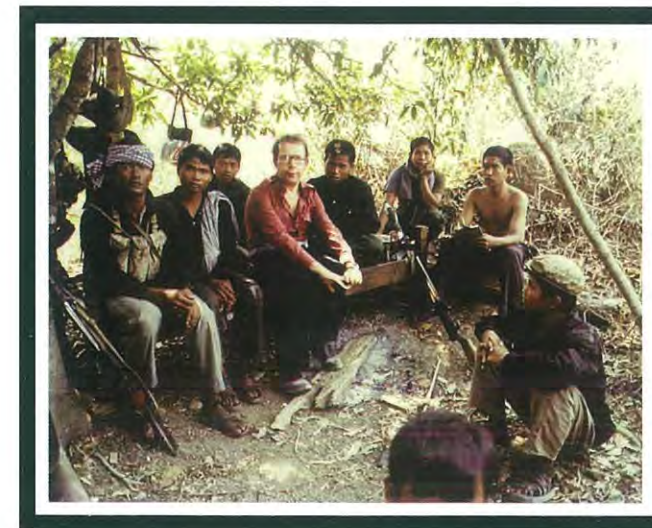
I felt confident about covering a Soviet invasion, though I surmised it would be rough. But I had already served three years for *Reuters* in Vietnam, spending months in the field,



and covered wars in Africa.

Yet what I would actually do if I saw Russian tanks clanking down the road towards me remained to be seen. I knew that, in a crisis, I could always get some copy to *Newsweek* via the American or British embassies.

In the event, the invasion, as we all know, did not take place, the big story I was prepared for did not happen. Walesa was arrested in December when martial law was declared, and later became a Nobel Peace laureate and President of Poland.



I exited through London, and then went on to help as a foot soldier in the *Newsweek* office in Rome to cover, by coincidence, the attempted assassination of the Polish Pope, John Paul II.

Even today, I know *Newsweek* was right to put a correspondent in Poland then. But I can't imagine it happening nowadays: the airfares from the Far East, the hotel bills, the car hire for three weeks, on a speculative venture.

Nor was it a project, I believe, that could have been handled by even the most talented freelance, having freelanced myself. You needed to have clout as a staffer with the embassies and the security authorities, and you required the backing of a newspaper or newsmagazine with resources so that the geography of Poland – the invasion routes – could be mastered on the ground.

And, with all due respect, few online bloggers, as they exist today, would have been likely to have the background I had gained in Poland, virtually shut off as it was from the world.

I've done something similar since, spending four days on the snow-covered Chinese-North Korean border in the late nineties with the writer Jasper Becker, dodging the Chinese cops, talking to frightened refugees, and examining the North Korean side through binoculars, across the narrow river dividing the two Communist states, and reporting



signs of famine in the *Times* of London – one of the first such reports.

I recalled then that I hadn't been so cold since I spent two and a half days one freezing Christmas in New York, having taken a year off from my Scottish newspaper to learn Spanish in Mexico and Central America so that I could apply for a job as a foreign correspondent for Reuters.

I had only two dollars in my pocket, and slept on a couch at the airport. I had to wait for my booked flight, as all others were full. I found that I could get into Manhattan for 25 cents, so that meant I could make two trips in and back, with a dollar to spend on sustenance. You could get a doughnut and coffee at Woolworths for 25 cents.

It was the hippy era, and in Greenwich Village I looked

longingly, as *Oliver Twist* might have, through steamed-up windows at members of the Beat Generation tucking in to heaped plates of pasta.

It seemed as if I was the only genuine Beat around.

Once, frozen stiff, I went into the *Newsweek* lobby, then at 444 Madison Avenue, to try to warm up. I watched the hot-shot correspondents coming out and heading for lunch at the nearby pricey restaurants. They seemed to inhabit an unattainable world.

I did get to join *Reuters*, and spent nine years in Vietnam, Cambodia, Biafra, Cuba – where I tracked down and interviewed the fugitive Black Panther leader Eldridge Cleaver, No 1 on the FBI's most wanted list – and I reopened the *Reuters* bureau in China, earlier shut down by Red Guards.

Then, out of the blue, *Newsweek* hired me as their Latin American correspondent. Soon, I was back in the lobby



at 444 Madison Avenue where I had stood penniless and shivering a decade before.

Then it was off to Rio. When I got out of the plane, there it was like the scene in the "Wizard of Oz" movie when the screen turns from black and white into glorious Technicolor.

I looked down from my penthouse suite on Copacabana Beach, and the fabulous women in their microscopic tanga bikinis (my first *Newsweek* fashion story, and was it ever fun reporting it!).

My second *Newsweek* assignment was Africa. President Mobuto Sese Seko, Zaire's then strongman, liked press people, maybe because he himself had started life as an AFP stringer. I interviewed him in the cockpit as he piloted his C-130 – still clad in his leopard-skin hat – to a southern town taken over by rebels.

"How do we know that they are not still holding the

airport?" I asked Mobuto, trying to conceal the worry in my voice.

"Simple," said the great man. "Do you see that C-130 flying to our right? I'll send it in first and if it doesn't draw fire we'll land."

So like a sacrificial lamb the other plane touched down first. I was with Mobuto when he approached a house where dozens of Belgian men, women and children had been massacred. Mobuto put his two hands up to his head. "My God," he said in French. "They've smashed in their skulls." My first-hand massacre story made *Newsweek's* cover.

Mobuto was widely reviled as a corrupt dictator who plundered his country. But I remember him as a man who was good with the press – one must take people as one finds them.

King Norodom Sihanouk of Cambodia, father of the present king, was another man generous with his time and hospitality with correspondents, and I spent many happy hours listening to his always entertaining, sometimes side-splitting, monologues. Thanks to King Sihanouk's personal invitation, I got to visit North Korea for the first time.

At a reception in Beijing, he introduced me to Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai, whom I later interviewed. It was important then for correspondents to know national leaders at first hand, though nowadays in China, and in many other countries, you can't get within miles of them.

From now on, thanks to press financial straits, leaders will become even more remote, as it will be harder for reporters to get out in the field – to 'go to the source' – to see how countries work. The bottom

line is everything these days, and the accountants are in charge.

After all, how does one know what a B-52 bombing strike looks like, without being there hearing the thunderous impacts and feeling the ground shake beneath your feet? What does a village being napalmed appear like? Have you seen a kid suffering the effects of Agent Orange?

What does it feel like to be strafed and bombed by the Ethiopian Air Force in Somalia, or rocketed and machine-gunned by a helicopter gunship in Sri Lanka at 200 feet, with bullets coming in through the car roof, and being saved by an old lady and a small boy who risked their lives to give me shelter?

What did the children in the Biafran famine look like, and more recently how about the child soldiers of Sierra Leone? I, like other staff reporters, have seen and understood all these things. Will the world's tyrants now get to carry

out their depredations without foreign correspondents to bear witness? Local reporters, though brave, are often – but certainly not always – too intimidated to have an effect. I had a pretty eventful journalistic career, visiting 165 countries and scoring a few scoops, and making a few Lulus of mistakes, which I blush to think about. Gradually I came to know the world as it really is, to understand the full Conradian horror, such as in Cambodia's Killing Fields, and the glamour, such as it was at Copacabana.

But, really, should we be worried? Is there anything wrong with our younger reporters and photographers now? Does FCCT member Joe Cochrane do a lesser job because he is not drinking champagne in first class, and staying in a five star hotel? Not in the least. The last time we were in touch he was trying to get a permanent reporting position in Baghdad.

As an old Cambodian hand, I tried to track down Pol Pot in China and along the Thai-Cambodian border, but failed. It was up to photographer Nic Dunlop, who had Brother Duch's picture in his back pocket, to locate and interview the murderous chief of Tuol Sleng.

It's not where you're staying, or the satin sheets on the bed, that will get you in to see this or that head of state or rebel leader – though a 'good address' often helps to give a correspondent acceptability; officials always ask where you are staying. Actually, journalists don't like five star hotels that much – too sterile – though I had the right to stay in them. I actually find them inimical to inspiration. A more laid-back, comfortable atmosphere in a smaller hostelry is preferable.

First class flying was fine – but for most in our trade that is a distant memory – even *New York Times* correspondents were complaining to me recently about the down market restaurants where they now have to do their entertaining.

But it's dogged determination, like Andrew Marshall and Philip Blenkinsop showed in their recent story 'The War the World Forgot,' when they tracked down the New People's Army in the Philippines, that counts.

And what about Hannah Beech, *Time* correspondent in Bangkok, and daughter of the great correspondent Keyes Beech and her earlier reports from China? And 'Emma Larkin,' to use her pen-name, and her 'Finding George Orwell in Burma? Both were brilliant reporting jobs.

It's not the size of your expense account that counts, but the force of personality – like I've seen with Joe Cochrane as he tries to get past the North Korean guards to speak to the Cambodian king.



But having an organization behind you, and sufficient funds, undoubtedly helped. Why did Wolfowitz not want to give up his World Bank job?

When, like Proust, I look back, in remembrance of things past, the words of an old song run through my head. "These were the days, my friend, we thought they'd never end."

They kind of did end in one way, but they never will end, really. There are so many great stories up ahead – as an old China hand, and veteran of post-Tiananmen days, I can see them coming.

Anyway, existing in New York for two and a half freezing days on two dollars, and all the other adventures from the rough police beat in Glasgow, to sharing a four berth compartment on the Trans Siberian Railway with three charming Russian models, to the trip down the Amazon, to the discos of Ulan Bator, Mongolia, to Easter Island in the Pacific, to a one on one interview with the Japanese Emperor, to the pretty North Korean militawoman who hummed 'Silent Night' to me, and long conversations with Fidel Castro and Aung San Suu Kyi, inside her wooden-built villa while under house arrest, were still well worth it.

Even if, at the end of the day, one becomes that recent sad new phenomenon, the Vanishing Foreign Correspondent.

James Pringle reported, in order, for the weekly Lennox Herald of Dumbarton, Scottish Daily Mail, Reuters, Newsweek and the Times of London. He has two Overseas Press Club of America Mary Hemingway awards (shared) for best magazine reporting from abroad.



A NEW FRONTIER?

Life might not be getting any easier for traditional foreign correspondents. But a host of new news organizations are emerging online, and could serve as a template for the future, writes John Berthelsen, an editor at Asia Sentinel

One of the problems with being an old fart is that your memories always look rosier than reality did. But for those of us who have spent at least part of our lives as foreign correspondents, the reality is that reality has got progressively worse.

In 1966, when I was posted to Vietnam with Newsweek Magazine, there were 550 reporters accredited in Saigon. We were all on full expenses in addition to salary, which we augmented by buying piastres, as the currency was then known, on the black market and turning in our expense accounts at the official rate.

Today, according to Pamela Constable, writing in the Washington Post, there are 141 foreign correspondents (not counting freelancers) in the entire world working for American newspapers. Few papers, except in places like Iraq, have any expatriate packages at all any more.

What happened? It's only partly the cost. American newspapers are determined to maintain their 20 percent average profit margins although, as one critic pointed out, the Baltimore Sun's previous string of foreign bureaus cost 5 percent of the news budget and generated 25 percent of the paper's front page stories. The other problem, editors say, is that Americans just don't care much about foreign news, which I suspect is mostly nonsense. The world is a far more dangerous place today than it has been for decades, and people want to know why.

There have always been freelance foreign correspondents looking to get a toehold on the journalistic ladder, starting out as stringers and working their way up to staff jobs. These days, though, there are precious few rungs to climb. Just consider Hong Kong, where a decade ago one could hope to land a spot on the weekly Far Eastern Economic Review or Asiaweek. The Asian edition of the Journal was a possibility, and even the South China Morning Post had a stable of regional correspondents. Now all of these publications have either shrunk — the Review has just two full-time staff to put out a monthly opinion magazine — or ceased to exist, as is the case with Asiaweek.

But there are still plenty of foreign correspondents around. There are more in Asia than there are places for them to publish. That is why Asia Times Online (www.atimes.com) and Asia Sentinel (www.asiasentinel.com), which I edit, have willing reporters writing for them for rates that would make regular correspondents cringe.

They are today's freelancers, working for piece rates.



I know. I hire them. I wish I could pay them more, and hopefully, as the new journalism starts to grow, I will be able to. Asia Times Online has a stable of perhaps 70 people scattered across much of the globe filing regularly for it. Although the Asia Sentinel is less than a year old, it has 25 to 30 people filing on a regular basis.

To the question of whether the readers want foreign news, according to Alexa, the California-based web information company, depending on the stories Asia Sentinel emphasizes, of the top five countries, about 20% are in the United States, an equal amount in Malaysia, with 9% in Singapore, 8.6% in France (go figure), 7.5% in Hong Kong and others scattered throughout Asia. Asia Times readers' top five countries are the United States (27.4%), China (5.9%), the UK, (5.7%), India (5.3%) and Canada (4.9%).

I have described Asia Sentinel in the past as a high-wire act. We are a very young experiment to see if advertisers and marketers are going to awaken to the fact that there is a real audience willing to support us. The figures above should show them that there is one. We believe it, or we wouldn't be doing it.

For Asia's once-vibrant regional weekly newsmagazines — the Far Eastern Economic Review and Asiaweek, it was the business model that killed them, and which is imperiling the Wall Street Journal/Asia and the International Herald Tribune. As advertising went increasingly local in the 1990s, advertisers abandoned regional publications, which found replating and changing pages and print runs expensive. Online magazines, we hope, will be able to capitalize by being able to deliver single-country editions to lure advertisers.

That isn't going to happen overnight. But we believe we can reinvigorate international news — and deliver it all over the world — across the Internet far cheaper than could ever have been dreamt of in print. Ultimately, we believe, we will be able to provide a better-paying forum for those who write for us now. It will take time. So bear with us.

John Berthelsen is the editor of the Hong Kong-based Asia Sentinel, a regional online magazine of news, comment and analysis.



HARD TIME

The many new opportunities for freelance writers haven't made life any easier for struggling foreign journalists. But there are still glimmers of hope — if only papers would stop worrying so much about the bottom line, reports Bangkok-based freelancer Dan Ten Kate

As the foreign correspondent appears to vanish, is it still possible to make a living as a journalist overseas? Certainly. Is it still possible to do great journalism? I guess so, but it's much more difficult.

When I first came to Asia in 2003, I didn't really know what I was getting myself into. Fresh from university, I landed in Phnom Penh a month before the national election working for a local paper called *The Cambodia Daily*. It had no Internet, no databases and no reliable phone system.

Even so, it turned out to be the best possible place for me to end up. The publisher was notoriously stingy, at one point even sending out memos for the staff to cut down on toilet paper usage (no easy task in Phnom Penh).

But he did spend money on travel and good reporting. Reporters were constantly heading off to all corners of Cambodia, often spending a week in a rustic provincial town to write a package of in-depth pieces that brought the country to life. A healthy competition emerged in the newsroom, and the paper's quality improved greatly. Moreover, it was fun.

After leaving Cambodia, I ended up at *ThaiDay* for its launch in 2005. The experience was completely different, to say the least. We never had enough staff — working six-day weeks for six months straight at one point — and reporting trips were rarely sanctioned. We did have fancy computers, wireless Internet and a beautiful office building, but the substance was often lacking.

As it goes, *ThaiDay* didn't last long, folding mere weeks before last September's coup. I was certainly in rough financial shape. During *ThaiDay*'s demise, when it was unclear when or if we'd get paid, I was down to 2,000 baht to my name at one point — and that didn't include the mountains of student loan debt. That sucked.

To ease the pain, I took any and all work that came my way. I landed a job doing editing work at a local newspaper, which provided for a work permit and a decent base salary. I also started editing business-related books and reports, and then began writing for some trade publications covering specific industries. Eventually I received better assignments writing about a range of political and economic issues.

A typical day starts early in the morning and ends late at night. In fact, the cycle can be never ending. Between juggling various editing assignments, I research, report and write stories. When one story is filed, the search for new ideas begins. I don't mind working long hours at all. I love the work. The only frustration is that I'm often trapped in Bangkok. If I were somehow independently wealthy and could afford to

travel here and there to report the hell out of a story, I'd do it in a heartbeat.

That's where journalism suffers from the loss of foreign correspondent positions. This is by no means to say that freelancers can't produce great journalism. As some traditional media outlets close down, new ones open up. Readers are turning to the web more and more, and new sites pop up all the time to deliver content. These places may not pay as much as traditional media, but they certainly allow enterprising freelancers a foot in the door. Websites can also take more chances, and go places the traditional media won't.

As I mentioned up top, local newspapers also provide space for journalists to write great stories. Again, the pay might be dreadful, but a story's impact is often far greater. Local readers are much better informed than readers abroad, and local stories can often effect real changes that truly make a difference in society.

In Cambodia a few years back, *The Cambodia Daily* spent great amounts of time and resources to tell the plight of hundreds of ethnic minorities from Vietnam who were hiding out in the mosquito-infested jungles of Ratanakiri province.

They had little food and only a few tarps to protect them during the rainy season. They were starving and some stricken with malaria could barely move. If they left the jungle, the Cambodian police would deport them to Vietnam, where they faced prison or possibly death. More would've died in hiding if sympathetic villagers did not smuggle them food, clean water and medicine.

At one point, *The Cambodia Daily* had reporters up there for nearly two months straight. We would sneak into the jungle hideouts with help from compassionate villagers, photograph them and splash their stories across the front page of the little 8x11 black-and-white newspaper. The UNHCR would use our dispatches in negotiations with the government for access to the region.

Finally the authorities relented and let the UN refugee agency search the areas in question. As their trucks pulled up, hundreds of asylum seekers ran from the forest into UN custody. This event may be small on a global scale, and maybe it only warranted a few inches in Bangkok's dailies. But it was a stark reminder to me of just how much power the pen can hold. Unfortunately, the desire for money — for media outlets trying to cut costs and for folks like me who need to pay off debts and save — often trumps the greater calling of our esteemed profession.



THE CREATIVE SPIRIT

The Burmese people may be living under the yoke of a military junta, but that hasn't stopped them from producing powerful works of art, many of which have recently been on display at FCCT. Ye Ni, a Burmese writer, reports.



Burma has been more or less isolated for over forty years, and hence its art mostly reflects traditional values and ways of life. But contemporary Burmese artists are now trying to develop a more experimental modern style. Contemporary

Burmese art defies previous conventional forms and some of its dominating artists define it as non-profiting, risky and self-sacrificing.

Today, Burmese artists are still facing difficulties working under strong censorship. Official exhibitions must be given official permission, and the Ministry of Information's censorship board has the authority to bar unacceptable work. Fortunately, artists are under less scrutiny than writers. But one subject that cannot avoid censorship and — most Burmese artists try to leave it alone — is nudity.

The modern art scene suffers an awkward existence in Burma, receiving virtually no support or assistance from the state, despite a growing international reputation. Exhibitions generally only take place in small, private galleries and are often subject to draconian censorship measures or closed down altogether.

Of the contemporary Burmese artists presented in FCCT's show, Khin Maung Yin is the most well known and popular. In the early 1960s he returned from Pakistan, worked as an architect for a few years, shot three films and then became a modern abstract painter in the avant-garde genre. As one of the pioneers in abstract style, his painting is strange in a sense, unique in emotion, and mystical in strokes.

Recently, he has been painting a series of portraits of "The Lady" — his homage to Aung San Suu Kyi.

Zaw Win Pe is one of the well-known Burmese artists to paint with a knife. He is the second-best seller in Burma. He is also often questioned by authorities for his daring use of color. In one particular incident, Zaw Win Pe needed to report that the ochre and reddish colors in his paintings were nothing but representatives of the landscape of Shan State. Viewers are advised to see for themselves why.

A retired lecturer from the Institute of Economics, Kyee Myint Saw spends most of time in bazaars. His "Market Series" is very

well known but his second series, "Yangon Night," won him an ASEAN Art Award in 2002. One of his famous series includes nudity.

Tin Maung Oo is known for innovation in artwork. His paintings have been shown in exhibitions in no fewer than five countries in Asia. He has held more than 20 group exhibitions and no fewer than 5 solo exhibitions. He blends the modern and traditional in his paintings with rich colors.

Zaw Mong's paintings bring viewers into the real life of Burmese people who live along the Irrawaddy River. The paintings vividly depict the dire poverty of people struggling to survive and live their lives on boats. His style is closely related to Realism but can also hint of Romanticism.

Pe Nyunt Way — who was born in 1952 in middle Burma — paints many pictures of Bogyoke Aung San (father of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi) in a modern style. Pe Nyunt Way is a prominent modern artist and was named among the Top Ten Contemporary Artists of the country. He has been a full time artist and illustrator since 1970 and is encouraging a younger generation of artists to emerge within Burma and in the international community.

Some critics have suggested that the works of Bogie are of an international standard. He and his works have been featured in the Bangkok Post.

Earlier, his paintings were mostly realistic. However, he has now changed to a more abstract form with a style called "Callaint" with a



combination of collages and paintings. Through his paintings viewers can feel his moods and emotions.

Nay Myo Say is one of the most successful artists in Burma. Educated as a doctor, he has not only composed songs but has also been a successful businessman as well. He has been described as a genius artist, creator and "art warrior" by director Mg Myo Min of Burma. Although his interest is in figurative paintings he likes to paint anything. His works include sketches, landscapes, portraits and collages.

Surrealism is San Minn's choice. A collector has contributed to the FCCT exhibition his depiction of Rangoon University and its famous Thit-poa-pin (a large, malodorous tree that is a symbol of Rangoon University).

The painting consists of two graduates with a Judson College head and Gangaw flower. The background shows red branches of the Thit-poa-pin crying out to the sky. This painting is banned inside Burma.

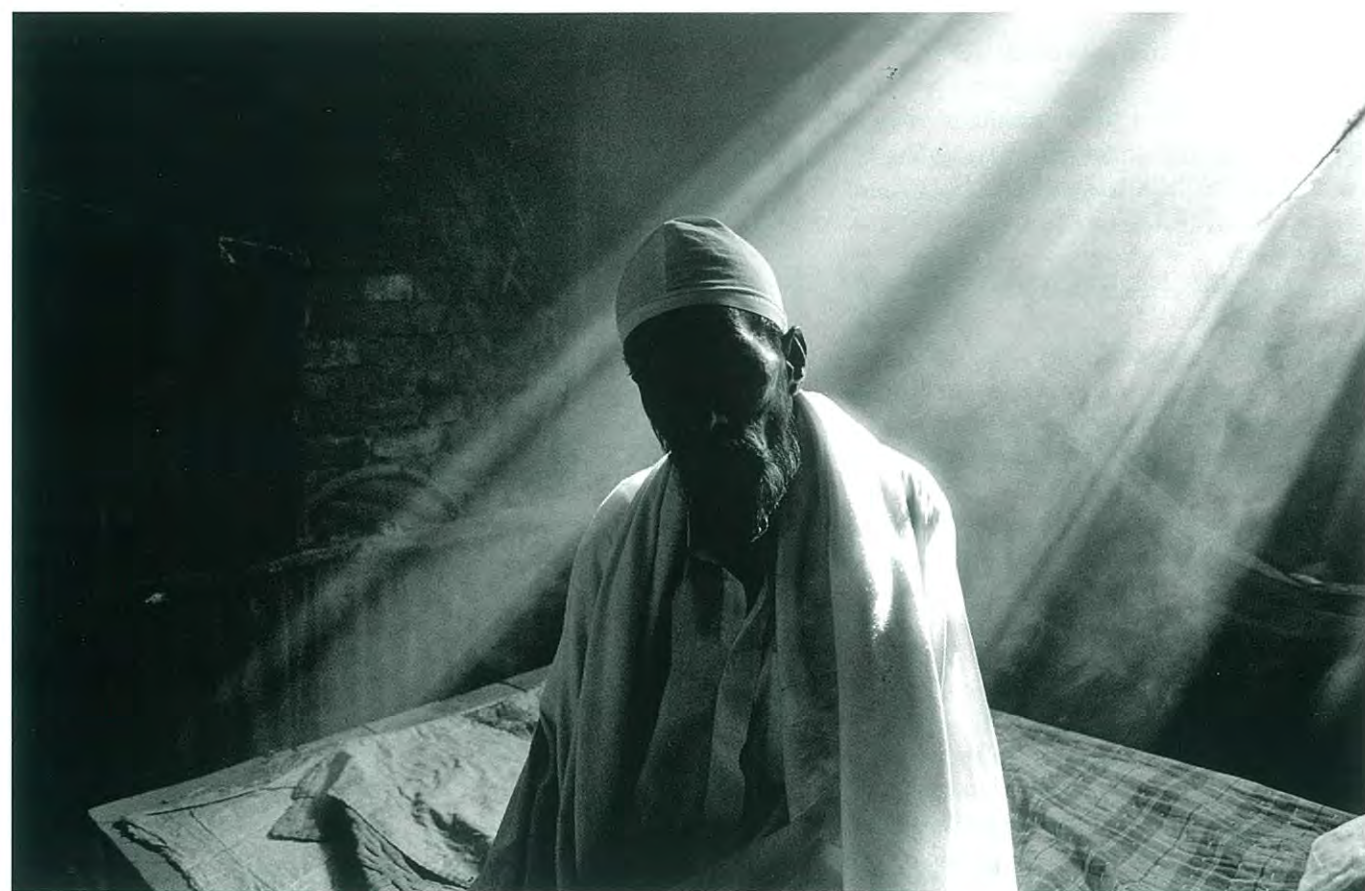
Mya Min Kyaw was born in 1956. He studied Fine Arts but loved modern arts and was expelled from the university for this reason. Not all of his artistic works reached public view.

Through his paintings, he was able to sing, cry, get angry and perhaps find relief. He was a full time artist. Sadly, he passed away in the third week of February in Mandalay Hospital.



NOWHERE PEOPLE

Photographs and Text by Greg Constantine



▲ **The Bihari (in Bangladesh):** Without citizenship status, the Bihari have no social safety net supporting them. Most Bihari in camps do not have access to healthcare, as less than a handful of camps have clinics. A sick 75 year-old man sits alone in his room in Pat Godam Camp in Mymensingh. He has no remaining family and is unable to obtain any healthcare.

It is estimated that some 13 million people worldwide are affected by "statelessness". They are denied the fundamental right to citizenship, have no recognized nationality, are refused most social, civil and economic rights and have been forced to live in the margins of society.

Statelessness removes people from the protection of laws and leaves them defenseless against harassment, exploitation and human rights abuses. Stateless people are the unwanted and the unwelcome and are some of the most vulnerable, disenfranchised and invisible people in the world, especially in Asia.

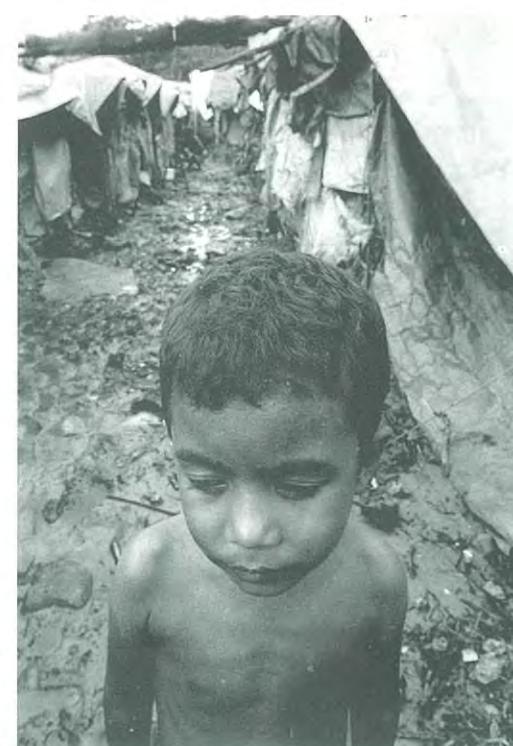
The Bihari in Bangladesh lost everything during the 1971 civil war in East Pakistan. They were fired from government jobs, lost ownership of their land and forced to flee into 66 internment camps. Now, 35 years later, some 200,000 Bihari still live in the same camps and are not recognized

as citizens of Bangladesh or Pakistan.

Called one of the most oppressed ethnic groups in the world, close to one million Rohingya from western Burma were stripped of their citizenship. Religious discrimination, economic exclusion and human rights abuses have forced thousands of Rohingya to flee to southern Bangladesh, where they are harassed, exploited and have received little or no humanitarian assistance.

In the state of Sabah in Malaysian Borneo, up to 30,000 children born to Filipino and Indonesian immigrants are stateless. Due to discriminatory immigration and citizenship policies in Malaysia, many children are deprived of most forms of documentation, including birth certificates, which denies them access to most social services. Neither Malaysia nor the Philippines recognize these children as citizens.

And in the Terai of southern Nepal,



◀ **Rohingya (from Burma):** Over half of the camp population are children born in Bangladesh. Because they are permitted little or no humanitarian assistance, the children do not receive any form of education.



▲ **The Bihari:** It is not uncommon for men to leave their wives to marry local Bengali women simply to obtain the rights afforded from Bangladesh citizenship. Left by her husband, this 20-year-old girl has no family to help support her and her young baby. She makes paper bags for money. She makes 1000 bags in two days and is paid less than half of one US\$ for both days of work. She is now going blind in both eyes and has no access to healthcare.

hundreds of thousands of lower-caste Dalits or "untouchables" continue to be excluded from Nepalese society. Although the Terai region is Nepal's economic backbone, the Himalayan upper castes have always viewed the lower castes of the Terai as foreigners of Indian origin. Though most Dalit families have lived in the Terai for generations, many are still denied citizenship and up to 90% are landless.

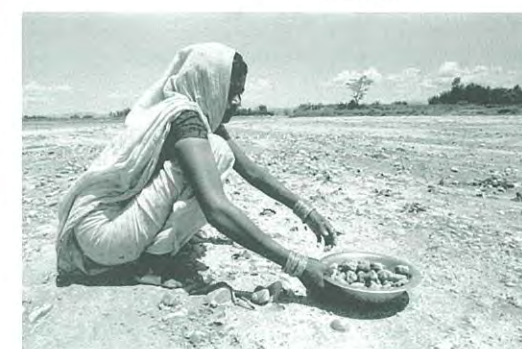
As democratic and multi-ethnic societies continue to reshape cultures around the world,

citizenship and the basic rights afforded from citizenship have never been more vital to one's participation and security in society. Yet, for ethnic minorities around the world, this fundamental right to citizenship has never been more fragile and at risk.

▶ **Nepal:** 90% of Dalits are landless. When the Khuti Kola River dries up in summer, Dalits in Dobindapur shovel gravel and rocks as an extra source of income. Local companies use the rocks and gravel for building materials.



▲ **Nepal:** A Dalit man and his grandson rest in the morning. The man's family has lived in the Terai for over five generations yet he is still without Nepalese citizenship.

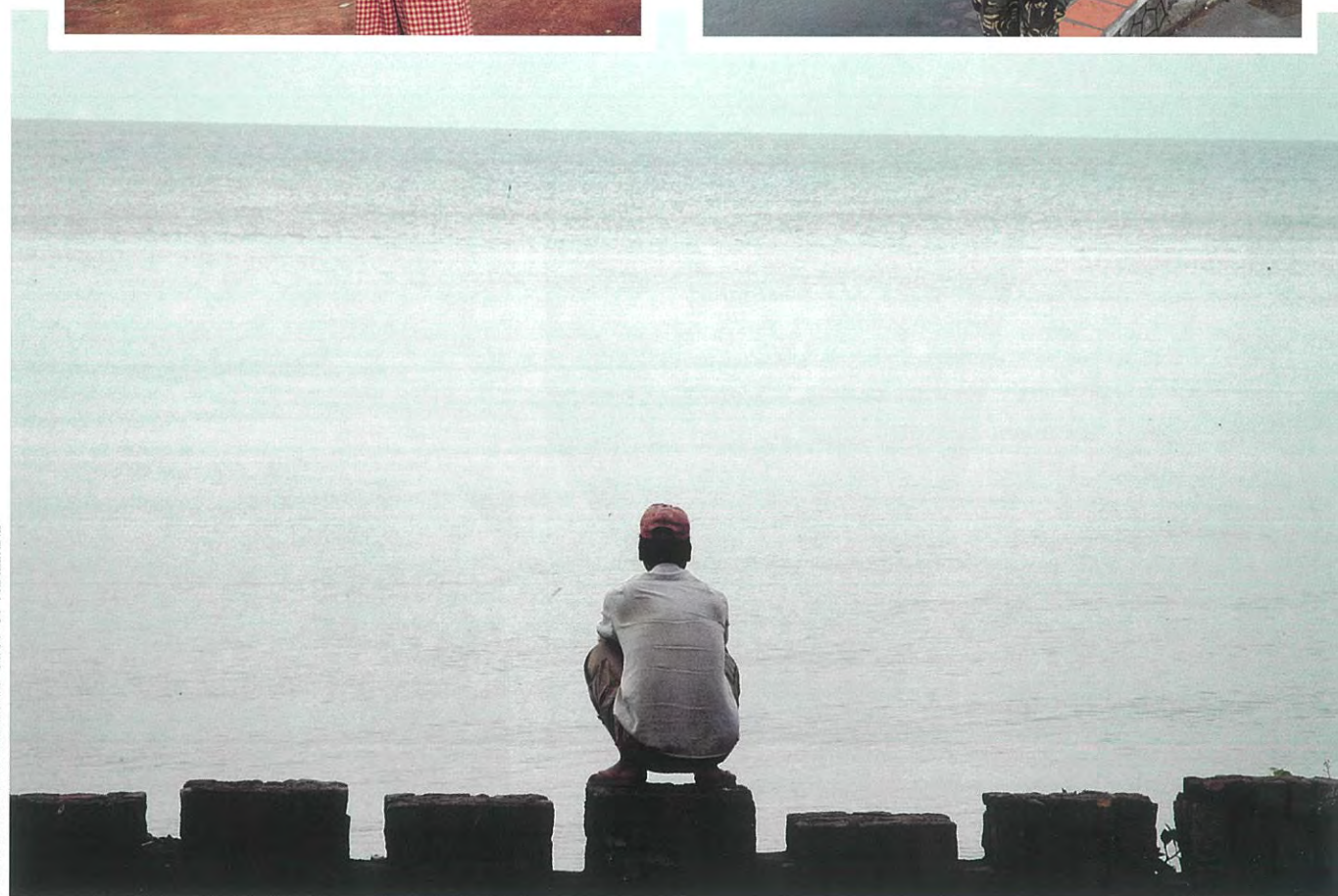


▲ **Filipino children in Sabah, Malaysia:** Over the past thirty years, conflict, liberal immigration policies and poor economic conditions have caused hundreds of thousands of Filipinos and Indonesians to immigrate to the state of Sabah in Malaysian Borneo. As a result of discriminatory citizenship and immigration policies, it is estimated that between 10,000 and 30,000 children are stateless in Sabah.

LIVING WITH GHOSTS

Photographs By **Patrick Barta**

Fifty years ago, the seaside town of Kep was one of Cambodia's richest resorts and a favorite of Cambodia's Francophile elite. But it was destroyed by the Khmer Rouge in the 1970s, leaving behind a maze of burned-out mansions and a desolate beachfront promenade. Now, tourists are coming back. A new power plant has brought electricity to the local population for the first time in years, and new hotels are rising from the ruins. *Dateline* editor **Patrick Barta** recently visited Kep and found a town that's eager to bury the past – but still struggling to overcome years of war and neglect.



Mexico Dreamin'

By Bangkok Chowhound

It's Saturday night in Bangkok and you need a break from Thai food. Fancy handmade parpadelle in a wild boar ragu? No problem. Craving duck confit with truffle mash? Name me an upscale restaurant in town that doesn't have this dish on its menu. Searching for the perfect lamb kofta, tonkatsu, pulpo a la Gallega, barbecued brisket or Hainanese chicken rice? Give me 30 seconds and I can reel off a few options for each.

But if you're hankering for a steaming bowl of posole, the ubiquitous Mexican stew of tender pork, or a humble plate of tacos al pastor, or even a single tamale—stop looking and buy yourself a ticket to Mexico. Because unless the Mexican Embassy starts airlifting some grannies who can make fresh corn tortillas every day, you'll never get a taste of real Mexican food in this town.

In fact, I'll go one step further: unless you've been to Mexico or you grew up in California (which, after all, was part of Mexico until the mid-19th century), you probably have never had authentic Mexican food.

Until I went to Mexico recently, I certainly never had. Much to my great shame, it took me more than 30 years to go south of the border.

My culinary imagination had been fanned by my husband's lovingly detailed descriptions of what he ate in his two years in Guadalajara, the capital of Jalisco state and hometown of thespian Gael Garcia Bernal. I've heard of his daily visits to the local tortilleria—kitchen towel in hand to wrap up the still-warm tortillas—so many times that I sometimes mistake it as one of my own anecdotes. Clearly, I've been missing out. And after eight years of hearing about startlingly fresh ceviche, strange but tasty fermented corn brews and the simple perfection of a ripe avocado mashed into a tortilla, I figured it was time to rectify this gross inequity in our marriage and book a trip to Mexico.

Mind you, being physically in Mexican territory doesn't guarantee you good food. A dear friend and her husband went to "Mexico" for their honeymoon—that is a self-contained resort in Cancun that's basically a ghetto for gringos on holiday. It was the sort of place where you could pay in dollars and order margaritas by the yard. The food was perplexingly bad, my friend said. Even though there were some Mexican families staying at the resort, they'd mysteriously disappear during mealtimes. My friend couldn't help but suspect that they were supping on much better—and much cheaper—food than the under-seasoned, soggy fare she and her husband found themselves pushing around their plates.

For some reason, I decided that the coastal state of Oaxaca—a six-hour bus drive southwest of Mexico City—was my best bet for ensuring that every meal and snack would be memorable. Maybe it was because Oaxaca City—the state capital with a beautiful colonial quarter—had become renowned for cookery classes in recent years. Or that the home of mole—that bewilderingly complex sauce with 20-odd ingredients including bitter chocolate—surely had more culinary secrets lurking in every home, storefront, café and restaurant. Truth be told, I just liked saying "Oaxaca"—pronounced "Wahaka"—over and over and over again.

But the food, how was the food? Our first breakfast in Mexico City consisted of fresh corn tortillas—which had an ineffably intense corn flavor and aroma—and squash blossoms sautéed with chili. Washed down with freshly squeezed orange juice. All for less than 40 baht, and eaten hot off a griddle set up on a street corner.

A promising start, and I knew things could only get better. Among the things we ate were: creamy popsicles studded with pecans; freshly made potato chips doused with salsa picante and lime; tacos with marinated pork; tacos with

cubed bacon fat; tacos with the crispy ends of a barbecued shank of pig; tacos with chorizo; tacos with grilled nopales, or cactus paddles; dried chilies stuffed with black beans and blanketed in queso fresco; tender chicken drowning in mole; pumpkin and sesame seed brittle that actually tasted of pumpkin and sesame seed rather than merely sugar—you get the picture.

The best meal that we had was a taco eaten standing up on a street corner in Mexico City's diplomatic area. It was our last meal in Mexico, and we were determined to find one last taco. And after a frantic race around the neighborhood, we did find it, from a man who had propped up his bike outside a bank and was scooping up luscious chunks of pork from a foam cooler strapped precariously to the back of his bike. Gathered around him were men in suits somberly munching away at their tacos with that inward expression you get when you're eating something really, really tasty. Silently, he gestured at me and silently I accepted his offering. It was gone in five bites. I'll be petitioning the Foreign Ministry tomorrow about a visa for the taco maestro.



WHERE YOU CAN GET MEXICAN HERE

OK, after railing about how you can't get authentic Mexican in Bangkok, you can enjoy close approximations. There's a line of salsa, corn chips, etc. called "El Charro" that's sold in supermarkets. They're actually made by a Mexican woman who married a Thai. She caters for the Mexican Embassy, but doesn't have a restaurant.

Friends swear by a new taco shop, Sunrise Tacos, in a parking lot near Sukhumvit Soi 12. The majority of its clientele reflects the, shall we say, more colorful denizens of Sukhumvit. I hear it is worth a visit, though one friend did tell me repeatedly that I should only go once I've "forgotten the taste of real Mexican food."



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