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## Mission College, Thailand, Assignment: October 26 - November 8, 2000

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Mission College,  
Thailand,  
Assignment  
October—November 2000

Keith Clouten

## **Thursday, October 26**

Northwest Airlines flight 11 from Detroit to Tokyo, Japan: Row 53, seat K - which means it's a window seat several rows behind the wing. Left Detroit at 4 p.m., scheduled to arrive at Narita airport at 6 p.m., 13 hours, 11 time zones and one calendar day later. This flight is a late-afternoon sun-chaser. At Narita I will change to Northwest flight 001 for six more hours to Bangkok where arrival is timed for midnight local time.

Nine hours into the Tokyo flight, we're tracking above the rugged wilderness of southern Alaska. It's cloudless, the air crystal clear, as chunky peaks capture the brilliant late sunlight gold, where they protrude from a frozen white sauce of glaciers and icefields. I have a sense of riding above another planet. Time is frozen in this trackless landscape as we soar into a perpetually setting sun. My body doesn't belong in this timeless space, and weariness begins to seep into my brain cells. I doze briefly and fitfully.

This trip to Thailand was somewhat unexpected. When I met Damian Ginajil last summer at the ASDAL Conference of librarians at Andrews, he talked earnestly to me about coming to help at his school, Mission College, and I warmly embraced the idea as a retirement stint a few years down the line. Mission College is a new Adventist post-secondary school, situated in hill country about 100 miles northeast of Bangkok. Started in a small way in 1990, the school was suddenly thrust into a growth curve three years ago when the church decided to close the Singapore campus of Southeast Asia Union College in favor of developing Mission College. Actually, they had no choice, because the Singapore government wanted the college land for city expansion, and compensated the church quite generously.

When Damian returned home to Thailand, he pressed his college administration to invite me to come to Mission College as soon as possible, as a library consultant. They granted his wish, and so with four weeks advance notice, I am actually on my way to Thailand on a ten-day assignment. When I tell my flight-mates, a retired couple on their way to Beijing, that I am going to Thailand on an assignment, the reaction is surprising. Are you on a peace mission, the lady wanted to know? To my knowledge, Thailand is not at war with anybody or with itself. Maybe she is confusing the Thai with the Palestinians.

I awake from a short doze and scan the snowscape below. For the first time in hours, I spot human settlement, recognizing the features of Alaska's premier city, Anchorage. Moments later, I have a clear view of the massive range rising up to Mt. McKinley, highest peak on the American continent, glowing brilliantly in the late sun. It is a rare spectacle that I want to photograph in my memory. I have seen the mountain! Feeling strangely fulfilled yet mind-weary, I pull down the window shade to catch some sleep during the remainder of the flight.

## **Saturday, October 28**

It was almost two o'clock this morning when I checked in at the Asia Hotel in central Bangkok. It's a nicely appointed, if somewhat older hotel with all amenities – five restaurants, two swimming pools, all-marble bathrooms, and a huge breakfast buffet. Though the tariff in Baht sounds prohibitive at 1450 per night, the exchange rate means I am paying just \$33 inclusive of taxes, tips and breakfast. I will stay here until tomorrow morning when the folk from Mission College come to pick me up. Meanwhile, having dragged myself out of bed mid-morning, I clean up and prepare to do a little exploring on my own.

Fortified with a huge breakfast and a container of water in my backpack, I set off into the steam bath which is Bangkok during the monsoon season. This part of Thailand has three seasons – wet, cool, and the hot.

Actually, it is hot in all three, with only relative difference in the heat factor. November is supposed to mark the end of the wet and the beginning of the cool which lasts while the sun is doing business south of the equator.

I could take a taxi to the grand palace this morning, but I feel adventurous and settle for a Tuk-Tuk, a motorized tricycle with a protective awning. The ride is OK, but my head is pushing into the canopy, so I have little view of the passing scenery. We also get full benefit from the exhausts of taxis and buses. The driver speaks little English but tries to talk me into stopping at several stores (men's tailor, jeweler, etc.) in hopes of pocketing a commission. I finally persuade him that I'm not buying anything today. Please just take me to the imperial palace.

The Grand Palace was built more than 200 years ago for the Thai royal family who have since moved out of town to a more private residence. The palace buildings themselves are certainly worth a visit, but what attracts hordes of visitors daily is the jewel box of glittering structures that surround the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, Thailand's most sacred site. Although I would be more comfortable wearing shorts in this fetid heat, I am aware that temples are off-limits to anyone who is not fully dressed. Inside the entrance gate, though, I see a stand where they will rent you trousers, shirts, and socks at very affordable rates if you've come unprepared.

The gold and glitter of the temple area is really breathtaking. I wander shoeless through the complex of pagodas, lavish ornamentation, and dazzling beauty at every step, taking lots of pictures. Finally I come to the Chapel Royal where the emerald Buddha sits under a canopy at the apex of a dazzling pyramid of gold furnishings. Standing in the Buddha's presence is not acceptable, so I obediently sit cross-legged on the floor with my feet pointing away from the statue. Today the Buddha is dressed in his wet season gear. Three times each year, the king comes in person to change the Buddha's costume. Later, in the palace museum, I inspect his cool and hot season attire.

Feeling hot and jet-lagged, I retreat for a while to the shaded galleries which encircle the entire complex, and sit down to read my guidebook. In less than minute I'm discovered and targeted by a group of school students who want to practice their English. I patiently try to answer their questions as one of the girls laboriously records my answers – What is your name? Where do you come from? What do you think of Thailand? etc. I attempt to ask

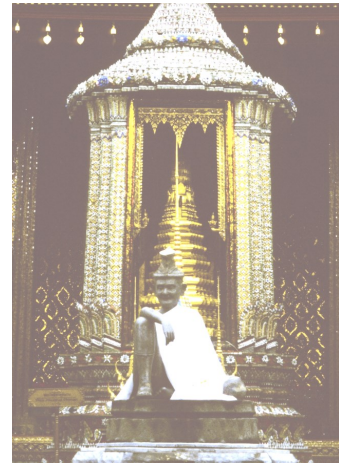


Above: Foyer, Asia Hotel, Bangkok.  
Below: Typical Tuk-Tuk.



Below: Parts of Royal Palace complex.





Left to Right: City Pillar; Grand Palace Entrance; One of the Stupas; Emerald Buddha in foreground.

them some questions, but their language study is not advanced enough to support conversation outside their narrow list of questions. Time to break away and get a taxi back to the hotel.

Mission College is a real surprise. I've been to several schools in developing countries, so I have in-built expectations which come fairly low on a scale of one-to-ten. Those expectations were not raised when I learned that Mission College was literally cleared from the jungle in the mountains north-east of Bangkok. Now that I'm actually here, however, I can list several features that exceed my developing-world standard by a long shot:

Wide paved roads, with paved sidewalks throughout the entire campus.

Academic buildings having fast elevators between floors.

Spacious modern buildings with full air-conditioning.

Top quality in furnishings, classroom equipment, and science labs.

The entire campus has been professionally and creatively designed and landscaped.

Campus-wide telephone system with voice-mail, extending even to dorm rooms.

On arrival, I'm taken to a spacious guest apartment equipped with kitchenette, tiled bathroom, twin beds, ample drawer and closet space, writing desk, and dining table. A small balcony at the back looks directly into the jungle. Damian arrives to welcome me, but has words of advice.

"Be careful of snakes," he says. "One of the staff members opened their door last week to find a death adder waiting there. And this morning the men were clearing the scrub near the church and uncovered a big python with a body as thick as your thigh." "I'll be careful," I promise. "What else is in the jungle?"

"Oh, there are tigers and some elephants, but we don't see them around the school." Then he adds, "But a couple of weeks ago, a big tiger was killed by a truck on the highway not far from here."

Damian checks that there is food in the frig, and plenty of drinking water. "You will eat with us for dinner tonight, and each night during your stay you will eat at the home of a different faculty family." He also talks about breakfast invitations, but I tell him I prefer to eat the fruit, cereals and breads that are provided right here in the guest apartment. I may eat lunches in the college dining room, if I'm willing to eat Thai food. I assure him that I will love Thai food.

After I've unpacked, Damian takes me on a tour of his 35,000 square feet carpeted library. It occupies three floors, all air-conditioned, but also provided with fans as an alternative when temperatures recede in December and January. Although the college has a current enrolment of 400, the library is designed with space for five times that number. Architecturally, the building has a stunning design focused on a spectacular circular core which is open through all three floors. As we finish our tour, I begin a mental list of features that I wish we had in the James White Library at Andrews :

- Ample space for future growth.
- Award-winning building design.
- Rich teakwood book stacks and furniture throughout.
- Large director's office with windows on opposite ends.
- Attractive, fully-tiled bathrooms on all three floors.

Before supper, Damian offers his office computer so that I can read messages from Ngaire and send one in response. I suggest she call me at 8.30 tonight (her time) which will be 8.30 Monday morning here.



Left:  
Guest Apartment.  
Right:  
Library Exterior



### Monday, October 30

This morning I meet the President of Mission College, Dr. Siriporn Tantipoonvinai. Not surprisingly, everyone calls her Dr. Siriporn. Her degree is in nursing which, although not taught on this campus, is a strong program at the older Bangkok campus at Bangkok Adventist Hospital. Dr. Siriporn leaves on an overseas trip in a couple of days, but has arranged for a basket of exotic fruit to be delivered to my guest room. The Thai are very gracious people.

The staff of Mission College is very cosmopolitan, with a minority of Thai. This contrasts with the student body which is nearly 80 percent Thai-speaking. However, the college is being developed to serve all countries of the Southeast Asia Union – Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand—so the school operates parallel programs in Thai and English. You might earn a business degree from either the Thai program or the International program, and so forth.

Library director Damian is a native of Sabah, one of the states of modern Malaysia. His wife, Teresa, is Filipino. Since Damian doesn't speak Thai, he has a full-time Thai librarian, Duangjai, who handles everything relating to Thai needs -- collection development, cataloging, and reference service.

I meet a South African staff member, Alvin Evert. He is the campus guru when it comes to computers and networks, and has made a strong contribution to college development in the two years since he and Martie moved here from Cape Town. Right now, he and his men are laying fiber optic cable throughout the

buildings in preparation for an Internet connection. The library was designed with multi computer stations in mind. In fact, Alvin has placed orders for a first instalment of fifteen computers which will be placed on the main floor. A strong Internet connection will provide a valuable gateway to electronic information, whether free or purchased.

A beautiful new campus church is under construction on the hilltop, with a wonderful view across the academic buildings to a range of jungle-clad hills beyond. It is a splendid site for a house of worship. Just now there is a flurry of activity to ready the church for the last weekend of November when the quinquennial session of the Southeast Asia Union Mission will convene here. The edifice has a striking design featuring a large inlaid cross which is illuminated at night, reminding the entire campus that Mission College is a bastion of Christianity in a land where 98 percent of the population are Buddhists.

The church complex will also include offices and classrooms for the Religion Department, currently headed by a Finnish pastor, Kai Arasola. I met Kai briefly at Andrews this past summer. His wife, Ida Marie, who works part-time in the Mission College library, attended our two-day library workshop at James White Library. Damian also wants me to meet the new pastor, Herbert Sormin. To our mutual surprise and joy, we remember each other from Avondale College days in Australia, forty years ago. At that time, I was the newly appointed librarian and Herbert was a religion major from Malaysia. It is another reminder that the Adventist Church is large enough to encompass the world, but small enough to be a family.

## Tuesday, October 31

As I explore this campus, I observe that existing and planned structures will cater for perhaps 2,000 students. Where will they come from? Church growth in the countries of the Southeast Asia Union is not particularly strong at this time. Other parts of Asia have their own institutions. No one seems able to give me a satisfactory answer to the question. I have seen schools in Africa where the opposite scenario holds true –schools that predict and

receive burgeoning enrolments, but whose campus structures are hopelessly inadequate to support the increases. Mission College appears headed for the reverse problem.

Observing the quality of the academic facilities, I wonder if the school might attract numbers of American students who could come to Thailand for a year's Asian cultural experience, provided a program is structured for that purpose. Cost-wise, students would not lose. With the average cost per credit only a small fraction of the American cost, students would be ahead financially even after a hefty airfare. I have seen



From Top: Circulation Desk; Space for Computer Stations; Study Carrels; Teak Adjustable Book Shelves.

classroom facilities and the library, but I'd like to inspect the dorm rooms. Do they meet reasonable standards?

I ask that question of Damian during one of our many walks around the campus. He introduces me to the men's dean, who invites us to go look at some of the rooms. Like all buildings on the campus, the residence halls are new and attractively designed. In the lobby we meet two students who invite us to visit their rooms on the second floor. I observe stairways and hallways that are spacious and sparkling clean. After visiting two of the rooms I note these points :

- Rooms are of reasonable size, with beds for two students.
- They are not air-conditioned, but all have ceiling fans and doors opening into balconies.
- Each student has a separate study desk, book shelves, and clothes closet.
- The shared bathrooms are ample, fully tiled with shower, toilet, and vanity.
- Every room is equipped with a campus phone.
- The dormitory has a worship room and student lounge with TV.

A Cambodian business student wants me to see his room which houses his personal enterprise. His "Mama Shop" sells fresh eggs, noodles, and sardines at competitive prices.

So there appears to be no problem with standards of accommodation. It is only when we visit the cafeteria for lunch that I momentarily have second thoughts. It's not the food choices, though westerners would need to adjust to a diet of rice instead of potatoes, and acquire a taste for mildly spiced concoctions. What *does* take me by surprise is a dining room filled with students who are all wearing black and white. The white shirts and blouses all bear the Mission College badge neatly emblazoned on the pocket.

Damian responds to my unuttered question. "Students are required to wear uniforms to all classes and academic appointments, including the library." I will discover that every university, public or private, in Thailand has a uniform dress requirement. I wonder how American students would react to this requirement – or is it just a part of the Thai cultural experience? [ Below: Campus Views ]



Each evening when I return to my guestroom, there is a little something in the frig – a container of fresh papaya, or home-made peanut paste, or a couple of fresh croissants. The source of these goodies is Leona Gouge, listed in the campus directory as "college hostess." She is the perfect fit for the job description. She and David are in their sixth consecutive year here as retiree volunteers. Forty years ago they were missionaries in Vietnam and left only when the Tet offensive forced them to do so. Their hearts have never left southeast Asia.



Here, David teaches an English class or two, and Leona looks after the guests. They receive a local allowance which is ample for their living in Thailand, and they pay for the annual trip home to their cabin in the mountains of northeast Oregon during the hottest weather here, April to June. They were affectionately known as Ma and Pa to their Vietnamese friends of yesteryear. Now they are Grandma and Grandpa to a new generation, including several Vietnamese who are students here. They love it here, and are loved by students and staff alike.

**Wednesday, November 1**

Thailand is widely known as “the land of smiles.” The term is well-deserved. I have encountered none of the hard-sell techniques that I’ve experienced in some other countries, and sellers, whether in shops or on the street, smile shyly and point to their wares.

Thai conversation is the epitome of politeness. Alvin illustrates it this way. When I might ask someone to “please switch on the light”, the Thai would say something like “may we have a little light, if that is possible?” He says the politeness extends even to police officers, which conjures up some interesting scenarios in my mind. “Excuse me, sir, you were driving a little dangerously when you ran over those two pedestrians. I am afraid that I must arrest you, if that is possible.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Today, we drive down to Bangkok to visit the library at Chulalongkorn University. Whenever I do a library consultation in a foreign country, I ask to visit at least two other academic libraries so that I have a local perspective in assessing needs and expectations.

The highway between Muak Lek and Bangkok is part of the “Friendship Highway” which U.S. funds built during the Vietnam War. It extends all the way to the Laos border and carries heavy truck traffic. Since its construction, the highway has attracted commercial development along its length. There is a ribbon of commerce all the way from Bangkok to the second largest Thai city, Khorat, a distance of more than 150 miles. Sometimes, the highway is more like a knife than a ribbon, as communities are sliced in half, made worse because the highway has no provision for cross traffic. If you wish to drive from point A on the east side of the highway to point B exactly opposite you on the west side, you will likely be forced to drive several miles south until you come to an overpass or where a U-turn is permitted. Traffic hurtles along the divided expressway at a fast clip, spelling constant danger to pedestrians who need to cross to the other side. The highway claims many lives.



Library of Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok



Administrative Entrance to Mission College.

Chulalongkorn University is Thailand’s largest, oldest, and most prestigious university, founded by King Chulalongkorn more than a century ago. The spacious and attractive campus is spread over several city blocks in the commercial heart of Bangkok. Parking is a problem, but campus buses provide continuous service between the largest schools.

Two things amaze me as we make our way to the main library building. I observe rows of double-parked cars. The solution to that problem involves leaving your car unlocked, in neutral gear with brake off. When necessary, an entire row of vehicles can be pushed out of the way, one at a time, to make a space to drive out. I will also carry in my mind an image of thousands of students, all identically dressed in their black and white uniforms, fairly similar to those at Mission College.

The library is a huge structure and incorporates most of the features we see in western universities – open access collections, rows of computer stations, Internet access. We are given a demo of their databases. The major problem is slowness of the Internet connection.

**Thursday, November 2**

Like me, Damian is an early riser, so on several mornings we agree to meet at six, just before sunrise, to enjoy a brisk walk around parts of the campus. The whole place is beautifully landscaped, with hundreds of trees, both native and introduced, all identified. In one section there is a planting of Australian eucalypts. This campus is an arboretum.

I meet the young architect who is guiding the campus development. He is a Thai, Rangsiman Kanchanaraphi, but like me, he travels with a Canadian passport, having gained his B. Arch degree from the University of Toronto.

Since my appearance in Thailand, the cool season has arrived, bringing pleasantly cool nights and day temperatures in the mid-eighties instead of the mid-nineties. I switch off the air-conditioner at night, preferring an open window and ceiling fan on low speed. In the quieter conditions, with an open window, I hear strange jungle noises whenever I’m awake.

\* \* \* \* \*

Thailand is a land of exotic fruits, and I’m game to try them all. Already, during my short stay, I have sampled and enjoyed a variety of tropical fruits. Papaya and mango have always been favorites with me. Here papaya is the rich, red, full-flavor kind. It’s off-season for mangoes, but I’ve sampled the strips of green mango which don’t hold a candle to the juicy ripe ones. Other fruits that Teresa introduced to me include jackfruit, pomelo (like huge grapefruit), guava, langsat (cousin to lychees I think), and chompu. Another new one to me is dragonfruit, a large, dark red, scaly fruit about the size of a pineapple. You strip off the outer skin to discover a large, milk-white juicy centerpiece containing thousands of tiny black seeds. It is sweet-tasting and juicy, and I like it immediately. “It is a good fruit for men to eat,” Teresa said. “Older men, perhaps?” She smiles. Yes.



Mission College Campus Church on the Hill

But I have not yet sampled Durian, which comes with an overpowering smell that drives many people away. Unfortunately (or fortunately?) it is out of season until April and May.

### Friday, November 3

This story belongs in the “Be-Polite-to-Police” department. Mark Haddad is a business teacher who moved here with his family from Andrews University this past summer. Recently he bought a car and went through the complex process of getting it licensed for the road. Foreigners get a temporary red license plate which does not permit night driving, but Mark was not aware of that restriction.

So, last week he was coming home from Saraburi after dark and was pulled over by a policeman. The officer was concerned about the red license plate, but Mark had no idea what he was saying, and concluded that he was being targeted as a farang (the popular Thai term for a foreigner). So he dug in his heels and gave the officer a piece of his American-English mind which the fellow did not understand. Finally, in frustration, Mark phoned one of the Thai administrators at the college who quietly explained to the traffic officer that Mark was not aware of the night-driving restriction. The officer said he would accept that, but added, “I have to do something, because he argued with me!”

\* \* \* \* \*

Today we make our second visit to a Thai university, this time in the regional city of Khorat, about fifty miles east of Muak Lek on the Friendship Highway. The University of Technology there has something in common with Mission College – it is new, founded in the same year, 1990. The library visit here is very interesting and worthwhile, with several observations and ideas which should benefit Mission College.

After the visit, we drive to a large shopping mall downtown. It is attractively laid out, with hundreds of shops and restaurants. Since it is lunch time, I admonish the other three to choose a restaurant and I will pay for lunch. With dozens of eating places to choose from, I observe that there is a Sizzler restaurant with its all-you-can-eat buffet and suggest that as a possibility. Duangjai warns me that this is one of the more expensive places, but I say that’s OK, let’s go inside. It has a wide selection of soups, salads and fruit, plus dessert bar, and with soda drinks all-round, the total bill for four people comes to 396 Baht, which at 42 per dollar, equals about \$9.40 in American currency – and tipping is not expected! Then, after a short shopping spree, we buy four dipped cones at the Dairy Queen – 60 Baht total (\$1.40). I could live cheaply in this country.

There is a music shop at the mall, and since I want a CD of traditional Thai music, Duangjai helps me find one. I buy three fine CD’s priced at a mere 49 Baht each, seemingly the regular price for most CD’s in the store.



I dine tonight with David and Leona Gouge. They have also invited Steve and Laura Nyirady, here from Southern Adventist University on a three-month sabbatical. The couple plans to visit Australia and go diving on the barrier reef before returning home. We enjoy some lively conversation. At dessert time, Leona says she has some frozen durian in the freezer. Do I like durian? I don’t know. Steve found a fresh one in a Bangkok

Suranaree University of Technology, Khorat

market a couple of days ago, so rushes off to his house to collect it, along with his video camera to record my first venture into the real world of exotic fruit. The smell is somewhat off-putting, but the fleshy yellow pieces have a rich flavor, not unlike a very strong mango. I've passed the test. I enjoy durian.

Later this evening, when I present a devotional talk during the vesper program (translated into Thai of course) I begin by telling them about my durian experience. They applaud. In some strange way I have been initiated into Thai culture.

**Sabbath, November 4**

I hear an Australian voice as I join others on the way to Sabbath School this morning. The voice belongs to Tim Maddocks, a native of Western Australia. He and his family (wife and two small boys) are self-supporting missionaries in Cambodia, but just now they are en route back to Perth for a short rest and family time before returning to the mountains of northern Cambodia. They traveled in a bumpy truck as far as the Thai border,



then bus to Bangkok, and finally to Mission College to spend Sabbath. Tomorrow night they will board the international train from Bangkok to Malaysia, finally flying Malaysian Airlines to Perth on a cheap fare deal.

Tim never attended Avondale College, nor has he had any formal theological training. His qualification, he says, smiling, is "the gift of poverty." Eight years ago, after finishing a degree in engineering from University of Western Australia, he and his wife decided they would like to serve the Lord in Cambodia, just then emerging from the tragic years and in desperate need of any kind of help. The Maddocks went there with enough personal funds to make the journey, but with no plans for future support. Instead, they placed their lives in God's hands for whatever that turned out to be. They have never made specific requests for money, yet in eight years they have never been in want, always blessed with sufficient for living and sharing. As their friendship and service for the Cambodian people has demonstrated the unselfish love of Jesus, several have been baptized into the body of Christ.

Tim believes that the church in these countries should be sensitive to the local culture. Cambodians would never think of stepping into a Buddhist temple or shrine without first removing their shoes. When they are told it's OK to wear shoes into our houses of worship, they are led to believe that these are not sacred spaces. Interestingly, I noticed several pairs of shoes left at the door of the church this morning. Tim said they probably belonged to Cambodian students. He and other missionaries, like Bruce and Linda Bauer, have been emphasizing a gospel that is culturally sensitive. I am impressed with the great faith and dedication of Tim and his family, and like what they are doing.

\* \* \* \* \*

As a visitor at church today, I have an orchid pinned to my jacket and an invitation to the potluck lunch which is held afterwards. Herbert Sormin preached a fine sermon. Unfortunately, Mission College does not yet have a music department, which showed in the mediocre quality of the Sabbath music, whether played or sung.

\* \* \* \* \*

Tonight, after a potluck supper at Damien's house with all the library staff, we stroll down to the outdoor sporting facilities, which are brightly floodlit every Saturday evening. The recreational facilities are as

impressive as everything else about this school. There is a perfectly level football oval with a paved track around the perimeter, three tennis courts, and several basketball / volleyball courts. A swimming pool will be added shortly. Adjoining the football field is a modern student center with activity rooms on two levels. Tonight, student teams are practicing for a coming sports day when students from the Bangkok campus will be bused here for some friendly competition.

### Sunday, November 5

This has been a full and interesting day. Simon Sim, the business manager, has wanted to take me to some sights in this part of Thailand. It turned out that several folk from the college wanted to visit the famous Weekend Market at Chatuchak, on the outskirts of Bangkok, so we drive there in three vehicles. The Chatuchak market is not only famous, it is enormous, with more than six thousand stalls arranged along narrow walkways in an under-cover complex. Getting lost at Chatuchak is considered a normal experience and part of the fun. You can buy anything there, even exotic and endangered wildlife smuggled in from Laos and Cambodia.

As we waited in the parklot for others to arrive, I fell into conversation with an American couple who are at Mission College for less than a year, and they talked about the financial support they are getting. While here, they receive a generous local allowance of 25,000 Baht (about \$600) per month. Additionally the college contracted to pay for their airfares, their US social security, their home mortgage payments, and a respectable percentage of their regular salary was being deposited for them back in California. In fact, they said, smiling, they would actually be considerably better off financially as a result of this one-year stint of "mission" service. I wish I had not heard that. Yesterday, I was profoundly inspired by the Maddocks' story of faith and dedication. Today, I am profoundly disturbed by what I have heard.



By one o'clock, we had seen enough of the markets, so Simon suggested we visit one of the Thai royal palaces a few miles north. Our group of eight in a van comprised the Sims, Sormins, and Ginajils. We exited the northern expressway about an hour later to the historic Bang Pa-In Palace near a village of the same name. The palace site is really an island in the Chao Phraya River upstream from Bangkok, and was first occupied by royalty in the mid-17th century. In those days

Left, from Top: Chinese Mansion at Bang-Pa-In; Thai Pavilion. Below: Group at Bang-Pa-In: Sims, Ginajils, Sormins.



Dutch merchants of the East India Company came here to fill their vessels with spices and exotic woods.

The palace is spread over many acres of parkland and waterways, and dates from the time of King Chulalongkorn who erected several beautiful structures during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. At the heart of the complex is a gorgeous two-story mansion, a gift to the king from Chinese merchants in Bangkok. The entire mansion and its contents were shipped from China. We removed our shoes to feast our eyes on the interior which drips with porcelain, fine embroidery, ebony furniture in-laid with mother-of-pearl, and intricate wood carvings.

As we were leaving the palace, Simon had a fruit seller slash open a fresh coconut for each of us. The cool sweet milk was a wonderful treat at the end of a hot day. I appreciated Simon's efforts to make this day a unique and interesting one for me.

\* \* \* \* \*

### **Monday, November 6**

Most of the morning is taken up with a meeting of the Library Committee, where I present a written report. I am pleased to find a very active and well-represented committee. This institution is proud of its library and wants the very best for its growth and development. My report is discussed at length, questions asked, and my recommendations accepted. I feel that the entire consultation process has worked very well, and I'm confident that the administration and faculty will take the report seriously. I spend the rest of the day with Damian, sharing ideas for the future growth of his library. This completes my work at Mission College.

\* \* \* \* \*

Tonight, Simon, with his wife and small son, takes me to eat at the town of Saraburi, about half an hour's drive from Muak Lek. We park outside the large Tesco shopping complex, which is something like a large Walmart superstore. I count 45 check-outs, just about all of them busy. I like the neat signs placed throughout the parking lot which read, "Beware of Pedestrians!"

Simon leads upstairs to a Chinese restaurant (Simon is a Chinese Malay, though he has never been to China), and the four of us enjoy a "steamboat" dinner. Each chooses several small fish or vegetable dishes from the menu, and periodically spoons items into the common cooking pot in the center of the table. The steamboat then becomes the fishing hole where you scoop the cooked delicacies onto a plate to eat with your rice. It's fun, and later the stock makes a tasty soup.

### **Tuesday, November 7**

This is departure day. Since my flight leaves Bangkok at six tomorrow morning, and I am to be at the airport by four, a decision is made for me to spend tonight in the city. The campus driver, Panut, will pick me up at eight this morning for the trip to Bangkok, where a room has been reserved for me at the Adventist Hospital. I will take a taxi from there to the airport early tomorrow morning.

At sunrise this morning I join Damian and Teresa, plus David and Leona Gouge, on a final walk around the campus, this time including a visit to the nearby Health and Wellness Center. This is a resort-style complex in a garden jungle setting, operated along the lines of Weimar Institute in California, and equipped with everything that is good for body, soul and spirit.

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Bangkok is a huge, amorphous city without a well-defined downtown core. The so-called city center covers many square miles, and is loosely divided into several zones. The commercial heart at Siam Square has some large department stores and indoor shopping centers, including the world trade center, plus most of the big 5-star hotels. This area reminds me of parts of Tokyo, with wide streets, tall buildings, elite restaurants and high-class shopping.

Bangkok Adventist Hospital (pictured above) is a mile or two west of this commercial core, but just a block from the point where the main northern tollway spews its contents into the city congestion. I must confess I am just a little bit nervous about spending a night in this hospital. I have vivid memories of booking a room for one night at the old Sydney Sanitarium when I was a student at Avondale and needed to be in Sydney early the following morning. So picture this scenario : I am awakened in semi-darkness about five in the morning with a thermometer thrust into my mouth. I wrench it out and mumble something about not being a patient, but now awake, I decide to be up and out of here before they roll me to surgery for appendix removal. I'm just preparing to leave, still in the half-dark, when another nurse opens the door and reports that my urine is normal. Where did they get my urine! She's gone before I can retract my voice from wherever it disappeared. I'm out of here!

So, I'm relieved that my Bangkok Hospital Room is actually a small guest suite separated from the main hospital building. I leave my things there and with an afternoon free, I decide to visit the Wat Po temple complex. It is about two miles distant, but since the city traffic is approaching gridlock near the hospital, and I have a street map, I decide to walk the distance. The route takes me by canals, temples and street markets. Everywhere are posters and huge street portraits of members of the Thai royal family. They are much loved and respected by their people.

Wat Po is famous for the Temple of the Reclining Buddha (pictures on next page). This is the oldest temple complex in Bangkok, dating from the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Apart from Thai massage parlors, which still operate for those willing to pay a small sum, the major attraction here is a chapel housing the reclining Buddha. After removing my shoes, I'm permitted to circumnavigate this monstrous gilded statue which measures 150 feet in length and 48 feet in height. The huge feet are inlaid with mother-of-pearl. On the far side of the statue are 100 bowls and it will bring you good luck and a long life if you put a small coin in each one. The constant clink of coins makes interesting background music for the visit.

Back at the hospital, I go to the cafeteria for supper, then do a final re-pack of my things in readiness for tomorrow's flight home. I turn in early to catch as much sleep as possible. The hospital security man will have a taxi for me at 3.30 a.m.



**Wednesday, November 8**

I am eating breakfast over Vietnam. Since mine is a veggie special, served early, other passengers will be eating theirs somewhere over the South China Sea. The Vietnamese countryside below is a mountainous region, with small pockets of settlement. I’ve visited the Vietnamese War Memorial in D.C., aware that thousands of young Americans – and there were young Aussies too – shed their blood somewhere on the land below. Those war dead may never be celebrated in this country.

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Northwest Airlines operates its Asian network from a special carousel hub at Tokyo’s Narita airport. Each mid-day, within a half-four period, fleet aircraft arrive from Beijing, Seoul, Hong Kong, Taipei, Manila and Bangkok, taxiing to gates around the carousel like obedient cows making their way to the milking parlor. There’s an hour of bedlam inside as people make their gate connections, while their baggage hopefully makes identical movements below. Finally, the same six aircraft, cleaned, refueled and re-boarded, take off for points east – Los Angeles, San Francisco, Honolulu, Minneapolis, Detroit, and New York. By two, local time, the terminal is empty and quiet until the westbound jets begin to arrive soon after 5 p.m. and then the whole process is repeated, with destinations reversed.

Soaring upwards from Narita this afternoon, I begin counting the hours until touchdown at Detroit around noon tomorrow – except it will be noon today because we gain the day we lost on the trip across the Pacific.

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After a night en route, it’s still November 8 when we land at Detroit’s metro airport. I have one final connection for South Bend, but there is time to make a quick call to Ngaire and then pause at Burger King for a drink. A large Fanta and a small serve of fries’ costs \$2.85. Seems awfully expensive -- my last full meal in Bangkok cost me less than a fourth of that; yet it’s infinitesimal alongside my monthly salary. I’m in transit between two economies, two worlds.

That sets me on a train of thought that has roots back in Thailand. When I get back to the office tomorrow I can, if I choose, submit a special expense report to be ultimately reimbursed by Mission College. The standard travel per diem would cover far, far more than a mere \$2.85 for Fanta and fries, the only expense I’ve had since leaving Bangkok. I could nickel-and-dime several other “out-of-pocket” expenses of the past ten days. I could even submit a modest library consultant fee, since I was called to go for that purpose. My trip



could yield a financial benefit, apart from the frequent flyer miles which always come as a travel perk. But I ask myself: What does it mean to be a missionary?

In my journeys, I've met good people who will go almost anywhere, provided the assignment comes with perks and benefits that make their time and effort worthwhile. But I've also encountered those who are driven by a spirit of love, dedication, and sacrifice, seeking to emulate Jesus, who lived to bless others. I want to be that kind of missionary.

Thank you, Lord, for bringing these things into focus for me. Now I must swallow the last couple of fries, gulp the last drop of Fanta, and head for that South Bend aircraft. I can hardly wait to receive Ngaire's welcoming hugs when I get home.



These bougainvillea were growing outside my guest apartment at Mission College.