

# No Turning Back

The Beginnings of WEC in Thailand



by Nancy Ashcraft

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## Editor's Preface

Nancy Ashcraft has written the following account of the beginnings of the WEC mission work in the Central/North parts of Thailand, and the stories of those missionaries who took part. It was her hope that those who would follow in their footsteps, would appreciate and take courage from the obedience and joy of those pioneers, and realize the requirements and sacrifice that it entailed. Nancy herself, though she came later, was also a pioneer. She has already chronicled her own story in *At the Scent of Water* (Christian Literature Crusade, June 1987, and available at Amazon.com), and she personally knew most of the people who appear in this story. She, herself, appears towards the end of part two (forthcoming) of this series.

Those who have read the works of Norman Grubb, particularly his *C.T. Studd, Cricketeer to Pioneer*, should see this story as a continuation. In fact, Norman Grubb, himself, appears as a character in Nancy's narrative. He played a vital part in launching WEC in Thailand. This is the story of WEC (Worldwide Evangelisation Crusade) as they began in Thailand, spreading the vision of C.T. Studd and motivated by his inspiration and example. His vision, and WEC's ultimate inspiration, of course, is Christ, by whom Paul, likewise, was inspired to build, not on someone else's foundation, but where Christ had never been preached.

This is the first of a two part series. Part two is entitled *Yours Crusading*. I hope to format it and make it available to the public in the same way as this. Shortly after writing the two parts, Nancy settled into retirement. She presently lives in a missionary retirement community in Florida.

Blessings....

robby charters

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## **Focus on Siam**

### **Chapter 1**

At the close of the Second World War, Siam was so unknown by the outside world, it appeared mysterious and hidden. The ancient kingdom was said to have a population of seventeen million, though a thorough census had never been taken.

Tales were told of golden palaces belonging to a line of kings that had ruled for almost two centuries and of graceful temple spires crowning a thousand hillsides. There were reports of sparkling gemstones and tropical rainforests of towering teak trees.

Norman Grubb, acting as secretary (leader) for the British Home End of WEC, doubtless read the descriptions. He doubtless heard the praises. And they left him untouched, unmoved.

It was the shocking statistics, the account of province after province with,

"No Christian witness,

No Christian witness,

No Christian witness.."

that brought him to a stop. Considering Siam brought him to his knees and finally to action

As far as advance to foreign fields was concerned, the war years had kept WEC to a holding pattern. Travel abroad and the flow of funds between nations were largely limited to the military. So the mission had concentrated on strengthening the home bases and recruiting prayer groups and partners for that day when advance around the world would again be possible. Now with the war over, borders were open and waterways free for civilian travel. And WEC was mobilized, ready to move out.

WEC leadership was looking for new targets, new fields, new lands. Where were we to invest lives to win this lost world for the Lord of Glory?

The statistics drew Norman Grubb's eyes to consider Siam. Throughout the era of modern missions, Burma was considered territory belonging to Baptist missions, Siam belonged to Presbyterian missions and Indochina to Methodist missions. This was not a matter of international law but simply comity of missions, that courtesy agreement among missionaries to respect each other's work and area. Only faithfulness to their own word held agencies and men to their agreements.

Comity of missions was a practice that most perfectly fit WEC policy. The very ethos of WEC assured that we would not seek to work where other Bible-believing evangelical missions were established.

Did this mean that Siam, an area reckoned to belong to Presbyterian missions, was a closed door to us?

Before the outbreak of war, vast areas of Siam had not been evangelized. The Presbyterian mission had no plans to expand their work beyond their existing stations, so they were willing for other mission agencies to enter the land and establish work outside of their area of influence. Several missions had entered Siam and begun church planting but always within agreement and alliance with the Presbyterian mission.

At the close of the war, as Norman Grubb was studying the situation in Siam, he found that, as there were still many provinces without any missionary endeavor at all, the invitation was still in effect. Missions that would work in harmony with the Presbyterians and the other already established missions, were free to enter.

Siam presented not just an open door for WEC but a compelling cry and an urgent need. Soon WEC sending bases, regional centers, prayer batteries, staff and candidates were focused on Siam.

While Mr. Grubb was corresponding with missions in Siam, he was also looking at the young people candidating to serve with WEC abroad. He wanted to find a team who could enter Siam and work together. He wanted a team thoroughly baptized into WEC principles, sensible enough to work in tandem with the Presbyterians and wise enough to keep from offending the Siamese officials. At the same time the team needed to be so empowered by the Lord that they could penetrate the darkness of

that heathen land.

Norman Grubb couldn't help but notice a candidate who had volunteered to type his correspondence. She had a full-time responsibility as bookkeeper for the Mission but in her spare time she was typing for him. Here was the spirit he wanted in the team members for Siam.

Ellen Gillman had already been a part of the Mission family for almost nine years when Norman Grubb approached her with his opinion that she should "serve the Lord in Siam". Ellen's parents had entered WEC when Ellen and her older sister, Betty, were still schoolgirls. The two sisters were too young to officially become members of the Mission, but their parents so took them into the decision-making process that they were not just involved in, but totally committed to the vision of the Mission and the lifestyle that best suited that vision.

Those were the early days of WEC in North America. In every regional headquarters, it was a time of communal living and sharing in every regional headquarters. The Gillmans took all meals with the entire household of whatever HQ where they were living. Mrs. Gillman was often in charge of the kitchen or of housekeeping arrangements. Ellen and Betty naturally took part in cleaning, cooking and laundry. And they both attended and took part in morning prayers except on school days. Later, on vacation from Prairie Bible Institute, the sisters slept in the girls' dorm with candidates who were on their way to foreign fields. Listening to candidates preparing to sail for Africa, India and Asia excited and challenged them.

That was a time when candidate training was not a matter of formal classes. It was rather a sharing of life, both physical and spiritual, through living, working and worshiping together. Betty and Ellen became vital parts of that sharing without applying to become candidates. In 1943, graduating from PBI, Ellen became an official WEC candidate, as had Betty before her.

While Norman Grubb was on a speaking tour in the United States, Ellen was working in the bookkeeping department of the Chestnut Hill HQ, just out side of Philadelphia. Along with her own duties, Ellen offered to help type some of the mission leader's heavy correspondence. Norman Grubb, watching Ellen, felt that here was not only a willing worker, but one who was a dyed-in-the-wool WEC'er! He was reminded of his own words, "The team to open Siam should be thoroughly 'WECized'". In this young woman, Grubb found the single eye to WEC's commitment to world evangelization.

Norman Grubb's opinion that Ellen should be a part of the team to enter Siam was completely unexpected. Ellen was looking towards India. She now says that her first attraction for that land came from her love for Rudyard Kipling's *Just So* stories and his other books about India. Of course attraction and guidance are two very different things. But it is important to note that Ellen took that initial interest in India into a very real spiritual concern. While she attended Bible school, she took every opportunity to hear speakers from India and to read everything she could get her hands on dealing with that land. She even chaired several prayer sessions on India.

India was Ellen's focus. That land had filled her vision and she had no reason to suspect that God had any other land as His chosen place for her.

To those of us who know Ellen, her response to Norman Grubb's pronouncement comes as no surprise. She was not on the defensive, nor threatened that her independence and her right to find her own guidance were questioned. Though she was not wanting or waiting for someone else to tell her what she ought to do, nor was she unduly swayed by Norman Grubb's position in the Mission, she graciously promised to pray about the matter. In prayer, to her surprise, the Lord did confirm His call to Siam.

\* \* \*

Wilf and Evy Overgaard had joined WEC in 1942. They moved into the Seattle headquarters with their daughter Sharon, just seven months old. For the next four years they would uproot and move three times, filling needs in the expanding mission. In the middle of that time of adjustment, readjustment and further adjustment, a fourth member was added to their family. Paul was born in September of

1944.

By the time Ellen was recognized within the Mission as a member of the soon-to-be-formed team for Siam, Wilf and Evy had become indispensable members of the home staff. They moved across country to North Carolina, from Seattle, to fill in while that base's leaders were away. Later they were called to uproot again; this time they were to go to Philadelphia. They were needed to help move the headquarters to a new location. All this travel was undertaken when Sharon was three and Paul not a year old.

After just four months in Pennsylvania, they were requested to move to Canada to do the bookkeeping in the Toronto HQ. They were to coordinate the North American finances be in charge of candidates from Canada, and help run the Headquarters.

Officially, Wilf was the bookkeeper for Canadian WEC, but he was often away on speaking engagements representing the Mission. In the Overgaards' thinking they were committed to missions and available to the Lord to move at any time in any direction He would lead. In the minds of the North American leaders of WEC, the Overgaards were the Lord's provision for the many needs of the Home End.

In the summer of 1946, WEC rented a camp facility at Round Lake, in New York State. Ellen calls the facility "rickety"! There, WEC held public meetings to present the need of a lost world and to proclaim the Lord's heart involved in sending His Gospel to the ends of the earth. Wilf was one of the speakers and Evy was in charge of planning, buying, preparing and serving meals.

At the close of the week of meetings, Evy wrote to a friend saying, "I know you'll be shocked to hear what God has asked of us." Her next sentence states, "We have volunteered for Siam." Obviously, in Evy's mind, God's requiring and their volunteering met together in partnership.

Evy goes on to write of how she and Wilf were talking quietly in bed after an evening meeting. Doubtless this was the only time they could have a quiet, uninterrupted conversation. A two-year-old and a four-year-old are well able to bring conversation down to a pre-school level (In that same letter Evy writes of how Paul was "just learning to talk and entertains us all with new words almost every day".) In Evy's account of that bedtime conversation, she says they spoke of how "One cannot very well tell others they ought to go, if one has not made every effort (to go) oneself".

They spoke of Colombia, a new WEC field. Evy felt no answering response to the need she had heard spoken of so often during that week of meetings. Then Wilf spoke of Siam. "Would you be willing to go to Siam?"

Almost to her surprise, Evy answered, "Yes!"

"But it's a pioneer field and maybe we couldn't take the children," Wilf mused.

Even with that colossal possibility of being parted from their children, Wilf and Evy were still willing to accept Siam. For the Overgaards this was a sacrifice that touched the most sensitive area of their hearts. That God did not require this sacrifice until Paul and Sharon were much older does not subtract from that painful surrender the couple made there at Round Lake.

"It was not dramatic", Evy wrote of that long ago conversation, "but it has a settledness and peace that indicate His presence and guidance."

The next day the couple shared their news with Ellen's father Edwin Gillman, and with Alfred Ruscoe, who was the leader of the Mission in North America.

(It was the practice, in those early days of the Mission, to refer to, and to call every staff member in the way that Africans in the Congo would have pronounced their names, even if the staff member had never been to Africa! Alfred Ruscoe was called "Rusiko", the name he had grown used to in his years in Congo with C.T. Studd. But for Mr Gillman to accustom himself to being called "Gillie" might have presented some adjustment. It is certain that Mrs. Gillman wasn't best pleased about being called "Ma Gillie" as the Africans would have done. We can be thankful that this practice of using "Congo-ized" names died out, within the Mission, about the time the Overgaards became a part of the North American home staff. If it stretches the mind to try to arrive at what the Africans would have done with

"Overgaard" it is even more mind boggling to consider Evy's reaction to being called "Ma" by all and sundry!

When the two Mission leaders were told of the Overgaards' call to Siam, Mr Gillmans only question concerned Evy's health. At that very time, Evy was planning a trip to visit a doctor in Michigan, leaving the two small children in the headquarters with Wilf and some willing staff members to care for them. The hope was that this Michigan doctor would be able to find out why Evy was always weak and exhausted. (Evidently no one considered that the birthing and raising of two small children in a headquarters situation, plus the upheavals of moving house over and over and the keeping up with a whirlwind like Wilf, could be exhausting!) Indeed, Evy battled with poor health all her years in Thailand. Perhaps one of the first points to be marveled at, concerning this initial team to enter Siam, is the fact that doctors passed Evy for the foreign field.

Wilf relates that when they faced Alfred Ruscoe with the news of their call to serve in Siam, he just looked at them for a moment. Mr. Ruscoe had the profile of a hawk and his eyes were deep-set and hooded. It was impossible to read his reactions until he became animated. If he just silently looked at you, you could imagine approval but you were more apt to feel that the hawk was about to pounce and devour.

Ruscoe regarded Wilf and Evy for what seemed an eternity. Was that gleam in his eyes approval or anger? Then, without a word, he turned on his heels and walked away!

Wilf and Evy were left to wonder: what would come next? Were they bound to be permanently on the home staff? Or were they free to follow what they now felt was the Lord's leading to Siam?

They had accepted WEC as being the Lord's choice for them, so the WEC leadership was a part of His perfect will for the Overgaards. They would accept Ruscoe's decision as the Lord's will. But they really didn't have any idea what that decision would be.

The next morning, Mr Ruscoe sought them out and explained that the Lord had told him, in the night, that there was a spiritual law: "Before you can get, you must be willing to give." The home end of the Mission was in need of recruits to staff a new headquarters in Philadelphia and the many regional centers across the country. Wilf and Evy were needed where they were, and it was hard for Mr Ruscoe to give them up. But in a struggle before the Lord, he had learned a principle of faith.

Freeing Wilf and Evy to head for Siam, Ruscoe added to their assurance that this was the Lord's will and way for them.

\* \* \*

Not long after the Overgaards heard the Lord's call to Siam, Fern Berg began to realize that the Lord was leading her to step out and become a part of the Siam team. Fern, of Scandinavian background from rural Minnesota, had had university training in home economics and further schooling from Philadelphia School of the Bible. WEC's emphasis on deeper life, and the climate within the mission of obvious desire for His fullness and His pleasure had strongly drawn and claimed her. As the conversations and prayer emphasis in the headquarters centered more and more on the advance to Siam, Fern awakened to the prompting of the Lord. She, too, was to be a part of that advance and Siam was to become a part of her life.

Fern tells us that the fusing of her life with Siam began with the practical job of acquiring an "outfit" to last approximately five years. The outfit of early missionaries was clothing, medical supplies and household goods. It was everything a person could imagine that they would need for healthy, wholesome living in a land far from their usual sources of supply. The members of the Siam team were each looking at five or six years till furlough time would bring them home to drug stores, shoe stores, and department stores.

Fern says she, with helpful friends was busy sewing dresses and pajamas of light weight cotton. Fern, eminently practical, would make sure that every article to be packed would be cool and comfortable, easy to care for and absolutely necessary. How then did she acquire seventeen purple, woolen snoods?!!



Well into her second term, Fern would laughingly examine these items so carefully packed in a storage drum. For a younger generation the explanation should be given: The snood was a loosely woven net worn to confine long hair. During the second world war, women working in factories were required to wear snoods to keep their hair from getting tangled in the machinery. Purple woolen snoods were hardly a necessary part of a practical outfit for Siam. In fact no use was ever found for them!

\* \* \*

Farewell and dedication prayer meetings were held in home churches and regional WEC meetings all across the country. Wilf particularly remembers a conference in Oregon just a week before they were to sail. The entire Siam team was there. When a new chorus was taught, each of the team members felt its message was to strengthen their own personal commitment. Each of them found encouragement, a personal touch from the Lord. The chorus was, "I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back, no turning back."

For Ellen, the memorable farewell was in Southern California at the El Monte HQ just days before their sailing. Perhaps this was the important farewell and dedication service for her, because her own parents were there and taking part. Ellen recounts that Lon Fulton, from the Japan field, and Doc Morris, from the India field, were there to lay hands on the Siam team and commit them to the Lord and the great work that was before them.

It needs to be remembered that these were very real, flesh and blood young people. They had fears and doubts that had to be reined into submission to the will of the Lord. They couldn't put on display their worries and misgivings. They had to step out, putting on display a faith that expects God to be underneath that step. While knowing their future was far beyond their own capabilities to handle, they reminded themselves that their "sufficiency was of Him".

None of them had reached their thirties and Ellen, the youngest, was not yet twenty five.

The atmosphere of farewell meetings places the missionary recruit in a false place of exaltation. They are suddenly elevated to assumed greatness. Even family and friends seemed to take a step back and viewed the Siam four as if they already belonged in the pages of history. It's a good thing there were four of them. They each knew the truth about themselves and each other. Their commission to serve, was just that, a commission to serve and not a commission to assume greatness. They were still the people they had always been. And hidden from onlookers, inside that person each of them was, the struggle went on. Balancing against the determination to go was the pull to stay. Tugging at their will to obey, was the desire to turn back. It would have been easier to leap off of their borrowed pedestals than to take the step of obedience that would propel them up a gang plank and off onto the Pacific Ocean!

## Four Set Sail For Siam

### Chapter 2

September 5, 1947 the Overgaard family with Ellen Gillman and Fern Berg set sail for Siam from San Francisco.

A very large gift had come into the mission earmarked for the opening of a work in Siam. Ellen says, "It was the answer to the prayers of four financially poor young people who were firmly set in their determination to enter Siam for the Gospel for WEC."

This gift set the timing of their advance to the other side of the Earth. It encouraged them to a level of faith that proclaims support and victory. It lifted their hearts in excitement and wonder.

BUT..... One time gifts, that help folk get to their fields of service, have a down-side. For those on the receiving end, such gifts can not be taken as an indication of further regular support. This gift could speed them on their way. But it did not promise, nor did it provide the support they would need in an alien land.

The WEC policy, at that time, was to free any accepted candidate to leave for their field of service, as soon as their passage money was in hand, even if they did not have a penny of promised support! Experience would reveal that, without regular support, a special one-time gift could leave a new missionary stranded far from home.

We do not know how much support had been promised to the family of four or to Fern. But Ellen tells us that she left for the field, that first time, with no promised support.

Their continuing story proves that their support was pitifully inadequate by today's standards.

The world would call them foolish to set out on that journey with such insufficient means. But they were not trusting in the promises of friends but in the Lord, who had called them into His service. They took C.T.'s words, "His commands are His enabling," to mean that not only strength, endurance, adaptability and the ability to learn the Siamese language would be theirs, but with all of that would also come every bit of money they would need to live on, on the level the Lord would choose for them!

\* \* \*

There were two other WECcers who hoped to sail on the same ship. Lucy Lapon and Judith Walgren had been suddenly granted visas for India. Their funds were tied up on the East Coast in the WEC treasury and they had no bookings or tickets. A call to the ticket agent advised them to travel to San Francisco, on the chance that they might be able to take advantage of cancellations. (Obviously they were already on the West Coast, probably in the Seattle or the El Monte Headquarters.) The two went to the pier without bookings or money for tickets!

When it was found that there were vacant places for Lucy and Judith on the ship, the Siam team, without a second thought, agreed to lend them the money needed for their fares.

Though it was known that there was money in the girls' account in the East and that money would certainly be transferred to the Siam account, the generosity of the Siam four was quite staggering. They had purchased tickets only as far as Hongkong, where they would need to find transport on to Bangkok.

They really did not know how long their stay in Hongkong would last. How often did smaller steamships, that could make their way up the river to Bangkok, leave the Hongkong harbor? What would passage on such a ship cost? What would it cost to stay in Hongkong for an indefinite period? Then, of course, there were landing fees and expenses in Bangkok. How much would these things cost?

Eventually a remittance check would arrive in Bangkok and could be deposited there. How long would the bank require to leave the money in their new accounts before they could withdraw what they would need for living expenses?

This was not the electronic age!

\* \* \*

The *General Meigs*, the ship that took the WEC party to Hongkong, was one of the President Liners that had been used throughout the war as a troop transport ship. Now it was in the midst of being converted back into civilian use. Its conversion was far from finished and still mostly resembled a

transport vehicle for moving fighting men.

Before they sailed, the WEC team had the chance to look over the huge, uncomfortable barracks that would house them for their trip.

Ellen and Fern would be sleeping in a room with bunk beds stacking three high. There would be approximately thirty women and children who would share that room with them. Evy with the two Overgaard children would be in similar quarters.

Though there were no chairs or accommodations for visiting in the barracks, they appeared luxurious when compared with the sleeping quarters assigned to Wilf! Down in the hold, or bowels of the ship, an uncounted number of men were to be crowded into bunks. If sitting up in ones bunk in the women's quarters left a hank of hair in the springs of the bunk overhead, sitting up in ones bunk in the men's quarters was an impossibility. And forget about springs! Wilf would learn how to roll in and out of his bunk, Navy fashion, on that trip.

Standing on the deck, the pier beneath them and the uninviting accommodations of the ship, behind them, they said good bye to the loved and the familiar.

Fern tells us that farewell streamers from the ship to shore gave the appearance that the team was leaving on a vacation cruise. "My last minute gift was a watermelon," she adds. "I'm glad the steward was wise enough to stow it away until we had settled stomachs."

Ellen recounts that leaving loved ones was "incredibly" difficult. She remembers standing on the deck waving and smiling and calling out to her parents. Finally all the good-byes had been said. Prayers committing her and her fellow travelers to the Lord had all been offered. Every bit of advice and every word of encouragement and every promise of prayer and love had been reiterated. What more could be said? But the ship was not about to sail and her parents were not about to leave!

Ellen says she gave a last wave and then just turned her back and went inside. She explains that her mother was sixty-five years old and so Ellen had little hope of ever seeing her again in this world! Sixty-five seemed so old and decrepit to the young Ellen! There was a real sense of burying her loved ones as she turned away.

That same surrender and emotional burial of loved ones had surely taken place for each one of them as they parted from family. For some, that experience would have taken place as they drove away from their parents' home, or waved from the back of a bus pulling out from the home town station.

Aching with the grief of parting, they found the Lord was still with them to breathe His encouragement into their hearts. Wilf says, "The words of the song, 'I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back, no turning back' were ringing in their hearts as they passed under the Golden Gate Bridge and out into rough seas and darkness." (And we thought Evy and Danny were the poets of the family!)

\* \* \*

The voyage on the *General Meigs* was something that none of them would ever forget. The large group, in each of the sleeping quarters, was so varied and their sleeping habits so different, there seemed never to be a time when some lights were not on full glare, some child crying and some group talking.

Evy became violently seasick as soon as land was left behind. Though both of the children were assigned to be in the cabin with her, Wilf took Paul down into his quarters, hoping that this would relieve Evy a bit and give her a chance for some sleep.

The ship was so overcrowded that there were not enough chairs for everyone to sit down at the same time.

Ellen says "comfort was the victim" of this overcrowding, and ventures the guess that the ship was so crowded because it was one of the first big ships to offer space to civilians wanting to go to the Orient after the war. There were some army dependents going out to join their men. There were civilian workers, students and several hundred missionaries in the crowded ship's quarters.

Marta Person was on that ship, going out to China to act as teacher to missionaries' children (with a Swedish mission). Because Wilf was particularly helpful to this group upon landing in Hongkong,

Marta did not forget him. And the Siam team had memories of the particularly pretty young woman who kept the Swedish children occupied. That they would one day be co-workers and comrades in Thailand never entered the thoughts of any of them.

Of course, there were two other WEC missionaries on that ship. Lucy Lapon and Judith Walgren, bound for India, were a part of the WEC fellowship that that encouraged each other on that trip to Hongkong. They all needed encouragement. There is romance and adventure in moving out in obedience and fellowship with the Lord. But as the days passed and home territory was left further and further behind the path of the ship, the group understood in deeper reality what this leap from the safety and familiarity of their old life meant.

There was a deck at the very top of the ship that few passengers visited. In the evenings the group found a measure of privacy here, to pray and sing together. "I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back, no turning back", their rather passionate theme song for the entire journey.

"The struggle of such a time of seasickness, homesickness and loss, is a struggle to bring feelings up to the level of one's firm commitment," says Ellen.

Certainly not one of them would have turned back had they been given the opportunity just then. They just wished that they didn't so avidly long to turn back. Their wills were firmly planted. Their desires were another matter!

Wilf reminds us that several years would pass before any of them had sufficient funds to purchase a return ticket!

\* \* \*

If the journey was such a traumatic venture for the adults, what must it have been for the two Overgaard children? Paul had his third birthday in the middle of the Pacific Ocean and Sharon was just five years old.

Ellen remembers how a birthday cake with three candles was brought into the dining room and set before a startled Paul. It was a stormy evening and Paul's chair had not been anchored to the floor. When the ship gave a lurch, the child was not heavy enough to hold his chair down. So his birthday party ended with an overturned chair that rudely deposited him onto the floor.

The trip must have come as a series of shocks to the two Overgaard children. Everything that had been stable and secure in their lives up till then, was now changed! Even the floor beneath their feet became unstable. Their parents were not even together on that crowded ship. Their mother, who had always nursed them in illness, was now violently ill herself.

\* \* \*

As the ship neared Hongkong the passengers were warned *ad nauseum* about about the danger of pick-pockets in that infamous city. So as the ship drew into dock, Wilf collected all of the cash from the team and divided it between to squirrel away between the innersoles of their shoes, in their socks or bras or wherever else they felt was most secure.

Wilf no sooner stepped ashore than someone stole the fountain pen out of his pocket!

Going ashore in Hongkong the team had no idea where they would stay. But Wilf, the recognized leader, scurried about and found not only accommodation for his own brood, but was able to aid the Swedish mission, leaving for mainland China and to organize flights on to India for Lucy and Judith.

(When Wilf was asked if he was appointed leader of the team by the home staff before they left home, or if the other three elected him to be leader, he says neither of those things took place. In fact he can't remember being officially accepted into the mission at all! And he wasn't so much leading that group as he was serving them.)

\* \* \*

For the WEC team, Wilf found perfect accommodations. Ellen speaks of the "Soldiers and Sailors Christian Association" on Henessy Road, as being "a sanctuary".

After weeks of sharing a cabin with more than a score of roommates, the joy of having a room to herself cannot be exaggerated. Though Ellen speaks in glowing terms of her accommodation at the

"Soldiers and Sailors Christian Association", it becomes quite apparent that this was no luxury hotel, as she describes the room for us. "There was a narrow single bed, one straight chair beside the bed and a hook on the wall, where one could hang a garment or two. Heavy bars on the window gave a sense of security and safety." Just fancy! This seemed like heaven after the *General Miegs*!

It's interesting to note Fern's remark about the "Soldiers and Sailors Association". "We felt like we were in prison behind iron bars."

Quite quickly, Wilf located a shipping firm that had small coastal steamers bound for Siam and the port of Bangkok. The next ship leaving Hongkong was the *Sen Kieng*. The shipping company was the Butterfield and Swire line. (Ellen always refers to the ship, not by its own name but by a slight perversion of the company's name, "The Butterfield and Swine".) This steamer was much smaller than the *General Miegs*. Because the river South of Bangkok was not dredged clear in those days, and the mouth of the river was so silted up, only small coastal tramp steamers could advance through the straights up the river to the Capitol.

"It was a horrid little boat!" Ellen flatly states.

But the price was right. And the timing was right. The team would be on their way before their funds ran out and they were left stranded on the edge of China. The team would land in Bangkok with enough money, still in hand, that they would not have to be embarrassed by need. Hopefully they would have enough to live on till the girls enroute to India could return the money lent to them.

The cabins were nice enough, on the *Sen Kieng*. Fern and Ellen shared a cabin and the Overgaards either had a larger cabin or were allotted two cabins (no one seems to remember for sure). But this was far from a luxury ship.

Ellen and Fern's stateroom looked out on a strange scene. Guards, with guns at the ready, patrolled back and forth on the deck just beneath their porthole. Beyond the soldiers was a hive of activity. Cordoned off from the rest of the passengers was a community of Chinese emigrants on their way to Bangkok. The area was a city of makeshift tents and wash lines, of woks sizzling on charcoal, cooking pots and teakettles steaming day and night. Raucous laughter and guttural calls cheered children at play beneath the lines of flapping wash. Racking coughs erupted from the circles of men at cards or dice games. Separated from the rest of the ship by a heavy mesh net and armed guards, this city seemed the very hub of the ship, teeming with life, sound and color.

This was, in fact, an area of danger. At that time of upheaval in China, emigrants had pirated ships in the South China Sea. These folk, who appeared to be innocent families and communities going about lives of washing, cooking, eating, playing and talking interminably, were potential pirates!

Ellen and Fern were constantly at their porthole watching what sounded to be dangerous arguments that broke out around board games or teakettles. From the sound of the voices, they expected at any moment to see the antagonists spring up and battle to the death. Instead, there was usually an outburst of laughter. Ellen says, "If there was not a continual roar of laughter from those who sounded terminally angry, we would have expected a massacre was about to be committed at any moment."

\* \* \*

Memories of that trip are a blur for all four of the Siam team. Ellen says she has no recollection of the officers at all and feels that perhaps they did not eat with the passengers. The only memory she carries is of the Captain who argued with Wilf at every opportunity about the foolishness of being missionaries. No answer would satisfy this man who did not know the Lord.

There is one story from that trip South from Hongkong down around the French Indochina and into the Gulf of Siam, that each of the travelers tells. The story has to do with the toilet facilities of the *Sen Kieng*. Within an hour or so of sailing, the travelers began to individually look for toilet facilities. Gathering together, they shared their quandary. Not one of them had located toilets and washrooms!

Wilf was then expected to approach the ship's doctor, a Chinese gentleman, to ask him where the bathrooms were located. Obviously there was a problem in communications, for Wilf had to bring back the startling answer that there were none!

Well!...the voyage stretched ahead of them for several days, days without any toilet facilities!

Ellen recounts that beside beds in each stateroom was a small cabinet and in the bottom of this piece of furniture was a commode (potty). This they accepted as the only provision for their need. Each evening after dark, they would each privately, surreptitiously approach the ship's rail to empty overboard their pots.

I wonder what the ship's crew and officers made of those sneaky young missionaries and their nocturnal trips.

After two, perhaps three days at sea, the entire WEC party was on its way from a meal in the dining room, out to the deck. Passing through a small vestibule, three-year-old Paul leaned his small self against a door that flew open depositing him onto the floor within. The poor child was completely forgotten as the WECers gaped at the scene revealed. There was a huge white tub, a sink and a gleaming toilet! That the door was marked with the letters "W.C." meant nothing to this team of young Americans. But those letters would, ever after, have a clear and welcome meaning for them: "Water Closet".

The trip to Hongkong to Bangkok took about five days. Fern was seasick the entire time. Ellen feels that Fern took one look at the greasy food dished up for them and lost her appetite, equilibrium and strength right then. Since Fern had majored in home economics in college and was well able to cook food to perfection and present it, a visual delight, it is not impossible that the greasy, gray unappetizing offerings did cause part of their physical discomfort.

There was a certain numbness about that last lap of their journey. The past was now so far behind them and the future was all unknown. Though none of them harbored any real affection for the ship that carried them along, they were in a cocoon. They had no responsibilities or duties. They didn't need to make any decisions. The cocoon experience was a safe and sheltered season suspended from the tensions and stresses of real life. In that last week of September, 1947, the cocoon was about to split open and spill the travelers out into the real world.

## Welcome to the Kingdom of Siam

### Chapter 3

On October 2, 1947, the coastal steamer, *Sen Kieng* out of Hongkong slowly made its way up the Chao Phaya river towards the capitol of Siam. The four adult passengers were mesmerized by the exotic river traffic against the background of steamy, flat, gray-green land with its twisted and tangled roots of mangrove bushes.

There was so much noisy, smelly, colorful boat life surrounding their ship, it seemed impossible that some small craft would not be swamped by the steamer's tide or cut in two by its prow.

There were boats loaded with fruits and vegetables. Others were piled high with bales of bright cloth. There were boats with shiny cooking pots for sale and other boats with pots in use, steaming rice and fragrant curries for sale. This bobbing, weaving mass of river life seemed always on the point of tragedy.

The morning sun had climbed high overhead as the *Sen Kieng* made its way up the river. Now at last reaching the area of the city of Bangkok the afternoon shadows were growing longer and longer.

Sampan and rice barges, ferries and freighters now were so crowded the steamer could hardly make headway at all. Temple spires and palm fronds were the design of the Bangkok skyline in that decade of the forties. And from the deck of that tramp steamer the WEC four looked down on a city with not even one skyscraper.

As the ship began to pull into dock, the passengers noticed a couple awaiting their arrival. One was a Westerner, a portly man dressed in white drill trousers and gleaming white shirt. He held over his head a red paper umbrella. This was the first time the WEC party had seen a paper sun-shade in use. They were to find that brilliantly painted sun-shades were commonly used. And they were used as often by men as by women and girls.

The gentleman under the red sun-shade was Peter Voth, with whom Wilf had been corresponding for many months. Peter and Clara Voth were C&MA missionaries who had worked for twenty years in North East Siam. Now they were on loan to the American Bible Society and living in Bangkok. To all the help and advice they had given through correspondence, the Voths would now add the kindness of hospitality of their home. They would take the little band of WECers under their wings and introduce them to culture, climate, and language and give them all the help and advice they would to those of their own family or mission.

\* \* \*

Ellen recounts a skirmish of sorts, that took place just as the gangplank was in place and permission to go ashore was about to be given. She and Wilf had been joking about who would be the first ashore and had been jockeying for the position nearest the head of the gangplank. Just at the crucial moment, Paul fell over a coil of rope and landed, crying, on the deck. Wilf, turning to help him up and comfort his small son, lost the place of advantage and Ellen nipped in ahead of him. She scurried down the swaying gangplank and so was the first WECer to set foot on Thai soil!

Over the years, memory of that first arrival is blurred, but all four mention the unfailing kindness of Mr. Voth and his Siamese companion in the meeting the ship and handling the immigration formalities. Fern adds that Peter then drove them through the dock area and out into the city in his own little car. Here the sights and smells and choking dust of a city ravaged by war met them. It was dark long before the car reached the Bible Society compound. To Fern's amazement, Peter drove through the dark streets with just his parking lights on. Doubtless this was in accord with some wartime law that had not yet been repealed.

\* \* \*

No WEC worker now in Thailand would recognize the city that met the eyes of those who disembarked from the *Sen Kieng* in 1947. The central boulevard was the Chao Phaya River joining Thonburi on the West bank with Krungthep, the beautiful "City of Archangels" on the right bank. Both cities were crisscrossed by canals. Paved roadways were few. And those were curiously empty of traffic. Cars,



*New Road 1950*

buses, taxis, even trucks were few and far between. Those in use before the war broke out had been carefully tended during the war years when no new vehicles could be imported. But shortage of spare parts, rust and no available gasoline for civilian use had sent a good many to a rusty grave. In a few months the imports would begin to trickle in, but this was still the day of water travel in the capitol, and engines for boats were more in demand than spare parts for cars.

\* \* \*

Siam was a kingdom but there was no king on the throne. Just a year before the young king, King Rama VIII of

Siam, had been killed in his bed-chamber in the Royal Palace.

When the WEC four arrived, the city was still alive with dark rumors about that tragedy. Some would always claim that the young King Ananda's death was accidental suicide. Others would call his death "murder" and their suspicions would range from the lowliest palace servants to the very highest officials of the land.

For the royal family, this was a time of crippling grief. Prince Bhoomipol, the eighteen-year-old brother of the murdered king, would not be seen to smile in public for the next ten years! Royal and educated Siamese feared that the entire royal family might be assassinated. The hope of that hour was that the British troops, then in Siam to disarm the Japanese army, would protect the royalty.

King Ananda Mahidol's brother, Prince Bhoomipol, would in 1950 become King Rama IX but in those intervening years, Siam would be governed by a ruthless trio.

Field marshal Pibul, educated at Fontainebleau Artillery School, in France, was Prime Minister. He so admired Hitler and later the Japanese military that he took Siam into the war on the side of the Axis. Pibul had fallen in 1944 when a civilian, Nai Pridi, who had led a freedom movement during the war, became Prime Minister. Most Siamese, who had hated and feared the Japanese, were thankful to have Nai Pridi in office and the Field Marshal out. But Pibul, backed by military leaders, mounted a *coup de'tat* in November of 1947. This was just one month after the WEC party arrived in Siam.

The military instigators of the *coup* promised to solve the "King's death case". Nai Pridi fled abroad and almost immediately two royal pages and a court official were arrested for King Ananda's assassination. But trials and appeals would last nine long years till 1955, when all three were executed.

Field Marshal Pibul, once again in office as Prime Minister, would be known as "the Butcher of Bangkok". But in the decade following the war, it was Police General Phao who was the most feared figure in the land. Under Phao, the police terrorized, imprisoned, tortured and assassinated those who spoke out against them.

The WEC four had not come to have anything to do with politics or palace life, but the palace and politics affected the street life of Bangkok. And the Bangkok of 1947 cannot be understood without knowing the political climate of that day. The sound of laughter and the picture of bright smiles might meet the missionaries at every turn, but the truth is that the city through which the four were escorted was a city in grief and shock. Suspicion and anxiety lay close beneath that cover of smiles and a *coup* was about to erupt and overthrow the government.

\* \* \*

It was not long before the group arrived at the two story teak structure that housed the Bible Society



and above those offices, the living quarters of the Voth household.

Mrs. Clara Voth greeted them at the foot of the shaded front porch and her first remarks would be remembered by the WECcers forever! "What would you want first, a cool drink or a nice shower?"

Ellen explains that none of them had ever received such an offer or been faced with such a decision when first arriving, as guests, at a journey's end. But over the years, Ellen was to extend that same offer to countless house guests as they arrived travel-stained and weary.

Incidentally, we are not told what the travelers requested, a cool drink or a shower. We are left to wonder!

\* \* \*

For the next month the four WECcers would live upstairs where wide verandas had been divided into a warren of small cubicles. The partitions were formed of screening and cotton curtains. The drawback to such cubicles is that every word and whisper was heard in the neighboring rooms. The advantage of such flimsy walls was that there was a free flow of every breath of air and even the tiniest bit of breeze.

This was a pattern that Wilf would copy over and over. For many years, every time a new WEC station was opened and a house rented, the field leader would work with available nationals to put in screening and screened partitions, and bathrooms. Added to the comfort and convenience this provided there was, for the single women, another valuable advantage; it was graphically seen that young women were under the care and supervision of this very capable man.

The Voths' home, above the Bible Society offices, provided guest rooms (screened cubicles) for members of their own Mission up-country, who would need a place to stay while in Bangkok. Along with their own C&MA folk they would now adopt WEC missionaries coming and going. A deep level of fellowship and lasting friendship was formed in those first weeks of October, 1947.

The old Bible Society building at 150 Sathorn Rd. looked right out on a busy canal. Sathorn was just a narrow motorway beside this wide water highway. Hundreds of houseboats lined the banks, while others, serving as shops and cafes bobbed their way between the stationary boats. Evy, writing of this scene says, "Most of the houseboats have arched woven grass mats as roofing and these are not high enough for anyone to stand upright in them. It is to be supposed that these boats are to be used only for sleeping and storage."



*Sathorn Road 1947*

In the cool of the evening it became the pattern for the new arrivals to cross over the canal by a wooden footbridge. On the side that would some day become South Sathorn, there was a shaded footpath. Here the inhabitants of the houseboats had built platforms. Shaded by the trees, they cooked on charcoal fire pots and ate their meals. Their washing was draped to dry over their boats, and over low

limbs of trees and shrubs. That washing had been done in the canal. In that same canal, garbage was thrown. And there, too, babies were washed, and dishes and cooking pots were scoured. In the evening that canal became the communal bathing place.

Fern saw the filthy, dirty water. She couldn't escape from the smell of sewage and frying garlic. And

she realized that much illness could surely be traced back to this unhealthy spot. But at the same time she reveled in the beauty of the people, their friendly smiles and music of their language. Long before she could speak their language, Fern's friendly teasing had little children responding to her. And she somehow communicated her friendliness and appreciation of their children to proud Siamese parents.

The Canal side path introduced Wilf and Evy to many of the culture shocks of Siam. One they knew they would have to face someday. But they weren't expecting it to burst upon them so suddenly or so soon. Siamese children, much older than Sharon and Paul were diving and swimming and running all around stark naked. They surrounded the two white children with their golden hair and sky blue eyes. Chattering away in what was certainly Siamese, they questioned, stroked and patted the small Overgaards. The warm brown bodies of the young Siamese, glistened with water from their swimming, were doubtless beautiful and the lesson in anatomy they provided for the young Overgaards was certainly innocent. It was just the suddenness of the lessons that caught the parents off guard and presented the two young Overgaards with answers to questions they were not yet asking!

\* \* \*

Fern explains that the Presbyterian language school was filled to capacity so Mr. Voth engaged the services of Kru Wan Hock to teach the WECcers. "Kru Wan was the first Thai woman to receive a nursing degree from the United States," Wilf informs us. He goes on to add, "She was a delightful person." Fern says of Kru Wan, "She was a dear Christian lady." After these two testimonials of praise, it's interesting to listen to Ellen, who says of this same woman whose given name translates as "Sweet", "She wasn't sweet to me!"

Kru Wan was staying near by the Bible Society house as she was teaching a Finnish couple, the Rassinas, who had come to Bangkok just nine months before the WEC team.

Though Kru Wan had this experience in teaching the Rassinas, she really had neither the training nor understanding of what was needed in teaching the Siamese language to foreigners. Ellen says that the books they used were little school books with anywhere from twenty to fifty words on a page. Kru Wan expected her pupils to recognize, pronounce and understand each page after just one day of repeating the page after her! She doubtless felt that the foreigners should be able to learn just as the Siamese-speaking children did.

Evy wrote of those first days of introduction to the primer, "The vowels are the weirdest collection. We sound as if we have indigestion as we repeat them."

Wilf explains that the primer they used taught them alphabet, and presented every different combination of vowel and tone for each consonant. It was not designed for foreign students.

He said, "What the course lacked was conversational material. Fortunately, an excellent two volume conversational course, developed for the US Air Force, had been brought from the States. We soon discovered that it was an amazingly accurate and scientific representation of the Thai sounds and usage."

Wilf continues explaining that the course "did not make much sense to Kru Wan." Peter Voth also dismissed the course with the condemnation that, "You cannot learn Thai properly by using a phonetic system."

Perhaps it was fortunate that Kru Wan was obliged to return to her home in the South, after teaching the WECcers for just three months. The new teacher to take her place had worked with foreigners before and was comfortable using the "Spoken Thai" textbook. Gradually the group began to acquire freedom in expressing themselves in this strange, musical language.

\* \* \*

Peter Voth helped Wilf to look for a place for the WEC to rent. Bangkok was very much smaller than it is today, and rentals were hard to find. Finally, a new little bungalow was discovered. The house was so new it was not quite finished and the WECcers would have to wait a week or more to move in. In all, the WEC team would live with the Voths above the Bible Society offices, a full month.

The rental was located in what is now the very heart of Bangkok, with traffic jams, shopping malls,

embassies, government buildings, and warrens of crowded streets with upwards of a million inhabitants. In 1947, all of the area south of Sathorn was open fields. Dirt tracks connected little farming communities. It was in one of these little communities that the new bungalow for rent was found.

Evy, writing to a friend before they were to move into their bungalow, says, "The house was painted a cool green and that is in keeping with the name of the street and the community. The street is called, 'The Street of Cool Air' and the community is called 'The Field of Clouds.'"

It sounds so cool and comfortable. But the newcomers to the tropics would soon find that a tiny bungalow did not have the cool air currents of the older, high-ceilinged house on Sathorn.

The home was tiny! And though the pattern of rooms was strange to Americans, it was a pattern they were to grow used to. Some now on the field still have homes built on the same pattern. The main structure was divided into three rooms. One room would house the Overgaard family, one room would serve as bedroom for Ellen and Fern and the third room would be the dining/sitting room for all of them. Behind this main structure was another unit, under a separate roof. This was the kitchen and laundry area.

There is no doubt that the house could be, and was, adapted to fit the needs of the WEC group. But there was a problem. That converted troopship that brought them the first lap of their journey had been so crowded, each passenger was allowed only suitcases. Their heavy baggage, with household items and books had to be shipped by freighter and had not arrived by the time they were to move into their new home. They had no furniture, no pots and pans, and not even one dish!

In the month that the team had lived over the Bible Society offices, the Lord had not only caused them to win the love and favor of the Voths but of others working in Bangkok. Evy wrote of how a Mr. Fuller of the Presbyterian mission had asked Wilf to speak at a large Chinese church that he was responsible for starting. Wilf, of course spoke in English and Mr. Fuller translated for him into Chinese. Wilf had spoken on "David and Goliath" and Mr. Fuller had been so moved by that message that he had concluded the meeting with a sort of dedication service. In prayer, Mr. Fuller commissioned Wilf, "May he take the stone from the sling of faith and overthrow the giant Buddhism in many lives." When this prayer was translated into English for the Overgaards and the two women, they were thrilled and felt it was a prophetic encouragement.

Now upon moving into their bare home, the team were to be once again encouraged by both Mr. And Mrs. Fuller. Seeing the need, the Fullers offered the loan of hospital beds being stored against the day when the Presbyterian mission would build a hospital in Bangkok (the Bangkok Christian Hospital on Silom). Because Mr. Fuller was the acting field leader of the Presbyterian mission and Mrs. Fuller was the secretary, they had the authority to make this loan! With the beds came mosquito nets, pots and pans and cutlery, dishes and even linens.

Clara Voth helped the team to shop for furniture. And she could not help but be a bit alarmed as she saw them purchase only a dining room set, a table and six straight wooden chairs.

Ellen tells of how the Voths were "so pained to think of us relaxing and studying in those hard, straight chairs that they gave us a wicker sitting-room set." Those deep slanted chairs were so comfortable that they were used and repaired and repaired again till there was not much left but repairs. Finally they were used as a pattern when ordering chairs made in Tak many years later.

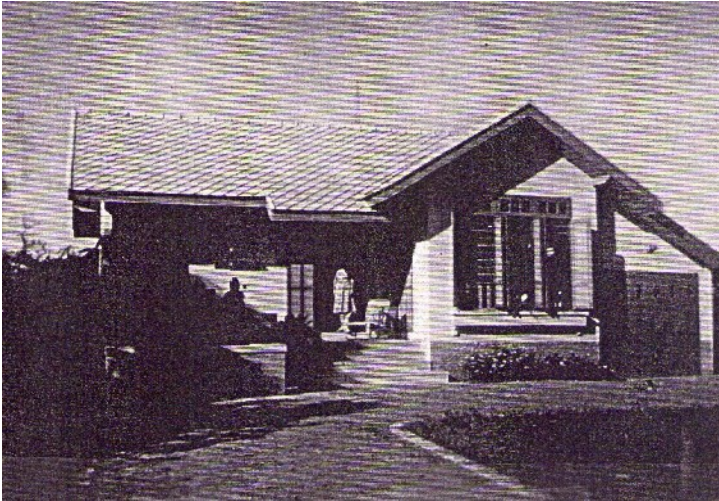
The Voths, the Fullers and others would be valued and loved friends and prayer partners for the team. And they shared in the great excitement that the four felt in moving into their own home.

This was November of 1947. Asia watchers had their eyes on a *coup* that overthrew the government in Siam. Nai Pridi was sent, fleeing for his life, to Europe. And Pibul, the "Butcher of Bangkok" was back in control in the Kingdom without a King. But the WEC four were moving on with their eyes on the King of Kings who had led them to this land.

## In The Field of Clouds

### Chapter 4

The WEC team settled into the pale green house in "The Field of Clouds". Stretching off all around the little community were rice fields. The heads of grain were just then full and ready for harvest. *Thung Mahamek* would shortly be the sight of harvesters bending to their task. And the young missionaries would have a constant picture of the cooperation and harmony teams of harvesters must have to get the job done before the harvest is lost.



*The Street of Cool Air in The Field of Clouds*

This was to be a time of quiet study. A time when the four adults could get ahead in learning to speak Siamese, or Thai, as the language was now being called. The name, Siam, had been changed to Thailand some time before, but even in Bangkok, English speaking Thai and foreigners were still calling the land Siam. Abroad, it would be years before the explanation, "...you know, the country that used to be called 'Siam'..." was no longer necessary (of course, neither Siam or Thailand are used in the Thai language).

This was supposed to be a time free from cares and responsibilities when the four adults could get down to language

study. At the end of this period of time they would be moving inland to some place not yet chosen. They would perhaps be two or three days journey away from the nearest English-speaking person who could help them in time of crises. So it was very important to use the gift of this special time for language study.

Evy would doubtless gasp to hear that this was a time free from cares and responsibilities. She was the *Mae Bahn*, the house keeper, the house mother. It was up to her to work with the servants that the Voths had so helpfully found for them. She was to plan meals and communicate those plans to the cook. Just imagine talking about the marketing and prices and cooking directions with a girl that knew no English, when you just conquered, "Where is the train station?" in her language. It is true that the girls had been trained by Mrs. Voth. But Evy had some ideas of her own about meals. She knew the tastes of her own household. For one thing the Overgaard children did not like spicy food!

Communication with the laundry girl would be a bit easier, for you could act out just what you wanted from her. And there wasn't much variation of what you wanted from a laundry girl in those days. There were no drip-dry articles or clothing, no permanent press. And Evy was only too thankful to leave the ironing to the "girl", for the knack of ironing with a heavy iron filled with sparkling charcoal was more of a mystery than the complicated language.

BUT....."The best laid plans"....

Evy had no sooner begun to work with the two servants, spend her time with the teacher each day and find a few moments to privately review those lessons covered by the teacher, when suddenly Paul came down with tonsillitis. Before his illness was over, his sister followed with a high fever.

When Ellen began to develop aches and pains, fever and nausea, it was assumed that surely she had contracted Sharon's illness. As Sharon got rid of her bug in just a few days, Ellen would certainly do the same.

Ellen did not!

As Ellen continued to run a high fever and was unable to eat, the WEC family felt there was no other course open to them, they would have to find a doctor.

Once again the Fullers came to the rescue of the new missionaries. They knew of a Danish doctor, Dr. Admonsén, who had a private office in the city. (It is hard, at this time, to imagine a Bangkok without the many hospitals with expert foreign doctors!) Dr. Admonsén was willing to pay a house call and he assured them that Ellen's ailment was dengue.

The doctor, introducing the newcomers to dengue, reassured them that this mosquito-carried disease was not fatal. It would run its course in about ten days. No treatment was available. Bed rest, plenty of fluids and aspirin to alleviate the symptoms was all the doctor could advise.

\* \* \*

How the team must have agonized over the tiny payment due the doctor for his unhelpful house call! Finances were tight. Mr. Voth had introduced Wilf to a very British type bank, The Hongkong and Shanghai Bank of Bangkok. In due time, a check would arrive from the North American home office. But at this point the team had spent just a month in transit and a month with the Voths and perhaps as much as three weeks in their "Field of Clouds" bungalow.

Ships passage and hotel bills in Hongkong and their passage on the Sen Kieng, plus ships passage and plane fares for Lucy and Judith, who went on to India had eaten away at their funds. The guest house prices at the Bible Society were minimal. The Voths and the Society had no thought of making a profit from the guest house, but it was expected to pay for itself in the prices charged. Furniture had been purchased. The first and last months' rent for their bungalow had been paid in advance. Soon servants wages, teachers wages and rent would come due.

Evy wrote to a friend telling, "A letter from India has come just at the right time. The girls who sailed on the same boat to Hongkong have arrived at their destination. They had with them, thirty dollars in American bills. Nowhere along their route of travel could they get those bills changed into the currency in use. So they sent them as a gift to us. This is just enough to see us 'over the hump'. Bills and wages and rent can be paid on time."

\* \* \*

With finances so tight, a doctor bill for being told to stay in bed and drink lots of water was a grief to the four. But, Ellen says, their minds were set at rest with the news that in just a few more days the illness would have run its course.

Fern was the designated nurse as she had had a short course of "missionary medicine". So, in charge of the sick room, that is the half of the room occupied by Ellen's bed, Fern dutifully took and registered her roommate's temperature. She saw to it that Ellen drank plenty of water. This was no easy matter as they had to boil all drinking water and the water used to rinse dishes and the water used for brushing their teeth. This water had to be kept at the boil for twenty minutes. The boiled water was strained through cloth into clay pots where it cooled to a tepid degree. Then it was poured into *koonto*'s, the distinctive Siamese vase-like clay pitcher that was widely used before refrigerators were introduced to the country. A *koonto* and cup were always by Ellen's bed. But the tepid water was so hard to get down. Ellen much preferred a steaming cup of tea!

Fern consulted her chart of Ellen's temperature for exactly ten days. The doctor had said ten days. Ten days were up! So.....get up!

Ellen was sure that this was the feelings of all of her co-workers! But she didn't feel any better nor did she feel any stronger! She had no appetite and a pile of boiled greens served up on a tin plate was almost the undoing of her.

\* \* \*

It was a day or so after the ten days allowed for Ellen's illness were up. It was just at dusk. The rest of the household were outside in the enclosed yard of their compound.

Were they discussing the problem of finding someone to cut the tall grass? Though this enclosed space had seemed such a wonderful place for the children to play, it now was apparent that snakes also found it a wonderful place visit!

It would take hours away from Wilf's study time to go to Sathorn with the request that Peter Voth

help him find a man to cut their grass. That request would take more than just a few minutes out of Mr. Voth's day too. And remember that the Voths were not of our Mission and they had full and busy schedules too. Our mission in Thailand will always owe a debt of gratitude to these folk who gave of themselves and their time with the attitude that they were there to serve us!

Wilf could do nothing to spare Mr. Voth. His help was absolutely necessary. But a way was found to cut down on the time it took Wilf to get to and from Sathorn. They had all come to realize that some sort of transport was necessary. So, out of their support pool, a used bicycle was purchased for Wilf's use. (Again, it is hard to imagine a Bangkok that wouldn't have taxis constantly passing the point where Wilf would come out of the fields into the roadway.)

Would they be deciding, out there, if Wilf should go to the Voths for help in finding a grass cutter? Ellen wondered. No! They were probably talking about what to do with the problem of the hypochondriac lolling there in comfort! She felt certain of this, as she tried to find a dry, cool spot to place her sweating head. Ellen ached in every joint and bone and her very bed had become a torment.

Ellen was so very hot. She felt that she must still be running a temperature. Surely the doctor was wrong about that ten day period being all there was to this disease!

Ellen could hear the murmur of voices outside. So she struggled out from under her mosquito net and aching with every movement, she searched for Fern's thermometer. It was soon discovered and she quickly thrust it under her hot, dry tongue. What discipline it took to leave the instrument there long enough to record her temperature!

104 degrees! She wasn't a hypochondriac! 104? Yes! 104! What a relief to know that she was just as ill as she felt she was! Ellen could hardly wait for the party outside to break up and she could share this "good news" with them!

"Poor Wilf" says Ellen, "he quickly headed off on his bike for Dr. Admonsen's house, which thankfully, wasn't too far away. Wilf intercepted the Dr. just as he was starting out for a dinner party and trotted him back to our house."

"Hold everything!" was Dr. Admonsen's command. He would have to do some stool tests. When the tests came back, the verdict was Para Typhoid! Ellen says she doesn't know if it was type "A" or type "B". But whatever it was, it was the worst type!

As Ellen had already lost a great deal of weight and was not able to eat at all, the doctor felt it was absolutely necessary to put her in Saint Louis Hospital on Sathorn Road.

This French-run Catholic hospital, Ellen says, "was a sanctuary". The doctors and nursing staff spoke French and the nursing aids spoke Thai. It could have been a terrifying time but kindness jumps language barriers.

Cool sponge baths and frequent changes of sheets and pillow cases brought a degree of comfort and communicated concern and charity. Her large room with its high ceiling gave the illusion of coolness. It was as cool as Bangkok could get in those days before air conditioning. There were not even many ceiling fans at that time for electricity was far too uncertain.

Listen to Ellen's own words. "I thought I had died and gone to heaven! The first meal they served me was canned fruit and crisp golden toast! I can't remember, if at that first meal the fruit was peaches or pears. Whichever it was, I took one bite and suddenly I had an appetite. And that wonderful big room all to myself -- well there were swinging doors at each end of the room -- so I had no privacy, anybody could come in at any time." This measure of solitude and quiet seemed to Ellen to spell Heaven! Just fancy a heaven where any one could wake you up at any time to jab you with a needle or give you a sleeping pill. Men and women could question you in a totally incomprehensible language at any time, and you couldn't make your needs or wishes known to anyone!

This experience was far too costly a lesson for Ellen. But for the next forty-five years, Ellen would be everyone's favorite nurse, even when we had a dozen qualified nurses on the field. They knew how to treat diseases but Ellen could think of tempting meals and ways to make an aching body more comfortable.

Ellen's stay in the hospital was probably about two weeks. She says, "It was a wonderful time, for there the Lord spoke to me about self-pity". Only the Lord could convict a soul about self-pity in such a way that the experience would be called wonderful! And Ellen never tried to undertake the Lord's part and convict her fellow workers of their self-pity.

As time drew near for Ellen to leave the hospital a further financial crisis was imminent. The full hospital bill had to be paid before a patient could be discharged. But still the money expected from the two girls in India had not yet arrived. A remittance check had come from the US home base with no mention of the money lent to Lucy and Judith. Without the return of that money the WEC team simply didn't have enough cash to pay Ellen's bill.

The hospital and doctor arrangements were all set in motion. The next morning, after a final check of her condition and her bill tallied up and paid, Ellen would be free to leave. The Fullers, in their kindness, had offered to send their car and driver to take Ellen and her WEC escort home to "The Field of Clouds".

With the mail of that very last afternoon, came the check from Lucy and Judith. In the confusion of their departure from San Francisco, now almost four months in the past, the two headed for India had failed to inform the home treasure department of their arrangements with the Thai field. So all of the money in their accounts had been sent on to them in India. Had the home end been informed, the money owed to the Thai field would have been sent to Bangkok and would have been in hand long before Ellen entered the hospital.

Certainly, on the human level there was confusion and some anxiety. Was this delay just allowed or was it designed by God to hone the faith of His servants?

\* \* \*

Home again from the hospital, Ellen was still quite weak. She tired easily and was quick to weep. What did she have to cry about??? Well, she was released from hospital on a Friday. Come Monday morning she was seated with Kru Wan and her study books! Enough to make the stoutest soul weep!

Ellen had lost at least a month of study. She felt that she would never catch up! The others sound so fluent. She couldn't begin to even understand what they said to the servants and neighbors. Ellen was, and is, a student. As a student she is competitive. It was humiliating for her to be so far behind the others!

\* \* \*

As the months of study progressed, Evy, another who had always been an outstanding student, felt that she had fallen behind the others. The time she had to spend with the servants involved with the running of the household had dragged her away from book time. Just being a mother had made demands on study time and at the start of the new year, 1984, she began home schooling Sharon. For the next decade of Evy's missionary life, she would be teacher as well as student, mother, wife and missionary.

Evy had a real battle on her hands. It began there in "The Field of Clouds" and it would continue for years. Her home would be a guest-house and often the guests would be unexpected. She would be housemother for language students and some of those students would resent being treated as students. Evy's battle to be in victory in her attitude toward this demanding life she would lead was an ever ongoing battle. Even to this day, in talking of that time, Evy battles to claim the high places of joy over circumstances!

Evy's experience of being pulled in so many directions as she sought to learn Thai would influence field policy for many years. Every arrangement would be made to protect study for mothers in their first year of language study. Some parents would resent this intrusion into their family affairs. But most, who would go on to learn the language and use it as full time missionaries, would be deeply grateful for every help that had been given them in their student days.

\* \* \*

When the team arrived in Bangkok, they had expected to remain there throughout their time as language students. And having no idea of how difficult the Thai language was, they thought one year of



study would doubtless send them up country able to verbally handle any situation. They soon began to realize that, even though they might live long in this land, language study would probably never be completed.

This realization did not make them want to stay longer in the capitol. For they were also coming to another realization. Conversation with the Voths about their time in the North East, and with the Fullers who had worked in the North, coupled with talk with servants and neighbors was showing them that the language of this land was far from standardized.

They began to understand that there were areas where Bangkok Thai would not be readily understood. Northern Thai, North Eastern Thai and Central Thai were all quite different. And within those broad areas there were pockets of unique language differences.

These differences, in language, have been standardized, to a great degree, by radio, television and the government policy of rotating government officials. Before the day of transistors, radios were few and far between. Television was nonexistent in Thailand, and even the highest officials spoke, exclusively, the language of their area. Obviously there were exceptions to this and well-traveled individuals could be found speaking the King's Thai in remote areas of the map. But fully ten years later, missionaries in Maesod, would be ordered to *Guang jong* by the *Nai Umper* (district civic leader) who met them strolling in the market. This sounded so ominous till they were told by another that this meant *Bud roam* (open your umbrella). That *Nai Umper*, the highest official in the area didn't speak Central Thai.

The team began to realize that a six month introduction to Thai in Bangkok was necessary. Then a move up-country to where ever they would be living and working to continue their studies there, was the best policy.

But where would they be living and working? No thought was given to remaining in Bangkok. Bangkok belonged to the Presbyterians (The Church of Christ in Thailand).

\* \* \*

Language study was not the only priority of that time in Bangkok. Wilf spent hours in consultation with the Fullers and others from the Presbyterian mission, reviewing the situation of provinces open to other mission agencies.

The Voths and others of the C&MA joined discussions, but officially they did not come into the decision process, for the C&MA worked exclusively in the North East at that time. Very early in talking and praying, the WEC team and the Presbyterian mission agreed that Central Thailand was the place for WEC.

Eventually, the choice was narrowed down to two areas. Each area covered three provinces. Nakhornsawan, Chainat and Angthong was one area under consideration. The other included Tak, Sukhothai and Kampaengphet.

Talk and prayer were not enough. Wilf needed to see the land for himself. He needed to "step it off". -- that is an in-house joke. Those who worked with him will immediately have a mental picture of Wilf "stepping off" some house he had found for them to live in. His stepping off measurements were always so much more generous and comfortable than the actual house!

A survey trip was undertaken. Peter Voth of the Bible Society and Boon Mark Gittisarn, a leading Thai evangelist and pastor joined Wilf on this up-country trip.

Tak, Sukhothai and Kampaeng became WEC territory as a result of that trip. Wilf says, "This choice represented considerable hardship because of distance from Bangkok and limits in communication. Travel from Bangkok was by rail to Pitsanuloke, a fourteen hour journey. Then on the following day, a six or seven hour truck ride would bring the traveler to Tak. Mr. Voth would have preferred that WEC choose Paknampho as the starting point of WEC work, because that would give a convenient railway link with Bangkok and a mere five or six hours of travel time. No other roadways connected Tak to the outside world. There was only the Pitsanuloke route. The only other way out of Tak was during several months in the rainy season when boat travel between Tak and Paknampho was possible.



This was not a choice based on population or easy access. It was a matter of walking with the Lord forward into His revealed will. Peter Voth and Boon mark had to step back and let Wilf realize the Lord's presence and leading. The women back in "The field of Clouds" were ready, through prayer, to live out an "amen" to this choice. Since they were all strong-minded women, only the Lord could bring such unity.

\* \* \*

Missionary friends in Bangkok would remark for years about the unity of the little group who had lived in "The Field of Clouds". They marveled that the six could live so amicably in such a tiny space.

They lived a good testimony before the watching community of missionary in Bangkok.

But we are insiders; we are of the same Mission family. So let's look at that experience from the inside.

Ellen called The Soldiers and Sailors' Christian Association in Hongkong a sanctuary. Later, she said of St. Louis Hospital that she felt she had died and gone to heaven! Why were these places so wonderful to her? The answer is obvious to all who know Ellen. She had a room to herself. For Ellen, a measure of privacy is necessary for her well being. Ellen wants no distractions when she is studying, or reading for pleasure, or writing letters. And most certainly she wants quiet when she is spending time with the Lord.

Fern welcomed distractions. She loved discussion. She wants to share a phrase she has just met in a book she's reading and wants to know why you are chuckling over the book you are reading. In fact, Fern likes reading to be a community affair. She likes one to read out loud to the other, stopping now and then to discuss the plot or a point made. She wants to discuss the letter she is writing and hopes you will share your correspondence with her. After a long day of study with her nose in a book, Fern need to talk!

Evy needed time. Working with the servants to keep the household running, to keep meals on time and clothing and bedding clean, maintaining something of their original color, consumed a great deal of her time. To be with her children, teaching, nursing, playing and talking took time. They needed their mother's help in adjusting to this strange land. They needed her supervision when rain or blistering sun kept them inside.

Classes and language study took time she just didn't have. When could she have time to talk to Wilf? When could she spend time on her nails and hair or mend clothes or answer letters?

Both Fern and Ellen helped with the meals and spent time with the children. But there was no way they could really lift Evy's heavy load. They couldn't get between Evy and the servants any more than they could get between Evy and her children. Responsibility was Evy's, and she was getting worn out! She needed time to rest, time for herself.

Wilf was almost engulfed in a woman's world. Those bicycle trips to Sathorn to talk and plan with Peter Voth and to meet with the Fullers to discuss strategies within comity, must have come as a breath of fresh air. Did Wilf need "male bonding"? If he did, he didn't know it. It hadn't been invented yet!!

There is always a price to be paid for real fellowship. It works out from our position as "all one in Christ Jesus" to the practical level of everyday life. The four adults in the "Field of Clouds" shared a love for the Lord, the joy of salvation and a burden for the lost of Thailand. But there were many areas of, and facets of their personalities where they did not have much in common. They had to honor each other, holding the other's ideas, opinions, convictions and needs as more important than their own. That was, of course, a constant dying to themselves. And they lived through it with affection and respect for each other that has lasted a half a century.

## Due North Chapter 5

The black snake-like creature swayed with a mesmerizing grace. It seemed to advance towards the bed where the two women lay prone, hypnotized by its movement. Suddenly it appeared to split in two and become two separate serpents swinging there up in the left-hand corner of the room. The two creatures flattened themselves against the ceiling and advanced, each on its belly, with lightning speed towards the bed. Then they instantly sprang back, to hang two swaying black loops. Were they peering through the murky light of dawn at the two human intruders there on the bed imprisoned by their own fear? Would the snakes' next movement bring the sharp, swift bite of death?

As the darkness slowly began to fade with the early morning light, Fern and Ellen realized that the swaying, snake-like beings looped there in the corner of the ceiling were not living reptiles, but were long, hanging threads of an ancient spider web. The soot of countless smoky kerosene lamps had coated the strands of web with a sticky blackness till they were thick, furry and inky black.

The sight of looping black spider-webs hanging from ceilings would become a familiar picture, but that morning in a Pitsanuloke hotel was the first time the two young missionaries had been confronted by such a sight.

Of course, they hadn't seen the soot-coated spider webs the night before when they first entered their room. They had been bone-weary after hours of train travel. All day ash, sparks and soot from the burning logs fueling the engine had blown in the open windows of their coach. Though they were all filthy and tiny holes were burned in their clothing no one was tempted to try to close the windows, for without air-conditioning the coach would soon be unbearable.

Arriving at Pitsanuloke at about four in the morning, it was pitch black. They hammered at the closed and shuttered door of the little hotel till, finally, someone was awakened by their banging and let them in.

Now with the steady growth of light in their temporary resting place, they began to realize how grimy the sheet was that covered their huge double bed. The mosquito net they had tucked in around them the night before was so riddled with rips and holes from cigarette burns that it now buzzed with mosquitoes. The insects had had no trouble getting in but now seemed to be imprisoned with the obviously delicious missionaries.

The girls didn't relish putting their feet outside of the net. But Ellen's watch indicated that the time they had set to meet the Overgaard family was fast approaching.

The bit of bathing they had indulged in the night before hadn't really made them very clean and they now saw by the light of day that they weren't much less grimy than the bed they slept on. They now questioned whether the water in the huge *ong* they had ladled out and splashed over themselves the night before had really been clean at all. Perhaps it was a good thing to be introduced to an upcountry hotel and bathroom in the dark!

Certainly, they now saw the bathroom was filthy! Oh well, they would soon be on their way again and this next stage of travel promised to be harder and dirtier than anything they had experienced on the train trip the day before. Any part of them that was clean at the start of this day would be unmentionably dirty long before their destination was reached.

\* \* \*

Meeting the Overgaard family at six o'clock as they had arranged, they compared notes of the night just past. They all looked a bit tired and rumpled and not too clean. Mosquito bites advertised that the two nets in the Overgaard's room had given no more protection than the one in Fern and Ellen's room.

The travelers were thankful that they had the experienced pathfinder in their midst. Wilf had been their leader through every stage of their journey from San Francisco. But now for the first time, he had actually gone before them and the way was not just a map in his hand but experiences in his memory.

He knew how to arrange for hot water for their instant coffee and Ovaltine. It was already so hot, that morning, the children would surely have preferred iced Ovaltine than the steaming drink offered to

them but it would be years before that first team to Thailand would trust market ice.

None of those travelers mentions what they ate on that journey. But it is reasonable to guess that they started out from the Voth house with ample provisions. Mrs. Voth would not have trusted them to foods they could have purchased along the way. Ellen tells us that the Voths considered that they were stepping off into the wilds to such an extent that they insisted that each member of the party wear a pith-helmet!

Before they had finished eating, there came a blast of a horn demanding their presence out in front of the hotel. The bus that Wilf had arranged to take them to Raheng was there, ready and waiting.

Bus! This was a bus?

Wilf had warned them that the motorized vehicle that would take them on this next lap of their journey was more of a truck than a bus. But somehow hearing his description had not prepared them for this meeting with their conveyance.

It was big but nowhere were there what you might call seats. Two long wooden planks were placed at each side, to run the length of the back of the bus. These could be taken up to allow space for whatever was being hauled. And that day the space was needed. Though they

had sold their dining room table and straight chairs, the drums and trunks that had finally arrived by freighter from America were now to travel with the party. The living room furniture that had been added to their outfit was crated and now moving with them along with the best second-hand bicycles they could purchase in Bangkok. The entire back of the bus/truck was completely filled with the foreigners' possessions. They would ever after borrow the Thai word *kong*. It seemed so much more inclusive than "possessions".

In the cab of the truck was another pillowless wooden seat. This plank, too, could and would be lifted again and again to retrieve tools and ropes and strange implements used to persuade a truck to move on a bit further. The entire WEC team now squeezed themselves into this seat/space with the driver. Wilf, with Paul on his lap, sat to the right of the driver (cars in Thailand use right-handed drive). All the rest occupied what we think of as the passenger seat.

With blasting of horn and ferocious grinding of gears, they were off.

Well, not quite.

Round and round the Pitsanuloke market they went. Stopping again and again to pick up passengers and boxes and sacks. There was a constant concert of hilarious voices with accompaniment of quacking, oinking and clucking as more and more passengers with their *kong* boarded the bus. The foreigners were now learning that they had never understood the meaning of the word "crowded" before. They had thought that the back of their bus was completely filled with their *kong*.

How ridiculous! Their entire store of earthly possessions was but a thin bottom layer of what this bus could accommodate!

Finally the bus was away and off on the trip up the highway to Raheng.

No! Wilf had already warned the women not to expect a real highway. Well, not even really what



Heading "Up-Country"

you would call a road. It was more like a pathway worn by the heavy wheels of trucks. In places it wasn't so much a path as it was ruts.

Fern tells us that the truck groaned and strained to move forward. Potholes and tree roots, rocks and stumps caused the truck to so creak and shudder it seemed as if the back part would be ripped off from the cab.

The way led through dense rain forests, across wide rice fields, and up and down deep, steep ravines. Bridges were nothing more than rough boards thrown across deep gorges that promised to become streams when the rainy season arrived. It was not uncommon for the truck's huge wheels to miss a board altogether causing the truck to lurch dangerously, crashing into deep ditches. It then appeared that every passenger in the back of the truck was an expert on how to maneuver a rescue.

The travelers in the cab had to climb out so that their seat could be lifted and strange tools drawn out of that deep hole that the board seat had covered. Rescues were carried out in an amazingly short time. The bus, leaning at a dangerous angle, could be quickly set right and a wheel hanging in air over a ditch would be propped up with boards. The Bus stuck in a swamp demanded strategy. Perhaps the use of many boards, or the winch could be used if there was a tree or rock close enough to become anchor.

The newcomers marveled at the party atmosphere of the travelers in the back of the bus and the jovial manner of the driver whose job was to conquer this amazing course set with hurdles, hindrances, blocks, snags, problems and difficulties. Of course, the foreigners could not get inside the mindset that expected every journey to be an obstacle course. Nothing else had ever been experienced by the local travelers. And the driver ran this very course every day.

The stops caused by calamity were not the only stops the bus made. It seemed that every few minutes they passed a small community of houses surrounded by fields. Often there would be a stop and wait while the passengers to leave the bus would search for his *kong*. A burst of laughter would leave the occupants of the cab wondering just what was going on back there. It would only be after months more of language study and a trip in the back of such a bus that they would discover that baggage had become seats for passengers who were not anxious to give up their comfort. An entire family seated on a soft-sided suitcase could hide it completely from view. Or a farmer, deeply asleep, could make the withdrawal of such a case from beneath him almost impossible. At every stop a drama or comedy was enacted.

The newcomers grew used to seeing saffron roofs trimmed with a border of green. Sometimes they were right at hand but more often they were spied off in the distance. The pattern of fields would be broken by a distant skyline of coconut palms, housetops and barns, and in the center, that distinct roof of a Buddhist temple.

They had, of course, realized while still in Bangkok, that this was a land deeply committed to the Buddha. They had marveled at Thonburi's most spectacular landmark, the Temple of the Dawn, *Wat Arun*. Encrusted with millions of fragments of broken porcelain and glass, it had sparkled in the sunrise and mirrored the splendor of the sky. They had heard the stories of the Emerald Buddha and seen the gigantic Reclining Buddha. They had observed funeral processions and parades of priests with their dancing attendants at merit making. They had grown used to the sight of lines of saffron-robed priests stopping briefly at each house or boat they passed, to receive their morning gift of rice from the faithful. They had listened to the deep, rhythmic chanting of those monks in Pali, the sacred language of Buddhism.

But Bangkok was not their responsibility. They had accepted, before the Lord, the responsibility for Tak, Sukhothai and Kampaengphet. Now their own area was coming closer with every passing kilometer. And they were seeing with new eyes, the stronghold of an ancient religion.

\* \* \*

It is Fern who pictures for us their arrival at the corner where the road from Pitsanuloke met the road that paralleled the Ping River. It was the middle of the afternoon and the steamy April weather had sapped what energy the jolting, disjointed ride had left them. But their anticipation and excitement

were mounting as they neared what would become their home town. Just as the bus came to the riverside road and they turned North towards Hua Diat, Paul Overgaard, just three and a half, burst out counting, in Thai from one to ten! What a climax to this moment of arrival.

Turning north, away from the market area, they really didn't get to see anything of the town of Raheng that day. (In those days, the town was always called Raheng and the province, Tak.) Perhaps it is just as well that they didn't see the place that was to be the center of WEC work while they were so tired, for the town was not much more than one long, dirt road beside a river. Only at the market area did it widen out to three or four crooked streets connected by even more crooked lanes. The houses were mostly of unvarnished wood but there were a few dwellings with bamboo walls.

Wilf tells us, "Tak, in 1948, was removed from civilization. Two or three trucks came in each evening from Pitsanuloke and left again the next morning with goods and passengers. No vehicles moved during the day, except that the police department had one jeep, the highway department had one flat-bed truck for hauling dirt and gravel, and a former member of parliament owned a 1926 Chevy. The elite of the city had their status symbol, a bicycle! The hospital had one resident doctor, and a public health nurse could be seen quite frequently, riding her bike to visit her patients."

By turning North at the river road they missed the sight of that wooden metropolis strung out along the side of the Ping River. Instead, they now bounced along what truly was no better than an oxcart trail.

They were headed for Hua Diat, "Boiling Head" in Northern Thai. They would later learn that this area was renown for drunken brawls and street fights that could break out at any time. Thus the name, "Boiling Head", *Hua Diat*. But they were not headed for some little off-the-map spot. No, Wilf had located and agreed to rent a famous spot, the Borneo House.

This was a huge bungalow used by a British company that was licensed to harvest teak from the rain forest behind Raheng and in the blue mountains stretching between the plains of Thailand and Burma.



*The "Borneo House" in Hua Diat*

This barely recognizable track was a highway for white forest managers. The occupants of the few houses scattered under the shady rain trees were accustomed to seeing lordly white representatives of the Company, *Borisat*, marching proudly in from the jungle-covered mountains. They led a procession of baggage-laden elephants, each one with its own mahout. There were cooks and coolies in that proud parade. But it was the white man in his pith helmet who drew the neighborhood to watch the majestic arrival. He murdered their language,

but he did it with such an air of confidence! He broke every rule of local custom, but he did it with a regal kindness! And his arrival brought fleeting prosperity to the neighborhood. Hua Diat knew little, and cared even less about the kings of Bangkok. It was these long legged, sunburned lords of the teak companies who ruled the jungle for them. It didn't matter which of the many young British managers arrived on any occasion. They all looked alike to the Thai, very tall and very pink. And each one had empowered their cooks and coolies to buy and buy and buy!

The neighbors would come early in the morning with ducks and duck eggs, chickens and hen eggs. There would be baskets of fruit, wild greens and roots gathered from the forest and wrapped in banana leaves or just bound in bunches, a forest vine and string held the bundle together. There would be fish just caught from the river or the stream that ran through the forest behind the Borneo property. And there would be fish or shrimp caught months before and carefully fermented to form the paste so needed in making Thai curries.

In the evening the temporary market that grew up inside the compound of the Borneo house was even larger than the morning one. Women came to set up charcoal fire pots, where they squatted to fry bananas or fish or onion dipped in rice flour. They set up stalls to sell their home-made Thai sweets and boiled peanuts or boiled sweet potatoes.

If the official cook for the white manager didn't buy a product, then the mahouts and coolies had their turn. Several days' march through the hills and mountains left them hungering for the foods of civilization. Hua Diat welcomed this mass of buyers descending periodically upon their community. There was always an atmosphere of county fair when the Company came to town.

\* \* \*

But the bus that brought the WEC missionaries to Hua Diat was bringing a different breed of foreigner and different atmosphere to the Borneo House. The newcomers wanted to appear friendly to the watchers who stood by the road observing their arrival. But they probably appeared just worn out. Their hired bus, creaking and revving its way up the uneven track was a far cry from the parade of majestic elephants whose footprints had left the way as pitted as a Chinese checkerboard!

The amount of *kong* this family brought with them was pitiful when compared with the jungle manager's baggage. Where were the folding tables and chairs, the tin bath and metal wash basins, the canvas drop cloths and tents, the camp cots and yards of mosquito netting? Where were the tin trunks filled with who knows what and supplies of tinned foods and medicines with their exotic pictures on the wrappers? Where were the coolies and cooks and servants that a white man needs to insure his comfort?

Obviously the company house had fallen into the hands of the poor! The days of prosperity for Hua Diat were over!

\* \* \*

The WECcers saw a huge roof covering a strange sort of house. It appeared at first to be just a high, railed platform open to the elements. They soon realized, however, that there were walled rooms. These walled rooms, used by the teak company as bedrooms, were on either side of an enormous open veranda. Outside the bedrooms were open porches. Because the open veranda stretched across the front of the house and the open porches ran along the two sides of the building, it did give the appearance of being just a high, covered deck. Across a bridge-way at the back there were other rooms suitable for storage, laundry and kitchen.

The place was hardly cozy!



Because of the intense heat, the new arrivals were thankful for the openness of the bungalow. No doubt a member of the Borneo Company would have settled his things in one of those walled bedrooms. But Fern and Ellen chose to use the porch at one side of their bedroom and the Overgaard family chose the porch at



*The Overgaard Family*

the other side. The walled rooms they could use as dressing rooms and closets. But for their own sleeping comfort, they wanted every bit of breeze they could get.

The bus driver, bus boy and Wilf had barely moved the furniture up stairs and piled trunks and boxes, when the tropical sunset brought sudden darkness. By light of kerosene lamp the WECers spread out their bedding and secured their mosquito nets.

They had no beds. Nor did they have mattresses. Ellen tells us that later on, they acquired beds made by local carpenters. These heavy teak platforms were in use by the mission for the next forty years. They were as hard as the floor and almost as impossible to move, but the eight or ten inches they lifted the sleeper from the floor gave a sense of security. Bugs and animals may run under one's bed but surely not all of them would want to climb up those legs.

Mattresses were eventually acquired also. These homemade, kapoc-filled mattresses were probably healthful at first. They were so hard they must have given magnificent support. They certainly didn't give much comfort! But after a few years, parts of the body made deep permanent impressions. To fit oneself on a used WEC mattress was to mold oneself into the hills and valleys created by all previous users.

But that first night, they must have put down some sort of soft surface to sleep on. Ellen had a sleeping bag of war surplus variety. A sheet tucked around that would have served as mattress. No one would need a covering sheet. A mosquito net tucked in around them would have been all the covering needed on any April night in Raheng.

A hard floor, two hours of rest the night before, and a full day of shaking, bouncing, and bashing around on the wooden seat of the Pitsanuloke bus had surely given each of these young people a preview of their old age. They ached in joints they never knew they had before. They were almost too tired to sleep. What they experienced that night was almost coma!

How did they feel about their first view of Raheng and the Borneo House? How did they react?

Towns and villages which they passed through their journey from Bangkok must have somewhat prepared them for Raheng. And they certainly were not expecting a modern metropolis. But Raheng was a very large step backwards in time from the Bangkok they had adjusted to. They would now need to make further cultural adjustments if they were to fit up-country Thailand.

The Borneo house was far more rustic than any building they had yet met in Thailand and the neighborhood of the house presented a picture of Thailand that they had never experienced before. Shaded by great mango and citrus trees were tiny wooden or bamboo houses. Often, they leaned at



dangerous angles on their spindly stilts, testifying either to great age or fierce wind storms! The crowing of cocks and the clucking of hens, the squeal of pigs and the dull ring of cow bells added to the all-too-obvious message of the scented air; they were now in farm country!

Did any of the four try to keep a stiff upper lip and project a rather false cheerfulness by looking on the bright side? Or did their aching bones and deep weariness cause them to feel that there was no bright side? They probably needed a night of quiet rest and the coolness of an early April dawn to bring them to thankfulness and praise.

There is something that ought to be stated about that little band, "The Siam Four". Underneath surface reactions there was usually a well of humor. If they were brutally honest, admitting that the trip had been a nightmare, their physical states, each a catastrophic ruin and their destination had turned out to be a tragedy, those four adults would have erupted into fits of laughter. Each one would have been

outdoing the others in presenting their memories of the two days just experienced. It would have been a rare treat to see frustration and even disappointment give way to humor.

We can know for sure that whatever reaction they displayed on the surface, beneath that the Lord did touch each one of them with a sense of His presence and the excitement of His will being worked out in their obedience.

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The Borneo House would not be bringing elephant parades to Huadiat. Nor would empty howdahs be propped against the mighty house posts. There would not be the musical sound of bamboo bells from tethered and hobbled elephants grazing throughout the night in the forest behind the Borneo property. While WEC rented the house there would not be the sight of the young white manager up there on the veranda, reclining in his folding chair and enjoying a smoke in the cool of the evening.

Instead, there would be the coming and going of missionaries. There would be the foreign music of hymns and choruses. Fern would play her concertina and Wilf would strum a vibraharp.

Instead of elephant bells, there would be the sounds of children at play and at lessons. And Hua Diat would find the



*Ellen at the foot of the stairs to the Borneo House*  
children just as enchanting as the elephants had been.

The missionaries would, as the teak managers had done before them, murder the language. But only for a time. Nothing could have been more evident than that these newcomers desired to communicate. The teak lords were condescending. The missionaries were friendly. Company managers valued the goodwill of the community only if it served their job of harvesting teak. The missionaries desired the



acceptance of the community that the community itself be harvested for the Lord.

Did Wilf have a sense of accomplishment as he fell asleep that night? He had led his little band halfway around the world and brought them safely to the place of God's appointment. Heaven's embassy was now about to open in Tak.

## The Borneo House

### Chapter 6

"Raheng seems to be a strategic point," wrote Evy in a letter to her friend Sylvia. "It is interesting to us that, after we announced our intention to come here, we learned that the Presbyterian missionaries, a few years ago, prayed earnestly that there might be someone to send to Raheng. The Evangelicals among their number are thrilled about our having been led here."

It is not surprising that the eyes of Presbyterian missionaries, working far to the North, would be drawn to Raheng. Although the very underdeveloped town strung out along the Ping River, seemed to be just nothing in the middle of nowhere, it was a strategic point on the route of travel from Bangkok to Chiangmai. Wilf tells us that, "In the days before the railroad was constructed, the missionaries traveling North from Bangkok, went by boat up the Ping as far as Raheng, and then engaged elephants for the remainder of their journey." He goes on to tell us, "One of the missionary women making that journey had become very ill and died while the party was camped in Hua Diat."

Doubtless, there were missionaries who made that arduous journey who would ever after remember that muddy track beside the riverbed with its straggle of rustic houses. Perhaps they would recall some kindness from a local as they were camped there to arrange for elephants and porters. Typical of Thailand, there would most certainly have been some kindly farmer who, with his wife, would offer bananas or mangoes or sugarcane to the obviously weary travelers.

Such a memory triggers a longing in God's people for that spot to hear the words of life. How many times have WECcers ridden past a community clustered about a temple to have that picture fasten on their memories and that place become a prayer burden?

It was not only missionaries who had been burdened for Raheng. Wilf recounts that, "Thai evangelists based in Pitsanuloke had occasionally traveled by boat to Paknampho and then up the Ping to Kampaengphet. Acharn Boon Mark Gittisarn made such a journey with Raheng the final objective. But he was obliged to turn back after becoming very ill in Kampaeng."

With the occupying of the Borneo House by the WEC missionaries, the area of interest and target of prayer was penetrated by God's messengers for the first time.

Now at long last missionaries had come to occupy this spot on earth's map and God's heart. It was exciting to be united with Him in answering the prayers of the saints and the desires of His own heart. Well, that was exciting to contemplate. But life left very little time for such contemplation!

\* \* \*

Life was hectic those first days and weeks in the Borneo House. Cleaning, repairing what was there and adding some necessities that were not there took up a great deal of energy. For many years, Wilf would work on every new WEC station that was opened, putting in screening and bathrooms and making the kitchen area a place where western women could work. Evy mentions in a letter written in those first days in residence that, "Wilf has hired two women to carry sand for the project he is working on downstairs." Doubtless he was mixing cement to floor a bathroom or laundry area.

Servants were sought and hired. In an account that Wilf has written, he states that two servants came with their original party from Bangkok. But in all the other letters and accounts given concerning those first weeks in Raheng, the search for and training of servants seems to have been a priority. This fits with the experience of years. For at least twenty years, dedicated Christians from Bangkok were willing to visit and help WEC for special meetings only if those meetings lasted just a few nights. It was a common occurrence for an *Acharn* to agree to come, then to cancel out when he took time to consider the inconvenience. Others came and had to leave before the meetings were over. In most cases the reason given was that food and water disagreed with them. It was obvious that workers from Bangkok suffered a culture shock when they tried to fit in upcountry. Actually they didn't always try to fit in; instead they tried to change the upcountry scene to fit Bangkok. Before the widespread use of radio and television and easy travel, to force a place like Raheng to act like Bangkok was a lost cause!

Doubtless the two trained servants from Bangkok found the adjustments to Raheng living was

difficult as the *Acharns* would. And so the WEC group were cast upon their own ability to judge character and began training servants of their own choosing.

Since many missionaries in Thailand today have never had a servant, it is necessary to remember a few things about the first two decades of WEC work.

There was no electricity in the WEC area. All cooking and baking were done on top of charcoal fire pots. All ironing was done using heavy charcoal-filled irons. All lighting was by kerosene lanterns, or pressure lanterns (for special meetings or special occasions). All cleaning was done by hand and much of it was on the knees. And without the cooling breeze of fan or air conditioner.



*Wilf with Paul & Sharon on the Overgaard wheels*

There was no running water in the WEC area. Every drop of water that arrived at our houses was carried from a neighborhood well or from a stream or river. The washing of bedding and clothing and linens was done by hand, down at the riverside or at the communal well with neighbors, or in the home after several trips had been made to carry the water necessary for use. To carry water in buckets suspended from the ends of a bamboo pole borne on the shoulders is a feat practiced and developed in childhood. The bouncing walk and the padded calluses on the shoulders develop together to make the task comparatively painless and successful.

Along with no electricity and no running water there was also no convenient market or trustworthy restaurant. A trip to the early morning fresh market was certainly not impossible. It just took a long bicycle ride along a dark cart track to get there. Long before daylight, many from Hua Diat were making that trip on foot. The market was truly a farmers' market. Much of the produce was brought to market by oxcart and most of it was sold by seven or eight o'clock in the morning. Certainly some fruits or eggs could be purchased along the way. But being new to

the neighborhood, the WECers didn't know which household had that to sell.

Nor could the household make the decision, sometimes, not to cook but rather eat in the market. How exciting it would have been to "eat out" occasionally. Of course, they would have had to light the charcoal fires to boil drinking water and to heat water for bathing. They would have had to ride their bikes into Raheng and find fried rice at some roadside stand. But no, this was not an option. Dysentery was a brutal disease, often fatal, and the cures obtainable from Bangkok were dangerous. Of course there was another consideration -- finances were tight. It was always cheaper to cook for six people than it was to buy meals, even at the dinkiest roadside stand.

Certainly a normally healthy Western woman could keep house and do all the chores, cook, wash, iron, garden, shop and even make charcoal if necessary. But she could not do those things and be a missionary. Our WEC policy was that we were not a mission with missionaries and their wives. Every

wife was expected to be as called, committed and gifted as her husband.

So, early missionaries had servants. The highest salary, fully ten years after WEC entered Tak was \$10, or 200 baht a month. To have servants was hardly an expensive luxury!

Servants, along with accomplishing a great deal of physical labor, were also a tie with the outside world and the immediate neighborhood. The wash girl would arrive early in the morning to light the charcoal fires for breakfast, bringing the latest news of the community. She would know who had the fight that could be heard in the middle of the night. She knew when a baby had been born or an elderly neighbor had passed away, or a local policeman had run off with someone else's wife.

The cook, who would have gone to the early morning market, would arrive in the middle of the morning and she would bring the news that was the talk down in Raheng. Since the WEC missionaries did not have a radio, and mail was certainly not regular nor reliable, news of the Communist takeover in China and the flight of the nationalist army into the far North of Thailand and Burma would have come first by way of the Raheng market. News that the British had granted independence to Burma would have followed that same grapevine. And the startling news that the US had entered a war in the Orient on the side of the South Koreans would have been told to the Mission family by a servant who had no idea who, what or where South Korea was.

Servants took news from the WEC household and spread it to their families and all who wanted to know what went on behind the walls of the foreigners' house. And, of course, everyone did want to know just what this strange group with their foreign religion were up to. That all three women were not Wilf's wives, could quickly be established by the testimony of the wash girl or cook. That money was not hoarded and stacked from floor to ceiling, could be guaranteed by the one who wiped the floors. That neighbors were not being cursed in demonic ceremonies would be scoffed at by those who worked for and with those first missionaries to Raheng.

\* \* \*

That servants have not been an unmixed blessing is quite obvious. Listen to an account that Evy wrote to her friend, that first year in Raheng.

"We have been camping on the trail of the cook all afternoon because we know that several times she has gone off with the fresh bread (a loaf or a pan of rolls). Twice, at least, she has given them to the priests at the Buddhist *Wat*. Only one of these times did we notice it ourselves; the other times we were told by another servant whose word is good and who has proven herself loyal. SO we have to find more evidence on our own so as not to involve the other one when we deal with the cook. This land allows revenge to run in any length as we have already seen, so we can not involve anyone else. We also know that the cook has been cheating us on the price of food. But we have not been able to catch her on specific items."

Evy went on to tell her friend that the Thai can be very clever at deception and cheating. Malee, the servant who was loyal and helpful, told Wilf that he was "not clever enough" to catch the cook!

Eventually, the cook was caught as she took a hunk of dough from the place she had hidden it. When faced with her crime, Se Ang, walked off in anger, taking a blanket that had been loaned to her.

But Se Ang was not the only one to leave. Not long after that, Evy wrote again of servant problems and said, "Malee has left us in a huff and I must say that I am glad! She was a terrific strain for me, first to have to try to get her to do the work, then to deal with her when she didn't. Then I would have to listen as the rest of the family sat around suggesting that if only I had said it some other way it would have been better. That's pretty hard to take when you only have so many words to say it with in the first place. I got to a place of desperation. And as far as I was concerned, it was a personal deliverance when she up and departed."

So Evy was left with the joy of starting from scratch to teach a new cook. Since "scratch" started with teaching the necessity of washing hands before food was handled and teaching that boiling the water (for twenty minutes) that was used in food preparation was not open to debate, this was no simple task!

In another letter, Evy speaks of trying to teach a new wash girl "She can't understand me and I can't understand her! I gave her a long speech about where she is to hang the clothes and how. She assured me that she understood and then proceeded to hang the clothes just where I said not to! I followed her around and pointed out that it was very important to wring all the water out of them. I showed her just how to do this, two times. When I came back, all of them dripped like the eaves in spring! She is very sweet, but that doesn't make the clothes clean."

Evy asked her friend to pray seriously for her in this matter of training and working with servants. "It does take a lot of energy to teach someone else to do things that are so absolutely foreign to them." Then she continued, "Pray, so I can get down to some of the other things that wait for me."

Language study was always there waiting for Evy to have time for it. And both Sharon and Paul needed and deserved her time and attention.

\* \* \*

For all four WECcers, language study was a priority. Wilf says of their study time, "From the language learning perspective, Hua Diat may not have been the best location. It was the recognized boundary between Central Thai and Northern Thai." Sitting with the teacher and at their books, they were immersed in Central Thai. As soon as they went out of their front yard, they heard, all around them, the sounds of Northern Thai.

Evy, writing to her friend, bared her heart. "I had often heard of the difficulties of the period of language study and how dry one got spiritually. But I was not quite prepared for what it has been. You are shut up to your studies. You do not have any outlet for many, many months because you have no words with which to speak. I wish I could explain to you how utterly hopeless I have felt at times."

A teacher was hired as soon as one could be found. Of course, no one was available who had ever taught the Thai language to foreigners. But Obah, a young woman who was a good reader with a pleasant voice and accent was found. That was about the best you could ask for in an upcountry language teacher in those days. The drawback was that although the teacher knew when the students were repeating the words incorrectly, she didn't know how to tell them what was wrong.

Each one of the adults spent an hour with the teacher each day, reading to her or repeating after her. Often they tried to spend a good bit of their hour in conversation. How tiring that must have been for Obah! Later they tried to prepare simple Bible lessons or discuss Scripture with Obah. Obah, a good Buddhist, must have found this difficult. The language was foreign for the students but the concepts were foreign for the teacher!

\* \* \*

Health was always a big factor that robbed the missionaries of their study time. Almost every letter written home mentions fever or dysentery among the missionaries and children.

Fern was found to have trachoma. She had to ride her bicycle down the long track to Raheng and all the way through the town to the small one-doctor-hospital for treatments. This was no easy trip as the path was far more suited to ox carts or elephants. And Fern had never ridden a "back pedal" bike before. She tells us that on one trip she fell in a mud puddle. Other than a skinned knee she suffered no harm but her pride must have been sorely wounded for she was wearing a white suit!

Fern probably continued her hour with the teacher each week day. But the trip to the doctor's would leave her little time for study on her own. As there was no clearly defined or structured study course, those pupils needed to put in much time in preparation for their time with the teacher. And then that hour needed to be reviewed. With sore eyes, Fern could hardly do that. Nor could she close her eyes and just listen to a tape repeating the teacher's voice. Tape recorders hadn't been invented!

Part of the treatment Fern had to have was a washing with a silver nitrate solution. This was very painful. For three months she took the trip several times a week. Back home, at the Borneo House, she was isolated, for trachoma was contagious. The doctor warned that "the disease is spread through water in which you wash your face. But it is not because somebody else has washed their face in it either." Evy adds to this, "Ha ha! Just try to figure that out!"

Trachoma may be spread through the use of linens; towels, washcloths and sheets. Those items in the laundry were regularly boiled for ten minutes. Not just Evy, but Ellen and Fern and Wilf had to keep tabs on the wash girl to see that that boiling was always done. Trachoma was no laughing matter and they took every precaution.

Fern says she felt she had been put in solitary confinement, keeping herself and all that she touched away from the others. It was this isolation that finally emboldened Fern to go alone to Bangkok to seek for a more qualified doctor's opinion.

While Fern was making her plans to travel to Bangkok, the local doctor diagnosed Ellen and the two children as also having trachoma!

Before many days of treatments for the entire clan were under way, Fern sent word from the capitol that a German doctor had diagnosed her as having acute conjunctivitis! It was quickly treated and cleared up.

With the burden of trachoma removed, Fern was then free to enjoy Bangkok and the little English tearooms with their selection of teacakes that she had come to appreciate while living in the "Field of Clouds". Those tearooms must have been in existence while the British forces were still stationed in Thailand. Certainly there have not been any of that sort of restaurant in Bangkok for a long time.

\* \* \*

"A sobering illness became a testimony to God's grace," Wilf wrote when he came down with a high fever and sore throat. "The local doctor gave penicillin injections a couple of times a day but to little avail. Sharon, sensing the seriousness of everyone's demeanor at breakfast table, wanted to know what would be done with Daddy if he died!"

That very afternoon a visitor came. "Dr. In Toom, a Christian doctor from Pitsanuloke was on a trip with a couple of friends. They had come by jeep to hunt in the mountains west of Sukhothai. Wondering how the missionary team in Raheng might be getting along, he decided to seek for their house and find out." His first action was to kneel beside Wilf's bed to pray and thank God for His help. After examination, he left instructions for the local doctor to increase the penicillin treatment to injections every four hours. Within a few days, Wilf was back to normal again. Most likely, the local doctor had little or no experience in using it.

\* \* \*

"Learning the Thai culture and religion was informal and unstructured," Wilf tells us. "But the daily contact with the people and interaction in various settings gave considerable opportunity to observe and learn." Neighbors were friendly and curious about the newcomers. They were more than willing to chat. The children of the neighborhood responded to questions with laughter and a delight in following any missionary on foot. Wilf found even the Buddhist priests wanted to talk with him and compare religions. The Governor and his wife came to visit. "All contacts with the official community were positive," Wilf records for us.

This general friendliness was somewhat misleading. The WECcers were encouraged that Raheng was open to the Gospel. Did this attitude of welcome and encouragement mean that Raheng was a receptive area?

Long before the team dared to launch any kind of public meeting, the Lord gave them a ministry in their own home. The first hint of what was to come was the report that a Christian girl was in town. She had come from Pitsanuloke. Upon the death of her mother she had been sent to Raheng to live with an aunt and attend the local school. Doubtless the first information came by way of the servants or the teacher, and the account given was that she refused to worship Buddha with her teacher and class. The fact that the account spread throughout town shows something of the importance of the girl's faith and obedience.

Soon this Christian girl found out about the foreigners North of the town and came to visit. Across the language barrier, they all realized their unity in faith. So the girl began to come every Sunday and she brought girl friends with her each time. They would sit in a circle, rather lost in that vast

porch/sitting room. They would read Scripture and add a bit of explanation and then pray together. Evy wrote, "We just have to leave the results to the Lord. It is the reading of His Word that will give the Spirit something to begin to speak to them about."

Eventually the girl, who was never named, returned to Pitsanuloke and we do not know what became of her or of the other girls who came with her on Sundays. But those meetings were the modest beginning. They would be repeated over and over with different ones in attendance. The foreigners' language ability would develop and those house meetings would see many converts. But over and over, converts would move away, or fall away, or die and a little group would disappear. Did some of those early converts go on to follow the Lord as they moved into the areas worked by other missions? Did some fall away for a time and then renew commitment and faith in some other area?

Ministry was a mingle of joy and sorrow, or bitter with sweet as some seemed to come into salvation. Their responses to the Lord and to His Word were exciting -- and then they were gone. Sometimes they just ceased to come to the Borneo House and at other times they were gone from the area.

If the little group in the Borneo House looked only at human results, they would have ridden a cruel roller coaster in those first months. From the great heights of encouragement they would have been dashed down into disappointment over and over again. The discipline of that hour was to keep their eyes upon the One who had promised and who was always faithful. They sang over and over the hymns that reminded them that He had not brought them thus far to put them to shame.

## **Base Camp Established**

### **Chapter 7**

According to Wilf's memory, Dorothy Caswell arrived in the Fall of that year, 1948. Dorothy had worked, before the war, for at least one term with the Presbyterian Mission in Chiangmai. Wilf supplies the fact that Dorothy wanted to return to the land she loved and sought to serve with a more evangelical mission than the Presbyterian Mission (in U.S.) was at that time. Certainly there were others among the Presbyterians, like the Fullers, who loved and accepted the Bible as the Word of God and only standard of truth and conduct for Christians. They were burdened for the lost of Thailand. But there were others who accepted parts of the Bible as inspired in the same way that any beautiful poem or musical piece is inspired. For them, Jesus was not uniquely the Son of God. And a Savior from sin had no part in their thinking or message.

Though Dorothy had doubtless had a busy and important ministry as a nurse in Chiangmai, she wanted a spiritual ministry. Hearing about WEC, she resigned from the Presbyterian work (The Church of Christ in Thailand) and applied to our mission.

Dorothy's transfer from one mission to the other was relatively painless. She met WEC's requirements and was passed for the field without much testing. After all, she was already a seasoned worker. The home end must have been impressed that this older woman (certainly in her late thirties or forties) would be a valuable addition to the Thailand team.

For Dorothy, arriving in Bangkok must have been something like a homecoming. She had been a co-worker of the Fullers and joining them and others of the Presbyterian Mission and catching up on news of mutual friends would surely make her feel "at home". But there is no doubt that she would have found Bangkok greatly changed, for there was still much evidence of the war with its ruin and filth.

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Up-country, the original four must have been looking forward to the addition of this one to their team. As an able nurse, Dorothy's fame had gone before her. How it would set their minds at rest to have one with them who would really know if their disorders were serious or not. Dorothy would be able to diagnose the fevers and ailments of the children. She would be able to treat the complaints of the adults. There was another matter that made Dorothy's nursing knowledge important to the household in Hua Diat. Evy was pregnant.

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The four in Hua Diat felt sure that as Dorothy had made all the adjustments to Thai culture and language, she would have all the answers to the questions the language teacher couldn't understand. She would know if they were saying things the wrong way or were doing things that offended the culture. Surely she would also have ideas of how to contact neighbors with the Gospel and how to put the truths of Scripture into every language.

That is what they expected....?

Contact with Dorothy was lost many years before her death. We have no letters or records of her own memories and since memories originate and center in the mind of the one remembering, Dorothy is not at the center in any of the accounts of that one term of her service with WEC.

But there are certain things that ought to be rather obvious. Dorothy was used to a much larger missionary community in Chiangmai. She was used to living on a much higher standard than the occupants of the Borneo House could afford. She was used to the beauty and culture of Chiangmai and the social life where missionaries, business people and diplomats mingled equally.

Dorothy was certainly older than any of the WECers she joined. And Dorothy came as an outsider. The four had known each other for years before they came to Thailand. They had memories and catch phrases and jokes in common. They knew each others' opinions and preferences and prejudices.

Though Dorothy could ride over many of the adjustments to land and language and culture, she did have adjustments to make, adjustments to her fellow workers and her new placement and situation.



Dorothy had been enclosed in a foreign community and job. There were facts of Thai community living and culture she had never met. And these were facts the Hua Diat four knew well!

Though Hua Diat Thai is called Northern Thai, the cultured Thai of Chiangmai would doubtless want to make many changes in the language that met Dorothy's ears outside the Borneo House in 1948. But Dorothy was the one who would have to make the changes and adjustments if she really wanted to have a spiritual ministry. How galling it must have been to have younger, less experienced missionaries correcting her spoken Thai!

Dorothy had barely unpacked when she began to make plans for a refresher course in Thai with the local "teacher". And there was no one to help her set up such a course. Her WEC co-workers and the teacher had not the slightest idea of how to set up such a course!

While Dorothy was settling in and taking her homemade refresher course of study with the teacher, Wilf was more than busy. He not only still needed to spend time in language study but he was the obvious one to make survey trips to discover where and how WEC should begin to spread out to "salt" and "light" the dark, decaying land of Sukhothai, Kampaengphet and Tak.

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Throughout that first dry season, Wilf rode every conveyance available to find the farming communities and hidden hamlets. Soon the figure of the foreigner became familiar to the Thai country folk and the Thai countryside became familiar to the foreigner. Wilf was coming to see that in that day and time, more people and villages could be reached by river travel than by any other way.

To survey the Kampaeng area, Wilf had to find and rent small boats that regularly made that trip. They were "flat-bottomed affairs, about two feet wide and about twenty feet long. Some eight feet of the boats were covered with a curved bamboo roof. Wilf could just barely sit up under this shelter but he could lie down there and be protected from the burning sun of the dry season and later trips when the season changed, he could find shelter from the frequent downpours that came to pound the turbulent river. Two men were required to pole a boat. When they went with the current it took an entire day to reach Kampaeng. But the return trip, against the current, took three full days," Evy wrote to her friend, Sylvia. It is interesting to note that the cost of renting such a boat for that long a time was just 125 baht, or \$6!

"Wilf took a cot and mosquito net and tarpaulin with him each trip so that he could camp out on the beach and be protected from the downpours," Evy continued.

Any part of our WEC area that could be reached by the Ping was visited and so thoroughly scrutinized by Wilf that he could take a report back to the women who would be partnering him in prayer to seek the mind of the Lord for advance. Evy wrote to her friend, "When the time comes for us to really be getting out constantly, a motor boat would be the thing, so we could travel up and down the river between here and Paknampho, touching three provinces. And through much of this section, the people are situated along the rivers."

Of course the entire team had seen Sukhothai, as their bus had stopped there for lunch on the way up from Pitsanuloke. But that straggle of weather-beaten wooden houses standing in stagnant water beside the river had hardly attracted them. The giant statue of the Buddha hovering over that crowded, smelly market had left them with a picture of the battle that would need to be waged to win the souls from that ancient control.

Everywhere Wilf traveled and reported on to the Hua Diat team, was a picture of loss. God's creation apart from His blessing and control. Everywhere he visited needed to hear the Gospel.

Wilf always took a number of Gospel tracts and he sought to make every contact an occasion for a Gospel witness. His fractured Thai improved by leaps and bounds and the women back in Hua Diat marveled as he recounted every conversation for them. "How did you say that?" was the constant interruption upon every recital of his chance meetings.

Of course Hua Diat and the many, little settlements just visible on the other side of the river were ever present burden on the hearts of the WEC language students.

Wilf reports, "About the end of that first year, an attempt was made to preach the Gospel in a very public way to the immediate community. Peter and Mrs. Voth came to Tak, bringing with them Acharn Boon Mark Gittisarn. A large platform was constructed in the front yard of the Borneo compound. Song sheets were prepared with the Thai translation of Gospel songs. For music, Fern Berg played the concertina, which she had brought with her from the USA. Since there was no electric lighting, gas lanterns, hung on posts, lit up the area."

Though there was no public address system, Boon mark was able to hold the interest of the gathered crowd. Wilf writes that he was "an entertaining preacher, with a clear salvation message. He was able to speak in terms of quite understandable to the Buddhist, but often tended to ridicule Buddhist practices and this may have alienated some. After the meetings each evening, literature was sold and given to interested persons."

"During the morning, the first street preaching was attempted to small, attentive groups," Wilf goes on to tell us. "Thought there were large crowds at each of the evening services, there was no evident positive response to the message."

For many years WEC would bring outstanding Thai and foreign speakers into the area. Later, the meetings planned and operated for such speakers would be much more sophisticated. Electric lighting, loudspeaker systems and even films would draw larger and larger crowds. Perhaps, first contacts with the Gospel at such meetings have later resulted in salvation. Certainly many have come under the sound of the Gospel. But how many truly heard, we cannot know in this life-time.

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Evy wrote to her friend, "We will be leaving for Bangkok about the tenth of the month (April)." Throughout most of that hot season of 1949, Evy had kept on as teacher for Sharon using the Calvert course, as language student and housekeeper in charge of servants. That May and April, the temperature in Raheng and Hua Diet hovered around 104 to 110 Fahrenheit for weeks on end with no break at all. Evy stopped Sharon's lessons only when Sharon became ill with a fever and chills. Now, just as the heat would reach its highest point and all of Central Thailand would be a furnace, Wilf and Evy would set out for the capitol and the birth of their third child.

This trip they would make by bus and train. Probably the same truck that had brought them from Pitsanuloke a year earlier would take them back to that bug-infested hotel. The second day of travel would be on the dusty train. It is important to remember that there was no air-conditioning at that time so to picture a cool journey where closed windows shut out dust and bugs and heat is to miss the reality by a wide margin.

Earlier, Wilf had taken Evy to Bangkok for a check up. That time, they had made the journey part way by boat. The flat-bottom pole boat Evy pictured for her friend does not present itself as the easiest way for a pregnant woman to travel. But evidently that was her experience the first day of that previous journey. The couple had spent one night in a Chinese hotel in Kampaengphet. The next day they journeyed on. Wilf says it was "a long boat ride on a double-decker to Paknampho and a second night layover to connect with the train on the following morning."

That ride on a double-decker boat sounds lovely. But since the couple now chose to travel by bus, we must conclude that the river boats of 1949 were no more comfortable than the buses of 1949.

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It must have been something of a relief to arrive once again at the Bible Society house on Sathorn Road. For Evy to be able to just appear at meal time with none of the responsibility of planning that meal or supervising its preparation must have been delightful. To simply put their soiled clothing out to be collected and then receive the washed, starched and ironed garments back before the evening meal must have seemed like a dream. But the greatest relief would be felt in knowing that Evy was now under the care and supervision of an American doctor, Dr. Marshal Wells.

Dr. Wells was with the Presbyterian Mission, and had come out to Bangkok as part of the medical

staff that would practice in a mission hospital that was still in the planning stage. Until the Christian Hospital on Silom Road was built and in operation, Dr. Wells would practice at the Catholic Hospital of Bangkok.

It was the Doctor's orders that brought the Overgaards to Bangkok with almost a month to spare before the baby was expected. Evy wrote that he also ordered that they stay on in the capitol for at least two weeks after the baby's birth.

Listen to a remark Evy writes upon her arrival in Bangkok: "Wilf hopes to get a real good teacher and make good use of his time down here ,and I have some dreams like that too."

No further mention is made of finding a teacher or extending their time in language study, but most likely, that is exactly what they did. This was a couple with a single eye to evangelizing the three provinces the Lord had committed to WEC, and they would use every opportunity to sharpen their skills and language towards that end.

\* \* \*

Mark Overgaard rode home to Raheng in a basket. His parents carried his basket on an evening express train, where they did not insist on going third class, but were persuaded to the luxury of a compartment with berths. This unWEC-like behavior doubtless came about at the sensible urging of the Voths or Dr. Wells! But no sensible urging could clean up or improve the Pitsanuloke hotel that received them at 3:30 in the morning. Nor could any earthly influence change or make comfortable the bus that brought them the rest of the way home.

Evy wrote that they arrived at the Borneo House at about 4:30 in the afternoon, having left the hotel in Pitsanuloke at about 9:00 in the morning. "The children were glad to see us, of course, though they practically ignored us at first and had eyes only for the baby. Six weeks was a long time to have been away from them and they seemed to have grown a lot and looked different. The girls had a big chicken dinner all ready for us and a nice birthday cake for Wilf. We did feast and talk a blue streak! It was so good to be home again. Though we had good fellowship with the folk in Bangkok, it was grand to be back to the family again."

Later, Evy would write that just a week after they got home, she had a spell of fever caused by an infection. "I was in bed for four days, fighting the high temperature. Dorothy gave me a series of penicillin shots. When it was all over, I no longer had enough milk to nurse the baby, so we had to put him on a formula. He cried a lot for the first days. But we finally found out what would satisfy him. So now he is happy, fat and contented!"

Doubtless times like this, when Evy battled infection and fever, the team would be grateful that the Lord had led Dorothy to be a part of their family.

\* \* \*

Early in October of 1949, Evy wrote to her friend: "Here I am. It is only 8:15 and I have the children in bed, and my various chores completed, so I have a few minutes to spend with you! So many evenings I don't get finished in time to do anything like this. This week both our pressure lamps are on the blink, and though we have tried to get someone to repair them, we're still in the dark. We each go around with a flashlight or a couple of candle -sized kerosene lamps.

"There has been wonderful moonlight last couple of nights. Ellen and I have sat just quietly and watched. Dorothy and Fern prefer to go to bed and read by means of flashlight. By the way, that's a common custom among us. First of all, in your bed with your net down, you are free of mosquitoes. Secondly, it's one place you can go to be alone! And there aren't many such corners in this house! Imagine living in a house where there isn't one room where you can speak in an ordinary tone without everyone else being able to hear. For some months at first, I found it very difficult especially in disciplining the children. I always knew others were listening without even trying. In fact, they couldn't help hearing.

"Frankly, if the Lord ever sees fit to let us live by ourselves it would be heavenly. But I wouldn't miss lessons that He teaches through this way of life. We know that in these beginning days on the

field, it is essential for us to be made a real unit. And the quickest way for that to happen is for us to be shut up to one another.

"We have been especially praying for the Lord for His work in our hearts now that we are about to be separated."

Yes, the time was approaching when two would move to spearhead a work in Kampaengphet. After much prayer, it was decided that Kampaeng was the next place for WEC to establish work and it was decided that Dorothy and Fern be the first ones to live there. This was not to be a long-term arrangement. In a few months or a year or so, Ellen would trade places with Fern. In fact, the move to Kampaengphet would not be made until Rosemary Hanna, a new recruit from the USA, would arrive in Hua Diat. With four unmarried women on the field it was possible to have them trade places and find out with which partner they could work most comfortably.

Perhaps it ought to be mentioned here that there were differing opinions about single women working together. Some, especially at the home end, felt that any two people called to the same area and work ought to be able to work and live together. Arguments can easily be made that any two people in right relationship with the Lord are going to be compatible. The longer single women stayed on the field, the less likely they were to agree to this position!

Evy continued her letter saying, "Last Sunday afternoon Ellen, Fern and I spent two or three hours discussing some points that had been sources of misunderstanding. It was very good to get it aired, and I felt it was very much of the Lord. For Fern and me it meant airing some things from Charlotte HQ days that we had never been free to say before. The Lord gave us real freedom and unity now. Praise His Name! If we lived in separate houses I doubt if we would ever find it necessary to say those things. But because we must soon be separated, and yet be one in His purpose, the Lord must take drastic measures sometimes."

No, communal living was never easy. Nor was it easy for any two women from different backgrounds and with different personalities to live together and work together. But Dorothy and Fern would be the first of many who would be many hours, in some cases, days' journey away from their nearest co-workers. They would manage as long as each was willing to yield her rights to do things her own way and consider the preferences of the other.

Did Fern and Dorothy prepare for that move down river with some misgivings? Certainly there would have been a sense of adventure and an assurance of the Lord's leading. Doubtless, each was aware of His personal promise to them and was expecting that, by faith, they would be adequate to the test before them.

\* \* \*

Evy closed that letter by reporting, "It's now 9:30. I'd better get myself over on my own side of the house, so my light doesn't keep anyone awake... even if it isn't very bright!

"I keep sort of listening for a motor launch on the river and hoping Wilf might be home tonight, but I really have no reason to expect him. He has been in Kampaeng about two and a half weeks and will need to be there till they finish the house."

There was no house found in Kampaeng that would have been suitable for the two women to rent, so Wilf had made an arrangement whereby he supervised the building of a house and supplied the material and plans. Then WEC would have the house rent free for six years. After that we would pay the going price for rent. That very suitable two story teak house was the WEC Kampaeng house for many years.

Evy continued, "When he (Wilf) comes home, the workers quit!" So, for many weeks he was back and forth on the river to get the house completed. The deadline in all their thinking was to have the house ready to move into before Wilf went down to Bangkok to meet Rosemary Hanna.

Her letter finished, Evy would quietly carry her lamp past the enclosed room on the Overgaard side of the house where they kept their clothes and books and personal effects. Stepping out onto the porch, she would shade the lamp with her hand so the light did not waken the sleeping children. Bending over

each one, she would check to make sure no arm or leg was touching against their mosquito net to come in contact with the ever-thirsty enemies that would seem to swarm to the tender skin of the children! Above the baby sounds and the breathing of the children and the night sounds from the garden below, Evy's ear would still be listening for the sound of a motor launch and she would still be hoping for Wilf's return.

## Comings And Goings

### Chapter 8

Wilf was thankful that the Kampaeng house was almost completed and he could be the one to make the trip to Bangkok to meet Rosemary Hanna. Over the months, he had been coming to the conclusion that a boat of some sort was necessary to reach the population of WEC's three provinces, so had been in correspondence with the Voths and Fullers about this. They informed him that a Presbyterian missionary, Ernie Fogg, had a motorboat for sale. A trip to the capital would serve two purposes. Wilf could take care of Rosemary's official business and inspect Ernie's boat for himself. If the craft met with his approval, he could go ahead and buy it and see to its shipment up-country.

The trip was so arduous, time consuming and expensive, when they left their stations to journey South, those early missionaries combined business with more business. No one went anywhere for pleasure!

\* \* \*

Rosemary's ship docked out in the Gulf of Siam in September of 1949. It was 37 years to the month since her mother, as a young single woman, Hazel Brunner, had set sail for Siam. And it was some 12 years since Rosemary had left Siam, the land of her birth. Schooling and the war had kept her on the other side of the globe those years, but although her father, Loren Hanna, of the Presbyterian Mission, was no longer living, and her mother was retired in the USA, Rosemary was, in a real sense, coming home.

Rosemary writes in her memoirs, *Cracked Earth*, that the freighter she traveled on from the States, was too large to enter the mouth of the Chao Phaya So with the ship lying at anchor about a half mile from shore, Rosemary watched "as the sun rose over the Eastern horizon, casting a rosy glow on the palm-fringed shore." Stevedores and coolies swarmed over the ship to "open the holds and maneuver the derricks."

Rosemary tells us that she strained her ears to try to follow their conversation and shouted remarks. She could not help but be a bit disappointed, for though Siamese had been the language she spoke first as a child, she could not catch and understand even one word! Of course, it was more than likely that the coolies were Chinese or Malaysian!

As Rosemary and the ship's officers ate breakfast, several small but very important launches arrived where the ship lay at anchor. Rosemary was quietly amused to note that a crowd of officials awaited her. Men in starched uniforms from the Immigration Department with stacks of official looking papers waiting to question her. Men in crisp brown uniforms from the Customs Department waited to check her cabin luggage. Men in dazzling white uniforms with insignias that told the world that they were from the Health Department were there to examine her immunization records.

How Rosemary wished her mother were there to share that moment. Hazel Hanna would have enjoyed all that official presence needed to permit her daughter entrance into the land of her birth. Fancy all that show of authority and all that expense and energy necessary to examine just one young woman! Rosemary was the only passenger disembarking!

\* \* \*

Disembarking was no easy matter, for Rosemary had to maneuver the lurching of the gangplank against the sway of the ship's side as it rode the choppy water at anchor. Her hands were full, for along with her purse, she clutched a paper sack containing lunch the ship's steward had given her at the last moment. A less agile person than Rosemary would doubtless have dropped purse and lunch in the effort to hang on to the rough rope railing to steady herself as the water lifted, then dropped the ship, gangplank and the slippery step beneath her feet.

At the foot of the gangplank, barges and small boats were tossed about. They were crashing against each other, rising and falling and sliding with the waves, no vessel offered a steady footing for the girl who waited, clutching the wet, steady railing.

Finally a group of young women crowded onto a small launch, took pity on the spray-swept girl

swaying there against the ship. Several of them worked together to pull a dazed Rosemary into their launch and then helped her to get across other launches and barges to the boat that would take her to the closest pier.

It was later, in talking to Mrs. Voth, that Rosemary understood that her deliverers were prostitutes who had sailed out to meet her ship!

\* \* \*

At the pier a ship's company car awaited the young traveler to speed her up the way to Bangkok. It was a trip of about four hours from the Gulf to the door of the American Bible Society on Sathorn Road.

Wilf, with soon to be five year old Paul, was there to greet the new WEC missionary. Wilf would take Rosemary to the different government offices to get her *Bai Tang Dao* and "Blue Book". He would go out to the dockyards with her to help take her hold-baggage through customs. Very few officials spoke English in those days -- except for unhelpful phrases like "I love you" and "Happy Birthday!"

Though Wilf was now Rosemary's field leader, it was the Voths, who had known Rosemary's parents, who made Bangkok suddenly feel like home. Later, before she would travel up-country with the "Overgaard men", Rosemary would meet the Fullers and Seigles, more old friends and co-workers of Loren and Hazel Hanna. Conversations around meal tables would bring to life memories of the young Hanna couple with their small children. Rosemary surely heard tales of their own childhood long forgotten by her and Claralice, her twin.

\* \* \*

While Wilf added a motorboat to the baggage that would be loaded onto their bus for the homeward trip, Rosemary acquired an organ. Ernie Fogg, from whom Wilf bought the boat, told Rosemary that the Samray Church had an organ that had belonged to her parents. As the church now possessed a new organ, the congregation would be glad for Rosemary to reclaim this piece of family property.

Rosemary gives us a good picture of the waterways of 1949 Bangkok, as she tells of the trip they made in Wilf's new boat to pick up her organ. "We started off in the rain. Little Paul went along. Mrs. Fogg had given me a toy parasol, about a foot in diameter, to keep my head dry. The others simply got wet. We started off from a pier in front of the Fogg's residence. It was a long trip, down one water-way and up another, under bridges, between grassy banks and busy streets ... After some time, we got to the Chao Phaya River, the main water way of Thailand. It is a wide and sometimes rough river, for it rises and ebbs with the tide. House boats were tied up all along the shore. Some were shops and places of business, others were purely residential.

"A heavy shower came on, and we drew up to one of these floating houses for shelter. As soon as we got under the roof, we discovered it was an opium den. Men lay in rows on a low platform with their heads on wooden pillows, smoking opium through long pipes. Here and there were smoky little lamps for lighting their pipes."

One can almost see, as Rosemary writes, the gray river smothered in the blanket of rain and the darker shadows of the opium den looming up as the little motorboat drew in under its roof. The shadowy figures with their sickly sweet-smelling pipes silhouetted there against the flickering light of their smoky lamps must have come as a shock to the new missionary.

Met by prostitutes at her arrival, now sheltered from the rain by the low hanging roof of an opium den, Rosemary certainly met the most seamy side of life in Thailand in her first days back in the land of her birth. It is doubtful that the girl who left Thailand as a student had ever heard of either prostitutes or opium dens. And certainly the Wheaton scholar who went on to Princeton Seminary must have remembered an idyllic existence. Rosemary must have recalled a sun-drenched garden in Lampang. Her childhood would have been full of music and laughter and innocent play there in that enclosed sweet-scented garden. One wonders if now exposed to the dark and ugly side of the land of her birth, Rosemary didn't have some second thoughts about staying on in Thailand.

Thankfully, the rain soon slackened and Rosemary writes, "We went on down the river and entered

another klong. This was a quiet, peaceful canal, with trees meeting overhead. Suddenly we heard firecrackers and native music. Around the bend in the klong came a line of canoes, each with a gaily decorated canopy, and all occupants dressed in colorful silks and satins. Some wore flowers in their hair or around their neck, and many had silver bowls, each with a little tree standing in it, made of flowers and paper-money. In the front sat the musicians with flutes, drums, xylophones, etc.

"They are on their way to the temple to make merit,' Mr. Fogg explained.

"When we reached the church, the Thai pastor and his wife came out. I sat on a bench and talked as best I could with people who had known my parents. But the mosquitoes swarmed about and stung me so fiercely that I was quite distracted from conversation."

When the organ was safely loaded on the little boat, its weight brought the boat to a dangerously low level in the rough water. Rosemary tells us, "The trip up the river was a terrifying experience for me. A wind had risen which made the water rougher than on our outbound trip, and we were now going against the current. The engine stopped several times and we had to paddle furiously to hold ground until it started again. Then we approached the mouth of our *klong*, the traffic had grown so thick it was hard to get through. We found ourselves between two large Chinese rice-boats -- they hold about a ton of rice besides the living quarters for a large family. Their sides towered above our heads and the wind and waves dashed them about so that I was sure our wee craft would soon be crushed or capsize. Paul was crying, and I'm sure we were all praying as we pushed against the sides of the big boats as hard as we could. Finally we squeezed through unharmed, and arrived home wet, but in the end, glad for the adventure."

\* \* \*

When Rosemary's trunks arrived at the customs area, Wilf began what was to become another part of his job as field leader. Along with talking the various items through inspection, explaining every article and answering the many questions about the person and purpose of the newly-arrived missionary, Wilf explained the work of the mission and presented the Gospel. Many would have seen travel to Bangkok and time spent waiting for official red tape as a waste of time and energy. But Wilf used this unique opportunity to reach out to lost officials. He valued the opportunity to witness over drums, battered trunks and tea chests to those lost officials of Bangkok.

Customs finished, the little band was ready to start up-country. Well ...not quite ready!

Soon-to-be-five-year-old Paul was running a fever!

The first lap of travel was a hot trip of many hours on an over-crowded train. Rosemary tells us that Wilf bought a cup of chipped ice at one of the many stops that day to try to cool his fevered son.

It was 10 o'clock that evening before the train finally reached Pitsanuloke and the tiny hotel where the party would be spending the night.

Rosemary adds to our picture of that hotel by explaining that she had been warned to take her own sheets and pillowcases. She was thankful for that advice when she saw the state of the one sheet covering her mattress and the badly stained pillowcase. She says, "Neither the sheet nor the cover for the cube-shaped cushion had been changed after the last occupant." She could have added "or after the last several occupants". Indeed, some pillowcases looked to have been on the pillows since the hotel first opened!

Rosemary, as had the other WECcers before her, would now be introduced to a Thai hotel bathroom. The cement floor, sloping to its drain in the corner, was slippery and slimy. The walls did not go all the way up to the ceiling and foreigners fought off the impression that eyes were peering at them over the wall, out of the darkness beyond. A dented tin dipper always floated on top of the oily-looking water in the *ong*. And it was certainly not an uncommon occurrence to find a frog frolicking in the *ong*. If the water were clear enough to see to any depth at all, bathers would realize that they were splashing mosquito larva over themselves.

Thankful that there was enough water left in her canteen to do the job, Rosemary brushed her teeth. Then she turned her empty canteen over to Wilf to have it filled with boiled water for the next day's



drinking. The restaurant that supplied that water was probably beginning to recognize the traveler from Raheng.

The next morning started out with breakfast on the veranda. Wilf had bought a papaya from a fruit vendor. Adding that fruit to a dish of rice and condensed milk he could purchase from the hotel, the three breakfasted royally. Rosemary tells us that Wilf had brought from home a tin of instant coffee. "The dampness had turned it hard and tarry, but after much stirring, we had two good cups of coffee."

\* \* \*

Something of Rosemary's humor can be seen when she tells of the highway their bus traveled that day. "It was a two lane highway -- that is, a lane for the left tires and a lane for the right ones with grass and weeds growing between." She further explains that when they met a vehicle going in the opposite direction, their bus had to leave the highway to let the other car pass!

\* \* \*

It is again from the pen of Rosemary that we learn of the lunch-stop that those long ago buses made between Pitsanuloke and Raheng.

Many passengers would have squatted outside the shade made by the bus. They would have had a great time buying fresh fruit or roasted ears of corn sold by locals who brought their wares in woven baskets hung on "hop" sticks. There would have been barbecued chicken and boiled peanuts and pickled mangoes, and to quench the thirst of the passengers there would have been soda pop sold in plastic bags. Sukhothai, the town of the usual stop, was already so advanced that it boasted an ice factory. Unless it was a day when the factory was broken down, there would have been brownish chunks of ice floating in the bag of *Coke* or *Green Spot*. The neck of the plastic bag would be tightened around a straw by a twisted rubber-band. You could hang your drink up anywhere but you couldn't set it down. The bag would collapse, spilling your drink out through the straw. Foreigners, *farangs*, accustomed to drinking out of glasses and bottles made the fatal mistake over and over!

But in those early years, the *farangs* didn't squat and eat in the shade of the bus. No, Rosemary was introduced to a Chinese restaurant that the missionaries had used before. There was an upstairs veranda built to look out upon the river. It offered a good panoramic view of the city and of river life. Rosemary noted the enormous image of the Buddha towering above the old, ramshackle marketplace and the crowded, crooked lanes that radiated out from its base. Everywhere the ruins of ancient temples dotted the area.

Wilf reminded Rosemary that Sukhothai had once been the capital of the old Kingdom of Siam. "The people of Sukhotha are ardent Buddhists, and very proud of their ancient temples, traditions and history. There are no Christians here, and we haven't had a chance to even visit this place yet." Something of the burden the small WEC band felt for this part of their territory could be heard in Wilf's remarks.

Sukhothai "was a squalid, thickly populated town. All the houses stood on stilts in scummy water. The river was crowded with craft, large Chinese rice-boats, barges from Bangkok all inhabited by families or teams of coolies. The tops were loaded with furniture and other merchandise from the city, to be sold or bartered for rice, coconuts, sticklac and other raw products." This town Rosemary describes for us was later destroyed by fire. The city that arose from the ashes is thankfully very different from that squalid town standing in scummy water.

\* \* \*

It was about four in the afternoon when the bus/truck finally reached Raheng and the Borneo house. Rosemary tells us that the entire household rushed out to meet them at the gate. Not just the small Paul, but Rosemary as well, was greeted with hugs. Wilf, of course, enjoyed the embrace of an exuberant Sharon, and his own wife. Later the group would realize that such a show of affection was so foreign to their Thai neighbors that they had become a spectacle! Neighbors never wanted to miss the treat of seeing those strange foreigners arrive home after just a few days absence. Doubtless it was a matter of understanding more and more of the remarks made by neighbors that brought the Mission to the habit

of rather restrained, formal greetings when welcoming arrivals out at the street.

What did the Raheng group think of the new/used boat that had been added to their possessions? Was Fern, as the musician of the group, excited about the folding organ that had belonged to Rosemary's parents? Certainly both boat and organ were valuable and useful additions.

There was one other item brought from Bangkok that must have absolutely delighted the Borneo household. Someone among the Presbyterian missionaries in Bangkok had in his possession a shortwave radio that had belonged to Loren Hanna. This treasure, they now gave to Loren's daughter. An ancient radio that produced a series of whistles and squeals and clicks that could drown out the strongest stations was indeed a treasure. The transistor was not yet in existence, so radios were both large and expensive. This old shortwave radio would now put the group in touch with the outside world. Well, that was the expectation!

Rosemary tells us that the next day, Wilf worked on the radio. "Now we will know what's going on in the world," someone remarked. "At Christmas time we'll be able to hear some Christmas music," another voiced. But Rosemary adds, "It was several months after Christmas before they got the radio to work."

That day, as Wilf worked on the radio, the rest of the house was a busy hive of confusion. Rosemary was busy unpacking and putting her things away. She uncrated her bicycle and assembled it. Fern and Dorothy were finishing their packing and clearing space for Rosemary's things. Evy unpacked, laundered and repacked for Wilf as he was to head out the very next day on an important trip. He was to accompany Dorothy and Fern in their historic move to Kampaengphet.

Evy wrote her friend Sylvia at that time requesting prayer. Baby Mark was having trouble sleeping at night. "Perhaps he is starting to cut his first teeth," she remarked. In any case his distressing crying made it necessary for someone to get up and comfort him several times in the night. When Wilf was home, he and Evy shared that job. But it is easy to see from his activities at this time, Wilf was seldom home.

\* \* \*

Rosemary's second day in Raheng started early as a "small motor

launch pulled up to the river bank in front of the house where boxes, trunks and furniture stood waiting. After all the things were loaded on, and the dog, Jip, tied and seated on the front platform, the group of missionaries stood in a circle on the bank, surrounded by a crowd of onlookers, to pray for Fern and Dorothy, and for the opening of the new station. Then they and Wilf got in the boat, the engine started, last farewells, instructions, and words of wisdom were shouted across the widening expanse of water, and the boat went puttering down the river and out of sight."



*The WEC Team in 1950:*

*Fern Berg, Ellen Gillman, Dorothy Caswell, Rosemary Hanna, Evy and Wilf Overgaard with Sharon, Paul and Mark*

## The Walled City

### Chapter 9

Though Kampaengphet means "Jeweled Wall", a few scattered heaps of disintegrating brick and mortar were all that was left of what once may have been an impressive wall surrounding a temple-filled city. Here and there in the overgrown jungle stood a crumbling structure that once housed priests. The paved courtyards where the faithful once gathered for worship were crowded with the twisted, snaking branches and roots of ancient banyan trees.

In 1949, though some temples had been cleared of the vines that curtained them from view, excavations had not yet discovered the extent of the sacred city, and restoration had not yet revealed the splendor that once was. Most of the ancient buildings, hidden behind their wall of vines and trees and roots, continued to disintegrate in the rain. Monkeys chattered behind those walls and brightly colored birds flashed into view, then suddenly disappeared, darting behind those curtains of green.

Here and there a farmer, enlarging his rice fields would uncover an arm or head of a stone statue. He would struggle to carry it to the edge of his field that it not break his plow, never realizing that here was evidence of long ago life and greatness.

Nearing the end of 1949, when WEC entered Kampaeng, there was only a hint of the ornate temples with their array of statues, paved grounds, gilded filigree ornaments and glass mosaics that once towered above the jungle growth. Only the name of the wall that had surrounded the legendary city was left to mark the area where that grandeur once stood.

The modern town bore the name of the wall, but in reality the town was just the center of a rice farming community. The mud track that wound its way beside the river for two or three miles was the center of that wider scattered community of fields and huts. There were a few storefront houses, a rice mill, two schools and a cluster of government buildings and scattered temples that threatened to follow the ancient walled city into crumbling oblivion.

The houses in Kampaeng were mostly wooden with rusty corrugated tin roofs. Rosemary tells us in her memoirs that "They were closely packed together and leaned far out over the river bank on rickety crutches." The temples scattered throughout the town lifted white-washed spires to pierce the vivid tropical sky.

\* \* \*

Fern tells us that the house that she and Dorothy moved into was the very last house at the end of town. Any semblance of roadway had come to an end, and the pathway worn at the side of the river was the result of water buffaloes and oxen being led to and from the town each morning and evening.

Built up on posts a full six feet off the ground, the WEC house was just beyond the mud-holes where water buffaloes wallowed. But the front of the house looked out on the beauty of the river with teak forests climbing its opposite bank and spreading out to cover all over the world as far as the eye could see.

The house itself was built somewhat along the lines of the Borneo House. That is, the center of the building was a wide open expanse extending from the front of the house right through to the back. Only a low railing served as wall to this most-used part of the building. Bedrooms were enclosed at the sides of this breezeway but Fern and the other WECers who would follow Fern and Dorothy to live in Kampaeng would spend most of their time in this open area where they would get every bit of breeze possible.

That Dorothy is not mentioned as spending most of their time in that area is not an oversight. Dorothy soon rented the house next door and established a clinic or dispensary where a constant stream of Thai came with ailments from simple fevers and obvious broken bones and gunshot, knife or animal attack wounds to the shocking disfigurement of yaws and leprosy.

Before moving to Kampaeng, the two women had shared their vision and hopes for the outreach they would have in this new area. Obviously, each was so taken up with her own vision that she couldn't really hear what the other one was saying. Or perhaps the pressure of the present so thrust

them into separate paths that they were unable to be the companions they had hoped to be. Fern makes the comment, "We had no real communication."

In any case, Dorothy had little time, energy or inclination for more than the medical work that went on next door. Certainly she shared the Gospel with groups of patients. She had flannel-graph to help picture the truths she wanted to communicate to all age groups. But it was the care of patients that monopolized most of her time, energy and preparation. Often strange symptoms kept her at her medical books late into the night.

That Fern became the *Mae Bahn*, and trained and worked with the servants was to be expected. The many times she had lifted those burdens from Evy's shoulders, along with her own talents and training made her more than qualified to run the household. But though she could enjoy the running of the house it was the call to evangelize that challenged Fern. Evangelization was the heartbeat of WEC. They were an evangelistic crusade; every member of the mission was expected to be an evangelist. Fern was willing but she was dismayed and disappointed to find that she would have to get out and do it all on her own.

Fern enjoyed preparing for children's meetings. To print out song-sheets and memory verses and arrange flash cards or flannel-graph for the story was no problem at all. It was going down those stairs and setting off on her own with her concertina to attract a tail of children; that is what always demanded a discipline of self-denial, for Fern could always see a dozen things waiting to be taken care of in the house. And the constant heat and humidity sapped her strength, dulling her zeal to leave the shady breezeway and shelter of her own roof. Fern had to force herself to do what she seldom really felt like doing. This was a spiritual battle that Fern waged constantly.

If Dorothy had had the time to be a prayer partner and companion in evangelizing Kampaeng, Fern would have been strengthened for that second front of spiritual warfare. It was in street meetings and meetings in homes open to her that Fern faced the powers of darkness and she reports that those confrontations left her "utterly exhausted, emotionally and physically."

\* \* \*

When Dorothy went on furlough, left behind among her gear, was the most complete set of visual aids for teaching the Bible that anyone on the Thai field would have for many years. Eventually, when it became obvious that she would not be returning to Thailand, Dorothy was asked what she wanted done with her trunk and barrel of possessions. Finally the answer came that she had no desire that those things be sent home to her and wanted them distributed to the WEC missionaries on the field. Only then, upon the examination of the teaching aids Dorothy had purchased as she joined WEC, did it become apparent that she had envisioned and prepared for being personally involved in an extensive teaching ministry.

Instead, she had an extensive medical ministry with a few moments snatched each day to try to get the attention of her waiting patients. Lifting her voice above the level of conversation going on in her crowded dispensary, she talked about a picture or poster that depicted a part of the Gospel. But Dorothy was talking to groups that had not only never been exposed to the Gospel, but who were not remotely interested. Many were desperately ill and in pain, or they were distracted with worry for a child they had brought for treatment.

It was a captive audience that Dorothy had each day, but it was only their bodies that were captured. To capture their ears and minds was another matter altogether. A few moments into her lesson, Dorothy would be drawn out by the coughing of an emaciated mother or the fretful crying of a fevered child. Or perhaps there would be a continual muttering of an elderly granny, betel juice oozing from the corner of her mouth as she complained that she couldn't understand how her unmarried granddaughter had gotten herself pregnant! A toothless uncle seated there on the floor would interrupt his own coughing to venture the opinion that he knew exactly how it had happened!

A quiet voice from a fragile-looking woman would begin the most explicit account of her problems and symptoms. The talker would look as if she would never have the nerve to interrupt a foreign



teacher, but she would continue on quietly to present her illness to any who would listen and the tragedy of the hour was that everyone in the dispensary would give her their undivided attention -- except poor Dorothy, standing there with her flash card!

\* \* \*

Fern confesses that as she went out with her concertina to attract children, she hoped that no sophisticated or educated adults would be drawn to her meetings; she felt so insecure in the Thai language. The children and elderly grandmothers seemed to laugh with her at her mistakes. But she felt so threatened by adults. Would they repeat and ridicule her mistakes? In spite of her timidity, Fern faithfully taught her neighbors and those in the back alleyways. She taught songs and verses and stories. Homes were open to her and where Fern sat on the floor close to the street and visited with householders, she made friends. She became acquainted. She knew names and family stories. Fern became a neighbor.



*Dorothy and Fern in Kampaeng*

There was another side to Fern's contacts with the Thai. It started in a small way in Kampaeng and would grow larger in every place Fern would live in Thailand. The wives of government officials and teachers would seek Fern out. Because Fern was willing to teach them how to make bread and cakes and pies, and she was willing to make special desserts for their official functions, she was always accepted in the highest social circle of whatever town or city where she would live.

Many WECers would seek to follow Fern's example

in the hope of establishing contacts with this educated and cultured group. But not everyone could be sure that their cakes and breads, baked in ovens propped up on charcoal fire-pots, would rise evenly. Nor could they guarantee even texture from the rough flour and sugar they had to use. Caramelizing the local brown sugar and perfecting the shaving and toasting of coconut for icing took more time than most felt they could give to such an art. Fern's training paid off. Her cakes, breads, muffins and pies were almost always perfect. Fern's disasters would have more than satisfied most of those who sought to emulate her. This was a bridge-building ministry for which Dorothy had no time or interest at all.

Dorothy, locked into the medical ministry, hadn't the time to explore and develop a discipling and teaching ministry. Fern, busy with housekeeping and the servants, was often too occupied to be out on the streets holding meetings. It is possible that each of them felt distracted from the ministry that would have made them feel fulfilled (though that is not a term anyone used in 1949-1950). But the truth is that both the medical ministry and Fern's many contacts in the town won friends for future WEC workers and sparked the original interest in hearts that would eventually follow on to know the Lord.

\* \* \*

Back in Raheng, Rosemary was spending some time with the teacher each day to wean her away from the Northern Thai of her childhood, enlarge her vocabulary and perfect her grammar. Both Rosemary and Dorothy had presented unique challenges to the language study set up. No one was officially "in charge" of the language school. The teacher had never had any experience in teaching her language to a

foreigner nor could she understand the language of her students.

Wilf, Evy and Ellen were still spending time with the teacher. Evy wrote her friend, Sylvia, that they had a good teacher and each one of them spent an hour with her each week day. That is a statement that needs to be interpreted by the conditions of life in that day and time. Illness, nursing the ill, interruptions and Wilf's trips all would have made it impossible for any one of them to keep to a rigid schedule. Three or four sessions with the teacher in any given week would have been a prize, gratefully appreciated. And each one had definite ideas of what he or she needed to study with the teacher in order to improve his or her conversational Thai and ability to present the Gospel more clearly. Each one knew how to make the most of that hour spent with what amounted to an "informant".

Rosemary was amused to hear her teacher talking to the cook or wash-girl out behind the house. That very same teacher had repeated over and over a Central Thai phrase, urging Rosemary not to use the Northern Thai equivalent. She spoke of the Northern Thai as if it were so low and uncouth, using it would brand Rosemary as uneducated. Not a half hour later, she was using the Northern Thai herself, never knowing that her student could overhear her.

\* \* \*

Ellen and Evy were also introducing Rosemary to neighbors and friends in Hua Diat and in the market area of Raheng Friendship with town folk who responded to the missionaries, but not to the Gospel, was an important part of life. Such friendships opened the eyes and ears of the missionaries to see what their "testimony" was really saying to the nationals.

There is one conversation that Ellen often mentioned over the years, for it puts a "pause and consider" clause into many a decision-making situation: Ellen had taken Rosemary down into the market area to meet a special friend. This friend was a young woman about their age. She was highly educated for the time and area, for she was the daughter of wealthy Chinese shop-owners. As Rosemary underwent the usual cross-questioning any language student meets from the curious, the girl's mother and a neighbor lady began to chat about the foreign missionaries and how they lived. The status symbol of the time was a kerosene refrigerator. A few of the most wealthy shop-owners of Raheng boasted such a possession, and had it prominently displayed in their front room. Guests would always be presented with a glass of chilled (and perfumed) water from the kerosene refrigerator. The neighbor lady ventured to guess that the wealthy foreigners would have a mammoth refrigerator in the Borneo House. Ellen's friend, who had been talking to Rosemary and didn't appear to be even listening to the other conversation, quickly spoke up; "Oh no, they are too stingy to have any refrigerator."

So much for a testimony of sacrifice! Many such conversations later, the missionaries would understand that while Buddhism as a religion applauds sacrifice, Buddhism as it is lived in Thailand despises any sacrifice that lowers a person's living standards or appearance, except in the lives of Buddhist priests.

In truth, the Hua Diat household didn't possess a refrigerator, not because of some conviction but because they simply couldn't afford one!

\* \* \*

There was another important friend whom Rosemary met in those first days in Hua Diat. *Mae Kai* (mother Egg) lived a bit to the North of the Borneo House. In that first year the four were in residence, she had come one morning with the request that the missionaries follow her home to see if they could help her son.

This young man, Duan, was desperately ill. Nothing more could be done for him. He had not responded to any treatment and spirit doctors and mediums had finally given up. Duan was dying.

His mother had heard and even seen much of what these foreigners did for the ill. Ellen, without medical training, had become rather renowned as a doctor! Perhaps her medical practice began with putting drops in a neighbor child's red and inflamed eyes, or giving soda mints to a friend of the wash-girl who complained of indigestion. Beginning with some small act of kindness, Ellen's doctoring had grown to many requests each week for aspirin and ointment and quinine.

Now the request had come that all of the missionaries follow Mae Kai home to see if they could help her son, Duan.

Was this the breakthrough they had been praying for? Each of the four wondered about this, as they followed the middle-aged mother along the path. From almost every house they passed, some one would call out to question the state of Duan's health, or to find out just why the foreigners were following Mae Kai. Obviously everyone knew her and knew of her son's illness.

Arriving at her home, Mae Kai led the guests up a ladder and across the roofless porch into a crowded room. There seemed to be scores of elderly females covering every bit of floor space and they appeared to be having a craft class, forming bouquets and bushes full of paper flowers. However, this wasn't a craft class or a lighthearted gathering. The women were making flowers for Duan's funeral.

In an inner room the missionaries found the heat quite suffocating. Although it was an oppressively hot day, a large fire was burning and at first, appeared to be built right on the floor of the house. Entering the room and approaching the fire, they discovered that what looked like a child's play sandbox had been built right in the room and the burning fire rested in that sand.

The young man they had come to see was lying as close to the fire as was safe. And in spite of that position of unbearable heat, he was covered with a home-woven cotton blanket. No calling from his mother or words from the missionaries could arouse him. Duan was in a deep coma.

There were few men in that room, for most of his friends and male relatives had gone off to look for lumber to make Duan's coffin.

\* \* \*

It was illegal to cut down a teak tree from the dense forest that surrounded Raheng, for the British and Danish companies had paid for the right to use all of the teak forests in Thailand. But Raheng, like most communities in Thailand, boasted many sawyers. Though it was illegal to saw, buy, and sell or even possess new teak boards, it was perfectly legal to build a new teak house. All that was required was that the boards used were not new; they must have nail holes in them to prove that they had been used before. So Thai acquired teak boards for any building project, a few at a time. The boards were carried in from the forests in the dark of night and immediately nailed up to the house-posts. Most houses had a growing wall of teak out at the edge of their porch or down under the floor of their house. Because boards then had nails and nail holes in them, they were no longer new and their possession was perfectly legal!

It took most families several years to accumulate enough boards to make an addition to their old house or to build a new one. Most houses had several wall or floor boards awaiting a building project.

In 1949-1950 almost all rural houses in Thailand were teak in spite of the fact that, on the books, it was against the law for Thai to cut down the teak trees. The rationale for this was that though the British and Danish had leased all of the teak-lands, they would always have all of teak they could harvest. The teak forests were so vast and so dense there was no way the foreign companies could do more than make just a small dent in those rain forests. And of course, in time, the companies' leases would expire and the forests would revert to the Thai government.

In the meantime, the people of the land would use the wood of the land. But they would do it carefully. After all, they wouldn't want to offend the foreign companies. They weren't stealing. The forests really belonged to them. Stealthy trips were made in the dark to carry boards; they positioned lookouts along the way to warn of impending discovery, and the nailed up new boards before daylight. All this was out of consideration for the foreign teak companies and the Thai officials required to enforce the law.

\* \* \*

Duan's brothers and friends had not yet returned with the wood for his coffin when the missionaries arrived at his home. But they would have no trouble persuading friends and relatives to part with a board or two from the boards nailed between their house-posts awaiting the day when they would build, or enlarge or repair their homes. Soon the sounds of sawing and nailing would fill the house as

builders worked on Duan's coffin just beneath the floor where he lay.

Sitting on the floor beside the comatose man, the missionaries hardly knew what they should do. Only Mother Egg seemed to have no doubts that they would have the answer that would bring life and healing to her son.

Finally, Wilf spoke up, asking that the spirit strings be taken from the dying man's wrists and neck. If this were done, he would pray to the God of Heaven to heal Duan. That the strings were removed at Wilf's request only proves that there was absolutely no hope for Duan. Had anyone in that room entertained even the slightest expectation of Duan's recovery, they would have violently objected to those strings being removed.

When the strings had been cut away, Wilf began to pray aloud. The other missionaries were most certainly praying silently. It was a tiny corner of human contact with Heaven. All around them was dense darkness, not just of Buddhism but of Buddhism mixed with spirit worship. The spirit strings that had been cut away were an eloquent testimony to the fact that a spirit doctor had performed a ceremony and tied those strings to protect Duan from death. Doubtless, Buddhist priests had also been there and had recited their incantations, and it is most likely that some of them would have worn spirit strings showing that their hope was also in the protection of spirits whose existence Buddhism denies!

Those praying in that house of death that day knew that they were in a crucial situation. They were on-stage before a watching world. Over and over they had taught in the streets of Hua Diat, always proclaiming both God's unlimited power and His unlimited love. How did the crowd in that house interpret what they were seeing, as four missionaries bowed before this god they talked so much about? Did that god even exist? If he existed, would he honor the petitions of these who claimed to be his servants? They didn't look like much! They didn't have shaven heads or pocketless robes to speak of their renunciation of this world. But at the same time, their clothing and the condition of their hands showed clearly that they were poor laborers!

Wilf surely claimed promises from the Word of God as he prayed. He surely proclaimed miracles and professed his faith that God could heal Duan, and He would do so, if that healing was within God's sovereign will and divine knowledge of what was best for Duan.

Since the Buddhist priests chanted in Pali and were never understood by the common people, it must have seemed strange for this foreign "priest" to talk to his god in language that even children in the room could understand. How very unreligious!

When Wilf finished praying, he lifted his head and opened his eyes. The foreign women with him lifted their heads and opened their eyes.

Duan's eyes opened!

Though Duan did not seem to be alert and aware of his surroundings it was obvious to all that a remarkable change in his condition had occurred.

That was just the beginning.

Why didn't God just restore Duan to full health immediately? Why didn't the young man sit right up and request food or drink? Why did God not choose a spontaneous restoration to vigorous strength and health?

Looking back, the answers to those questions are obvious.

Duan's recovery was slow. At times there seemed to be no progress at all. But daily, one or more of the Hua Diat four would visit with medicine and vitamins. They would bathe the invalid and try to make him more comfortable. The ministry of the Borneo household to Duan showed their care and concern for him as nothing else could have done. Day by day, God continued to touch the life and needs of Duan through the members of His body on earth.

But they didn't just live the Gospel, they proclaimed the Gospel. With each visit, they would tell more and more about the Lord Jesus.

Never was the house empty. Never was Duan alone. There were always several neighbors and members of the family present waiting to hear what the foreigners would teach.



As Duan became stronger, his mind was captured by the words he heard. Duan and others of the household became the first believers in Hua Diat, the first to come to faith and a desire to follow on in obedience to the Lord.

\* \* \*

It was into this atmosphere was promised harvest that Rosemary Hanna moved. This was a time of excitement at the Borneo House. Table conversation recounted the testimony of Duan and Mae Kai and others of that neighborhood who were growing in faith and were living and speaking a testimony before their friends.

Raheng was an exciting place for missionaries to be at the start of 1950. Kampaeng was another matter.

## **Notice to Move**

### **Chapter 10**

It was nearing the end of 1949 when the occupants of the Borneo House received notice that the Company wanted to use their house in Raheng. The WECcers would have to be out by April of 1950. And so the job of house hunting began.

The young missionaries had already come to feel that to be "light and salt" in that long, strung-out community by the river, they ought to divide up. There were two women and the Overgaard family all living in the same town. They could have one household remain in the Hua Diat area and the other move south of the market.

The team had been experiencing that their most effective witness was to immediate neighbors and those close by just to the North of them in the neighborhood of Mae Kai's house. If a neighborhood response was what they could expect, then they must divide and be seed in more than one neighborhood.

This decision to put so much distance between the two households in Tak deserves more than a passing thought. It would have been so convenient and so pleasant if the two houses were within easy walking distance of each other. To be able to drop in on each other for an unscheduled visit over a cup of coffee or to borrow a tin of milk or a cup of sugar would have made life so much easier. Even to cancel a scheduled meeting or share really pressing news meant a long bicycle trip, often in the rain and over muddy paths.

It is obvious that their own convenience and pleasure was far down on the list of priorities those first WECcers in Raheng considered in moving from the Borneo house. But their decision further complicated the job of house hunting.

\* \* \*

Meanwhile, life in the Borneo House continued. Since the house was in a very large compound, a coolie was needed to keep the grass (anything green that would grow) cut down. There was no such thing as a lawn mower in Raheng in those days. So Si, an elderly man, carried water for the bathroom and for the kitchen and cut the grass. Rosemary says, he "squatted on the ground, swinging a long knife about an inch above the ground until a circle of grass was cut. Then he moved over about two feet and made another circle to overlap with the first."

Si had to stop every half-hour or forty-five minutes and roll a pinch of tobacco into a square cut from a banana leaf. Finding a shady spot, he rested and doubtless contemplated deep philosophical questions as he puffed on his homemade cigar. (Many missionaries to Thailand would learn to their embarrassment that often uneducated, illiterate Thai farmers had very deep philosophical questions that demanded considerable thought and study to answer!) In any case, whatever Si was thinking about in those breaks he took from cutting the grass, it took him many days to finish the entire lawn. And by the time he finished the last section, the first section needed cutting again.

At some point in the two years the Mission was in the Borneo House, Wilf got the idea that they could cut back on household expenses if they invested in a goat, to eat the grass. So a goat was installed. Tethered with a long rope so he couldn't wander off but reach plenty of grass to eat, the goat became a part of the Borneo compound. Evy reported that he ate everything, absolutely everything, from the wash-girl's straw hat to the dish-towels drying on the line, from the children's socks to the rope he had been tied with. But he wouldn't eat grass!

By the time Rosemary arrived in Raheng, the cook at the Borneo House was a young man named Inn. Listen to how Rosemary describes this tiny, graceful young man: "His features were set off by a high pompadour of beautiful shiny black hair. When neatly combed back, it added a couple of inches to his stature. When not combed, it fell over his ears and covered his cheeks, adding to the impression of daintiness which was part of his personality. Inn was a real prince charming, and his life was already tangled in triangular knots. Nevertheless, he was a good cook."

Actually, Inn was more than a good cook. He was a warning who imprinted the missionaries with

lessons that would help them through the years in many situations. The missionaries regularly had household prayers with the servants. Inn responded charmingly. He agreed, confessed, praised and thanked as the lesson indicated. He could talk rings around the missionaries. Whoever was leading the prayer time would come away bemused, wondering just who was in charge of that meeting. And they all realized that if they did not know about Inn's completely amoral life, his pious words would have convinced them that he was truly a devout believer!

Over the years, there would be many Inns, Thai who professed faith and told of experiences with God and encounters with the Lord Jesus in dreams and visions. If they could speak with eloquence, charisma and persuasion, a red warning light flashed for all those who remembered Inn.

Wait!!

Examine fruit!

Look for character!

Look for faithfulness!

Watch friends and relatives for confirmation of his testimony.

WECcers would meet such characters with the hope that their profession of faith was real. But they were careful. Even in their prayer letters home, they did not want to use testimonies of dramatic conversions until those conversions had stood the test of time.

If a conversion was real, the convert's life was his own pedestal; neighborhood, family, and friends would be watching, listening and remembering.

\* \* \*

From the Borneo House, Rosemary and Ellen would set out several times a week to have street meetings or to visit in homes and to continue the teaching that had begun in the area of Duan's home.

Rosemary paints a vivid picture for us when she tells us that children suffering with red-eye would eagerly wait for Ellen's passing by. When Ellen and Rosemary would come into sight, the scattered children would gather in a straggly line by the side of the road. Children in their ragged play clothing, looking like babies themselves, would be holding a naked baby sister or brother astride their hips. Rosemary reports that, "Ellen went along the line, putting a drop of medicine into their red, watery eyes. Even the tiny ones were remarkably good about opening their eyes."

Rosemary tells us that, "On Saturdays, Ellen and I visited villages along the farther bank of the river. When we first started these weekly trips, it was at the end of the rainy season when the roads were still deep in mud. We were usually splattered and caked with mud after wading ankle-deep and pushing our bicycles. Then we had to carry them down a steep slippery bank at the boat landing and balance them across the sides of the boat. By the time we had thought it out and decided that the bicycles were a waste of time and energy, the roads had become dry and hard, and the bicycling was better. But the ferry boats stopped running then, so we carried the bikes and left them at a home near the ford. The river had receded to waist depth by the time the boats stopped, and toward the end of the dry season, it was almost down to our knees. We arrived on the other shore with dripping skirts, but it did not take the hot sun long to dry them.

"Walking the length of a village, we stopped at homes, or in yards or on the river bank, wherever there were people. Sometimes we chatted with individuals, and sometimes we had a full-fledged meeting with singing and preaching. We almost always sensed a greater response and friendliness on the second or third visit."

Rosemary painted a picture of the part of the day that was relaxed and carefree, lunch time. They always took a lunch with them and found a quiet secluded spot where they could relax. After lunch was eaten, Rosemary says they often "lay on their backs and gazed up into the leafy mosaic of the bamboo."

After a short rest they would head back, stopping at houses and places they had missed in the morning. At the end of the trip there would be the repeat performance of crossing the river to once again arrive with wet, muddy skirts.

Then after they had finally gotten home late in the afternoon, she says, "We sank wearily into our

rattan chairs and Evy served us a cup of tea; were were glad to be home again."

It is deeply moving to hear that almost fifty years later, WEC missionaries witnessing in that same area have come across several very elderly Thai who were wanting to register their faith and express commitment to the God Ellen and Rosemary told them about so many years ago!

\* \* \*

Wilf was busy as usual. He had searched all over Raheng, looking for suitable housing and it looked as if nothing was available. In January of 1950, Evy wrote her friend, Sylvia, "Wilf left Friday for a trip across the mountains. He walked and took a guide and a carrier. You see, there is no road across and you must walk, or ride horseback, if you do not want to go by plane. (There was a plane in to Maesod twice a week in the dry season. If the landing field was not deep in mud, or heavy clouds did not make the flight through the mountain passes to dangerous to undertake, there were as many flights in the rainy season too). He is headed for a town about fifty miles away, close to the Burma border. It is Maesod. It is part of this province of Tak, but is separated from this area by mountains. But in the city there are supposed to be over fifty thousand people." (One wonders where that number came from!)

Evy continues, "We have been having some thoughts that we, our family, should move over there. You see, our contract on this house expires in March and we have not, so far been able to find anything suitable (in Raheng). One old house we looked at would have required several hundred dollars in repairs and then, may not have stood up too many years. It was so old and crooked already. Several things have happened to turn our thoughts to Maesod, so we felt Wilf ought to go over there and have a look at the situation. I had quite a battle at first, but the Lord has given me real peace and the desire to do His will."

Though Evy had come to a place of willingness to move across the mountains to Maesod, she still was able to see the multiplied problems of such a move. She continues, "There are several sorts of inconveniences in connection with such a move. We would have to move our things over by horseback or carried by coolies. And for me, the big problem would be starting all over again to train servants. I would never get a chance to study (the Thai language)! But that is the Lord's business entirely and He knows how I should best learn or if He can use my faltering tongue."

Evy went on to say that the problems she could foresee in moving to Maesod were, "really very minor things in the light of the need of getting the Gospel to that place, if now is the time the Lord sees is best for that place to be reached."

Evy gives us another picture of Raheng at that time when she talks of house hunting for a place for Ellen and Rosemary. "If it is decided that we go over there, the girls will stay here and carry on; though as yet we don't have a house for them either. But it is easier to find something that is usable for two girls than for our large family. Most Siamese houses are open with perhaps one room that is enclosed. And that room is usually small and dark so that one would have nowhere to go for such little details as changing one's clothes! Most Siamese whisk off their clothes underneath a skirt or bath-cloth. As far as that goes, plenty of older women, when at home, don't wear anything above the waist anyway."

This might be a good place to mention that the women missionaries had come to realize that it was quite acceptable to wear very low-necked blouses and dresses. Though it's doubtful that any of them had such garments. Most Thai women worked around their homes and yards with just a bath skirt tucked under their arms. And most mothers nursed their babies in public, then often forgot to cover their breasts. To be bare above the waist was not thought of as being seductive or immodest. But it was considered seductive and unacceptable for a woman to show her knees! This is why Ellen and Rosemary, in crossing the river, always got their skirts wet. They could not hitch up their skirts to keep them dry!

In Evy's next letters to her friends, no mention is made of a move to Maesod, so presumably Wilf came back with the information that Maesod was not as big a town as others on the eastern side of the mountains, and doubtless he had been met with the shock that the Thai language they had been studying was not spoken in the Maesod area. He surely found some who understood him, but it is

doubtful if he could understand them!

Maesod was a gloriously lovely little town at that time. Unlike Raheng and Kampaeng, it was not built on a large river, but rather on several small crossing streams on their way to the Moey River, the border of Burma. There were more coconut palms than there were people in the little town. And what people there were were very picturesque. The few market stores were owned and run by Indians and Burmese in their national dress. The early morning fresh market was crowded with tribal folk, all in their national costume. And there, in that little border town, the ethnic Thai, a minority at that time, all wore the Siamese national dress. The lush valley, between a mountain range in Burma and another in Thailand, was still relatively isolated from the rest of the world and had its own personality made up of all the ethnic groups living there together.

The town itself must have been a surprise. For it was little more than a village. Wilf could quickly see that the reported population was a great exaggeration. Perhaps all of the Thai settlements on the Maesod side of the border had been included in that number!

Most WECcers who visited Maesod had a longing to move there simply because of its beauty and quiet. But 1950 was not yet the time to open a work in that isolated place and so it was put on a shelf for a time, but became a prayer target, and Wilf kept it before the other workers as the Lord kept Maesod on Wilf's heart.

\* \* \*

In another letter Evy wrote a short time later, "Wilf has been away down in Bangkok for several days. He left here in our new little boat with an outboard motor last Wednesday. He took it as far as Kampaeng and left it there while he went on to Bangkok by bus and train. We had a letter from him and he said when they got about eight or ten miles from here, a pin in the propeller broke and they were unable to get it repaired, so they had to paddle the rest of the way -- about forty five miles. Of course, going South the current is strong so it was not so hard, and they arrived there about nine thirty that evening. Fortunately, Wilf had a couple of young fellows from here with him and I guess he was very glad of it!"

Evy then says that, "one of the boys who went with Wilf was the young fellow who was healed through prayer last spring, and who later gave his heart to the Lord. His name means "month" and you should pray for him. He wants to work for us very much, but so far, it just has not seemed the thing. We do long to see him grow into a strong witnessing Christian. The things that draw to the old life are very many."

Though Evy does not name the things of the "old life", we can guess at some of the things that had a pull on Duan. His large family had all been Buddhist before his healing and they had played a prominent part in Buddhist activities in that community. All of Duan's contemporaries would have been or would be going into the priesthood. Mae Kai and Duan with the other believers in their family had lost their identity and social prominence in the community.

Of course there were temptations that pulled at Duan that had nothing to do with the social structure of a Buddhist community. There would be the drinking and gambling and wild night-life of Duan's old friends. He was certainly invited, perhaps pressured, into joining where he had so fit in, in the past. Foreign missionaries certainly didn't have any social life to offer this young man as an alternative to his old companions!

It is possible that part of Duan's desire to work for the missionaries was an effort to get a bit of distance between himself and his old life. Or perhaps he saw this as a chance to learn more of the Lord. But the Thai thinking, expressed over and over to the missionaries of that day, was that wealthy foreigners ought to pay people to become Christians. For many years, converts would be asked, "What are they paying you?" It was hard to get to the bottom of Duan's thinking. He had certainly been asked what the foreigners paid him to be a Christian. How demeaning to have to answer, "nothing"! For many years WECcers battled with this problem. Would he be ruining the cutting edge of a convert's testimony if we hired him to work for us? Would his wages be considered pay for becoming a

Christian?

Though Duan was never hired to be a servant, it is clear from the reports of that time that the missionaries, and especially Wilf, spent a great deal of time with him. In today's terminology they were discipling him. In their thinking, when they were not purposely teaching, they were sharing their own Christian reactions and outlook with this new believer. They were building into his life and character, Christian thinking and principles.

\* \* \*

About this same time, Evy wrote her friend, "My eyes have been bothering me a lot lately so I may have to go to Bangkok after Wilf gets back. I will take Sharon, too for a checkup, and Ellen may go down for dental work. If it works out that way, Rosemary will go down (to Kampaeng) to be with the girls a few days, as of course, she could not be here with Wilf. We have a girl who is fairly good with the baby now, so it would not be too bad for Wilf to have Paul and Mark." Evy ends this subject by saying this is all "indefinite." And we do not know, from the correspondence of that time, if that trip to Bangkok was ever taken, but Evy's outline of the arrangements that would have to be made for her and Ellen to be away, give us some insight into the complications of living in that time.

\* \* \*

Evidently the lease on the Borneo House had almost expired when two houses in Raheng were found for the WECers.

Rosemary writes, "A suitable house was found for Ellen and me just a short distance from the Borneo House. It was on the river bank, and at the foot of a hill on which stood a temple, "Wat Doi". Americans would say that it was a two story house. Downstairs was one big room and the entire front of that room was made up of folding doors and the entire front of that room was made up of folding doors that opened right out onto the street. Upstairs could be made to serve as bedrooms and sitting room for the two girls and that downstairs room was perfect to use as a meeting room for children's and worship services for believers."

The house found for the Overgaard family sounds as if it was the one Evy had mentioned in a letter as being very old and crooked and needing hundreds of dollars of repair. For the "South House" used for many years as the principle dwelling for WEC in Raheng was unbelievably old looking, very crooked and the evidence of repairs upon repairs was in plain view.

Moving out and moving in was just the beginning of work. There was screening and partitioning and putting in bathrooms. Converting areas to be used as kitchen and laundry rooms took precious time and even more precious strength, for these moves were made at the height of the hot season! Remember, there were no electric fans or refrigeration. A tepid drink of water and a cool shower (throwing tiny



*Fern & Ellen at the "Wat Doi" house*

dippers of water over oneself was called a shower) in a very hot room were the best the WECcers could do to refresh themselves and cool off. And those showers did cool one off! And that coolness lasted until the bather began to dress. Evy could tell you that by the time they had struggled into clean clothing and fastened buttons or zippers, they were dripping wet and not with shower water! In shopping for dresses or blouses for many years, the WEC women would first consider how easy a garment was to get into. It did not matter how lovely or how stylish a garment might be; if it fastened in the back or had many buttons, it was discarded immediately. A woman would be a frustrated sweating mess before she could get such a garment fastened.

Wilf had considerably more building to do at their own house, for a good part of the house was without a railing. And since the house was built about eight or ten feet above the ground and little Mark had just begun to walk by himself, a sturdy railing was a must!

\* \* \*

Life was seldom without complications. The Overgaards had barely moved into the South House when the children began to come down with fever. Evy had no cook or wash-girl as yet, so Ellen and Rosemary took turns. Starting early in the morning, they would ride their bikes down to spend a day meeting the pressing needs of the family. And those needs were multiplied when Wilf came down with the fever.

The rains had started in earnest by this time and the road was a muddy obstacle course. Riding their bikes down through town was a chore in itself. Shopping in the fresh market could have been a delight, but trying to find food that feverish foreigners would want to eat and that could be easily prepared was another matter.

The fever was diagnosed as dengue by a local doctor. So the prescribed treatment was just aspirin, lots of liquid, and bed rest. Wilf began to feel better and Evy came down with the fever! "In fact," says Rosemary, "she was severely ill." Several days into caring for Evy, Ellen began the aches and pains that announced the onset of dengue. Rosemary says, "After doing what I could for her, I left her with Som, the wash-girl." And off she peddled South, to care for the Overgaard household. It is not surprising that when Wilf and Evy heard that Rosemary had left Ellen ill to come to look after them, they sent her home to nurse her own household.

We get a further window onto the living conditions of that day when Rosemary tells us that Ellen was tossing and turning on a "springless wooden bed". Looking on in sympathy, Rosemary remembers that they possessed an air mattress stored downstairs in an old trunk. The energy it took to unpack the trunk to find the air mattress, lug it upstairs and then try to blow it up told Rosemary what she had been expecting -- she had dengue too!

"I don't know how many days we lay there in silence," she wrote. "Sometimes, one of us would feel a little better for awhile and would get up to fetch things for the other. We ate almost nothing, which was fortunate, as we had no cook." (Their cook had been loaned to the Overgaards to help them over their crisis.) Som was willing to do the cooking, but as she was a completely untrained girl, just barely in her teens, it is not surprising that she did not even know how to open a can of soup. A can of tomato soup had been saved for just such a time of emergency, and manipulating a foreign can opener had used all the culinary skill the child possessed. That she had to go so far as to heat the strange contents of the can came as a distinctly unpleasant shock to her! But carefully following the instructions, she presented the invalids with "two tea saucers filled with partly warmed tomato soup."

Rosemary tells us that when Wilf heard that they were sick, "He sent a telegram to Fern asking her to come and help us. Her arrival three days later was like a ray of sunshine. Cheery conversation, clean sheets, bed baths, and dainty morsels on a neatly set try did wonders in reviving us."

Illness behind them, the two households could begin their ministries afresh in Raheng.



## Tell of The King

### Chapter 11

Duan's mother, Mae Kai, was a traveling saleswoman. This was a familiar sight and important part of rural life in Thailand before roads, telephones, radio, and mail delivery systems brought little villages and hamlets into constant touch with the outside world.

Along every jungle path and across the ridge of every rice field, small lines of women could be seen. They walked along, single file, dressed in black or dark blue to protect their skin from the sun. Each carried two woven bamboo baskets suspended from a flat bamboo pole across her shoulders. Their baskets were filled, when they started out, with trinkets, sewing needles and thread, fishhooks and fishing line, candles and matches and kerosene for lamps, flashlights and batteries, cheap perfumed soap and cheaper and more highly perfumed oil for men's hair. There would be cakes of harsh, yellow laundry soap and tiny bottles of laundry bluing. There was always a sameness in the wares, for there was a constant demand for these things. But a distant village could request something different and the women would remember, and on their next visit, there would be the ordered item.

Along with the sales items, the women carried twists of paper and sealed envelopes. These were notes and letters from relatives and friends.

As they started out from their own village early in the morning, a neighbor man would be watching for them as he bent to the task of hitching up his oxen. The fire that had burned all night there by his tethered animals added a tangy fragrance to the damp, cool dawn and comforted the achy bones of his old bowlegged dog, just stretching and growling his greeting to the day dawning. The neighbor had a twist of paper for the women and the instructions that this was a note to be delivered to his eldest son living in "Wild Mango Village".

From a house in the first village they passed that day, a woman would call out to them to wait a moment as she hurried from the breakfast she was cooking, for she had a message to send. Wiping her hands on an old piece of material as she hurried down the stairs and out to the footpath where the saleswomen waited, she would be talking all the way, explaining the message she needed carried to her brother living in "New Field Village". "You know Nai Ai, that was married to Na Bang who died in childbirth last year." The women would confer together there by the fence that kept the village pigs out of this woman's garden. Yes, they knew Nai Ai and just exactly where he lived. "Tell him we need him Tuesday. We're putting a new roof on the rice barn."

On and on the instructions would go. The women seldom progressed on a sales trip without messages to deliver, both written and verbal. The women never refused to act as news couriers, for usually a stop to tell news would result in a sale of some item from their baskets.

If there was an item of gossip, a drunken brawl ending in a murder or a married woman run off with someone else's husband, then the saleswomen would become the center of attention everywhere they stopped to tell the story. These women carried the news of the times. They were the broadcasters and telegraph lines of that day.

Mae Kai supported her family as one of those important women. Her husband was not robust. A heart condition kept him from the rice farming he had done as a younger man. By the time of Duan's illness, he was content to stay home and do the cooking and look after their school-age children. The older children were grown and married, but there were still some of school age. That does not mean they attended school. The school in that area only went up to the fourth year, but saying they were "school-age" defines them for us.

Mae Kai often spent nights away from home with the other saleswomen. Rosemary records for us in her memoirs, *Cracked Earth*, along with current news of the day, she would now "tell the people all about the Jesus she had come to know, how He saved her son from death, and how he had saved her from her sins and brought light and peace to her heart. And she kept telling them that some day the missionaries would come to their village to tell them more about this Jesus."

Mae Kai took the first announcement of the God who cared enough to listen to man on earth. It was

her testimony that planted the first seeds of thought about a God of love and power to many villagers in Tak province. It was her testimony that prepared the way for missionary visits. Mae Kai was a broadcaster of the good news of the Gospel -- news of the King of kings.

\* \* \*

There was news of another king being carried by the saleswomen of 1950.

It was in May, just one month after the WECcers moved away from the Borneo House that His Majesty, Bhoomipol Adunyudet crowned himself King Rama IX. Enthroned above the Amarindra Hall in the heart of the Grand Palace, he received the diamond-studded crown and with his own hand, in ritual slowness, lifted it above his head then solemnly set it in place.

\* \* \*

Seven hundred years earlier, the 'Tai tribe migrated across Southern China. Driven by warring Chinese further and further South, at last they fled into the plains controlled by the Khmer. The wiry, graceful 'Tai then spread out to occupy the vast rice-growing plain country. For years the Thai paid tribute for their fertile fields to the Khmer capital at Angkor. But this people of independent spirit eventually overthrew their rulers.

The Thai brought with them a binding belief in invisible spirits. But in conquering the Khmer, they absorbed the religion of the land, Hinduism, for the court of the kings and Buddhism for the people of the land.

\* \* \*

As His Majesty, King Bhoomipol set the crown upon his own brow, he was proclaiming himself to be the living incarnation of the Hindu gods. As a man, no one would ever know him again, he was a god. The Thai would gladly worship him. All the honor and glory and pomp that was his rightful due would meet a deep need in the psyche of the Thai. Deep in the Thai personality was this bedrock layer, the need to worship. The exotic grandeur of the fairy-tale palace and all the ritual honors given the king and royal family satisfied this longing for a king.

This need to worship had drawn scattered Thai together in heart and united them as a people as early as 1238, when the first of the long line of kings of Siam began to rein from the first capital in Sukhothai. In 1350, the capital moved to Ayuthaya, just North of present day Bangkok. Thirty-three successive kings reigned there for nearly 400 years. In 1767, Ayuthaya was destroyed and pillaged by hordes of marauding Burmese warriors who invaded from the West. That army had crossed the river and poured in through mountain passes mounted on elephants. They destroyed and pillaged as they moved across the land toward the capital.

Surrounding the walled city, they camped there for over two years. The golden roofs rising above the city walls and the music of fountains, the tinkling temple bells and the rhythmic chanting of hundreds of Buddhist priests gave the lie that inside all was peace and plenty. But a city of over a million inhabitants was starving to death!

At the end of that heroic stand, the sacred, the glorious city of palaces and temples connected, not by roads but by canals that wove their way through gardens and ponds and under flower-covered arches and exotic blossoming trees was completely destroyed. The king and his court were slaughtered. The gardeners and servants, builders and merchants of the city who had survived the siege were either killed or taken to Burma as slaves. Only the unwanted were left to hide in the ruins of the once great city, reduced to rubble. The jungle would soon cover and hide, for over a hundred years, the scar that once was the city of the kings of Siam.

Even in defeat, there are soldiers who distinguished themselves. One soldier who came to fame in the wars with Burma was Taksin. He raised an army that was able to recapture the ruined capital and drive what was left of the Burmese army back to the border within a year of the fall of Ayuthaya.

Taksin proclaimed himself king while leading his army, constantly repelling invasion from Burma. Though most of his fifteen-year reign was spent in wars and battles far from his chosen capital, a palace and royal temple were built not far from the present site of Wat Arun in Thonburi.

Taksin's reign came to an end when his own behavior became so erratic that he was pronounced to be insane. He was subdued and imprisoned within his own palace compound.

\* \* \*

General Chakri, another famous soldier of that era of warfare was away fighting in Cambodia when he heard of the imprisonment of Taksin. He quickly turned his army and hurried home. Chakri, marching at the head of his army, arrived at the capital on April 6, 1782. That very day, he was offered and he accepted the crown.

One of Chakri's first official duties, as monarch, was to order Taksin put to death. Since no "divine" blood could be spilt, the king had to be executed in the ancient Hindu royal custom: he was sewn into a silken sack and beaten to death with a perfumed, sandalwood club! What a gruesome end to a violence-filled life! And it is for this Taksin that the province of Tak is named.

Chakri moved his capital from Thonburi to a small village of Chinese traders on the banks of the Chao Phraya River. The merchants agreed to relocate a short distance away in an area called Sempeng. This began what was to become the Chinese center of the modern capital. With the crowning of King Rama the First, the Chakri dynasty began in Bangkok.

A labyrinth of canals was constructed to connect the dazzling palaces and temples and monasteries built in copy of Ayuthaya's remembered glories. Palaces and temples and gardens would multiply as successive kings sought to make merit by building these sacred structures.

\* \* \*

In 1950, the slender young king, robed in gold, crowned with jewels and enthroned in magnificent splendor, embodied two worlds. He had been born in Boston, Massachusetts, and educated in European schools and universities. His cultural tastes were Western. Now, above his throne, a crimson and gold nine-tiered umbrella proclaimed his Hindu mystical Kingship. A crown shaped as a tapering temple spire of heavy gold and studded with flashing diamonds testified that the grave-faced young man of just twenty-three was Siam's new "Lord of Life".

Brahman priests invoked in rhythmic chanting that their gods attend and bless the ancient ceremony. Ritual music filled the palace grounds and silver trees were presented as offerings to the jade-green emerald Buddha, *Phra Kaeo*, and all across the nation in temple courtyards, monks and peasants beat celebration gongs.

\* \* \*

1950 was a year when news of the king and his court was carried throughout the country on a wave of relief and rejoicing. Back in 1946, King Ananda's body had been washed, anointed and bound, then he was dressed in fine coronation robes and crowned. His body was then sealed in a silver casket in an attitude of prayer. Later, that casket was bolted inside an eight-sectioned urn of carved gold, and this was raised on a multi-tiered catafalque in the ornamental Pavilion of Paradise in the heart of the Grand Palace. Monks in saffron robes kept vigil and chanted unceasing before that glittering urn.

But the funeral rites and ceremonies were not completed in 1946. The young King Bhumipol, unmarried and just barely nineteen years old, had returned to Switzerland to complete his university schooling. And Siam was left to a military junta, to unrest and uncertainty.

In 1950, the long delayed funeral rites were continued and completed. Emotional crowds had flowed into Bangkok for days. Every road and stream and river from the furthestmost corners of the Kingdom was alive with traffic headed for the cremation ceremonies. There was a profound current of emotion throughout the land. It was a mixture of the end of grief and the stirring of hope and new joy.

On the appointed evening the great urn was wheeled from the Palace ground on a huge chariot, drawn by a hundred uniformed marines. Inlays of glass mosaics glittered and flashed in the light of the sun as it set over the river. As the urn came to rest in a temple of teak and gold, high above the huge crowd, the King appeared, wearing the uniform of a Marshal of the Royal Guards. He carried a lamp of consecrated oil and as he bowed before the urn three times, a wave of grief rose from the crowd and was heard by radio throughout the land and around the world.

Listeners to radio could not see as the young king lit the pyre, but across the land, from every temple compound, ancient musical instruments toned out the song of death. Tears wet the faces of old and young throughout the land and sobbing was heard from thousands who had never and would never so much as see a king of Siam.

The ornate and mystical rites of the coronation ceremony had held the nation in a mood of euphoria, and then the news that the young king was about to wed a beautiful and aristocratic Thai girl spread from village to village on a wave of joy. The coming wedding was discussed and described by villagers who had never experienced such magnificence and grandeur in all their lives.

The talk of the king was everywhere, in every home and office and store of every city in the country. The name of the king was heard in every coffee-house and roadside cafe of every town across the land. At bus stations and marketplaces and school-grounds, praise for the beauty and the magnificence of the royal ceremonies was extolled. In the country villages and rural communities, details of the king's life and fortune were discussed. King Rama the IX was praised continually from sunrise to sunset. And his country was supremely proud and happy.

The missionaries in Kampaeng and Raheng and Hua Diet listened. They were outsiders. Everyone of that original band of missionaries, except for Canadian Ellen, was an American. Not only were the land and language and the culture foreign to them, but the frame of mind that owns a king on the throne was foreign to them.

They looked at poverty and sickness. They were grieved at the lack of schools and modern technology. And they calculated the fortune spent on decorations that were burned at a magnificent funeral. They were staggered by the wealth that was worn and displayed for a short coronation ceremony and by the expense of a royal wedding. And they observed that, in some way that they could not understand, the most unfortunate poverty-stricken Thai exulted in what the missionaries considered waste! The king was worthy of all the wealth, all the riches and honor given to him and the Thai heart gladly worshiped him. The foreign missionaries were just bewildered.

\* \* \*

How amazing then, that this king, so worshiped and honored in his grand palace really had no authority to rule the land! In 1932, a historic coup ended the absolute rule of kings of Siam. The royal princes were taken hostage and the king was forced to sign an agreement giving up his right to rule. The coup established full constitutional government through a National Assembly. But elections revealed amazing political apathy. The mass of Thai people did not care at all who ruled from Bangkok. As long as they were free to run their own lives and worship a king from afar, they did not care who had the power to govern the nation. This profound apathy left military leaders the opening to be the real power-holders in Siam.

If this contradiction, a king on his throne without the power to rule, gave the young missionaries some food for thought, they did not write or record their thoughts for us. But they were watching something of that same turn of mind played out in the lives of the few who had come to praise the Lord of Glory.

Mae Kai could speak to the praise of the creator who had raised up her son from death. She was a runner for the King of kings, taking His fame before Him. But when meetings were set up for Sunday morning at Ellen and Rosemary's house, Mae Kai just did not bother to come! Though Duan attended for some time, he eventually began to fall away. Rosemary says this one who had experienced the power of God in the healing of his own body just "drifted away"! She recounts for us that the entire household became embroiled in the opium trade. They were becoming more and more wealthy and more and more feared in their community.

Other converts of that day who seemed to so gladly worship a distant King, rebelled at any teaching that would require change and obedience in their lives. Si, the gardener and Som, the wash-girl, and many others had that same profile. They bowed before the Lord and praised Him. They spoke to their friends and neighbors of His might, but they would not give up the social life that revolved around the

temple. They would not give up ruinous habits of sin.

Praise and worship for the King came naturally to the Thai. Obedience to a ruler was another matter.

## **Leprosy!**

### **Chapter 12**

It was always hard to control their expressions when the missionaries suddenly caught sight of a leper. They might turn to see some one peering out at them from a darkened window. The face would be badly disfigured, with the nose cartilage so eaten away by the disease that all that remained was just two gaping holes into a flat surface. The bronze of the Thai complexion would be marked and scarred by puckered, greyish-white lacerations. Or they might catch sight of a figure limping away from the road with hands and feet twisted and maimed. The fingers of one suffering with advanced, crippling leprosy would be stiffened into almost unusual claws and the toes so indrawn and twisted that the feet appeared to be toeless hooves. Often, lepers had great ulcerated burns or sores, and ragged bandages from old clothing made their pitiful appearance all the more grotesque.

Certainly, the servants of the Lord had pity for these disfigured outcasts. But they had little understanding of the disease and knew of no way they could help them physically, emotionally or socially. There was no cure for the disease. And the medicine available barely alleviated the physical symptoms of the advanced sufferer.

The missionaries did have the answer to every leper's spiritual need, but they so seldom saw the crippled outcasts and even more seldom were the occasions of conversation with those hidden ones of Hua Diat and the market area of Raheng. The WECcers thought there were just a few, unfortunate victims of the disease in their neighborhood until the visit of Paul Arnold.

\* \* \*

It was in September of 1950 that Paul Arnold, a Presbyterian missionary attached to the McKean Leprosarium in Chiangmai, came to make a survey of leprosy in Thailand.

The lower half of an island, five miles below the city of Chiangmai, in the Mae Ping River, had been given to the British Mission to Lepers. With support from abroad and gifts from Siamese royalty and nobility, a prosperous colony had flourished. A coconut plantation and village streets with every imaginable tropical flower made the colony a beauty spot. But it was the humane care and consideration given to outcasts and their welcome into the community that caused the fame of the colony to spread far to the North in Yunnan Province of China.

Thai-speaking lepers came to the Chiangmai Asylum from Yunnan Province in considerable numbers. They came on foot over high mountain trails walking for as many as twenty to twenty-eight days. But in Thailand, there were still provinces where lepers knew nothing about this place of asylum and the help provided for them.

Mr. Arnold came to assess the situation in Tak Province. Was leprosy as endemic here in the South as it was to the North? And he wanted news of the McKean Leprosarium to spread, and the care provided to be made available to the needy in the central and western provinces of Thailand.

The Overgaard home became the headquarters for this visitor throughout his stay in Tak Province. Each day, he and Wilf would set out with some representatives from the local office of the Department of Health to visit as many areas of Raheng or neighboring villages as they possibly could. Over and over, as Paul finished examining the healthy-looking unmarked people, he would declare that here was another infected with the incurable, crippling disease. Finally, he declared that never had he found a place with such a high incidence of the disease as was Tak Province!

Evvy wrote in a letter to her friend, "After they had finished looking around here, Wilf accompanied him to our other station at Kampaengphet. And they found there even more with the disease in that Province. What they want to do is find some lepers who are willing to go to Chiangmai to the Leper Island and learn how to give injections." The idea was that they would then return to their own neighborhood to treat patients who were their neighbors and friends.

\* \* \*

Paul Arnold's visit opened the eyes of the WEC team to a need all around them that they had not really understood to exist. They had thought there were just a few infected with leprosy in Tak, and those few

were hidden away, outcasts and despised. Now, they realized that some of the people they had contact with every day were in the early stages of the disease. Evy wrote with a good bit of misgiving that "children who came regularly to play with Paul and Sharon at the Borneo compound were diagnosed with leprosy!" But there was cause for alarm even closer to home than that!

\* \* \*

As Paul examined well-looking children and adults, the WECcers looked on. A blindfold was placed over the eyes of the subjects and a piece of soft cotton was gently rubbed along areas of their back, shoulders, neck, ears and face, then it was moved up and down arms and legs. If the subject could not identify where he was being touched, a more thorough examination was undertaken

"Anesthesia is one of the first symptoms," Paul explained. "That loss of sensation is what causes burns and sores and wounds to go untreated. A leper can step on a burning charcoal spark and not even know his foot is burning until he smells his burned flesh! He can cut and bruise his hands and because he feels no pain, he can go on using his hands till skin and flesh are damaged almost beyond saving!"

It was this anesthesia that was to blame for minor scrapes and cuts becoming the ulcerated sores that fester and eat away till gangrene and blood poisoning set in.

The blindfold and cotton test alerted Paul to areas of anesthesia, and led to the more thorough examination to determine if the one with those areas without sensation was indeed a leper.

Paul Arnold could not know that his words of explanation brought sudden alarm that settled as a blanket of dread for Ellen Gillman. Ellen had been noticing areas of anesthesia about the outside of her ankle bones. She had mentioned this to Rosemary and the two had wondered just what would cause the loss of sensation to those areas. They knew of no skin disease or vitamin deficiency that might cause such a symptom.

With the doctor's pronouncement, "Anesthesia is the first noticeable symptom of leprosy", Ellen and Rosemary had exchanged startled glances. Rosemary could smile with calm assurance, "No way could Ellen have leprosy!" But Ellen was not smiling! She thought of the children that played about the Borneo compound whom Paul said were infected with the disease. Had she treated them for red eye? Had she washed and anointed other sores and scratches for them?

Ellen thought of the many homes where she had sat on the floor, her feet carefully tucked under her, and visited sometimes for hours. She thought of the buses she had ridden with women and children pressed close to either side of her. There were a hundred places and times when she could have come into contact with the disease. And now, with Paul Arnold's explanation, they understood that no one really knew just how the disease was passed! There had to be some physical contact. But no one was certain why ones who lived with lepers and were in constant contact with them could sometimes escape the disease while others who appeared to have little if any contact with a diseased person could become infected!

And now, they all understood that many, many who appeared perfectly well were infected and the disease was progressing right on course, undetected and unsuspected.

Rosemary writes that as Ellen revealed that she had an area of anesthesia, "Everyone looked at her in startled horror. Just to make sure, she went through the routine blindfold test, and beyond a doubt, she had the first symptom of leprosy."

\* \* \*

No time was to be lost. A letter was quickly composed and sent off to Dr. Buker, who was in charge of the Leprosarium in Chiangmai. Ellen's situation was outlined for him and his advice asked.

Dr. Buker's immediate answer brought the invitation for Ellen to visit the Leprosarium as soon as possible for further tests. This was an invitation they were hoping for but its reception just deepened the horror of the situation. It was obvious that Paul Arnold and Dr. Buker feared the worst and urged all possible speed in diagnosing and treating the disease -- or was it speed in separating her from her co-workers, Ellen had to wonder.

It is perhaps impossible for today's missionaries in Thailand to realize the seriousness of the threat



that faced Ellen and the others. As there was no satisfactory treatment for leprosy in those days, the diagnosis that Ellen had leprosy would be a sentence of death. A long, slow and very lonely progress of death.

The loneliness began even before the letter to Dr. Buker was answered. Immediately, Ellen began to be very careful that she had no physical contact with Rosemary. She didn't dare to ask Rosemary to button that hard-to-reach button at the back of her blouse. Nor did she volunteer to help Rosemary to get a splinter out of her finger.

Rosemary certainly bent over backwards to try to make Ellen feel that she was not worried about contacting the disease. She never wanted Ellen to feel like an outcast in her own home! But that very carefree attitude of Rosemary put Ellen under the strain of being careful for both of them.

Should she keep her dishes separate, to be washed in separate water? Should she be touching the dishes at all? Would her handling the dishes and cutlery contaminate them? What about her bedding? Could Rosemary's things be washed in the same water as the sheets she had been using for a week? Paul Arnold had told them that they were "reasonably certain" that the disease could be passed only by actual physical contact. But "reasonably certain" just wasn't good enough for Ellen! She had to make certain that she did not pass the disease on, now that she was so convinced that she was a leper!

There was another problem area that was almost more than Ellen could bear. The Overgaard children had become very close and precious to her. For the six weeks Wilf and Evy were away in Bangkok at the time of Mark's birth, Ellen had had the responsibility and care of Sharon and Paul. And all the time that they live in the same house, Ellen had been the one to come to Evy's rescue when she was tired or needed time for study. Taking the children off of Evy's hands had been a great delight for Ellen and for the two children.

Often in the evenings, while living in the Borneo House, Ellen had taken the children out for a walk down by the river bank. She told them the stories of the *Wind in The Willows* and they they looked for the hole that was the entrance into the home of "Ratty". And that great house just out of sight beyond the woods, could be "Toad Hall"? They had their favorite spots where they could catch sight of fish in the shallows, or nesting birds in the tree branches that overhung the water.

Ellen was a Canadian. But her parents lived in the United States. If Ellen did indeed have leprosy, there was no way she would be able to get a visa to visit her parents! Would she even be allowed to enter her own home land? Would she have to spend the rest of her life at the leper colony in Chiangmai? Would she never be allowed to see her parents and had sister and brother again? Would she never see her homeland again? Remember that Ellen was barely twenty seven years old at this time.

\* \* \*

The date set for Ellen's trip North quickly arrived. But for Ellen, there was nothing quick about it. A lifetime of fearful speculation was crammed into a few days.

The night before she was to travel by bus/truck she spent at the Overgaard home. There was no such thing as a bus station in those days. Very early in the morning the

bus would begin circling around the market area, stopping at the houses of those who had let the owner of the bus know they wished to travel. As the house where Ellen and Rosemary lived was North of the area where the bus made its rounds to pick up passengers, Ellen had to spend that last night in the South House.

How miserably uncomfortable it was for everyone! Ellen had to feel an outcast. She didn't dare touch the children or their books or toys. She must have felt that to use a hand towel was to bring danger to her dearest friends. Evy and Ellen had become as close as sisters, but now they were separated by a barrier of fear and precaution that removed them from each other as if they walked in two different worlds.

It was almost a relief to hear the blaring of the bus's horn and finally climb on board and find a seat. In the dark of the morning, the Overgaards and Rosemary gathered in the doorway to call out their last words of encouragement, but a curtain of rain blurred Ellen's vision of them there, lit only by the glow

of an oil lamp Wilf held aloft.

Rosemary lets us know that they all wondered if Ellen would be staying on in Chiangmai! Would she ever again be a part of their team and community?

\* \* \*

For Ellen the nightmare continued. The rain fell in blinding sheets. Though the bus driver drove with one hand continually on the horn, it seemed impossible that any approaching vehicle would either see or hear them. The road was quickly flooded and the swirling waters hid potholes and low spots washed away by the rain. There was the continual danger that the bus would be washed away.

Flooded engines coughed and sputtered and finally stopped. wet passengers huddled in the spots that they felt were most dry. But really, the open sides of the truck/bus assured that no place inside was truly dry.

During the course of the trip the passengers had to change buses several times. Washed out bridges made it necessary for the bedraggled passengers to trudge through the rain, be ferried across swirling currents to board equally wet and uncomfortable buses on the other side. Just keeping track of her luggage was a nightmare for Ellen. The saving feature of the miserable trip was that it left little time for her to dwell on the probable outcome of the journey.

Ellen didn't look like a leper -- not yet! So her fellow travelers weren't afraid to sit next to her or extend a hand to help her over slippery bridges. For the first time in Thailand, she found herself refusing those helping hands and keeping a careful distance between herself and the women and children who would have crowded in around her. Ellen was tasting what it felt like to be an outcast!

Three days after Ellen left Raheng, the Overgaards and Rosemary received telegrams that lifted their hearts to praise. Ellen did not have leprosy! The results of further testing showed there was no possibility at all that she had that dreadful disease. Dr. Buker felt certain that the areas of anesthesia on Ellen's ankles were the result of many hours sitting on the floor in Thai homes. Ellen had literally ground her ankle bones into the bamboo matting, destroying nerve endings.

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Why was it necessary for Ellen and the entire team to experience such a traumatic test?

\* \* \*

As missionaries, we see so easily how God is dealing with us and answering our prayers. We don't always get to see how He is working at the other end of circumstances. We don't always know that our presence and message and work are God's answer to the needs and longings of others, perhaps long before they come to know Him.

At the McKean Leprosarium, there was a young girl who had been brought there years before. Because others of her family were badly disfigured, scarred and crippled, this little child had been rescued while only her nose cartilage eaten away indicated that she had the disease. Treatment by injections of Chalmulgra oil had stopped the further disfigurement and in fact, the disease was thought to be so under control that Gaeo Moon could soon go back to her home.

Gaeo Moon, now in her teens, found parting from McKean to be devastating. She had many friends there, friends her own age, friends equally disfigured. But most important of all, she had friends who were Christians. Gaeo Moon had arrived at McKean with spirit strings about her wrists and neck. She wore lucky charms and amulets. But the child's only understanding of her religion was the memory of horribly frightening funerals. She remembered the chanting by drunken spirit doctors and shaven-headed priests that went on and on into the night.

Religion for the little girl who arrived, frightened and ill at the Leprosarium, was without comfort, hope or joy.

Gaeo Moon found McKean not only to be a place of great beauty and welcome, but she found the love of a Savior with forgiveness and help for daily living. Religion for the young woman who would leave McKean, was now a Person, a Person who had power to save her and keep her all her life long and on into eternity.

Before leaving the Leprosarium, Gaeo Moon was given the same training that Ellen was given. There was a short two-week course of training in diagnosing and treating the disease. There wasn't much choice in treating leprosy in those days. Sores had to be cleaned, of course. Gangrenous flesh had to be cut away and ointments for healing applied. The main treatment that went deeper than just those putrefying sores was the injection of Chalmulgra oil.

Both Ellen and Gaeo Moon were trained to give the needed injections. They practiced for hours injecting oil into pomeloes. The thick, tough skin of that fruit was found to be as difficult to pierce with the needle as was the tough, scarred skin of the leprosy patient.

Gaeo Moon had some training in how to share her faith. She could tell of her own salvation experience and give a good account of what the Lord had done for her. She could tell the Gospel story and recite many verses. And she knew many, many Gospel choruses and songs and hymns.

Perhaps Gaeo Moon left McKean with an excited expectation of seeing salvation come to Mai Ngam (Beautiful Wood), just North of Hua Diet and the Borneo Compound. Perhaps there was excitement at the prospect of seeing her own family and being back in her own home.

But reality for Gaeo Moon was shocking, devastating and soul-destroying! Phi Gaeo was the only living close relative Gaeo Moon had left. This older sister lived alone in a ramshackle hut, dark, damp and steamy in the hot season and bitterly uncomfortable in the cold season. On her first night at home, swarms of mosquitoes attacked Gaeo Moon. Her blood was so much thicker than her sister's. The stench of decaying flesh nauseated her, for the constant care at the Leprosarium kept sores clean and dirty bandages were either washed or burned. Gaeo Moon found that she could hardly swallow the food Phi Gaeo expected her to prepare. Her sister showed no tender compassion or affection at being reunited with her and indeed showed only a bitterness that Gaeo Moon had been so long away from home and so had failed to work and care for her.

Gaeo Moon buried her face in her damp bath towel and cried herself to sleep that first night, and for many nights to come. It was days before the girl, so homesick for McKean, would have any appetite for food or any heart to enjoy anything about Mai Ngam.

\* \* \*

Ellen could understand Gaeo Moon in a way that no one else could have. She could remember the devastation of loneliness at being thought to have leprosy. She could remember the horror of contemplating a future of disfigurement and a lonely death as an outcast.

Ellen also understood that the disease and complications associated with the Chalmulgra oil seemed to unloose emotions to the point that sorrow became hysterical weeping and wailing of grief that could not be contained. Fear became paralyzing horror that froze thought and reason and became senseless flight or insane immobility. Annoyance became hot, uncontrollable anger, a murderous rage, self-destroying to experience and ugly and disgusting to see in another.

Ellen could understand that Gaeo Moon's shock and disappointment in her home and sister would move her to days of uncontrollable weeping. And she could understand that Phi Gaeo's jealousy of her sister and her frustration at her own plight caused her to rage and accuse, lash out with outrageous screams of abuse or to withdraw into days of cruel silence.

It took all the understanding and patience Ellen had to approach the situation in the little house in Mai Ngam. The overwhelming proportions of the complicated problems cast Ellen upon the Lord in a new way. Ellen had to have the patience, not of Job, but of the Lord. She needed the wisdom, not of Solomon, but of the Creator, to help those two sisters. Words had to be spoken into that stormy situation and they must be the words that had power to still the waves.

The Lord was the answer to that dreadful little home situation. But before Ellen could even call on the Lord, He had taken her on a journey that led her as close to the black decaying despair of leprosy as she could safely go, and then brought her back so she would understand, sympathize and know how and when to reach out to those two sisters.

\* \* \*

Gaeo Moon eventually settled into life in Mai Ngam. Phi Gaeo began to depend upon her presence and help (though it's doubtful if she ever expressed appreciation or thankfulness!). Gaeo Moon made friends of her neighbors and relatives in the area. And everywhere, with every contact, she gave witness to her faith in the Lord who loved her and washed her from her sins.

Eventually, Gaeo Moon formed a team with Ellen and Rosemary. Often she went along on their planned trips, but even more often she was the one to lead. Gaeo Moon wanted the two missionaries to add their Gospel presentation to the witness she had been giving. So she would lead Ellen and Rosemary up the tiny, crooked path past her home to an equally tiny, hidden house of bamboo or rough wooden boards. Here would be a widow woman or elderly couple that she had been talking to about the Lord.

It would be impossible to write or tell the history of the Church in Tak without mentioning the name of Gaeo Moon over and over. She was the key the Lord used to unlock and open dark hearts and homes. Perhaps it would not be exaggerating to say that Ellen was the one who made it possible for Gaeo Moon to adjust and become content to stay in Mai Ngam.

\* \* \*

We cannot see all of the reasons the Lord had Ellen pass through that dreadful experience of believing she was a leper. But we can see that her experience led to WEC being involved with the treatment of leprosy.

And there is one more part of the story that ought to be mentioned. In the woods behind Mai Ngam, there was a small clearing with three tiny huts. A man lived alone in each hut. Nai Bun, Nai Sohm and Nai Leao were each so crippled and scarred by leprosy that they had been put out of their community. Their disease was so feared that they were not welcome to even visit in their homes. They knew that they would never again hold a child on their lap. They would never sleep beside their wives. They were truly outcasts, driven from society.

Their families provided them with rice, and perhaps a bit of *Gup* or *Nam Prick*. And over the years the wives of Nai Bun and Nai Sohm and the mother of Nai Laeo would bring them a blanket or article of clothing, as they couldn't work to feed themselves or to earn money due to their hands being deformed. They had nothing to do all day but dwell on their own



*Nai Sohm, one of the leprous men of Mai Ngam is baptized in 1950*

miserable state.

How often, over the years, those men have told how, in their misery, they called on God. That high

power that they did not know, but were driven in their need to seek and petition. "If there is a God who can help us," they called, "Come to our aid."

In order to answer their cry, God led Ellen into the despair of their situation and brought her back to Raheng to start a leprosy program. Ellen was the first one of a long line of missionaries who would serve and love the leper men of Mai Ngam. It all began when she was forced to "sit where they sat." (Ezekiel 3:15)

\* \* \*

There was an important result from the WEC missionaries coming into contact with Dr. Buker. The vocabulary of each missionary was permanently changed. "Never call anyone a leper," the doctor commanded. "There are men and women, boys and girls who have the disease of leprosy. You can speak of a leprous man, but don't ever call him a leper!"

## R & R

### Chapter 13

By the end of 1950, the WEC team was moving at full speed. Officially, they were no longer language students. Though each of them would continue to study and their Thai vocabularies would expand for as long as they lived in Thailand, they were now equipped to minister.

They were pioneers, and the going was hard, but each one was committed to the vision the Lord had given and were using their full strength and gifts to see that vision realized.

\* \* \*

While Ellen was still in Chiangmai at the Leprosarium, Wilf spoke at the weekly evangelistic meeting at Ellen and Rosemary's house. He usually came for that meeting in the motorboat that he had purchased when Rosemary first arrived in Bangkok. When this particular meeting was over, he found that his boat was no longer moored where he had left it. The night was dark with heavy squalls of monsoon rain shutting every familiar landmark. Search as he might, he could neither find his boat nor the ferry man that was usually on duty.

Rosemary tells us that since he could not return to Hua Diat and the girls' house, he set out to walk the distance home. The roadway had become a river with swift current continually sweeping toward the deep river. In many places, the black water swirling about him was chest deep. The rain and thunder and roar of the water were so loud, no one could possibly have heard, if Wilf had called for help. Rosemary thought he was secure in his boat and Evy waited at the other end for the sound of the motor and of Wilf's call.

It seems almost foolhardy that Wilf would venture out into such danger, but the team understood that they were on a lighted stage; their every action and word were examined. The message they had to give would have been robbed of its power if ever an accusation of immorality could be brought against them. There was no way Wilf could have returned to a house where Rosemary was staying alone. He never entertained that possibility for a moment. The Gospel was too important to be forfeited for his own personal safety!

The fact that Wilf finally made it home, looking and feeling like a drowned rat, but certainly alive, is sure evidence of the Lord's hand of protection upon him.

\* \* \*

It was in November of 1950 that Rosemary Hanna's mother arrived. Mrs. Hanna had served in Siam under the Presbyterian Mission for 36 years. Now widowed, and her children all grown and independent, Hazel Hanna wanted to join Rosemary and the WEC team. It wasn't just that she wanted to visit her daughter or her many friends still serving with the Presbyterian Mission, or even the desire to visit the land that had become as much "home" for her as the United States could ever be, but Hazel Hanna still had the heart of a pioneer missionary.

Rosemary's letters telling of her treks with Ellen across the river and into tiny, rice-farming communities and villages were as magnets drawing her mind, her imagination and her heart. This was a life she could feel was worth living. Mrs. Hanna did not come to Thailand as a visitor, but as a missionary.

No, Mrs. Hanna did not apply to the mission and take the candidate course as Dorothy Caswell had done. But she did visit the mission headquarters and came away with a sort of unofficial stamp of approval; she was called "Ma Hanna"! And she left behind her a WEC staff completely under the spell of her personality and testimony. For years the stories would be told of the woman who escaped capture as the Japanese army moved in to occupy Siam, that she had sat high upon a deck chair secured to a lurching, tossing ox cart that slowly advanced along the Burma road to freedom, would have a lasting impression.

This was no journey for a white woman, not even a white woman swaying high above a lurching ox cart and seated on a deck chair. If we could have seen her there, holding aloft a black umbrella for shade and for protection from the tropical sun and the spasmodic drenching downpours, doubtless our

first reaction would have been laughter. But the truth is, this was a marvelous experience of seeing the Lord undertake in extreme hardship day after day for months!

Steep and dangerous mountain ranges had to be crossed. There was nothing that anyone could call a road for most of that part of the journey. The tracks through dense jungle had to be carefully examined and the right ones chosen. For there were tracks made by elephants on their way to watering places and tracks made by hidden tribesmen traveling on foot between villages. To keep heading in the right direction was no easy matter.

Claralice Wolf, Rosemary's twin sister, supplies us with the following about their mother:

The Siamese officials respected the American missionaries, and kept the Northern border open till the last one had crossed into Burma. Most of them went through Burma to India, riding elephants across the mountains. They reached the United States in a few months.

Ma Hanna and her husband, on the other hand, felt sure that Japan would be defeated in a short time, so they remained in Burma, working with Dr. Seagrave's nurses. Chiang Kai Chek and his army were there, too, having been driven out of China by Mao's forces. A few months later he left for Taiwan, leaving Burma with only a band of 90 British Commandos to defend her. As the Japanese grew closer, their task was to leave Burma by a route over the mountains called The Hump, blasting bridges and roads behind them to slow the advance of the Japanese. Hazel and Loren Hanna joined them. At first they had trucks and equipment, but soon the ruggedness of the terrain destroyed them, or fuel was impossible to obtain. Occasionally they could hire some hill tribesmen to carry Ma Hanna in a chair, but they soon preferred to return to their own hill homes. After months of hiking, they reached Kunming, thin and haggard. One commando had died, one had gone blind, and his companions had had to carry him.

Kunming was the city where the American forces in India were flying over the hump to deliver military material to the Chinese fighters. After a short rest, the Hannas were flown to India, then to Calcutta where they were put on board a military ship that zigzagged across the Atlantic and dropped them off in New York City. They had been out of touch with their children for months.

Mrs. Hanna would quietly tell women and girls, in the days when such things were not spoken of in mixed company, the greatest aid the Lord graciously sent to her was that He delivered her from having her monthly menstrual period for all those months of travel. How good is the God who leads us lovingly along!

It was not just the story of that dramatic escape that would impress WEC leadership, but the many accounts of a long life of faith that saw God work and provide and bless. It was a quiet spirit that shouted the message "God is enough", to the tiny new field in South East Asia, a helper who would bless them to pieces!

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Though it was November of 1950 when Mrs. Hanna arrived in Bangkok, her sensible example began to make its impression long before her arrival. Ma Hanna sent out money to have a desk and bed made and to have a room fully screened; she wanted to be a worker and not a sick patient to be nursed. She would take every precaution to ward off malaria. And with a sensible work desk and chair, she could comfortably work on translation and teaching lessons. It was Ma Hanna who first alerted the WEC team to the value of a comfortable bed and a good night's sleep.

These simple provisions Mrs. Hanna asked Rosemary to have ready for her arrival seem so obviously necessary as to be not worth mentioning. But those first WEC missionaries to Thailand were so dedicated to the principles of sacrifice that they were not considering their health as a front line of attack from the enemy -- a line that needed to be protected, not just with prayer, but also with some sensible down-to-earth provisions. Now it is true that the team had been using screening since that first house in the "Field of Clouds", but it had never been considered a first priority.



Ma Hanna did not arrive preaching health and rest and sensible comfort. She arrived having made provision for those things. But her message was the Gospel, and her burden was for the Thai, who had never heard the Gospel. The message she did not articulate, but taught by her lifestyle, was, do all the necessary things for health and well being that you can. But keep the driving passion of your life, the evangelization of the lost. Had Ma Hanna talked comfortable living, her message would have been immediately rejected by WECcers who had committed themselves to a life of sacrifice.

The week before Ma Hanna was to arrive, Ellen and Rosemary set aside a day to rearrange their storeroom to accommodate her trunks. As they moved some of their things, they found them to be "alive with termites. They (the termites) had done such a thorough work that there was no possibility of salvaging anything." Rosemary writes, they "had to carry their trunks out to the river bank and burn, not only the contents, but even the trunks themselves." Rosemary tells us that they did not even dare to leave the bonfire, but had to stand there in the blazing hot sun "prodding the fire till every scrap of cloth, paper, and wood was consumed and every termite dead."

It became a regular part of the agenda of every household to check trunks and boxes in their storerooms for termites. They checked their bookshelves carefully for white ants, and anything of leather that they possessed was regularly wiped free of mildew and set in the sun to toast. The houses had to be built with wide-open spaces to catch every breeze that was blowing, but those same openings in the walls caught rain-filled wind. The wind blew the torrential rains in under the roofs and sometimes even up through the flooring! Floods, in the days before the Yan Hee Dam, was constructed, annually invaded the grounds and often even the houses of those who lived in Raheng. Just to keep ahead of the elements was a constant battle.

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When Rosemary went down to Bangkok to meet her mother's boat, her planning was perfect; she arrived in the city the night before Mrs. Hanna's boat was due. What a surprise to get off the train and find her mother there waiting to welcome her! Mrs. Hanna's ship was a full day early so she got herself settled in the Presbyterian guest-house and was ready to surprise Rosemary.

While the two women were still in Bangkok, clearing Mrs. Hanna's things through customs and renewing old friendships, Wilf and Sharon arrived. Wilf always had mission business to take care of in the capital, but this was an unscheduled trip. Wilf and Evy had begun to realize that Sharon was unwell. Her symptoms were confusing, so a trip to a Western doctor was necessary. The doctor consulted was able to prescribe the medicine that would eventually work a complete cure, but along with diagnosis and treatment, the doctor gave grave warning concerning the necessity of knowing thoroughly the life and habits of servants who worked in their homes. Sharon's illness was contracted from their cook.

What a life! Disease invaded the homes of the early WECcers through their servants. Mildew sprouted on their shoes so carefully tucked under their beds. Mold grew on their valuable books, and white ants ate what mold did not destroy. Termites attacked their trunks and boxes and even ate furniture. At night, cockroaches scurried looking for any food to eat. Ants and beetles, snakes and heat stalked them by day, and mosquitoes swarmed buzzing about their ears by night. Fancy! Mrs. Hanna actually wanted to return to all of this! A life of retirement, of comfort, of ease and entertainment could not hold her back! Obviously, Thailand had a lure that no outside could understand!

Ma Hanna settled into the "girls' house" quickly. No, she didn't go out on every trip Ellen and Rosemary took to evangelize the villages across the river and the isolated farm communities North of Raheng. But she was ready for their return with tea and something she had just taught the cook to bake, that would make each homecoming a delight. And she would have plenty of hot water ready for them to have a hot shower.

Servants used to bathing in the river could never quite appreciate the foreigners' need to take the chill off the water they would pour over themselves from the bathroom *ong*. How often weary, sore missionaries would return to their home after particularly grueling trips to find that the cook had just

poured a kettle of hot water through the straining cloth into the large drinking water *ong* in the kitchen! Well, that might not matter so much if one could quickly put a kettle on the charcoal fire to heat for baths. But often that was not possible, for the rice kettle had just been set on the fire pot to cook for the evening meal. The second fire pot, always burning away, would be in use to cook the *gup* (literally, *with* -- the food that goes "with" the rice). No servant would appreciate having her cooking set off of the fire to heat water for bathing! Her rice and its "with" were going to be ready at the same time. "Foreigner, stay out of my kitchen," was written on the face of every firm-minded cook at such a crucial time when the meal preparation was well on its way!

There was no fear that there would not be hot water for bathing once Ma Hanna was installed in the house. For one thing, she had the language that could explain just why that hot water was necessary to these strange foreigners to Thailand.

Another area of tremendous help was the variety of Thai curries and fried dishes Ma Hanna knew just how to make. She knew just what to tell the cook to buy in the fresh market. Then, if the girl had never made that dish before, it was of no matter at all. Ma Hanna could tell her exactly how to cook the dish. Meals became much more varied and exciting and of course, the recipes were shared with the other WEC households.

Ma Hanna did not go on the strenuous all-day journeys for she would say she knew her own strength. She knew her own limits and felt if God put her in a situation where her God-given strength was depleted, He would increase her ability to go on. But if she put herself in such a position, He might well let her suffer the natural consequences. This was an attitude so at variance with the prevailing WEC attitudes of "burning out for Jesus" that it caused the missionaries even years down the line to pause and look for assurance of the Lord's will before leaping into life-threatening situations.

While Rosemary and Ellen were out preaching and doing simple medical work, Wilf and Evy were busy too. Evy had started meetings for children and was visiting neighbors looking for opportunities to share the Gospel. Wilf spoke at a Friday night meeting at the girls' house each week and in their own area, a street chapel was opening in December, following Ma Hanna's arrival. Meetings there were well attended. Evy wrote, "The neighborhood gathers and sits quietly and attentively listens to the message. And they all seem to enjoy singing our Gospel songs and hymns." This was in marked contrast to the Friday night meetings at the girls' house. Rosemary wrote in a prayer letter at that time, "The people being quite unaccustomed to church, chatter between hymns, babies whoop and holler, mothers come to the door and call their children home, young men inside call to their passing friends to come on in, but some pay very good attention."

This was a time of sowing the seed. And the presence and message of the sowers was not always appreciated. The Overgaards' cook reported to them that "One morning as she was at the river having her bath, she heard a group of young fellows say that they did not want any more of the foreigners' singing or preaching. And that if we went to their area again, they would stone us." Evy took this as an encouraging sign!" At least they have been roused to opposition and that is something. It is a better sign than indifference."

Ma Hanna had her own ministry beyond the back-up help she gave to Ellen and Rosemary. She formed friendship with neighbors and market people who had never been particularly responsive to the younger women. Her age, her life in Lampang and Chiangmai and her knowledge of life in Siam before the Second World War, formed a bond with many and gave her the opportunity to witness for the Lord.

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The Christmas just after Ma Hanna's arrival, she and Rosemary went down to Kampaengphet to help Dorothy and Fern with a Christmas program they planned to carry out. The two from Raheng left on the 18<sup>th</sup> for a seven hour trip. Rosemary wrote in a prayer letter that they traveled, "half-way by bus and half-way by boat. Dorothy and Fern had a party for the government school teachers with games and refreshments. My mother and I each spoke a few minutes, and then the guests stayed for a long time and chatted. The head-teacher became a Christian."

Rosemary went on to report that, "Two days later, we had a Christmas service in the little chapel. We hoped for about 50 to 70 people, but when we started, there was such a crowd that couldn't all get into the chapel. So we made them go out onto the street, and we stood on the porch. There was a solid sea of faces all the way to the river, and up and down the street. We sang hymns and Fern sang a solo, Dorothy played the saw, my mother played the organ, and I told the Christmas story, illustrating it with flannelgraph pictures. As many as could see the pictures paid good attention. But many were trapped in the chapel behind the pictures because the street was so packed they couldn't get off the porch.

"By seven the next morning, we were all on our way to Raheng." Rosemary tells us that that return trip (against the current) took them a full ten hours. Naturally, they were all dead tired when they finally arrived home.

"The next day was Sunday and we held a Christmas celebration in the new South chapel. Each of us spoke on a part of the Christmas story. There was a lot of singing. The following night (Christmas) was our celebration here." That would have been in Rosemary and Ellen's own home. Rosemary wrote that, "The Siamese children help, reciting and reading from the Bible. Both services were well attended and thoroughly enjoyed."

She goes on to tell of a communion service the missionaries held with Wilf officiating, and then of a dinner they all ate together. A turkey had been given to them by an Englishman, and they had had a special Christmas tree. "It was really just a palm branch decorated with red balls and cellophane, but it reached to the ceiling and added the festive note to our gathering."

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That year of 1951 is the first time the Tak fair was mentioned in any of the letters or writings of those missionaries. Perhaps it was the first time the fair was held. In any case, the WEC family had a booth at that fair. Rosemary wrote, "There were people from all over Siam, and we had opportunity to make the Gospel known to several thousand during the course of five days."

Christmas, New Years and the fair coming as they did one right after the other, would have presented a picture of hectic activity. Ma Hanna was watching all of this and perhaps she was thinking that there would be a letup after the fair. "Surely there would be a slower pace and times of refreshment to rest and recoup strength," she must have speculated. But instead, she saw that the two households in Raheng and the household in Kampaeng were galvanized into activity.

Evy, in a letter to her friend, Sylvia, gives us a look: "Wilf and I with Fern and Ellen have been doing meetings as a team. On that boat trip, we also took the children, as we could care for them, and carry on their lessons (after some fashion) while we went along in the boat. Beside the seven of us, we had our cook, a girl of about eighteen, and the four men to pole the boat. We lived, cooked, ate, studied, slept and everything else in the space on that boat which was just enough for the eight of us to lay out our bed-rolls each night. We had great fun and the Lord undertook for us, though it was a bit hectic each evening when we stopped at villages for meetings. To get our baths and prepare supper, then eat, and get the children fed and ready for bed, get out our musical instruments and assemble the books we wanted to sell, besides lighting lamps and so on, was sometimes quite a hassle. We were out for almost two weeks. In some places there was at least curious interest and we sold a lot of literature."

The trip left Evy with the picture of crowds of adults who had never heard the Gospel stories before. And she asked her friend to, "Picture rows and rows of naked little boys and girls, or if the night was cold, wrapped in towels and blankets. Lots of them, both small and large, smoke cigarettes."

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Beside the work and the primitive living and traveling conditions, Ma Hanna was seeing something else. Everyone of the foreigners had experienced severe illness during their first term. Before they could fully recover, they would be down with malaria or dysentery or some undiagnosed and unrecognizable fever. Every one of them had experienced dengue with its many days of fever and then its long tail of depression. The Overgaard family was subject to boils. And most of the missionaries had heat rash, infections and strange skin eruptions.

Ma Hanna told Sharon and Paul how they must be careful to keep their hands away from their mouths. Because they unconsciously scratched infected mosquito bites and healing sores, it was of utmost importance that their hands stayed away from their mouths. Well! That was fine, except that their mother was carefully teaching them to cover their mouths when they coughed or sneezed! How could they cover their mouths with their hands and at the same time keep their hands away from their mouths?

Ma Hanna began to talk of the need to consider the care of the temple, the physical body that the Lord had entrusted to each one of them. She started them thinking of the need of a short vacation. But how could they get away from the demands of their stations since they couldn't afford the travel and expense of the beaches far to the South or the cool hill resorts to the North?

Rosemary writes in her memoirs, "For a long time, we had been going through difficult times financially, buying only the very cheapest of native food." She explains that they often did not even have money for postage stamps. "How could we possibly think of going away for a vacation?"

But they all saw the wisdom of Ma Hanna's urging. And they began to feel that this very thing they could not possibly afford was the Lord's will for them.

One day, when Ellen and Rosemary were out on their usual evangelistic trip to the other side of the river, they heard of a place called Lan Sang. They were told that high on that hill (the speaker pointed with his expended lips at a nearby hill that seemed to lean right over him), there was a cluster of beautiful waterfalls.

Yes, they were told, they should be able to reach the site on their bikes, for the falls were close to the road. They knew that a road was to be built all the way to Maesod. At that time, the Maesod road was still far in the future. But there, on the Raheng side of the mountains, there were still the remains of an old road the Japanese used prisoners of war to construct during their occupation of the country. That road was washed out in places. Up in the mountains, there were spots where landslides had covered the roadway and there were other spots so overgrown by tropical jungle that it was impossible to guess just where the roadbed lay. But from the river up to Lan Sang, the road was still usable.

One Saturday, shortly after hearing about the waterfalls, Rosemary stayed with the Overgaard children, and Wilf, Evy and Ellen set out on their bikes to explore the possibility of vacationing at the Lan Sang falls.

Leaving their bicycles at the village of Lan Sang, the party climbed a steep trail that wound up into the hills and finally to the breathtaking sight of a high waterfall. Wilf went exploring farther up the stream, but Evy and Ellen sat down to soak their feet in the cool water.

Rosemary records for us Ellen's remarks to her upon their return home. "We almost wept for joy to see such beautiful scenery and to feel the fresh, cool air."

Asking questions in the village of Lan Sang, they found that a man there would agree to construct three bamboo shelters for them. There was plenty of bamboo right at the site and, after all, that was just the sort of structure he replaced every few years so he could live out in the middle of his rice field and protect the new rice from grazing wild animals. The fee he would ask was minimal. So plans began and a date was agreed upon.

Ma Hanna would not join this trip. The climb was probably more than she felt she ought to undertake. And then, she had so many friends in Chiangmai, she could easily plan a visit to see them later on that would be restful and refreshing.

Rosemary felt that as she was not as worn-out as the others who had been on the field longer, she would plan to join them for just their last two weeks at the falls.

Dorothy also chose not to join the team at Lan Sang. She had invitations from friends with the Presbyterian Mission to join them at a mountain resort in the North. So she left Fern to join the group that set out from Raheng.

Rosemary describes the scene at the falls for us. "The Overgaards' little house stood beside a large pool, into which the water fell from a series of falls between two rock cliffs. The dining room consisted

of a bower of bamboo with a long table and two benches, all of bamboo. Just out of sight, above the first fall, was another house for Fern, Ellen and me. It was reached by a steep ascent through a narrow crevice between two cliffs, and was built on poles over the stream, close to another high series of falls. It was so beautiful and wonderful, I felt for the first days as if it were all a dream."

Listen to a letter Evy wrote while at the falls. "This is our fourth hot season in Siam, and is it ever hot. We felt it a must to get away for awhile. This place is delightful beyond all our expectations. It's quite hot in the middle of the day, true, but there is beautiful scenery, solitude, and water to cool you off, either by swimming, or by sitting on a rock in a shady spot and letting your feet dangle in the stream. The stream comes tumbling down through a canyon of solid rock. There are several falls. It is magnificent! God was good to lead us here."

Supplies were carried in by ox cart and carriers. They did need to take a lot of things with them; charcoal and charcoal fire pots, cooking pots and pans, dishes, bed rolls and mosquito nets, oil lamps and medical supplies, any kind of games or books that would entertain them and the children, and then there was the food to be cooked. Evy wrote, "The closest village is about an hour and a half away on foot. And about all you can buy there are coconuts and bananas! A couple of times someone from there has made the climb here to sell us bananas and eggs. We brought eggplant, onions, pumpkins and cucumbers with us from Raheng, so we have done well on vegetables."

Of course, each one had packed a suitcase of clothing but Rosemary relates that, "I had forgotten the key to my suitcase and so was limited to the few garments I had contributed for packing around the jars of food. My Thai books, vocabulary lists, etc. were in the suitcase. The others laughed with glee and hoped i would not get the key for a while."

Rosemary continues for us, "We all helped to dam up the stream, making the pool deep enough for a good swim, and about twenty feet in diameter. A huge vine hanging from a tree at the top of the cliff nearly reached the water, making a gigantic swing by which we could glide from one end of the pool and land on the rock at the other end."

It was a primitive sort of vacation and would not be everyone's idea of the perfect getaway, but it was just exactly what that group needed.

Rosemary makes one more remark about that vacation. "Near the end of April, Wilf had to leave for Bangkok to meet another new missionary, Bill Charters, from Northern Ireland. Bill joined us for the last few days at Lan Sang."

## **Romance**

### **Chapter 14**

Not long after vacation, the dreadful heat was broken as the rains began to fall. Bill Charters watched the rains set in and they did not stop. Rain poured down as a rush of silver bullets flattening fields and flooding roads for an hour at a time, then it came as a steady drumming on the roof for days on end. Part of his military duty Bill had spent in India, and monsoon rain was an old acquaintance.

With the coming of Bill to the Thai field, a pattern was begun; full-time language students would live with the field leader and his family or they would be placed in the household of other senior workers. This would mean that the language student was protected from the interruptions that the running of a household brings. This arrangement also meant that the new arrival would spend meal time, coffee break or afternoon tea time and the evenings with the senior workers. The sort of conversation at such times would thoroughly acquaint the language student with the work going on. He would be in on decisions in the making. He would meet problems and know individuals. He could understand what had gone on before his arrival on the field and feel a part of the ongoing work. Unofficially, he had a voice in policy making!

There was no time set aside to teach new arrivals on the field about the Thai culture and the adjustments they must make if they were to fit in. But such a course was not needed. New missionaries learned from the conversation at meals and in the sitting-room.

Perhaps it should be noted that until Bill's arrival, those who came to Thailand after the original party were those who already spoke the Thai language. Though both Rosemary and Dorothy needed to have the opportunity for refresher courses in the language, they were already able to converse and minister to some degree. And the importance of adjustment to Thai culture was already understood and experienced by each of them.

Before Bill's arrival in Thailand, the Overgaards had their house prepared for him. Evy wrote to her friend some months before Bill's arrival, "We don't know just how we will provide space for anyone else, unless some major changes are made. The property has changed hands and the new landlord is willing to make changes, but we are afraid that he will want to raise the rent unreasonably high. So we are trusting the Lord to work it out."

Obviously, the Lord did work it all out, for many missionaries started their field experience as language students in that house. A full five years after Bill's arrival in Raheng, the rent was still ten dollars a month (200 Baht)!

But the South House was not the most convenient or comfortable house. Evy continued in her letter, "Lately, when it rains all the time, we have to remind ourselves that this house is just a bit of crusading we have the privilege of doing. You see, the house is in three separate parts, so that if you want to go to the kitchen or to the dining-room, or the bathroom, and it is raining, you have no choice but to go out in the rain. When it is raining hard, you get quite wet -- to say nothing of how the dirt and water get tracked all over the house. Markie just wanders right out into the rain and someone needs to keep an eye, or better yet, a hold on him at all times! It would be luxurious to have a house all under one roof."

Bill, fresh from WEC headquarters in London, would have been prepared for crusading and sacrifice. He was doubtless thankful for the preparations made for him and ready to take advantage of the study time given him. He spent "six hours a day with the teacher, a young man who had just come out of the priesthood," Rosemary writes.

If the climate of Thailand and the living standard of his fellow-workers came as no surprise to Bill, there was still an area where he must have been surprised. Leaving home with all his connections to family and friends, church and school, Bill had put an area of life onto the altar. He was willing to remain single and was moving ahead into that life. If from his own background and social setting, his own Bible school and church and doctrinal fold he had not become attracted to any young woman, it hardly seemed likely that on the other side of the world with a tiny group of people from totally different backgrounds, he would find a life partner.

Bill could not help but notice Rosemary. The young Rosemary Hanna was not pretty. No, she was absolutely beautiful! She stood out in any setting. The Thai delighted to call her *Grung Chat*, the half-cast, not just because she could speak Northern Thai and could always act as a carefully reared Thai girl would act, but because they approved of her black hair, healthy fair complexion and her beautiful dark brown eyes. They felt that she was too beautiful not to have some Thai blood in her!

Just imagine the young Bill Charters coming halfway around the world by steamer. Then, traveling up-country on one of those bus/truck affairs to be dumped off in a town that looked like back-of-beyond. And that wasn't all; he and Wilf would have crossed the river in a boat poled by a half-naked Thai, then been trucked to Lan Sang, where they shouldered their backpacks and climbed straight up into wilderness mountains, and there at journey's end, was Rosemary!! It didn't take Bill long to fall in love.

\* \* \*

Not many months after the vacation at the waterfalls, Ellen's sister and brother-in-law, Dave and Betty Woodward, came to visit. They had been serving on the Tibetan border, but with the Communist takeover in China, had been forced to leave. In Hongkong, they made the decision to backtrack and visit Ellen. Betty was, at that time, still a Canadian, and couldn't get a visa to enter the USA because she had just come out of Red China. The family with two small children did not have money to stay on in Hongkong if the visa continued to be delayed. A visit to Thailand and Ellen was the Lord's plan, and love gift to the sisters. And the Woodward's visit proved to be important for the Thai field then and for many years to come, as Dave was instrumental in helping form field policy.

Until 1951, the WEC missionaries in Thailand had never had an official field conference. They did not need to! For the first years, they all lived in the same house and all had equal voice in decisions made and all knew every part of the work and outreach. With the opening of the station in Kampaeng and then a second house in Raheng, that situation changed only slightly. Letters and visits kept all informed and every one of them felt free to express advice or even disapproval of the work carried out by the others.

But Dave brought another perspective to the thinking in Raheng. He was the catalyst that brought Wilf to call for the first Thailand field conference, with the Woodward's as guests and in at least one area, advisers.

Evy wrote that it was a time of real blessing with reports of the work and needs from each station and a time of intercession following each report. Dave and Wilf led in devotional meetings and without previously conferring, they each stressed present obedience.

The business and decision that would change field policy had to do with finance. Dave and Betty, coming from the outside, saw something that the Thailand WECers were overlooking. The Woodward's realized that the Overgaard family was at a great financial disadvantage. Only adult missionaries were drawing a food allowance from the general fund. This meant the Overgaards were trying to feed a family of five on the share of two adults. (Actually, there was only a short period of time when the Overgaard family lived alone. For the first two and a half years, there were two other adults living with them and sharing in the kitchen pool. With Bill's arrival, there was again another adult in the household.)

Certainly, all of the Overgaard's co-workers would have been more than ready for the children to be given a fair allowance, but it took an outsider and a man of Dave's stature to force the issue. And Dave, doubtless, had a real fight on his hands to convince the Overgaards that they should be drawing some portion of an adult food allowance for each of their children. It was the vote of that first Thailand field conference that established the scale of food allowance that the general fund would pay for missionaries' children.

\* \* \*

There was an area where the visit of Dave and Betty was of great help to Bill Charters. Rosemary lets us in on their very private lives. She is the one to let us know that Dave became Rosemary and Bill's

private mail carrier and that he was Bill's confidant and adviser. What a shame that we don't have some of those notes and letters to examine as we study 1951!

At the end of the field conference, Bill and Rosemary became engaged.

We ought to stop and look at the engagement of Bill Charters to Rosemary Hanna. Bill, from Ireland, had left school at fourteen. Then, after his conversion and military duty, he attended Emanuel Bible School in Birkenhead, near Liverpool. This school, where the famous Stanley Banks taught, was a school that many WEC candidates came through before the Missionary Training College in Glasgow was opened.

Rosemary had been sent as a child to a private school in India. Then, after graduating from a high school in the USA, she went on to study at Wheaton, one of the most prestigious private colleges in the United States. Graduating from Wheaton with honors, she went on to study at Princeton Seminary.

One can almost hear Rosemary's relatives lamenting that Rosemary, so educated, so polished and so beautiful, was throwing herself away on a "nobody"! Was this one of those famous missionary mismatches? Was this a case of propinquity? Was it just that there was no one else for Rosemary to marry?

But...Rosemary's mother, Ma Hanna, was on hand, and she realized as did the rest of the field, that Bill was not a "diamond in the rough". No, he was a diamond, cut and polished. Though he hadn't the formal schooling of Rosemary, he had been a keen mind and was a reader. He would continue to learn as he continued to read everything he could put his hands on. Bill's good manners were based on consideration for others. He was a gentleman.

\* \* \*

The announcement of Bill and Rosemary's engagement necessitated change. Since the mission policy was that engaged couple should not be living in the same town, Rosemary was sent to Kampaeng to work with Fern, and Dorothy moved into the house at Wat Doi with Ellen and Ma Hanna.

Wilf accompanied Rosemary on the boat that took her and her trunks to Kampaengphet. Rosemary writes that, as the boat neared the river bank, waiting children set up a shout announcing its arrival. More and more neighbors gathered to welcome the new foreigner as the boat was being moored to a sturdy tree. Of course, they had met Rosemary at Christmas time when she visited with Mrs. Hanna, and Wilf was, by this time, a familiar face and voice.

Some of those welcoming neighbors helped Wilf to carry Rosemary's heavy trunks upstairs. The next morning the same helpful ones moved Dorothy's things to be loaded on the returning boat. There must have been many in the crowd that saw Dorothy and Wilf off that day, who owed their lives and health to the nurse who was now moving away from them.

For several months, Rosemary and Fern worked together, continuing the evangelistic work that Fern had been doing on her own. Dorothy's thriving dispensary had to close, as neither Fern nor Rosemary was qualified to carry on that work. The dispensary building was then used twice a week for meetings. Rosemary says these meetings were sometimes crowded and interest was very good.

It was February of 1952 that Rosemary's mother joined her in Kampaeng and Fern moved to Raheng. Towards the end of that month, another exchange took place as Rosemary and her mother went to Raheng to make the last arrangements for the wedding, and just for a few weeks, Bill manned the Kampaeng station alone.

\* \* \*

There is an acceleration of cultural adjustments when a first term missionary becomes engaged on the field. Many WECers, over the years, would be in such a culture shock that they would not be able to accept gracefully the Thai standards for their courtships. Some would see imposed restrictions as the unfair demands of senior workers. Others would judge the Thai customs to be just foolish and heathen. Strained at the leash of Thai customs they marred their own testimony before the watching Thai, marred their own memories of their courtship, and as straining at the leash is never comfortable, they vexed and provoked themselves.



Bill and Rosemary accepted the Thai rules for courtship with grace and humor. Let Rosemary tell us what their experience was like. "Among the conservative high classes, young people were never allowed to be alone together, but were closely chaperoned. Obviously WEC could not have a lower standard that would cause us to appear promiscuous. So, whenever Bill and I met, even after months of separation, we greeted each other with a brief handshake, and sat down on our properly spaced chairs for a friendly chat in full view of the spectators standing down the street and looking up through the railing."

\* \* \*

In February, the Overgaards, Ellen and Fern set off for a trek over the mountains to the Maesod area. Fern kept a careful diary of that trip, so we can enter into something of the adventure and excitement of that time. Fern writes:

Tuesday, February 19, 1952: We had prayer, Ma Hanna took our picture and then we started off at 4 o'clock in the afternoon. With canteens slung over our shoulders, kerchiefs on our heads and dressed in our oldest clothes, we walked down the street to a place where a pole boat waited to take us across the river. On the other side we waited for a logging truck to be greased and oiled for the next leg of our trip into the forest. Eventually, Ellen and I climbed up onto No. 8 and Wilf and Evy onto No. 9. Then started a roller-coaster ride up and down mountains. In places there were steep drops at the edge of the narrow road, but we learned to keep our eyes on the beauty of the forest with its flowering trees of pink and lavender. We rode for a good hour before we finally came upon our pack ponies and the spot chosen for our camp that night. It was getting dusk and the dampness of the forest was already creeping in upon us so the burning campfire the pony driver had started was a welcome sight.

That fire looked even more welcome after a cold bath in the stream close by! Old bamboo shacks that road workers had used gave us a sense of comfort and protection as we had strung up our mosquito nets inside them. So after a hot supper, we wearily climbed inside our nets. But in spite of the fact that the pony drivers kept the fire burning all night to keep us warm, we didn't sleep well. We heard trucks passing all night as they shifted gears just at the incline where we were camped!

February 20 started at daybreak with the moving about of the pony drivers, so we got up, washed, dressed, ate our breakfast and were off by 7:30. Most of that day, we followed the old highway to Burma that was built by prisoners of war. In spots, torrential rains had washed out all signs of the road. In other places, there were piles of rock and trees and we guessed that the roadbed lay beneath. The bells of our ponies tinkled a merry tune as they led the way. The sound of that tune was lost, time and again at a curve in the road or shoulder of the mountain. We were only too glad to hear it again after a lapse of time. It reassured us that our trip's necessities were still with us. Just before stopping for the night, our path led down and down into a ravine far below. Beside the path for horses and oxen, I found the stair-steps made by elephant foot-prints. This staircase was less tiring for my weary feet.

The next day, Fern records:

As we walked, overhanging vines and stately tall trees surrounded us on all sides. There was much deep shade, coolness and lovely springs. We heard chattering parrots, and gibbons called from one end of the ravine to the other. Everything about us was beautiful, but our own bodies became more and more sore and tired. Finally, we were barely able to lift one foot after the other. And to sit down became a slow calculation. We didn't stop to rest at noon. We didn't dare. We knew if we stopped we would never get started again.

Thursday, February 21: Thankfully, we came to some flat land!...

It was that night that the travelers arrived at Maw Dta's village. Wilf had met the Christian headman on a trip the year before and brought his present troupe to meet and fellowship with this isolated testimony hidden so far from civilization. Fern says that after baths and a hot meal, they had a meeting in Maw Dta's house.

...Wilf gave a message in Siamese and Maw Dta translated it into Karen. It was a thrill to sing with them songs as *There is Power in the Blood* and *At the Cross*. They sang in Karen and we sang in Siamese. But we were so tired from our traveling we were glad when the meeting ended at 9:00 and we could plop into bed.

Thursday, February 22: We woke up heavy as logs! ...

How did they keep on going? Part of the answer is that Wilf had a gift for persuading you that you could do what you were absolutely certain that you could not! Part of the answer was the anticipation that that very night, they would hold a meeting in Maeramad. They had heard of the second largest town on the West side of the mountains and knew that they were the first Siamese speaking group who had ever come this far with the Gospel message. That evening Fern says, "Ellen and I maneuvered our decrepit frames down the village streets and advertised the evening meetings." She goes on to report that "about 300 people came."

Saturday they stayed on in Maeramad, and Fern reports that a Karen lady came to them bringing a gift of sweet potatoes and greens. Fern understood that the woman professed to be a Christian, but her Thai was so strange, Fern wasn't sure if the woman was a believer herself or just knew believers?

That night they had a second meeting that was even better attended than the one the night before. Ellen and Evy gave flannel-graph lessons. Fern led the singing with her concertina. There, as with every place where Thai was spoken, they sold literature. At 9 PM, they climbed into the ox-cart to travel through the cool of the night to their next destination.

They stopped at every sizable town along the border area. In several places they held meetings with more than 500 in attendance. In Maesod itself, they had over 1000 who gathered for meetings in the local cinema.

Fern writes about that trip, "Blisters? Yes, I had them And I limped along with swollen knees. I couldn't bend them or feel really comfortable for a long time after that trip! But the lights of lanterns and flashlights of people crossing the rice fields to attend meetings made it all worthwhile."

\* \* \*

While the team was away on the Burma border, Rosemary stayed with the Overgaard children and taught Sharon and Paul, who were then in the third and second grades. Mrs. Hanna was busy at Hua Diat making Rosemary two wedding dresses, a long one for the real wedding, and a short one for the civil ceremony at the British Embassy in Bangkok.



*Mrs. Hanna cuts the cake*

"The houses had to be made ready for the six wedding guests who would come from a distance," Rosemary writes:

Chairs were sanded and painted, curtains made, tables varnished, etc. When the weary travelers returned from their trek, they too plunged into the work of preparation.

The day before the wedding, all our old friends arrived: the Seigles and the Voths from Bangkok, Dr. and Mrs. Ed McDaniel from Chiangmai; never before had Raheng seen so many white people. It was a wonderful treat for us.

The wedding took place on the evening of March 25<sup>th</sup>, at the Overgaard home. The end of March is usually unbearably hot, but an unseasonable rain the day before the wedding had made the atmosphere

pleasant. Fern and Mrs. Voth made a wedding cake, Charlotte McDaniel and Mrs. Seigle made the corsage and bouquets, and Mr. Seigle the punch.

Ellen was the maid of honor and Sharon sprinkled flower petals from a silver bowl. Wilf was best man, and Evy, the hostess. Mr. Seigle and Mr. Voth performed the ceremony. Ed McDaniel took pictures. There were about fifteen Thai guests. I was rather in a trance and unconscious of many of the details, but I do recall how handsome Bill looked in his white suit, with his deep blue eyes and dark wavy hair.

All our guests brought gifts. Gaeo Moon brought four glass tumblers. Others brought silver bowls, lamps, cooking pots, etc. Bill's teacher brought a talking myna bird and a parrot. The parrot had no cage, so the teacher handed the bird to Mother. She was receiving guests so was obliged to have the parrot perched on her finger while she welcomed the rest of the guests.

Early the next morning, we started on our journey to Bangkok by bus. The older couples, Seigles and Voths, sat in the front seats, the McDaniels and Bill and I sat in the back part. The floor was loaded with lumber nearly to the level of the seat... (Remember, the back seats did not face forward but were just two long boards running the length of the truck body) ... Thus we bumped and jolted along. We ate a Chinese dinner on the balcony of the restaurant at Sukhotai, and after stops and waits here and there to mend tires and fix the engine, etc. we reached Pitsanuloke in the evening. Here the McDaniels took a North-bound train and the rest of us went to Bangkok the next morning.



After the civil ceremony at the embassy, Bill and I stayed in Bangkok for several days as guests of the Voths, enjoying the refinements and luxuries of civilization. On our return to Raheng, we joined the rest at Lan Sang where they had gone again for vacation, at the same site as the year before."

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Certainly, some clever WECcer on the field today will look at this account and say, "Wait a minute! Bill and Rosemary met at Lan Sang waterfalls at the 1951 field vacation. By the 1952 field vacation at the waterfalls, they were married and home from their honeymoon!" There was nothing slow or indecisive about those early WECcers! And yes, the mission did



*The first field wedding, Bill and Rosemary Charters, 1952*

have the rule that engaged couples were not to be married until the second one to arrive on the field had been there for two years. It is understandable that the Thailand field was considered a rebel field for many years, but there was a reason for letting the Charters get married early. Conference had decided that Fern and Ellen would go on furlough in the autumn of 1952, and the Overgaards would go a year later. By marrying early in 1952, the Charters would be established as a family and equipped to man one of the stations before Fern and Ellen left the field.

\* \* \*



*Honeymoon*

the Lord for only seven years when she arrived in Thailand, she was thoroughly equipped to serve Him and prepared to walk in obedience through all of the adjustments that faced her.

Though Alma is still in contact with the Overgaards, she and her husband, Hans Sierhuis, have chosen not to contribute to this history, so there will be many gaps in their stories.

No account has been given of just exactly when Alma arrived or of who went to meet her in Bangkok. Nor is it recorded where she lived and started her language study. Presumably, Alma started

In April of 1952, about the time of the second field vacation at the waterfalls, Alma Lyons arrived on the field. Alma was an American from New York state. Though her experience growing up included Sunday School and church, she did not come to know the Lord till she was in her twenties. Alma then attended a very tiny Bible School where teaching was doubtless excellent, but the school existed mainly because of the outstanding gifts of just one woman teacher. There was only a handful of students in Alma's class and with the aging and death of her teacher, the school came to an end. There were hundreds of such tiny Bible schools in America in those days, and many, like Alma's school, wonderfully trained their students in the knowledge and use of the Word of God. Though Alma had walked with

Thai study in Raheng in the Overgaards' home.

\* \* \*

It was in that dry season of 1952 that Wilf and Evy and others began regular visits to Sukhothai. That city, which appeared such an unattractive slum to the WECers upon their first journey to Raheng, was now becoming a target of interest and prayer and activity. At first, meetings were held in rented *hong taew* storefronts. There must have been some interest that encouraged the team to go ahead, for a house was rented and prepared for Dorothy Caswell and a companion. The suggestion is given that Ellen was the one to first go as Dorothy's companion. But we do know that Ellen was on the verge of furlough; her time in Sukhothai could hardly have been more than a matter of a few weeks.



*Fern Berg and Alma Lyons*

Fern and Ellen planned to travel together as they started home for furlough. Their sailing date from Bangkok was set for the 19<sup>th</sup> of September. But Fern's booking had to be canceled as she did not have the funds to pay her passage. It was not until the beginning of October that five hundred dollars arrived for her. She was then able to fly to Yokohama and join Ellen's freighter there. Why would the Lord engineer such a delay? Evy gives us the answer to that question. As Fern had that extra time in Thailand, she was able to teach the Overgaard children. Thus Evy was able to go with Wilf to Sukhothai, where the new WEC station was established.

In October, just after Fern had left the field on her flight to Japan, Wilf went down to Bangkok to welcome two new arrivals: Marta Person from Sweden with WEC, and Elly Hansen from Denmark with the Danish Covenant Mission.

In China, the Danish Covenant Mission had operated under the umbrella of the China Inland Mission. During those last months that China was open to mission work, Elly took the necessary candidate course of the CIM in England. But by the time she was finished and ready to sail for China under the CIM and the Danish Mission, China had closed. The leaders of the Danish Mission looked for other fields in Southeast Asia and finally settled on Thailand. Though the CIM, now under the name of the Overseas Missionary Fellowship (OMF), was getting started in Thailand, they were not initiating a policy of sponsoring associate workers.

The leaders of the Danish Mission carried out extensive correspondence with WEC leaders in Britain and then with Wilf on the field, and it was finally decided that WEC would sponsor and work with the Danish Mission in Thailand. Elly was free to join the fellowship and the work in our three provinces.

Marta Person, from Sweden came not as an associate but as a WECer. Back in 1947, Marta sailed for China with a Swedish mission to act as teacher for the children of their Swedish missionaries. The group she served with was located far inland in Southwest China. With the sweeping victories of Mao's army and the fall of the government, the group of Swedish families fled China through Burma and India, settling for a time in Ceylon. There, Marta was able to finish the semester's teaching she had begun back in China.

Marta's family at home were, by this time, more than anxious about her and the unclear situation in Asia, and were urging her to come home. So, in 1950 she boarded a ship on its way from Australia to

London. On board the ship was a young Australian on his way to the mission field. He was headed for West Africa, but would be stopping for a time at his Mission's headquarters in London. He was a candidate with the Worldwide Evangelization Crusade.

This young missionary candidate on his way to the field for the first time, and the Swedish girl on her way home from the Communist takeover in China, became friends. That friendship quickly grew, and before the voyage was over, the two had become to an "understanding". This may be a term that is no longer used in mission circles. It means they were agreeing to marry if the Lord continued to lead and open doors that would bring them together.

Marta applied to the Mission, and in 1951, entered the candidate course in London HQ. At the best of times, a WEC candidate course is difficult; for Marta it became a traumatic ordeal. Through correspondence, she and her friend, then in Africa, broke off their engagement. Something of Marta's spiritual maturity can be seen in the fact that the Lord was able to bring her into a commitment to the Mission and a willingness to serve with WEC wherever the Lord would lead. A letter from the Thai field stressing the need for workers was the instrument the Lord used to speak to Marta and guide her in her direction towards Thailand.

Marta boarded the ship for Thailand in Rotterdam. Just days later, Elly boarded the same ship in Hamburg. The voyage took more than five weeks, for the freighters stopped many times along the route to unload and take on new cargo. Elly and Marta had all the time in the world to get acquainted. Though Marta and Elly were exact opposites in temperament and personality, they could have real fellowship in the Lord and fuel each other's faith as their ship drew near to Bangkok.

\* \* \*

Marta says that as their ship came in to dock, "There stood Wilf at the landing, in front of the East Asiatic offices not far from the Oriental Hotel. He stood, waiting there to greet us and welcome us to Thailand. As he shook my hand, he said, 'We have met before, haven't we?'" And of course they had. They had met five years before on the *General Meigs* troop transport ship.

Ellen has already told us that Wilf was helpful to this party of travelers. Marta now adds this information: "The women and children were waiting on the docks in Hongkong for all the luggage and heavy baggage to be off-loaded. It was hot, and we were all exhausted. Wilf led us to a place he had found close by where we could sit under a roof and eat ice cream!" Marta adds with a laugh, "How typical of Wilf!"

\* \* \*

Marta and Elly then experienced what the other arrival before them had endured: the heat, the dirt, the mosquitoes and the confusion of Bangkok, the up-country by train, then truck. Marta tells us that they stopped in Sukhothai for a short visit with Dorothy Caswell, "who was living alone there at the time." Marta suggests that Ellen had been Dorothy's companion there, but was just then on her way home.

\* \* \*

That year began with wedding preparations and a honeymoon. It began with the adventure of an historic trek across the mountains to Maesod. The year ended with the opening of a new station in Sukhothai, the start of furloughs for Ellen and Fern and with new arrivals to the field.

To examine each missionary and the way God led them to Thailand is to understand how personal and private is God's dealings with each one. No two followed exactly the same path to Thailand. No two experienced exactly the same impressions and feelings as they adjusted to their adopted land. But all, in their deepest, personal longings, found the Lord, who never left them, to be all they needed. And each one could give voice to truths, "I, being in the way, the Lord led me." And, "As for God, His way is perfect."



*Mai Bun, Nai Leo, Pi Gaow, Gaow Moon -- two unknown, Alma, Marta, Elly*