

Newsletter No. 6

Once again for friends in all corners of the globe, another offering of life at the far side. An attempt to reveal the inner secrets of paradise and the pitfalls within. Any reference to people and places are neither fictitious nor imaginery, they are quite intentional !!! Enjoy.

My first task is to commend my good friend William Gibbs for his unending stories, most of which I have now heard a dozen times. OK, sometimes I don't listen so it probably takes a few goes to get the message across. Stories of the good old days, when people used to doff their caps, open doors for ladies, and say Thank You for any pleasantries bestowed. Nowadays that is just a distant memory with the norm being public farting, hacking out dockyard oysters and hurling abuse at passing strangers. Well that's just me, others are far worse !!

Leaving Bangkok at the start of August, I headed by truck at breakneck speed driven by Pon, the aspiring Lewis Hamilton of Thailand, for the tranquil retreat at Lakeside Lodge. With Eat in tow as a fully fledged partner and nervous passenger, we eventually set up camp in Room 3 some two hours later, filling the bathroom with pills, potions, lotions and various bathroom paraphernalia. The excitement of being somewhat nomadic still has that feeling of displacement, but on arriving at the picturesque Lake Chaknork, the ability to immediately chill out, or *cha cha yen yen*, soon takes over. A large glass of Scottish wine, Khun Nightowls eloquent banter and the feeling of déjà vu become totally beneficial to one's health.

For those of you who have been to this oasis, Murf, Chris/Cyndy, Dutchy and the Kerseys, will attest to the wonderful hospitality William and his excellent team give to allcomers. A very tight knit family unit from Korat (Nakhon Ratchasima) and Chiang Mai (Phayao), these units are the very fabric of society that demonstrate the strength of Thai family life. So much for the Western undisciplined, WGAS, or the Devil-may-care attitude of their modern selfish society – frankly, moving on has been an enforced blessing in disguise. Yes, I'm bitter, very, very bitter and I apologise to friends for continued cynicism and underlying hatred of those who have done me down. But its my right.

Anyway, enough of my vitriol, there are things to do, places to see and people to meet. With William still struggling with my ribald sense of humour, and interesting phraseology, the two deaf and ageing Nightbirds set forth for a few familiar haunts. After a couple of pipe openers in Soi 6, we visited our old friend A at the Sunshine Bar. As members of his highly unsuccessful pool team we were pleased to hear they still hadn't won a match but had won a couple of frames. Despite the attention of numerous decollaté young girls and one bearded lady, the team failed to respond to treatment on the bench. So it was back to the Johnnie Daeng once more and another round of risqué stories. Meanwhile Mamma A supplies platefuls of chips, chicken wings and rice, whilst number one poolster and main bar steward, Khun Dtun, an unfortunate polio victim, smashes all-comers with his mighty crutch. Scenes reminiscent of Apocalypse Now. Oh, glory be !!

The month of August was an important one as I required another visa run before September, or I could apply for a Retirement Visa at the local Pattaya Immigration office. We decided to get documentation in place before August 25th, thus allowing time for a trip to Cambodia should there be a failure in obtaining the correct ticket. Having planned this in Bkk, I had already obtained a Health Certificate from the Christian Hospital over the road from the Duke of Wellington. This was an entertaining spectacle. Mark (DoW) suggested visiting at lunchtime so he and I scampered over the road for the appointment.

The sight of a huge, red-faced farang, pouring sweat and puffing like a steam train, must have caused some concern. The gurney pusher looked suitably shocked and quickly moved away.

Trouble is, they insist on doing a blood pressure check first up. OK, so it was a tad high, like 215/95. Weight was quite impressive too, and I definitely had the impression that they wondered how I was still standing. After half an hour BP taken again and had come back down to 145/85 – most reassuring, and the gurney pusher returned. Guess I really must stop all this scampering about !!! Anyway, the Doctor was not greatly impressed but at least he signed the document stating that I was in fine physical health !!! Thank goodness I had scampered down to the ATM earlier in the day !!!!!

I had managed to get a Proof of Residence letter from Khun Pook, Managing Director of the Silom Serene, so armed with two official forms all I needed was a letter from the Bank showing current account details. As there is a minimum requirement, I needed to seek a further transfer from UK to meet the target. So with instructions given I just had to wait a couple of weeks before obtaining the necessary document.

News had been received from UK that the Flying Dutchman was due to visit the Kingdom en route to Melbourne on the 14th. It made good sense to visit Bangkok Bank to obtain the various papers, have lunch at the Duke and collect the Fraudster on the way back to Pattaya. Typically the Bank had screwed up. Lost the transferred money, totally hopeless !! Anyway, after much admonishment, a good lunch was had by all, including Khun Tony who is hardly seen at all these days. Returning via Suwannabum, the gangly buffoon (good call, Daz !!) stood out like a sore thumb near the taxi rank. Ladled aboard the flying truck we headed back to Lakeside without any further mishap.

Despite the Dutchman only having one pair of flimsy skidsters, he managed to unclag them in the swimming pool each morning and dry them before confronting the locals. Happily, Khun Onn noticed the sameness of Dutchy's wardrobe and purchased three new pairs in the local market. Cutting a fine dash in backpack circles, our visiting buffoon easily passed as a local wastrel.

The following week passed very quickly with sightseeing around the countryside during the day and around the sois during the night. Visiting A's Bar saw Dutchy promoted to Pool team member and an important match the following Monday. Down on Walking Street, Nightowl suggested a visits to Cats Go-Go so having met up at Lita's Bar in Soi BJ (no further comment!!) for some refreshment and, errrr, ladyboys to test the Dutchster, we headed for more noise and scantily clad coyote girls. I got lost along the way having had to stop for a leak. During my search for the others, a tap on my shoulder and there were Mark, Mike and Nick from the Duke and Big Mango in Bangkok. The boys were on a big night out and already seemed to be wearing the beer goggles, judging by the skank house they invited me to. Hot Girls for lame old codgers, up some precipitous stairs, was not a Doctor's tonic. Half an hour watching extraordinary acrobatics with sensitive parts producing the contents of a hardware store it was time to make hasty escape. At least the boys rushed off leaving me to descend the stairs in a more leisurely fashion. Still lost but now in moby contact with Dutchy, I found an excellent music bar opposite the Roxy where I waited for the others. Half an hour in Cats, getting deafened, and then it was next door to Le Boesché. Quite busy inside and having found a seat with a gynaecologists eye view, it was time to savour the goods. Impossible to have any form of conversation, it was quite easy speaking total gibberish and everybody still laughed. Best bar of the evening and plenty of attractions (and distractions). Thanks to Mamasan one and two for keeping this old roué focussed. Back soon.

In the meantime I had to visit the Immigration people to change my visa. A complicated procedure where the incumbents speak no English, are surly and unhelpful, the whole process unravelled before my eyes. Having eventually obtained the correct stamp in my passport, I was directed to the senior officer at the rear of the room. This person could be described as being possibly of the female gender, probably a bean flicker, humourless and quite definitely, a misandrist. Out comes the 'VOID' stamp, bang bang bang – that's yer lot, pal. No retirement visa for you. No reason given, just push off – next !

Having sat for twenty minutes awaiting further instructions, it was necessary to confront the Gestapo to find out what went wrong. This time no amount of deflection would move me and I guess I must have looked grumpy until the reason was given. It appears that one must have the minimum requirement in the Bank for a period of at least three months prior to seeking a retirement visa. So that was it then. Ok, people, see you again in three.

So a trip to Koh Chang and Cambodia had to be hastily arranged. Not a bad idea as it would give Dutchy a good look at different parts of Thailand. William spoke to one of his mates and the trip was on for two nights and days at Koh Chang Resort and Spa.

Monday night saw the debut of the Gangly Buffoon, and, miracle for sure, a win for A's Bar (8-3). Much frivolity and antics both short and long time. Even the bearded lady might have had a dust down. Khun William and I beat a hasty retreat before being subjected to the pressures of the night (well that's my story and I'm sticking to it !!!).

Thursday, 09.00am and the gang of five set off for Cambodia, equipped with sandwiches and Scottish wine. Weather was dreadful, heavy rain and thunder showers with overcast conditions. Not looking good at the crossing, but at least there was a store selling umbrellas by the passport control office. Half an hour later and visa stamps were all in order. Off to the ferry for Koh Chang and at 03.00pm we were wedged in like sardines on the No. 3 Rust Bucket. Crowded with children stuffing their faces with palid frankfurters – hmmm, what good practise for later in life !!!

Koh Chang is a lovely island, mainly for the hikers and backpackers, but it does rain a lot. The west side of the island has the better beaches and is where most of the hotels and resorts are located, White Sands being the most famous. The roads are dreadful and the driving similar. With all the rain, many of the roads get washed away and are filled in with various types of rubble and unsuitable material. Strange that there is only one road on the island and it does not complete a full circuit.

First night out with evil intent saw the boys visit Steve at the Butt-a-fly Bar in the White Sands Entertainment Complex. This is an interesting Merseysider who has a nasty habit of trying to polish off a pool frame by one handedly potting the black. Absolutely hopeless. Following ribald tales of abject failure and ramblings of a man whose ambitions included running for President in a monastery, we all felt it was time to move on. Perhaps that was a good thing as his group of artistes appeared looking like a backing group for Danny La Rue. Hmmm, enough said.

With the time approaching 10.00pm, Night Owl was a bit jaded so we decided to call in on our old friend Johnny – a wild Rasta Thai woman who used to live in South East London. A curious creature whose opening salvo included a rendition often heard in the more unrefined parts of Wrexham late on a Friday night. Her Bar is on the only drag between White Sands and our hotel. She does at least play some seriously good music and Dutchster was invited backdoors to assist in the CD selection process amongst the bongs, thongs and schlongs of the Marley Madam. Whilst away, my anathema – the dreaded spider, came out of a quiet corner. This one was HUGE. The locals said they had never seen one this size. It scampered across the road, halting traffic and swerving motorbikes. Yes, readers, I am prone to exaggerate but in this instance, it was a big mother. A bird eating spider, and well capable of the occasional ostrich.

Day two saw a conducted tour of the island, culminating in the seafood restaurant at Salakphet. One of the best eateries anywhere with such a good variety of seafood fresh from the daily catch. The curried crab is a real speciality with prawn tempura, khao pad goong, pla mhuk and steamed sea bass adding to the flavours. Visitors to the island – a definite must !!

Returning to the mainland the following morning was a welcome relief from the weather. Having

had a poor night at some different bars along the White Sands area, where ladies drinks are charged at 30 baht above punter drink. So for a Tiger beer at 60 baht, lady drink is 90 baht. For Johnnie Red at 120 baht, lady drink becomes 150 baht – and all for the same orange squash. Total rip off. Anyway its just a warning for the unwary visitor.

Back to Lakeside on the Saturday and a final night to get the Dutchman into trouble. No problem for an experienced Wrexham street dog. Looking the complete buffoon, this was Dutchy's finest hour. Con the bargirl into a night of bliss, get her to cough up for the room, the taxi there, the taxi back, a packet of ciggies and some toothpaste and the old pro was firing on other people's cylinders !! William, myself and the team collected the shipwreck from the Queen Vic the following morning (midday) and whisked him from harms way. That night he was on his way to Melbourne. Best of luck to the good people of Victoria !!!

A fishing frenzy broke out at Lakeside after Khun Eat caught the biggest Pla Ning ever. A whopper at around the two kilo mark. Thereafter Onn managed to snare a Sawai despite having the entire rod and rig ripped from her grasp, the whole lot ending up in the pool. Fortunately the float reappeared and we were able to hook the line and retrieve the missing rod, sawai still attached. A further leviathan of the deep was hooked by Eat, big enough to require landing in the washing basket. This was destined for lunch on Saturday.

Little else to report save Boy Wonder's long suffering wife sprogged Richard's umpteenth child. Oui's third and Richard's sixth (ish). All well but Boy Wonder keeps falling off his motorbike in the hope that somebody else might be to blame and compensation could be around the corner. Anyway it was a time to celebrate and a night out at the Sunshine Bar followed. A's wife Toy had also produced the same day so much merriment was had.

Many thanks to Night Owl, Khun William, to Onn and the rest of the team : Nipaporn, Porn, Pon, Pee, Peean, Napalm and Thirsty. Sure, I know you think I made these up but only the last two are as I can never remember their real names. Excellent hosts, fine culinary displays even though the breakfast can be confusing when selecting boiled, fried, scrambled or poached eggs. Any helpful readers out there wishing to assist, we are in desperate need of Bovril, Roses Lime Cordial, Loch Fyne kippers, Arbroath smokies, jellied eels, and Andy Smith's immense Gamepie. Food parcels via Grand Met will be gratefully received.

Back to Bangkok to check out the networking contacts. Ok, so it will be back to proper TV services with Rugby and Cricket World Cups to watch in the Duke. Despite major efforts to restore television at Lakeside, it seems that satellite server Agila II at 146°E keeps switching off at the critical moment. Still when the system is working, it is very good.

Also Lord Hall is calling by for a week and will need someone to show him around – Lady Noot to the rescue !!! Look forward to catching up with Herbie's biffing post !!

Thanks for all the generous comments on the forum. Yup, guys, it is tough not having seen a ball bowled in anger back in Blighty. If I could make it any different, I would – but I can't, despite recent efforts, so its gonna stay the same. I intend to revamp the website in the next few weeks, to include a gallery in a travelogue style. It will have pics of places and people here for anyone interested.

This still remains a fantastic Country, lovely people, great culture, hopeless blokes, hopeless politicians, hopeless drivers, but some serious ass. Folks, keep real !!!!

Be lucky,

The Exile