



Sawatdii, kha, nakrian (phonetically speaking that's "Hello, students.") I am delighted to share with you some of my experiences as a Peace Corps Volunteer to Thailand, and I invite you to examine my Thai display in our library. In addition, I want to call your attention to the marvelous articles on Thailand in the October 1982 issue of National Geographic.

The pictures of the royal family are particularly beautiful!

Our training site was Hilo, Hawaii where I lived for three months in a room of an abandoned hospital. The rigorous schedule included classes in methods of teaching English as a foreign language, cultural studies, an intensive language training. For an hour and a half before breakfast, we sat in small groups of five repeating peculiar sounds spoken by the Thai language instructors.

After vigorous morning exercises and breakfast, the other classes began; they continued until eleven o'clock every night. I soon started to dream in Thai, and I knew then that the classes were successful. The selection process eliminated almost half of our initial number of candidates. Each week we sat with a "shrink" who helped us decide if we could adjust to the Thai culture. Language instructors, former volunteers, and professors from the East-West Center at the University of Hawaii spoke to us about some of the difficult adjustments we must make in the small villages where we were to be living. In most cases, the Peace Corps Volunteer was the only English-speaking person in the province. Frequently, volunteers were sent to villages where the Thais had never seen anyone from the western world. Peace corps insisted that we speak and write Thai, that we spend our monthly allowance of seventy dollars in the village where we taught, and that we become sensitive to the Thai culture.

After only three months, about seventy of us arrived in Bangkok, the nation's capital, confidently conversing with

new Thai friends and eagerly anticipating the first meeting with our Thai students.

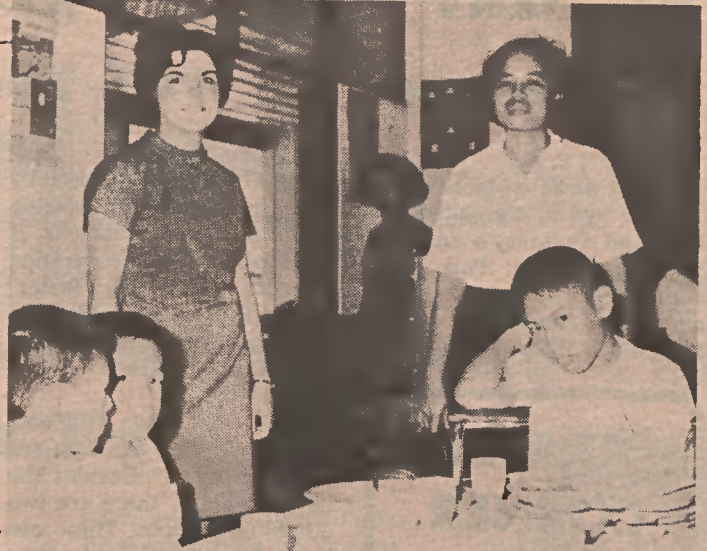
I was assigned to teach English in a provincial girls' school, Stri Watplabpla, Nonburi. The school provided housing for me and several other teachers on the school compound where one of my high school students lived with me in a two-room house on stilts. Though Thai students are introduced to English in the fifth grade, the language program is weak. By the time students entered my classroom, they had learned very little. However, the class literally buzzed with eager students who wanted to learn from a native speaker of English. We had such fun speaking the dialogues I devised between a Thai and an American student, singing "Head, shoulders, knees, and toes," and repeating pattern practice drills -- "This is a pencil, --a pen, --a desk, --a chair, --a ruler, --a notebook." Some of their errors were humorous; other errors were difficult to correct.

Frequently, I stood directly in front of a student's face and repeated a word many times, often with animation, until I heard the sound I wanted from her mouth. My students eventually spoke English with my midwestern accent. I shall always be grateful for the hours we spent together laughing, learning, and struggling to make our mouths produce and our ears hear the distinctive sounds of English.

Thailand, an exotic and fiercely independent kingdom, strategically lies between Laos, Cambodia, Burma, and Malaysia in Southeast Asia. Its 48 million subjects are basically Buddhists who love King Bhumibol Adulyadej and Queen Sirikit. The king is the spiritual leader of the people, defender of the Faith, and the symbol of Thai culture, as well as the temporal head of the country. The Thais are friendly, polite, and particularly appreciative of grace in social contacts.

These lovely people were gracious and kind to me

Faculty visit to another school.



Training in the Waipio Valley near Hilo, Hawaii.

during my two-year stay in their country. I am certain I learned much more from them than they learned from me. I am happy that John F. Kennedy initiated the Peace Corps by challenging us to "ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country." As a Peace Corps Volunteer I tried to answer this challenge. I loved my Thai students and their lands, and I love America for providing this enlightening experience.

Charlotte Jones,
Department of English

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