

## My Bangkok - 2011

Friends who have never been to Thailand ask me what I like about it so much that I've spent half my life here. Well, for starters, you won't learn what the word "exotic" means until you come. This is a glimpse of **my Bangkok**.



This is Soi (sidestreet) 8, the classiest soi along Sukhumvit Road which is the most exotic street in the most exotic city in the world. It's been my winter home since 1995. I most often eat at food vendors like this one. The food is incredible and, say, chicken fried rice? \$1.00. I live down where those trees are.



There's five massage parlors on the soi. I get a 2-hour massage for \$12 2-3 times a week. During my "research" days in the '80 I'd stumble in hungover as hell and two hours later float out on a cloud. They're that magical, a genius mix of yoga and massage.



The modest entrance to the boutique guesthouse I live in.



The first thing Eet asked when I walked in the door after 10 months was, “How Su?” A year ago we had just flown back from working on the Les Stroud shoot in Sri Lanka when she landed in Bumrungrad Hospital for five weeks with a severe staph-A infection. But that’s the kind of place this exquisite guesthouse is to me. After 16 years we’ve long become family.



5B. My bright, well appointed studio suite.I love it.



From my balcony. There's birds and squirrels and—at first rain—frogs!



The brightness, silence and cleanliness creates the perfect creative atmosphere. In 5B I rewrote my adventure-thriller *Thai Gold* for my two Asian publishers (allowing me to boot it up even more from the bestselling international Bantam edition); wrote the sequel *Opium Dream*; co-wrote (with Kevin Chisnall) the *Thai Gold* screenplay; and spent the first three months of development on *Adventurous Dreams, Adventurous Lives: Today's Adventurers Recall the Youthful Dreams Launching their Remarkable Lives*. The idea for that book popped into my mind while at the PS. I also wrote several newspaper and magazine articles from here.



This is Kevin who has worked with everyone from to George Lucas to Mel Gibson to Angelina Jolie, one of the funniest, most creative people I've met. He often keeps me in stitches with his free form, totally politically incorrect sense of humor. Because he's a Kiwi, his nickname naturally enough is Sheep Fucker.





My Thai publishers are a class act. They have stores all over the country. After 13 years of healthy sales of my books the company was sold and the fiction division killed, a too familiar scene worldwide. I loved the association. Besides *Opium Dream*, it kept *Thai Gold* in print which has been almost continually on the racks somewhere in the world since 1987. That beautiful book really has legs.



When I was writing it in the '80s set in the bars, brothels and backstreets of Bangkok I had no idea I was launching “the Bangkok school of fiction” but that’s what Geoff Alexander coined it on his website which in part tracks Bangkok writing at <http://thailand.wowasis.com/literature/bkkbangkokfiction.php> There’s now over 60 novels by a few dozen writers using Bangkok as a character, writing adventure-thrillers and using the fascinating ex-pats here as models. And that’s another thing I love about Bangkok: I get to hang with a lot of fellow authors. This place is crawling with writers.



Infamous Sukhumvit Road taken from one of Neal and Patty's balconies while I'm sipping his November 1967 300-limited-edition Speyside. Literally a million dollar view.



Sukhumvit ground level. This are laid back, patient, they don't bother honking. That's another of a million things I love about them.



For several hundred yards along Sukhumvit are sidewalk vendors. This is a VERY rare shot of it not looking like this....



Here every genuine and counterfeit product on the planet is for sale and cheap. The counterfeits range from Gucci, CDs, DVDs, watches to....



...hard on pills. The Thais are *laissez faire*, the Dutch of Asia. It's one of the safest cities in the world. People are always smiling (everyone has perfect teeth!) and have a great sense of humor, especially the women. Thai idioms I love. The three-wheel tuk-tuk is called that because of their sound. Jail is a monkey house. Use your imagination what smoking a cigar is. But my favorite is one bargirls use while seducing punters: "Oh dah-ling, you handsome man. You go me?" "Dah-ling" means monkey's ass.



To feed my (admittedly small) intellectual side, I go to the Foreign Correspondents Club of Thailand to which I was introduced in 1984. The speakers are on the cutting edge of history. This rectangular bar has seen a lot of Scotch flow through me. The conversations are fascinating, like Nate Thayer telling me about tracking down Pol Pot, the mass murdering leader of the Khmer Rouge.



I even bought a chair.





The Chao Praya River is incredibly exotic. It was at the Peninsula, right, were we celebrated New Years.



When friends are visiting—like the Hooter brothers from Vancouver and London, England, two sleazy lawyers with prominent probosi—I always take them to my favorite neighborhood outdoor restaurant, Cabbages & Condoms. Instead of a breath mint, they give you a condom after your meal. (<http://www.pda.or.th/restaurant/> will answer your obvious questions about this classy restaurant). Thai food is incomparable.



After dinner we stroll to nearby Cowboy Soi, currently the hottest red light area. .





Lots of these bars have dozens of girls dancing naked. In 30 years I've seen more pussy than a retired pet shop owner. Ain't interested.



Hooter Minor wants to see the B-10 Bar at Nana Plaza, the other neighborhood bar constellation on Sukhumvit. We could walk but Hooter is getting old and falling apart so we jump in a tuk-tuk for 40 baht, or \$1.30, and roar down the half of a mile.



Nana Plaza is a horseshoe stacked three stories high with bars with booming music and a-go-go girls.



Does that guy have a hard on...?





These friendly girls and I have lots in common. We both rents places for people to stick their things in. Rent-a-Thais outside Nana Plaza. There's 50 at closing time.



Thai women are some of the most beautiful in the world. We old Thai hands often joke about the sore necks we get from turning our heads so often for second looks while walking down the street—and Sukhumvit is the premium street for bird watching.





And they're all slender! An endangered species back in North America.



Or even worse—Arab women who must be so ugly that their men keep them covered from head to foot. The Arab Quarter, known variously as the African Quarter and the Muslim Quarter, is the Terrorist Quarter to me and part of the neighborhood.



Now that Su has arrived our friends, who have largely ignored me, bring out the bands and parades. Here's a luncheon they threw for Su. Half joined us on a northern Saskatchewan canoe trip in 2002 and the other half three years ago. Thai cooking on the Reindeer River! A first for Saskatchewan. Neal and Patty will be with us again on the Missouri this summer..



And we visit friends too, some in the same hospital Su was in a year ago. You don't think you know Jerry Hopkins but you have a passing acquaintanceship. Among over 30 books, Khun Jelly wrote NO ONE HERE GETS OUT ALIVE, the Jim Morrison biography that Oliver Stone based THE DOORS on. A chapter in his BANGKOK BABYLON, verbal portraits of unusual and interesting characters entitled "The Collector," is about me. His ticker missed a beat but he'll be alright. That his wife Lamyai in bg. (This is a photo to have a caption contest with....)



Those on Su's Scarecrow List a year ago will remember our teenager doctor, Dr. Non, here with his wife Ann, an internist. They live on our soi.





When we're born we're issued a language, a culture and a superstition. Being disgusted with the one launched by the Vatican Evil Empire, I chose my own god—and this is Him: St. Julian of Bangkok. His cathedral of 300 high end single malts is the altar at which I worship.



There's a few A Lists in Bangkok, but His is the most interesting and eclectic. Through His White Room flow the most fascinating people in the world.



John Everingham is just one. If you saw *Love is Forever* with Michael Landon about a romantic who scuba dived under the Mekhong River to whisk his girl friend out of communist Laos in the 1970s, this is him. The best photographer in Southeast Asia, we collaborated on a story about the Devil Dancers of Sri Lanka pre-tsunami. His latest venture is the Beach Front Club at [www.thebeachfrontclub.com](http://www.thebeachfrontclub.com)

So that's it—why I love Thailand. The food, massages, culture, weather, beaches, anthropology, prices and the people, both Thai and farang!



And let's finish this glimpse of My Bangkok with a nice ending....