

**The Gang's *Klong* (Canal) Tour, New Years Bash
and other Bangkokian Stuff
December 2014**



Okay! The book is done, but I'm setting it aside to cool down for a few weeks before giving it the final sweep to do tweaks and boot the color up to the max. I hate to see it end. It's been a lotta fun writing. Hopefully next time I can tell you about it. Gotta confer with my agent first.



Eleven of the gang chartered a *klong* boat to spend the day exploring. Bangkok decades ago used to be known as the Venice of the East because of all the canals, called *klongs* in Thai. Now it's the Venus of the Orient.



But 90% have been paved over for roads. However, across the Chao Phraya River in Thon Buri, it's still a wonderful, exotic maze.



Loading up on cold beer, single malts and a ton of snacks, we headed out for the day. It's a regular thing we do, every year or two.



I'm wearing my hat, despite the shade.



My years of canoeing and the outdoors is catching up. I had a basal cell act up on my nose, requiring a plastic surgeon's magic. I know, I know, why didn't I let him continue?



Thai life at its most traditional and placid.







Feeding the catfish.



Klong tours are a major tourist attraction, and well worth it.



Longtail boats are colorful and loud as hell. They love noise. They hook up a big truck engine like this sans muffler. And they go like hell.



Much quieter. A traditional sampan. Sam means "three." Pan means "board." Now you know. Three-wheel samlors are called tuk-tuks because of the sound they make. I love things like this about the Thai language, though after all these years I speak nothing more than taxi Thai. I can't hear the tones.



The king had his 87th birthday Dec. 5.



We crashed his party. Biggest crowd I've been in by far. He's much loved in Thailand, binding the country together while factions often squabble.



Unfortunately, he's been living in a hospital for the last few years and wasn't able to make a showing.









Besides interesting architecture, Bangkok has the most interesting stairs anywhere.











Sukhumvit Road, our home drag. Now that news that the oinkers have been stopping and searching tourists has hit the *Wall Street Journal* and other international media, the powers that be put a stop to it. Tourism lays the golden egg. The corrupt, greedy bastards will have to find another vulnerable group to shake down.



Did my Christmas shopping.



But Christmas Day we treated ourselves to another four-hour spa.



Love and marriage in Thailand is sometimes a case of this, he laughs.



Taking the Skytrain to the New Years bash. That's Birdman beside me in the reflection.



Rare indeed to see the Skytrain this empty. Everyone's back home in the provinces for the holiday.



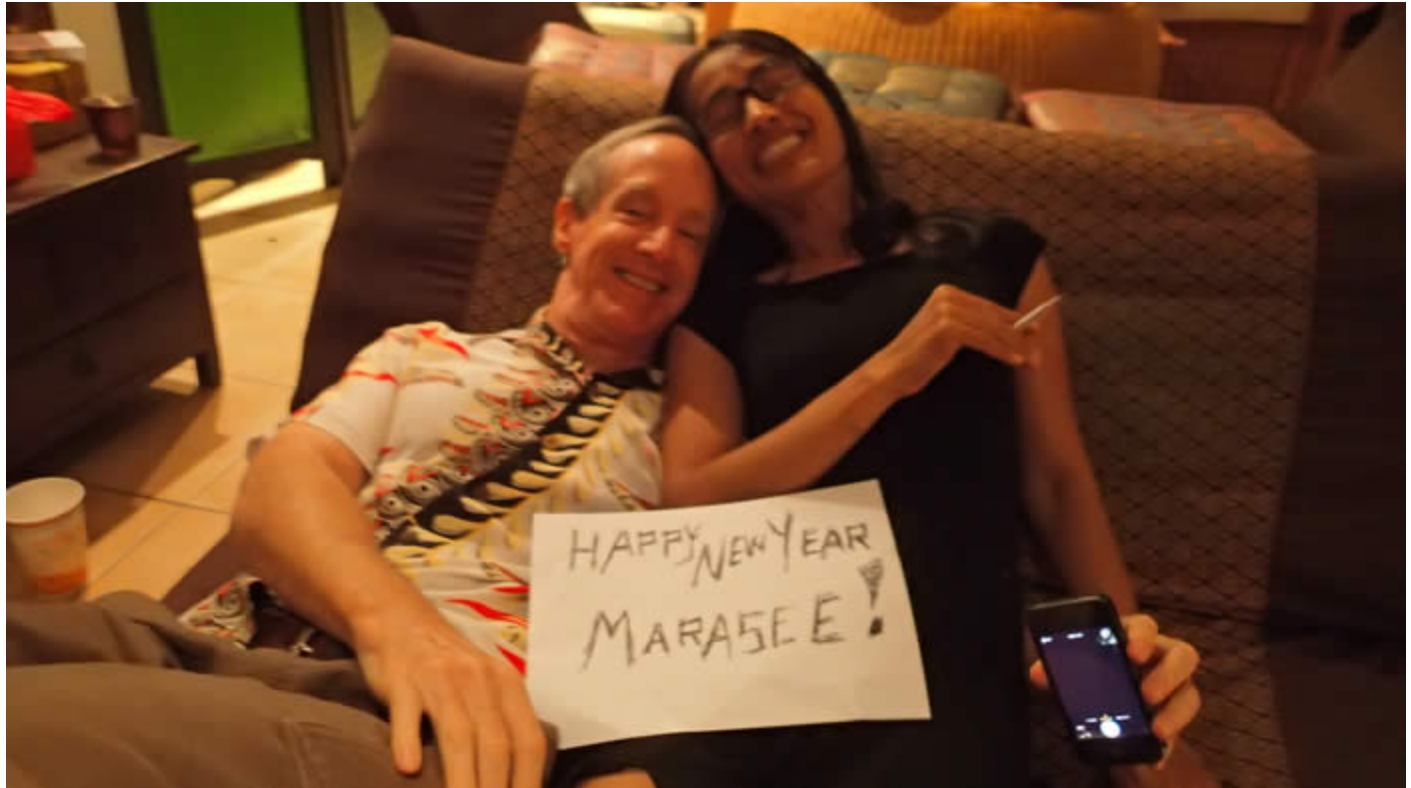
The gang is heavy on media types, writers, journos, documentary makers, PR and advertising with the odd scientist, archaeologist and ethnologist thrown in (besides me). Great bunch of people, about fifty of us form the group. All old friends and getting older all the time....







Our organizer, Marasee, put the annual bash together as usual but jumped over to Saigon instead.



But it was Ernelle who kindly lent us her apartment. She, also, was away. She's an archaeologist. If she was looking for old things she should have stayed. The party was full of human antiquities.

Not these two though. Also many thanks to Mam (left below), Guilhem, Slash and Hot Lips for organizing the food, mix and clean up!









Past senator Kraisaak, the bravest man I know. As point man for human rights in Thailand he's made powerful enemies over the years. But such is his magnificent obsession that he can't do anything other. His dad was a former prime minister.





Oh! The bottle's empty! Time to go home. It was 6am anyway. May 2015 be your best one yet!