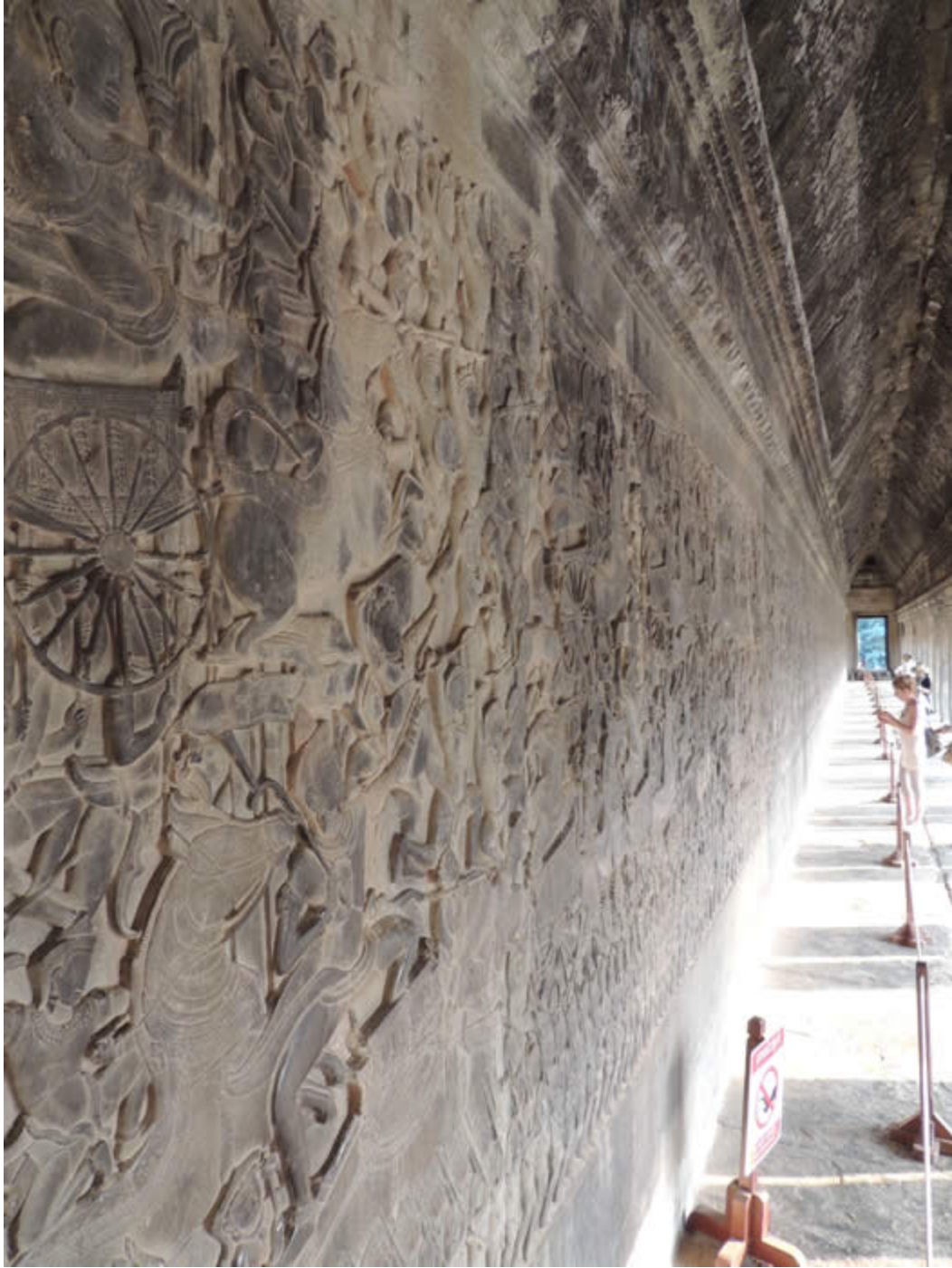


**I was Eaten Alive by Man Eating Fish
and Lived to Tell the Tale,
and Other Adventures in Cambodia & Thailand
February 2015**



In 1994 when The Dragon Lady and I were last in Angkor Wat there was a tank, machine gun nest, soldiers with AK-47s and the Khmer Rouge were only 24 kilometers away. We had the Wat 100% to ourselves. Today, 2.1 million tourists pour through here. I knew I shouldn't have written that travel article....



Surrounding the enormous structure, the largest religious monument in the world, is a brilliant frieze.



Angkor as a whole represents, along with ancient Greece, the greatest artistic architectural achievement of ancient times. Some, like the Mayan and Aztec, are crude and often downright amateur. The Egyptian's, stiff.



There's much more to Angkor than just the Wat. Nearby is the causeway over the 100-yard-wide square moat, 5.5 kilometers long, leading to Angkor Thom, the city itself. It's believed to have held a million people, making it the largest city in the world. It flourished from the 9th-15th centuries - though the 12th saw most construction - at which time Ayutthaya, Siam's then capital, overran it. Happily, they didn't vandalize it, which is peculiar behavior for invaders. They wouldn't be treated so well themselves by the Burmese, as we shall see.



In the center of Thom is one of the two crowd pleasers - the Bayon - with it's 54 towers, each with four faces. On our first visit we spent five full days exploring the ruins which spread over a 100-kilometer-site - and on this trip we were surprised at how many we missed. This was because they were off limits then due to land mines. This was one of the world's grandest cities, while Europe largely lived in squalor.



The Elephant Terrace ran for over 100 yards. The king strolled atop it, perhaps casting his mind ahead to important decisions he had to make that evening. As Shiva's living embodiment on Earth, he was forced to keep a couple of thousand concubines. Poor guy.



Outside the moat and nearby is another causeway with me and a row of other dick heads leading to the other crowd favorite.



Ta Prahm, with its figs and banyans intermingling with the ancient ruins, is the other fave. The opening sequence of *Tomb Raider* was shot here.





Ahhhh. The perfect woman. No head. And gives me a place to set my beer.



The crown jewel though - and the world's single most beautiful temple - is Banteay Srei. It's 24 kilometers north of Angkor. We weren't able to visit the last time because of the bloody Khmer Rouge.



It's not a large temple, but it is exquisite. It predates most of Angkor itself, being built 950-1000AM. The sandstone carvings are the work of a master. That sandstone could withstand that many centuries of monsoons is a revelation in itself.





Being amongst artwork of this beauty imbues a feeling of softness, calm, reverence and admiration. It's an expression of the human creative spirit at its best, brightest and finest. So rare in today's world which so often seems to be going insane and self-destructive.



Our comfortable transportation for the day from Siem Reap, five kilometers away, for only \$20.



The last time we were in Siem Reap it was a dusty town of perhaps 1000. Now it's a bloody *city*. The name is a misnomer. Siem Reap means "Siam Defeated." Well, it was Siem Reap that had the crap kicked out of it. Pub Street, incidentally is the name of *all* the streets downtown, which keeps it simple for Aussis. The Cambodians are a warm, friendly, sensitive, gentle people - so at juxtaposed opposites to the horror that went on here. I've been following its recovery since its lawless early Wild East days and am pleased, and warmed and even surprised, that it's emerging as a fine, fine country. Most Cambodians are so young they have no memory of the terror. We'll be returning next year.



Any country where wimmen wander around in pajamas is also my kinda place.



Crocs are everywhere.



Including on the menu. It's the best croc I've tasted anywhere.



The croc pizza, of all things, was outstanding. As was a burger, the best I've tasted since a 1950s style diner near Union Square in San Francisco, which I look forward to returning to next summer.



I love disgusting food, of course, and they even have a menu designed just for me.



Snake, kangaroo, crocodile, dogfish, squid and ostrich. They also sell little BBQed snakes-on-a-stick on the street. This is one of the great exotic food capitals of the world.



Cambodian BBQ is popular for cooking these delights. Madame Su, being Japanese, will eat anything of course.

7	Special Salad (Served with special mustard Dressing)	\$ 4.75
8	Salad Cook Tail (Served with Cook Tail Dressing)	\$ 3.75
9	Maijonese Salad (Served with maijonese Dressing)	\$ 4.75
10	Nicoise Salad (Served with maijonese Dressing)	\$ 4.75
No.	Bugger and Sandwich	Price
1	Chicken or Pork Sandwich	\$ 3.75
2	Egg Sandwich	\$ 2.75
3	Tuna Sandwich	\$ 4.75
	Grilled Vegetable Sandwich	\$ 4.75

Asian menus are always hilarious.

Ber & Restaurant
\$0.50 Free PopCorn
Cocktail Buy 1 Get 1 free
All Food Include Rice Water
and Fruit Salad
the Best Food

Free popcorn...? Anyway, beer is only 50 cents. Prices are excellent in Cambodia, better than Thailand.



Love this one too. If night markets are so popular, why not start at noon?



It was here I was eaten alive by ravenous fish! If I look goofier than usual, it's because I'm laughing.



I'm being tickled to death! Before they stripped the flesh down to the bones I managed to heroically escape. They, of course, eat the dead skin.



We booked at two different places that looked interesting. Here I'm still tweaking that book. I was premature proclaiming its completion. I got a cold which segued into a bronchial condition and the drugs Nurse Hattori prescribed fogged me up more than usual. Writing and polishing was impossible for some time. Like all writers, I'm a perfectionist and as long as the metaphors and tweaks keep coming, I gotta keep writing and appeasing the muse. This is the spin-off to *Adventurous Dreams*, *Adventurous Lives* and an important book, I feel. As if the others weren't.... But I'm not sending it to my agent in the US until I'm completely satisfied.



The Dragon Lady feels the same way, and has proofed it twice and still isn't satisfied she's caught everything. She's a voracious reader and has copy edited most of my books and done an excellent job, something I'm very appreciate of. She wants it to cool for a few weeks before she does her final sweep. This was taken back in our Bangkok home.



I mentioned that Shiva was big in Angkor (as was Buddha). Here's Shiva's phallus embedded in consort Pavarti's *yoni* which you see all over Asia.



It even formed our shower head! Do you think I could get The Dragon Lady out from under it?



While there I googled "Dave Walker" and to my surprise learned his last residence was just around the corner! Dave was an old friend, a journo and film maker, who disappeared from his long term guesthouse here Valentine's Day 2014. His body was discovered by kids three months later in bush near Angkor Wat, presumably murdered.



His last digs were modest. He was a good guy, a fellow Canuck living his dream of adventure. He co-wrote *Hello My Big Honey*, letters from Bangkok bar girls to their boyfriends. His death is still a mystery that confounds the Bangkok writing community.



We love old colonial hotels and this beauty was our second booking. To our astonishment, it turned out to be built in 2006 to look like a century-old French Colonial! Asians are infamous for their instant antiques and copying everything, but this was a whopper.



At the same time they did such an authentic, quality job, we were impressed. Service was excellent.



We booked an upscale room so we could see what the odd configuration in the back was. It turned out to be the shower! Water sprayed over half the room, he laughs. The door opened out onto the rooftop pool though, which was cool.



Another hilarious typo at Siem Reap's airport. Dufry Shops...duty free shops....



We jumped over to the famous flower festival in Chiang Mai, in northern Thailand.



There were 16 floats, bands and hilltribes - including my beloved Hmong - the most artistic tribe in the world. These are the ones I've been studying, admiring and collecting amongst for 35 years.



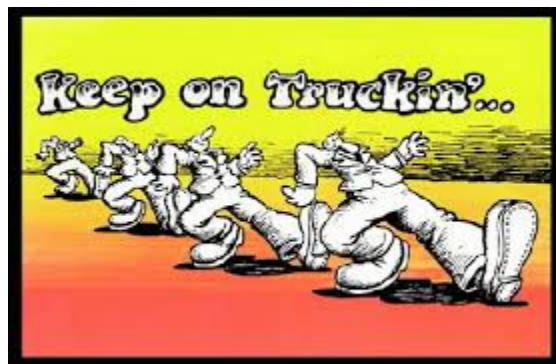
The bang up festival ended with a finale.



A flower festival is an apropos place to meet an old fellow hippie buddy from my late '60s Vancouver daze. The last time I saw Ron Simpson-(Over-The)-Hill 44 years ago he was 26 and I was 25. He had hair all over the place but it's just on his face now. This is only his second visit to Thailand and he already speaks more Thai than I do - but he speaks bits of 31 languages. Trying to take him anywhere is like trying to herd a pack of puppies full of piss through a forest of fire hydrants. He stops to talk to everyone, or is continually veering off on tangents. Same as in 1971, the last time we kicked around together.



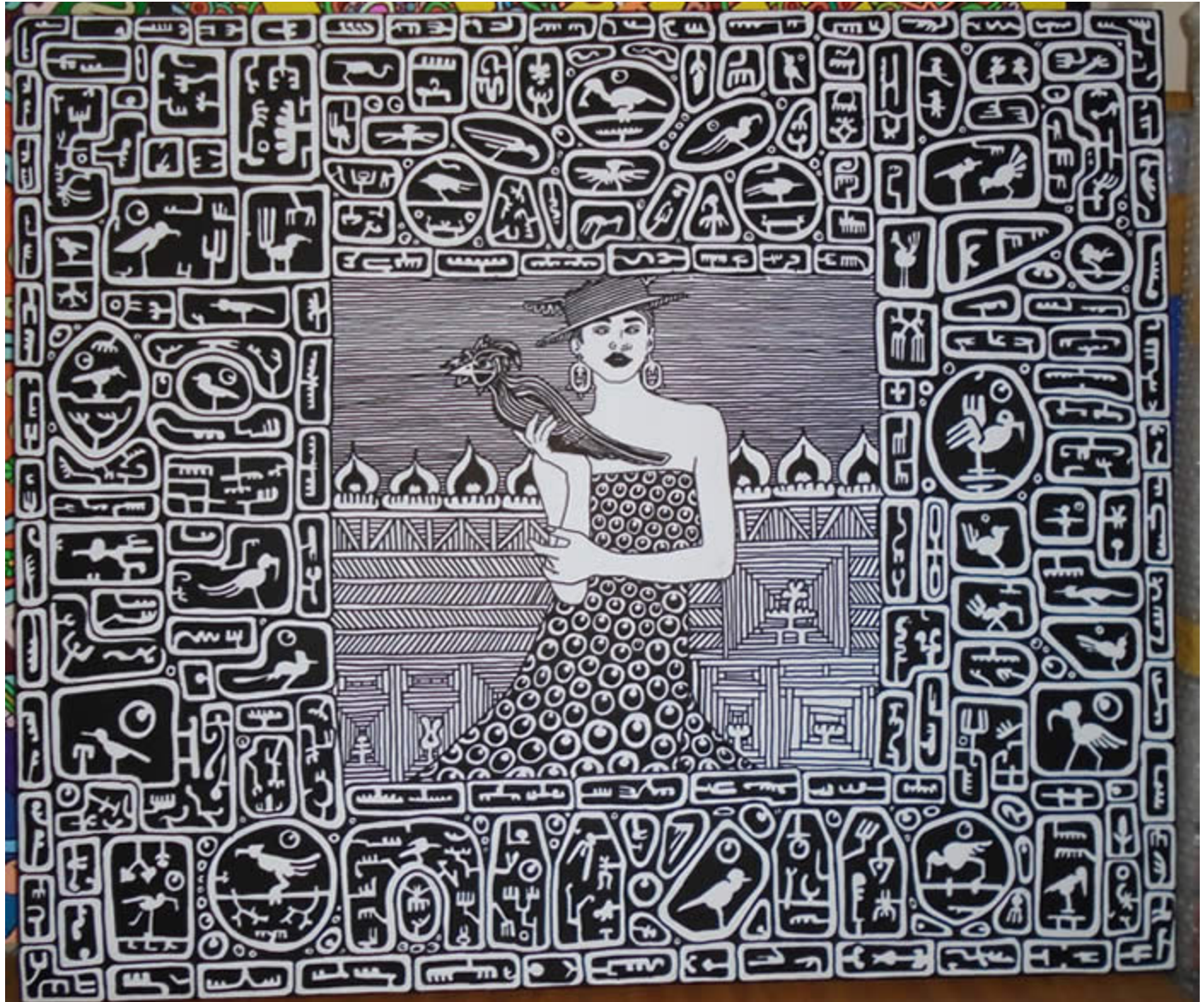
Talking about old hippies, if you were a fan of the Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers like I was, you well might remember Buckwheat Florida Jr. Meet his modern reincarnation, Bucklee Bell, one of Thailand's two top hilltribe ethnologists (the other is Akha Jim). Back during the Summer of Love in San Francisco he was one of the top underground cartoonists.



He's a very modest guy and always considered himself second string and thus was taken aback back then when the dean of underground artists, R. Crumb, referenced him in one of his cartoons. Crumb is famous for the Keep on Truckin' thing, among other motifs, like the fat women he loves. And this famous album cover:



Four years ago during an interview, Crumb was asked who *his* favorite underground artist was. Buckwheat Florida Jr. Bucklee was again completely blown away. But thus began a correspondence.



Bucklee aka Buckwheat is still tripping away on paper. This is the lead piece from his showing being displayed at a gallery in Chiang Mai right now. He's tagged it at \$1500.00. I love it. And I'm tempted.... Bucklee came to Chiang Mai in 1986 and he's been here ever since and is married to a local gal.



If you're in Chiang Mai swing by Kesorn Arts on Tapae Road and flash a peace sign. He's completely without guile, fascinating company and full of stories that'll set you back laughing til you fall off your chair. Somehow he remembers the 60s. I had the pleasure of sponsoring him into The Explorers Club.



One of Bucklee's - and most local ex-pats' - favorite restaurants is Bier Strube on the moat just down from Tapae Gate. We love old homey, traditional restaurants and this one is great. A fellow writer, Sean Bunzick, introduced it to me a few years ago.



The dish - khao soi - Chiang Mai is famous for is served here. It's a kinda noodly gravy soup.



The happy and friendly Tanapan runs the joint. Chiang Mai is also famous for having the most beautiful women in Thailand, a country blessed with far more than its rightful share, and she's a splendid example. How would you still like to look this beautiful when you're in your late 70s ladies? That's no facelift.



We also had two dinners with James Hightower. An aeronautical engineer for Lockheed for 20 years until he couldn't stomach the war culture anymore, he threw it - and a huge salary - away over a dozen years ago to teach math at a local university where he's perfectly content. Math is something I don't understand. If I didn't have my fingers, I couldn't count to ten.



We also had dinner with Gerry Ivanochko, a retired biologist from Saskatchewan, and his wife Goo. Gerry launched the commercial mushroom industry in Saskatchewan. Now mushrooms are something I understand. In the wet summer of '95 Madame Su and I ate 16 wild varieties and lived to tell the tale. The Audubon's *Field Guide to North American Mushrooms* is the Bible. But remember: when in doubt, throw it out.



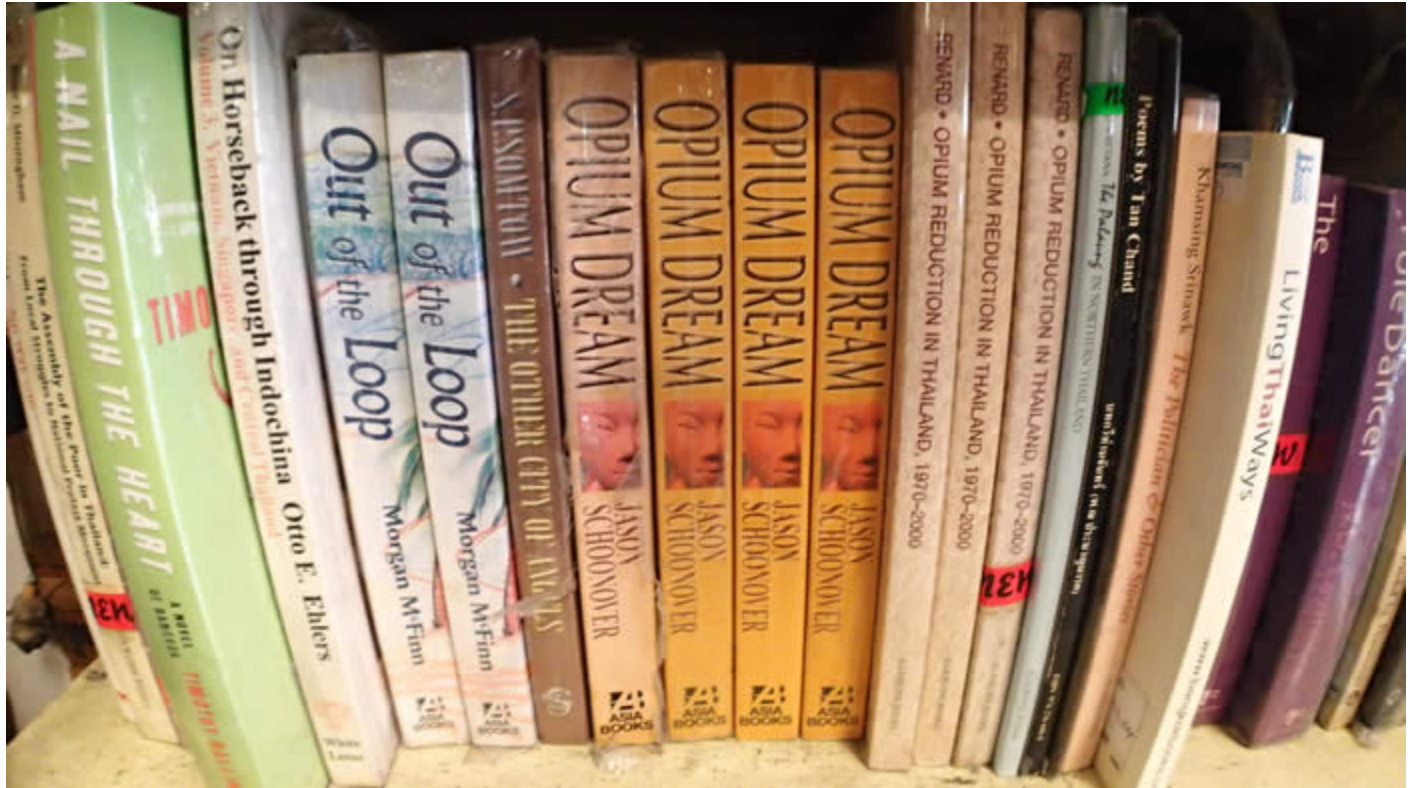
Su never having seen Chiang Mai's most famous mountain top temple, whatever it's called,
Gerry generously drove us the next day.



There I met more little Hmong sweeties and learned a new Hmong word: "Mun-eee."



Back in Chiang Mai. It always gives a writer a bump to see his books still on sale, even if they're in a used book store. The gold *Thai Gold* pocketbook on the left is the original Bantam edition of 1988. Long time to be circulating. The two on the right are Asia Books edition.



Opium Dream is the sequel and I'm pleased to see it's still popular. I didn't see any of *The Manila Galleon*, but then it wasn't published in Thailand. To my, and Su's delight, we're consistently told by readers that it's their favorite read of mine. It particularly pleases me because it was the most challenging to write, with two parallel stories dovetailing chapter-by-chapter. One in 1702, one in modern times. It's an adventure tale of course, factually based and historically accurate, which is what I strive for in all my books.



We stayed in my usual favorite place. I see they haven't changed their signage, he laughs. Must dry before get out of pool? That'll be a neat trick.



On approach from the Gulf of Thailand to Bangkok's airport. The smog isn't just Bangkok's folks. It covers Asia. Welcome to the 21st century.



We grabbed a cab at the airport to Ayutthaya, Thailand's ancient city, for \$38 for the 1.5 hour drive. And in a new a/c Toyota. Cabs are incredibly cheap in Thailand. Founded in 1350, the Burmese trashed the city in 1767, forcing its relocation to the present location of Bangkok 80 kilometers downstream.



Also with an estimated population in 1600 of 300,000 (and a million in 1700), it was undoubtedly one of the most beautiful cities in the world. Meandering lakes and *klongs*, or canals, were everywhere.



Shiva's privates were, uh, big everywhere too of course.



SUSAN!! Damned feminists....



Period architecture forms part of the museum, a style only now going out of favor by "modern" buildings. Yecch.



It was at the museum a long time mystery was solved. In about 1988 I bought for \$5 a little terracotta head like the one in the middle at Bangkok's Weekend Market. I never knew its age or origin. Ayutthaya. It's mounted at home.



Ayutthaya was on an island, and the foreign concessions were outside of the perimeter. I'm pointing at the Dutch concession, or "factory." And here I have what is likely a family connection.



Madame Su points at the Japanese concession, which supplied samurai soldiers as palace guards. Each concession held about 1500 people. Below the Japanese one was the Portuguese.



1636-40 the "factor" or boss was Jeremias Van Vliet. As readers of the earlier New York Blah Blah know, I'm a Schoonover in name only. In the late 1600s in Kingston, New York, one Peg Leg Perrick Van Vliet had a roll in the hay with one Mrs. Debra Van Schoonhoven/Schoonover. After she got knocked up, Peg Leg stumped away as fast as he could, leaving Deb holding the squalling little bastard, my direct ancestor, which she brought up as a Schoonover. 20% of the North American Schoonovers belong to the illustrious Bastard Line. Several members distinguished themselves in acting, from Shirley who co-starred with W. C. Fields in *Never Give*

a Sucker an Even Break, to my actor-producer-playwrite ggrandfather who, with a private train car, ran a tent show up and down the midwest from 1906 until the Depression destroyed his business and him. His blood pressure soaring, he died soon after. My Van Vliet line also did well, and in show biz too. Jo Van Fleet was James Dean's mother in *East of Eden* and Paul Newman's in *Cool Hand Luke*. General James Van Fleet fought at Utah beach (then a colonel under General Teddy Roosevelt, the late president's eldest son), the Bulge and ran the Korean war for the UN. New York Mayor John Vliet Lindsay also descends from Peg Leg, continuing a long association of my family with that city of cities.



We grabbed the local form of a tuk-tuk down. That Jeremias Van Vliet grew up in South Holland only 24 miles from where my earliest Van Vliet was brought up, and that both were from notable families, it's highly likely they were related. Coincidentally, while Jeremias sailed for Asia in the 1630s my ancestor shipped out for New Amsterdam, now New York, at the same time. I long thought I was the first Schoonover to come to Asia but it appears I'm booked ended between Jeremias and my gggrandfather Wm. Leonard Schoonover II who fought in the Battle of Manila Bay during the Spanish-American War. They must be the source of my adventurous genes.



They spared no expense on the Japanese museum and garden built on site.



The Dutch concession with the original foundation. In the background is the reconstruction, with also an excellent museum.



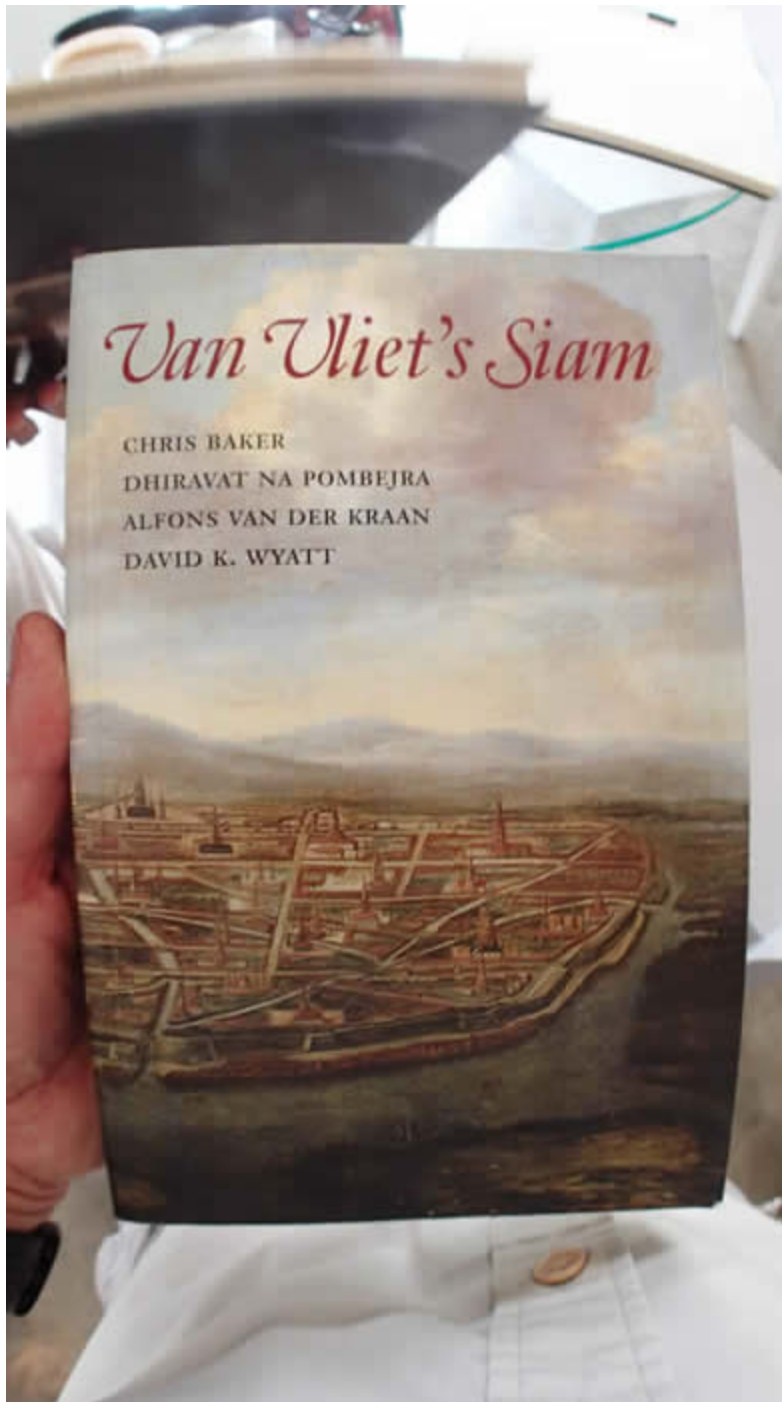
The Dutch East India Company virtually invented capitalism and had a million employees go through it during its lifespan.

The VOC: business innovations

The formation of the VOC constituted an important trade innovation in the 17th century world. The usual method of joint investment in a single sea voyage to Asia may have brought great profits in the event of the vessel returning home safely with its cargo. But it could also lead to the trader's ruin if the ship was wrecked at sea or succumbed to attack by pirates. The Company devised a way of attracting capital by selling shares to a large number of investors, these stakeholders receiving dividends from the Company's profits. It was thus able to start with a far larger amount of investment than an individual voyage could muster. The VOC limited the buying of shares at a price of 3,000 guilders. The first capitalisation of the VOC brought over six million guilders, which was ten times the amount of capital which was used to set up the English East India Company. This was the first example of an actual stock exchange in the world. The buying and selling of stocks was a way of spreading the risks in sending out ships to the East.

Before, individual groups or companies of Dutch merchants had competed to

It certainly launched the stock market. After the Brits took over New Amsterdam at the point of a cannon, they little changed the profitable Manhattan structure the Dutch had established - but claimed they were the progenitors. Hardly. That's one of the many Dutch legacies to North America.



Jeremias was more than a trader. He was also a brilliant and highly intelligent writer, with an appreciative and keen eye for Siamese life. He wrote the earliest account of life in old Ayutthaya and his observations jump off the page. His most interesting story concerns this (from the museum):

เรือบริษัทที่เข้ามาเทียบท่า และชุมชนบ้านหอลับดา

Living under Siamese laws

In 1636 some drunken VOC seamen caused offence during a picnic, picking fights with Siamese courtiers. King Prasatthong was incensed and sentenced the Dutchmen to death by being trampled by elephants. The VOC chief in Ayutthaya, Jeremias van Vliet, had to hasten to court to perform a ceremony asking for royal pardon, which he received, though the VOC had to sign an agreement to live under Siamese laws and customs.

The Dutch had doubts about Siamese justice and feared the severity of Siamese punishments: they therefore wanted to be freed as soon as possible from this agreement. When they later made a treaty...

The drunken buffoons had actually desecrated a Buddhist wat, which infuriated the king. You wouldn't dare do that today in Thailand.





We loved our stay at the Park Guesthouse. Not only is it in the middle of the ruins but Win, the outgoing owner, is a treasure.



Uh oh, a pretty girl. We must be coming to the end of another too-long Blah Blah....



We jumped back to Bangkok for a last feast with the gang - champagne and Peking duck as the first course.



Then, after six fabulous months in Tibet, Nepal, Cambodia and Thailand, we winged back to this...? Are we nuts...? There's a reason. We want to get over jetlag before hopping on to one of our favorite cities and events in the world....