

*The Peace Corps Thailand  
Newsletter*

# Sticky Rice

Fourth  
of  
July  
2011

Warning: Contains Freedom

## Introduction

Welcome to the Independence Day edition of Sticky Rice. You're about to look through an exciting issue for a few reasons. First, it's that time of the year us Americans celebrate our country's independence with fireworks, parades and alcohol (in moderation, of course). Second, group 123 is now representing Sticky Rice with two new editors.

What would we have without the United States of America? What would we have if the minutemen hadn't done so well? What would we have if Thomas Jefferson hadn't written to England: *We're cool on our own, thanks.* –TJ. We wouldn't have independence, Grand Canyon National Park and the Peace Corps. Without these things, America is not America and we hope this issue helps celebrate the messed-up beauty of our country.

## **123 Editors**



My name's Jeff Jackson. I'm from St. Paul, Minnesota and I live in Surin. I like good people, good literature, good music and good baseball.



My name is Denise Silfee and I come from somewhere in Pennsylvania/New Jersey by way of Oregon/Wyoming. I am living in Si Thep, Petchaboon, and I am a TaCCO Volunteer. I love backpacking, riding fast horses, reading anything I can find, and snowboarding. I am afraid of the dark, grizzly bears and dying in airplanes.

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## [Interview with Sue Akins](#)

*Sue Akins (CBOD 122) wrote this for Sticky Rice, framing it as an interview, about her experience as ordaining as a Bhikkhuni. She was determined to explore this country as much as she could while she was here, and though she's left Peace Corps, we all know she's still having amazing adventures. Indeed, Sue and adventures go hand in hand. So here it is, her account of becoming a female monk, if only for a time.*

### **Where did you go and how long was your adventure?**

I went to Songdhammakalyani Monastery in Nakhonpathom (<http://www.thaibhikkhunis.org/eng/>). It was a 2 week introduction to Buddhism with a Bhikkhuni Samaneri ordination. There were 17 Thai women and myself in the group. It is run by the Bhikkhuni Dhammananda who received her ordination in Sri Lanka because currently it is illegal to ordain a Bhikkhuni in Thailand.

### **What is a Bhikkhuni Samaneri?**

A *Bhikkhuni* is a Female Monk and *Samaneri* means novice. Females must be a *Samaneri* for 2 years prior to ordaining as a *Bhikkhuni* as opposed to Males who can receive full ordination once if they are over the age of 20.

### **What did you do while you were there?**

Our first few days were spent as “*Machee*” Nuns dressed in white. Our day started around 4 or 4:30 am. We would go for chanting and meditation around 5 am after that we would do morning chores which focused on maintaining the facilities. We would have breakfast around 7 am and after breakfast we would do the dishes and our laundry and then classes would begin around 9am. Lunch

would be around 11:15 am and after lunch we would do more cleaning and maintenance till about 1 pm, at which time we had more classes till about 4 or 5 and then we did our afternoon chores. Clean up and showers about 6pm and then off for more chanting and meditation at 7 pm and lights out at 10. This routine continued even after we were ordained because unfortunately someone has to take care of the place, so there wasn't a lot of time to just meditate and focus on gaining enlightenment.

**What was the ordination like?**

The day started the same as all the others but after breakfast we had the ceremony for shaving our heads and then it was a quick shower before the procession to the temple for the ordination ceremony. Once there we received our robes and then walked around the temple 3 times, threw some money to the crowd and entered the temple. After chanting we went into the basement of the temple where we changed into our robes and then back into the temple for more chanting. Then we exited to receive our Alms bowls from family or friends and then back in for more chanting and blessings. After the ceremonies concluded we headed back for the traditional lunch with family and friends.

**Did you enjoy your experience and would you do it again?**

Yes, I really enjoyed the opportunity to experience life as a Monk. It was very interesting and enlightening. I would consider doing it again but I would go to a different location where they focus more on meditation and the theological aspect of Buddhism. Most of the classes we had focused on the history and lineage of Buddha. We didn't really have the opportunity to discuss philosophy and theology.

**Were you able to understand all the chanting?**

Yes, most of the chanting is done in Bali and they had books with all the chants, with the transliteration and the English translation. They also have a tremendous library on the grounds, which has an extensive collection of books on Buddhism in English.

**What was the most interesting thing that you learned?**

Well, I learned many things. One was that not all Monks shave their eye brows, only Thai Monks do that because of an incident that occurred about 500 years ago. The second thing is that Monks cannot drink while standing. Third, as a Monk you are given a new name and mine was Dhammasumana.

**What about all the rules?**

Before ordaining we had to "take the precepts" which means that we agree to live according to the rules but most of them are simple and deal with just being very courteous. I just want to mention that there are several different sects of Buddhism with different rules and we focused on the Theravada sect and its rules.

## America



## I Love America

by Denise Silfee

I love America. I love that America has carpet in living rooms and bars with over one hundred beers on tap. I daydream about predictable traffic patterns and the aisles of Barnes and Noble, the dairy section and tolerable volume levels at social events. All of these things verifiably exist in America, and all of these things I have previously taken for granted. Since coming to Thailand my love for America has only deepened.

Living in Thailand also has the side effect of letting me love an America that doesn't exist yet. Being far away, I tend to paint pictures of America for Thai people the way I think America should be, the way I think America has the chance to be and hopefully will be, but that it isn't yet. And this makes me wonder, Am I a giant fibber?

Thai people like to ask me questions that allow for comparisons of our quality of life. Wealth and my lack of it are popular topics. I don't have to try hard to show them that not all Americans are rich. I describe to them that at one point in my life I lived in a double-wide trailer, had a thirty-year old pickup truck, no electric heat and a cat with a broken tail. That surely isn't living the high life. I tell them I can't afford to buy a house and my ability to file my taxes for free in the "makes under \$25,000/year" bracket. And I tell them that yes, we do our own dishes and wash our own clothes.

It is in the harder questions that my idea of how I want it to be and how it really is gets a little skewed in my explaining. For example, I tell Thai people that yes, Americans come in many different colors, and yes, this is okay and this is normal. If you are born in America, you are an American. Thai people don't believe me, and I have forcefully and enthusiastically restated that, yes, this is the truth. End of sentence...

...even when I know that it isn't the end of the sentence. This is the America I want to love, the one that believes "all men are created equal," even though there are some glaring contradictions of this all over the country. Blame it on my lacking Thai vocabulary or my lack of desire to try and explain the complexities of race, but I like to let Thai people believe that in America, all shades are equal. I don't try to explain to them that there is still a disproportionately large number of non-white people living in low-income communities, or that the Spanish language and immigration are common political battlefields all across the Southern and Western United States. I don't want to tell them about how I had to ban some of my students from coming to my classes until they stopped drawing swastikas on their jeans and their skin, or that the two biggest gang rivalries are between the Native American reservation kids and the Hispanic kids from urban California. All of these things are part of the truth, but they are hard to explain. They are contradictory to what I want America to be.

The other day Roger was hanging out with some high school students who were mocking and deriding a thin boy with the most beautiful laugh I have ever seen (yes, you can see it) for being gay. Roger said, "Oh you like boys? That's ok," and went on to spend the rest of the day with the kid to the confusion of some of the other students. It is the tactic we have chosen to take in the land of Thai: we don't laugh when people make fun of others for their sexual preference, and if we have the chance to speak, we say, "Oh I'm sorry, that's ok in the America, so I don't think it's a big deal." But is it okay for everyone in the America? Or is it just what I want to be okay in the America? Is it really "okay" to be a gay American, when the "coming out" of any important person is still the fodder of the evening news, and when teenagers are deciding that suicide is preferable to the torments they get in the hallways every day? And is it misleading to keep telling Thai people that America is so "okay" with the spectrum of differences that people are still fighting for the right to have every day? As any American knows, the line between what is 'supposed to be' and what 'is' is wide and gaping. So am I a liar, or a forgivable idealist?

I can't fib about everything. I can't say that poor people get a good shot at health care in America, or that the elderly in America are always given the respect and value that they are given in other cultures. But because I grew up in America and read the books I read and experienced the



things I experienced, I believe that America should be a country of complete acceptance and tolerance as long as no one else is being hurt: physically, emotionally, mentally, economically. I am proud of America because it aspires to this equality and that everyday people can stand up for their rights to that equality. It is what I want others to know about America because historically, it is a relatively new idea. It may not yet exist, but it can. It is the ideal that makes me proud and the fact that I live in a country that can change and grow and make the changes to someday fit the ideal. It is the chance that makes me love America.

As much as I miss my cupboards of cereal and oatmeal and my toaster oven and lazy nights on a couch not made of wood, coming to Thailand has given more than just the superficial appreciation of the comforts I take for granted. It has forced me to really think about what America is when I try to explain it to others, and to continue to confront what I believe America should and can be. Maybe I am a fibber because I tend to speak to the ideal, but it is fibbery out of hope and confidence of what will one day be, nothing more.

The other day in one of my classes, my co-teacher held up the American flag and asked what it symbolizes. The answer she was looking for was justice and freedom. My heart swelled. I would not want to belong to a country that stood for anything but.

## America Looks Better from Here

by Jeff Jackson

*"But if the world could remain within a frame, like a painting on a shelf, then I think we'd see the beauty and we'd stand staring in awe at our still lives posed like a bowl of oranges." –Conor Oberst*

I've never been the flag-waving type. Maybe it's because I believe you can quietly respect your country or maybe it's because I think Sarah Palin is an idiot and waving a flag is literally the least you can do. I've been patriotic, but not in an unconditional way. I vote for not only what I believe in, but what I believe is best for everyone. I think that's patriotic. I also think being a good citizen and being part of your community is patriotic.

For the next two years I'll be a part of another community. I will do my best to be a good part of it, but it's not my home community. Even though I'm on the other side of the world, I find myself much more proud to be an American. Why?

### **Don't know what you got 'til it's gone**

I sometimes think, "Why don't Thai people conduct their lives more like Americans?" Then, ten minutes later I'm thinking, "Why don't Americans change their ways to be more like Thais?" This is why I'm here – to assist with cross-cultural education of Thais and Americans. I'm still getting a feel for the Thai government system, but it's not my government system. I do miss the American system and the beauty of it. It's a wonderful thing now that I have a chance to step away from it and see it from afar without the ugliness. I don't see the crooked politicians, petty bickering or Michelle Bachmann.

### **I'm representin'**

As a Peace Corps Volunteer, a third of my job is to be a positive representative of the United States of America; I better love my country. Luckily, I can say I do with no hesitation.

During the swearing-in ceremony I felt a bit emotional as I raised my right hand and swore to defend the constitution of the United States of America for such a historical and well-respected organization. It felt good.

### **I love the king of Thailand**

He's a great man. He's helped me appreciate the states even more. At the same time, I look at the states and appreciate Thailand even more. It's amazing what can get done in this country when

half the country isn't arguing with the other half about whose opinion is correct. Then I realize how great it is to have a voice.

The few times I've seen President Obama on TV, I always point excitedly, as if to say, I know that guy! Sometimes people will ask me if I like the president. That's when I realize I have a choice. I can like the president if I want or not. There's no law telling me how to speak.

**"They like this music," I told myself and took a deep breath...**

My assignment here is to help assist community members with issues they have. It's not to promote my ideas. I'm cool with this, but there are times I want to shove America down their throats.

When I see kids playing soccer, I want to kick the ball into the rice field and start teaching the essence of a good double play or how to pull off a suicide squeeze.

When I see someone throw their potato chip bag out the window of a moving car, I want to call the police with their license plate number.

When I'm at a party and their blaring high-pitched Thai music I want to – oh, this is where my desire rises the most – plug in my iPod and make sure everyone in the village can hear "Born To Run" while they cringe and I writhe in patriotism.

But I hold back. I am *jai yen yen*. I enjoy the good and the bad of Thailand, just like I did and do of America. However, I'd be lying if I didn't say I miss my country. It's much like going on a much-needed vacation. You spend weeks waiting for the departure date so you can get away from work and home. You have a blast on vacation, but when you get home, you appreciate it more.

I'm nowhere near ready to go home, but I can already tell I'll appreciate it more when I get there.

*"My father said, 'Son, we're lucky in this town / It's a beautiful place to be born / It just wraps its arms around you / Nobody crowds you / Nobody goes it alone / That flag flying over the courthouse means certain things are set in stone / Who we are, what we'll do and what we won't.'"* – Bruce Springsteen

*"Someday girl, I don't know when we're gonna get to that place where we really want to go and we'll walk in the sun / But 'til then, tramps like us, baby we were born to run."* – Springsteen

## Americawesome

by David Barron

On this Fourth of July, 2011, it is almost certain that 25 percent of the American people are morons. From that near-certainty, we should be prepared to accept that up to 40 percent of the American people could be morons, or are only part-time morons: highly specialized for certain areas of abject moronity, while retaining a tenuous grip on reality.

This is a good thing.

See, that 25 percent is the lowest percentage of morons that any country has ever had anywhere, at any time. The entirety of human history up to this point speaks for itself, but the point is that it's all down to free speech.

Thanks to free speech, America harnesses more power per moron (PPM, measured in d'ohs per capita) than any other country on Earth, thanks to the First Amendment. When morons say moronic things, non-morons have to figure out why those things are moronic, and the more moronic things that have to be assessed, the better calibrated is the non-moronic middle, and the better defined become the edges of Morony, the vast land of plot holes and spelling errors that lurks on the frontiers of civilized society.

Other countries attempt to suppress their national equivalents of Noam Chomsky (when not being a linguist), Glenn Beck (when not being a clown), Christopher Hitchens (sometimes), Pat

Robertson (always), the plethora of (non-violent) extreme religious organizations, or the (poorly organized) left-wing extremist groups, but these happy few are the urine in the American 100% natural leather duster, keeping the rain off of the new dress of our nation's conscience underneath at the minor expense of an unpleasant odor on the way to the party.

So, on this Fourth of July, 2011, rather than complain about these active cultures in the national yogurt, approach them, take him firmly by the grimy hand, look her straight in the dull unblinking eye and tell them "Thanks, you morons. Your wrong has made us all more right."

Then sit back and watch the fireworks.

## On Culture



## Beyond Mai Pen Rai

*Cultural Adjustment in Muang Thai*

by Lisa Bevell

Sometimes the remedy to feeling isolated is company. While settling-in at site, I would often share dinners with my landlady and her family, my "land-family," if you will, in the alley between our houses. One evening, when I eventually built up the courage to share my true feelings of loneliness, my landlady told me plainly, "Li-sa, you must *awdt-ton* (อดทน)."

*Awdt-ton*. This was neither a word that I recognized nor one that my landlady could readily explain. It took consultation in an electronic Thai-English dictionary to clarify the matter. I read the definition aloud: "It means to bear, to endure." I smiled.

I didn't like the word 'endure' because it required me to admit that, on some level, I was suffering. As Peace Corps Volunteers (PCVs), we endure isolation, the weather, unusual diets, bucket showers, wildlife living in our houses and, sometimes, squat toilets without the benefit of toilet paper. Regardless of whether we're faced with these unique obstacles, life, as a whole, presents us with numerous personal challenges. We all have things to bear. So I suppose in many ways we're all *awdt-ton*-ing something.

When I look back at that dinner conversation, I realize that struggling was precisely what I was doing during my first few months at site. The answer to most questions I had seemed to be "*Mai bpen rai*." Everything seemed shrouded in a blanket of misery and dead geckos. Unfortunately, I cannot pinpoint the precise moment when I stopped merely enduring. I just know that I did. I'd like to confess that it was a PCAT-inspired transect walk through a rice field that made all the difference. However, this would be a lie. Ultimately, I believe that what shifted the tide of cultural non-



adjustment was interaction with people—my fellow PCVs, land-family, co-teachers, and beloved community dressmaker, who usually reminds me that I’m getting fat.

Additionally, I concentrated on being true to myself. Dare I admit that I—(gaspl)—dislike karaoke? I appreciate that my counterparts respect my preference for minimal participation at four-hour karaoke dinners. The fact that they allow me the space to be me makes me want to surprise them with a special serenade in Thai. With eyes fixed on the extensive Extreme Karaoke Professional® catalogue, I remain hopeful that I might just surprise myself as well.

## Crossing Culture Halfway

### *A Hypothetical Culture Session*

- We actually like to live alone and we’re not afraid of ghosts.
- We don’t have your metabolism.
- We would appreciate more than 30 seconds’ notice.
- We stay hydrated, therefore, have to pee.
- We’re not used to this slower pace-of-life, but we’re not complaining.
- We are indeed handsome and beautiful, but you’re blowing it out of proportion.
- We prefer to remove clothes when it’s hot.
- We’re okay with walking 100 meters. No ride required.
- We don’t need a plastic bag...or a straw.
- We like greasy and sweet food...in moderation.
- We don’t need the obvious pointed out to us. Yes, it is hot. This fact is inescapable.
- We’d like to know more specifically where we’re going than “tiii-noon!”

## The Ear Plug Story

### **Anonymous**

Being new to Thailand, I finally was recently able to make a trip out of site to Tesco/Lotus. I needed to buy earplugs, which I thought would be a pretty easy task. I couldn’t find any, so I resorted to asking the very helpful staff (no sarcasm, they really are). I know the word for ear, but not plug, so I used body language to show me putting in ear plugs. First we went to the headphones. Nope, we brought in another staff member as I demonstrated putting in ear plugs again—nothing, blank look. So now I said “rooster” and “morning” in Thai (blank looks) and I then embarrassingly made the noise of a rooster in front of several of the helpful staff. They all smiled, conversed with each other, and off we went to...yes, the alarm clocks of course. I again tried to demonstrate ear plugs, said “ear” and “quiet”. By this time we had a real issue on our hands and had five staff members involved in on the task. There was more discussion, a couple staff members pointed back to the music and headphones and they were quickly updated on the situation. I sat there and smiled until I heard the words for swimming pool as they conversed. I said yes, let’s go there. Excitedly I was taken in the direction of the recreation section where one member ran ahead and brought to me a couple options and yes, there were ear plugs, but the plastic kind (I’m looking for the foam-like ones so I can sleep through the night.) I smiled and we said ear plug together several times “tee-ut huu” (or something like that) with lots of smiles, but now I’m looking for something a little different. I then said the words for “loud work” and pretended to jackhammer. They all immediately seemed to understand and several said in unison “mai mee”. Oh well, at least it was a success in communication. From there I headed to bus station back to site. I have since got my ear plugs sent by friends from the U.S.

## Shakespeare in Thailand

*by Dev Banerji*

*Hamlet: Denmark's a prison.*

*Rosencrantz: Then is the world one.*

*Hamlet: A goodly one; in which there are many confines, wards and dungeons . . .*

We were lesson planning. Correction: I was lesson planning; my co-teachers (both women) were gossiping about my love life. Never mind that I was sitting right next to them – my ability to overhear everything only added to their perverse pleasure. “You too serious,” K. Oy said, assuming a tone of voice you would use with a five-year-old, “lelax.” K. Sit just pointed at me and giggled like a rat.

Maybe that was my problem: I couldn’t lelax. But wait: I’ve never been called too serious in the history of my entire life. In high school I elevated not being serious into an art form. In college plenty of girls went out of their way to tell me I wasn’t serious enough. Believe me, the last thing anyone would think to call me is too serious.

I tried to explain that we were in a library, a place of learning, knowledge and discovery, not a fun house – there were no wacky mirrors here, only wacky people; that we were supposed to be working; that when you’re working, it might be a good idea to take it seriously otherwise you might not get anything done; that there was nothing wrong with being serious: we’re all serious sometimes. *Kao jai mai?*

They didn’t understand – or maybe they did, it’s hard to tell – their response is the same either way: make weird noises and even weirder faces. Maybe we were in a house of mirrors after all . . . a giant house of mirrors, whose name was Thailand.

I put down my pen and, though it pained my ears (which deserved better for all their loyal years of sonic service), listened to what K. Sit was saying about me. One: I had a girlfriend back home. And two: I was betraying said girlfriend with anything that had two X chromosomes and moved. Let me briefly address these claims: my co-teacher is a gossip.

Too brief? Let me elaborate: I don’t have a girlfriend, but even if I did, I’ve never had the opportunity of cheating on her hypothetical self since K. Sit personally went to every house in my village that had a daughter around my age and barred them from going to my house or even speaking to me, under penalty of Buddha knows what. (I later found out she told them that Peace Corps prohibited male volunteers from having female friends.)

Suddenly all phone calls to me stopped. Girls who previously came over to chat or share some fruit or help me conjure something edible from my kitchen vanished into air which was, miraculously, thinner than them. This was the beginning of a period which I like to call The Great Estrogen Drought. There was, needless to say, much suffering.

Back at the library, meanwhile, storm clouds are gathering above my head . . . because the topic of conversation has taken an unforeseen detour from the staleness of my love life to something far juicier: whether or not I’m a virgin. In the red corner, we have K. Oy, who is leaning towards virgin. And in the blue corner, K. Sit, who is convinced of my promiscuity. A peal of thunder signals that the fight is under way, and as they duke it out my only solace is the thought that they might destroy each other, thus delivering me from my torture and simplifying the remainder of my existence in this country.

Sadly, mutual annihilation isn’t in the cards. And now the wind is picking up, the clouds are pregnant with darkening omens, and before I know it K. Oy is descending upon me with lightning flashing in her eyes: “We need know which is it, you and the girl have . . .” she breaks into giggles and makes what she thinks is a charmingly sly face, but it comes out looking like a Halloween mask – I actually feel as if I’m in the presence of evil, there’s no other way to describe it, and this only

happens when she attempts to speak English, almost like something being lost in translation, except in reverse – something is gained in translation, something vile and not of this world. How else can I explain it? It's like a once-pretty drunk old hag trying to flirt with you – her face crumples up and her features contort themselves into arrangements that until then you did not know were geometrically possible . . . it's like watching a five-year-old trying to clobber a square peg into a round hole, you just want to shake her and yell Stop! It doesn't work that way!

To recapitulate: there was thunder, a battle in a library which was really a house of mirrors, pregnant clouds, black omens, ocular forks of lightning, and a sudden descent: "We need know which is it, you and the girl have . . . that is the question," she finishes, without having asked an actual question. And once I hear those words my ghetto side breaks loose, and I'm thinking *Oh no she didn't. Oh no she didn't. Did this &~!@\$% just quote Shakespeare on me?*

And I say unto you, Thai people: You may pick your nose from the hot season to the cold. You may insult me as often as you like. But please, for Buddha's sake, leave Billy out of this.

*Questions or comments? E-mail me at dev.banerji@gmail.com.*

## Food



## Stuffing Your Face: Grilled Eggy Bread

by David Barron

Today, you're going to make Grilled Eggy Bread. Now at first you ask "Daveilicious?" (for of course you use my culinary pseudonym when discussing such matters) "I ain't never heard tell of no 'grilled eggy bread'!" And I, after commenting on your hillbilly accent and obvious low-breeding for a time, reply: "That's because you have not the soul of the chef." And with this wicked burn are you cowed, ready to listen to the rest of the instructions in sullen silence. Other food writers for this fine journal of cookery have concerned themselves with 'presentation', 'taste', 'food safety' and other such frippery, but this is Stuffing Your Face, and thus all that need concern us are the twin virtues of our age: Quantity and Convenience. We must also endeavor to fulfill the Great Question: "Does it go well with lao kao?" (The Great Answer, of course, is "No, but that's OK") Let Us Proceed:

### **Grilled Eggy Bread**

*Starter*

#### Materials:

One (1) Dao Fie w/Grill

Some (Some) Charcoal and means to set it aflame

A Deep Plate

Manly Courage (can substitute lao kao) & Knives

#### Ingredients:

Four (4) Slices of Whole Wheat Bread, thicker the better

Three (3) Eggs, Fresh

Pepper

An Onion

Whatever Else You Have Lying Around

### *Preparation*

Light the charcoal in your grill. Avoid inhaling too much of the black fumes, but note that they may drive away the hordes of mosquitoes. Eggy bread is best grilled between the low heat time that smoke goes away, but before the fire catches for proper meat grilling. Now crack three eggs into the deep plate and stir with a spoon, then dice a bit of onion and throw that in there, then cover with pepper and whatever else you have lying around. Stir again. The resulting goop is known as eggy.

### *Process*

Place a slice of bread in, press lightly, then reverse the bread. It should now be covered in egg and onion bits. This was intended. Transfer the slice unto the warm grill and flip it every couple of minutes so it doesn't stick. When it's well-done, remove the slice and repeat with fresh slices until you run out of eggy or fire becomes hot.

### *Presentation*

Using mouth, eat, savoring deliciousness to taste. Serves 1 to 4 while waiting for the meat course to cook.

## **Thai Style Farang Food**

*A Little Somethin' Somethin' for Everyone in the House*

**by Denise Silfee**

I love farang food. I love Thai food. In general, I would say I love all food. What I don't love is lack of variety. While Thailand has all the variety in ingredients, sometimes I feel like I'm eating the same flavors, consistencies and types of meals over and over in my favorite food stalls. So once in a while, I try a little "free style" cooking, as my host mother likes to say, blending some fave dishes from the US of A with some Thai flare and pizzazz.

Thai Style Spaghetti Moo

The goal with this spaghetti is flavor. If you want your Thai peeps to think farang food has some kick, follow below. Feel free to adjust most ingredients... like maybe you don't want people sweating their chilies back onto their plates.

**Ingredients** to serve a seven-person family, plus some neighbors

*\*denote items that may need to be purchased at a Tesco or Big C.*

\*Spaghetti noodles...you choose this amount, I trust you

\*Four 8-10oz. cans (*sii-sip-ha* baht each) of Prego spaghetti sauce (sure you could make your own, but this is easier, especially when serving the masses)

About 15 red tomatoes, cut into cubes

1.5 big regular yellow onions, cut into half-inch square cubes

7-8 little round eggplants, quartered

2 bell peppers, diced

4 bunches of green onion, sliced thin

3 heads of garlic

1 big handful of black pepper balls (we could only find the kind you crush yourselves)

6-16 red or green spicy chilies, chopped

2 big pork loins...unless you can find already ground pork. My guesstimation says we used 3 pounds. Kilos? Who knows, I'm not there yet and neither was the market where I bought the stuff.

Olive oil, which I didn't expect but our family had. Other oil will do, too.

Dried red chili flakes

Fish sauce (*nam bplaa*)

*Warning: This dish requires multi-tasking.*

1. Start boiling water for spaghetti. Hint: adding salt and olive oil to the water makes it boil faster, and then also keeps the starch from the noodles bubbling up and over out of the pot once the noodles are added. Don't have olive oil? Experiment with other oils and let me know if it worked.

2. With mortar and pestle, mash up the thin-sliced green onion, heads of garlic, pepper balls, and your chosen number of chilies. Watch your eyes.

3. In a wok, add a thin coating of oil across cooking surface and allow to get hot. Add the stuff you just mashed up in the mortar and pestle. Add the cubes of yellow onion. Sauté for about five minutes, until you smell the garlic and the onions and the chilies start to burn your eyeballs.

4. (As you're doing all this other stuff, watch that spaghetti...and don't let it burn and stick to the pot. Spaghetti is done when noodles taste soft but still firm, or until you like it. Drain hot water. Watch your face, steam hurts. Then run cold water over hot spaghetti to keep it from clumping up while it cools.)

5. Add ground up pork to wok. If you had to grind it up yourself, tip: using a cutting board or chopping block, hack the meat with big butcher knife in one direction, then turn it and hack in another direction. Keep doing until it is sufficiently mashed up. If you need help ask a Thai mother. She knows.

6. Thoroughly cook pork to avoid getting parasites in your brain. (Ever see Animal Planet's "Monsters Inside Me"? Yeah, cook that pork.) Thoroughly mix in the onions, pepper, chilies.

7. While cooking pork and after spaghetti is finished, put all the chopped up and cubed tomatoes into a sauce pot and let simmer over medium heat. Using a big spoon, periodically smash up the tomatoes. As they cook, they will begin to resemble a sauce more and more. As the water from the tomatoes seeps out, increase the heat til they are a-poppin' and a-bubblin'. Add one big spoonful of dried red chili flakes, if desired.

8. When pork is completely cooked, add everything in the wok to the boiling tomatoes, plus eggplant and bell peppers. Add 4 cans of Prego to beef up the sauce. It's also full of sugar, so *mai sai* the extra cups, Host Mom.

9. Stir the sauce up until it's boiling and smelling good. Add a few dashes of fish sauce to make all the Thai people watching you smile with joy.

Serve it all up at the family dining table, or mat. Invariably, some sugar, fish sauce and more chilies may be added to individual bowls, but as a whole, our first serving of this meal was a roaring success. We were praised for our spiciness and the air was filled with "Wow! Wow!"s all around. If you have bread, show them how to mop up that extra sauce with a piece of fluffy white *kanum pan*, a move that brought forth exclamations of surprise—"It's not for dessert?" No, no it's not.

A twist: spaghetti ta-lay. Instead of pork, use a hefty dosage of squid and shrimp. We made two kinds of sauce when we made ours, with one being seafood and less spicy than the other. Good luck, and send your comments, additions and success or failure stories in for us all to hear!

*Next time: The Ultimate Thai Style Burger Moo*

## Fact and Fiction



## Better Know a Province: Buri Ram



*by Kale Roberts*

Forget everything you thought you knew about Buri Ram Province. Isaan's poor but proud neighbor to Surin and Cambodia conceals untold adventure under its demure facade. There's a reason it boasts the most marriages per capita to foreign husbands: not only are the women beautiful and internet-savvy but rice-loving Germans and Scandinavians know Buri Ram is among the world's top producers of jasmine rice. If that's not enough, Prakonchai district hosts a Fermented Shrimp Festival each New Years—move over Times Square!

Culinary delights may flavor the dry, river-less landscape, but they aren't the only things. Volcanoes dot the countryside and host a series of 1,000-year-old Khmer temples, the most famous being Phanom Rung Historical Park. Ancient ways are not soon forgotten at this volcanic peak, where the Hindu god Shiva dances to destroy the world only for it to be rebuilt again in ever more splendor. It's possible Shiva busted a move which prompted the construction of Thunder Castle, Buri Ram's new football stadium. Nearing completion, this blue behemoth will host the province's premier football team, Buri Ram PEA, for the pleasure of 24,000 fans.

When the astute traveler isn't engaging village girls, tilling clay-hardened rice fields or cheering PEA, she can relax in the warmth of friendly, Khmer smiles and traditional ways. Women weave colorful silk patterns that shimmer in the sun like the backs of wet water buffalo that occasionally saunter by. Betel nut-chewing grandmas will wind a yarn for all to hear while their husbands converse around Buri Ram's own brand of homemade white whiskey. Custom and tradition rule—this is your grandmother's Buri Ram, and that's a very good thing.

## **Foresight**

*by Kari Greenswag*

Yvonne Gardner froze. That is to say that time, space, the universe itself froze as Yvonne experienced one of her 'episodes', as her mother called them, which of course made Yvonne wonder if her mother was actually from Victorian England. Who today called anything like this an 'episode'? Still, Yvonne didn't have a much better word for it and no word could sum up what happened to her. It required descriptions, diagrams and particle accelerators to fully explain. She didn't want to experience what she did, but then, like so much of her life, she had little control over it. As her grandmother (on her father's side) had said: "You can't help the way you're born." Granny had never imparted the corollary, however, which was: "—but you sure as hell can help what you do with what you've got."

Yvonne had figured that one out for herself.

Yvonne could see through time. When a split decision would affect an outcome, the world froze and presented to her the timelines that could evolve from this one accident of fate. She had seen so much that sometimes she wondered why she wasn't crazy and locked up. It was more likely, she reasoned, that she was crazy, just very high functioning.

The colors and sounds faded almost as quickly as they had come on, and she stood for a moment, reorienting herself to the physical, momentary present universe around her. One of her friends—Kristie, her brain supplied—was looking at her with concern. Kristie knew about Yvonne. They had been friends since they were a year old, and it had been impossible to keep the secret from her.

"Honey," Kristie said, taking the glass out of her hand. "You look tired." More and more of the present swam back to her. They were at a party, a state function with leaders from around the world. She was working the room, nudging the future this way and that. Now, if she could only remember who she had been talking to, what she had seen, and then put it all together to understand what needed to be done.

"Yeah, I am," she said and let Kristie lead her away. How many times had she lost herself in time tonight? Too many, probably.

"What did you see?" Kristie asked, smartphone at the ready to record and figure everything out. Sometimes it was like they were science fiction Nancy Browns, tracking down the clues to find the culprit who would trigger nightmare visions of the future.

Yvonne frowned, remembering...

"Kristie, we need to run," she said.

"Why?"

"Because the building is going to explode!" Just because she could see the future did not make her life easier. Often, it made it that much more difficult, like running out of exploding buildings with her best friend in tow. But never did she wish she was normal.

## **Book Reviews**



### **Blue Highways (William Least Heat Moon)**

**by Kale Roberts**

"On the old American road maps, the main highways were in red, the back roads in blue." So begins William Least Heat Moon's *Blue Highways*, the story of a broken-spirited Missourian who slices off a sliver of enlightenment from a season on the dust and gravel back roads that color America's past and unlock doors to its present. Think Steinbeck's *Travels With Charlie* without the dog. Heat Moon goes it alone with only his thoughts and broken heart as company — a feat few men could endure (but those men didn't write this book). More than about one man's search for himself in the vastness of the American landscape, *Blue Highways* is about the country folk who form the fabric of the U.S.: Cajun cooks in Louisiana, hand gliding enthusiasts in Oregon, saloon girls of Texas, fishermen of the Northeast, runaways, religious zealots, and immigrants. Adeptly capturing these characters' accents as well as country wisdom, Least Heat Moon paints a portrait of America I won't soon forget; a portrait that is quickly fading away in our modern age. Structured into 1-2-page chapterettes, this book is perfect for a Peace Corps volunteer's daily dose of nostalgic Americana.

### **The Know-It-All (A.J. Jacobs)**

**by Tracy Wise**

*Savage Norse soldiers from the middle ages who, it is said, went into battle naked. Hence 'going berserk.' So to truly go berserk, you should take off your pants. Noted."* - A.J. Jacobs

Its entries like these, that make me love this book "The Know-it-all" by A.J. Jacobs. The perfect distribution of dryness, vulgarity, history and pop culture, just how I like 'em. But, where is the pop culture, you might ask? If anyone who has ever seen "Clerks", directed by Kevin Smith. You will remember this is Dante's favorite line for Randall, while Randall elegantly swaggers from one side of the frame to the other. Dante sings, "Here comes Randall, the Berserker!"; I remember everything

about that swagger and so do all of my friends from high school. However, as many times as we used to sing that hypnotic tune to each other and try to perfect that remarkable swagger. I am quite sure, none of us knew the meaning or origin of the words we were using. I am sure, if we cracked open the Encyclopedia and read the “Berserker” entry we would have had an even more fun time. Imagine, a group of high schoolers at lunch time singing “Here comes Randall, the Berserker!” as we pretended to battle one another with our pants off? Yeah, I am pretty sure we would have been sent home, but at least we would have learned something that day... thanks to the Encyclopedia!

This book reminded me of a friend, a friend that I could curl up with and giggle at until my heart was content. It reminded me of the days where I would be at home behind my computer and start laughing uncontrollably at a joke one of my friend’s wrote me and my Dad would burst in and say “Who’s in here with you?” But, as a Peace Corps Volunteer instead of my real Dad wondering why I was laughing so hard at something I read. My host Dad was the one looking at me strangely as I read at the breakfast table and suddenly burst into laughter. I always forgot, who was around me as I read this book and would just shrug to whoever was around me and say, “*Sanook*” (fun!). I believe this is a good sign of a great writer, you forget where you are and are absorbed into the delight that is their world.

Jacobs does an amazing job of writing about his experience of what would seem to be as the most dull and inane tasks of all time, reading the Encyclopedia Britannica from A to Z. He doesn’t just read it, he breaths it in and challenges his present life to what he has bought in a store, the printed version of the truth.

I have to add that the title of this book is a little deceiving. “The Know-it-all” naturally makes you wonder if this guy is a pompous, jerk off notifying the world that he can challenge anyone in a knowledge show down. But, let me tell you, this is not who this guy is. He makes me want to cry and live the most humblest of lives. He’ll tell you he’s not the smartest or the wisest of men, but he did learn that “You’d better focus on the good stuff or you’re screwed”, “The race does not go to the swift, nor the bread to the wise, so you should soak up what enjoyment you can”, “Morality lies in even the smallest decisions, like whether to pick up and throw away a napkin”, “You should always say ‘Yes’ to adventures or you’ll lead a very dull life”, “Knowledge and Intelligence are not the same thing- but they do live in the same neighborhood” and how important family can mean. This book has become one of my dearest friends and I will defend him; regardless of what your original perception of him is, how long his jokes/theories are and whether or not you decide to read him. But, I do recommend giving him a try, you won’t regret it.

## **A Prayer for Owen Meany (John Irving)**

**by Jeff Jackson**

Owen Meany is a short kid with an extremely high-pitched voice who thinks he’s an instrument of God after he accidentally kills his best friend’s mother with an errant foul ball.

But Owen would never have claimed that he “knew” what God wanted; he always hated the sermon part of the service-of any service. He hated anyone who claimed to “know” God’s opinion of current events.

John Irving (The World According to Garp, The Cider House Rules) takes the reader on a journey from the time of that baseball game through the early sixties and eventually into the Vietnam War through the eyes of Meany’s friend, John Wheelright, years later as he reflects on the events in the small New England town from Toronto. Irving entertains the reader with fantastic character development through most of the novel until bringing everything together in the final 20 pages.

I fell in love with the characters of this novel and the ending left me breathless. This novel can be found on the “Kindle file.”

## **High Fidelity (Nick Hornby)**

**by Jeff Jackson**

Told through the eyes of Rob Gordon, a struggling London record store owner in his mid-30s, High Fidelity is the perfect novel for romantics and music snobs alike. The reader may cringe at some of Gordon’s decisions, much like their own decisions in the dating world. The novel begins with the breakup of Gordon and his girlfriend, Liz.

It would be nice to think that as I’ve got older times have changed, relationships have become more sophisticated, females less cruel, skins thicker, reactions sharper, instincts more developed. But there still seems to be an element of that evening in everything that has happened to me since; all my other romantic stories seem to be a scrambled version of that first one.

When Gordon is not trying to get Liz back, he’s arguing with his employees about their top five “side ones track ones” or their top five Cheers episodes. “A while back, when Dick and Barry and I agreed that what really matters is what you like, not what you are like.”

The novel is different enough from the film and much more in depth that’s it’s well worth picking up even if you have seen the movie. It could be called a guy’s version of Bridget Jones’s Diary. It can also be found on the “Kindle file.”

## **An Accurate Horoscope That Is True**

**with Underwire Faustus, H.E., B.C. and Bvt. Maj. Gen. of the Dance Celestial**

### **Aries**

There was once a man named James Crackorn, and he crossed the shining sea to search for a mystical land of spells and faeries. He didn’t come back. Nobody cared.

### **Taurus**

Biology teaches us that every species that now exists is descended from an ancestor common to every other ancestor. You should remember this as you go about your day. (Cannibal.)

### **Gemini**

Stop yelling, I’m doing the best I can!

### **Cancer**

Official.

### **Leo**

There’s a limit to how large a civilization can be before it collapses under the weight of its own population. In the case of America, this might turn out to be measured in pounds.

### **Person or persons named “Tammy”**

You, madame(s), are doomed, and there’s nothing you can do about it. This would be an excellent time for charity.

### **Virgo**

[This space reserved for the VULGAR SEXUAL HUMOR of your or your censor’s choice.]

### **Libra**

Hey, anybody remember The Fifth Element? What was the deal with music in that movie? Also, why would that amoral industrialist expect Pure Evil to pay its bill? These are important questions, people.

### **Scorpio**

Oh, sure, it'll look like it's dangerous until you pull the trigger. Then it gets REALLY dangerous. (Don't point it at anything important.)

**Sagittarius**

I was never promised a jet pack, but I retroactively demand one and then immediately rescind my demand upon realizing that I'm afraid of heights.

**Capricorn**

Is this too meta?

**Aquarius**

The stars aligned today to guarantee you yogurt, and deny all of Africa food. I hope you enjoy that, because it's all you're getting.

**Pisces**

"Billy!" cried Martha. "I'll never forsake you, not until this struggle is over!"

"Martha!" shouted Billy. "I think I see..."

**Editors' Note — July 4, 2011**

**by David Barron**

...America! Well, that was fun. Winding this issue down is hard, because it's so great and a lot of fun to edit. Kind of like America. When I think of my time in the Peace Corps, I always think of it in terms of multiculturalism, myself a citizen of the world, people aren't so different anywhere, imagine there's no countries, and so forth. But sometimes I have to take a step back and remember where I got all those opinions from. They're a product of America: I wouldn't have them without having been born and raised in America, rubbing shoulders with multicultures on a daily basis (to the point where I'm more likely to notice when I'm not surrounded by Different), discussing important issues every day, whining for the heck of it and knowing nobody can say "Stop" without being wrong. That's America.

As you can see from the sheer bulk of this issue, we received many and more submissions, of high quality and great variety. A great issue! Along those lines, we want to thank all the contributors for their work, and encourage all of you readers to contribute to the Labor Day issue on September 5th. If you're stuck, think along the themes of "What Labor Day means to me..." and/or "FOOTBALL!". Whatever, just send your contributions to [stickyrice.newsletter@gmail.com](mailto:stickyrice.newsletter@gmail.com) or to any of the editors (we all talk) before August 26!

See you Labor Day!