



THAILAND - THE UPS AND DOWNS

A True Story

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INTRODUCTION

Many books have been written and many pens yet to touch the note pad about Thailand's 'Bar Girls'. This book isn't just about them, although this story and my life now would not have been possible without two of the aforementioned. I write this book without any malice or bad feelings as my life now is immeasurably happier than the one I had before.

I am sorry, as I have quite forgotten to introduce myself, my name is Ian Brooks and at the start of this story I was a divorced lonely 44 year old. I had a good job, an average three bed semi-detached house in rural suburbia with too many unfinished DIY projects on going, an old Volvo 340 and a stupidly fast Kawasaki ZX9R which frightened the shit out of me on many occasions. I had an even sillier past time during the months from spring until autumn I was a formula 2 motorcycle sidecar road race passenger. I should have retired from the sport after the I.O.M. TT in 1993 but no one told me so!

That's enough about me and the past so here we go. Spring 2000 and it is 10:25 in the morning at Mainwaring Engineering Stockport Cheshire England...

CHAPTER ONE: IT STARTED WITH A FRIENDSHIP

“Ian, the new miller has just arrived,” Sue said excitedly.

“Hang on Sue, I’ve not interviewed him yet,” Ian replied sharply.

“Well, I’m sure that you are going to like him, Ian.”

“Why is that?” Ian turned his head and gave the director’s wife one of his cold stares.

“Because he rolls his own fags and rides a motorbike,” she says, with an ear to ear grin. Ian opens the office door and looks Sue straight in the eyes and shouts bitterly.

“That’s no recommendation, Sue.”

He goes outside the front door and into the car park to meet the applicant.

“God, why is Ian so touchy at the moment, Stan?”

Stan turns away from his computer, “It’s all the work, Sue. He’s working long hours on this new contract and I know that he works late at night tuning engines for that flipping sidecar. It’s time he gave up that stupid sport. Mark my words it will kill him one day, nothing more certain.”

“Stan, shut up,” snaps Tony the junior director, “I admire him for that. What do we do at the weekend? Do the shopping, clean the car or mow the lawn if it’s not raining. I wish that I had some action and excitement in my life.”

“Good morning,” Ian says offering a hand of welcome, “Jonathon Green, I believe?”

“Yeah, but I prefer John, thanks.” John stubs out his cigarette with his foot.

“OK, John, my name’s Ian and I’m the Works Manager. You didn’t have to put your fag out as I need one,” Ian announces as he produces a packet of tobacco and starts to roll a smoke, “I believe you’re an ex-employee of Henry Simon Engineering, aren’t you?”

“That’s right, time served,” John replies nervously, “I got laid

off last year. It was expected, but still a shock after working there for such a long time.”

“Last year!” Ian takes a large pull on his cigarette and breathing out a cloud of smoke, curiously asks John, “What have you been doing since then?”

Thinking that things are not going too well for him John rolls another smoke and replies.

“Well, I got paid out a good sized wedge and I’ve never had so much money in my pocket. I spent a few weeks unsuccessfully looking for another job and decided to have a good long holiday in the sunshine,” taking another drag, “I’ve just got back from Thailand. I spent six months out there.”

“I will have to see proof of that,” Ian said disbelievingly, whilst looking at him straight in his eyes, “You haven’t got much of a suntan.”

“No probs. I’ve got my passport here. There you are. I thought you might ask the question and as for a suntan, well the night clubs don’t close until five in the morning.”

“Like a drink do you John?” Ian asks while flicking through the pages of John’s passport, “Well, that’s fine. Do you want a coffee? Come on in and I will show you what we have got to offer.”

“Well, I do like a drink as a matter of fact, but show me a bloke that doesn’t.”

They walked into the dismal oil stained walls of the subcontract engineering shop. Ian made them a cup of coffee and he showed John around the factory.

“How many blokes work here Ian?”

“I’ve got twenty two on the shop floor and there’s nine staff in the office but to tell you how many actually do some work here is really another question. It says here on your CV that you’ve got CNC experience, is that correct?”

“Yes, but I’ve never seen this system before. You’ll have to show me the ropes, Ian.”

“Of course I will however if you had told me the opposite, then I would have called you a liar and that would be the end of it as I know that Henry Simon hasn’t got any of these machining centers.”

John gave Ian all the right answers and they were soon discussing wages. An agreement was found and John started work the next day.

They became very good friends in time, and spent many a drunken night with Ian listening, fascinated at John’s stories of Thailand and Cambodia. John’s girlfriend’s name was Noi, which means ‘small’ in Thai and she was of Cambodian descent. He referred to her as the ‘Cambodian Queen’.

In September of that year after only six months at Mainwarings, John told Ian.

“Sorry mate. I’m leaving at the end of this week. I’ve got a flight back to Thailand, because the ‘Queen’s’ missing me and she wants me to go back now. Thanks for the overtime as I’ve saved a lot of money.”

So John left not saying if or when he might be back. Ian was sad to lose a very good machinist as John had worked all the overtime that Ian had asked him to do, unlike the majority of his workforce, but also John had turned out to be a good friend as well.

During the cold winter months, John sent Ian many post cards about his exploits in Thailand and Cambodia, emphasising how cheap it was to live out there plus reminding Ian of how beautiful the women were. Ian had a thing for oriental women ever since he saw the movie, ‘Enter the Dragon’ starring Bruce Lee, many years ago.

He read them with envious eyes whilst drinking heavily every night. He sat alone on his two seater sofa surrounded by empty Newcastle Brown Ale bottles and an overflowing ashtray. Thinking only about his pathetic life and wishing that he could change it, then stumbling off to bed, once again, as drunk as ever.

John returned to England and went back to Mainwarings one year later. Ian was overjoyed about it as the factory was bursting at its seams with work and he needed all the help that he could get. Unfortunately after working all the overtime that was available he only stayed for another six months, then he returned to Thailand and his 'Queen' who lived in a house in Pattaya which was paid for by her dead sugar daddy. John never mentioned to him what Noi did for a living and he just assumed that she was an ordinary house wife.

Two years past by with many a letter and post card landing on Ian's door mat, his life continued to be that of a lonely mid forties divorced man. Many of his friends believed that he had an interesting and exciting life, but behind the front door to his house this was a long way from the truth. His imagination drifted off to the "Land of Smiles" fueled by John's flood of correspondence and on a Saturday morning in mid August another letter presented an invitation. It read.

"It's about time you booked a flight mate. One of Noi's friends Bee has been asking me loads of questions about you. Do yourself a favour. You're not going to regret it."

"Hmm," he thought, "why not?" opening another bottle of brown ale, he sat down and reached for the phone book, "Trail Finders, that's it..."

CHAPTER TWO: INTO THE SPIDER'S WEB

The Jordanian Airlines Airbus touched down with a bump on the runway at Don Meaung Airport Bangkok. It was 13:10 on Boxing Day 2003. Ian was brimming with excitement and very impatient to depart from the plane. He was soon through immigration and proud as punch to have his passport stamped. He collected his bag from the carousel and briskly walked through the green "Nothing to declare" corridor and into the foyer. Instantly he was surrounded by Taxi touts.

"Sir, Taxi. I do for you good price. Where you go?" Sharpening his pace he said nothing and walked through the hoard of smiling faces.

"Ian, Ian," came a shout, "well you made it then, how was the flight?" John said while shaking Ian's hand vigorously.

"OK mate, but the food wasn't anything to write home about and I'm gagging for a fag. These Taxi touts are a pain. How are you?"

"They're on the prowl for first timers and charge a rip off price. All you have to say is 'mai-ow khrap' and they will leave you alone."

Walking out of the air-conditioned airport foyer through the revolving door, Ian quickly took off his leather jacket.

"It's like stepping into an oven," parking his suit case and wrapping his jacket around the tow handle, "I've got to have a smoke mate. What did you say, 'Meow kap'?"

"No mate, 'mai-ow khrap,' it means 'no thanks' in Thai. How do you want to travel, taxi or bus?"

Wiping the sweat from his brow and taking a deep draw on his fag. "No contest. Taxi, please. God it's hot," Ian replied with a smile as big as Cheshire, "I can't wait to get to Pattaya. I need a good session on the beer as I only had one drink during the flight. I haven't been this sober in years."

"I'll shout a taxi. It'll be about twelve hundred baht."

It took the taxi two hours to get to Pattaya and en-route they picked up a few cans of Singha beer. Ian watched the landscape pass by and smiled at the overloaded pickup trucks filled with freshly picked pineapples, sacks of rice and all manner of goods. Two old Dakota planes lay at the roadside in a state of part dismantle. They were leftovers from the Vietnam USA war. The taxi drew up outside the Opey-De-Place hotel. It was a new hotel and Ian smiled approvingly. He passed John two thousand baht and got out of the cab. A young man smartly dressed in a military style uniform stepped out and carried Ian's suitcase into the hotel lobby. Ian checked in and nervously handed over his passport.

"Why do they want my passport, John?"

"Don't worry about it," John said with a smile at Ian's nervous response, "you'll get it back."

The smartly dressed young man picked up Ian's case and struggled off with it in the direction of the elevator. He was very short and thin but refused the offers from Ian to carry it himself. They walked past the swimming pool. Many young beautiful Thai girls were swimming and having fun while their customers sat drinking and laughing at the girl's antics.

"Put your eyes away mate," John declared, "you've seen nothing yet."

They went up to the third floor and the bell boy opened the door to room 316 which was to be Ian's home for the next three weeks. Inserting the electric key fob into its socket and switching on the lights he stood waiting. John gave him twenty baht from the change of Ian's taxi fare and the young man left the room with a big smile.

"Well, what do you think?"

Ian opened the refrigerator door and took out two bottles of Singha. Looked back at John and replied, "Heaven John thanks a lot mate. This hotel is much more than I expected and look at the size of the bed. I have never seen one so big. Six people could sleep in it. Here have a beer."

“Cheers.”

He had a shower while John drank his beer and helped himself to another one.

“What do you want to do, Ian? Go for a ‘soapy’ or go straight to meet the girls?”

“Soapy!” Ian said as he walked out of the bathroom rubbing his long gray hair dry, “What’s that?”

“A massage with all the extras, you can’t come to Thailand without having one, very relaxing!”

“I think we will skip that and meet the girls, as you put it. Where are they?”

“Soi 7, it’s only ten minutes away in a baht taxi.”

Sitting on the side of the enormous bed and pulling on his jeans, Ian replied.

“What’s a baht taxi?”

“A converted pick up truck with a roof and seats in the back, the Thai government’s set a fixed fair. It only costs five baht per person to travel inside town and that’s the law but the drivers rip off the ‘farang’ and charge what ever they want. I’ve had loads of arguments with them. I work and live here but they still treat me like a tourist, bastards!”

“Hmm, must be frustrating, pass me a beer, please,” Ian continued to get dressed in blue jeans, cowboy boots and an ‘Isle of Man TT’ t-shirt, taking his beer from John and drinking half of it in one gulp, he looked at John and said, “Farang?”

“Means white foreigner mate. Come on, it’s time to get you acquainted.”

They left the hotel and walked the two hundred yards to the main road. John waved down a baht taxi and they climbed inside. Already Ian’s long gray hair was wet with perspiration and his shirt had started sticking to his back. It was thirty two degrees centigrade and five thirty in the evening. The taxi stopped and two people climbed in, an elderly European man and his Thai boyfriend. They sat down and held hands. The taxi stopped again