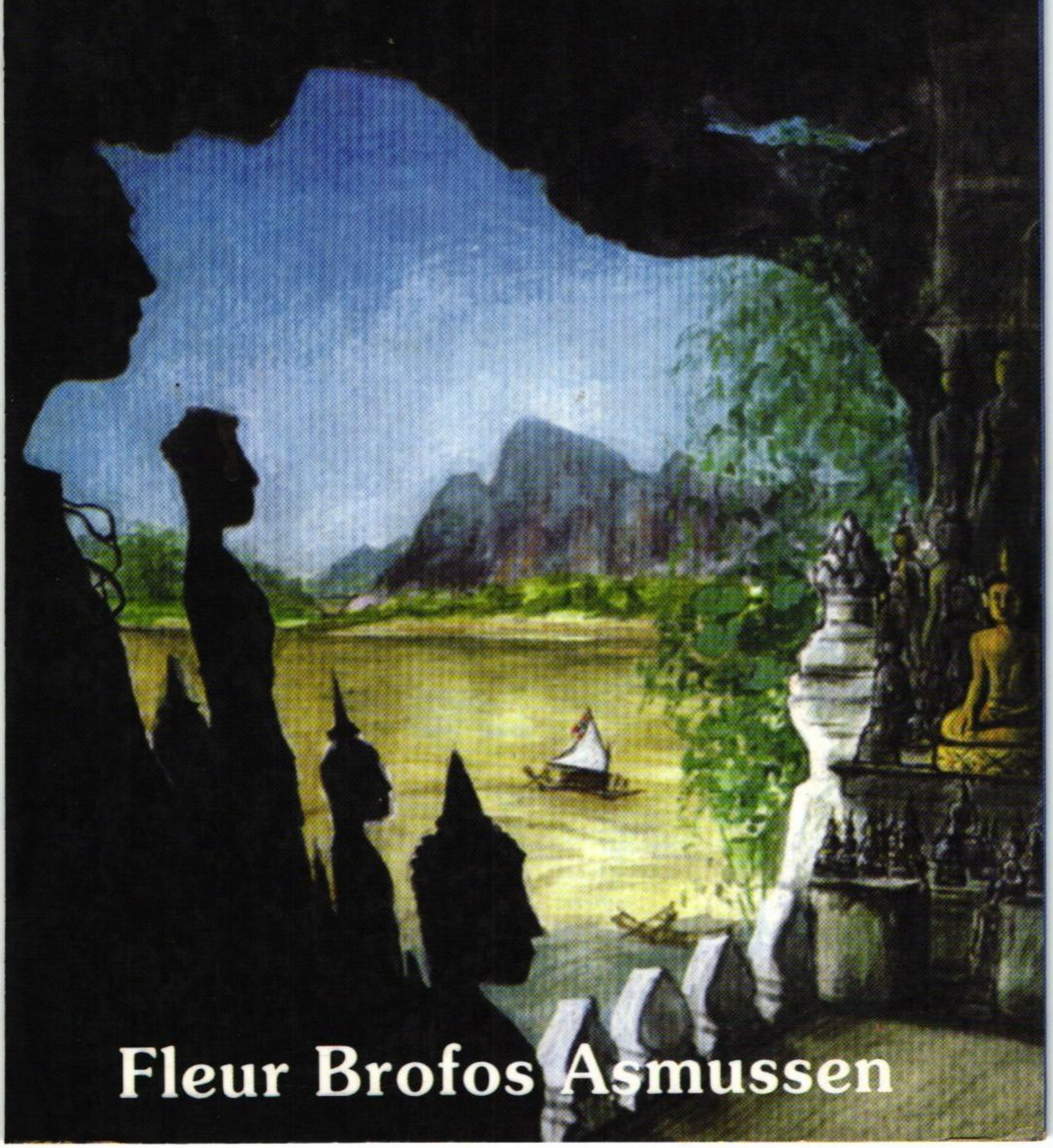
LAO ROOTS



Fleur Brofos Asmussen

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New history for a very old people

THE POLITICS OF RITUAL AND REMEMBRANCE, by Grant Evans. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1998, 216 pp., baht 495, $14.95 (paper).

Reviewed by
STEPHEN MANSFIELD

Grant Evans is one of only a handful of Westerners who could be said to really know post-1975 Laos well. He is one of those rare figures who can write in a scholarly but engaging manner on fairly portentous subjects,

Evans is a professor of social anthropology at Hong Kong University, best known for his previous books "The Yellow Rainmakers" and "Red Brotherhood at War." In "The Politics of Ritual and Remembrance," his most recent work, he examines, without a trace of the lumbering academic style often associated with political anthropology, the efforts of ex-communist, now "post-socialist" regimes, to reconstruct social memory

value."

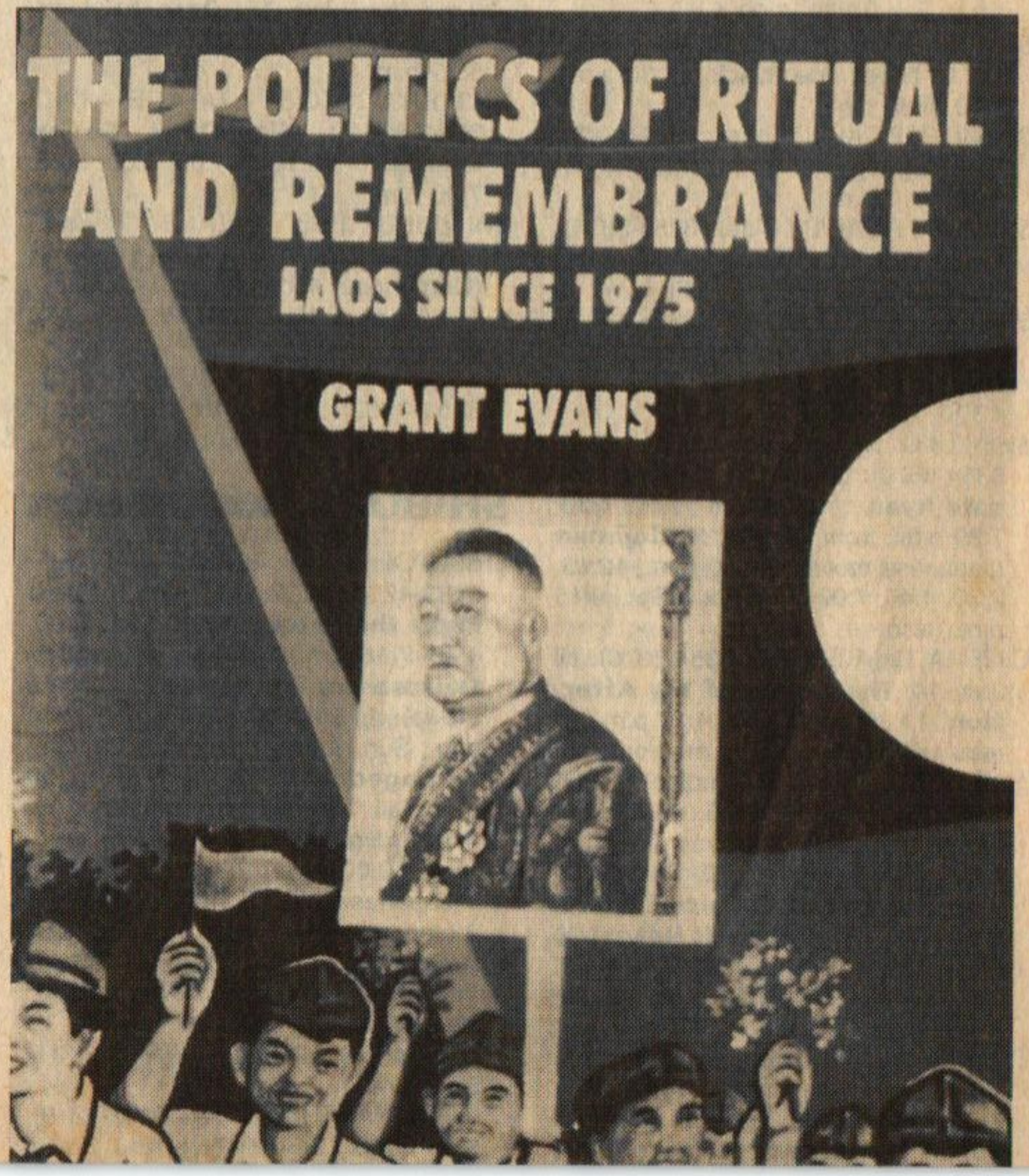
The Lao word for legend (tan) in fact, translates as "old story," a term synonymous in the Lao mind with history, each incorporating accounts of both a real and fabulist nature.

Silence on the question of history has not served the state well, obliging it to compile its own version, a form of so-called patriotic history in which the past is not allowed to undermine the Lao revolution or its main architects. The reconstruction of social memory required to do this demands a certain collusive amnesia which the very nature of historical interpretation in Laos — elastic and accommodating, as opposed to critical, analytical and methodical — appears to lend itself to. In a demonstration of the kind of political alchemy possible in this climate, the word "prosperity" replaced "socialism" as the national motto in August 1991 at the

mock and belittle the Buddhist clergy, it was an extraordinary statement.

If Evans is to be believed, the cult of Kaysone is part of the state's effort to create national legitimating myths and, to a certain extent, to fill the void left by the dissolution of the monarchy, the symbolic center of the nation whose disappearance — or removal by communist authorities — has never been fully accounted for and merits almost no mention in post-1975 historical texts.

The cult of Kaysone and all that it implies on the subject of image manipulation is being promoted, according to the writer, by establishing new memorial museums, through political speeches and statements made in the state-controlled press, and through the appearance of countless numbers of new statues, including 150 new busts of the former leader,



memory.

Evans traces the sometimes sinister, often comically mismanaged, attempts at ritual and symbolic change in Laos, and the recent re-emergence of older, deeper cultural structures. Offering intriguing insights into the nature of social memory, Evans reaches some striking conclusions on the failure of trying to replace or contemporize ancient rituals and symbolic structures.

Evans premise is that communist regimes didn't so much collapse as mutate into authoritarian or oligarchic forms of government. He writes with the confidence that comes from intimacy with his subject.

Before the French established a colonial presence in Laos, history was taught through orally transmitted legend, accounts by wandering Buddhist priests, the work of pagoda schools, village shamans, the songs of itinerant balladeers or the study of palm-leaf manuscripts, highly perishable texts carefully tied in cotton strings and wrapped in silk, that had survived war, insects and a tropical climate.

"A sense of history," the 19th-century French explorer Francis Garnier, lamented, "is absolutely absent in the Lao. Their imagination is fired by fables and extraordinary legends, with no precise date, making it impossible to appreciate their historical

motto in August 1991, at the same time that government cadres were discreetly airbrushing out the hammer and sickle from the national flag and other official insignia. The event appears to have passed without so much as the batting of an eyelid.

All hardline regimes look for symbols of legitimation. Evans observes that "death temporarily opens a gap in the social structure and ritual sets out to fill it." The death of Kaysone Phomvihane in November 1992 provided just such a moment for the Lao political theater to stage the first rituals that would develop a complex personality cult based on the former party leader.

To confer Kaysone with a similar level of awe or semi-divinity enjoyed by the likes of a Sun Yat Sen or Ho Chi Minh required, in the case of Laos, the symbolic endorsement of the Buddhist clergy. At the subsequent memorial service, which preceded a traditional cremation with full Buddhist rites, Nouhak Phoumsavan, the hastily appointed new president, committed the ultimate communist heresy of admitting to the possibility of an afterlife, a more supreme force than the people's committee, by uttering the formerly inconceivable exhortation: "Comrade, we wish your soul may reach paradise and the state of bliss." For a regime known to have gone out of its way to

produced at furious speed in North Korea and donated to the Lao government to meet the deadline for a Kaysone anniversary.

Evans skillfully examines the resurgence of rituals suppressed by the communists, many associated with the Lao monarchy, and the resurfacing of Buddhist rites and private ceremonies such as weddings in which couples have once again begun to dress in the sumptuous attire of royalty. He also analyzes the structure of ritual language connected to the former court, as well as the role of the Thai royal family, which is winning the affections of ordinary Lao through state visits, donations to Buddhist temples and as patrons of development projects. The family members serve as proxy figures for an absent Lao monarchy.

History, of course, has already formed its own judgment on the recent past, one which Evans endorses when he concludes that "the Lao socialist revolution was an enormous waste of lives and energy," that efforts to build socialism in the country "achieved nothing economically, and wrecked a fledgling modern education system. Economic, social and cultural development only began to occur after the LDPR (Lao Democratic Peoples Republic), step by step, put back in place capitalist policies and practices which were already



in action under the RLG (Royal Lao Government)."

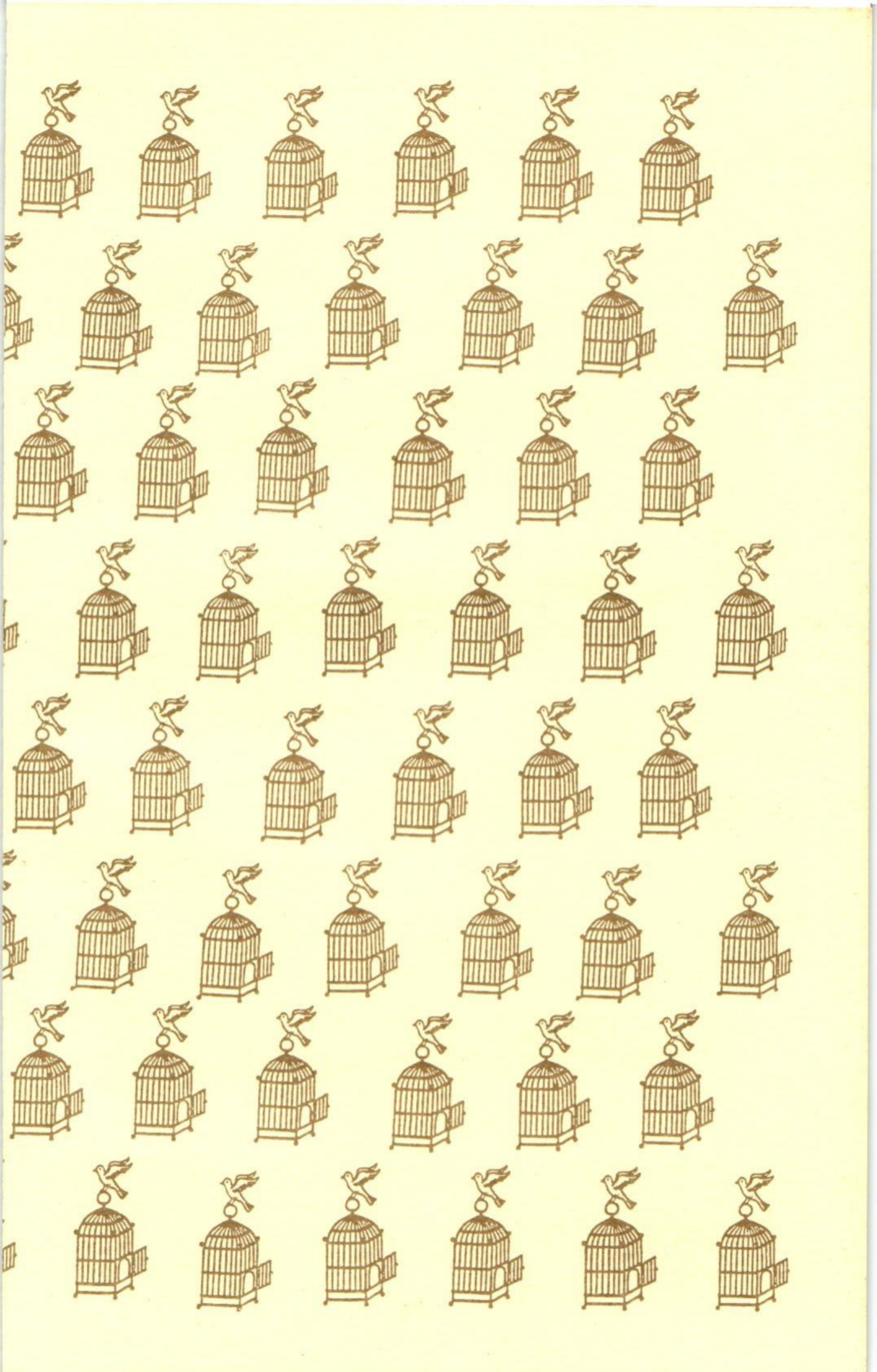
In a chapter titled "Customizing Tradition," Evans demonstrates in his best, high-ironic vein how the current regime, in what must be an extraordinary turnabout by any standard, has striven to relegitimize itself not only through the conventional deployment of national symbols, but also by nominating itself as the chief defender of "Lao tradition." In the same chapter, he examines the expectations of the country's fledgling tourist industry, which has forced the Lao to delve back into their cultural past, much of it associated with the old regime, and to revive many of its crafts, festivals and performing arts for the delectation of visitors.

The tinkering with truth and the omissions and distortions of state-appointed historians and censors appear to be on a collision course with, the insatiable demand of tourists for the material past in the form of souvenirs and memorabilia. The resurfacing of the past in the shape of old coins, bank notes, medallions and posters depicting the former king and his father, tolerated to a surprising degree by the authorities, has focused much fresh attention on the old regime.

"Cynics might argue," Evans notes in a style that gives some idea of the distance the author places between himself and the standard academic offerings, "that the tourist market will finally remove all traces of the old regime from the country more thoroughly than all the repression exercised by the new regime."

At a crucial turning point in the political and social history of Laos, Grant Evans has written an important book which is, as he would be the first to admit, an inconclusive study: It sets out to examine a process rather than a sequence of events. It remains to be seen how much longer the past can be kept in its present state of mummification, as the regime would clearly prefer, or whether history, reasserting its claim on cultural memory, will come back alive and kicking.

Silkworm Books can be contacted at P.O. Box 76, Chiang Mai 50000, Thailand.

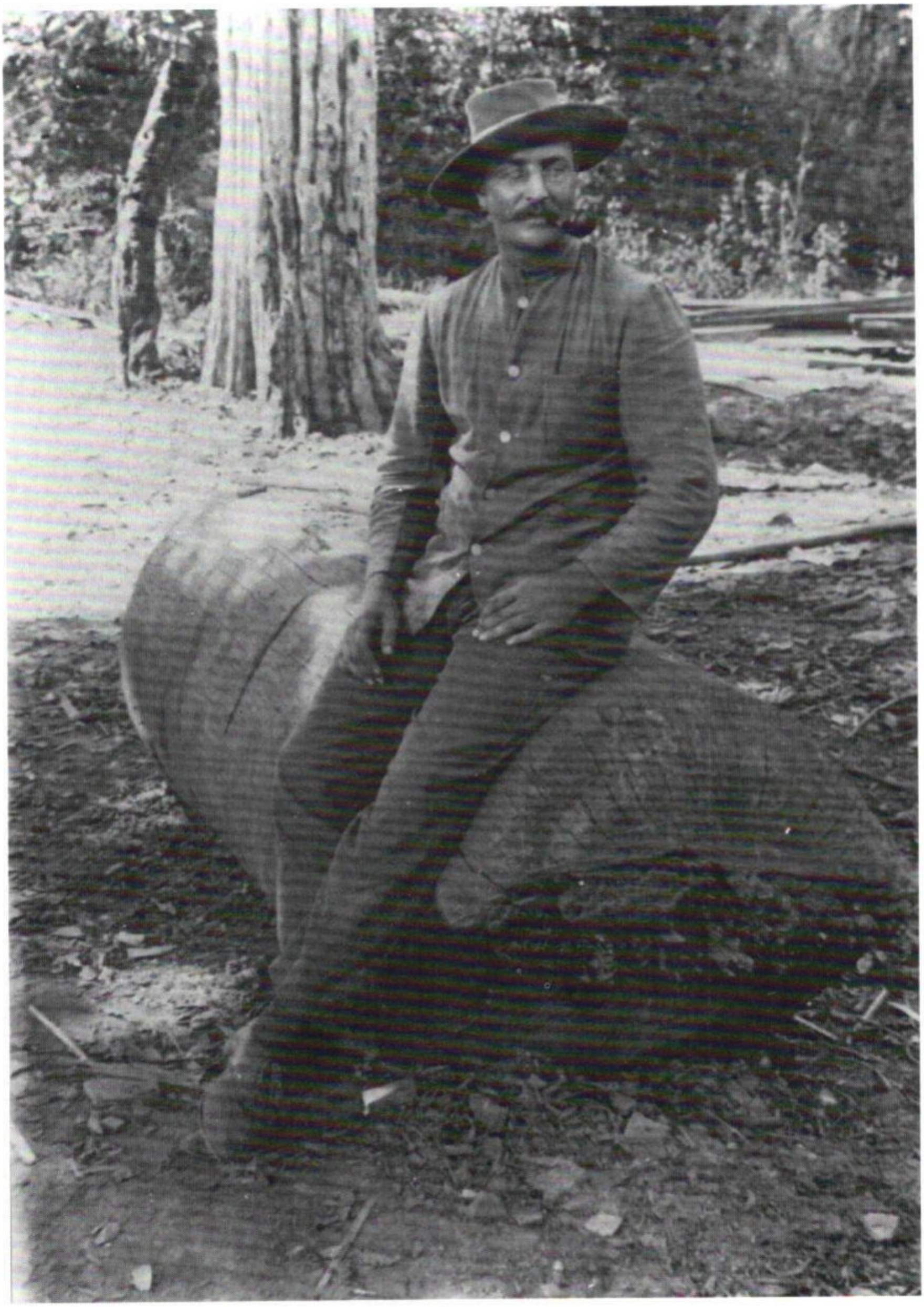


Endpapers

The birdcage motif presented on the endpapers is taken from six teaspoons that were a gift to my grandfather Peter Hauff from his lifelong British friend, Sir Henry Festing Jones. The origin of the teaspoons is uncertain, though they may have come from a silversmith's shop on Regent Street, London. From there they made their way to Saigon, then returned to Europe after my grandfather departed Indo-China in 1929. After that the little spoons crossed the Atlantic Ocean four times! The image of a free bird and the words

'I Love Liberty'

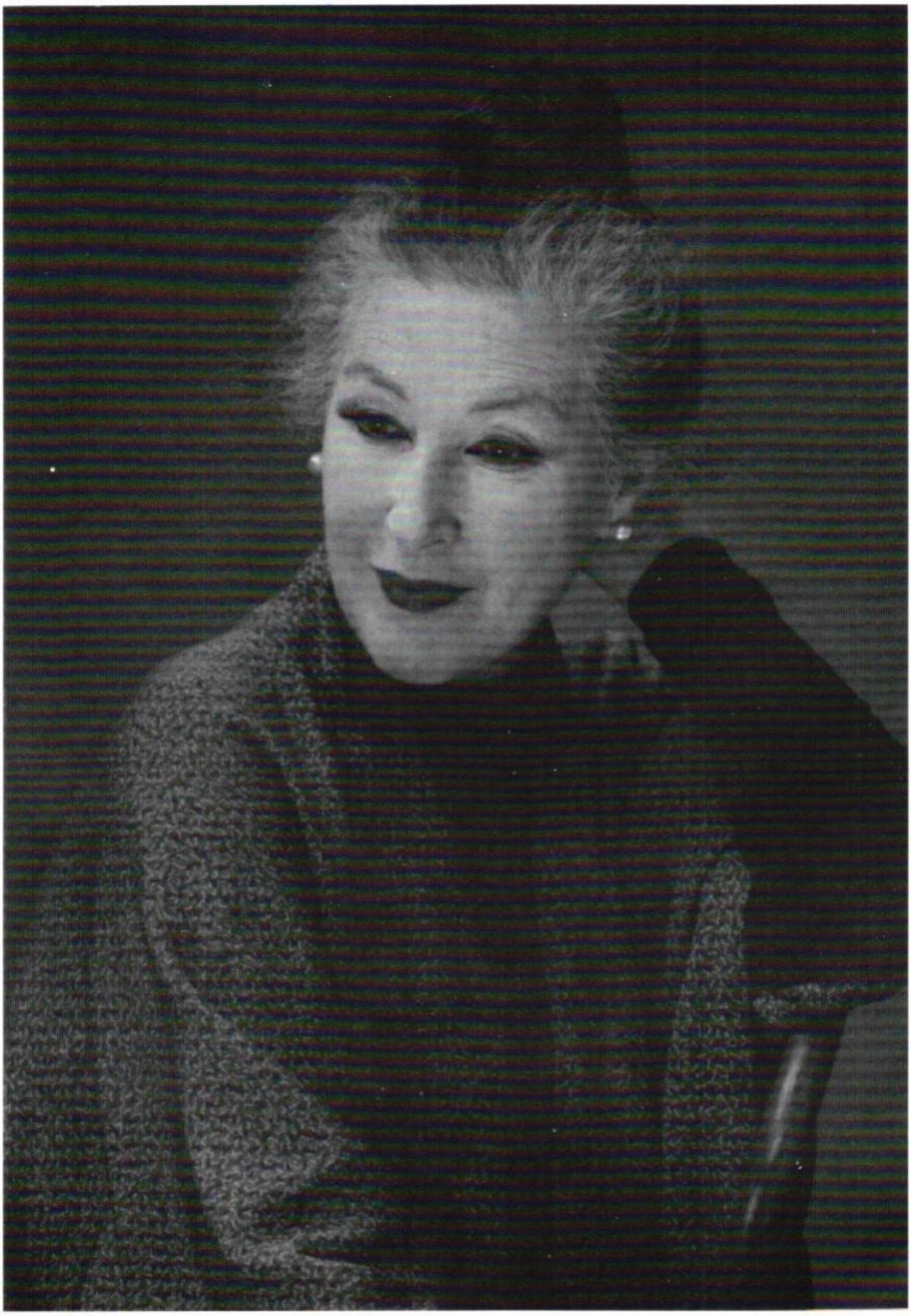
must have spoken profoundly to my grandfather.






24/VII







Lao Roots

ASIAN
PORTRAITS



VISAGES
D´ASIE

LAO ROOTS

Fragments of a Nordic-Lao Family Saga

Fleur Brofos Asmussen

White Orchid Press
Bangkok 1997

LAO ROOTS

Fragments of a Nordic-Lao Family Saga

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First published in 1997

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Chatuchak, Bangkok 10900, Thailand

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To the memory of my grandparents,
Sao Boun Ma and Peter Hauff,

With Love.



From where comes the lizard?
From the rice fields down by the river.
From where comes love?
From the eye down to the heart.

Think, think of the land of Batavi.
A banana can be cut in two.
Think, think inside your heart;
one pillow for two heads.

White bird flies in the teak tree,
Hops around and eats ants.
The eye's pupil, the heart's sanctuary,
Where in Heaven we follow.

A favourite Malay poem, learned by my Grandfather Peter Hauff
during the early years of his long stay in Indo-China.

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PREFACE

All the years that I have known Fleur, the flower was the beautiful butterfly, forever fluttering around the world, always travelling, exploring, painting, drawing, mostly in Asia—Tibet, China, India, Laos—or riding a camel in Pakistan. Why? It seemed as if she was searching for a treasure she already had.

I remember Fleur during our long, intimate lunches in the small cafés of Copenhagen telling me about her métis mother Irene, née I Kham Tem, half Lao, half Norwegian. I was always mesmerized by this mother of 'mixed blood,' a startling beauty, ice cold—and glamorous. Irene had been told, right from the beginning of the century when she was taken away from her mother in a Lao village and brought to the West: forget your past, your language and your origin.

And she tried to forget, climbing the social ladder as a means of self-protection. At the top, she imagined, one could never be hurt. Or heard, as it turned out.

Fleur told me also of her Vietnamese Aunt Maud, Thi Thin's daughter, who 'lost her memory,' of all these half-caste women in Europe during the first half of this century who did not know who they were and who raised their daughters and sons in silence.

Passing on the heritage of hidden identity, the repression of memory cast a shameful shadow upon this mixed (up) family, while they at

the same time enjoyed all the privileges of an upper-class life in London, Paris, Norway, Denmark, New York.

Fleur tried to escape her fragmented childhood by going back, searching for her mother's roots in Laos. But underneath the shadow, as it turned out, on her own shelf, lay her grandfather's, the explorer's, manuscript, papers and letters from the East. Fleur had kept them all those years as her light and lifeline. They tell the story of how he, her grandfather Peter Michael Vosgraff Hauff, son of a Norwegian shipping family, at the end of the last century, longed for adventure and fell in love with the Orient—and Fleur's grandmother Sao Boun Ma. It is a sad yet rich story of betrayed love, homeless affinities and double loyalties.

By deeply absorbing herself in her grandfather's papers Fleur learned about herself. She learned why she had always had the awkward fear of not belonging, feeling that she didn't fit in anywhere, although she found herself at home almost everywhere in the world. Fleur had the strange sensation that the dead, in this case her grandfather, keep their loving, protecting hands over us, giving us guidance as well as inspiration to live our lives in adventure—and connection. This is the life she illustrates for us in this book. It is a moving document of longing and loss, and high spirits.

As a tribute to and expression of love for her grandfather's courage and transgression of his time and place, Fleur has decided to share the treasure of her grandfather's papers with us. And we need them, I believe, in our turbulent times, when cultures mix as never before, no borders hold any longer and apartheid is replaced by ethnic cleansing. It is my hope that Fleur's book will induce all of us to ponder the ancient question, 'Who am I?' and to tolerate the 'impure' complexities of the answer in the open spirit of her grandfather Peter Hauff.

Suzanne Brøgger

Summer 1997

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My gratitude also goes to the writer Patrick Booz for taking on the task of editing and re-writing my manuscript. His many years in Asia and patient attention to detail helped a great deal with the preparation of this book.

Dr. Remegius Fäesch and his wife Rosemarie kindly sent me copies of Hans Fäesch's diary and old photographs; I am most grateful for their interest and assistance.

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To my Lao relatives, Bounnack, Khambay and Lamphey Sayavong, for writing down their stories.

Deep thanks to the many friends and kind people I met during my visits to Laos.

To my friend Marie Thøger for her kind help.

To my cousin Erik Wishman for writing the story of his Vietnamese mother, my Aunt Maud, and to Ellen Hedberg Otterbech.

To my 'cousins' Ulf Trotzig and Lasse Hauff for kindly allowing me to include their stories.

To my ninety-five-year-old Aunt Lily Monsen for letting me have what I needed of family papers in her possession, and to Anne Marie Hauff Wold.

To my brother-in-law Serge Gabriel for giving me all the old family papers that belonged to his deceased wife, my sister Bambi. And to his daughter Suzette Schöbitz for recent photos of Aunt Sao Ming.

A great, sincere thanks to my brother Frederick Brofos for lending me Grandfather's old photographs, letters and family papers.

Mostly I want to thank my husband Des Asmussen, for his encouragement, patience and constant interest in my book, and also to my daughter Souvanni. Without their support the creation of *Lao Roots* would not have been possible.

Author's note.

The names of my family, friends and public figures in this book are real. Please forgive me if I have omitted anyone in my Lao family, due to the difficulties of communication.

PART I

FLEUR'S STORY

'Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thoughts.'
—Shelley

CHAPTER 1: BEGINNINGS

Tuesday, 11 November, 1930. *'I am glad to be able to fix the date of my first sight of you, dear little baby. Later on you will probably read this and vaguely remember your grandpapa coming to London, long, long ago. Just now you are a small fat little baby, sitting on the floor smiling. I hope I shall be able to see you often and follow your growing up to be a good little girl, then a good big girl and finally a good woman. I wish you everything desirable and hope that you will always think kindly of your*

Grandpapa P.Hauff.'

This book circles around my grandpapa. I found these words written to me in a diary my parents kept for each of their three children, and though I do not remember Grandpapa coming to London long, long ago, later in life I met this remarkable man, once in 1946 only. So the two of us never actually got to know each other, having so few chances to be together. Still, I have a clear image of him, and in time, from many sources, I have been able to piece together his life story. This is the tale I want to tell, and how it has come to shape my own life so profoundly.

My own story begins in 1929. I lived with my mother, father, younger sister Bambi and older brother Fred in a large house in Surrey, England. On a lovely spring day, as my mother writes in my diary book, I was born in our house called 'Imbry.'



6. Irene, Fred, Bambi and Fleur at 'Imbry,' Surrey, England. 1938.

Nanny Edwards took care of us children, maids cooked and cleaned, a gardener tended the big kitchen garden and a chauffer drove our black Buick. We spent our summer holidays at the seaside, at Bognor or Littlehampton, or at the house in Normandy, France. Often we went to mountain resorts in Norway for the summer and winter holidays.

My father had his office in London and he frequently travelled to foreign countries on business. On weekends the sound of a typewriter came through the open window of his study as we played in the garden. Miss Humphries, his secretary, waved to us as she worked. My father was a busy man.

Nanny brought us downstairs to see my mother in the afternoons while she was having tea. My mother wished us to sing French nursery rhymes as she played the tunes on our grand piano, but she soon grew impatient if we sang incorrectly.

A veil of mystery seemed to surround my mother, a very beautiful lady. She had dark hair and narrow brown eyes that immediately saw everything around her. Her prettily shaped mouth matched the fingernails painted cherry red, in the fashion of the day. When she spoke and smiled, she revealed a row of pearl-like teeth. The clothes she wore were elegant, the



7. My grandfather Peter Hauff's first and only visit to 'Imbry,' with Fred and our dog 'Pete,' Surrey, England. November, 1930.

most wonderful creations, bought when she travelled to London, Paris or New York. Yet we could only admire her from a distance as she avoided our attempts at physical contact; we seemed never able to take her hand or hug her. Her strictness kept us in line. Impatience quickly grew to anger and often she slapped us. We had to behave and have good manners. We lived our lives in fear of displeasing her. Once my mother and father went away to America for several months and upon their return I did not know who she was.

As 'nursery children' Fred and I made up our own imaginary world. He created a land called 'Therdonia.' I was Queen Fleurinda and he was the King. He even made our own stamps! Fred's great interests were history and geography. He told me stories of Romans who lived in our garden, showed me pictures of castles and knights in armour. Could it really have been pirates that buried a treasure box full of old coins and glass beads, the one we dug up beneath the rhododendron bushes?

We both went to school in the village, my girls' school being just down the road from his school for boys. Fred left us at age eight to go to boarding school in Seaford on the coast. He took along a large play box and his

tortoise named King Leopold—the boys at his new school had a little zoo for their pets.

From time to time I heard my parents speaking Norwegian, especially if they did not want us children to know what they were saying. And although my mother often spoke French, too, I always thought of us as a nice English family. In fact, my father was Norwegian, and my mother half Norwegian. One day, in the school locker room, a girl from my form came up to me and said, 'Oh, I am sorry to hear your Queen died.' I looked at her in surprise and just stood there, not understanding. 'Queen Maud of Norway,' she went on. Right then I realized for the first time that I was not quite the same as other girls.

I missed Fred a great deal, but soon I had a baby sister to love. Little Bambi was four-and-a-half years younger than me.

I was tall for my age, with fair hair and keen green eyes, but I was pale, shy and bashful. I went on my bicycle to school in the village, and each morning I turned the sharp bend on Granville Road to be confronted by a mass of blue morning-glories, freshly opening to the sun's first rays. Our little Pekinese dog, Tiny Tot, came along for the ride, snugly placed in my bicycle basket with feathery ears flying in the wind. At the school gate he knew he could go no farther, so he ran home again. There was little traffic on the roads those days, so I knew he would be safe and waiting to greet me when I returned in the afternoon. Once, however, Tiny Tot did sneak in and found me in line with all the other girls, preparing for morning hymns. The headmistress firmly asked me to dismiss the dog at once!

Our village of Weybridge was filled with special sights and places for a girl of ten: the pet shop, the chemist, with a large white scale I liked to stand on while my mother talked, the tea shop filled with ladies sitting at little tables, the window stuffed with lovely buns and cakes. A war invalid with no legs had his own spot on the pavement where he made drawings with coloured chalk and people dropped coins into a cup.

Most special for me was the tiny newspaper shop that doubled as a post office. It overflowed with books, magazines, papers, pencils, postcards, useful items, even toys. I longed for a small, pleated, red-leather handbag hanging in the window. After a long, painful summer at the seaside, during which I had gotten scabies and faced the daily ordeal of Nanny scrubbing my arms and legs in the bathtub until they bled, my mother said I had been very brave and she bought me that little red bag.

The name of our chauffer was Winter. Fred and I could never understand why we were not to call him Mr. Winter. He was, after all, a man just like Daddy. Winter drove our big Buick, and after school Fred and I would



8. Irene and Einar Brofos with Fred and Fleur at 'Imbry,' Surrey, England. 27 April, 1930.

sit in the soft seats in the back. At times he drove us to London to visit the dentist. Along the way we knew of a place where the bridge over a stream made a little hill, and as we approached Fred and I would shout, 'Faster, Winter, faster!' He did indeed speed up and we screamed with joy as we hit the car's ceiling.

I enjoyed playing tennis, riding and dancing. In the afternoons long walks with Nanny and Bambi in the pram took us to strange and unknown places along distant roads. My favourite walk led to a duck pond, wild and mysterious, with high bulrushes like a jungle. Another walk passed cramped row houses down by the station, far away from the large houses with neat hedges and drives of St. George's Hill where we lived. I realized another, very different world existed away from 'Imbry.'



9. Fred and Fleur, England

But on a summer's day in June, 1939, when I was just ten years old, my safe and happy childhood years in England suddenly came to an end forever.

Animal crackers in my soup,
Bunnies and rabbits loop the loop.
When I grow up
In a year or two or three,
I'll be happy as can be
Like the birdies in the tree.

—From a Shirley Temple song I used to sing.

'As if all around there was danger, like the ice just beginning to melt.'
—Sarashina Nikki

Chapter 2: Norway and the War

Since Nanny Edwards could not come with us to our house in Blonville, Normandy for the summer holidays, it was decided that either Fred or I should go to visit our grandmother in Norway. The decision was made by tossing a coin, and it was me who was to go.

I made a last, final circuit around the garden on my bicycle, along the gravel paths and then a sharp turn into a section we called Fairyland. I fell off the bike and had two bleeding knees that were wrapped in bandages as we left for London. Those were my last carefree moments before leaving, never to return to live in the house where I was born and where I belonged.

Nevertheless, I was excited going to Norway, a country I remembered from various summer and winter holidays, and felt happy having no Nanny telling me what to do and what not to do. My mother and father came along to see me off at King's Cross Station, but the train suddenly pulled out of the station before they could say goodbye, something they often mentioned in years to come. The train headed north and in Newcastle I boarded the *M/V Black Prince* of the Fred Olsen Line. I felt a sense of freedom as I ran around the decks, wearing what I wanted, going wherever I pleased. I had often sailed across the North Sea when we all went to Norway. My father and I would walk together up and down the deck in the fresh air. I was proud being like him, not feeling seasick like the others below deck.

In the morning the ship came to Christiansand, a port at the entrance to the Oslofjord. My mother's sister, Aunt Maud, came to meet me and we walked around the town of tiny wooden houses. It was Sunday and the shops were closed, but my aunt went in the back door of one and I was

given sweets!—a forbidden item at home. The ship sailed after half an hour, heading up the fjord, and suddenly I felt very lonely, missing my brother and sister, my parents and my home, now all so far away.

In Oslo, Daddy's brother, Uncle Fritjof, came to meet me and pass me along to my grandmother, who was waiting for me at Geilo, in the region between Oslo and Bergen. He put me on the wrong train, so I had to change and was delayed, and thus I arrived to a worried Bettemama (as we called my grandmother). Aunt Tinga, Daddy's unmarried sister, was there as well and the two ladies took me to the nearby Ustedalen Turist Hotel, where we stayed.

The hotel dining room was filled with old people—not a single child in sight—and the hum of this strange Norwegian language made me feel very lost. At the dinner table my chin barely reached higher than the huge Norwegian soup plate placed in front of me, and I had to use an enormous silver spoon to eat with. The soup was a thick reddish-brown and it had little hairs in it that stuck in my throat. I did not know then that it was rosehip soup, but I did not like it and it made me feel sick. The maid came by and said something in Norwegian that I could not understand. Suddenly she put another huge dollop of whipped cream into my soup so the soup flooded up on the sides, making even more to swollow. At home I was made to eat what was put in front of me. I loathed milk and might spend an entire afternoon in the 'naughty corner,' holding my mug, trying to force down little sips, feeling sick, miserable and sad. And now in this strange place nobody noticed my tears slowly rolling down my cheeks into the soup. I did become sick and broke out in a rash of red spots. But I never ate rosehip soup again.

Soon I settled down enjoying summer in the mountains. I went for walks with Tante Tinga and her mysterious friend, Mr. Caligari. I gathered wild flowers to my heart's delight—a new sensation as we were not allowed to pick my mother's flowers in our garden at home. My hair was getting darker and longer, though nobody seemed to notice. At home it was cut to the ear lobe, but now I could make a pretty curl and, looking at myself in the mirror, I sensed I was growing up.

Summer passed and suddenly World War II broke out the day after my family returned to England from the summer holidays in France. My father wrote me long, serious letters, telling me to stay in Norway. I was to go back to Oslo with Bettemama and Tante Tinga and stay with them in their apartment. Then I was to start attending Vestheim School for Girls, the very same school my mother had attended as a child. My father was able

to come over from England for a visit in October (1939), bringing with him a suitcase of winter clothes for me. Then he left for England again.

I was in the fourth grade in school and soon started to learn Norwegian, though it gave me comfort to speak English with a little Canadian girl who was my classmate. I took the tram back and forth to school and soon fell into the rhythm of life, learning to live with these elderly relatives. Still, my new life here was very different from anything I had known. I slept in the maid's room next to the kitchen and back stairs. The view out to the yard revealed garbage cans and women beating their dusty carpets. No trees grew, no flowers in a garden. It seemed terribly sad. I could only dream as my days and memories of home in England faded away slowly.

Bettemama was very old. She wore long, black clothes and a wide, velvet ribbon around her neck, and had lace collars on her dresses. She used a shiny black walking stick to get around; once as a young woman she broke her leg falling down the stairs and it had never healed properly. Bettemama had seven children, of which my father was the eldest. She knitted grey woolen socks and kept them in a wooden chest, the same chest that my father had taken as a young emigrant to America at the age of nineteen. I would sit on Bettemama's lap, listening to stories of the past, told with her mild though brittle voice. She was kind and I liked her.

Tante Tinga, unmarried and in her forties, was terribly vain, twisting her face, raising her eyebrows, throwing the heavy drapes in the hall around herself, posing, pulling at my sleeve, constantly asking me if I thought she was beautiful. Painting heself with lipstick and rouge, she left in a cloud of powder each morning for an office job in a bank. She went to French and piano lessons and was jealous of my mother. Tante Tinga grew stranger as the years went by, living alone in the old apartment after Bettemama died in 1943.

During the war an incident occurred that startled me. My mother and I were visiting Bettermama and Tante Tinga and suddenly, after a row, I discovered her crying, an extremely rare thing to happen. She took my hand and said we were leaving. Is it possible that Tante Tinga could have hurt her deeply by calling her a half-caste?

Another incident took place years later when Fred, then fully grown up, came to Oslo to visit. Tante Tinga told him to get away from the window; with his dark hair, people would think it was 'La Mumba!'

The Christmas of 1939 was a happy time for me. The whole family arrived in Oslo by military airplane from Scotland; we were together again, and I was overjoyed. Around Easter, 1940 I was sent to Hammerseng, a

boarding school for girls in Lillehammer. My parents, Fred and Bambi stayed in Oslo.

War came to Norway on 9 April, 1940. The Germans quickly occupied the country and British-German battles took place near Lillehammer. Airplanes flew over our school and we could hear the sound of bombs. That night we evacuated, silently moving up the mountain in the darkness and cold, the snow providing enough light for us to find our way. Teachers carried on their backs the two youngest children. Suddely we heard soldiers coming along the path. Thank goodness they were Norwegian resistance fighters. Through them the teachers learned news of the war.

We stayed in hiding in small huts in the woods, living on boiled potatoes those first few weeks. In time we returned to the school, but I was told never to speak English. The war dragged on, with food shortages and German soldiers everywhere. The Germans took over many large buildings and nearly occupied our school as well. The headmistress showed them a dormitory with little beds for children, unsuitable for soldiers, so they went away.

I soon settled down and retain wonderful memories of my friends and teachers and the fine atmosphere at school, like a big family, during those war years. We were not allowed out of the school grounds, however. The Germans had taken over a boys' school farther up the road; in the mornings we rolled down all the dark window blinds when the soldiers came marching up the road in front of our school. Sometimes Germans would hang on the fence watching us play tennis.

My class mistress was named Helga and because she was young we were allowed to call her by her first name. Helga was really more of a painter than a schoolmistress. Tall and slim, with short, fair hair and kind, blue eyes, she wore soft shades of colour with a three-cornered scarf tied loosely around her neck. She took me aside once and told me I did not have to be like the others, just be myself.

Before nine pm bedtime I was allowed to visit Helga in her study, she correcting papers by the dim light of a single lamp. In this semi-darkness I played her gramaphone softly and danced in the twilight. She showed me her art books and pictures of her favourite paintings. Helga was a fine artist herself, with a unique style of painting people, flowers and birds. Her book of Paul Gauguin's paintings was my favourite. His colours and native women of Tahiti inspired me and I felt these were the most beautiful pictures I had ever seen.



10. The girls in my class, with teacher and flags - in 1942!

I started oil painting at that time and owe a tremendous thanks to Helga, who has always remained close to my heart. Helga and I lost touch after the war years. I knew she had gone to England to marry an English doctor, and we occasionally wrote to each other. (Even back in Norway during those school years she confided in me that she loved an Englishman.) She had five children, one called Robin, but in time we stopped writing.

Many years later I accidentally met Helga's niece in Oslo, whom I knew from school. She gave me her aunt's address so I sent a letter, not knowing what the response would be. I received the kindest possible invitation to come for a visit at her home in Norfolk. Now a widow over eighty and going blind, she lived in a little cottage. I discovered her spirit had not changed and the paintings that I so admired covered the walls. We had wonderful talks, and some years later I was able to see her a final time, on her deathbed. The treasure of our friendship continues to live in me.

I received letters from my parents—Fred and Bambi wrote, too—and they all stayed on in Norway, moving from place to place, until the war ended in 1945. I was allowed to visit Fred at his school near Hamar, not so many hours away by rail, though he could not visit me. Once we decided to flee and return to England; we jumped on a train going north but were caught and sent back to our schools.

As the war years dragged on food and clothing became scarce. School rations were limited to three pieces of bread per person per day. Sawdust was mixed into the flour to make it stretch further. A slice of kohlrabi fried in cod-liver oil lay cold on the bread slices. I have memories of hearing a squeeling pig during class and seeing a bucket of blood being carried into the kitchen. Blood pudding! I had to convince my teachers that it was impossible for me to eat blood pudding, or rosehip soup—otherwise I would come down with a rash. On Fridays the great treat was pancakes, and once in a while we would each get a raw egg and some sugar to beat in a glass. All the girls sat in the front hall and on the staircase, beating the eggs like mad with a teaspoon until they became thick. Then we would all eat the sweet contents slowly, enjoying every spoonful.

North of Lillehammer the Germans had a large prison camp for Russian soldiers. Every day during the cold winter months of 1943, these Russian prisoners of war were transported in open trucks, packed side by side, to work near our school.

The Nazis, the German command and the Norwegian collaborators Terboven and Quisling, planned a large ski competition on 'our slope,' called Storbergjordet. Russian prisoners removed great masses of deep snow to create a road from the main roadway to the foot of the ski slope; this allowed the Nazis to drive their big cars directly to the bottom of the hill to see the slalom event. For unknown reasons the ski competition never took place. When out skiing in the morning, we could see the trucks driving up the road. It was a dreadful sight to witness those silent, starving prisoners. Often we passed close by them on our ski runs.

One freezing morning I was skiing back to school with my girlfriends. We passed a group of Russians shuffling along on the hard packed snow, their long, brown coats almost reaching the ground. I noticed a prisoner had cupped his bare hand backwards, close to his side. The next second I saw a Norwegian boy quickly drop a cigarette into the hand—German guards were all around, watching and pointing with their bayonets for all to move on. The instant the Russian received the cigarette, he pulled at the gold ring on his finger. It did not come off, so he thrust the finger into his mouth. The ring then came off, and with tears of joy and thanks he slipped it to the boy. An angry German saw something going on and pushed the Russian boy along with a bayonet down the road.

Everyone knew the prisoners only got potato peels and rotten kohlrabi to eat. We students, about fifty girls, decided to save a piece of bread each or the Russians. Every other day four of the older girls, age sixteen, filled their rucksacks with packages of bread and went on skis to where the

prisoners worked. They asked the German guards if they could give the prisoners the food; the answer was, "Ja, ja. Just go through." Those starving men were overwhelmed with thankfulness.

One day the girls arrived to deliver the food, but new guards stood on duty. They became very angry, threatened with their rifles and told them to go away. On their way back to school, the girls met some Norwegians they knew, and these men promised to deliver the food somehow. The girls happily gave them the food and skied back to school.

At five pm, as we sat at long tables doing our homework, our headmistress came to announce that the Germans had come to the school, recognized the four girls who had 'smuggled' food to the Russians, and now demanded that we leave. They would take over the school and we must be out by eleven am the next morning. We had no choice but to quietly pack our clothes, books and belongings and hug each other goodbye.

The four girls were fetched by the Germans and underwent hours of interrogation. That same evening, around eleven pm, the telephone rang. The Germans had changed their minds! They did not want the school after all so there was no hurry to evacuate, and we settled down to life as usual.

'Roots are branches down in the earth, branches are roots in the air.'
—Rabindranath Tagore

CHAPTER 3: TO DENMARK

Later, however, just two days after the start of summer holidays, the Germans did take over the school. Our teachers were interned in Lillehammer and the school became Gestapo headquarters for mid-Norway. Such things happened all over the country, so I had no school to attend anywhere. Under these conditions, my father arranged for me to go to Denmark, where the food shortages were less severe than in Norway.

It was July, 1943 and I was fourteen years old. Once again I was put on a train by myself, this time headed for the Swedish border, where I had to change to a night train for the trip through Sweden. Most of the passengers were Germans in civilian clothes, and I remember them tucking money into the cuffs of their trousers!

At the Swedish border we spent hours filling out forms and dealing with red tape. Germans and customs officials hurried back and forth along the train corridor. Passengers were given lovely white wheat buns, an entire bag each, something we had not seen for years! We rejoiced. At the station we could hear free Sweden's radio coming from a post office.

The following morning I awoke to the flat landscape of southern Sweden, the province of Skåne, with black and white cows grazing in the fields. The train stopped at Helsingborg, a port city directly opposite Denmark, and from there I took a ferry across the sound to Elsinore (Helsingør), right up to the large brick railway station. Air raid sirens sounded as I arrived in Elsinore, but soon the all clear was called. My father had arranged for a man to meet me and escort me on the last leg of my trip to the coastal town of Vedbæk. At Vedbæk station the whole family I was to stay with came to meet me.

I entered the life of a large household: a mother, a father, a son (slightly older than me), two old maiden aunts, a grandmother, a maid, a cook and a gardener. The house, just five minutes from the sea, stood in a large garden with tall trees, lawns and flowers. A small island in a lily pond was connected to the garden by red, Chinese-style arched bridges. Two white swans sailed majestically past a little pier with a row boat. It was all so clean and beautiful, and my first lunch with the family in Vedbæk was overwhelming: a big table with white and dark bread, butter, eggs, sausages, ham, paté, herring, cheese—such a table I not seen for years!

They all spoke Danish, of which I understood little. To be polite I answered 'yes' or 'no' when spoken to, hoping my response was the correct one. I had my own room, with views out to the lovely garden and pond, my own bathroom and a piano so I could start playing again. I called my hosts aunt and uncle, Aunt Ellen and her husband, and was happy to be in a place where everyone was kind to me.

In January, 1944 I started to attend Rungsted State School, taking the train every day, but I did not do at all well on the exams. I felt the time had come to ask my aunt for permission to learn to draw at an art school. This had been my innermost wish since I was ten years old. I knew I wanted to be a painter when I grew up.

Good fortune was with me, and in the autumn of 1944 I started art school in Copenhagen. I was fifteen, one of the youngest pupils, and our work consisted mostly of drawing Greek and Egyptian plaster cast sculptures. My teacher was Bizzie Høyer, an excellent teacher, firm but with valid criticisms. She taught us to have great respect for art and to be humble when thinking of ourselves as artists. She would point out the window to the vegetable sellers and horse coachmen, telling us that they were doing a far better job than us.

Before too long the Germans once again took away my school. One morning I opened the school's great door and there stood a German soldier in his nettle green uniform, glaring at me.

We moved classes to other locations in Copenhagen. I was very lucky to meet at this time my lifelong friend Vibeke Klint, who was to become one of Denmark's finest weavers. We had excellent talks together. She was already then interested in Indian art and textiles, and I loved Oriental art and culture. We became grest friends. I continued at my art school for eight months until the war ended on 5 May, 1945.

'As I long for the cherry tree to bloom and grieve when the blossoms start to fall, this seems my own garden into which I gaze.'
—Sarashina Nikki

Chapter 4: Years of Yearning

It is impossible to describe the feelings of joy and happiness in the days just after the war ended. Everyone was elated, and very soon a new chapter in my life began.

My father came down from Norway to fetch me at Vedbæk. I was both sad to leave my aunt and uncle and happy and excited to come home to my own family, especially to see Fred and Bambi again. So I returned to Norway with my father and that summer the entire family stayed at a country farm. How wonderful to be with my brother and sister again! I spoke a mixture of Danish and Norwegian—our shyness soon gave way to the close friendship we knew in earlier times.

Fred was working at the British Headquarters in Oslo when the war ended and stayed on there when my father went to America on business and my mother, Bambi and I went to live in Stockholm for six months. Soon after Fred left to go to university in America.

In the months after the war my family lived in hotels, first the Grand in Stockholm and then at Saltsjöbaden outside the city. The 'Swedanes,' a famous jazz band, played at the latter and Bambi and I hung about when they were rehearsing.

After dinner my mother would be surrounded by admirers at our coffee table. Gentlemen—five or six of them—wanted to be near her. There was an American high officer, a British secret serviceman and an Australian to mention a few. I was allowed to sit with her, even allowed to smoke. I think she liked there as a chaperone. My beautiful mother was enjoying life again after the difficult, miserable years of war in Norway. Sweden seemed to be a land of plenty.

Even so, like so many other people uprooted by the war, we longed to find a new home and went back to England to try our luck. The old house

in Surrey seemed unsuitable, having to depend on servants; we ended up at a place called Oatlands Park Hotel with many other misplaced families. The changes England had gone through and the continuing economic difficulties forced my parents to give up the idea of settling there. Soon Bambi and I moved with my parents to Denmark.

In Copenhagen we again started in a hotel apartment. Bambi and I were sent off to Zahle's School for Girls, and with bitterness I would pass each day my old art school. My parents told me that I must finish ordinary school and pass the exams, so I went through a nightmare of studying German and mathematics, trying to adjust and fit in. All of my yearnings and dreams of becoming a painter faded away.

I had constant disagreements and rows with my mother. Life became increasingly unbearable and I was most unhappy, unable to work at my art. My father would come home from the office and ask, 'What has the weather been like?', meaning have there been any fights. I shut myself off and retreated into my shell, hardly able to speak with my mother, who was utterly different in her ideas from my aunt in Vedbaek. A certain jealousy grew in my mother towards this aunt and I was forbidden to visit her, but Vibeke and I went on our bicycles to see her anyway. The love and understanding I received from my Danish Aunt Ellen made me forget the harsh aspects of my mother's character.

In the eyes of my mother everything was wrong with me. She told me I was ugly and stupid and felt I was too tall, with feet and hands that were too big. 'Here, wear this ring,' she said, handing me a large ring with a green stone. 'Then people won't notice your big hands.' This only made me increasingly clumsy and awkward. She told the hairdresser to thin out my thick auburn hair and give it a rinse to create a more reddish colour. On top of all these blows to my self-confidence, I still had to use my old clothes from the war, which were too small. My white confirmation dress was too short and tight across the chest, but I had nothing else to wear until mother gave me some other ugly things for going out to evening balls. No wonder I was always a wallflower. I sometimes think of my mother's unkind treatment of me. Could it be that she was nearing a crucial changing point in her life, unable to bear the thought of having young daughters who outshone her with their youth?

My parents and I were invited to a fancy-dress ball at the Italian Embassy and, not knowing what to wear, my aunt lent me a traditional national dress from Madeira, a kind of peasant costume. I liked it, with its tight black-velvet bodice, white blouse and flared skirt in red embroidered stripes.

At the ball a young man dressed as a Chinese, in black silk, pillbox hat and long braid down his back, approached me for a dance. We got on well and danced all evening until I suddenly saw my mother bearing down towards me across the dance floor. 'Where on earth have you been?' she barked, rudely ignoring my partner. (She could not imagine that I was out on the dance floor!) 'Come along, we are going home,' she said sourly. Driving home in the car she asked who that young man was, anyway. When I mentioned his name—young baron so-and-so of a prominent Danish family—she turned and looked at me. 'Oh, but you could have stayed!'

The hypocrisy of her values infuriated me, but what could I do? I felt more and more the fear of her unkindness and anger. Her complete inability to love me as a daughter seemed to break my heart, and in my misery I failed the school exams. Pleading again with my parents,

I finally was allowed to enter art classes with the Danish painter Niels Hemmingsen in Østerbro, Copenhagen. My drawings became much freer than those made under the strictness of Bizzie Høyer's instruction. I was really happy to be back working with my art again.

In June, 1947 Fred came to stay for the summer holidays. He had been away for two years at university in St.Louis, and Bambi, and I were overjoyed to see him again.

Shortly after his arrival in Denmark we all left for the holidays, staying at the grand hotel on the beach at Falsterbohus in southern Sweden. My mother, beautiful and stunning as ever, soon had many new friends and admirers. Fred and I refused to let her push us into being with the 'correct' social youngsters, so we went exploring instead.

One memorable adventure took us to the bird island of Måkläppen, far out to sea off Sweden's southrnmost point. We decided to swim there; it took us hours of paddling and wading in shallow water to reach the island. The baking sun and solitude made us happy and reminded us of our childhood, and we had great fun exploring the shoreline, discovering hundreds of screaming gulls, an old shipwreck, a huge timber log, high grass, a dead swan, a wooden crate from New York, USA. We soon realized the sun had disappeared, it was getting cold and the waves were rising, so we began the long trip back. We had been in the water for nearly four hours and returned to the hotel late for dinner.

My parents were understandably furious, pointing out the real dangers of such a swim. They had had enough of us unruly children. My father decided Fred and I should go hiking in the Norwegian mountains, as he had done in his youth. So off we went by ship to Norway. At sunrise I

stood at the railing, enjoying once again the entrance into the Oslofjord, surrounded by the fresh smell of fir trees growing along the coast.

We stayed for several days at Bettemama's old apartment where I had lived eight years previously upon arrival from England. Everything looked the same—red plush 1890s furniture, lace curtains, heavy drapes, old gramaphone with a handle—only Bettamama had passed away four years earlier, in 1943. Tante Tinga still lived there, going off to her bank job every day.

Back in Copenhagen after the summer, my mother grew tired of living in a hotel apartment, eating with lots of people in a dining room, so we moved to a flat near the Radio House. Tiny Tot, our Pekinese, came along and had a room of his own, as usual, so I got a tiny room in the attic.

I had stopped playing the piano. Bambi and I hated practicing after school when my mother was at home because she constantly interfered, telling us to count out loud. Being a fine pianist herself, I suppose she followed our every note with despair. As soon as she was out of the house, Bambi and I would rush to the piano to play. Our father, in fact, enjoyed our scales and plinking and he encouraged me in music. For my birthday he took me to Fona Music Shop and bought me a guitar. I started lessons with a little old lady and soon I could play and sing the songs I liked.

Life went along and I took comfort in small pleasures and diversions, but my situation was still terribly difficult. What could I do, a mere art student? Where should I go? Then I remembered an English family we had met in Falsterbo. I had looked after their two little children, even visited them in England one Easter. They told me to come back whenever I wanted to look after the children, so once again I returned to England. My father and Bambi said goodbye to me at the Copenhagen Main Station.

This family, a young couple with a boy of six and little girl of three, had a fine big house and garden in the country. As an au pair, I helped with the children, even spent a little time in the kitchen although at the age of nineteen I still had no experience cooking. Suddenly I earned my own money, one pound ten shillings per week, with room and board! At home we rarely had pocket money and my allowance of one kroner a week quickly dwindled to nothing because twenty-five øre was subtracted each time I talked back to my mother.

Wednesday was my day off. Then I would take the train to London to see the art museums and famous shops. I grew to like the children and we frequently went for lovely long walks along lanes in the woods, with the dog running ahead. Their father and I built a chicken coop and soon we had fresh eggs. Life in the country was good.

Although I missed Bambi and the family, I enjoyed being free from my mother's constant nagging. My brother Fred attended university in America, so again our family were like 'little dots' spread out on the map. Being so far away had its shocks, too. One morning the postman brought me sad news. My mother, who never wrote, sent a postcard telling me my father nearly died of a stroke during a conference in Antwerp, but was now recuperating slowly.

Much as I enjoyed the English family, the countryside and my work, it became clear that I should move on. I wanted to continue with my art so I applied and won a scholarship at Guildford School of Art.

So I moved away to Guildford and lived in a small room in a row house behind the hospital. It was wonderful to draw again and I felt happy and lucky to be back in art school. I studied oil painting, still life and life class and chose to learn about book illustration.

Soon, however, I noticed a resentment towards me from my fellow students. Many were young people from local, well-to-do families, and some seemed more interested in their social life than their art work. I was extremely thankful for my scholarship and wanted to work hard. As soon as I arrived in the morning I started my work, while the others could stand around chatting and socializing for ages. My seriousness and self-sufficiency must have caused irritation. In addition I was a foreigner, the only non-British student there in 1948-49, and rather than living in a great red-brick house I had my simple rented room. I dressed much more simply than the other students; the girls wore nice cardigan sets and tweeds, whereas my clothes were Army and Navy surplus. They resented me to such an extent that one day, going up the school stairs, a girl spat at me. How strange to think that once, not so long ago, I had been a girl living in a big house in England.

Then one day my fortune changed. An extremely popular girl from pottery class came over and talked to me, thus commencing a friendship that brought sunshine into my life. My new friend wore big brown boots, had long blond hair and a little turned up nose in the middle of a pixie face. She bubbled over with enthusiasm and asked me, 'Isn't it boring living in digs? Why don't you come live with us?' Amazed, I asked her what her parents would say and she answered that everything would be fine! She had a kind, sweet mother, a little sister, a cat and a large black Labrador dog. Her father was away in India. There were lots of empty rooms upstairs, one for me to live in, another that we decided to make our studio, with all our paints and pots and art gear.

Unpacking my trunk, with all my belongings spread out on the floor, my friend asked, 'What are these?', eyeing a bag of senna pods. A bit embarrassed, I explained that my mother had given them to me to soak in water overnight, then drink the liquid to relieve constipation. From then on my name was Senna and hers was Pod.

Now everyone at school was friendly towards me and life was wonderful. I was busy in class with my art and every afternoon I went home to a warm, welcoming family. Pod's mother treated me like a daughter, even dressing me up with her earrings. we had parties and sewed evening dresses with bare shoulders for ourselves, inspired by Christian Dior models in the fashion magazines.

With the approach of my birthday in May, Pod wanted to give me a puppy dog. I chose a toy poodle. One afternoon we all drove to a poodle kennel to make the choice. A pack of fluffy little barking pups rushed towards us in great excitement, squeeking and pushing to get as close as possible to our outstretched hands. Each seemed to say: 'Take me! Take me!' Suddenly I noticed a black puppy sitting on a step by itself, a bit forlorn but looking straight at me. This was the one I wanted! so Pod and her mother bought it for my birthday present. We received the pedigree papers and I took her home in my arms. We called her Bijou, the sweetest, easiest little creature. She lived until she was thirteen years old.

My parents and Bambi moved to America in 1949, leaving Europe behind for the Land of Plenty. Although my father, now semi-retired after his stroke, would have prefered to live in Norway, my mother definitely wanted to move and both thought it important for the children to receive an American education.

In addition, my mother was happy to escape the constant questions about her origin which she always faced in Norway. How she hated people saying: 'But Mrs. Brofos, you are not Norwegian, are you?'

The family initially settled in Scarsdale, outside New York City, where Bambi went to high school. In the spring of 1950 a letter arrived in England from my father telling me to come over to join them in America. They had bought a house in the Berkshire Mountains in Massachusetts and were prepared to have all our belongings and furniture—held in storage in England—shipped across the Atlantic for the new home. They wanted me there as well.

Among my father's instructions was permission to withdraw as much money as I needed from his London bank for travel, tickets and anything else I might require. I jumped out of my bulky khakis and into a neat grey flannel suit from Harrod's, with matching grey accessories and a celadon

green cashmere sweater. On my head I wore a most stylish little grey felt hat, shaped like a leaf, made by an ex-RAF hat-maker friend.

Tucked under my arm I carried little Bijou, with her $50 passage ticket. I had just recently turned twenty-one and now stood at the railing of a great ocean liner full of anticipation at seeing my parents down below on the dock in New York harbour. What would the next stage of my life bring?

At first we stayed at the Barbizon Plaza in New York for a few days. The smartly dressed people on Fifth Avenue, in navy blue and white, all looked alike. This summer of 1950 was going to be one of adjustment for me.

Soon we went to our new home, a white colonial house with green shutters within spacious grounds. The place was called One Oak for the single great oak tree that stood on the front lawn. Long ago people gathered beneath the tree for meetings, and I learned about Indian legends, the Mohawk Trail and other lore of the surrounding Berkshire Mountains.

Fred had finished his university studies and was waiting for us in the new home. Soon he would be drafted into the army. Bambi was attending the local high school in our town.

One day large moving vans pulled up, leaving deep furrows in the lawn to be near the front door. Out came an incredible volume of things that had been stored in England since World War II. All of it literally was placed on our doorstep: the Steinway grand piano, heavy bedroom furniture, Queen Anne dining room table, chairs and sideboard, rugs and paintings, our old nursery cupboard. Best of all were all the toys and my treasured books from childhood, even a big box of seashells from those long-ago holidays in Normandy. The unpacking was filled with excitement and nostalgia, though most of the objects were of little use now.

Bambi, popular, pretty and full of fun, had a nice college boyfriend. This young man had a friend at another college, and soon the four of us went out on dates togethers. I suddenly felt swept away in my new life living with the family again, fitting into my new role and 'the American way of life.' Soon I had many friends, the telephone rang constantly and my mother would just say, 'Take it, it must be for you.'

The summer was filled with picnics, swimming parties and music. I remember especially that we had moonlit dances at a wonderful old mansion, with fireflies sparkling in the balmy summer nights. We belonged to the country club where, I suppose, my parents met people they liked. It was a summer full of fun and I finally felt happy again to be in the family, together with my grown-up little sister.

'From darkness lead me to Light.'

—The Bible

Chapter 5: The Bombshell

In that summer of 1950 something happened that shook me to the core, an event that changed my life forever.

Out of the blue my mother revealed a fantastic story to my brother, my sister and me. 'Sit down, children,' she said, calling us into the drawing room. 'I have something to tell you now that you have grown up.' With no sign of emotion she proceeded to tell us that her father Peter Hauff, our grandfather, had gone away to live in Indo-China as a young man. There he married a native woman of Laos named Sao Boun Ma, and this woman gave birth to my mother!

My heart jumped. In those moments I felt as though a bomb had exploded. I was stunned and excited, suddenly overwhelmed by feelings that had lain dormant all my life. Now I wanted to know everything. I asked her what her mother looked like and she answered she had a photograph in the bank which she would show us. 'She was not pretty,' I remember my mother saying. 'But she was so good and kind.' Upon seeing the old photograph, taken around the turn of the century in the faraway land of Laos, I was overwhelmed and filled with joy, feeling this was the most special person I had ever seen. My grandmother looked just like the beauties in Paul Gauguin's paintings from Tahiti that I so loved, paintings I first saw in Helga's art books as a twelve-year-old at boarding school, long ago in Norway.

Continuing her story, my mother told us that she and her sister, our Aunt Maud, born earlier of a Vietnamese mother, became ill from the tropical climate and were taken to Europe in 1908. Grandfather had married his childhood sweetheart, Thona Høyer, who was to be the new mother of his two Asian children.

Fred and I had so often wondered about our mother, never fully forming the meaning of these thoughts, never daring to ask the questions that might reveal the truth. A veil of mystery seemed to envelope her. We could not just hold her hand or kiss her powdered cheek. She did not care for that. She never took our hands, never hugged us, never comforted us. My mother never listened to or understood our wishes, our ideas or our views. Her words to us were the law! 'I have never been fond of children,' she revealed to us that same afternoon. And she continued with the words: 'As you know, your father loves children!' This stung us badly.

Now suddenly the forbidden secret of her birth and origin came tumbling out. At last we realized how hard it must have been for her to tell us of these painful things, shut up inside her throughout the decades. She was a master at concealing her past, and only very rarely did we actually get a glimpse of the truth. Once during the war, when Fred and I were children in Norway, Fred whispered to me that he had looked in my mother's passport. 'And can you imagine,' he said. 'It says she was born in Bombay, India!'

After so many years she had finally found the right moment, and the courage, to tell us the real story.

The knowledge of our Laotian roots gave us much to think about, with many new unanswered questions about my mother's heritage. It also made us look upon ourselves with new understanding.

Now finally we could comprehend why, when we were small, the children in Norway had shouted after Fred and me: 'Chinese! Chinese!' Rushing to our parents in tears, we received no answers.

Upon reflection, I realized everything Asian had always attracted me. Now I knew why; Asia was a part of me. My life changed from that day onwards. My eyes, my thoughts and my heart were filled with a deep longing to go out to this remote land called Laos.

'The bird wishes it was a cloud, the cloud wishes it was a bird.'
— Rabindranath Tagore

Chapter 6: On My Own

After the summer holidays my new American friends went back to their studies. My parents wanted me to stay at home and help around the house, with the expectation that I would marry a nice young man. They completely denied my innermost wish to attend art school, in Boston or anywhere else. As a strategy to keep me at home, they said I would have to look after myself financially, thinking this would make me stay.

Remaining at home was out of the question for me. I had to leave and I had to keep on with my art studies. I thought of nothing else but how to get away and how to start a life of my own. Only then might I be able to achieve my dreams, including the dream of one day visiting Laos.

In September, 1950 I left home and headed for New York City. Our dentist lent me $20, the train cost $10, so I embarked with a mere $10 in my pocket. My mother's parting remark as I said goodbye was: 'You will come crawling home!' These words only made me feel strong and more confident than ever.

At the last minute Fred came running down the drive. Catching up with my taxi, he jumped in and said, 'I can't let you go to New York by yourself!'

With Bijou under my arm, we settled, with Fred's help, in our respective YWCA and YMCA on Lexington Avenue. Three days after arriving Bijou was discovered and without further ado I was told to leave, with the following words ringing in my ears: '*Never* in the Y's history has anyone dared to bring a dog along!'

I was determined to manage and get along in my new life. The big city was scary at first and I was miserable among the masses of strangers

pushing onto buses and subways. But I managed to find meagre jobs—selling stationary at Lord and Taylor's department store, working in bookshops—and soon I gained confidence.

With persistence and good luck I got a scholarship at The Workshop School of Advertising and Editorial Art, a fine school with excellent teachers. Ezra Jack Keats, famous writer and illustrator of children's books, was my teacher and became a life-long friend.

I was free at last. I could eat Chinese food, visit the strange little shops in Chinatown, bang the big drum in the temple there. At the great museums I could drink my fill of wonderful Asian art. My dream of seeing Laos one day never left my thoughts.

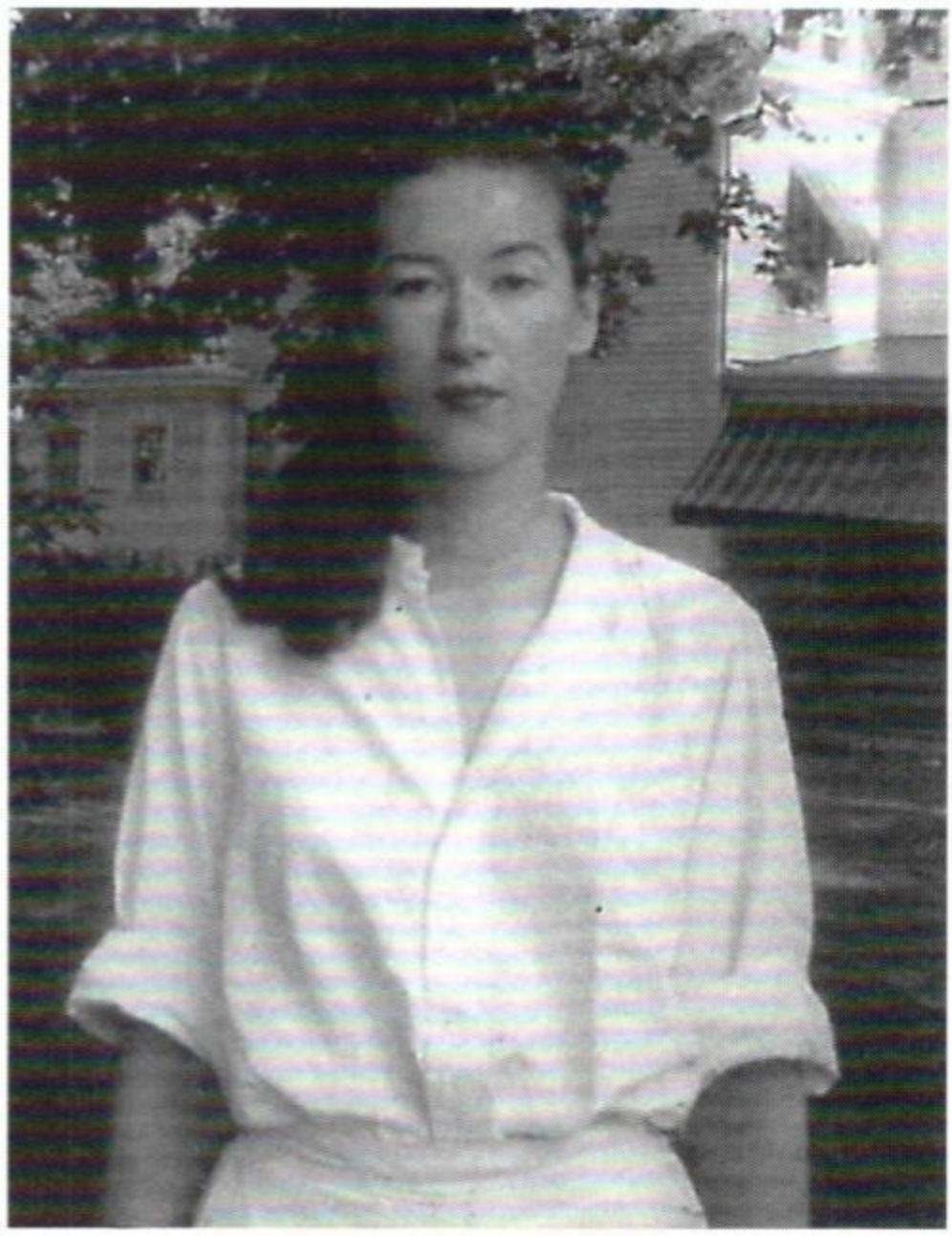
I read about the Peace Corps and Dr. Dooley going out to help the poor and sick in the villages of Laos. I yearned to go there, too, to do something useful and worthwhile, to meet the Laotian people and begin to understand where I came from. Down deep I somehow wanted to find my roots. Yet at this point in my life I was merely an art student, lacking all qualifications, so there was really no opportunity to go to Laos.

Unfortunately, after only six months my art school closed for lack of funding. I did not lose heart, however, and by presenting myself as a person of ability I was able to find work. For the next few years I became the assistant to one of New York's great costumiers, Mme Helene Pons. We made costumes for the Metropolitan Opera's new productions, for the New York City Center and for Broadway shows. I loved this life of the theatre and turned it into my real life, working extremely long hours, then coming home exhausted but happy.

Eventually the old yearning to return to my art reappeared. I left Mme Pons, prepared a portfolio and showed my drawings at advertising agencies and magazines. Work started coming in. I even had my own agent.

When I left for New York, Bambi remained at home, attending high school. My mother had forbidden us two sisters to be in contact after my departure, so I wrote secretely, sending my letters to the home of one of Bambi's classmates. She wrote back and in this way we kept in touch. Later I visited her on weekends at her university campus in Buffalo, New York and she came down to the city as often as possible.

My mother, believing we had grown apart, was furious when Bambi announced that I was coming to her university graduation,. But Bambi held her ground and insisted there would be no graduation without Fleur! I was there. My father gave her a new silver-grey Buick for a graduation present and that summer Bambi and I drove off to Mexico and back. My parents never knew about this.



10A. Fleur, Grenwich, Ct., USA, 1956

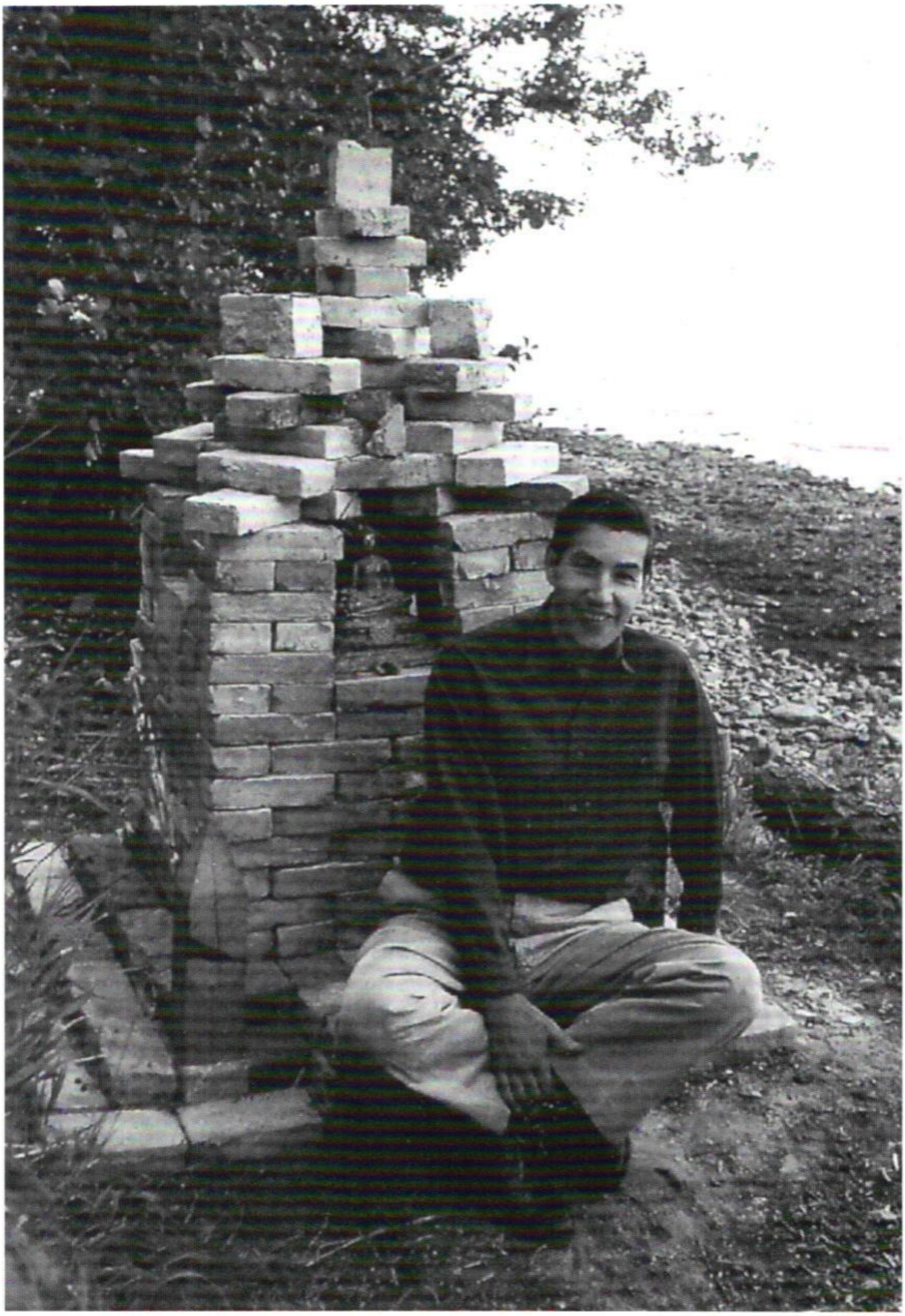
Fred was the first one of us to marry. His wife was a sweet English girl, an artist and competent art director at a prominent advertising agency. They moved away from New York City to a peaceful town in New Hampshire, where their son Alex was born in 1963. Fred continued stamp collecting, as he has done all his life. He is known as 'Norway's philatelic ambassador to America.'

My brother Fred published in 1996 *A Selection of Philatelic Essays*, some of his numerous articles on Norwegian and Scandinavian postal stamps, written over the past 50 years.

My sister Bambi, with her good background in art education, started a job as an art teacher in Connecticut. We all went home occasionally, my mother freferred one at a time, to visit my parents.

My dear father was getting old and frail, understandably after suffering several strokes. They lived in Florida in the wintertime because my mother could not stand the cold weather of the north.

Bambi married Serge Gabriel, a Frenchman, in 1958. My father, thank goodness, lived to see his sweet little granddaughter Claudette—his first grandchild—during the final summer of his life. I, too, finally married in 1959, much against my mother's wishes. He was a painter I had known



11. Fred builds a brick 'Angkor' in our garden by the lake, Denmark. c.1976.

for five years. My father, age 77, died at a home a month after my marriage.

Sadly, my marriage did not work out and within a year I was divorced. My love affair with New York also seemed to come to an end; I had an enormous longing for nature, for earth and grass, for trees, flowers and clean air. Once again I packed up my things, put my belongings in storage and departed, leaving behind life, home, work and friends. Fred and Bambi said to me: 'Fleur, now you can go, you are free and unmarried, you can go to Laos.'

I did begin a great journey, with the expectation of driving through Europe to see the sights until the rainy season in Laos ended, then proceeding to Asia. I even went so far as to buy a BOAC round-the-world ticket, but for a number of reasons I never got to Asia and therefore refunded the ticket.

In London I bought a small car. My first destination was the beach at Blonville in Normandy, site of happy childhood days and the very place where the Allied invasion of June, 1944 pushed the Germans back. I had a little one-man tent that suited me perfectly at campgrounds along the way. Sometimes I slept in little hostels when in need of a proper bath and bed.

In Switzerland, in the Valais, I came upon a remote, narrow, near-inaccessible valley that ended in a huge glacier. Great snow peaks towered on either side as far below people worked their little fields. I felt I had found a kind of Shangri-La of peace and quiet. Small villages with old brown wooden huts, free of tourists and big hotels, welcomed me and gave me the comfort I needed. Climbing in the mountains each day helped me get over the difficult times: the loss of my father, my divorce, the uncertainties that surrounded me. I did not know where I was going and my hopes of travelling to Laos were once again postponed.

'Spring did not forget the tree,
whose branches once were white with frost.'

—Sarashina Nikki

Chapter 7: Denmark Again

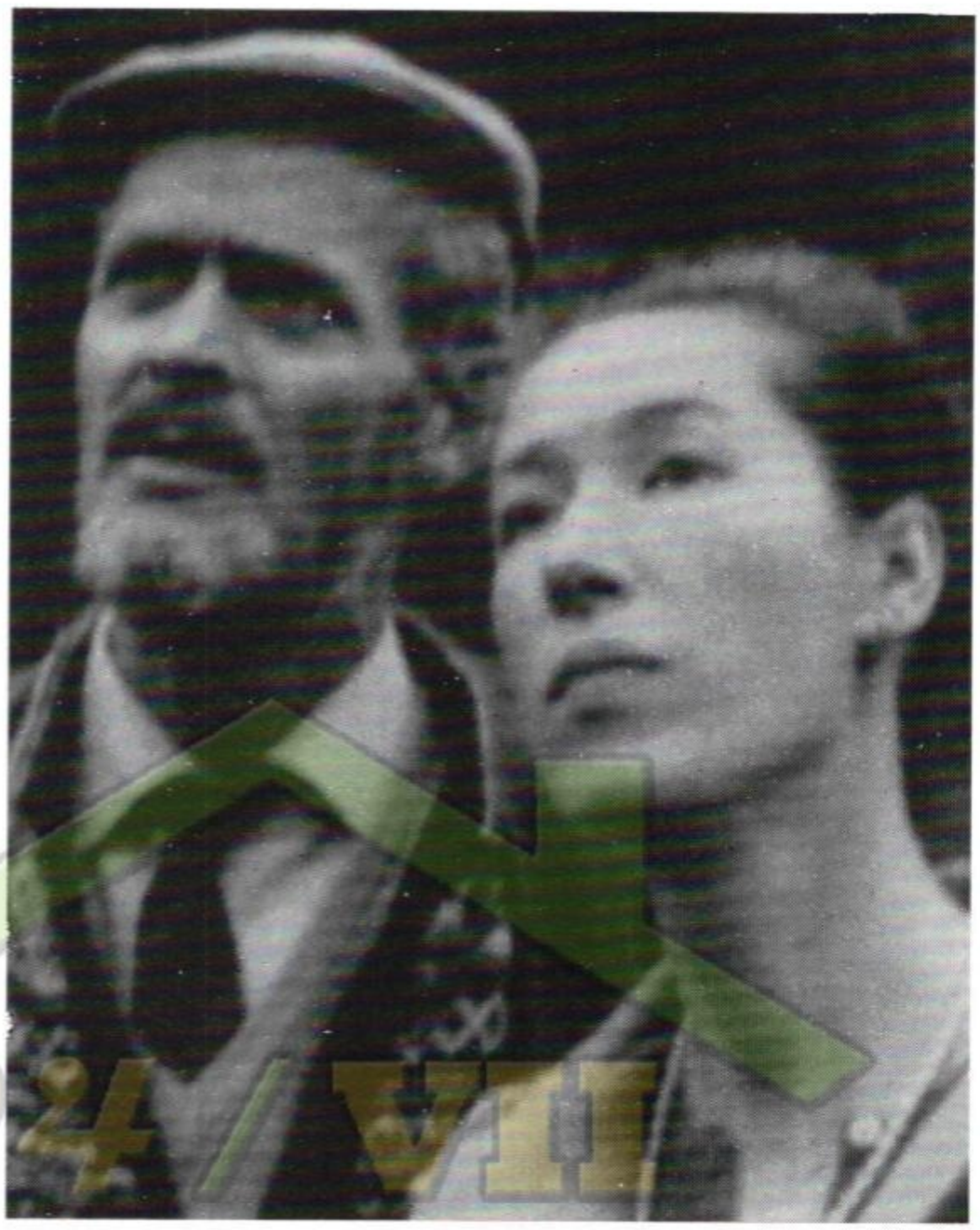
I was happy to have my little house on wheels and my tent. I drifted northwards and finally decided to drive to Denmark to visit my dear aunt, who was now old and alone. I had such fondness for her, feeling that in many ways she was my real mother, the one who truly cared about me. After arriving I decided to settle in Denmark again, making drawings for magazines and advertising to support myself.

After living in a hotel, then in a rented room in suburban Copenhagen, I met a man who in time would become my husband. A year passed—I even went back to try to live in New York—but fate determined that I should meet this older man again. His own marriage had disolved, so a good friendship turned into love and later marriage.

We found an old house by a lake in the countryside, away from the city. I stopped smoking a month after we moved in together. An ancient Lucky Strike pack still lies in a special silver box to remind me of past hectic times.

For years I dared not unpack all my belongings for fear of suddenly moving again. Steamer trunks and crates with books, treasures and personal records remained unopened. Slowly, however, I felt at ease. The awareness of having escaped the skyscrapers of New York towering over me, to live under apple trees, safe in my haven following nature's yearly seasons, these thoughts will stay with me always in thankfulness.

My husband, a renowned Danish illustrator, encouraged me to continue with my art and illustration. In 1966 a little girl with blue eyes and fair hair was born to us. 'What are we going to name our baby girl?' Des and I asked as we leafed through the Danish name-book, from A to Z, trying in vain to decide on a name. Andreas—Des for short—was fascinated with



12. Fleur and Des Asmussen, Fredensborg, Denmark. 1964.

the story of my heritage so we agreed to find a Laotian name for our baby girl. But a foreign name not in the book was unacceptable to the Danish authorities. In any case, the first thing was to find a name.

Des wrote to ask Prof. Søren Egerod, a Sinologist and expert in Asian languages, if he could help us. I wrote to an acquaintance, a young member of the Laotian Mission to the United Nations in New York, to see if he could kindly send us a list of Lao names. Letters from these two contacts arrived almost simultaneously. We chose the name Souvanni because it sounded sweet in both Danish and English. The name means 'little flowering girl' in Laotian.

Des wrote to the Danish Church Ministry and the Ministry of Justice requesting special permission for this beautiful though unusual foreign name, explaining the many reasons why we had chosen it.

We anxiously waited for a reply, as the date of the christening was set and the family invited. At the last minute, just two days before the Sunday christening, we received a positive answer; the ministries had granted permission for the Laotian name. So we called our girl Souvanni, a name



13. Irene (Brofos) Hamilton, with her granddaughter Souvanni, Florida. 1972.

everyone, friends and families alike, enjoyed and approved of. Everyone, that is, except my mother. She never once mentioned the name. In her letters she avoided writing 'Souvanni,' preferring instead to simply use the letter 'S.' In spite of this, my mother was extremely fond of her youngest, and final, granddaughter. She went so far as to tell us that Souvanni was the one most like herself when she was a child.

«O Love—
frail living leaves burn brighter with you
than cold stars.»

—Rumi

Chapter 8: Bambi and Laos

In 1979, nearly thirty years after the fateful summer when we learned of our Laotian roots, my beloved sister Bambi showed me a wooden box which contained all of my letters to her from that period long ago. We had always stayed in touch and, strangely, she envied my life of freedom in New York. I tried to tell her not to, but rather to see the advantages of a good education and the chance to settle down normally.

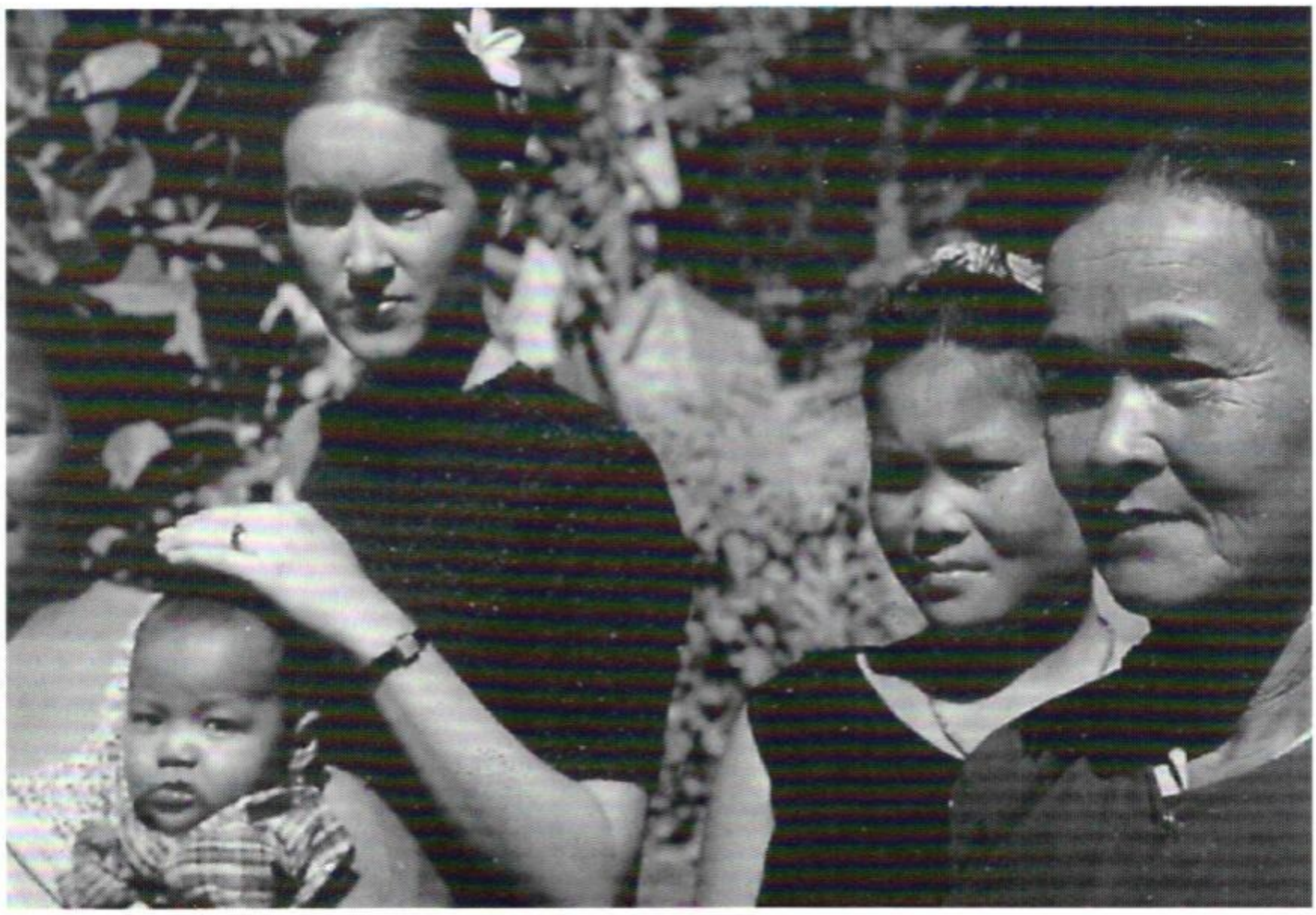
My father wanted her to study Business Administration but she soon switched to Art Education, and after graduating from university she became an art teacher for young children in the US and later Japan.

Through the years the strong bond of friendship and fun between us sisters irritated my mother. She told me later that I had taken Bambi away from her! Bambi was my parents' favourite, a role that could not always have been easy for her. But she always stuck up for me. Once she pertly said to my parents: 'Why don't you give Fleur a proper present for her birthday. She needs a watch!' They listened without fail and I was given a fine Omega. The matter of gifts was always problematic for my mother. On my twenty-first birthday she presented me with a strand of Oriental pearls, taken from her own necklace of three rows. I loved pearls and was thrilled with the gift. Soon, however, she became angry with me for something trivial and took back the pearls. How strange and sad to behave this way, giving a present and then taking it back.

Bambi's first teaching job was in Connecticut. I lived in New York at that time so we visited each other often and almost daily talked on the telephone. After her marriage to the Frenchman Serge Gabriel they settled in Manhattan so we saw a great deal of each other. They eventually had three daughters. Serge had served in the Korean War and when a chance



14. The sisters, Sao Bao and Sao Ming, Laos. 1967.



15. Cousin Sao Chieng with her son (left), Bambi, Sao Ming's daughter, Sao Ming. Ban Mai Village, outside Vientiane, Laos.1967.

came for him to return to a peaceful Far East, to open IBM's Japan office, he and Bambi agreed; this was a wish they both shared. They settled in Tokyo in 1966 to begin a stay of five years.

During this period Bambi and Serge met the Laotian ambassador to Japan. In addition, Bambi met a group of Laotian students studying in Tokyo and greatly enjoyed having her first Laotian friends.

Ambassador Singharajh was fascinated to hear the story of our Lao grandmother and promised when next on leave to search for our living relatives. And, true to his word, he sent news that, yes, he had found our family. Imagine our joy! Two sisters, the daughters of my grandmother Sao Boun Ma, lived with their families as rice farmers in the village of Ban Mai, outside Vientiane. Their names were Sao Ming and Sao Bao.

Bambi and Serge went to Laos to find these relatives in 1967. I will never forget the long, detailed letter she wrote to me after seeing our Lao family. Soon after came photographs of Bambi and Serge among our newly found relatives.

When my mother heard the news she was icy and dismissive. All she said was: 'They must be imposters.' Her inability to accept her past and



16. Old lady who knew Sao Boun Ma (left), Mme Nokham's mother, Mme Nokham, Sao Ming, Bambi, M. Nokham, Sao Chieng, M. Inthavong's sister, Sao Ming's daughter; outside Sao Ming's house, Ban Mai, Laos. 1967.

the fact of Laos seemed tragic to me. For her, Laos was buried when she left as a child.

Dear Aunt Sao Ming, my mother's half-sister, lived in a stilt house made of wood with one large room above the ground and open porches at each end. Mats rolled out on the floor comprised the furniture. Serge, seeing the simplicity of their life and apparent poverty, gently asked Laotian friends from the city if he might give a present, perhaps a sack of rice or a water buffalo. He was told a simple gift of money ($100) would be fine. Rather than being used for material gain, it would pay for prayers to be said in the village wat in honour and remembrance of our grandmother Sao Boun Ma. The money would also pay for new saffron robes and sandals for the monks.

Aunt Sao Ming wanted to give Bambi and Serge a Laotian wedding. This took the form of a *baci* (pronounced 'ba-see'), a traditional Lao festival that brought together people from all walks of life to celebrate a happy occasion. The marriage baci was hosted by a prominent friend of Serge's who lived in Vientiane. Serge describes the wonderful ceremony



17. Bambi and Serge's Laotian wedding ceremony (baci), at the Nokham home, Vientiane, Laos. Mme. Nokham (foreground), Sao Ming, Irene Gabriel (Bambi), Serge Gabriel, M. Nokham. 14 December, 1967.

in a short piece written in January, 1968, after he and Bambi returned to Tokyo.

Baci

On Thursday, 14 December, 1967 we arrived at the Nokham's house at five pm for the baci. *All the guests had already arrived. The Inthavong daughters helped in the kitchen with a number of other people. We proceeded upstairs to the site of the ceremony, where everything was ready and waiting: special flower arrangements, silver bowls on the floor, beautiful rugs and all the relatives, simply dressed, sitting in anticipation. They exclaimed in admiration as Bambi came in dressed in Laotian style.*

We were seated by the huge silver bowls as more and more people arrived, young and old. An ancient, frightened princess, over 90 years old and the picture of death itself, was seated on a cushion in front of us. Then a special band from a nearby village arrived with their native instruments. As the room filled up with more than fifty people, the ceremony began. The women chewed betel nut and throughout the baci they constantly spat red juice into pots scattered about the room.

We were to be married again, Laotian style, said Mr. Nokham. The band leader doubled as a priest, draping himself in a white scarf, going through certain motions and incantations, mumbling while facing the arrangement of silver bowls. Then he took a chicken, cooked by Sao Ming, and put it into Bambi's right hand, along with flowers from the elaborate arrangements. The priest, followed by Mr. Nokham, tied a string around Bambi's wrists. This operation continued for both Bambi and Serge, on both wrists, and was performed by everyone present so that we ended up with strings half-way up to our elbows; our legs were numb from sitting on the floor for so long. Each time a new string was tied the people close by would touch us with a hand to participate in the act. At the end our hands were not large enough to hold all the flowers given to us with each tying.

Then Sao Ming broke up the chicken and fed pieces of it to us Laotian style, with bare fingers. With all the emotions we felt it was difficult to swallow even one or two bites of the meat. Cold cooked rice in special silver boxes accompanied the chicken, also to be eaten with the hands. Throughout the ceremony the audience watched while the band played traditional Laotian tunes.

The honoured guests of the party were served dinner downstairs, buffet style, while the common guests ate upstairs. The Laotian food was comprised of very hot sauces over cold noodles and rice, salad, fresh fruits and many other delicacies. Strangers walked in off the street to eat and the band also joined in. Altogether, the guests represented the extremes of Laotian society, from the very rich to the extremely poor. The result was a very strange mixture. Our family members had probably never been at such a super ceremony; the younger children of the Nokham and Inthavong families had never seen such plain people before. After dinner, everyone joined in downstairs to dance the lamvong *together late into the night.*

After this initial and marvelous breakthrough in finding our Laotian family, Des and I started planning to meet Bambi and Serge in Bangkok. There we would spend the Christmas of 1969 together and then proceed to Laos.

We left the damp, cold Danish winter to arrive in hot, sunny Thailand to meet Bambi and her little family. Souvanni was three-and-a-half years old.

We lived at the Rex Hotel, which had a swimming pool on the roof, while Bambi, Serge and their three girls stayed at the more elegant Oriental. Bambi invited us for Christmas eve, even ordered a genuine Christmas tree for their room. For all of us this Oriental evening proved to be a fairy tale. Hundreds of twinkling lights sparkled in the garden of flowers by the river. Thai dancers performed their ancient, graceful movements to the

sweet sound of gentle music. Delicious smells rose from platters of pungent, spicy delicacies. Overhead protecting us all was the dark, starry heaven of this balmy Christmas night in Thailand.

Our real goal, of course, was Laos, so after a few days our two little families caught the night train from Bangkok to the border town of Nong Khai on the Mekong River. Inside a teakwood sleeping car my heart beat to the train's rhythm, anxiously anticipating tomorrow.

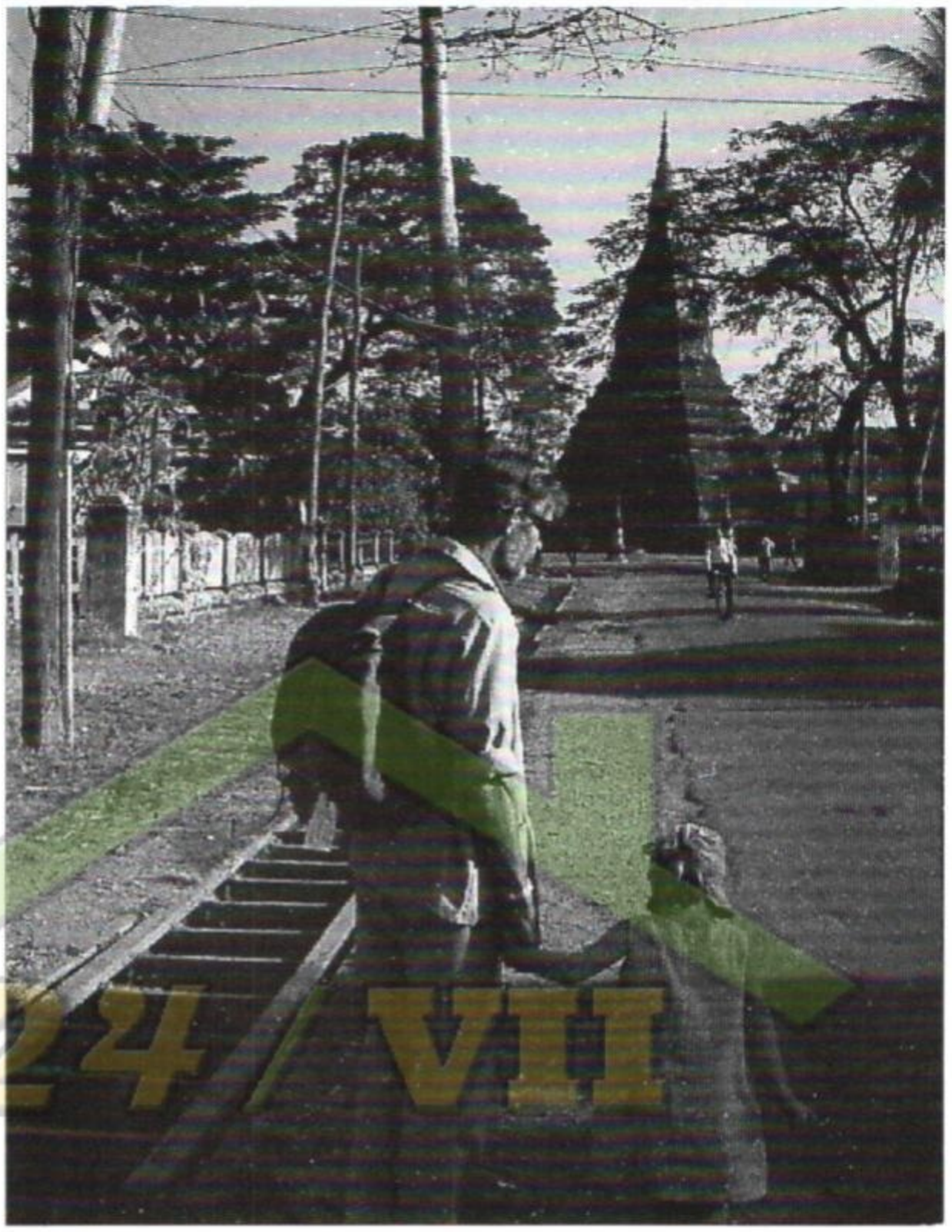
In the dim morning light we awoke to find everything in our compartments covered with reddish dust. All through the night pink-brown powder from Thailand's dry season landscape had entered tiny cracks and settled like a mist.

At Nong Khai we boarded a small ferry, crossed the Mekong in just a few minutes and, climbing up the steep banks on the far side, I found myself in Laos at last. Nearly twenty long years had passed since I first learned that I was one-quarter Laotian, and suddenly here I was standing at last on the soil of Laos!

Our Laotian friends met us in shining black cars and immediately offered us refreshing coconut milk. As the sun rose we drove to the Lang Xang Hotel on the banks of the Mekong in Vientiane. During the first several days our hosts entertained us with wonderful parties and baci festivities, where Bambi and I, our husbands and children learned to dance the *lamvong*, a traditional Lao dance. Special feasts of Laotian food were prepared in our honour. Everyone was so kind to us. The story of our Lao heritage spread to the many people we met. «You are one of us, you have Lao blood!» we were told. We felt like we belonged.

But what about our Lao family and relatives? Our friends told us amidst all the gaiety that there were 'troubles' outside Vientiane. It would not be possible to drive out to visit the family in the village, even with a police escort. They could, however, fetch Aunt Sao Ming, Aunt Sao Bao and their families from the village and bring them into the city to meet us. Bambi, who had seen them all in 1967, felt I should make the decision. 'Fleur, it's up to you,' she said.

Having come this far, would it really be possible to miss seeing my long-lost family? Yet deep in my heart I felt it would somehow be humiliating for them to be brought into the hotel, to sit on the floor, unaccustomed to furniture. Would they not prefer to show us their house and their village? So my answer was no, I will wait. I shall come back to Laos and I will find them again and visit them where they live. What a disappointing decision to make, yet I knew it was right.



18. Des with Souvanni, That Dam Stupa, Vientiane. 1969.

At the crack of dawn, beneath an orange-purple sky, we piled into three cycle rickhaws and left the city of Vientiane along the dusty road on the banks of the Mekong as the cocks crowed and the city was awakening. Descending the many steps to the ferry that was to sail us away, a sadness came over me. Through my tears in those brief moments came a powerful thought: I knew I would return to Laos one day.

Our plan upon returning to Bangkok had been for us all to visit the fabled 12th-century temple complex of Angkor Wat in Cambodia—a journey I had dreamed of for years. My grandfather had visited Angkor four times in the early decades of this century, and I wished to follow in his foot-steps. I felt I was making a connection with Peter Hauff's Southeast Asian past.

Bambi, Serge and their three daughters were to fly to Siem Reap in Cambodia, while Des, Souvanni and I were going by bus. We would meet there to see the great Angkor Wat together. But in Bangkok Souvanni



19. Maud (left), Claudette, Souvanni and Suzette at Wat Pra Keo, Vientiane, Laos. 1969.

suffered from stomach trouble. I did not dare to take her on a long bus ride, in fear of breaking down and being stranded in the rice fields in the heat with a sick child three and a half years old.

The Gabriels went on to Cambodia, and we changed our plans. Instead of going west, we headed southeast, leaving the dusty, noisy city of Bangkok for Pattaya on the Thai coast. We enjoyed a week in our own little bungalow on the beach, and soon Souvanni was well again, happy to experience her first pony rides along the water's edge. This all took place in January, 1970 when Pattaya was still a quiet fishing village.

I was very disappointed not going to see Angkor Wat, but, here again, I felt certain that one day I would get another opportunity. Twenty years went by until I at last managed to see these fabulous temples, after my return to Laos in 1990.

Within a few days of returning to Denmark in early 1970, news reached us that the communist Pathet Lao had overthrown the government, arrested the king and queen and plunged the country into unrest. Now there was no telling when I might be able to fulfill my promise of going back to the country I had only recently come to know and love.

After five years in Japan, Bambi, Serge and the children returned to America, living in Connecticut, but within a few years were on the move again. This time it was Paris, where Serge worked in IBM's head office.

It gave us great joy to have them so near in Europe. Souvanni and I visited the family in Paris, though a dark cloud cast a shadow over Bambi. She seemed unwell and unhappy. We did not know what was wrong and could only remark that she was delicate by nature and had gone through many trials in her life, moving so often from country to country.

For Christmas 1976 our two families decided to meet in Norway for a skiing holiday. This was the last time Bambi and I were together in Norway, a country we both loved dearly, yet one we never spent enough time in as adults.

Bambi was extremely thin and kept holding her hand at the back of her neck, where she felt pain. Could it be rheumatism? Luckily we had a lovely holiday and she told me her great wish to spend Christmas together had come true. Little did we realize that very soon the awful truth would become known. Bambi was extremely ill with bone cancer.

The next two-and-a-half years proved tragic, especially for Serge and the three daughters. Despite the best medical care, Bambi slowly grew weaker and weaker. After being in and out of the hospital in Paris, Bambi and her family moved to a beautiful house in the south of France, in Vence, just above Nice.

Everyone did their best to give support and comfort to my sister. My mother even came over from America, but by this stage Bambi could not stand her. Claudette, the eldest daughter, left university in the US to come to France. She was like an angel, taking care of the house, shopping in the market every day and looking after her mother.

Suzette, the middle daughter, attended ballet school in Monaco and came home whenever she could. Maud, the youngest daughter, attended a nearby French school. She could sit quietly for hours playing with dolls on the floor of her mother's bedroom, a comfort to my poor sister so deathly ill. From her sick-bed her eyes gazed up to the cliffs of the mountain above Vence.

At particularly bad times, Serge would telephone me in Denmark and ask me to come. I rushed down to France as often as possible, each time

to discover that Bambi had changed completely. From being 'the lady of the world,' she now appeared as a small child, prefering us to speak Norwegian.

She liked me to read the stories of Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, Norway's great writer of folk tales, and Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales, especially *The Fir Tree* was her favourite story. I had read it aloud to her since her childhood, bringing tears to our eyes.

Fred managed to come over from America to see her, too. Bambi asked him to burn all of my mother's letters to her.

We had a final Christmas together in Vence with our husbands and children. After blood transfusions and numerous treatments at the hospital, she gained some strength and was able to get up. We took her on drives to the small villages and mountains she loved so much. Bambi begged me to make Serge accept and understand that she wished to be cremated after she died, her ashes to be spread upon the high mountain above Vence which she viewed from her bedside.

In 1979 I was going to turn fifty. Bambi, determined to come to Denmark in May to celebrate my birthday, had bought an exquisite ivory white silk costume for the occasion; this desire for one last celebration helped keep her alive. As May approached, Bambi realized she could not travel. Instead, she asked me to come to Vence, where we could celebrate Serge's birthday as well. At the end of May Des, Souvanni and I arrived in Provence to be close to Bambi. After some days Serge arranged for us to stay in the house of friends, to be even nearer to them. The first night in this house I took a pill to sleep and went to bed at nine pm. Around eleven we were awakened by a neighbour outside calling: 'Mme Asmussen ...' Serge had telephoned urgently saying I must come immediately.

I jumped up, dressed quickly, got in the car and drove off into the darkness, leaving Des and Souvanni to follow the next day.

Finally I arrived at the house. All was silent except for Bambi's doctor and Serge speaking in low voices in the living room. I went upstairs and stayed by Bambi's bed in the morning; she had been unconscious for a long time. The doctor told us it would be just a matter of hours. 'Have a little apple juice,' I said gently. She opened her mouth a tiny bit so I could give her a few drops from a pipette. She knew I had come to be by her side. 'Can you hear Maud playing the piano for you downstairs?' I asked. Bambi's head nodded ever so slightly. It was noon and I heard Serge and the children coming up the stairs to her bedroom.

A sudden change occured as Serge and the girls entered. We all stood around the bed and as we watched in those few seconds, Bambi became

very quiet and peaceful. Her face became serene, slowly her breathing stopped. She had died and was gone forever for all of us who loved her so much, yet her spirit lives on always in our hearts.

We spread her ashes on the mountain above Vence, among the wild flowers, as she wished.

«The sun rises in the East
spreading clouds of gold...»

—B. S. Ingemann

Chapter 9: Return

Time passed. Throughout the 1980s I often travelled in Asia but it was extremely difficult to go to Laos, a country still closed to tourism.

In Stockholm I talked with people at SIDA (Swedish International Development Authority) who assisted with worthwhile projects in Laos, to help the country reconstruct after so many terrible years of war. They sympathized with my earnest wish to visit Laos and to see my relatives, and contacted the Laotian Embassy on my behalf. The ambassador was in Laos at the time, but his wife, Mme. Chaulamany, invited me to visit her one afternoon. She served Laotian delicacies and I thoroughly enjoyed meeting this lovely lady in her home. When her husband returned she would tell him about me.

Unfortunately, nothing came of this initial attempt to return to Laos. More years passed before I tried again. No Lao embassy exists in Denmark so once more I contacted the one in Sweden. I learned Ambassador and Mme Chaulamany had returned to Laos, so I had to deal with new people. They informed me that they could not issue me a private visa—I had to have a purpose for going. 'How about if I wrote an article about Laos, with illustrations, for a Danish newspaper?' I asked. The reply was yes, they could issue a visa for me on those terms.

As luck would have it, I had applied earlier for funding to support a journey to Laos, and suddenly DANIDA (Danish International Development Authority) came through with a positive answer. Step by step I could see my dream materializing, so I started in earnest to plan my travels to Southeast Asia.

Through contacts with editors and journalists in Copenhagen I received the necessary press card, as I would be visiting Laos as an official guest. I had just two weeks to prepare. Among my papers I carried photographs of my grandmother, Sao Boun Ma, my Norwegian grandfather and my mother as a little girl in Laos.

Questions arose nervously in my mind. Would I find my family? Would any of them still be alive after so many years of warfare? Would the government officials in Laos help me? Could I dare tell them my true story and purpose?

I had a brief stopover in Bangkok with Thai friends, then on Sunday, 18 February, 1990 I boarded the fateful flight to Laos. Looking out the window as the airplane descended towards Vientiane, I was full of excitement at the thought of my arrival in the marvelous landscape below. The mighty Mekong curved like a silvery ribbon, thin pencil lines of dry, red earth marked pathways among the emerald green rice fields. At the last moment before touching down the huge roofs and spires of many temples rushed past.

Atop the sky blue airport building masses of people waited eagerly to meet friends, family or foreign aid workers on the daily noon flight from Bangkok. The Laotian women dressed in their graceful, multi-coloured silk *sinhs*. I passed these reunions unnoticed, picked up my luggage, changed money and was the first person out of the airport. Soon a taxi carried me on my way along the only road leading to Vientiane. I felt I was in a dream, really and truly back in Laos in the brilliant sunshine of a beautiful day.

I noticed old and new wats in courtyards shaded by tall palms and enormous mango trees. Then the taxi passed a complex I recognized; in my mind flashed the thought that Grandmother Sao Boun Ma would have brought her children to this very temple each morning, nearly a century ago.

Entering the city, we passed one great wat after another, each within shady gardens, protected by gigantic, brightly painted warriors and guardian demons. On my left stood many old Laotian and French colonial houses that must have been familiar to my grandfather.

The Hotel Viloy, where I was to stay, had been torn down in the recent building boom, so the driver turned a corner down another street. There before us, to my delight, rose the great black That Dam Stupa. How auspicious! A photo I had with me from our first journey to Laos in 1969 was of Des and Souvanni by this wonderful, centuries-old stupa.

I eventually settled in a hotel after changing rooms four times to find one that had running water in the bathroom. It was Sunday afternoon, all government offices were closed, so, unable to reach official contacts, I telephoned my Laotian friends from twenty years previously. They fetched me and drove me to their home, where the little children I remembered had now grown up, married and had little ones of their own. I listened to stories of the hardships my friends endured during the years of war and was happy to hear life again was changing for the better.

On Monday morning, after a breakfast of coffee, juice and a French baguette in the near-empty hotel, I hurried up the street, like all Westerners newly arrived in the tropics, until I realized how ridiculous I was rushing everywhere.

My destination was the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a ten-minute walk towards the Mekong. The Press Office had been expecting me, but at a somewhat later date, so my papers were not yet in order. Everything in Laos takes time. While we waited we made a formal itinerary of places, sights and institutions the Laotian government would like me to visit. I was told they would try to fulfill any special requests I had.

Everyone treated me kindly in these offices so I ventured to tell them about my Laotian roots. Presenting the whole story of my family, I was happily surprised at their interest and concern. Encouraged by this friendly atmosphere, I brought forth my hidden photographs. The officials told me they would do their best to find out whether or not any of my relatives was still alive in Ban Mai Village.

The ministry assigned a young man to be my guide, to accompany me everywhere. A car and driver would take us around. I had to wear on my jacket a press badge with Denmark and my picture and name written in Laotian, 'for my own protection' said the officials, and I was to wear it at all times. My guide took me to see Vientiane's markets and numerous wats, including That Luang, Laos' most important and holy monument.

I telephoned the former Laotian ambassador to Stockholm, M. Chaulamany and his wife, and was invited to tea in their home, situated between two grand old wats. My guide came along, too.

Then we went to see many craft workshops and schools. I enjoyed visiting a silversmith in his village shop. He hammered intricate borders and designs on traditional silver bowls used for weddings and festivals to honour the Buddha.

At several weaving workshops I could see the women weaving such intricate and beautiful designs on their wooden looms. They created a huge range of colours and patterns for the sinh skirts.

At an art school, walking through the painting class, I noticed a yellow-robed monk working on an advertising project! He had been at the school for five years and was the most promising student. Other students drew soldiers with modern weapons.

At the Classical Dance School a group of young dancers rehearsed for an evening performance to be presented to visiting dignitaries from Cambodia. I asked the guide if I could see them dancing in their beautiful golden costumes; he said it would be impossible without special permission. Luckily, my friends the Chaulamanys invited me as their guest.

Every day before my guide picked me up at the hotel I would walk to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to inquire about my family in the village. Every day reconfirmed the slow pace of life in Laos; it always took time to make a *program* or get the proper *permission*.

I had made friends with a Lao family, across the street from the hotel, that had a wonderful textile shop. Almost every day I browsed and admired their beautiful hand-woven fabrics, decorated with patterns of elephants, birds, and fabulous animals. The family members spoke little English, but we managed with sign language. I showed them the photographs and explained about my Lao family, then ordered a navy blue sinh with a wide, bird-pattern border for the long-awaited first meeting with my relatives.

But would I ever be able to find them? The days dragged by and still no word came about contact with the family in Ban Mai Village, just thirty kms away. I never lost heart but I was becoming quite worried about the situation.

«How far are you from me, O fruit?»
«I am hidden in your heart, O flower.»

—Rabindranath Tagore

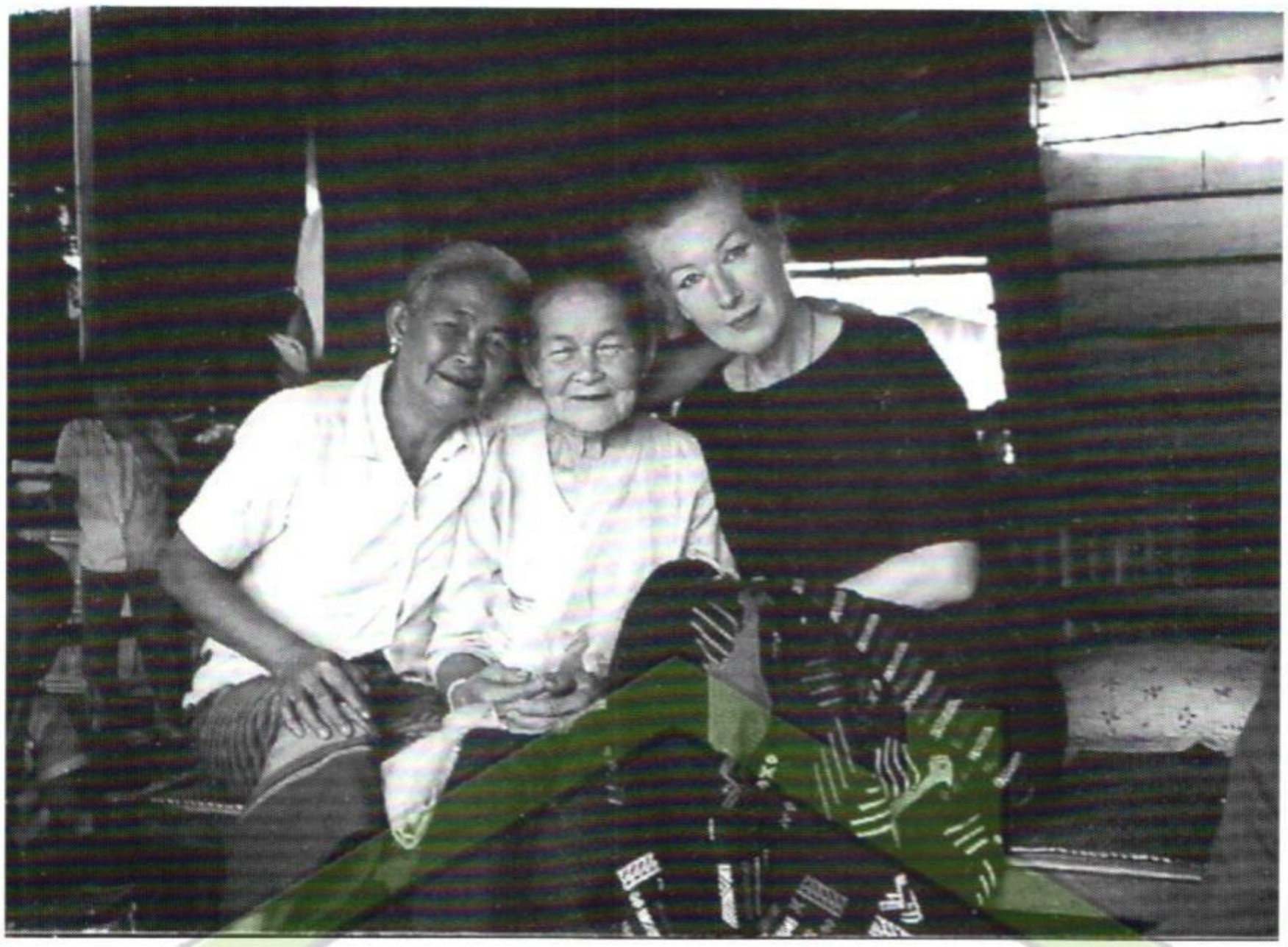
CHAPTER 10: MY LAO FAMILY AT LAST

Then one day in the car, to my utter surprise, the guide turned to me and said my relatives had been found. Aunt Sao Ming was still alive! She remembered Peter Hauff's name and our whole story. I learned I could visit the family in two days, on Friday, 23 February. Exhausted and elated I returned to the hotel—the dream of reunion was almost a reality. I just had to be patient and keep myself under control until I could meet the family.

Friday finally came and the guide arrived with our car. Before driving to the village I went to the open market to buy gifts that would be appropriate for the eventful meeting. I came away with a freshly roasted chicken right off the fire, meat, bananas, a variety of fruits and biscuits. Then we headed west along the Mekong River for the thirty-km journey.

The driver stopped the car next to several wooden houses on stilts, standing on either side of the dirt road. From here a small earthen path led up the hill to to a cluster of houses and the village wat, which resembled an open verandah on stilts, covered with a corrugated tin roof. We were told by villagers that my Aunt Sao Ming was on her way to greet us. As we reached her house and stood by its high steps, we saw a group of women coming up the hill. My eyes sought out my long-lost aunt. There she was! quite bent in old age, carrying a basket under her arm. It struck me immediately that she looked like my mother when she was old. They both had the same intenseness in their looks and actions. This similarity filled me with a strange sensation, but equally it made me feel right away that I knew her, and loved her.

Leaving our shoes at the bottom of the steps, we climbed up to the verandah and gathered on the large, airy porch at the house's far end.



20. First meeting with my Lao family at the old house where my grandmother Sao Boun Ma lived, and where she died in 1943. Sao Bao, Sao Ming and Fleur, Ban Mai, Laos. 1990.

Many people slid in quietly beside the family as we all placed ourselves on mats or on the floor. I think the entire village was there, including all the little children, everyone eager to see this unique event.

Aunt Sao Ming, my mother's half-sister, spoke in Lao and my guide translated for me in English. In measured tones she recounted the whole story again, bringing up names and incidents that I had memorized, which had become part of my own personal lore and history. How amazing to hear it all authenticated by this dear, courageous Laotian woman. The loss of Sao Boun Ma's first child, my mother, was a real tragedy. As Sao Ming explained how my grandfather, Peter Hauff, had taken her away forever, I looked around at all the silent faces of the people sitting on the floor next to me. Tears rolled down their cheeks—we were all in tears, even the driver.

We spoke of many things that day, during which Aunt Sao Ming told me the full history of her mother, Sao Boun Ma.



21. Members of my Lao family on the verandah of the old house in Ban Mai. (top row, from left) Khambay, Chanchan, the monk Ammone (son of Chanchan), young monk from the village; (bottom row) Sao Ming, Sao Bao, Sao Ming's daughter. 1990.

She was born in 1878 in the district of Kamoutasai, now believed to be the town of Nong Bua Lamphu in northeastern Thailand, about twenty-five miles southwest of the major centre of Udon Thani. This area is approximately fifty-five miles from Vientiane.

The name Sao Boun Ma (Miss Boun Ma) means 'the one who brings luck.' At the age of three (1881), she was taken by an aunt to live in the village of Ban Wattai on the outskirts of Vientiane, just beyond the old city walls. The village still exists, though part of it now lies within the bounds of Vientiane's Wattai Airport on the banks of the Mekong.

Eighteen years later, in 1899, Grandfather Peter Hauff bought his piece of land from a riverboat captain. As he went about fixing up his house and property in Ban Wattai, doing errands to establish his new business, is it possible he might have seen Sao Boun Ma fetching water at the well with the other young girls? This, according to family legend, is exactly what happened.

Sao Boun Ma, as a twenty-one-year-old, was brought by the villagers and presented to Peter Hauff. They explained that it was not good for a man to live alone. This girl, who had lost her parents in the war with Siam, was pure and kind and would make a very good companion. Grandfather took her to be his wife.

She was treated like a princess, with high social status, after becoming married to a white man. Sao Boun Ma travelled extensively with my grandfather, often many months at a time in Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam, always carried in a sedan chair. Once she was away so long the local people thought she had died!

On 10 January, 1901 Sao Boun Ma gave birth to their first child, a little girl they named I Kham Tem, Item for short, which in Laotian means 'centre of my eye, full of gold.' In Laos the given name is usually descriptive, refering to such objects of everyday life as flowers, colours, metals or trees. My mother, Sao Ming's half-sister, later came to acquire the European name Irene Louise.

The second child, a boy name Bac Noi, was born in 1904 but sadly drowned in the Mekong River, at the age of two or three, while bathing with his family. An old photograph of Sao Boun Ma, with little Bac Noi on her lap, reveals on the back the following inscription which I copied in the 1950´s: 'Bac Noi, Don Sadom 12 Feb. 1904—(then a drawing of a cross) Vientiane, Laos, March 1907.' The photographer was G.L. Lanté of Saigon. (These dates may have been wrongly copied by me.)

Grandfather wanted to bring Sao Boun Ma back to London with him, but she refused to come, saying she was a Lao and would not fit in. This village girl, with no formal education, understood intuitively that Victorian England would not tolerate such a couple.

As the story goes, after my grandfather lost his little son, he wanted to take his daughter back to Europe to be educated and raised as a Western child. Grandfather asked Sao Boun Ma what he could give her before departing with their child—land or gold. My grandmother firmly said: 'No! Nothing!' Accepting wealth would be like selling her own daughter. Sao Boun Ma stoically lived with the loss of Item, yet for the rest of her life she always thought and spoke of her sweet, beloved first child who was taken away from her to live in Europe, never to be seen again.

She waited seven years for Peter Hauff to come back to her, but he never returned. In the end she married again, to a man named Thit Phoua, and together they had three children. Sao Ming, born in 1912, was the eldest.



22. Lao children at Vientiane, with Bac Noi (right), son of Sao Boun Ma and Peter Hauff.

She asked me if Peter Hauff had remarried. I answered yes, though I believed it was an unhappy marriage, and they had no children.

Sao Ming continued her reflections. Grandmother Sao Boun Ma died in Ban Mai Village in the summer of 1943 at age sixty-five. She was cremated and buried under a large tree on a nearby hill. My sister Bambi and her husband Serge had been to the site in 1967 to pay their respects. Bambi brought me two white stones and a shell covered with the dry red earth of Laos which she found under that tree. I asked if we could go there now, but the family explained that after twenty-three years the jungle had taken over and the tree could no longer be found.

Aunt Sao Ming sat next to me throughout the day, holding my hand, leaning her head against me, looking up into my eyes, all with great warmth and affection. She wondered why my mother had never come to see her. She hugged me and we both cried many times that day.

Sao Ming, when she laughed and smiled her sweet smile, even when she was silent and thoughtful, reminded me very much of my mother. Her left eye is poor, as was my mother's, though this can be expected in a woman born in 1912.



23. My mother 'I Kham Tem,'
later to be called Louise Irene Hauff. c.1904.

She went on to tell me of her own children, of which there were seven! Most still lived in the village, but her youngest son Bounnack, formerly a monk, had married and later fled to France with his wife and three sons to escape the difficult years. That family now lived near Toulouse. A daughter and a number of grandchildren had made the move to Georgia, USA.

Sao Ming was proud and happy about her grandson Ammone Sayavong, who in March, 1990 became initiated as a fully ordained monk. He was there with the extended family that day, a good looking twenty-five-year-old in yellow robes, wearing a pair of glasses. His father (Sao Ming's eldest son) was with us, too, dressed in an army jacket. Peeping out of a breast pocket was a white frangipani, Laos' beloved *dok mai*, the national flower.

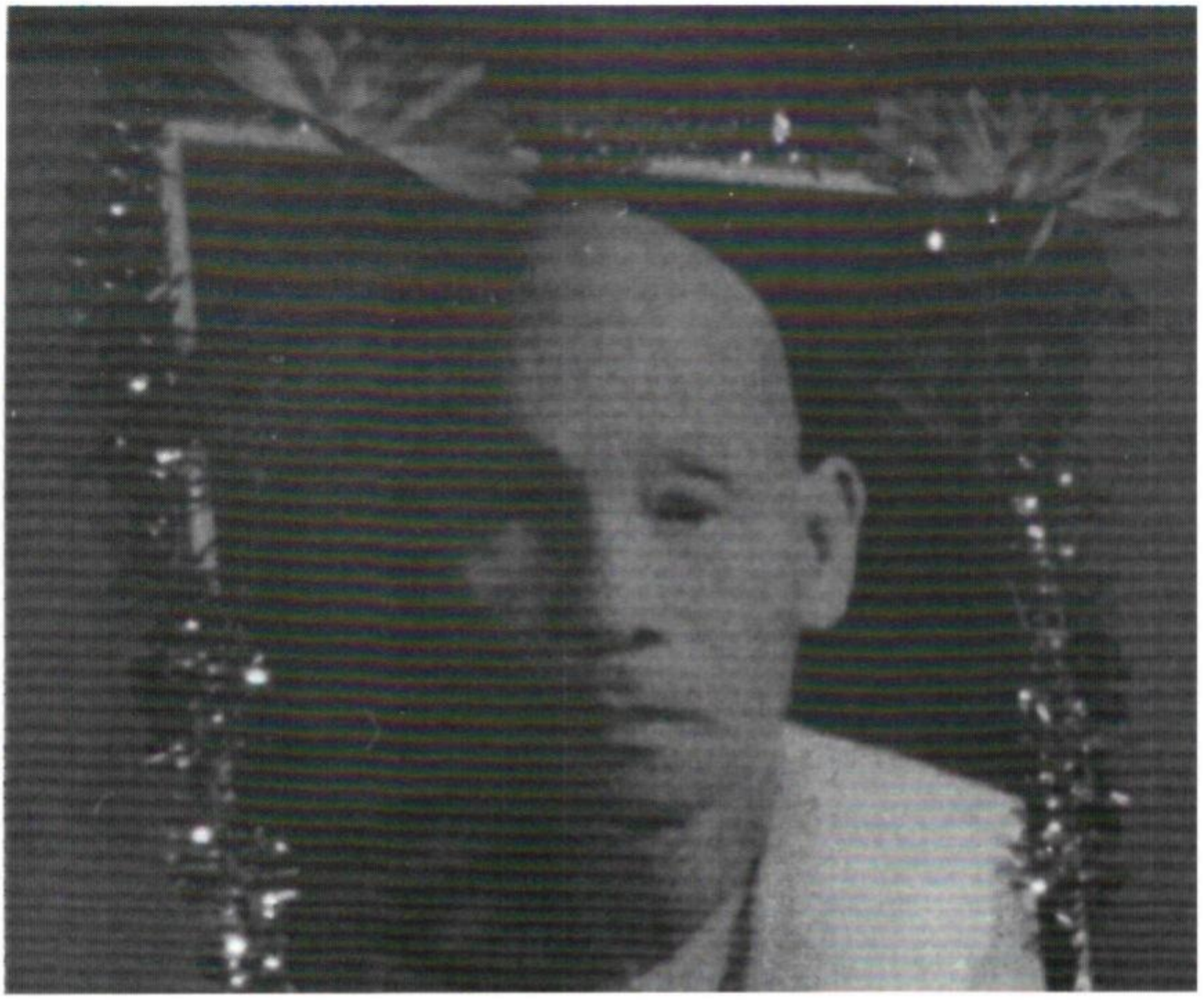
Sao Ming and I tied white cotton strings to each other's wrists, making prayers and wishing all good things to one another, as is the Laotian ritual for important family events.

Then we all walked over to the village wat and climbed a ladder into the temple's altar room. The centrepiece was a large white Buddha, surrounded by a great many smaller Buddha statues. Aunt Sao Ming made an offering of the fruit that I had brought. We women sat kneeling with folded hands while the monks, seated before a platform, prayed for my grandmother Sao Boun Ma. Then we slowly poured cool, fresh water from a deep plate into a large, flat plate while further prayers were said. I heard the monks chant the name Sao Boun Ma at the end, just as the last drops of water filled the bottom plate.

We walked down to the river, where we made a photographic record of this unforgettable family gathering. Sao Ming and I realized that the time to depart had come. In tears we said goodbye, then I drove away in the waiting car, waving to them all, a tiny group of people that meant so much to me. With them was a blood-bond I had found after years of searching, a bond as strong as anything in the world. Our meeting left me with a profound happiness that will stay with me always.

So many wonderful things had happened to me on this trip, and still good fortune seemed to be with me. Before leaving Laos I received permission to visit Luang Prabang, the ancient royal capital. I had strongly wished to see this small city where, nearly ninety years ago, Peter Hauff had started floating great teak logs down the Mekong.

My trusty guide and I took a short flight across the northwest part of the country and soon found ourselves in the almost empty Hotel Phoucy, situated within a garden of shady trees, clusters of yellow flowers and delicate hanging orchids.



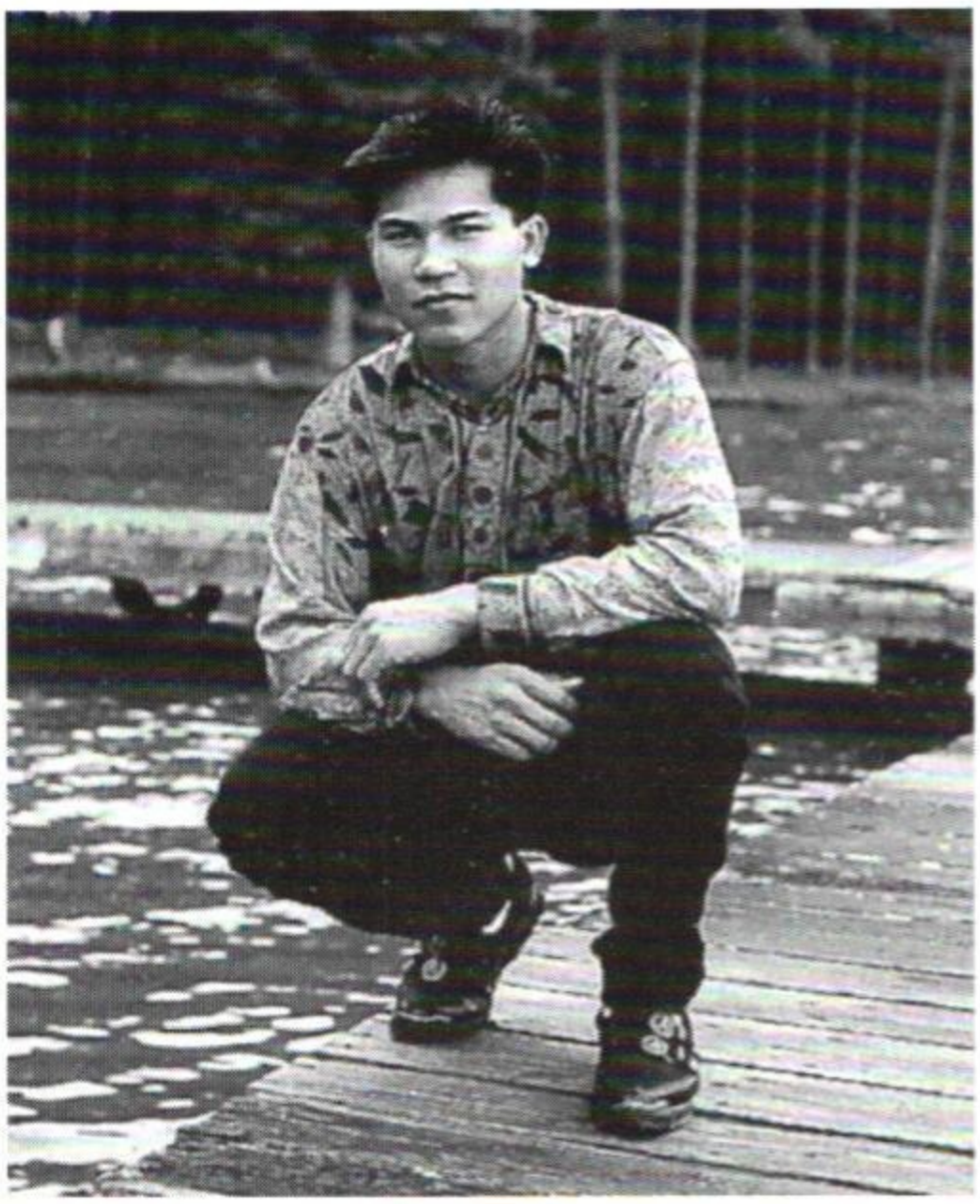
24. Thit Thanh Sayavong, Bounnack's father (Sao Ming's husband).

After dinner we sat sipping a cool tonic in the black tropical night. The guide, a young man of twenty-seven, had been vigilant in watching me ever since my second day in Vientiane. Over time, though, he began to relax and I promoted my trustworthiness by showing a love of nature, birds, butterflies, flowers and textiles, and not poking into politics at all. It became pleasant for us to be together.

As we sat in the garden I asked him to tell me about his childhood, and so he did.

He was a village boy who grew up sixty-five kms south of Vientiane. He remembered the war and the arrival of American soldiers, coming to take the village women. His mother told him to run and hide in the jungle, which in those days was dense and alive with wild animals, boars and tigers.

Nobody worked after sunset; all the villagers went home from the fields, had their supper and by seven pm it was dark and time to go to sleep. Every night they heard a tiger growl in the forest, so all ladders were



25. Lamphay Sayavong, Georgia, USA. 1992.

26. Serge Gabriel with Bounnack, Kemthong Sayavong and their three sons: Seksack, Chackapong, Soutket, Toulouse, France. 1992.



pulled up into the houses on stilts. My guide became terrified when he heard the tiger roar—his mother would say to him: 'Pray, just pray!' He recounted to me tiger tales and ghost stories and loosened up to such a degree that we became friends.

In the daytime a local guide from Luang Prabang accompanied us everywhere as we drove along awful, pitted roads in a blue, jeep-like vehicle. At Mt. Phoucy (Phu Si), a high hill opposite the King's Palace, we climbed the many steps to Wat Chom Si on the summit, from where we got a magnificent bird's-eye view of the entire city and the Mekong River.

One morning we caught a long, narrow boat to take us up river to see the King's Holy Caves, also known as the grottoes of Pak Ou. These famous caves, renowned for their Buddhist sculptures and dramatic setting, lie about thirty kms from Luang Prabang. The 'captain' controlled the engine at the stern, racing our craft past other river boats filled with cheerful women and monks holding black umbrellas to protect themselves from the hot sun. On both riverbanks green jungles came right down to narrow strips of sandy beach. Villages appeared with the roofs of bamboo houses barely visible under thick shade trees. In the distance looking north mountains in various hues of blue rose to great heights. An abandoned American gunboat from the war, hauled up on shore, was used as a vegetable garden. Water buffaloes wallowed at the water's edge as two white butterflies fluttered close together over our boat as they crossed the broad river.

Rocks, currents and whirlpools came and went, and inlets, dark and sandy, where people bent over the shallow water, clearly intent and busy. 'What are they doing?' I asked, thinking they might be fishing. I was told they were panning gold from the river! 'Can we sail over to see them?' I inquired. So we turned the boat for shore, but the moment the people saw us approaching they ran away. We went ashore quickly and the guides reassured them there was nothing to fear. Soon they forgot their shyness.

I carefully watched how these people carried heavy loads of sand to be sifted and panned, backbreaking work that demanded great perseverence to win a few tiny specks of gold. Men and women from the villages come to pan gold in the river to earn extra money when there is not much work in the rice fields. The gold specks are shaped, little by little, into pea-like units which are weighed in grams. They call such a golden pea a hun.

The panners let me try my hand at their difficult work. Soon we all became friends and they all crowded around me, showing their gold finds. I wanted to bring my daughter Souvanni little lumps of gold from these amiable people—a precious souvenir of Mekong River gold! I bought four

gold peas from four different panners, and the gold was then put in a tiny glass jar containing a watery liquid. The cost: $15.

Upon returning to Luang Prabang from the boat ride, I found a smith in the marketplace. I noticed he had only a few plain gold rings on display for sale, but decided to trust him with the work anyway. He took my little jar with the four gold peas, now shaken together into a single lump. In the dim light of his workshop I watched my gold being 'purified,' heated by his blowtorch to a glowing red. Suddenly out of this process appeared a shining golden drop.

I bought a small ring for a young girl's finger and he agreed to weld the drop onto it. 'Do you want me to make it heart-shaped?' he asked. 'No, just leave it the way it is,' I said, thanking him for his fine work, a drop of gold from the Mekong.

".. and who remain shall flower as they love,
Prayse to our faring hearts.."

—Dylan Thomas

Chapter 11: Laos Once More

Souvanni graduated as a designer after four years at Copenhagen's Danish Design School. She then decided to spend a year in London trying her luck in the fashion field, a year full of experiences in the highly competetive field of costume design.

Upon her return to Denmark, she was pleased with my idea that we should go out to Laos together. We both knew the importance of her meeting Aunt Sao Ming, now past eighty, and the other Lao relatives, linking the new generation with the old.

My niece Maud, Bambi's youngest daughter, was travelling in Asia and welcomed the idea of meeting Souvanni and me in Bangkok.

On 2 January, 1992, a cold and frosty morning, the two of us flew from Copenhagen, via Amsterdam, to Thailand. We spent several days seeing the sights of Bangkok, sailing on the Chao Phraya River and visiting golden temples. At the Oriental Hotel, having tea in the garden, we reminisced about the happy times of our first visit here in 1969.

Maud still had to wait for her Laotian visa, but we would meet up with her in a few days. Saying goodbye, we departed Bangkok's steaming traffic chaos and flew to Vientiane.

Souvanni and I settled in a hotel next to the Mekong and, eager to see our Lao family (they had no idea we were coming), we hired a car to drive us to Ban Mai Village. The driver spoke English, which proved a great help in communicating with Aunt Sao Ming. We hired this young driver throughout our stay.

Sao Ming was excited and happy to see us. Her cheerfulness overflowed and once again I felt the strong, indestructable bond that linked our fami-



27. Souvanni, Sao Ming, family and villagers, Ban Mai. 1992.



28. New wat being built at Ban Mai. Sao Ming and family; (top) Maud, Fleur, Souvanni. 1992.

lies together. Sao Ming was still wearing a pair of my small glasses I had given her two years previously. Maud soon arrived and we ventured out again to enjoy another family gathering.

In Vientiane we met a kind Lao-French lady named Mme Dara who was interested in our story. Wanting to visit Ban Mai and meet Sao Ming, she drove us in her car, bringing along many Lao books for the village children. It was wonderful to see such joy in the eyes of all the youngsters as Mme Dara handed out the books, all of us sitting around on the floor of Sao Ming's house on stilts.

Back in the city, we moved to the Lani Guesthouse. The daily room rate included the use of three bicycles; now we could really get around, to the market, the museum, Wat Pra Keo, That Luang and other sites. We bicycled along a narrow path, past the old city wall, looking for any trace of old houses or trees or gardens that might have been the site of grandfather Peter Hauff's residence. One day Mme Dara came with us to speak with the village elders of Wattai, hoping to glean some information of the past. We looked at overgrown plots and old structures, talked to the oldest people we could find, but nothing conclusive turned up. Mme Dara believes that Peter Hauff's first dwelling, the one purchased from a steam-

ship owner in 1898, was now submerged under Mekong waters. Erosion through the decades has caused a steady collapse of the banks, and the river has carried away much of the land that once stood 100 years ago.

Although we never found evidence of exactly where grandfather lived, we felt a kind of peace and tranquillity in the surroundings. As we bicycled along the narrow path, passing bamboo houses and children, calling out sabadee! greetings! as they waved back to us, we perceived the unchanging quality of life here, as if something whole and good in the country had remained unaltered since the time my mother was a child.

Souvanni, Maud and I interrupted our stay in Vientiane with a trip to Luang Prabang. We happily settled into the Hotel Phoucy. Here in the old royal capital for the second time, I felt confident guiding Maud and Souvanni to so many outstanding sites: the Watermelon Pagoda, the King's Palace and National Museum, Mt. Phoucy and the many temples.

We went on the Mekong River boat trip as well, departing on a misty morning so cold we had to huddle together wrapped in thick blankets. Our destination for the day was the King's Holy Caves, an incredible site high above the river. Our small boat pulled in beneath cliffs and rocks covered with dense jungle foliage. Hundreds of steps led us up to the caves. In semi-darkness we climbed on and on to different levels, through rooms and passages that linked the caves together in a honeycomb network.

Feelings of awe and admiration came over me as, entering the cool quietness after bright sunshine, my eyes adjusted to the darkness and saw in the dim shadows hundreds of Buddha images. Some towered into the lofty blackness of the ceilings, other smaller ones clustered in ranks, side by side, extending as far as the eye could see. The dust of centuries lay on the heads and shoulders of the statues, here and there gleaming in gold. What sacred spirits and devotion lie in this holy sanctuary!

Looking down through rough rock openings, framed by cascades of lush, clinging plants, I gazed at the ancient river's golden waters, winding their way from the far off frozen plateau of Tibet. The great waterway, flowing majestically through this land of high mountains, impenetrable jungles and emerald green rice fields, transported me back in time. For a moment I imagined grandfather's small boat, flying the Norwegian flag, gliding by on the muddy waters of the Mekong.

We returned to Vientiane and received the happy news that Sao Ming wanted to invite us once more to her house in the village, this time for a baci. For the occasion she made a beautiful flower decoration, formed by placing twisted banana leaves in a traditional silver bowl. The leaves stuck

up like green candles and were studded with fragrant frangipani flowers *(dokmai)*. Bundles of white cotton string hung from the decoration in preparation for the ceremony of good wishes.

The villagers considered Sao Ming, even at her advanced age, to be the expert in flower decorations. They came to her specially to make their baci displays. In spite of her failing eyesight, she handled the delicate arrangements with ease. She could spin and weave, too, creating cotton spreads to sell to the villagers. Sitting on the floor of her house, she gave us a demonstration at her spinning wheel.

During this last visit, Sao Ming carefully brought out for us to see the only two items remaining from all of her mother's possessions.

First she held up a very large black lacquered bowl for rice. Next came an elegant round box made of nougat coloured wood. The lid and sides were inlaid with 'flame,' multi-hued mother-of-pearl in a pattern of leaves and flowers. Years ago, she told us, robbers had broken into the house and stolen everything except these final memorials to Sao Boun Ma.

My grandmother had owned quite a lot of land from Peter Hauff's days, said Sao Ming, but now it was all gone. Sao Ming herself lives a simple but happy life in the village. She cannot read nor write, but her son Khambay has been a monk and is literate. He regularly sends me photos and news, in Lao, that I have translated here in Denmark by a Thai friend or Buddhist monks at a local temple. Bounnack and his wife Kemthong, both of whom I met in Toulouse, have gone back to Laos to take care of his aging mother, my beloved Aunt Sao Ming.

Their three sons still attend schools in France.

How strange to think that so many people in my Laotian family are spread throughout the world today. It began so long ago when my grandfather Peter Hauff chose to take away his daughter to be raised in Europe. His is a long, colourful and complicated story, and I will let him tell it in his own words.



29. Suzette visits Sao Ming in Laos. August, 1996.

PART II

GRANDFATHER PETER HAUFF'S STORY

Chapter 12: A Start in Saigon

My grandfather's tale begins with the title *A Norwegian Trader's Experiences in Indo-China.*

This invaluable document is almost all that remains of my grandfather's voice. It speaks to me vividly of the experiences and adventures that occured nearly a century ago, and it is also a major part that has helped me solve the riddle of my life.

I sit here an old man, far down in a small village of Southern France, paging through some yellowing notes. The Mekong River rushes again in my ears, and I hear the noise and laughter of happy children playing. These children of nature were my friends, and the saga of my youth again becomes alive for me.

Peter Hauff's father was a ship's captain, so as he grew up he learned of faraway lands, even visited foreign countries. This taste for travel stayed with him, and when at the age of 21 the chance arose for a position in the Far East, he grabbed it.

Boarding in Marseille, he devoured with interest everything the passengers could tell him about the lands of Indo-China, his ultimate destination.

I learned that Indo-China really consisted of five countries, all widely different from each other. Many races, civilizations and languages coexist. A Tonkinese is more different from a Cambodian than a Russian from a Spaniard. One must not think that all these people are wild men. That word 'wild' is almost a curse.

My grandfather quickly adapted to the ways of the East and, far from finding things wild and unruly, was utterly enchanted with the richness and variety of life, even in the seemingly mundane.



30. Peter, Gustav and Lily Hauff with their parents in London.



31. Peter Hauff as a schoolboy in London.



32. Peter Hauff as a young man in London

I came to Saigon one Saturday evening in 1894, and moved into a hotel in the Rue Catinat [Saigon's famous boulevard of shops, hotels and villas]. My first impression was a whirlpool of black clad people. I couldn't distinguish between men and women. They all had long hair; I was surprised to see them sitting on their haunches along the roadside. Later I learned that this was their preferred resting position.

Within two days of arriving he started in his position with a large commercial trading firm. Always gifted in languages, my Grandfather plunged right in learning the dialects of the country. A bewildering array of languages presented themselves before young Peter Hauff. Southeast Asia is one of the world's most complex linguistic areas, with many language families overlapping. Annamese, the dominant language in Vietnam, belonged to the Mon-Khmer language group, Laotian belonged to the Thai. At least seven dialects of Chinese coexisted in Saigon alone, and a huge variety of sub-languages and tongues were spoken among the minority, tribal and mountain peoples of the region.

My Grandfather began with Annamese (standard Vietnamese), learned under the tutelage of a clever colleague named A Koun. Born of a Chinese



33. Peter Hauff playing the horn with friends: Mme. Belland, Dr. Tardif (right), M. de Vaux (left).

father and Annamese mother, A Koun did his best to teach this difficult language, but soon Peter Hauff learned that a more practical—and easier—language lay within his grasp. This was Malay, the lingua franca of the region, especially in the business community.

This is the case because big business is in the hands of the Chinese, many of whom come from Singapore [where Malay is widely spoken]. So I therefore gave up Annamese, and took on instead Malay. Ordinary Malay, the popular kind, is simple and very clear and one can manage with a few hundred words. A Koun spoke Malay just as well as Annamese and Cantonese. He was fond of music and could sing Malaysian folk songs, called pantung, verses of four lines of which the first two anticipate the next two. Here is an example:

Dari mana datang lintah?
Dari sawah di'turun ka kali,
Dari mana datang 'nya chinta?
Dari mata di'turun ka hati.

From where comes the lizard?
From the rice fields down by the river.
From where comes love?
From the eye down into the heart.

This is part of the folk song that opens this book. I found it among his old papers, handwritten in Malay and Norwegian. Its happy lilt and sweet words spoke directly to my grandfather's character and remained throughout his life as a kind of symbol for everything that was free and easy and delightful in Indo-China. The poem's message of love must have held a hidden meaning for him, too.

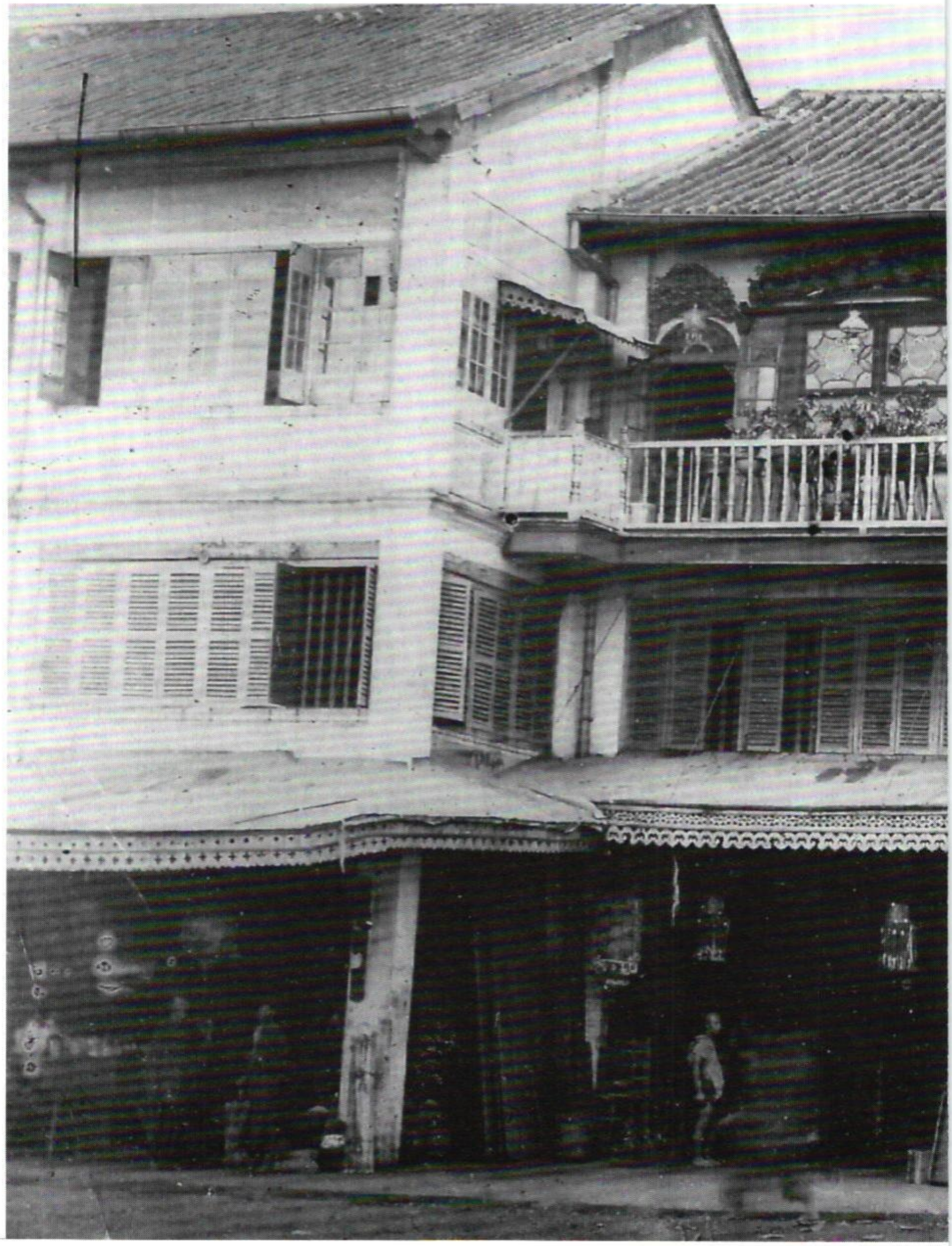
Grandfather went to work diligently every day but loved the diversions and small adventures that Saigon life afforded.

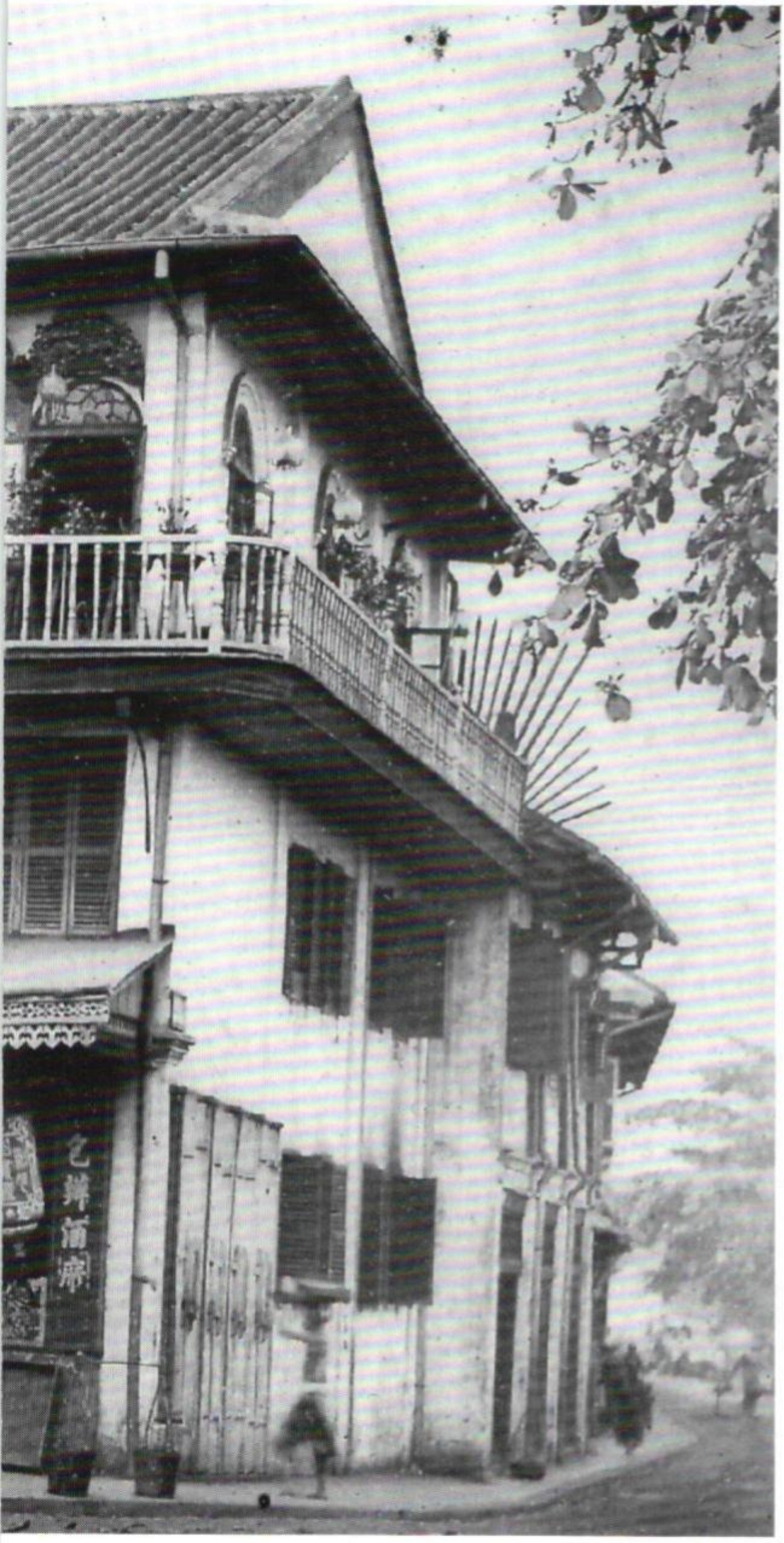
A Koun led me to Cho Lon, the Chinese city near Saigon, which contains over 250 thousand people. It is the business centre; the name in Annamese means 'the great market.' I enjoyed spending my evenings in Cho Lon, made many friends and in time learned Malay and Annamese. I tried also to learn Chinese, but that was much more difficult.

After several months my Chinese friends wanted to introduce me to their private clubs, but insisted that I dress up as a Chinese. I readily agreed to that. There were eight clubs of eight to ten members each, who divided the expenses for a house with restaurant, game room and male and female singers. It was extremely rare for a Chinese to allow a white man to enter his private club.

A friend of mine, Tai Heng, a textile merchant, had a nephew called A Song who undertook to dress me up as a Chinaman, with black hat to hide my hair and marvelous black eyebrows. Of coarse, no beard. In the evening, in poor lighting, I could pass unnoticed. I spoke Malay and represented myself as coming from Peking, in order to explain why I did not speak Cantonese, a common dialect here in Cho Lon. The food was exquisite, the music produced by small girls of seven or eight years old. They loooked like small dolls. Naturally, one must adjust oneself to Chinese music, to falsetto voices and screams that often sound disharmonic to a European ear.

The monotony of living in a hotel irritated my grandfather, so with his youthful initiative he simply made other arrangements.





34. Chinese-style house, Cho Lon, Saigon. 1897.



35. Peter Hauff at his house, with banana trees, Cho Quan, Saigon.

A friend had just installed a distillery at Cho Quan on the arroyo between Saigon and Cho Lon. There, for an inconsiderable sum, I built a small house of planks and roofed it with straw from the river bank. I hired a cook named Nam and a boy called Que. The cook made good food and stole like a raven, but I was satisfied. I felt myself free and happy in my little house.

One day my grandfather was on the docks of Saigon when three great war ships from the Royal Russian Navy arrived in the harbour. He was immediately called upon to organize and provide sustenance, food and drink for these sailors and officers. He was happy to do this work, but he insisted to the Russians that he should be paid in gold coin, not paper currency; this box of coins was duly paid and formed the foundation of grandfather's fortune in Saigon. He already had an eye for the riches around him.

The Annamese are very fond of jewels and never wear imitations. Formerly, one used to see jewellery of silver, but now everyone wants gold. Men prefer to buy gold instead of putting money in the bank. They buy fine gold plates which they bend around a finger. In this way capital is always available. Lately diamonds have become fashionable. The Annamese don't want coloured stones at all. I have seen rich Annamese women with diamonds as large as nuts on every finger and with bracelets of gold and diamonds right up to the elbows

His success in supplying the Russians guaranteed that he would receive further commissions, and indeed during future port visits grandfather was

called upon. He befriended the Russian admiral and in time was appointed Russia's Honorary Consul in Saigon. During one grand banquet my grandfather arrived to discover a garland of rubies and diamonds surrounding his dinner plate! Decades later in the south of France my step-grandmother Thona was seen wearing these jewels, but sadly they have disappeared and no one remembers their fate.

Gold coins, rubies, diamonds—all beautiful and desirable. But one item of great value meant more than all the others to my grandfather. This was a large gold ring that he always wore, because he loved it and because it symbolized a profound friendship. The ring was given to my grandfather by the famous British writer and philosopher Sir Henry Festing Jones. It was dated 1761 and inscribed with the words 'Love Unites, Death Parts.' The origin and history of this mysterious ring were never revealed.

Festing Jones's fascination with the writer Samuel Butler spilled over to my grandfather, who sought out his biography *Samuel Butler* and read avidly *The Way of All Flesh*. This latter book, considered Butler's masterpiece, was published in 1903, a year after the author's death. The book was influential at the beginning of the anti-Victorian reaction and helped turn the tide against too much parental control and religious rigidity. Butler's highly independent character and willingness to question and criticize the accepted norms of his day, and above all his fearlessness in the face of orthodoxy, may have influenced Grandfather and given him courage to go his own way. The tension between freedom and conformity proved to be one of the main forces in my grandfather's life.

Grandfather and Henry Festing Jones remained life-long friends. Peter Hauff chose him to be my mother's godfather, and she in turn was extremely fond of him, calling him 'Uncle Hoppy.' Grandfather later went so far as to name one of his great Mekong River log boats *Hoppy*, in honour of his British friend.

Chapter 13: Boats and Water

My grandfather was up before dawn every day to walk to Saigon's riverbank. Here before him, stretching in both directions, was the grand activity of the river, boats large and small, sampans, steamers, lighters and ferries, all loading and unloading goods of every description. He soon had many friends. Everyone knew him.

I always got up at five o'clock in the morning, and for fun I made a sail canvas canoe with which to travel around on the river at Saigon. Part of the night I often spent chatting with the fishermen. An offer of a cigarette was enough to make an acquaintance. After two or three years I spoke Annamese fluently; that I spoke their language gave me great prestige and assured me of their confidence.

My boss heard about my forays on the river and forbade me to risk my young life pointlessly. He was very angry; one does not do that sort of thing! To be honest, he was right. The river at Saigon is treacherous. If one falls into the water one risks remaining there. The incoming tide is salt water, which is heavier than the fresh water that comes down the river. The conflicting currents and densities cause whirlpools. If one falls deep enough so that the salt water current gets hold of one, then one can be taken down and drowned. All the same, I was a good swimmer and did not let myself be frightened.

Peter Hauff, at ease on the river, quickly became knowledgeable about the dangerous waters and the life of the fishermen. Though he didn't know it at the time, the sum of these experiences became terribly important as preparation for his future adventures on the mighty Mekong River.

By far the most important feature of Indo-China is the Mekong, 'the mother of rivers.' It has a huge delta with hills and mountains, un-



36. Peter Hauff in his skiff at entrance to Lai Thien, on the waterways outside Saigon, Cochin-China. 'Had not got the topsail up yet.'

doubtedly former islands. The whole country is cut through by canals and arroyos, which are natural canals formed by tidewater. The Mekong has seven outlets and as the tidewater rises quicker in one than another, it causes a continuous change of current. During the dry season, the water level falls all the way to Cambodia, but during the rainy season the Mekong brings such an abundance of water that the country is partly inundated. These huge masses of water bring along sand and mud in such quantities that Cochin-China grows by a metre a year along the shore. The shoreline is overgrown with bushes and mangrove trees. It is worth noting that the Annamese call the country nuoc, meaning 'water.'

He had a natural ability to make friends with the locals, and he had a keen eye.

The fishermen interested me. They made hooks of brass wire with a long bone thumb. The fish were greedy and swallowed a good part of the bone thumb together with the bait. They also used nets, and other very effective methods. At high tide they close off the small arroyos with bamboo weaving and pick up the fish with their hands when the water drops. Or they paddle along the banks at high tide in long, swift boats, each with a white painted plank on one side and an adjustable woven bamboo mesh, shaped like a comb, on the other side. The fish, frightened by the white plank, jump in panic against the comb and fall into the boat.

My grandfather so obviously loved the floating world of the waterways and its special sights, habits and surprises.

A large proportion of the population lives all the year round in boats and, as all transport is made by water, hundreds of thousands of craft of all sizes are constantly on the move. Whole families live on board, the husband and children rowing and the mother steering. They row standing, as in Venice, and the mothere steers by directing the rudder with her feet. The boats are of three or four different types and most have a mast and sail made of matting.

The Annamese paint a pair of eyes at the bow of their boats and make these eyes look as natural as possible. They make two round symbolic signs which they call mac treui [better known as the yin-yang symbol], the celestial eye. The outer circle means 'the universe, the Absolute All,' or, according to Chinese philosophers, the 'Great Nothing.' This circle is divided into two equal parts by a curved line, shaped like an 'S.' Each part is painted differently, for example one part red and one part blue. In the red part there is a blue spot and in the blue part there is a red spot. The esoteric meaning is this: the universe consists of contrasts of opposites which, however, carry the possibility of evolution and change. Each element contains part of its opposite. If red is good and blue its opposite, then some bad will always be in the good and vice versa.

Small steamers are being used more and more, but firewood and coal are often too dear and it seems certain that oil motors will replace steam engines before long. Sharp competition exists between native-owned boats and the French steamship company, Messageries Fluviales, which is handicapped by rules that insist on French officers in command. The company's boats are of course cleaner and more comfortable, but the majority of the travelling public is native and insists upon neither cleanliness nor comfort. The Annamese travel a great deal and always have a huge quantity of luggage, consisting of the most astonishing things. Besides useful articles, they bring all their cherished belongings: clocks, glassware, musical instruments, pet monkeys, dogs, birds. The boat deck is crowded with people. Some eat and drink, others wash themselves, do their hair, sing, play and gamble. Some even delouse each other as a pastime.

On native boats there is generally a small room reserved for opium smoking. Opium is sold in small tins, looks like thick wood tar and is smoked in the usual way. This involves holding the opium in suspension at the end of a long needle, dried over a small lamp, rolled into a ball



37. Boat race on the Mekong, with twenty men standing and rowing.



38. Boat race, Luang Prabang, Laos.

about the size of a pea and placed over a small hole in the head of the pipe. This is held over an oil lamp and the smoke is deeply inhaled. An opium smoker can always be detected by his brown nostrils. The preparation of opium has been made into a state monopoly and the price is kept so enormously high, increasing every year, that the use becomes impossible to most people. The raw material comes from India and is prepared in Saigon.

There still exist some boats driven by a tread-mill, kept in motion by a stern wheel powered by six or eight men. These boats have one great advantage, being able to go in exceedingly shallow water, but they do not make much speed against the current and are rapidly disappearing.

In 1904 Cochin-China was ravaged by a typhoon, an extremely rare occurrence. The tremendous wind caused immense damage to life and property, and since that year the waterways have become infested with a floating plant called luc binh [a kind of water hyacinth], bearing pretty light blue flowers but in such quantities that they cause serious obstruction to navigation. Even small steamers get stopped by masses of luc binh that float up and down with the tide. The plant withers in salt water, but it has probably always existed in small quantities in the quiet backwaters; it was the typhoon that tore it loose from there [and spread it throughout the waterways]. Many schemes have been tried to rid the country of this plant, all to no avail. People have even tried to make use of the water hyacinth, for it contains fibres in the spongy leaf stalk that can be made into paper, but even this has been abandoned because it did not pay.

One year there were some great festivals in Saigon and my chief was president of the festival committee, so I got the job of organizing the boat races. Racing canoes came from all parts of the country, some up to eighty feet long with a crew of sixty men. When the races were finished I managed to get forty of the best men to take me for a trip up the Saigon river to Thu Dau Mot. The speed was so fast that we passed everything afloat, including steamers. In the afternoon we took a rest at a small village and the Annamese population became scared because they thought we were pirates. The rowers were mostly Cambodians and Tiams from the western provinces, much darker than the locals.

Navigation is not very difficult for a good pilot, but he has to be wide awake. Large rafts of timber and big lighters of paddy (unshelled rice) drift along with the current and cannot possibly be steered in time to avoid accidents. Now and again one meets a man sitting in the water, up to his armpits in mid-stream, just floating along. He is freighting bananas, huge bundles of stems that float in mid-water just below the surface.

Chapter 14: Agriculture and Food

My grandfather enjoyed the out-of-doors and took an avid interest in agriculture. Food preparation and dishes, tobacco and betel, animals and spices—all closely linked to agriculture—clearly delighted him.

Cochin-China is an agricultural country which produces an over-supply of one million tons of rice annually. The government continues to open new waterways to make possible the cultivation of new land, especially to the southwest, towards the Cau Mau Peninsula.

Rice is the most important food. A daily ration consists of 500-800 grams of rice and the food is so heavily spiced that as much rice as possible is swallowed. The Annamese use chopsticks just like the Chinese. They eat a lot of fish, more rarely meat and then mostly pork or fowl. An unavoidable addition to the menu is a sauce made of rotten fish. It is called nuoc mam and is made thus: a large bowl or jar is filled with small fish recently caught. The fish are strongly salted and the whole thing is put away to rot. The juice or sauce that results is the nuoc mam. The most prized sauce comes from Phu Quoc, the large island far to the west off the coast of Cambodia. Lemon juice is added to the sauce, with a little red pepper. It doesn't taste so bad, really—but the smell!

Much food is eaten in a raw state, fruit green and unripe. Annemese always have a stomach ache, and that is not to be wondered at. Green mangoes, dipped in nuoc mam, would surely not be recommended by doctors anywhere.

They are an agricultural people and the cultivation of rice has been well organized since time immemorial. The sowing is done as soon as the lowest rice fields are wet enough, at the beginning of the rainy

season. These fields are prepared with plow and harrow drawn by water buffaloes, until the soil becomes liquid mud. The domestic buffaloe is a large, powerful animal, yet is led easily by even small children. It can be very dangerous to people dressed in European clothes. These buffaloes have formidable horns and can use them.

The fields are divided into patches by mud banks, according to their level, so that water can be let into one patch from another, or let out and away, in order to keep the water level at a steady height. If the rains are insufficient, water is brought up from the nearest channel by human power. Generally, a triangular bamboo basket, made water-tight with resin and wood oil, is worked by two men. Each controls two ropes fastened to the basket. The work has to be very rhythmical in order to tip out the water at the right moment. There are also other contrivances, a bucket fastened to the end of a pole, worked as a lever, and in some parts water wheels are used. Very rich people have begun to use motor pumps, but they are too expensive for the common people, who content themselves with prayers for rain at at the pagoda. When the rains are altogether insufficient it is a disaster for the whole country and nothing can be done.

When the young paddy becomes about a foot high and the rest of the fields are ready, the shoots are pulled up by the roots and tied into small bundles for re-planting. This is a very busy time and people from one village come to help their neighbours. Hundreds of boys and girls, men and women, with trousers pulled up, form long lines. Small children follow the advancing line, handing the ma [young paddy] which has already been placed in heaps all over the field. The planting is done in a cadenced rhythm to a melody which everybody sings. The planting is mostly done by moonlight and it is a true marvel to see how quickly and precisely one field after another is planted. The owner of the field has to feed all the people who helped, and great fun and rejoicing take place. In the space of a few days huge areas are planted, and in a few weeks the whole coutryside is covered with tender green plants as far as the eye can see. Rains do not fall evenly over the country and one province may be able to supply another with ma at the right time.

The paddy of Cochin-China is usually classed in three sorts: gocong, having round, short grains; vinhlong, having round, long grains; and baixau, with long, narrow, hexagonal grains. This latter is considered the best quality and is known in America under the name pychow. There is still another kind of rice, very glutinous, called nep. It is used

by the natives for distilling alcohol and is the kind most common in mountainous districts, as it does not need to grow in water and is often called 'mountain rice.' One variety of rice becomes red instead of white and is considered poor. Very happy trials have been made with 'floating rice,' a plant that grows in water without having its roots in the soil. It is considered precious in areas where the land is inundated by the Mekong during certain times of the year.

All this rice far exceeds the consumption of the country, and exports from Saigon are up to one-and-a-half million tons per year. Rice mills, once existing only in Cho Lon, are now being put up all over the country. Some are very small, producing only ten or twenty tons of milled rice per day. The Annamese have profited by milling their own rice, but rice produced in small quantities causes difficulty for export. Large quantities must be of similar or uniform quality, and it must necessarity be sold according to sample. Thus the system of many small mills has its drawbacks. Chinese merchants overcome this difficulty by buying up small quantities from all sources, then mixing the rice to get a uniform quality.

The French government has made great efforts to incite the population to cultivate things other than rice, because a difficult rainy season often means disaster. The efforts have had good success and maize is now regularly produced. Sugar cane and pineapples are produced in increasing quantities and modern sugar refineries have been started.

Pepper is grown in very large quantities in the western provinces and especially in the district of Kampot, Cambodia. Black pepper is the fruit that has been left to dry with the skin on, and white pepper the fruit without the skin. To turn black pepper into white is a simple matter. Black pepper is put into warm water until the skin falls off. It is said that 'natural' white pepper is also found, in this way: A certain bird eats the ripe red berries but only digests the outer skin. The remainder—the white pepper—passes through the bird and can be gathered up under the bushes. I hasten to say that I have never verified this story, but it does not sound impossible. Large amounts of pepper are sent to Singapore and re-exported from there, but the bulk goes directly to France.

Rubber planting has developed remarkably and it is now admitted that the soil and climate are excellent for this purpose, especially the red soil in the northern and eastern parts of Cochin-China. When the industry started, coolies were imported from Java to undertake the

delicate job of tapping the rubber trees, but now Annamese labour is used.

The preparation of fish oil has also been developed and exports are increasing. This industry is still primitive, and the Annamese only work this when they want a day off. The family takes itself to the riverside. Grandma is settled down beside a large cauldron and plenty of dry wood. The whole family then start catching fish, which they throw into the boiling water. Grandma keeps the fire going and skims off the grease. This is put into empty kerosene tins and sold to the nearest Chinaman.

A strange fish, completely inedible, is called thoi loi. It is ugly to look at, with protruding eyes and slimy skin. It becomes a dirty grey colour when dead. When alive it is the colour of mother-of-pearl. The largest I have seen measured eighteen cms. This fish is amphibious and jumps around in the mud at low tide. I have even seen thoi loi on a country road in full sunlight. I told an English skipper about this fish, but he took my story to be a great fisherman's joke and asked me how much whiskey I had drunk when I 'saw' these fish. The next day I collected five or six thoi loi in a tin can and placed it on the deck of the skipper's boat—he was amazed.

The fish of Cochin-China usally have a taste of mud, but there are also masses of delicious lobsters, crabs and shrimp.

New land was cleared far from Saigon in the north of the country, in a region inhabited by Khas; the Annamese called them Moi. I once went north with ten oxcarts of merchandise, eight days journey from Saigon, and saw some Moi villages. These people are much more shy than the Khas in Laos and cannot speak Laotian. Both men and women go nearly naked, having only a thin strip of cloth, three inches wide, around the waist and between the legs. Like some Kha tribes in Laos, a 'village' is merely one long building, with fireplaces along the middle and mat partitions with women and children on one side and men on the other. Their great preoccupation is to procure salt. These Moi journey in large groups for many weeks to the seacoast to buy salt from the Annamese. They are peaceful, but other tribes farther inland are very hard to deal with. They murder any Annamese on sight, and white men, too, if they can. I have a friend in the forest service whose business took him to such villages. He always had a good escort and was not molested, but the tribal people abandoned their villages soon after his visits and penetrated further inland.

I had some good shooting in these northern areas, where game is plentiful: elephants, tigers, panthers, deer, wild buffaloes. The latter are the most dangerous of all because they always move in large herds and charge immediately. Snakes abound, also, but I have never been bitten.

Peter Hauff recorded habits and details of daily life that took his fancy or struck him as particularly interesting or entertaining.

One can see young girls who are absolutely beautiful. Unfortunately, they destroy their eventual beauty by chewing areca nuts with betel leaves. The chewing produces a red juice, which is not swallowed. Therefore, all houses are equipped with enormous spitoons, even on the tables. Men smoke cigarettes but also chew betel, and this colours their cigarettes. For an unknown reason they do not throw away the cigarette butts. Instead, they stick them wherever they can, in a fence, on a wall, in a tree trunk. I had difficulty in training my cook from decorating the kitchen in this manner.

The Annamese cultivate tobacco for their own use. They use all the leaves of the plant and their tobacco is very strong—moreover, it has a disagreeable smell, and great quantities are consumed. Tobacco is mostly used in cigarettes of a local type. The paper is rather thick, sold in rolls. A cigarette contains very little tobacco and much paper. A small pinch of tobacco is put on a leaf of paper, which is then rolled diagonally and the loose end without tobacco hangs conveniently from the lower lip and soon becomes red with betel juice.

CHAPTER 15: ANNAM AND COCHIN-CHINA

The true Annamese, living in Annam, are very different from the ones in Cochin-China. Annam is an old state and remains semi-independent, ruled by an emperor, nominated by the French. The treaty placing Annam under the French Protectorate was signed in 1883, but the people were so used to being under Chinese dependency that they have yet to understand French methods of government. The Annamese mandarins and officials have always used the people for their own benefit and are loath to give up this prerogative. The French employed every means to make it clear that Annam was no longer a vassal of China. The entire court and all the mandarins were gathered together to witness the destruction of the huge seal, which had formerly been brought in great pomp from China. It was a magnificent block of gilt silver, weighing nearly fourteen lbs. In their presence the seal was melted to show it had no further use.

Sensible Annamese do not hide their satisfaction in having a stable administration instead of being at the mercy of the dishonest mandarins. They appreciate communications, schools, hospitals, etc.

In the olden days, only mandarin administrators were allowed to own an umbrella. Now everyone may have one, and no Annamese is really happy without an umbrella.

The capital of Annam is Hue, a large and beautiful town about twenty miles from the coast. It was begun in the twelth century by King Poklong, and still retains a city wall some eight miles in circumference. Within stands the Imperial City, with very fine gates, numerous buildings and the emperor's palace. Farther up the river lie the splendid tombs of the royal and imperial families.

The emperor of Annam, invested in theory with unlimited power, oversaw the elaborate ceremonial at the imperial court. The potential for corruption and abuse of power was great as well. When the Emperor Thanh-tai exceeded all limits, the French government was forced to step in to stop the outrage. He lived within the high walls of the palace and amused himself in his own way. One story claims he allowed a pregnant woman to be cut up, just to see 'what was inside.' Another states that he enjoyed the terror created when he drove naked girls into a walled garden and shot at them with a saloon rifle. Each year at Hue a fight was arranged between an elephant and a tiger. I was told the tiger had its claws cut, but even so one of the two animals usally got killed. The French halted these excesses and deported the emperor from Indo-China.

The Annamese are very good mechanics and become wonderful chauffeurs. They are interested in all kinds of machines. Oddly enough, rather a lot of them are left-handed. It is well known that they are very clever at embroidery. On the whole the Annamese are patient and make an effort with all kinds of handiwork. Wood carvings, inlaid with mother-of-pearl, are beautifully executed.

The Annamese use coconut oil for their hair and when this oil becomes rancid it causes an unpleasant odour. They go barefooted, but wash their feet at all opportunities. In front of every house there stands a jar of water and a basin for foot washing. Young people bathe willingly, but they do not take off their clothes and they do not use soap. Those who live in towns and villages are usually cleaner than those who live in the country.

Men and women are clothed in very wide trousers of silk or wool, always black, except when in mourning when they dress in white. Round the waist is a strip of material, usually red for women and white for men. It is sewn onto the trousers and functions as a belt, held fast with a knot in front. The jacket is almost the same for men and women and always black except for special occasions, when the men put on several jackets of varying colours. Lately, they have been using small short vests. Ceremonial clothes are always of silk and always well sewn.

If a woman is attacked by another, it is always the hair knot and the trousers that go first. The women are the most pushy and can make a monkey blush. It often happens that they more than literally 'get into each other's hair.' I have seen many fights between women, and the battle was not over until one had pulled the trousers off the other.

The people have several terrible methods of revenge. Under each knot of a bamboo there are small white 'hairs,' hard as glass. These are collected and put into the food of a victim. The insoluble hairs soon perforate the bowels and symptoms appear that mimic dysentery. No medicine helps and the victim then dies after several months of misery. Annamese have told me that finely chopped tiger's bristles achieve the same results as the bamboo 'hairs.'

Annamese are very cruel to animals. I have seen children pluck a chicken alive just for fun. They play with kittens and small dogs, but when the animals grow up nobody cares for them and half-starved dogs are a great nuisance everywhere, being a danger to public health.

The Annamese are above all gamblers. The government has forbidden gambling games, which naturally makes them only that much more exciting. They play and bet in all possible ways. I have seen people stand in front of a church and with excitement watch the movement of the hands on the clock tower. The gamblers were betting on whether it would begin to rain at a particular time. They also bet on whether the license number on the next car to pass would be odd or even. Horse races and cockfights are watched with the most lively interest. I have seen a cockfight where the bets surpassed twenty thousand dollars.

Most Annamese live in bamboo huts with roofs covered by straw or large leaves. The roof is very thick and protects better against the heat than tiles. But it is a little disappointing that the roofs also form a favourite resort for snakes, mice and all kinds of creepy-crawlies. The houses have no windows and are always half dark, which actually makes a nice contrast with the blazing sunshine outside. The front of the house is covered with large sheets of woven bamboo. They hang on hinges and give shade when opened out. People who are rich enough build houses of brick, with tile roofs. However, these houses often only have tiny small rooms and are poorly ventilated. The Annamese prefer to live near the water and often build their houses on poles [stilts] right on the water, thereby saving the installation of a sewer. In the room that serves as a kitchen, they make a fire in a frame filled with earth. Strangely, house fires rarely occur.

All ceremonies and festivities have enormous success. A costly funeral is a very popular attraction. Coffins are elaborate, made of four-inch planks, and the lid is a heavy piece of wood over six inches thick in the middle. When such a coffin is put into the decorative hearse, it needs forty or fifty men to carry it. The procession involves hundreds

of people who carry embroidered silk banners extolling the virtues of the deceased. A number of tables are set up for a banquet with excellent food. Close relatives wear white, unbleached cotton and the widow always pretends to be unable to walk without the support of two other women. Then come the professional mourners, women who cry and howl for a fixed price. However, Annamese find it too hard to be utterly serious, and the whole procession fails to give an impression of mourning. People talk, laugh, joke and smoke cigarettes.

Rich people are in the habit of buying their coffins long before the time of death and putting them on exhibition in their houses. They are very proud to show them to friends. In the house of the Annamese governor of Cho Lon, I was shown two beautiful coffins of hewn marble, and I wondered how many men would be needed to carry them. Wealthy people also build their own tombs. Half way between Cho Lon and Saigon a rich family has its private cemetery, a large park with tombs here and there and a comfortable house to entertain guests after each funeral.

Annamese as a rule believe in transmigration of souls, but not as Buddhists, who believe a person lives multiple lives until perfection is attained. Rather, the Annamese interpret transmigration more directly; a person is punished after death by being condemned to live again as an animal, or rewarded by being allowed to live again as a rich, happy human. They understand little about Buddhism and have only the vaguest ideas about the subject.

My grandfather was alert and interested in people, events and institutions in the country's interior.

My first travels in the interior of Cochin-China were made to visit the pawnshops with a view to insuring them against fire. These places are always solid, brick-built houses circled by a wall, and they close at six pm. They are well guarded, as they generally contain important valuables, and I found very good accommodation in them.

Every town and village has a 'town hall' where the Annamese authorities hold their meetings. Up country these structures are simply thatched huts, but in towns they are neat stone buildings. They also sometimes function as guesthouses for travellers. There is always a watchman and a very large drum that at night is beaten at regular intervals—every fifteen minutes—to show that the watchman is awake and to frighten away possible thieves. Generally this watchman is a feeble old man. I have often had to avail myself of this accommoda-



39. Peter Hauff at Bien Hoa, north of Saigon. November, 1897.

tion and have regularly cursed the drum that prevented sleep. In vain did I try to bribe the old watchman to be quiet!

Since then I have had many experiences in the way of lodging. In places I preferred to put up at the covered marketplace, or even in the open, where I only risked mosquitoes. Sometimes I tried to put up at the Annamese hotels. The 'hotel' at Rach Gia was a room on the first floor over a Chinese retail shop. Round the walls were six sleeping places, separated by mats, and in the central space sat a wash basin for common use, and one bucket, also for the use of ladies and gentlemen. I got up and departed very, very early the next morning.

Later on, when I became better known and had made friends nearly everywhere, I was usually invited to private houses. My arrival was made the excuse for festivities and neighbours flocked to see the strange white man who spoke Annamese, shared their food and used chopsticks. They asked me questions about every conceivable thing. The Annamese knew I had nothing to do with the government and treated me accordingly, without reticence.

When you ask an Annamese how far it is to such and such a place, he replies: 'about the time you need for eating a bowl of rice' or 'the time it takes to smoke two cigarettes.'

Chapter 16: Cambodia

Although Cambodia does not play a leading part in Peter Hauff's story, the small country pressed between Siam and Vietnam clearly held a place of affection in his heart. He wrote a short but accurate history of Cambodia and the Khmer people, and followed its geography, economy and way of life with real care.

In the eyes of the Cambodian people, their country is independent, they still have a king and court and Cambodian governors are in the provinces. But the present King Sisowath has really not much to do with the actual government; a French 'Resident' runs every province, and the treasury, customs and military are all managed by the French.

Kompong Chhnang is called 'Town of Clay' because clay pots are made here. It is a small town, built half on dry land and half in the water, lying between Cambodia's capital Phnom Penh and the great inland lake Tonle Sap. It was here that I saw for the first time a guillotine in action. All Europeans were requested to witness the execution of a murderer, so that the natives could see that all the white men agreed with the verdict. The prestige of the white man has to be kept up or else the mere handful of whites could not stay unmolested among millions of natives. This may be difficult to understand for people who sit at home with a policeman under the window, but out here it is absolutely necessary to make the natives respect the white man.

Cambodia is now a prosperous country and the budget generally shows fewer expenses than receipts. The land is mostly flat and very fertile due to its periodic inundation by the Mekong River. The chief crops are rice, maize, pepper, tobacco, sugar cane and cotton, but also

cardamom and the fine, peculiar durian fruit, so popular in Singapore, very good to eat but having a bad smell. The cotton has a very short fibre and is sold to Japan for weaving crepon [a heavy crepe fabric].

The fisheries are very extensive and great quantities of fish, salted and dried, are available for export. These fisheries occupy 30,000 men and take place at the lower end of the great lake Tonle Sap, Cambodia's largest. It lies nearly in the centre of the country and varies in size depending on the time of year. In the dry season it is about 120 kms in length and thirty-two kms wide. The lake then is only a few feet deep. During the rainy season, however, when the Mekong brings enormous masses of water, the country is flooded because the mighty river's seven main estuaries cannot carry the volume. Tonle Sap then quickly fills, from the Mekhong and from a number of smaller rivers. The lake's surface area then becomes three times as large as in the dry season, and the depth reaches twenty-five feet. The current of the river and flow of water from Phnom Penh to the lake thus change direction every half year.

The villages along the lake shore are built on 'floating foundations' made of bundles of bamboo, which rise and fall according to the depth of the water. Each house navigates on its own, followed by great numbers of canoes, the only transport and means of communication from house to house. As soon as the depth of water permits, a lively traffic of large junks begins, especially to carry away the huge stocks of paddy, which have been waiting many months. About one-third of the rice exported from Saigon comes from the shores of Tonle Sap, particularly Battambang. At the height of the rainy season ocean-going steamers go right to the northern end of the lake, where it is so broad one cannot see across.

The water from the Mekong is yellow from the silt, and this of course settles in great quantities when the current turns and the lake empties itself. The wide mud banks that gradually emerge as the waters recede are splendid for the cultivation of maize and cotton. No manure is needed and the soil is free from grubs and weeds.

By these yearly deposits of silt, it would seem probable that the lake is doomed to disappear, leaving only the necessary waterways of the rivers that now empty themselves into the lake. It appears that the Tonle Sap used to be part of the ocean, before the comparatively recent formation of Cochin-China. At the mouth of the Siem Reap River, at the lake's northwestern end, one can still see the remains of a stone



40. Dragon boats, Phnom Penh.

built jetty. This, without doubt, was the sea harbour of the Khmer capital.

In the rainy season the water covers everything, leaving only the treetops visible. It is very beautiful to see these mighty trees mirrored in the calm water, with shady places that beckon to one. I followed my fancy one day and rowed in under the foliage, but did not stay long. The trees swarmed with insects of every description, in such numbers that they hung in bunches. Other animals took refuge in the treetops as well, snakes, monkeys and lizards. I shot a monitor which measured six feet.

The lowest water season lasts from February until May. Then the water begins to stream up from the Mekong again and the whole population gets ready to catch fish. The lake is a great breeding place and man and beast and bird all want their share of the teeming swarms of fish. Gulls and herons, crocodiles and lizards get busy. When the water recedes, rushing out through narrow outlets, the fish are crowded together in less and less space. They are hauled out in nets, cleaned, dried and salted. All refuse is thrown back into the water.

Where the Tonle Sap enters the Mekong, and where this latter divides itself into two branches, stands the present seat of the Cambodia's capital, Phnom Penh, formed by the union of fourteen villages with 35,000 inhabitants. In 1866 King Norodom moved his court here; previoius kings had their capitals at Oudong and Lovek.

The Phnom Penh of today is reckoned to have been built in 1891, and since then many fine buildings have been erected, many in the Cambodian style. The Royal Palace is a walled city within the township; the king resides here with his 300 wives and a host of relatives and servants. The chief buildings are the throne room, the dancing hall and the famous pagoda, which has a floor laid with silver tiles, and where is kept a great treasure of gold vessels and objects. Among these are a massive Buddha statue of gold and one made of a single, large emerald. This pagoda is surrounded by a covered gallery, opening inwards to the court, with frescoed walls representing legendary episodes from Indian mythology. Nearby is a unique pointed tower, a stupa tomb. All protruding ornaments, from top to bottom, have hanging from them small bells. These myriad bells all tinkle with the least breath of wind.

In the middle of Phnom Penh stands a small hill with a pagoda and stupa, said to contain a relic of the Buddha. Natives told me that years ago this stupa had a large diamond at the top of its spire which shone day and night, but a Portuguese missionary carried it away.

Here also is an equestrian statue made to represent King Norodom. The story goes that in 1872 the citizens of a small French town decided to have a statue of Napoleon III, but the war made them change their minds. A clever merchant of Phnom Penh bought it cheaply, simply cut off the head, and replaced it with a likeness of King Norodom. This he sold to the court of Phnom Penh.

The king keeps a renowned troupe of dancing girls, who perform gracefully in picturesque costumes, like princesses of ancient times. Cambodians seem to have more artistic taste than the Annamese. They love fairy tales, having a richly coloured fancy, unlike the Annamese who are more materialistic and prefer satirical stories. Many Cambodian tales are reminiscent of our own fairy tales, and mostly deal with beatiful princesses, bold knights and savage animals.

Clothes in Cambodia are the same as in Siam. Both sexes wear short hair and both wear the sampot, *a piece of cloth, about six feet long and three feet wide. It is put around the hips with the end in front.*





41. Street by the Palace, Phnom Penh.



42. Monk, Cambodia. c.1900.

The upper edge is twisted into a knot, the two ends rolled together, passed backwards through the legs and hitched up in the middle of the back. The result looks like a pair of baggy knickerbockers. They also wear tight fitting coats. Well-to-do people wear shoes and stockings and the men like to wear a broad brimmed felt hat if they can afford one.

A description of Cambodia would be incomplete without a mention of the marvelous ruins of Angkor. This complex is the best known and most wonderful of all, but many beautiful ruins lie all over Cambodia. The northern shore of the Tonle Sap, site of the ancient capital of Angkor Thom, is covered with ruins of palaces and temples, which took hundreds of years to build. I have seen most of them.

At one time 70,000 men worked at Angkor Wat. Huge stones, some measuring 6 feet by 4 feet by 3 feet, were brought from quarries situated thirty kms away. They were probably hauled on sleighs made to slide across slippery green banana stems. Every stone that shows is decorated with carvings. They display an amazing range of subjects: symmetrical figures, or designs showing episodes of daily life, mythology, history, soldiers, giants, prisoners, dancers, imaginary birds and beasts, kings, ships, and deities. The whole gives a picture of a past civilization, profoundly rich in real and fancied pictures.

The French government is fully aware of the priceless value of these ruins and carries on continual excavations. It is truly lucky that Cambodia is governed by an art-loving nation, so these treasures can be preserved from total disappearance.

I saw Angkor for the first time in 1911 and wandered around alone. I noticed an opening in the middle of the temple called Bayon, about half way to the top. I entered a pitch dark passage and suddenly fell into a deep well at the very centre. I had some difficulty getting out, having hurt myself rather badly. I had sprained a hand and was bleeding profusely. At the far end of the tunnel-like passage, which went through the building from side to side, I was lucky to find Mr. Commaille, supervisor of excavations. He explained that the well I had fallen into was an old treasure chamber, emptied long ago. I was very glad to meet a European. He helped me to bandage my arms and I stayed with him a week. Mr. Commaille had previously conducted archaeological research in Egypt, and he gave me many interesting explanations of Angkor. He has published an excellent book about Angkor and is very enthusiastic about these ruins. He once said: 'All the ruins of Egypt, the Pyramids included, could find room on the



43. Monks, Cambodia. c.1900.

space occupied by Angkor Wat alone.' Unfortunately, Mr. Commaille was murdered by the natives a year after my visit.

I went to Angkor again in 1919, and the living conditions were much improved. There is a comfortable rest house nearby, and when I was there a large party of American tourists turned up. At Siem Reap I had seen a troupe of Cambodian actors and I made arrangements with them to come and perform at the temple; I managed to mobilize 150 men, women and children, each with a torch, and I invited everybody from the surrounding villages and pagodas to attend. I chose the place for the performance, one of the baptismal wells (now dry). My troupe consisted of five musicians and seven dancing girls. At nine pm I organized a procession of lights. We were over twenty white people, about 200 priests (and monks) in their robes and at least 500 natives of all descriptions. Two tiers of galleries surrounded the baptismal water basin. I arranged the torch bearers around this, on the floor, and the white people were provided with chairs on a ledge jutting out into the basin. Musicians and dancers were placed here as well. The evening was quite a success. The smoke and red light from the torches played on all the fantastic stone carvings and the ensemble made a most picturesque scene. One could see the dark blue sky above, studded with stars, while the upper galleries became shrouded in a thin veil of smoke. The spectacle was an episode out of the Ramayana, the great Hindu epic. The native spectators were deeply interested, and in the half light their multi-coloured garments and eager brown faces, peeping out from windows and openings, gave life to the fantastic old building. The American tourists were delighted and said that this one evening was worth the trip from Chicago.

My grandfather visited Angkor twice more, in 1928 and 1929, the latter visit soon before he departed Indo-China forever. This final journey must have been like a pilgrimage for him. He came to say goodbye to a beloved place and pay his last respects to one of Buddhism's, and the world's, greatest monuments.

Chapter 17: First Mekong Voyage

Peter Hauff's first trip up the Mekong took place in April, 1898. This small expedition of discovery set into motion events that would change his life profoundly, and ones that are literally responsible for my existence.

At the end of the nineteenth century, travel on the Mekong River was still wild and dangerous. Only thirty years before much of the waterway was entirely uncharted and unknown to the outside world. The Mekong, like the Nile in Africa, flowed from an undiscovered source through lands shrouded in mystery. The French government undertook a major effort to understand and map the river. This became known as *The Mekong River Expedition, 1866-73.*

Its main purpose was to discover a trade route up the Mekong into China. Six determined and heroic Frenchmen—scientists, linguists, adventurers and explorers—set off into the unknown.

In many ways, my grandfather Peter Hauff followed very closely in their footsteps. He did things never before attempted on the river, was the first European into many regions and, year after year, proved his valour and courage.

After staying in Phnom Penh about a week, I continued my voyage by steamer but could not proceed farther than Kratie because of shallow water. We left on a Saturday morning and it was a delight to see the crystal clear water of the Mekong proper after the muddy waters of the Tonle Sap and the arroyos of Cochin-China. The water could be drunk alongside the boat, this during the low water season. In the rainy season it is different; the water is still good to drink, but muddy. It is a common practice to put alum into it to make the mud sink.



44. Steamer on the Mekong.

On board the steamer I learned an easy way of fishing. The crew and passengers, men, women and children, each had a stick with a piece of string and a bent pin. With these they whipped the water as fast as they could. Boiled rice was thrown overboard in small handfulls as bait, and the water was so full of small fish that they were hooked and brought aboard in great quantities. Everybody fished until they could no longer move their arms from fatigue. I, too, made a great success of my efforts.

We arrived the next day at Kratie, where I left the steamer. Each white passanger now had a boat to himself, with servants. The cabin was formed by a bamboo roof stretching in an arch from side to side of the boat. My boat had a crew of 11 men including the man at the helm. These people were Laotians from Stung Treng and seemed a very jolly lot.

This is the first mention my grandfather makes of Laotians in his writing, and it has always made me happy that his initial impressions were of optimism and approval. Fun, too, quickly came to the surface.

The voyage to Stung Treng took a week. We stopped every afternoon at a convenient place, cooked our food on the beach, and I slept on my mat in the bottom of the boat. We had great fun every evening; I had a violin and the crew could soon sing the tunes I played.

Many of the men had a khen, *the especially Laotian musical instrument. It is made of eight reeds of unequal length, tied together in pairs. All the reeds pass through a hollow block of wood (or gourd) that forms the mouthpiece. Holes pierced in the sides of the reeds can be opened or shut with the fingers of both hands. The tones very much resemble those of an organ. One man would play, another sing and the rest clap their hands. Sometimes two would sing, improvising as they went along, criticising and joking in verse. Good barbs and answers would make everyone roll with laughter.*

Over time my grandfather's attitudes towards the Laotians never changed. If anything, they became even more full of praise.

The Laotian boatmen are the most happy-go-lucky people I have ever seen and they seem to enjoy life to the full. They laugh and sing all day and make friends at once. 'Eat,' 'boiled rice,' and 'bathe' were the first three words of Laotian I learned. Their personal luggage is very restricted and consists of a bag containing rice, tobacco, salt and a rice pan. No extra clothing and nothing to sleep on. In fact, I have never seen people who could live and be happy with so few accessories.

The current got stronger every day and we progressed mostly by punting and could only use oars now and then, at places where the current was less rapid. Poles of wood were fastened across the boat and planks overhung the sides. The whole crew walked round and round, shoving with their bamboos on the land side. These bamboos had a wooden fork at one end and a hook at the other and when the water was too deep, the men hooked the trees and pulled instead of pushed. The boat wobbled tremendously from side to side and now and again a man fell overboard, causing the others to laugh but the helmsman to swear because the river is teeming with crocodiles.

The Laotian boats are not built of boards, but are made from a single piece of timber. A great round log is roughly shaped and dug out lengthways through a narrow opening in the middle, leaving a certain length untouched at each end. The opening thus made is then filled with water and a fire is lit all round the log and kept going night and day. The sides of the log are then gradually forced apart from each other, very, very slowly, by driving in wedges. This operation may

take a month or more. Provisional thwarts are put in and the boat becomes broader every time these thwarts are changed for longer ones. When the boat cannot be broadened any more, for fear of splitting at the ends, the final shape is given. Finally the boat is sunk under water for two or three months to season. The finished boat is often twice as wide as the original log. They are made long, often twenty-five to thirty feet in length, and I have seen one that was nearly five feet deep and able to carry five tons. Thousands of these boats are made at Stung Treng and sold in Cambodia and Cochin-China.

One evening there was great joy in the camp. The men found several bushes swarming with big red ants that make their nests in curled leaves. A big pot of water was put over the fire and all the men came along with branches covered with ants and dipped them into boiling water. One man was sent off to bring back a quantity of small green bananas, the size of a finger and very sour. Ants, bananas and padak*—salted, partly fermented fish, the extremely pungent national delicacy of Laos—were pounded together and eaten with rice. I tasted the concoction and it was not as bad as you might think.*

Each man had his own knife, more like a small sword, and used it for everything: chopping wood, cleaning fish, cutting his hair. They slept on the bare ground or on a flat rock, without pillow or cover, although the nights could be cold. They mostly rolled their cigarettes in dry banana leaves, and the boat always stopped when we passed a place where the banana stems grew, so as to renew the stock of leaves. But they also liked to get at my old newspapers, which allowed the making of tremendously big cigarettes. The Laotian tobacco is quite good and I smoked no other myself.

I had a bottle of rum in my luggage and wanted to give them a treat. I filled a big tumbler, naturally meaning it for all nine men, but the first one emptied it and I was surprised to see that the rum seemed to have no effect. The Laotians seldom drink alcohol and it is rare to see a drunken man.

Grandfather was sad to say goodbye to the fine crewmen at Stung Treng, but to continue upstream he needed to leave his private boat and join a small steamer that carried on as far as Khone.

The district of Khone is known in Laotian as Si Pan Don, 'Four Thousand Islands.' Here the river is extraordinarily wide, close to fifteen kms, and covered with many rocks and islands. On each side are large waterfalls, Salape on the west side and Pa Pheng on the east. The falls at Pa Pheng are 1500 metres wide and the drop in the dry



45. The falls at Salape on the Mekong's west side, near Khone, southern Laos.

season is 15 metres. During the rainy season the entire country is flooded.

This settlement of Khone, below the Mekong's first set of rushing falls, was grandfather's first stop in Laos proper, just north of the Cambodian border. At this point he was more than a thousand kilometres from the mouth of the river.

The puffy little steamer could only just make headway against the very strong current. The river is deep in a rocky bed and the whirlpools made the boat jerk. Small sandbanks were covered with crocodiles gaping in the sun, and there were shoals of big 'mammals,' like dolphins, that played around the steamer. It is bad luck to kill these animals, and I did not shoot.

It took only six hours to get to the southern point of Khone, an island on which there is a four-mile railway to the northern end. All transport and goods use this railway as the numerous water passes [passages], east and west, are not practicable. From Khone's northern end I took a rowboat that brought me to a comfortable steamer in a few hours, and in the evening I reached Khong, the capital of southern



46. Another view of the Salape falls.

Laos. Here I paid a visit to the Résident of South Laos, Colonel Tournier, who was shortly to be nominated Résident Supérieur of North and South Laos. At that time there was also a Résident for North Laos, residing at Luang Prabang.

I slept on board the steamer which left early next morning for Ban Muong, a small village opposite the Siamese town of Bassac. This stretch of river is easily navigable at all seasons, it is broad and the current is weak. Small hamlets appear with their pagodas, the graceful spires always placed on the river bank. At this season (spring), the banks are extremely high, often rising fifty or sixty feet above the water, and the natives cut steps in the clay soil to get up and down.

It took a day to get to Ban Muong and the steamer went a little further north, to the island of Don Co, where we found boats waiting, coming from the north with passangers and mail. I stayed on board as I was returning by the same steamer.

This marks the limit of Peter Hauff's first Mekong River voyage. He had seen much. During those weeks aboard boats large and small he specu-

lated about his future and allowed a seed to grow inside him, based on hope and a simple observation.

There was not a single white trader in North Laos. The trade was all in the hands of Chinese, who came from Bangkok via Korat [today's Nakhon Ratchasima, on the main route to eastern Thailand]. All the products of Laos were exported that way; Saigon had no share of this traffic. I saw possibilities in exporting to Saigon the natural products, such as hides, horns, stick lac, gum benjamin, cotton and red pepper. I got the firm impression that Laos was a land with a great future, having immense natural resources in the extensive forests and unexplored mountains.

My grandfather decided to become a pioneer trader in the virgin territory of northern Laos, and with swift determination he set about realizing his dream.

I got safely back to Saigon where my friend Hans Fäesch, a young man from Basel, agreed to join my venture. We went together to our respective homes in Europe, met again in Paris and made the necessary purchases to begin trading in Laos. We were back in Saigon in six months and started up the Mekong with a hundred packing cases stuffed with all sorts of articles for bartering.

So began the Laotian adventures of Peter Hauff in the final month of 1898.

Chapter 18: The Way to Vientiane

Peter Hauff had the good fortune to find in Saigon another young man with energy, love of life and the spirit of adventure. These two friends spent their free time making excursions into the interior, learning languages and getting to know local customs and habits. They got along very well and from their endless talks evolved the idea of becoming traders in the virtually unknown and untried region of Northern Laos. Once they decided to do this, nothing could stop them.

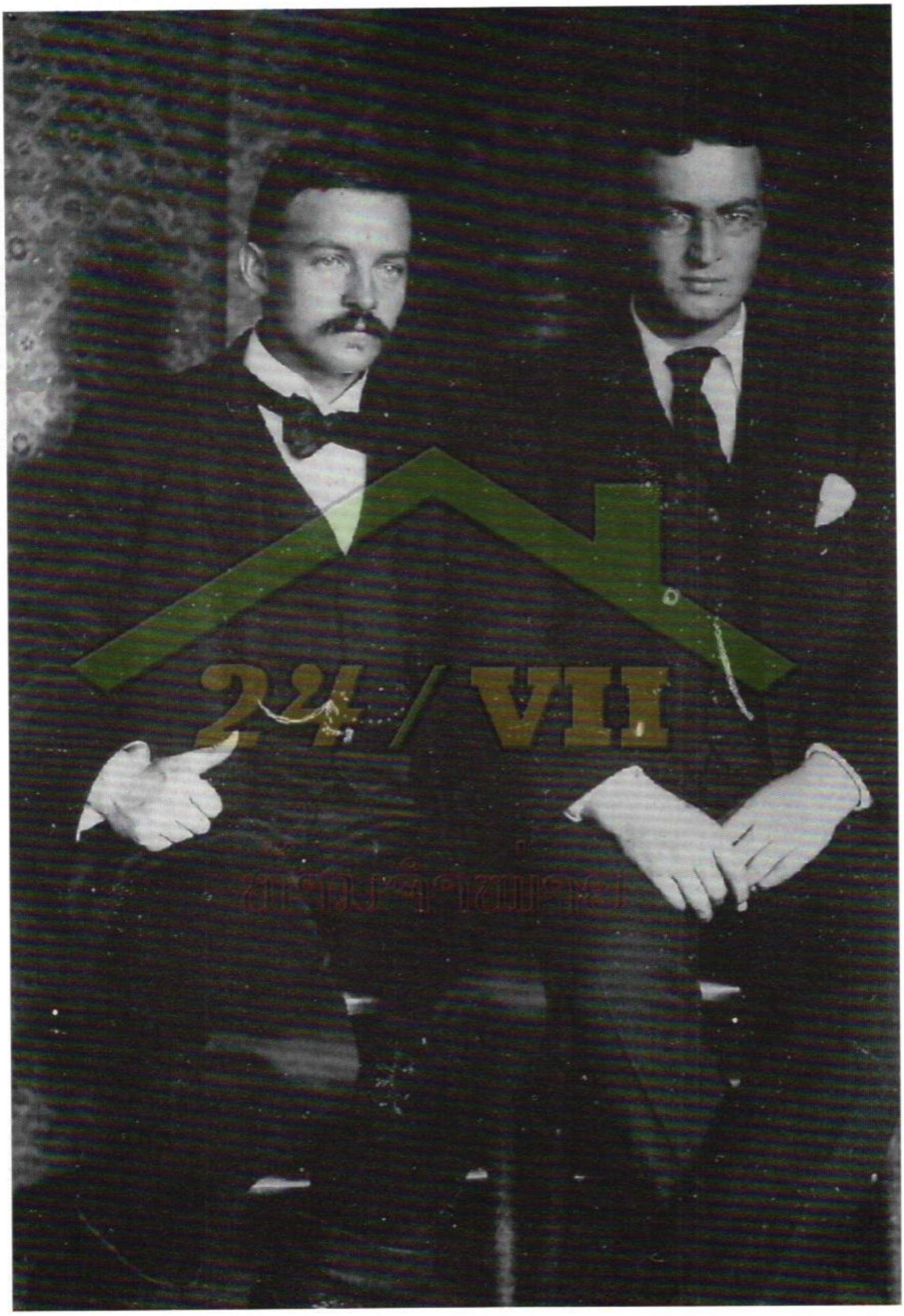
Laos had only recently become a French protectorate. As early as 1886 France won the right to place a vice-consul at Luang Prabang, but not until 1893 did it receive official recognition—from Siam and Britain—to organize the territory of Laos as a protectorate. Most of the provinces fell under France's direct control, although the Kingdom of Luang Prabang in the north survived.

The government strongly encouraged young people to bring trade to these backward regions. The French had big plans for developing the interior—expanding transport, building roads and railways, extending administration and the benefits of 'civilization.'

It seemed a perfect time to start something new, so these two enterprising young men jumped at the chance.

They planned carefully, however, and that is why they made a return visit to Europe, to their home towns, to prepare for the great venture before starting in earnest at the end of 1898.

Hans Rudolf Fäesch, my grandfather's friend and partner, grew up in Basel, Switzerland. Born in 1871, he was two years older than Peter Hauff, but in other respects their two lives were remarkably similar. Both



47. Hans Fäesch (left) and Peter Hauff (right).



48. Lao woman in Western dress.
She is possibly Hans Fäesch's wife.
Photo from family album in Basel, Switzerland.

were sons of well-to-do families from prosperous cities, one from London, the other from Basel. Both had good educations, though neither went to university. Peter Hauff and Hans Fäesch each had a stint in London, working as clerks and apprentices, and in their early twenties each was was sent out to the Far East to start his career with a large merchant company.

Fäesch, like my grandfather, possessed a keen eye and an open mind to the things around him. He had a friendly and energetic personality, and he, too, created a written record of his travels and observations. This record, however, was put together from lively and informative letters to friends and family at the time, rather than being a single, purposeful document written years after the events described. Selections of Hans Fäesch's writing were compiled and published as a twenty-page entry in the 1904 edition of the *Basler Jahrbuch*, the year after his untimely death at the age of thirty-two.

It is worthwhile presenting these writings because they supplement and elaborate the observations of my grandfather. Please note: paragraphs written by Hans Fäesch are followed by (HF). All other writings are by my grandfather.

Great excitement gripped both men as they finally found themselves on the verge of departure. A thousand details needed attention, and both worked flat out. Hans Fäesch writes on the last day of Novemember, 1898:

Our belongings and equipment will soon be in order. Planks and beams are still being made ready for the press which will be used to compress cotton bales. The whole equipment will consist of approximately 250 boxes and bales. The people taking part in this enterprise, apart from Peter and me, are Ngai-Ki, the cook, his wife and Peter's private boy. I have no boy but intend to get one later on when we have arrived at our destination in Laos. I need a native to teach me the language. (HF)

To prepare for the expedition I acquired the following in London: ammunition for my Winchester rifle and my revolver, a knife, a dagger, an axe, photographic plates and paper. In Saigon: cooking equipment, enamelled cups and plates, a shovel, a pickaxe, a hammer, tongs and other tools. Each of us has a working lamp plus a well armoured copper lamp. And each a field bed; we found this extremely necessary since we both have been warned against the humidity and fumes of the ground. Provisions for two months. A journey into the interior of an unknown and uncivilized country is an undertaking demanding preparation, time and patience. The last three weeks we have spent packing our equipment. We have been working twelve hours a day. (HF)

On 4 December they finally got underway, filled with happiness and anticipation. They departed on the *S/S Mekong*, a small river steamer, and Fäesch evoked the romance of departure.

We said our goodbyes to the two slender church towers of Saigon, bathed in the silvery light of the moon. The electric lights soon disappeared behind us and once again we were rocked by the restless waves, sailing round the southern corner of Cochin-China towards the great Mekong River. The muddy waters of the river roll towards the sea. We entrust to you, Old River Mekong, our destiny for a long time and expect the river spirits to be friendly and hope that evil spirits will not tease us. May we sail along in good health, carried on your broad back, where our desires lead us and where we expect to find our future. (HF)

My grandfather clearly was eager to make good time and get up river. He had travelled this way before and only picks up his narrative again once the expedition has reached Laos. Fäesch, on the other hand, is enthralled by the sights and pleasures of the Lower Mekong voyage.

5 December. We have now arrived at My Tho. To this point the railway from Saigon runs through rich rice fields, the granary of Cochin-China. We only stay for a short while, take some boxes on board and sail on. It is as if we were sailing on a lake. Endless stretches of water lie ahead of us, and the boat throws brown, muddy waves to the sides and white foam behind us. The flat shores are fertile beyond belief. Bananas, betel palms, enormous shady forests, coconut palms and shrubbery change in endless variety. Tall slender palm trees have overgrown creepers that hang down from great heights to bring variation into the picture. (HF)

Here and there the forest retreats, huts border the river, rice is grown and you see people of a much darker colour than the Cochin Chinese fishing from small boats. Huge tonkans, *heavily loaded, with enormous sails and five rudders, sail slowly down the river to bring their products to Saigon. The landing place is full of fruit vendors selling sugar cane, durian, papaya and, of course, betel and tobacco. Coconuts obtain the best prices because in the heat one's thirst cannot be quenched by anything better than the juice from this fruit. I am writing this sitting on my bag. As a desk I have a paraffin drum and the cook is holding a parasol above me to protect me from the burning sun. (HF)*

Ten days went by without mishap, the little flotilla passing the rapids at Tmochre safely and later the larger rapids at Preatapang, which the French call 'les terribles.' The voyage was a delight.

The nine boats carrying our goods stopped and the most interesting beach life developed. Each boat lights a fire and the crews place themselves around these fires in picturesque groups. They cook rice and roast fowls. The equipment is simple; three large sticks are stuck in the ground, the cooking pot is placed on top, a fire underneath, and the kitchen is operating. People develop a fantastic appetite on this trip. Some herons and a vulture that I shot are devoured to the last bone. Then there is music and singing and Laotian tobacco is smoked, rolled in betel leaves. The picture of the Mekong beach is fabulous. The river flows lazily along, and above the sky is starry in a way that can only be seen in the tropics. And surrounding us are at least thirty fires, around which sit men of all shades of yellow and brown, chatting, eating their frugal meal, smoking and singing. Later, over the water creeps the silence of the night, undisturbed by any sound. (HF)

At Tmochre the river narrows into terrible rapids. One cannot see the river any more. It is split up by hundreds of small and large is-





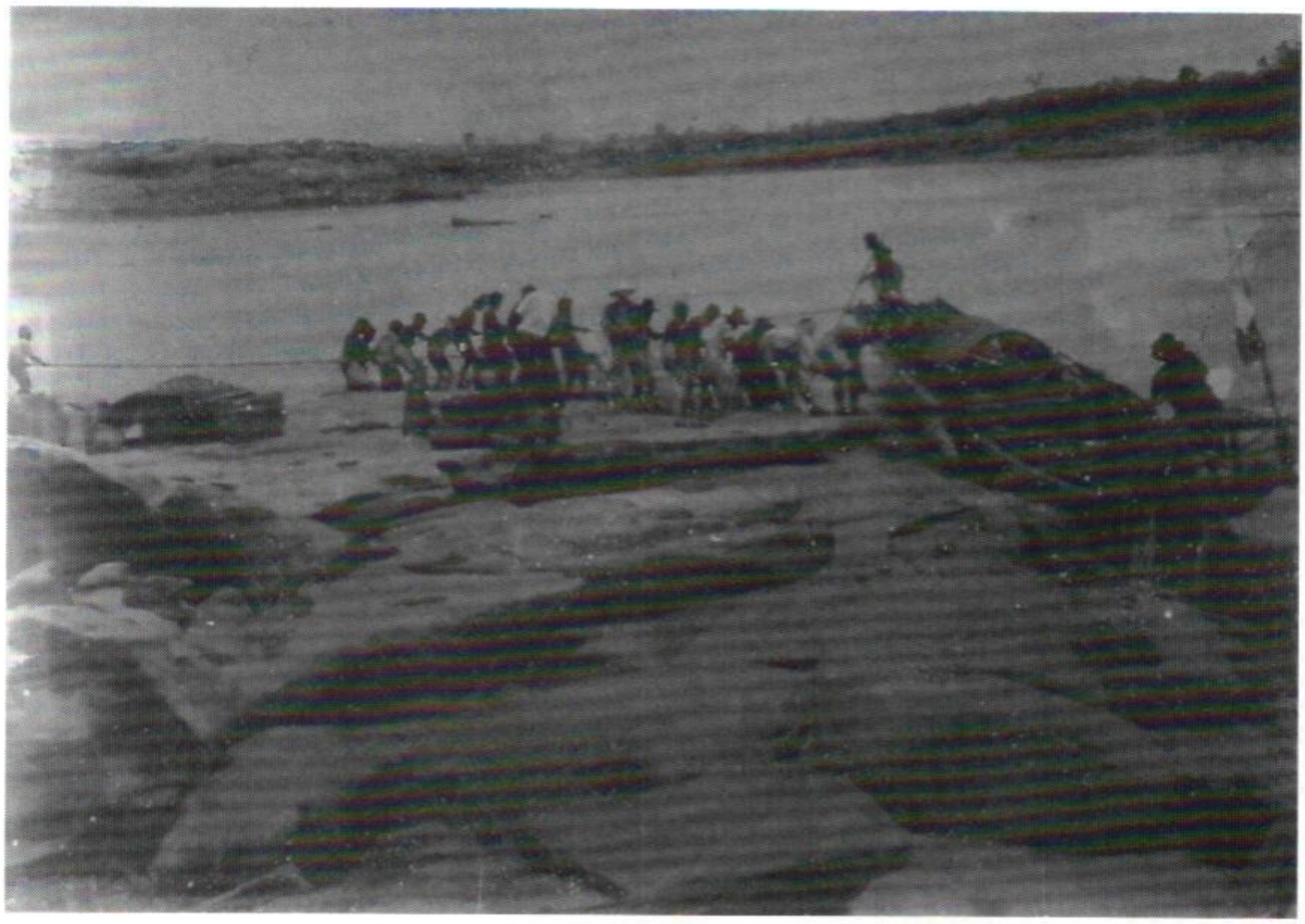
49. A halt between two rapids: boats, men, table and chairs.



50. Large sampan built of heavy wood sailing on the Mekong.
Note Norwegian flag hanging at top of mast.

lands, between which the water rushes with enormous power. Here we must find the right passage between rocks, the sandbank and floating tree trunks, pushing, floating, rowing, trying to avoid the hazardous stones. In the bushes on the banks and on the islands the brown hands of the oarsmen try to find a purchase, bringing the boat slowly past the dangerous spots. The work of the natives pushing the boat slowly forwards with boathooks is incredibly hard. I tried it but at the first push I was thrown overboard. Fifteen to twenty men worked in my boat, and I saw with great pleasure that much attention was given to the big boat, the only one carrying uninsured goods. (HF)

Every day something new! Here crocodiles abound. Monkeys, the first I have seen in Indo-China, jump happily from tree to tree. The beauty and wildness of the landscape surpasses everything that we have hitherto seen. Here the tiger is still the king of the forest. Wild animals abound. In the jungle, quite close to the cataract, sits a tiny temple and an ancient monument guarded by Buddhist priests. In front of the deities the few forest inhabitants kneel down on the ground



51. Men hauling a boat over rocks at a difficult passage, Mekong River.

on covered mats. Two bells sound at sunset and during the night to keep the tigers away. (HF)

We are received by all the French people with great hospitality and are everywhere welcomed into their midst in the most friendly manner. As soon as we arrive at an inhabited place we have to pass from one dinner to another. Everywhere extra bottles are opened. Once back in the boat we return to our frugal lives. Often our existence is quite rough. If we are in luck when fishing we eat fried carp and trout and other kinds of river fare, such as catfish, eels, crayfish, frog legs and all kinds of birds. But often there is only plain rice. Then I bring out some of my sweets. (HF)

To learn about the production of rubber (caoutchouc) we went to the Siamese village of Outhomm on the other side of the river. On our arrival we were received formally and kindly by the local mandarin. We had donned our fine Chinese silk robes which we had brought along for receptions with the natives. Peter wore a pair of dark blue trousers and a purple frock coat with a pink scarf. I wore a pair of light blue trousers and a silver grey frock coat with a revolver and a dagger at my side. All our oarsmen walked behind. Thus we entered

the village and were immediately taken to the main hall in the middle of the village; it stands two metres above the rest of the huts. As the 'eldest' I was offered the high chair. Peter sat on my right, the mandarin on my left. Important natives squatted around us and ordinary people stood outside. The house was adorned with a paraffin lamp and two decanters, prize possessions of the owner. Chumchum, coconut milk and cigarettes were consumed in large quantities and we communicated as best we could in a stammering Laotian. We soon got to talking about the purpose of our visit and the old man promised to send his people out into the forest to collect rubber. (HF)

We spent Christmas in Muong Pak Sedon doing business. But in the evening we lit a fire and made ourselves some grog after dinner. It was cold, like at home, and we drank toasts to family and loved ones. Peter played on his violin and we sang and smoked. Later in the night we sailed to the rapids at Keng, which barred our way. (HF)

On 5 January, 1899 the expedition approached Se Moun.

The river flows quietly for some time, but soon after foam and bubbles show there is a hindrance and a few minutes later a thunderous noise hits our surprised ears. And here we are in front of an enormous waterfall that allows no passage by boat. We unload everything, down to the last item, and all the goods—together with the boats—are dragged across the terrible rocks. (HF)

At this point the two men had been on the river for six weeks. The hardships of travel took many forms, including their daily fare.

Rice and pork, pork and rice ever since New Year, two weeks ago. I am fed up with it. Tomorrow I had better try to hunt for some fowl. (HF)

By 2 February the group had reached Pak Moun, just below the stretch of rapids of Khemmarat. Here they were just thirty kms away from the steamship that would bring them to their final destination of Vientiane. Enthusiasm was mounting, the future seemed all that mattered. Fäesch mused on the situation, and seemed dismissive of the places they had passed through and left behind now that their true goal was close at hand.

Upper Laos will be the most interesting operation area. It is richer, the population is more civilized, they have more material needs and work harder. People living on rice, wearing miserable loin cloths and dwelling in huts too humble for European pig sties—it is pointless to trade with such people [living in the south]. (HF)

Now that we are very close to our destination the results of our endeavors will not fail. I am full of confidence! We are received every-

where with extreme politeness, even cordiality. Our names are known all over Laos and we are expected everywhere. At the trading posts (commissariat) they all want us to stay, but Vientiane still seems the most profitable place. (HF)

Nevertheless, even with Vientiane so close, Peter Hauff and Hans Fäesch decided to try their hand at trading right away. Their first business venture at Pak Moun began on a good note, as recorded by Fäesch.

Today a postman arrived with two weeks' Basler Nachrichten, *many personal letters and business letters. A good day! (HF)*

But my grandfather took a more sober view as reality set in.

It all looked pretty hopeless at first, and not knowing the language we felt a little lonesome when the steamer turned down stream. The people were very kind, however, perhaps rather inquisitive, but we excused that, realizing our proceedings seemed very strange. Imagine! Two white men suddenly appearing and living in a tent, with a hundred unopened packing cases. As time went by we opened some of the cases, and at the end of a week we had sold very little, but had begun to pick up some common phrases. We soon found out that we had to ask twice as much for everything because it satisfied the buyer to haggle over the price; no one bought anything without getting a reduction. Fixed prices are unknown. It is the custom that once a thing is paid for, there can be no further discussion about price, weight, quality or anything else. This custom proved useful on one memorable occasion. We had several cases of ceresine, a petrol residue like wax, for making candles. This a native took to be beeswax and bought the whole stock, thinking he had made a wonderful deal. We learned that beeswax is much used for making candles at the pagodas and is much dearer than what we asked for the ceresine. The buyer took the stuff to a local pagoda, and there the priest told him it was not beeswax.

Our stock of small, cheap tobacco pipes sold out quickly, but the cotton goods were considered too dear. All day long people came and asked for medicines. A lady wanted a drug to regain her husband's love, another came with a hunchbacked child. They imagined that our medicine could work immediate miracles. I am afraid we did not get much of a reputation as doctors. After about a week the bartering ceased and we left all our goods in the care of the pagoda.

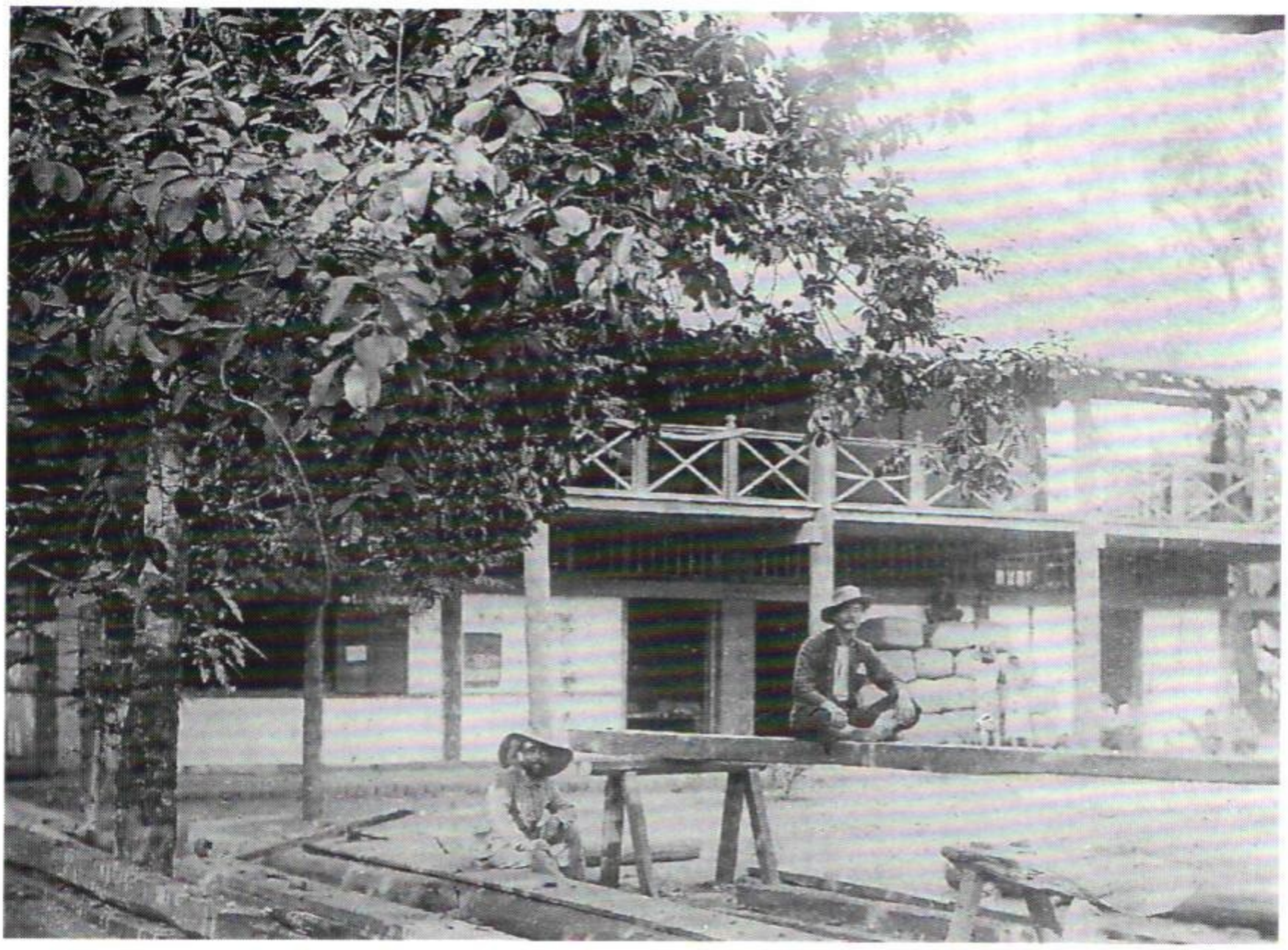
The reason for this interruption in trade was an excursion to the west, to the important town of Oubon (now Ubon Ratchathani), seat of the Siamese provincial government, and to Pi Moun, a very large village. Both stood on the banks of the Se Moun River, a major tributary of the Mekong.



52. Peter Hauff's house at Vientiane. c.1902.

My grandfather and Hans Fäesch hired six men as helpers and made the long, eighty-km walk to Oubon.

There we got lodging at a pagoda, dressed up in white clothes, and the next day were received by the Governor of Oubon, having the title of Viceroy, the brother of King Chulalongkorn of Siam. His name was Sadet Khrom Mun San Pasit. We were received in a large hall, hung with red cloth and decorated with huge elephants' tusks standing against the walls. The viceroy spoke good English and had charming manners. We were treated to coffee and cigars and were each presented with a set of silver buttons, made from old Siamese coins. He was amiable and it seemed all the more so when he learned that we were not French; he appeared anxious about the increasing French influence. He lastly offered to give us a house and grounds, if we promised to settle there. We said we would consider this. He introduced us to the postmaster, a native of Bangkok who spoke English and proved to be a very intelligent young man. Unfortunately, he had lung trouble and little hope of living more than a few years. We stayed at his house for some days and he helped us to collect information. We visited the



53. Hans Fäesch (left) and Peter Hauff (right) in front of their house.
The house was later sold and became a post office, Vientiane. c.1901.

town and found there were many rich Chinese who controlled all the trade, doing their transport by ox cart from Korat. We knew by experience how difficult it would be to compete with rich Chinese who were there to stay. We finally decided not to accept the viceroy's offer, however tempting it might have seemed.

With the help of our friend the postmaster we bought two large boats and a quantity of buffalo hides and horns. We then started down the Se Moun River and stopped at every village until we finally had our boats fully loaded. The evening after leaving Pi Moun we were attacked by robbers. They came after us in five small canoes and started shooting. Happily, Fäesch and I each had a good Winchester rifle and the brigands soon turned back. Our men were very frightened at first, but their confidence returned when they saw how quickly we could shoot. They rowed very hard and we were not molested any more.

Not knowing the river, we were rather disagreeably surprised to come to a waterfall, which no boat could pass because of a sheer drop of fifteen feet. We discharged our cargo, however, and managed to get the boats down, re-loaded and arrived very soon at Pak Moun. There

we found many natives who had heard we bought hides, and they had arrrived with important quantities which now brought our stock of hides to about eight tons. We then hired some boats and transported the lot down to Don Co to be loaded onto the steamer. We returned twice to Pak Moun and I was left alone on a sandbank to look after the goods until Fäesch returned. After the boats left I found I had no food and nothing to cook with. Fäesch was away for three days and I dared not leave our merchandise. I caught some fish, however, which I roasted Laotian style, placing them before the fire, fastened to a spit of bamboo. I had tobacco and matches and was as happy as possible, but I was glad when the boats returned and our cook served roast chicken and boiled maize. Chickens were cheap; we usually got six for an empty mineral water bottle.

After loading our goods on the steamer at Don Co, we started off up the river again and collected our belongings at Pak Moun. Before we left, the old priest who looked after our goods came to me with a piece of brass plate. He wanted me to make him a razor, and as I had the necessary tools to do so he was very happy. I even made an inscription on it, which he had written out beforehand.

This was at the height of the dry season and the current was exceedingly strong. The whole way the river is enclosed between high mountains, and the river bed is full of rocks, making numerous dangerous rapids. A single rapid sometimes means several hours of hard effort, unloading the boat, carrying everything over the rocks and then hauling the boat with ropes. At some places the river is less than 150 feet wide, but extremely deep. The mass of water has over time scooped a passage through sheer rock, and the current is terrible. This region is uninhabited except for the village of Khemmarat. High up on the hillsides we saw patches of burnt forest, where the nomadic wild tribes had cultivated rice, but otherwise there were no signs of human beings. Morning and night we had a concert made by birds and monkeys, but in the middle of the day complete silence reigned. The heat sent everything to sleep.

A few days above Khemmarat is a tiny village called Huan Hin, or 'stone house,' so named for a ruined building made of stone. It must be very old because there is no attempt to create arches. Long stones have been fashioned like wooden beams and joined as if they were in a wooden building. This stone building is fascinating for its architecture and strange location, far from any known centre.

From Pak Moun we put in eighteen hard days to reach Savannakhet, the southernmost town in North Laos. This important place, whose name means 'City of Victory,' has a road that connects it to Ai Lao in Annam. Opposite Savannakhet, across the Mekong, is the Siamese town of Ban Mukdahan, just a large sleepy village. We left Savannakhet by steamer for the final lazy four days to Vientiane, which is now the capital of Laos. The steamer stopped here and there and we began to get an impression of North Laos. It is much more populated than the south and much richer. The people are more active, there are numerous important villages and the river carries a certain amount of traffic.

We finally reached Vientiane in March, about three and a half months after leaving Saigon. If we had not stopped on the way we might have reached Vientiane in about six weeks.

Hans Fäesch was ecstatic about arrival after the difficult months on the Mekong.

Finally we have reached the promised land. What a Paradise! For hours and hours we pass houses and villages along the river, giving us an unsurpassed view. Lovely pile-built huts and houses are surrounded by vegetable and flower gardens of indescribable richness. Sugar cane and coconut palms abound; the enormous crown of Ficus religiosa *[a kind of banyan tree] spreads cooling shade. Areca palms stand erect among the huge leaves of banana and bamboo. Grapefruit and many other fruit trees grow in fertile gardens. Everywhere there is tenfold abundance, much more than in the southern provinces. (HF)*

Earlier discussions with a river boat captain had raised the prospect of buying land upon arrival in Vientiane. Peter Hauff and Hans Fäesch were eager to get started, so things moved quickly.

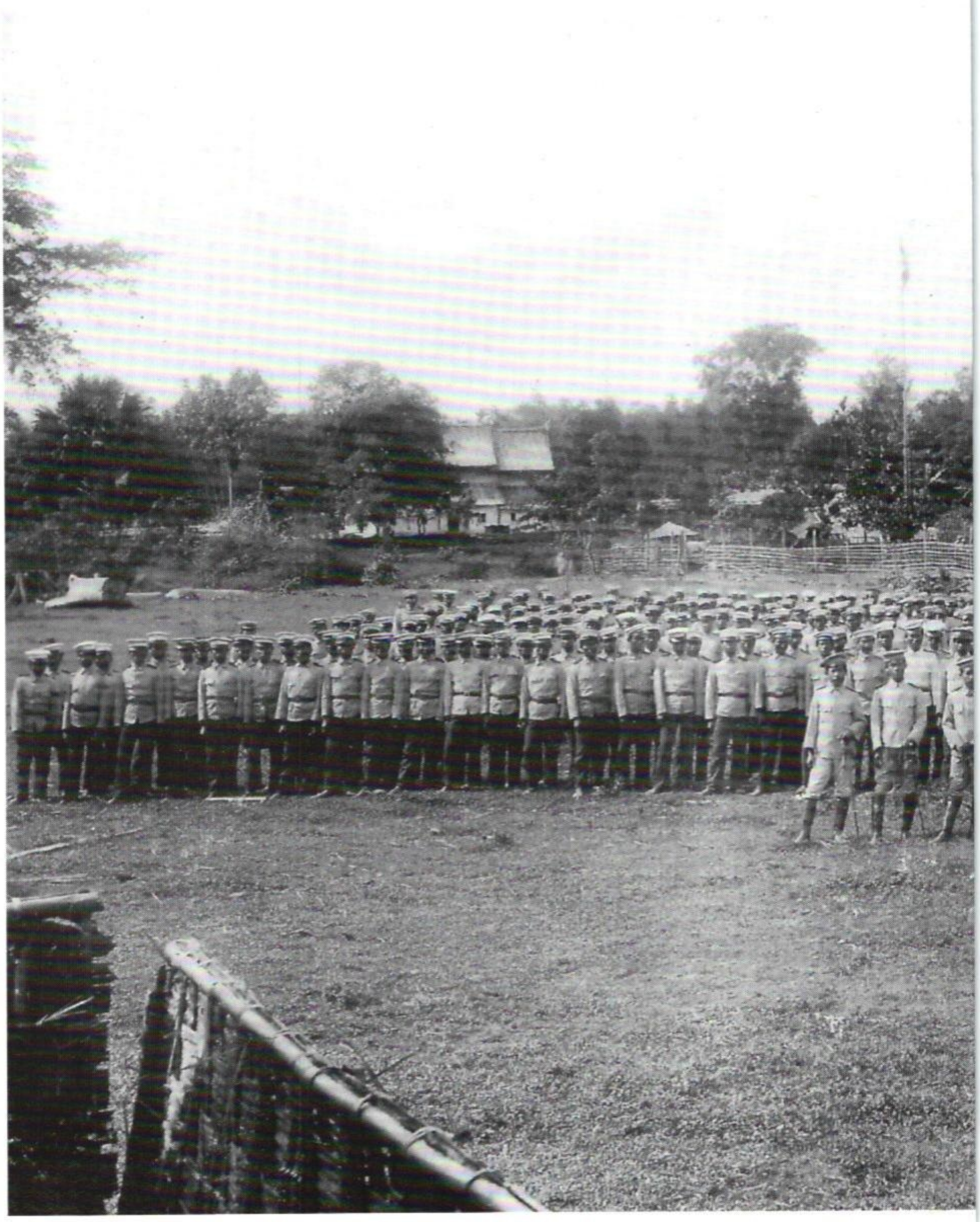
After having seen the piece of ground with a house we accepted. It was just outside the old walls of the town, in a village called Ban Sitan, which means 'four wells.' We started our business at once, got a big board, put it on two boxes for a counter and opened our packing cases. We had a stream of clients immediately, especially the ladies. They came to marvel at all the strange and beautiful things we had.

Our site [shop and home] is on the outskirts of Vientiane; from this point on the area is called Ban Sitan. It is actually one large township since one village overlaps the next. Innumerable people enliven the street along the river where our shop is situated. The shop is full of people all the time and most of the goods have been sold. As soon as we consider this a going proposition, we intend to build a nice wooden house exactly like the two houses at the World Exhibition in Paris





54. Pagoda in ruins at Wat Pra Keo,
Temple of the Emerald Buddha, Vientiane. 1899.





55. Siamese soldiers with commanding Japanese officers and French officer (governor?), Vientiane, Laos.

(1889). At present, though, it is quite primitive but we do have sufficient protection against the rainy season now approaching. Furniture, such as chairs, tables and cupboards, is non-existant. (HF)

Not far away we have bought a piece of land with a bamboo hut, small garden, areca palms, bananas and a yellow plum tree—all to supply refreshment with their shade, fruit and lovely appearance. (HF)

After a few weeks Hans Fäesch noted real progress in their living arrangements and the overall state of affairs.

We have bought a Laotian house, pulled it down and put it up again. This place is idyllic. We have ten to twenty coolies working on the house every day, clearing the ground of prickly undergrowth and planting a hedge of green bushes and bamboo around it all. (HF)

Within a short time even this new house was inadequate, as explained by my grandfather.

Our house soon proved too small and we set to work cutting trees and sawing planks. First we built a storehouse and then a dwelling with a shop on the ground floor. We had to search far for suitable timber, across the river, a two-day journey by boat. We had great difficulty hauling the logs up the steep banks, with ropes made of raw buffalo hide. I went across the mountains to Annam to find carpenters because I could not find decent ones in Vientiane. The house finally proved to be large and solid. The ten principal columns of hard wood were thirty feet tall and one foot in diameter. We had to build a high bamboo scaffolding to raise the columns on end. The floor boards were over two feet broad and four inches thick. Walls were made of bamboo smeared with clay and straw, all of which was smoothed over with cement and then whitewashed. It took two years to build this house.

When you walk from Ban Sitan to Vientiane you have to cross a small river to enter the gate of the old town. Remains of the circular wall can still be seen. There you see temples, centuries old. Surrounded by old walls and many niches exhibiting bronze Buddhas stands the main monument, a tall column, wide at the base and tapering towards its golden pinnacle. The column is circled by figures representing the deity, rooms for the priests and chambers containing the library and treasury. Most deities are cast in solid bronze with gems for eyes, and hung with golden and precious decorations. In the main temple alone reside more than 20,000 Buddhas. (HF)

If you pass through the left gate, you arrive at the ruins of an old pagoda. When clearing the wilderness we found first an altar, then a

temple with a beautiful but sadly damaged Buddha. The head was missing though the chest and crossed legs were intact. These ruins are haunted by spirits which are not to be disturbed. Therefore the site must be laid out as a pleasure garden. (HF)

Vientiane was the seat of the old Laotian culture, seat of the old royal family, and is today—one hundred years after its destruction—on the point of rising from the ashes. Busy trade and energetic people will soon create a new prosperous era for the city. (HF)

Chapter 19: Trade

When we came to Vientiane in early 1899 there were only two white men in residence, Mr. Morin, the Government Commissioner, and his assistant, Mr. Vatel. The first time I met Mr. Morin he was supervising the building of a wooden bridge over the small Nam Passac River near our house. He was tall and thin, clad like a Laotian, with a coat and bare feet. We soon became good friends. He managed all the public functions at that time, including the post office. He was perplexed one day when we received a very large money order by post. There was no telegraph line yet and the government 'treasury' had not enough cash to pay the amount. We needed the money to pay for produce bought from the natives and so we agreed to take the amount in silver of all descriptions, by weight, because taxes had been collected in that way. So we fetched a cartload of buttons, old coins, bracelets and so forth. It was a longwinded business, especially as we had the job of paying our business relations in the same way, and they had their own likes and dislikes of these objects. The French silver piaster was not yet in circulation and small coins disappeared at once, being turned into ornaments for children. The money chiefly in use was Siamese ticals and Indian rupees, small change being oblong pieces of brass, in the shape of a canoe, called lat. *Also in circulation were thick bars of silver, but they were often filled with lead and of different weights.*

So far we have brought a lot of activity to Laotian trade: approximately 800 chests imported and 250 exported. Our stores are so filled up with goods, hides, tusks and rubber that yesterday the floor collapsed. (HF)

It was amazing to see how one thing after the other became fashionable. When we arrived only a few people owned umbrellas, so in time we naturally sold out our stock of cheap, white-cotton umbrellas. But when we brought out silk parasols in all colors, there was a rush among all the ladies of Vientiane. Cigarette holders were unknown but failed to catch on, whereas we never had enough pipes to meet the demand.

The Laotian taste differs considerably from the Annnamese. These latter prefer blue or green, whereas Laotians like orange and yellow. We had some red cotton blankets with borders printed in black. All those with triangular ornamentation were sold at once, while square ornaments were not accepted.

Many-coloured small toilet soap was much asked for, not for washing but only for smelling. Soap was immediately called 'saboo' and it became a fashion for the ladies to have a piece each. They all carry a very nice lacquered bamboo basket for a handbag and a piece of saboo was soon considered indespensable, together with tobacco, betel leaves, areca nuts and sisiet-bark. Well meaning Laotian friends told me not to show so many goods at once, but only to show one pipe, one piece of soap and so on, because, they said, clients would be more eager to buy if they thought I had limited stock.

Cotton and silk material were not sold by the yard, but by the 'fathom.' The clients stretched out their arms as far as possible, holding the material between the very tips of their fingers, to get the best possible measure, but presently they all wanted me to measure because my 'fathom' was much longer. I had to keep two prices, one for their fathom and a dearer price for mine. There exists an official fathom, called wa luong, *about six feet, but it is not used in commerce.*

Colonel Tournier became Résident Supérieur of all Laos and made Vientiane his capital. A great ceremony took place at the old Si Saket Pagoda. All chieftains came and performed the sword dance. The swords were dipped in water blessed by the priests and everyone, including us, drank this water as an oath of allegiance to the government. Colonel Tournier was a genial man, a typical officer who had sprung from the ranks, but he had very quaint ideas about trade.

Until our arrival, all export goods went to Bangkok, but now we sent everything to Saigon. One day the colonel came to see me and said he was about to set export duty on certain articles. For example, stick lac was to have a fee of 1.50 piasters per picul (sixty kilos). I said it would not be practically possible to pay more than sixty cents. He laughed and made the duty 1.50 piasters anyway, with the result that no more

stick lac was exported to Saigon, but rather smuggled across the river and sent the old way to Bangkok.

The steamship company Messageries Fluviales, although subsidized by the government, began to let its numerous agents buy rubber from the natives. This became a serious source of competition for me because of the shipping and warehousing facilities. Furthermore, the Annamese employees of this company began to pilfer rubber shipped downstream by us. I found an excellent way of getting even with the company. A post office had opened in Vientiane and it was obliged to carry all mail. During the dry season the company steamer had to moor outside a broad sandbank in front of Vientiane. I prepared several hundred post-parcels of rubber, which I submitted at the post office the very morning that the steamer was to leave. The captain came at the last minute with two men to take the mailbags. My friend the postmaster, Mr. Lavergne, had a good laugh when he told the captain he had better fetch his whole crew to carry the mail across the sandbank. This, in fact, he had to do, though he swore at me.

Colonel Tournier later travelled overland to Luang Prabang to tell the natives they were selling their rubber too cheaply, that it was precious and worth its weight in silver. The result was that they cut the rubber creepers instead of tapping them and all production was killed.

The big difference in price between unshelled and milled rice gave us the idea of acquiring a small rice-shelling machine. We bought one form England, but it proved unsuccessful. Four men sweated while turning it, with poor results. Old Pho-mouk, a Laotian friend, laughed at us and brought along a native machine, which one man worked easily while turning out twice as much white rice. This machine is easily made in a couple of days. A tree trunk is cut crossways into two flat 'cakes.' These are split carefully into thin strips, from the centre to the edge. The strips are then rearranged, about half an inch apart, to form a flat basket; the spaces in between are filled nearly to the top with fine clay. One millstone lies ready as a base. Another is placed inversely on top and actuated with a pole placed as an eccentric. A hole is made in the center of the uppermost millstone, the unshelled paddy is poured in and comes out shelled between the stones.

We had much more success with a small cotton ginning machine. It did good work and I invented a bale-pressing machine actuated by two strong levers. We made good bales and sent large quantities to Saigon. This cotton had short fibres and was especially adapted for the

Japanese market. The Laotians only cultivate cotton for their own use and there is no doubt that cotton growing would pay.

At Vientiane men from places north of Luang Prabang often came to sell precious stones, mostly sapphires, but also topaz, amethyst and garnets. These men, called Thai Nua, 'Laotians from above,' are tattooed from the belt to the knees and look as if they are wearing tight knickerbockers. The first time a man asked me if I wanted to buy stones I was surprised to discover he kept them under his skin. He showed me his arms and legs and was prepared to slit the skin to extract the gems for me. Having no pockets, they ingeniously keep their jewels in safety under the skin's surface. After some years in this business one can imagine how the skin looks. Many of the stones offered are worthless and, being a poor judge, I abstained from buying. These people also make large holes in their earlobes. The women wear great heavy golden ornaments stuck through the ear, and the men seem to take pride in disfiguring themselves still more. I have seen some who carried their matchbox in the ear. The lobe was so distended it formed a ring.

Chapter 20 : Travels

By now we had built a good trade and had plenty of work. We took a new partner named De los Rios, whose father was Spanish and mother English. One of us three Europeans was constantly away for a month or six weeks, beating the countryside on both sides of the Mekong. On the Siamese side I had to use my handy Colt rifle sometimes, but I soon got to be known and was therefore left in peace. Unfortunately, Fäesch began to suffer from bad health and De los Rios could not stand the hardships of sleeping out, eating poor food and occasionally drinking bad water. They both had fever. De los Rios had to go to Saigon and the doctor sent him to Europe, but he died in Paris a month after his arrival.

We were constantly making expeditions to nominate agents to collect produce. I went once with four oxcarts, starting from a village opposite Vientaine on the Siamese side. I was away nearly two months, having reached Muong Pan in the interior of Siam, a dangerous region, which meant I had to have my rifle handy at all times. There were few villages and the jungle was nearly impassable, so I had to change direction constantly. No roads, few bridges and an unfriendly population made the going hard. We took refuge in the pagodas.

Most of our excursions were made by boat and we visited every inhabited place along the river. One evening I arrived at a small village below Pon Pissay on the Siamese side. It was pitch dark and a man from the village told us the locals did not want us to come ashore until morning. This was a disappointment for, having rowed all day, my men anticipated the pleasure of seeing a new place and making love to the girls. It is the custom that the old people retire early and



56. Peter Hauff and Hans Fäesch on the Mekong.

the young girls sit up late, spinning and weaving, while the young men smoke and sing, play the khen *and tell stories, always trying to be witty at each other's expense. If one of the girls wants to do a favour, the young man receives a flower which he places behind his ear. Every morning it was great fun to see who had failed to get a flower. Even some who had a flower were accused of picking it themselves.*

We found a large pagoda for the night. It was empty except for a brick Buddha at one end. We swept the floor and I went to sleep on my mat, with knife and gun handy. I was awakened by something breathing in my ear, put out my hand and felt a hairy body that slunk away. I immediately lit a candle and saw a black animal run behind the Buddha. Its head seemed as large as the body. My men got up quickly and we stalked the strange animal. At last we cornered it and found that it was simply a black dog that had got its head stuck in a black, pear-shaped basket used for catching fish. We had a good laugh, each assuring the other that he had not been afraid.

Ruins lie in all parts of Laos, though none reach the imposing dimensions of Cambodia's magnificent temples. Still, it is terribly impressive when, right in the middle of the jungle, far from any habitation, one comes face to face with the ruins of a temple with bronze or stone Buddhas lying about, overgrown with weeds. I have seen places where hundreds of bronze Buddhas lie mute and untouched.

At Vientiane I heard a lot about the village of Tourakom, on the Nam Ngoum River, two weeks away. According to the map, it looked



57. Peter Hauff and Hans Fäesch aboard the *Ran*, Mekong River, Laos.

as if it would be possible to go up a small river north of Vientiane and then overland to reach it. Besides, this river interested me because the natives panned gold at its junction with the Mekong and I was eager to explore its higher reaches. I took a small canoe with four men and travelled five days through fine scenery, the landscape becoming wilder and rockier until we came to an ideal little village nestling at the foot of a mountain among beautiful trees. The river's steep banks were covered with flowers. I sent two men ahead with my luggage and took a bath alongside the boat. Suddenly I heard laughter and, looking up, saw the bank full of women and girls, who seemed to enjoy the sight. I put on my sampot and went up to the village, but everyone had fled. My men told me that all the village men were away hunting and would only return after nightfall. The women had never seen a white man before and laughed, saying I looked like a woman because although my back was as brown as theirs, the parts below were white.

I took lodging at the pagoda and went to sleep as soon as it was dark. In the middle of the night I was awakened by a torch lighting up my face. The room was filled with people who wanted to touch me and examine all my belongings. Most of the men had never seen a white man and the women were now less shy. The men were determined to see my rifle, which I would not allow them to touch. I needed to create a diversion, and I knew how to do it. I always carried with me a small electro-magnet which gave shocks through two brass handles. I placed one handle and a silver coin in a water jar and told them to hold the

other handle and take out the coin. This caught their interest and they all tried. Each person could not understand why his predecessor could not take out the coin. At last I asked them to go and let me sleep, but before daylight others came wanting to conquer the magic coin. They brought me presents of rice, fruit and eggs.

I made enquiries but no one had even heard of Tourakom. The horizon revealed nothing but high, forest-clad mountains; the locals assured me I could not get anywhere that way. To make a path through unknown mountainous jungle was a thing not to be attempted so I decided to return to Vientiane.

One day, during a lengthy excursion below Saniaburi, I took time off and explored the little tributary called Nam Kadinh. This arm comes into the Mekong from between two huge mountains and natives claimed golden fishes lived here but could never be caught. For such trips I had a very small canoe with a sail, capable of carrying myself and a boy. We went off early in the morning while the big boats continued down river. Here I found the most beautiful scenery and felt a kind of absolute liberty. Waking when the last stars are fading in the sky, seeing the sunrise approach, awakening to the life of a virgin forest, hearing the thousand voices of beasts and birds and insects—this is the real 'joy of life.' We rowed until noon and landed on a beach to cook rice. Suddenly I heard a great noise across the river and saw a large stag running through the jungle with its horns flat against its back, pursued by the long bounds of a great tiger, his stripes gleaming in the sun. In the afternoon we could row no further, faced by a mass of rocks that marked the place where the river emerged from under a mountain. I learned later that the Nam Kadinh is the same as the Nam Theun, which disappears under a mountain several miles away to the east, towards Kham Keut.

The renowned brigand Khrom Apa kept his headquarters in this wild region. He was good to his many followers but he terrorized the countryside, stole cattle which he sold in Siam and took by force anything he wanted. He even exacted tolls on all boats passing on the Mekong and sold passports to the frightened people. The government was forced to make a special expedition to catch him.

I was at Pak Hin Boun when he was brought there in irons and put in prison. His wife was also taken and flogged to make her tell the names of his accomplices, but she stood firm and said nothing. I spoke to her. She could not understand the ways of the white men. One flogged her cruelly while the other (the doctor) gave her medicine and

treated her kindly. Khrom Apa managed to escape across the river to Siam but was recaptured and committed suicide. He put a knife into his stomach and I saw him dying at the ambulance.

During his travels, Hans Fäesch kept an observant eye on the river and recorded changes in the weather.

The Mekong River reaches its peak in July. From August until the following April and May it falls, and when the snows in the mountains of Tibet begin to melt, it brings us debris, trees and whole islets. From then on the river rises until August, in the same cycle, year after year. The difference in the river level varies from sixteen to eighteen metres. High tide facilitates sailing, trade and communication, and we depend on the various degrees of swelling. At low tide transportation to Cochin-China and Cambodia is dangerous, almost impossible. The steamships stop sailing and my letters, normally reaching Saigon in thirteen to sixteen days, now take a month. It is even worse in the opposite direction. Sometimes two months are not enough for mail to reach me. (HF)

21 April, 1899. It is hot, very hot indeed. Thirty-two degrees in the shade, but often up to thirty-six or thirty-eight degrees, especially between eleven am and three-thirty pm. This week we had forty degrees every evening. Last night we had the first rainfall. The river has risen 1.5 metres. (HF)

25 June, 1899. Over the last month the Mekong has risen four metres and sends her dark brown waters downstream with furious force, carrying with it trees, roots and debris. The rainy season has started with all its discomforts. I prefer the heat to this humidity. Mosquitoes are almost eating people alive and snakes and leeches emerge. Underneath the house I keep two fires burning in an effort to smoke out the pestilence. Two kinds of insects can drive you mad. One kind, called hin, *is smaller than a pinhead, almost invisible, easily penetrates the mosquito net and bites like a bedbug. The other kind is bigger, does not bite, but sucks at the rim of your eyes, nose and mouth. Only smoke will chase away the insects and mosquitoes so I keep my pipe in my mouth all day. (HF)*

The discomforts of rain and insects could often be offset by the beauty of the land and the forests encountered during 'business trips' into the interior.

On leaving the villages, the shadows and pleasant coolness of the forest always immediately welcomed me. Enormous old trees stand with their tall trunks tightly interwoven with lianas and all sorts of

creepers. Undergrowth, bamboo and thorny shrubs cover the ground completely. This is virgin jungle, where no living soul has set foot. This is the territory of the wild animals. Multi-coloured birds float on light wings in the dome of the forest. Parrots scream and butterflies, which only a vivid imagination could think up, flutter from leaf to twig, from flower to flower. (HF)

At Ban Kenn I climbed up into the sala, *a large, empty hut, found in every village, which serves as a lodging house for travellers. There I was visited by the locals, a delegation from each house. In these parts there are lots of people who have not yet seen a white man, and especially our way of eating makes them laugh. The prominent inhabitants and the village elders escorted me into the various temples. We inspected the village from one end to the other, which took all of three hours. Everywhere big plantations of mulberry trees can be seen; here the silkworms are reared. (HF)*

Hans Fäesch returned to Europe so I was alone for eight months and did my best to straighten out our affairs. I went to Saigon on business and very nearly got drowned in one of the Khemmarat rapids. The boat I was on, furnished by Messageries Fluviales and transporting mailbags, carried nine crew members, four Annamese passengers and myself. We got caught in a whirlpool and sucked down so that the boat filled with water. The men were prepared to give up and only stared in horror at the foaming water breaking over the rocks in front of us. I argued that it would only be too silly to drown without trying to save ourselves, so I fastened a rattan rope around my waist and started swimming, having taken mark of a tall rock farther downstream. Happily, the rattan rope floated. I drifted downstream quickly but managed to get on the rock's upstream side. The boat swung to and floated past me, but I held onto the rope and secured it by making a turn around the rock. Before I left the boat I had set the people to bailing, and now they managed to pull the boat up to the rock. We stayed there for two days, removed the mailbags and got everything dry and shipshape.

Once back in Vientiane I started work again, calling at all the riverside places to collect goods. I had two boats coupled together with a few large bamboo floats. These I piled full of goods, having no rapids to pass, for I meant to send all by steamer to Savannakhet. One afternoon, near a beach on the Siamese side, I heard a gurgling sound and soon saw we were sinking; one of the boats had sprung a leak. I had some money in a trunk, so I set that afloat with my rifle on top and we

all swam to shore. In the rush I unfortunately kicked the sharp end of a bamboo stick, cutting my foot from toe to heel. The people ashore were very unfriendly. They gave us no help and no food, even though we had nothing to eat. We managed to save only a limited number of hides and had to wait four days for the arrival of the next steamer, bound for Vientiane. By the time we reached there my foot was ghastly. The doctor was away and the steamer would not depart down river for eight more days. I needed help badly, so I took two good men and a small canoe, and we rowed for five days to Pak Hinboun. I had a very high fever and became delirious when the wound was scraped clean. After two days of care I was able to move again, even assisted the local doctor to amputate the leg of a man who had been shot.

The following year I went to London, chiefly to see my mother, but I could not stay long. I was soon fed up with fancy clothes, tea parties and inane conversations that interested me not in the least. Everybody seemed in a hurry, wasting time doing useless things. I disliked the cold and always found the air stuffy. In addition, I found I had become rather impossible. I went to bed too early, got up too early, expected too much of the servant, threw bones on the floor. I could not sleep in a bed, finding it too soft, so I made my own bed on the floor. Above all, I felt that I was a nobody among so many white people.

I was glad to go back to the Far East, booking my third class passage from Southampton to Singapore. On board I met a rather tough sort of man who called himself Salt, who was getting off at Singapore. He was illiterate and told stories of gold digging in Australia, tin mining in Malacca and adventures in Borneo and the South Seas. He had only four pence in his pocket, but we had a big dinner ashore at Port Said, where I wrote a letter for him to his wife in England and paid for the stamp. At Singapore he borrowed money to pay for the luggage from the wharf to the hotel. That afternoon I found my friend Salt in the bar, resplendent in new clothes, standing drinks all around. Later he came to me with a cheque for £400 on London and asked me if it was all right. It was. The next day he showed me another cheque, for £700, and said he was going to Malacca and then back home. He refused to tell me where the money came from and I got the impression something queer was going on. Some years later I saw him again in Singapore, approached him and said, 'Good morning, Salt!' He just looked at me, mumbling that his name was not Salt and that he did not know me.

Chapter 21: Buddhism and Belief

Although Buddhism is the official religion of Laos, age-old beliefs in the forces of nature and spirit worship have always persisted. The most common expression of this ancient animism is the belief in spirits or ghosts, usually considered frightening or dangerous.

The Laotians believe firmly in ghosts, which are classed in many different categories. A ghost is called phi *(pronounced 'pee') and the particular kind of ghost is designated by a suffix. An insane person, believed to be inhabited by a ghost, is called* phi-ba. *Laotians will never say so-and-so is dead. They simply state that 'he is lost' or 'he has gone back to his former village.'*

Some days ago our head coolie saw a big phi sitting in my beautiful mango tree; two coolies gave notice because of the phi. The grandmother of one of them died a short time ago so perhaps the spirit of the deceased is haunting our woods. The other man has experienced something really sinister. As he was sleeping on my verandah, a huge phi stepped on his stomach and stared him in the face with burning eyes. I had to admit that this was terribly disturbing, so I gave a long and voluble oration against the nuisances of all kinds of flying, climbing and perambulating phis. My speech made a deep impression on all except the head coolie. In an equally voluble oration, and in much better Laotian, he stated that even if Than con Khay—*'the gentleman who buys things,' that is, me—or* Than si Ta—*'Jimmy four-eyes,' that is, Peter, because of his spectacles—shot the evil spirit with the rifle which holds many sons in its belly (repeating rifle), the phi would not fall down from the tree.*

I had to admit that was true, and my carefully acquired authority had now slipped out of my hands. (HF)

The phis continue to haunt our trees. Nobody wants to sleep on the verandah. Also, our neighbour, the temple's head priest, has seen phis in our garden, so by now I have almost come to believe in them myself. (HF)

I am very fond of the song sung by the bonzes, the one sounding in the quiet of the night as a high mass. I am often with them. I like the bonzes' simple way of life, their way of dressing and their movements. A nearby temple has a large golden Buddha and many small red and golden Buddhas. All this bathed in the light of the moon creates a fairy-like scene indelibly printed in my mind. How lovely to hear the chanting of the monks. The clear young voices of the novice bonzes set off beautifully the deep basses of the old monks. (HF)

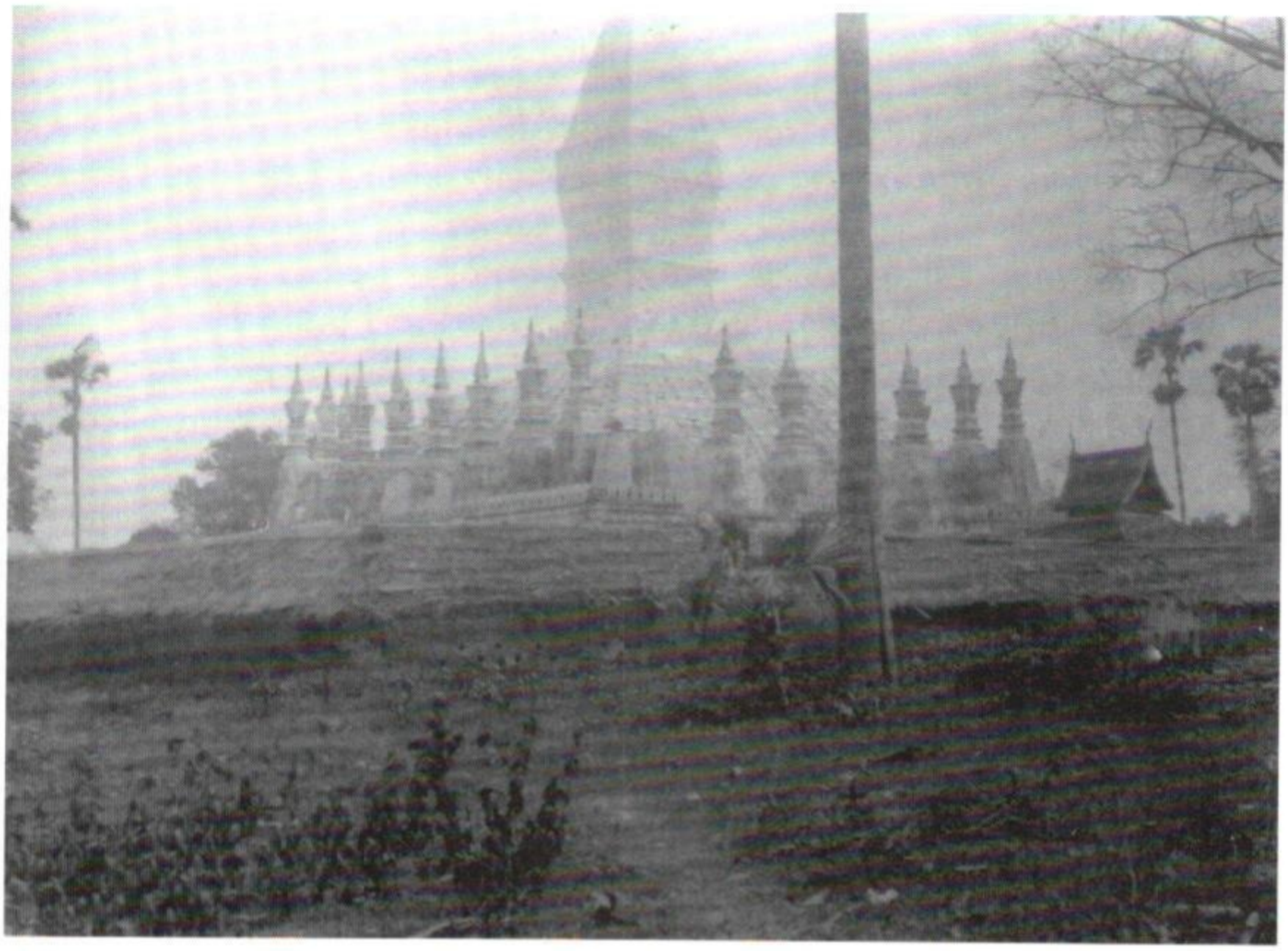
From sunset to bedtime the sacred singing of the monk choristers in the nearby wat (temple) has been carried to me. I love listening to it. The singing of the novices floats like heavenly music. They sing to the glory of Buddha. Quietly a bell chimes, interspersed among the hollow sounds of the gong. Today, because of a full moon, the singing, the bells and the drums are unending. (HF)

Tonight we have had a terrible storm with heavy rains. One of the large coconut palms, loaded with nuts, fell into the wat with a thunderous noise. Undisturbed, the choir continued singing in spite of the rain and wind and splinters from the tree. Softly the song of praise sounded in the darkness of the night, clearly the words rose towards the dark heavens: o kha sa! anna pan te, o pan te, o kha sa! *(HF)*

Not all of Hans Fäesch's observations were so romantic and pious.

*Last night I attended the choir practice of the priests, which took place in the house of the head priest. He was sitting in the background with the text in his hands. In front of him a torch was burning, weakly lighting the primitive room where the priests and monks were sitting or lying on the ground, laughing and chatting during the prayer. Farther away the novices (*nens*) were sitting doing all sorts of irrelevant things. They were all smoking cigarettes and there were huge outbursts of laughter whenever a priest, his hands folded before his face, gravely performing his litany, made a mistake or ran dry. (HF)*

One afternoon while singing a quiet song of lamentation they burnt the body of a child. The funeral pyre arched high above the small coffin, made of light wood and swathed in cotton strips. At first there was silence. Then, with a wad of cotton, the priest lit the fire and



58. That Luang, the Great Sacred Stupa, Vientiane, Laos.

quickly the flames engulfed the pyre. The low and lovely singing started again, and the priest mumbled a prayer. Finally everyone departed, single file. After the cremation there was eating, drinking and dancing. (HF)

Corpses are usually burnt, but also often simply thrown in the forest, or, in the case of death by infectious disease, the body is sewn into a mat and thrown into the river, on a raft of bamboo covered with flowers and lighted candles. Only priests are buried and have tombstones.

All men learn to read and write, but many forget because they never practice and have no use for literacy. The Laotian alphabet is easy to learn and is written from left to right. Young boys, sent to the nearest pagoda until the age of fifteen, are taught reading and writing by the priests. They do all the menial work and must observe monastic rules, such as eating only one meal per day. Every morning priests and pupils, each with a bowl, go in a procession through the village to collect food given to them by all the housewives. At age fourteen or fifteen the pupil becomes chua *and wears a yellow robe. Some time later he*

will decide whether he will become a priest or return to his family. If he chooses to become a priest he takes a vow of chastity; a priest is forbidden to talk to women except at a distance. He shaves his head and passes his time singing psalms at certain hours of the day, beating a wooden drum to mark time. He gives counsel to those who ask for it. The sacred language of Laos, like Cambodia, is Pali.

The high priest at Wat Mai (built in 1796) in Luang Prabang was called Satu. He was a dear old soul, very learned, who calculated and foretold correctly eclipses of sun and moon. His greatest amusement was to take a watch to pieces and put it together again.

Laos' most important building is the That Luang, four kms from the centre of Vientiane. Partly restored, this temple complex covers a large square, with lesser sanctuaries forming its four sides. From an elevated interior square rises the square, central tower; it is nearly fifty metres high.

The town of Vientiane was formerly surrounded by a great wall, now in ruins. Some forty pagodas still remain within the walled area. The principal one is called Si Saket; the walls of its main hall contains several hundred niches, each niche holding two Buddha images. Laotians, after success in some undertaking or recovery from a serious illness, present Buddhas to the pagodas as thanksgiving.

CHAPTER 22: CUSTOMS AND FESTIVALS

Many people complained to me saying they could not make the Laotians work. I admit they are not hard-working, especially when asked to do unusual jobs or use unusual tools. But they can work very satisfactorily with their own tools; very few white men could replace a Laotian at his own special job. They are not used to hard work and cannot understand the many things that the white man considers useful. Patience and comprehension go a long way with them. There is a much used word in Laotian: susu. *It means 'anyhow' or 'just for fun' or 'with no particular intention.' If you ask 'What are you doing?' a Laotian will reply* het susu, *'I am just working susu.' Of course a white man thinks they do too much susu. It is good policy to let them amuse themselves in their own way and I always gave my Laotian workers permission to do what they wanted when there was a* boun, *a village feast.*

A boun takes several weeks to prepare; much time and effort goes into making cakes and dishes and brewing rice alcohol. It is not strong and only the old people drink it. Sometimes they make it look better by adding aniline dye, but it does nothing to improve the taste. They also make a kind of weak beer. Leftover cold rice is collected in jars. When nearly full, these jars are topped up with paddy and dry yeast is added. The jars are then closed with clay and left to stand for about ten days. When the time to drink comes, the clay cover is broken and long reed straws are inserted and water poured on. Four or five people drink from the same jar through the reeds. The result is a very good drink, vaguely resembling weak beer.

An important boun lasts several days. Bamboo sheds are put up around a large open square and in these all the women and girls sit and serve cakes and delicacies to the men, who squat down in front, telling jokes and singing impromptu poetry. What we call obscene language is tolerated, though no man would touch a woman. Practical jokes are played and appreciated if they are funny, otherwise the culprit is hissed off the grounds. The girls dance, often sitting down, with graceful movements of hands and body. Small wax candles are placed between the fingers and this makes a pretty play of light and shadow.

If a young girl is pleased and wishes to encourage a young man's declaration of love, she gives him a carefully prepared betel leaf to chew. Instead of asking the actual question 'Do you love me?' she asks if the betel is good. If the man says yes, it means he is honestly in love with her. The festivities continue until late at night, and visitors from afar sleep in the sheds, rest during the day and start the amusement again in the evening. Powder and paint are not used as cosmetics, though people wear plenty of flowers in the hair.

Women bathe four times a day. They bring a stick, wade out until the water reaches their knees, plant the stick beside them, sit down and take the skirt over the head in one motion, hanging it on the stick. Women always bathe together at certain assigned places. The men bathe farther up river, and the priests still farther up. These rules are strictly kept.

I must mention some Laotian laws, which exhibit the tolerant and peaceful disposition of the people. Divorce, for instance, is a very simple matter. The husband or wife seeking the divorce leaves a bunch of flowers on the sleeping mat of the spouse and quits the home—that is all and nothing more need be said. Incidentally, I have never seen two women quarrel in Laos.

How different from Vietnam, where the women were tearing off each other's trousers!

As for theft: stealing is not considered a crime if the stolen goods can be eaten at once, or if the article carried away does not exceed one tical [baht] in value.

The Laotians are not usually gamblers, but do play a game called lin bia *with four cowrie shells, formerly used as money. Two of these shells are scooped out and filled with black resin. All four are tossed like dice and may fall with black or white uppermost. The men are good wrestlers and also play a game almost identical to field hockey. An-*

other sport consists of kicking a bamboo ball with feathers, similar to a shuttlecock.

The men dress like the Cambodians, but wear fewer coats and hats. Shoes and socks are rarely worn; only very rich people have this luxury. The men have short hair, and elders often shave their head, leaving only a tuft above the forehead. At Luang Prabang the women arrange thier hair in a high knot on the top of the head, wound round with a gold chain. Babies are painted all over with the juice of a root called ki min *so that they become yellow. It is said that ki min protects them from mosquito bites.*

May, the Month of Roses (1899). The houses in the village of Ban Isai are built on piles and underneath are looms. This is always a sign of wealth since those who work in this country become wealthy. The silk is handled by women so I am soon surrounded by the fair sex of the hamlet. The old women squat and all wear a sinh, *the Laotian woman's sarong. They chew betel and spit the red sauce into the middle of our circle. The young women sit in the second row and the girls behind them. Laotian women wear their hair cut very short and wear flowers as ornaments.* Dokmai, *a white frangipani, is stuck behind their ears and in their hair. How they manage to keep them there I do not understand, since when talking they make lively gestures, the shaking of the head being an important feature of communication. Young ladies also wear a* pha, *a piece of material, mostly yellow, wound around the breasts. The sinh is almost always made of silk, interwoven with many golden threads. Underneath the sinh the wealthier women also wear a white cotton pha, which in a charming way can be discerned at the top. This feature is of great importance since it signals a high social position. I should point out that all Laotian silk is very rough and cannot be used in European mills. (HF)*

The wife of the village head brought me a brass bowl full of fruits and decorated with dokmai. The gifts are always presented with great ceremony by a woman who kneels down in front of you, proffers the bowl, folds her hands and lifts them above her head. Then follows a light bending of the upper part of the body, then the arms fall and conversation begins. The natives never speak to a white person without squatting on the ground. (HF)

When you meet a Laotian in the street, he takes off his hat, steps to the side of the road and when the than *[gentleman] approaches, he squats. Young women turn their backs on Europeans from a squatting*

position, and they invariably do so when not wearing a breast cloth (pha). (HF)

If you enter a house, you are shown into the first room closest to the ladder. A mat and a pillow are immediately produced and the owner of the house squats in the direction of the mat, pointing at it and inviting you to sit down. When the guest has taken a seat, all the surrounding men and women sit down on the bare floor. At first everybody is silent while cigarettes and a bottle of water are placed before the guest. Everybody smokes and the conversation may begin. The children are always frightened and run away. Young girls keep their distance but old women, especially grandmothers, have great authority. (HF)

Time is reckoned by the moon (lunar calendar) and dates are given as 'fifth day of the fading moon' or 'fifth day of the growing moon.' Annamese reckon a child to be one year old upon the arrival of his first New Year's day; Laotians reckon age as we do. Many adults are unsure of their age.

Laotian folklore resembles the Cambodian and is filled with tales of all sorts, including the following cautionary story of the Princess and the Priest.

The King of Vientiane had a beautiful daughter who, unfortunately, fell in love with a young priest. Against all sacred rules, this priest yielded to temptation and fled with the princess in a small boat down the Mekong River. The princess lay on a bed of flowers in the bottom of the boat, her lover sang beautiful songs to her. The boat glided softly with the current and everything seemed perfect. The princess then saw a tree on the bank, covered with the most pleasing and alluring red flowers, and she said she wanted some of them. Wishing to please her, the priest climbed up the tree to pluck the blossoms, but an evil spirit dwelling there caused him to fall into the water and drown. His wicked soul stayed behind in the flowers, and ever since these flowers have always been full of black flies.

I myself have seen that the centres of these flowers are infested with black flies. In addition, the fruit of this tree is beautiful to look at but completely inedible. This story and its symbols ought to warn priests to refrain from such escapades, but I am afraid such is not always the case. The Laotians are very tolerant, and passionate, and temptation sometimes gets the better of them.

The fon *is a special mimed dance accompanied by the melodious tunes of the* khen, *a kind of flute-organ. During the dance the feet*

remain in the same place but the arms, wrists and fingers are moved and distorted in beautiful and wild ecstasies whenever the music expresses softness or passion. The head, shoulders, chest and abdomen take part in the movements, now in a gentle, now in an abrupt way. The effect of the fon on the Laotian mind is impressive. The observer is transported into amazement and rapture. His eyes become wide and he follows every movement of the dancer, whose half-closed eyes are fixed on the ground. It has often happened that a girl performing the fon for me suddenly opened her eyes and stared me straight in the face. This is a declaration of love, and a Laotian would be unable to resist. A young Laotian girl perfroms the fon in the same way that a young lady plays the piano back home. (HF)

Flowers play an important role in Laotian life. Even if the language at times appears ugly, flower names seem to have a poetic ring. They seem to belong to a different language altogether: sokselika, dokanika, dokphila (pomegranate flower). (HF)

The male lover receives a dokmai *flower from his girlfriend. As he has no buttonhole, he places it behind his ear and, thus adorned, proudly parades in front of his friends. The sweet smell of the flower symbolizes the tender love that he feels for her. He, on his part, gives her the fiery red* dokphila *that tells her of his burning passion for her. She, too, places this symbol of love behind her ear. (HF)*

*Then the feast of union (*bun*) follows with lots of flowers and cotton strings. These cotton ribbons or strings have many functions, but all are for the good. Their presentation ensures quick growth for babies, and sick people are given cotton ribbons to wear around their waists to help them recover. A traveller is given a cotton string to assure safe passage through the dangerous* kengs *(rapids). And lovers attach a ribbon to their arms, the man to his left, the girl to her right, and soon after they tear it apart. The one with the longer section feels the stronger love in his, or her, heart. Through the use of these consecrated strings, the Buddha helps and heals the people, giving them a deeper insight into the chambers of life. (HF)*

During the wedding all sorts of fruits, decorated with flowers, are placed amidst cakes and cookies, rice of the finest quality and rows of small yellow candles. The guests arrange themselves as they please around a small table. With good appetites, they help themselves to cooked and baked dishes, to rice and padek*, a fish dish. Then there is music and fon dancing and brandy. Cotton threads tie everything together. The oldest man says a prayer. He asks the Buddha for much*

money, much rice, much blessed youth, good health for the buffaloes, fertile fields and so on. Then the cotton strings are tied together. In his left hand the groom holds eggs, rice and cookies, asking the deity that these things will never be missing. In her right hand the bride receives fruits, silk and cotton so that these will never be absent in their future household. Then both their wrists are tied together and the thread is broken. Uninterrupted eating and drinking continue until sunset. (HF)

In general, Laotian cooking is unrefined. Rice is the staple, and the people eat practically anything they can find. The jungle, fortunately, is filled with excellent things to eat. In living as a Laotian I have eaten and enjoyed fried iguana [monitor] tails, pelican meat, grilled snake, grasshoppers, ants and other insects. Near Vientiane, and especially at Luang Prabang, exists a tremendously large fish called pa beuk. *It can reach 300 lbs, and great joy arises in a village when such a fish is caught, especially one containing roe, which is salted and as good as caviar.*

Vientiane. Three days ago we had a lovely feast. At sunset the priests started beating the gongs. Earlier that afternoon a boat race had taken place on the river and the long boats with their gold and red prows were now waiting. The bonzes occupied themselves making a platform of bamboo from one boat to another to act as a foundation for a large frying pan that held cooking oil. Soon a big fire was crackling underneath and grease from the pan often hit the flames. As darkness fell across the water, many boats left the river bank to the accompaniment of harmonious ringing of bells and bonging of gongs. This was the start of a marvelous festival of lights. All up and down the Mekong, 'fire boats' were sent out. Fiery chains ran like snakes across the river. Thousands of small floating lamps, illuminated with oil and cotton wicks drifted with the current. Myriad pieces of light reflected in the water like embers, hundreds of thousands of little lights shimmering and glimmering, moving with the stream. Every Laotian, even the most backward, understands the meaning of this festival of lights. All over Laos the millions of little flames set out on the river ask the Buddha for a steady, life-giving flow of water, and in his faithful heart he listens to the sound of bells and gongs and songs coming from the fire boats and he trusts in his God.

Chapter 23: The Tragedy of Hans Fäesch

Life appeared lovely and free, full of festivals and lights. But this was illusory. In August, 1899 Hans Fäesch acknowledged for the first time that he had a serious health problem.

Since my last entry [nearly two months before] *I have suffered from a bad bout of dysentery and I probably have to go to hospital in Pak Hinboun. (HF)*

Then in December he writes:

A fortnight ago I went to the hospital where peace and quiet and good care have made me feel much better, but my recovery is not stable and it has been decided that I should go to the plateau of Xieng Khouang, which is situated 1200 metres up in the mountains; it has a European climate at this time of year. (HF)

This plateau, over 100 miles north-northeast of Vientiane, contains the highest point in Laos (Mount Phou Bia, 9246 feet [2820 metres] above sea level) and also embraces the famous Plain of Jars. My grandfather had visited Xieng Khouang previously and had this to say about the region.

Between Luang Prabang and North Annam lies the Laotian province of Xieng Khouang, formed of hills and of an altitude that permits the cultivation of European fruits. The grass is good and suitable for cattle raising. First, however, the region must be rid of the tigers, which



59. Family group of Laotians at Xieng Khouang, Laos.

abound in the jungle. I have seen ice on the pools of water early in the morning.

Hans Fäesch continues with his narrative.

For twenty days I have been on my way from Tatoum, and from there the road was very bad. An attack of fever complicated things even more. In this country the roads do not go through passes but across mountain tops. The horses climb like goats and the people unwillingly carry their burdens. (HF)

He tried to keep up his spirits, and over the next few days he had encounters with the Meo tribal people. He enjoyed the company of these mountain dwellers, but even more so the scenery.

I felt as if I was in the Swiss Alps. Pigs in their sties and cows in their stables gave the place an alpine atmosphere. It was cold. Misty clouds passed by, dampening the short grass, cyclamen and feverweed. It was just like the peaks of the Bernine Alps. Homesickness caught hold of me. (HF)

His health held for the time being, and the cool weather of the upland plateau was a temporaty relief. Once he reached Xieng Khouang he was installed in the local guest house, but then his health took a turn and by

early February, 1900 he was in trouble. The saga of Hans Fäesch is worth telling in full because of its drama and the heroism that he showed while lonely and miserable in wild territory. Ultimately it played a part in my grandfather's life and his decision to leave Laos.

I am getting worse. I feel miserable, cold, fever, dysentery, no more medicine, no milk, no sugar, lodgings lousy, coolies on the point of mutiny, and I dare not show them how ill I feel. (HF)

He finally decides to leave the highlands, and writes the following from Luang Prabang on 9 March, 1900.

I left Xieng Khouang in a very bad state on the morning of 23 February. I had fifteen coolies and, being too weak to walk or ride, was carried all the way to Muong You in a sedan chair. My coolies are a bunch of weaklings, they are almost all ill, they moan and groan and are terribly bad humoured. They are opium addicts. Yesterday I was thrown out of my chair three times, today only once. Sunday, 26 February was a long, tiresome day. I was very weak and on arrival at the sala *(guest house) I was shivering with fever so badly that my servant immediately put me to bed. The coolies were very frightened of staying at the sala because they thought I was going to die and become a ghost (phi). Then I would sit on the sala roof and do them harm. The next morning when I woke up I discovered that my coolies and bearers had made themselves scarce, abandoning me and my servant and all my belongings in the wilderness. On top of that I had an attack of the shivers at nine am, with no medicine or milk. In short, I was at my wit's end. (HF)*

My runaway coolies let me know that they would carry me on only if I doubled their wages. I could not give in to this insolence if I wanted to keep my dignity, but I had come to the end of my tether and longed for the hospital. So I sent for the oldest man in the village and told him that I was going to die, but first I wanted to be carried to Luang Prabang. If he could not place at my disposal twenty coolies from his village within an hour, I would die right here and my phi would sit on his rooftop and he would experience all sorts of calamities. This helped. After half-an-hour a man came along with nineteen bearers and soon we were on our way. After days of forced marches we finally arrived in Luang Prabang on 5 March. I was so miserable I could hardly reach the hospital. I was brought finally to a beautiful bamboo hut and was happy just to lie down. Here at the hospital there is a good doctor and I am being well cared for. He will keep me here for some weeks. If I cannot be cured I will go to Europe. (HF)

This is, in fact, what happened. After three weeks at the Luang Prabang hospital Fäesch returned to Vientiane, but his short period of good health did not last and in April, 1900 he set out for Europe. He went back home to Basel and with care, good food and rest he recovered over the course of many months. His spirits rose and all he could think about was returning to his work and the strange, difficult but wonderful life he had discovered in Laos. He also thought of his dear friend and companion, my grandfather, and wanted to carry on to fulfill their dreams of a successful business. Nearly a whole year had passed by the time he returned to join up again with my grandfather.

In retrospect, it would have been better for Hans Fäesch to stay in Europe, guard his health and find a more suitable line of work. But he loved the adventure, the challenge and the exotic life he had chosen, and in the end nothing could keep him from it.

During the following two-and-a-half years Fäesch reported that his state of health was good. His single greatest adventure during that period was a trip of exploration to find a new, shorter route for exporting goods to Haiphong, through Tonkin, over the mountains of Laos along difficult elephant paths. My grandfather wrote in detail about that trip (see Chapter 25), and also recounts one last adventure with his dear friend.

When I returned to Vientiane [from Europe] I found our business affairs going to pieces and Fäesch in a very bad state. He had lost his energy and did not want to see white men. He took only native remedies and suffered much from dysentery and liver complaint. We decided to sell the little steamer Si-thanh, *and I tried to clear up our money matters. A half-Chinese from Siam named Chau-un had settled in Vientiane and we advanced him 4000 piasters to procure rubber. He delivered no rubber and would not return the money. I heard he was planning to leave so I watched him. As expected, he boarded the steamer with a heavy chest, and I followed him with the intention of getting my money back, but the captain refused to let me molest his passenger. As a backup, Fäesch had gone to a spot across the river at the Siamese town of Nong Khai with horses and six armed men. Arriving at Nong Khai, Chau-un went ashore with his money box and joined a group of waiting friends. I knocked some of them over and sat on the money box, with a gun pointed at them. Then I rushed down to the beach, met Fäesch, opened the chest before witnesses, found our money (minus a few hundred piasters) and returned to Vientiane. Two days later Colonel Tournier summoned me and said he would put me* before the native tribunal. I pointed out that this he could hardly do, as the

'crime' had been done by a foreigner against a foreigner in a foreign country. This was the last I heard about the incident.

In the end, however, climate, disease and hard conditions caught up with Hans Fäesch. During the summer rainy season of 1903 he suddenly fell ill with fever. A doctor in Vientiane nursed him with loving care and hoped to see him recover.

I have some bad days behind me. I have suffered terrible attacks of fever but today I am better. My old friend, the head priest of the temple of Si Saket paid me a visit in order to see for himself how I was. 'Do not despair,' he said. 'The fever will soon disappear, the evil spirits (phis) will not touch you, the good spirits will protect you because you please our God.' A short while before, at the request of the old man, I had had the Buddhas in the temple painted with gold and had thus obtained the goodwill of the priests and their gods. (HF)

These lines were written at the end of July, and they held out a touch of optimism. But he suffered a terrible setback, a sudden attack of dysentery, and in spite of the very best treatment Hans Fäesch died on 5 August, 1903 at the age of 32. He was buried in Vientiane in the grounds of the Old Temple [of Si Saket], near to the home he had built and where he had spent so many evenings listening to the monks' songs and beloved night sounds.

Chapter 24: Down the Mekong

My grandfather's story picks up again. His notes, comments and observations are invaluable in understanding the situation in Laos and Siam at the turn of the century. He could, with pride and confidence, speak about his experiences and all he had learned.

I was interested in all I saw and heard. I wanted to meet other peoples and races so I took every occasion to travel. I always chose the most primitive means of locomotion, just to learn more.

The Mekong River has a length of over 4400 kms, and its source on the high plateau of Tibet is far, far away from the lush, tropical climate of Laos. I myself have gone upstream for a distance of 2650 kms from its mouth. At Luang Prabang, some 2600 kms up the river, the banks are very steep, but vary with the time of year. Many stretches are navigable the whole year, such as the 400-km section between Vientiane and Savannakhet. Below this is a stretch of 165 kms that contains fifty rapids.

Peter Hauff gleaned this knowledge the hard way, travelling each difficult kilometre by himself, year after year, slowly adding to the storehouse of his experiences. My grandfather's first major trip down the Mekong River, in the summer of 1899, makes for exciting reading.

In time we had more goods to send than the steamer could carry. We had taught the natives to collect India rubber and they gathered rather important quantities. This we always sent by steamer, but now we could not find room for the hides, horns and other produce. I then decided to undertake our own transport. I took two large boats and twenty men, travelled up river to the mouth of a small tributary and

went up this for several days to a forest of bamboo, a special kind with long joint sections, suitable for making rafts. The place was like a paradise in the middle of the day, no people, only birds and butterflies in the thousands. The nights were awful, though. It was impossible to sleep because of mosquitoes, ants and especially a species of tiny white fly, too small to be seen singly, that stung incessantly. We made a great fire all night long and sat around it picking leeches off each other. The first morning two men had their faces so swollen they could not see. We worked for all we were worth. Bamboos were cut in great quantities and made into four huge bundles, tied around with rattan. One bundle was placed on each side of the two boats, coupled together with cross pieces of wood so that the boats were lifted completely above the water. On this we made a floor of bamboo and a hut, also of bamboo. It took us five days to finish this raft and we were glad to get back on the Mekong.

The river was rising every day now. By the end of June all preparations were finished and my floating warehouse was loaded with approximately forty tons of buffalo (ox) hides, stag hides and horns. Numerous other kinds of produce were on board as well.

I called my craft Hoppy *and, with a crew of fourteen men, I departed Vientiane early one fine morning and passed Muong Kouk by midday. I had two small boats with me and rowed ashore to see the French missionary there, but good old Father Contet was not at home. In the afternoon we arrived at Nong Khai, an important Siamese town where I went to the post office and received a letter which had been waiting for me for four months. I sent a telegram to Ban Duamakheng, site of a Siamese prince who doubled as the provincial governor. I got an immediate reply saying that I would be received. In the meantime I chatted with a Siamese official who told me he was the happy father of forty-two sons, and he promised to let me have three horses the next morning. I only got them at five pm. One had a saddle, the other a cushion and the third nothing on its back. I had two men with me and started at once but soon came to a muddy place where the horses sank and got stuck. We managed to haul them out but soon after the water and mud became so deep it reached their bellies, then their backs. I gave it up as a bad job and never did see the prince. We got back to Nong Khai at eight pm, battered and bleeding from our jungle trip.*

We floated gaily with the current for three days, then camped at a small village named Ban Nakhan, inhabited by the Kha tribe who speak their own language. These Kha usually inhabit the mountains and differ greatly from the Laotians. I found them shy but not unkind.

The next day we passed the first rapids at Keng Kadok and six days later the rapids of Keng Pa and Kheng Kabao. We stopped at the Siamese town of Nakhon Phanom, where I wanted to see a renowned tomb (that), a beautiful monument nearly 100 feet high, said to have been built in a single night by all the girls of the town, helped by angels. Now badly deteriorated by age, it is built of brick plastered with the native substitution for cement, made of sand, lime, sugar and glue from buffalo hides. This mixture becomes very hard and is still used in Laos. Legend says that a great treasure lies buried under That Phanom; the Siamese government keeps a watchman there. A side temple houses a Buddha of black stone. The local priests told us that if any man could lift it while seated, he would be assured of great riches and long life. All my men tried in vain to lift the statue.

The next eleven days passed without serious mishap. It was difficult to steer this unwieldy craft and every evening it took at least an hour to get moored. A man would swim to shore with a long rattan rope and fix it to a tree. We payed out the rope little by little so as to slacken speed and stop. We arrived safely at Huan Hin but knew we had the most dangerous part ahead of us, the rapids of Khemmarat.

The fun began immediately. We passed one rapid after another and in the evening stopped at a small island. A terrific thunderstorm took the roof off my floating home so I slept under a buffalo hide. We soon made a new roof and cast off. Just below the island churned four whirlpools that made us dance round and round. The powerful current carried us towards a very nasty rapid called Keng Khongluong, where many lives have been lost. Either because of bad judgement or strong wind we missed the middle channel and were turned up river by a side current, only to be caught in a whirlpool, which made us turn like a top, without escape, for an astonishing seven hours. At last we managed to fix a rope to the shore and haul ourselves to safety. A smaller craft would certainly have been sucked down and lost. We started again but were once more trapped in a whirlpool until late evening. We finally got to shore and stayed there until morning.

The next day and the following three days went well. Then we were caught on a rock in the Keng Don Makkeua. We tried another route

through the rocks and rapids, but this forced the raft to go over a three-foot fall. We braced ourselves, all the crew ready to swim if necessary, but we passed safely. Our stock of rattan successfully repaired the damaged bamboo floats. The landscape here is of a savage beauty, the rocks are quite black and polished, forest-clad mountains rise on both sides and the current is so strong the river appears to be higher in the middle than on the sides.

That same day we had a bad scrape. One of the bamboo floats was torn off on a rock and we spent two days repairing it. Now the current seemed to become more furious every hour, the volume of water increased over the rapids and it became nearly impossible to stop. We could hear the roar and see the vapours of the huge rapids ahead. One man after another jumped overboard and swam for shore with the rope, but it broke again and again. At last only three of us were left on the raft. The rattan rope got caught around my leg, dragging me overboard and cutting me badly in three places. Somehow we managed to stop the hurtling raft—the men came swimming back in the pitch dark, everyone utterly exhausted.

The next morning the river was full of driftwood. Whole trees with roots and all swirled around, disappeared into whirlpools and popped up farther down, grinding against each other with the noise of breaking branches. We shoved away huge trunks that crashed against our craft; the bamboo broke constantly, some giant trunks threatened to capsize us and the raft became increasingly unstable. About noon we were very nearly sucked down in a very strong whirlpool. The water flooded over us, we lost control completely and were sent towards a ledge of rocks barely covered by the water. The men rowed, prayed and swore in turn. The raft was driven onto the ledge and we passed over it sideways. Against all expectations we were still afloat below the ledge and danced on gaily. Rapids continued to threaten us and we were so low in the water that the deck was continually awash. Two men bailed constantly. We were glad to stop a whole day at the village of Ban Pong. Here we got extra bamboo which we added to the bundles. The men had fished out of the river a twisted tree trunk, which we erected in the village with the following inscription: Thanh Hauff mi boun lai *('Mr. Hauff has much luck').*

After this the voyage was comparatively easy and we finally arrived at Khong. We discharged the cargo, undid the bamboo and took the goods in several trips by the original boats to Khone, to be sent to Saigon by steamer. I had two days to wait and sent the men back to

Vientiane with the boats. Then I did some sightseeing before heading downstream. In the forest at Khone sits an ancient temple dedicated to Brahma, the Hindu god of Creation. Here is a lingam stone, still visited by women wanting a child.

When I came to Saigon I was rather in a sorry state. My wounds were still open and I was tired out, largely because the food on board the raft was insufficient.

Fortunately, in Saigon my grandfather had a chance encounter that led to an interesting and enjoyable diversion, one he badly needed for recuperation after the trials and bruises of the river.

I met an old friend, Captain Mugford of the S/S Lady Mitchell. *He was taking a cargo of rice to Iloilo on the island of Panay in the Philippines and asked me to come along. I accepted. At Iloilo I witnessed the bombardment of Santa Barbara, part of the Spanish-American War, just missed being shot by a Filipino and run through with the bayonet of an American soldier for being out past curfew. After Iloilo, we crossed the Sulu Sea, passed the northern end of Borneo and saw the huge peak of Mt. Kinabalu, known as The Chinese Widow. We put in at Labuan for coal, where I saw a little of Sarawak. My health returned and once back in Saigon I started for Vientiane.*

24/VII
ข้ามจำหน่าย

Chapter 25: Elephant Trails

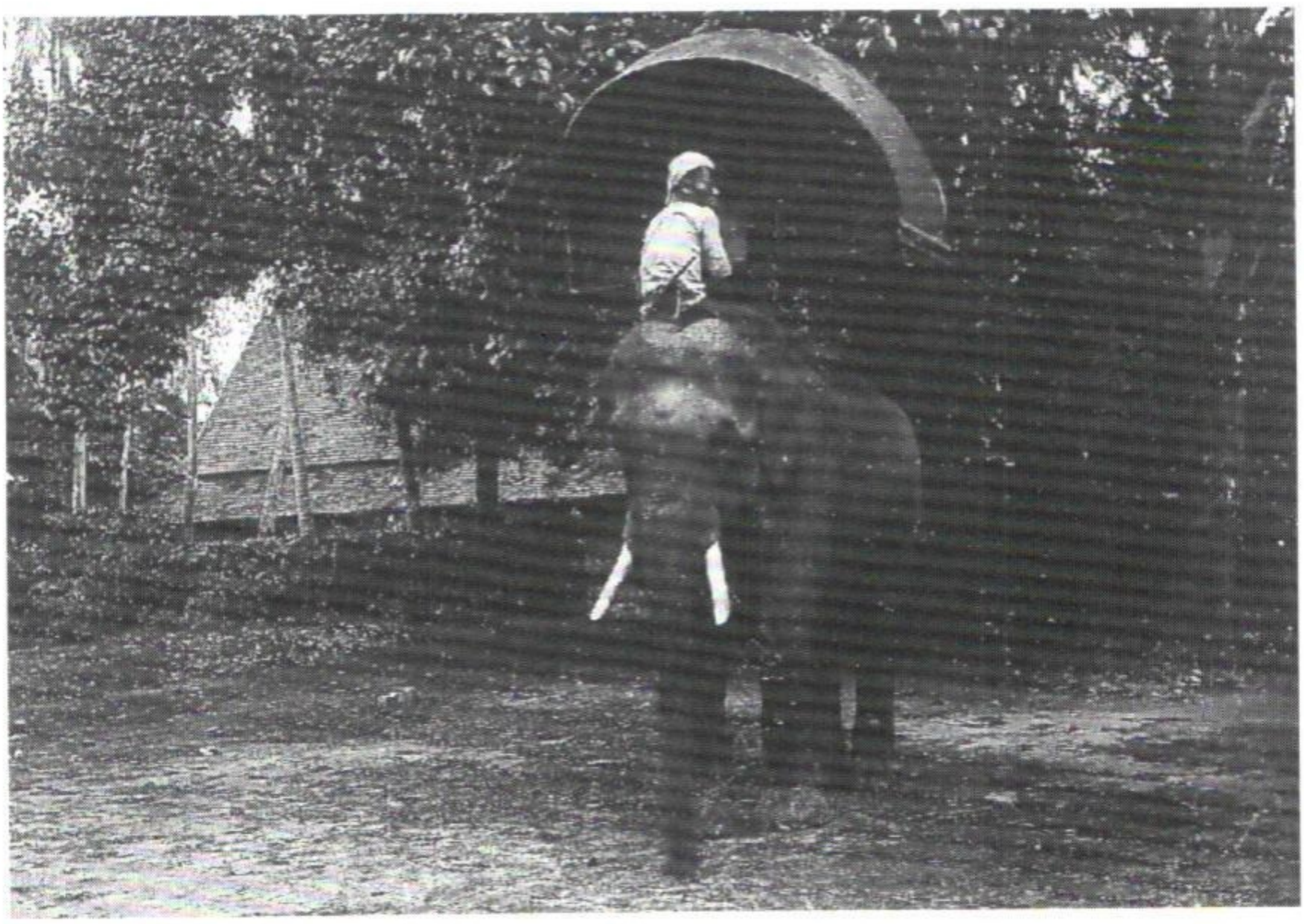
I was told there was rubber to be found in the province of Cammon, half way to the coast, so we decided to go there. I took several boat-loads of rubber from Vientiane to transport and landed at Pak Hinboun, hired smaller boats and started up the Nam Hinboun tributary. We went as far as possible, to a place called Kheng Keut, head of a district with old tin mines, now worked by a French company. I hired fourteen elephants at Kheng Keut, loaded them and set off past Kham Keut, across the Nam Theun River, through Cammon Province to Nape, last village west of the Annamese chain of mountains.

Passing Kham Keut, I came upon a camp of Khas who were sawing planks in a curious fashion. They built a scaffold high up into a tree, lopped off the top branches and then sawed planks downwards, directly from the living tree. They explained it was hard work to fell a tree and then raise it for sawing; this way was easier. In Cammon Province are some enormous trees. I once measured a fallen tree that was nearly 200 feet from roots to crown.

To begin with I rode an elephant, but soon found it more agreeable to go on foot because of the creature's very uneven gait. Also, the elephants refused to cross the rickety bridges. Instead they climbed down into the ravines and up the other sides, often stopping along the way to feed on nice juicy trees.

Laos has few tame elephants because most are exported to Burma or Siam, where they are used in the teak timber industry. A tame elephant will fetch up to 40,000 rupees in Burma. Wild elephants are plentiful, however, and the Laotians hunt them in a special way. Hunting expeditions take one or two years, with up to 100 men. Ten or









60-63. With elephants in Laos.

twenty of these men head into the deep forest, armed with fearsome looking home-made guns. These have very large bore barrels and the butt is replaced with an iron spike. Each gun is loaded right up to the muzzle with all sorts of broken iron and brass, even stones. After several weeks of searching the hunters spot a heard and then must approach it with great cunning to mark out the bull elephant. Once done, the hunters array themselves and one armed man lets himself be chased by the bull. He runs as fast as he can to a chosen place, drives the gun into the ground, lets the elephant nearly trample him and then pulls the trigger by a string tied to his foot. He runs away and another man lets himself be chased, and so on, until they kill the bull elephant. After that it is easier to catch some of the others with snares, pitfalls or traps. The men also use tame elephants to help catch the wild ones. The taming begins by tying large tree trunks to the elephants' legs, which stops them from running away. One man takes care of a particular elephant and little by little wins its confidence. If the animal is bad tempered it is tied up and starved into obedience. The period of taming continues during the long tramp to Burma and the elephant's value increases the nearer it gets to Mandalay.

The semi-domesticated elephants interested me. Every afternoon at about five pm the elephants were unloaded and allowed to roam in the forest. Each had a wooden bell so it could be found more easily in the morning. The drivers went out very early every morning, about three am, to seek the animals and sometimes had difficulty in bringing them back. It is useless to try and make an elephant carry anything more than the burden it was given at the start of the trip. For example, it will carry four men, or four women, but not two men and two women. One morning I watched the elephants being loaded, especially a female, that seemed to look around for something. She walked up to a bush and carefully chose a particular branch, which she broke off below the fork, having first removed the upper branches. She thus got a fork with which to scratch herself. Elephants are susceptible to flies and mosquitoes. I noticed she followed a plan; had she broken the whole branch at once, she could not afterwards have made the fork. Another elephant, a mother, carefully balanced a tree trunk on a stone to make a see-saw for her baby. These baby elephants are intensely funny, with their wrinkled skin and old-age appearance, yet inside they are wonderfully childish.

As we travelled, the elephants paid no attention to the discomfort of branches whipping our faces. I tried going on horseback but my legs

were too long for these small ponies and I caught my feet in the undergrowth. In Cammon I passed a valley with the most wonderful vegetation of gigantic tree ferns. Towards evening, behind a palm tree, I suddenly saw a near-naked Kha with his bow, arrows and spear. The Kha live in the jungle and meet the tigers without fear. I gave him a present and he sent his arrows unerringly at whatever I pointed to. The arrows are made of the glassy part of the bamboo and the ends are burnt to make them hard. Later I took one of the Kha aside, gave him a knife and told him to light a fire. He chose two kinds of wood, a block of hardwood and a thin stick of another species. Then he made a bow of bamboo, twisted some string around the stick, made a small hole half way through the block, filled this with scrapings of dry bamboo, inserted the stick and made it rotate quickly by using the bow. In about ten minutes he got a tuft of dry moss to ignite.

It was nothing short of marvelous to see how these people lived in the jungle. Perhaps they were happier than white men in their great cities. The Kha way of life often made me think to myself: 'Man needs but little here below, beneath Heaven.' On the practical side, I found some likely things for bartering with the Khas—thin brass wire, glass beads, cheap razors.

The valley was filled with animals. Monkeys are the clowns of the jungle, and they can make plans, too. I once saw a large field of maize stripped in half an hour. Hundreds of monkeys made a chain right down the mountainside, while others did the harvesting and passed on the corn from hand to hand. Now and again one of them tested the corn for its quality, but they all agreed to do the harvesting first, as quickly as possible.

At Nape, a village high in the mountains, a French officer resides with some native militia. He was glad to see a white man and showed me with pride his lovely garden. Waterfalls and hot springs abound in the neighbourhood. Here at Nape we lodged in a Laotian house, tying the horses underneath. During the night noises woke me up. Beautiful moonlight covered the land and I went out to see what was wrong. The horses had torn themselves loose and all the animals of the village stampeded to escape a large, roaming tiger. It passed close by but had no use for me.

A further day's journey brought us to Tram Mua, with only a tumbledown hut for travellers. Here, at an altitude of 3000 feet, rain falls constantly throughout the year and damp fog rises every morning. Small leeches dropped from the trees and penetrated everywhere, even

through our boot eyelets. Many bit my neck and face and we all endured a terrible night, without even dry wood to make a fire. Next morning we started the steep descent of the mountains' western side, over the Hop Ham Pass. Half way down the mountain is a flat, open space used as a place of barter. Here the Annamese and Laotians have met since time immemorial to exchange goods; the site is called Monkey Market. It took only four hours to get down to the first Annamese village, Ha Trai, a dirty, busy little place. The slight Annamese, dressed in black or brown, made a striking contrast with the strongly built, more manly Laotians.

Flat bottomed boats took us to Vinh, near the seacoast. At Ben Thuy I embarked on a steamer going to Haiphong in Tonkin. I made my accounts and found that this way of transport was too dear. The elephants carried too little cargo and it had taken me a fortnight to get from the Mekong to the sea. I did this trip again, however, with 140 carriers rather than elephants, and that proved to be quicker and cheaper.

Chapter 26: Up the Mekong, 1902

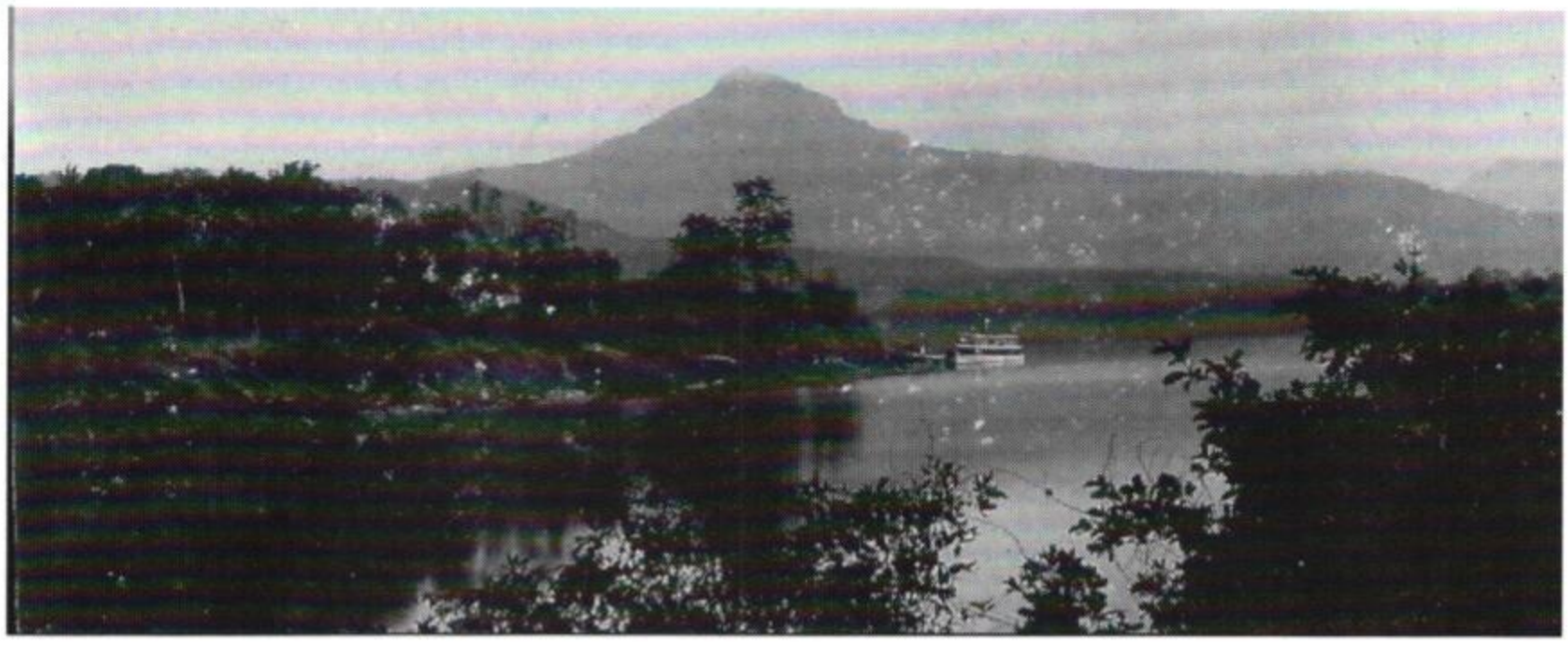
Our trade was increasing, but transport difficulties grew as well. My brother, then an engineer in London, consulted a friend who was superintendent to the Royal Niger Company and knew about river transportation. The plan was to build a suitable steamer for travelling on the Mekong, and this consultant made a drawing for a small steamer. It was what we wanted, and ultimately we had it built in sections in Lancashire. The ship was fifty-two feet long, could carry about thirty tons and made twelve knots speed at the trials. It was sent out via Marseille, but the transport steamer that carried it got orders to take troops to Madagascar, and our little boat went with it to Diego Suarez and thence to Saigon, causing a very long delay.

Not knowing this, I had left for Saigon with eleven of my best men to receive the steamer. I was forced to wait two months while the dry season rapidly approached. My men could not stay in Saigon; they felt cramped and uncomfortable living in a town, and so did I. So we all went down to the seacoast at Cape Saint James [now Vung Tau], where I hired two small houses. At least we could roam about in the fresh air. The Laotians care little for geography; they are satisfied to know that white people come from the other side of the salt water. All the countries that interest them are situated along the Mekong, and other lands are of little importance. Having no work to give my men, I organized sports—running, wrestling and stone throwing—to the great amazement of the Annamese population.

At last I heard that our boat had arrived in Saigon, so I made arrangements with a firm to put it together. Sections that could float separately were brought around to the slip and work commenced, but it was all too slow for me. Telegrams from Laos reported the water was sinking fast above Khone, and failure to get through now would mean waiting nearly a year. I hired an Annamese sampan, a flat boat with a roof, to live in, and moored it alongside the slip. For two weeks I worked all day and nearly all night by candlelight, toiling urgently to finish the job. My brother had sent me a blueprint of the engine, and though I only had a rudimentary knowledge of mechanics, I was able, piece by piece, to build the ship. The boat was finally launched exactly fourteen days after its arrival in sections. We christened the dear little thing Si-thanh *and steamed from Saigon in the evening. I hired an Annamese pilot to take the steering as far as Phnom Penh and a local fireman. Together we faced our hardships, which began immediately.*

The fireman had never seen anything but a French pressure gauge, measured in kilos rather than pounds, and was dumbfounded when required to keep the pressure at 180. He thought we were going to blow up at any moment, so he let the pressure drop. The firewood was wet, too, so we made little speed. The pilot was no more satisfactory. He first ran us into a rice field. I could excuse this because the night was dark and the tide high, but later, when we came to a stop near a house and discovered we were completely lost, I got angry. We floundered about all night and at last reached My Tho in the morning. This was a Sunday. I badly wanted dry wood and managed to buy some from a French baker. When I returned to the Si-thanh *my men told me the two Annamese had deserted. With no time to waste, I simply took the helm myself. In Saigon there had been no time to build a proper cabin, only a corrugated iron roof, so now it was terribly hot, standing and steering with my head just under the roof. We stopped at nights because I was unsure about the correct channels to take.*

The voyage to Phnom Penh took ten days; during the last three I had fever but kept on. As soon as the boat was moored I fainted and fell on the packing cases. When I came to, I was in a nice clean bed. I got up, dressed, went downstairs and learned I was in the house of a friend. He was out, but I soon found him close by. My friend trembled all over when I asked for an explanation. He told me some natives had met him by chance and told him there was a dead European on the beach. He went down and saw me, fetched a doctor and brought me to his house. I had a very high fever, 41.6 degrees, and the doctor thought I



64. Pak Sedon with steamer, Mekong River, Laos.

would die. I felt perfectly all right again and took steps to leave that very night. I was annoyed at having lost twenty-four hours with this silly fever. My friend helped me, though he strongly recommended that I wait some days.

I found a Cambodian pilot and safely reached Kratie. Here I went to see the Résident, an amiable fellow who gave me six bags of coal and a good pilot to take me to Khone. The Résident came to see my boat, which he admired; it was a real beauty, although not painted, only smeared with red lead. We arrived in Khone without any trouble; the coals did wonders to keep the pressure at 200 lbs. Currents on the Mekong were very strong so my brother in England had had the boiler tested to 280 lbs pressure.

The little railway between South and North Khone was built by the French government to carry two small steamers. I had counted on using this, but upon arrival found that the railway had been taken over by the steamship company Messageries Fluviales. Their agent, with probable instructions from Saigon not to refuse my business, which would have been against their contract, instead simply asked an impossible price. He also flatly refused to sell me a single piece of firewood or any lubricating oil. It was evident that the company regarded me as a competitor, the Si-thanh *being the first privately owned boat in Laos. I was a bit crestfallen, but not for long. I swore at the agent and walked back to South Khone. I was too proud to pay the extortionate price for use of the railway, though this put me in a very risky position. Before building this railway, the government had sent ma-*

rine officers to explore the rapids and passes, but their verdict stated it would be impossible to take a boat up the Mekong at this point.

I went to a tiny village on the island of Don Sadam and took counsel with the old men. One dear old soul said I ought to try the pass named Ho Sadam, between the islands of Khone and Sadam, so the very next morning I made a plan. My eleven splendid Laotians understood exactly what was needed. I sent two men in a canoe with money to buy all the coconut oil they could find. Four men were despatched to North Khone to collect dry wood, load the boat and come down Ho Sadam from the north. Four others were to collect more wood and bring it on board. I unbolted all I could, awning and all, unloaded the goods and sent them by carriers to North Khone. Some Europeans came and told me I was mad, but I told them the boat was mine to do with as I pleased.

These preparations took two days and I saw with dismay that the water level was sinking steadily. At four am in the morning we had steam up and left South Khone, turned the point and entered the pass. The first day went well; we made one mile. The current was too strong for steaming only, and I had to haul on ropes fastened to trees. The second day was worse. We only progressed about 150 yards, needing to chop down trees and use the anchor chain and winch. The third day was a little easier, but the fourth day the water was so shallow we had to build a dam of trees and branches behind the boat. That helped, and on the fifth day I blew the whistle in front of the steamship offices in North Khone.

Then I discovered I had a lot of friends. Officials came down from Keng, toasts were drunk and a telegram sent to the Résident Supérieur, who was then attending a council in Hanoi. I felt quite a hero for some hours. The year after I was made Knight of the Royal Order of Cambodia.

At Khong I found the government repair shop. The engineer was extremely helpful. He overhauled the engine and arranged the propeller, which fortunately had detachable bronze blades. It looked like a cauliflower but was easily beaten straight.

The water was so low any attempt to ascend the rapids of Khemmarat was out of the question. I received a telegram stating that Fäesch was seriously ill and got news that De los Rios was dead. Besides these setbacks, there was a native insurrection that had started in Siam but now seemed likely to spread to Laos. I therefore let the boat to the government and started northwards.

Some time before I had made the acquaintance of Mr. Patté, French Consul at Oubon in Siam, a very kind old man. He insisted that I accompany him to Oubon and take over the construction of a new large consulate building. So I went with him and discussed all the details, though of course I would do nothing until the financial side was clear and settled. After our discussions I decided to continue the return trip to Vientiane. I had only two men with me so the purchase of a small canoe was sufficient for our transport. We set off, but one of the men said he preferred to go on foot and left for Pak Moun. I continued with the other man. The water level was very low and there were many rocks, so we capsized again and again, hour after hour. We finally reached Pak Moun, only to learn that the entire countryside was unsafe because of the insurrection. In some Siamese villages we had already seen gruesome sights. The Siamese authorities had beheaded several rebels and stuck their heads on bamboo stakes.

The river postal service was stopped and I could not tackle the rapids of Khemmarat with two men only, so we rowed down to Pak Sedon, the town on the Mekong from where the telegraph line runs to Savannakhet. The line had been cut but I meant to go on foot following the telegraph poles, a distance of some 350 miles. To place the telegraph line, a clearing had been made through the jungle, though brushwood and secondary growth made the going difficult. All the bridges were broken so we had to swim the rivers. I reduced my baggage to a rifle, hunting knife, kettle and a biscuit tin with cartridges and matches. We soon finished our provision of rice and had to live on bamboo shoots, edible leaves and whatever I could shoot. Happily, my men had some salt. My shoes wore out in three days and I had to continue barefoot, and the swollen legs of one of my men delayed us. We passed the ruins of burned villages, finding fruit in the abandoned plantations. All men, dogs and cattle were gone.

One evening we saw some Kha natives and tried to avoid them, but they soon surrounded and cross-examined us. When I told them I was 'Than Hauff' from Vientiane, whom they had already heard about, they became more friendly. I explained that I collected no taxes, but rather bought their goods. In the end they let us pass, though we remained afraid that others less well disposed might find us. In fact, the following day we were shot at. We needed to move more swiftly; we now started at the earliest possible hour and kept on until after dark. We did not dare make a fire for fear of attracting attention, but were so exhausted at night we slept well on the bare ground until sunrise.

At last we arrived at the sizable village Song Khone, beyond which there were mostly rice fields all the way to Savannakhet. The man with the swollen legs could walk no further so I hired an oxcart. My feet were in very bad shape and, curiously, all my toenails had fallen off.

We were lucky to catch the steamer at Savannakhet, its last voyage for the next three months. A few days after we left Savannakhet was attacked by some 500 fanatics who believed that the French bullets would be transformed into flowers and fall at their feet. They were beaten back and some were taken prisoner. Of these twenty-two were beheaded.

When I got to Vientiane I found Fäesch absolutely run down, mentally and physically, and our business at a standstill. Attack seemed immanent. We began at once to fortify the house by piling up cotton bales for a breastwork. We had sixty men and fourteen guns, and kept watch day and night. Every night we heard drums and saw people with torches on the far side of the river. Our Laotian neighbors told us amazing stories, but we could not verify them. The postal service had stopped, telegraph lines were cut and it was only after a month of anxious waiting and fear of attack that we heard the true story of what was happening.

My grandfather then went on to describe what has become known as the Holy Men's Rebellion of 1902. It was a popular uprising based on superstition and the fear of modern changes taking place in Siamese society. The rebellion soon got completely out of hand.

Fanatical preachers, calling themselves Pho-mi-boun, *'Fathers of Luck,' had started a movement in Siam. They had their own morality which they preached, but with disastrous results. The population flocked together to hear these preachers, who told them to stop eating meat and to let loose their pigs and fowls. The masses were instructed to drink only water—nothing else—and to pray several hours each day. Moreover, everyone was to follow his own conscience in matters of right and wrong. The result was the breakdown of law and order. Domestic animals were driven into the forests, rice fields were no longer cultivated and hordes of bandits took advantage of the general chaos to plunder, steal and burn the villages.*

The people were told that a supernatural giant, called a yak, would come and eat all the children of the unrighteous. The only safeguard against this horrible giant (so large he could stride across the Mekong) was to have a certain fruit in the house, which had been blessed by the

priests. This fruit became so sought after some people procured it by force.

Parts of northern Siam and Laos were soon like a nest of wasps. Near Attopeu, the warlike Khas fought against the French, refusing to pay taxes. They caught a French officer, wounded him grievously, then tied him to a tree to be eaten by red ants. In Siam, the authorities soon crushed the fanatics and those causing disorder, but in Laos the movement quickly calmed down on its own.

Life returned to normal, though we found that many of our agents had been robbed or murdered. We lost important sums of money that had been advanced against the delivery of rubber.

Chapter 27: Teak and the Great River Voyage

At this time a large firm in Saigon, the one I originally worked for, made a contract with Phya-hom, second King of Luang Prabang, to buy his teak timber. This valuable timber could not be sent down the Menam River (better known as the Chao Phraya) to Bangkok because it originated within the watershed of the Mekong, so it made better sense to float it to Saigon. The teak was to be delivered to a starting point slightly north of Luang Prabang, but the French agent there was deemed to slow and unsatisfactory. Consequently, the firm asked me to take the business in hand. Fäesch agreed with this plan and even suggested that we move our headquarters to Luang Prabang.

I left Vientiane by canoe and took fourteen days to reach Luang Prabang, a record speed at that time. I stopped one night at Pak Lay, a place that seemed to be the most practical outlet for goods from North Laos if a railway could be built to Ayutthaya and Bangkok. Along the way I noticed small villages where the entire population was afflicted with struma [goitre].

Luang Prabang is the capital of a kingdom of the same name. It embraces land on both sides of the Mekong, bounded south and west by Siam and Burma, east by Tonkin and north by Burma and China. The native name of the country is Lan Sang, 'ten-thousand elephants,' and the national coat of arms carries three white-headed elephants. The ruler was King Sakkarin, a genial, good-natured man who received everybody. His successor, now reigning, is King Sisavong. Luang



65. View from Mt. Phoucy: main road with the Mekong at left; ('Le marché, L'ecole, Le Mekong à gauche, Le Nam Kan à droite), Luang Prabang.

Prabang is really a large village with an active population, significant trade and many foreigners. The people are gay and there is always a boun festival in one part or another of the capital.

The women of Luang Prabang are renowned for their beauty and are no more sunburnt than Spanish women, and often have rosy cheeks. I was very amused to see all the women congregate and chatter on the beach every morning. Large logs of timber are moored here, and eight or ten of them would go out and squat on the log until it sank under the water. They continued their gay conversation while this arrangement served as a public bathing room for ladies. During my entire stay at Luang Prabang, I was visited by laughing girls who made fun of me for not being married.

The silversmiths of Luang Prabang have a great reputation and turn out fine objects, mostly filigree work with hanging paillettes (foil used in enamelling). Boxes and bowls are made of hammered silver and decorated with flowers and mythical animals, angels and deities, all



66. Procession with the king at Phoucy, Luang Prabang, Laos.

shown in relief. Here there is also the important craft industry of lacquered and gilt bamboo.

North of Luang Prabang are several more or less independent states, governed by men who bear the glorious title of Chau-fa, *'Master of the Skies.' I felt I was near the Celestial Empire of China.*

The people here are more warlike than farther south, and the brigands bolder. These trends become stronger the nearer one gets to China. The chieftains are always at war against somebody and as soon as one of them feels strong enough, he raids his neighbours. Luang Prabang has often suffered, but since the country became a French, calm and order have prevailed.

I had been in Luang Prabang for a fortnight, surveying and taking over the teak timber business, when I received a telegram saying Hans Fäesch was dead and had been buried just behind our house. Before this, Fäesch had sold the house to the government, which turned it into a post office. I could not possibly leave my work, but should have liked to settle our mutual affairs in Vientiane.



67. Members of the Lu tribe, Laos.
The Lu are one of many tribal groups that occupy mountainous Northern Laos.

Peter Hauff, as ever, worked hard and found ingenious solutions whenever problems arose.

I got orders to mark the teak logs, but with what? I went to see the high priest of Wat Mai, a man named Satu, and he found a way. The two of us worked for a week on the project, which in fact was the lost-wax method of casting. First I made a hammer head out of beeswax, with the letter 'D' clearly outlined. Then the priest started by throwing thinly diluted clay on the model, letting it dry, and then repeating the process, building up thicker and thicker layers as the days went by. He left a hole at one end of the clay lump, and also put a square peice of wood through the wax hammer, to allow a space for fitting the handle. I collected about five lbs of old brass and when all was ready, we poured the molten metal into the hole at the top, the wax melted and was replaced by brass. The result was a beautiful marker, admirably suited for the purpose of hammering a distinct sign into each teak log.





68. Pagoda in ruins, Luang Prabang, Laos.



69. 'A monstrous teak log.' Peter Hauff in Laos.

I had no difficulty in recruiting about eighty men. I promised to pay them every evening and give each man a daily measure of rice. I procured money in ten cent pieces for this purpose.

We made several large rafts out of the 1200 logs, some of which were four feet in diameter and up to fifty feet long. When all was ready we had a huge farewell. Hordes of people gathered on the river banks, lots of flowers were thrown and in the evening everyone enjoyed a boun fest. The priests at the festival did their best to entertain us all with their fireworks, in fact spectacular sky rockets. The best rockets were made from tall bamboos stuck in the ground, finely split from top to bottom and tied together with threads. The priests made their own gunpowder, and for the rockets they placed wet balls of powder mixed with resin at specific points. Once ignited from the bottom and launched, they flew at tremendous speed. As the threads burned, the 'branches' from the split bamboo fell outwards, creating the impression of a blazing bush. Some rockets were enormous, sent up with a contrivance at one end to make a trumpeting sound like an elephant.

We started in good order and all went well, though some of the rapids proved difficult. We had to repair the rafts constantly and every

evening there was a hunt for rattan. Some of the men had the unending job of making rattan ropes. I built a hut made of mats, about the size of a dog kennel, and was half naked every day because we were in water as much as out.

At Vientiane some men refused to go further and had to be replaced, but this was easy to do. Here, too, I looked into our business affairs and learned there was nothing left after Fäesch. All had been sold at auction, even my own things, so I found myself utterly ruined. I was very glad to have a good job in hand.

Before continuing I made the logs into four rafts, as it would be easy sailing to a place below Savannakhet. We got there without mishap and I re-made the logs into very small rafts with four men on each. I had procured at Vientiane fifteen boats and canoes, which were useful for fetching rattan and buying food, also for communication because we soon found the small rafts were scattered over several miles. I went ahead in a boat to Pak Moun and there united all the small rafts into four large ones. Nothing serious happened from Pak Moun to Khong. My men were content and I had sufficient money to cover the extra costs of hurrying up our descent of the Mekong.

Before us lay the most difficult stretch, the passage of Khone. I knew the Ho Sadam Pass better than anyone, and this knowledge came in very handy. Little by little, taking one or two logs at a time, I collected them all and moored them at convenient islands near the northern entrance of Ho Sadam. The water was falling and I tried to get all of the logs into the pass, but had to leave the largest ones because they could not float in the shallow places. I built a hut on the south side of Don Sadam, where I had many friends from the eventful time when I took my steamer up the rapids. I saw the steamer at Khong. It was painted white and had a cabin, but the name Si-thanh *was not changed. I wept like a boy when I saw her and thought of all the hopes we had built on that boat.*

At Don Sadam I was visited one day by two Danish gentlemen, Guldberg and Fenger of the East Asiatic Company, Bangkok, who were travelling for pleasure. The men were also interested to know how this first floating of teak on the Mekong would turn out because their company also exported large amounts of teak. They had with them a Sinhalese servant and a French photographer, Mr. Azassiz, whom I had previously met in Singapore. They came to me because they wanted to see the Mekong's large waterfalls. With 150 men and plenty of boats I made the arrangements easily. We went on foot to

the northern end of Don Sadam and embarked in four small canoes, leaving the Sinhalese servant with the largest photographic aparatus, the provisions and the guns. We paddled against the current, then struck westward, keeping a good distance from the Fall of Pa Pheng, which roared and smoked in a terrible fashion some distance below. We landed above the fall and made our way through the jungle, needing to proceed a certain way inland to emerge below the fall. At this time of year the masses of water fell from a height of sixty feet; the width of the fall was about 1500 yards. After taking some photographs we went back the same way and my new friends said they would like to see the other fall, Salape, on the western shore. This we decided to do the next day.

When we were nearing our camping place we heard a noise of drumming and presently saw the Sinhalese sitting high up in a tree, with an ashen face, beating a biscuit tin for all he was worth. He could not speak but pointed to the luggage. Looking there we saw a huge tiger, the largest I have ever seen, poking about among overturned baskets. We shouted and leapt ashore and slowly the tiger walked away, leaving footprints as large as my hand. The servant climbed down and explained that he heard a noise behind him while he was watching some people play on the beach. Quickly, he grabbed a tin of biscuits and climbed the tree. We all had a good laugh but regretted not having our guns in the boats. Next day we went to see Salape, more a huge rapid than a fall, and very difficult to photograph.

I stayed at Don Sadam as long as the water level permitted the floating of timber down the Ho Sadam Pass. Then I went to Saigon for six months, where I was given work connected with exporting rice. I lived in the Chinese town of Cho Lon, reporting every day to the office in Saigon. This was a comparatively tasteless and lazy way of life for me, but the rest did me good.

I was back in Laos in May having managed to secure an aid in a young Frenchman, Guy Cheminaud, whom I had known as agent of the Messageries Fluviales at Vientiane. He knew Laotian perfectly and was just the man I wanted. We had to shift our headquarters constantly; the water was rising and the channels shifted as the water rose. Some logs became caught in the bushes and rocks and caused much trouble. We finally collected all the teak at Stung Treng after months of work.

During this period in southern Laos Peter Hauff and his new colleague Guy Cheminaud encountered a most remarkable man. The whole experi-

ence clearly moved my grandfather and confronted him face to face with unknown things. He wrote a special section about the man. It is a peculiar tale, though of a kind one often hears in the remote parts of Asia. My grandfather, in a somewhat disjointed way, tries to remain impartial and open minded when faced with seemingly unbelievable 'facts.' He also tries to draw the link between tremendous longevity and a mysterious, sugar-like material found in termite mounds.

The Story of Pho Kham Bao

Laotian termites, also called white ants, live off dry wood. They build their mounds partly under and partly above ground. These mounds, often two metres in height and several metres in radius, are constructed of earth and sand and a special liquid the insects produce. Such termites cannot stand the daylight.

During my stay on Don Hip Island, south of Khone, where I was occupied floating teak logs with my friend Guy Cheminaud, I met a very old Laotian huntsman named Pho Kham Bao. He told a story so strange I cannot do otherwise than to present it here.

One evening we came back after having shot a deer with 'soft horns.' Kham Bao told us these horns grow out irregularly after the origianal horns are shed; the native people prize them and consider them to be an astringent medicine.

'You may have your share of these,' he told us. 'Oh, thank you,' Cheminaud replied. 'I don't need such strong medicine.' Then I asked the old man, 'But how old are you exactly?'

'I am much older than people think,' Kham Bao answered with a smile. 'My present wife, who lives nearby, has survived many others who died of old age. During my long life I have mourned many wives and all their children. One day I shall let you know the truth of my birth and life story.'

Below I will tell these many things as they were told to me, without commentary. The reader must decide for himself the truth of these remarkable tales. I hope one day science will confirm for us the great benefits of eating the contents of termite mounds, the 'glucose' and the rich vitamins. This seems to be a biological truth that, until now, has gone unrecorded.

Old Kham Bao supplied us with meat from animals he had shot or caught. In addition to hunting, he acted as a doctor, healing people with traditional medicine and the time-honoured folk practices of Laos.

Everyone in the country uses 'home remedies,' some quite curious. To cure a cold, the patient stands in the river for hours in the early morning with water up to his neck, teeth chattering with the cold.

His name—Kham Bao—means 'Light Gold' or 'Floating Gold.' Sometimes people called him Old Father, sometimes Thian Kham Bao; thian *is the Laotian title for ordained Buddhists priests who have reached the third degree rank.*

Looked upon as a huntsman, he was something of a wonder. He knew the jungle intimately, and if others were starving, he always had food to eat. He often fell into contemplation, becoming silent and unapproachable. When he did talk about himself it was always in the polite Laotian tone, and I frequently had to wait patiently, without insisting on further questions, until he was in better spirits.

Once my supply of sugar ran out. I told my cook and he asked if I would like to use termite sugar, which I had heard about, so I said yes. The cook then went to consult with Kham Bao because he alone knew everything about the subject. Three days later Kham Bao came to me with a small tin box containing semi-transparent lumps, like tiny crystals. 'Just a few pieces are enough to sweeten your coffee as usual,' he said. 'It is much better than what you can get in Western countries, and this small portion is enough to hold you through, until you can get sugar from a merchant. But be careful. You should not eat more than a very small amount, otherwise there is a severe risk, causing an effect you will feel for many years.' I had a cup of coffee with a few grains of this 'glucose' and I must admit I felt in a pleasant mood, physically and mentally.

During this 'treatment' that took place on Don Hip Island, Kham Bao decided to share his promised, confidential information. He spoke to me calmly and accurately, as he always did, and strongly urged me not to reveal this story as long as he lived. He believed the effect of a 'glucose treatment' would last for forty years, unless one started a further treatment.

Kham Bao told me he was born in Vientiane during the rule of Phra Raxat Thirat. His father, named Xieng Ting, created and cast a golden Buddha image, representing the seated Sakyamuni [the historical Buddha]. He placed it as an ex voto offering in the Wat Pra Keo [Emerald Buddha] pagoda after naming his son 'Floating Gold.'

Kham Bao grew up and, as he was related to the reigning prince and married to a princess, he was chosen to accompany a party headed by the Dutchman Gerhard van Wuysthoff. This group of foreigners was

travelling to Java after a trade mission to Veintiane during which van Wuysthoff presented precious gifts to the prince. At the Cambodian border Kham Bao said farewell to the party but, with an urge to travel, he carried on to Bangkok and Ayutthaya in Siam.

There, with the support of the court in Vientiane, he married a lady of the Siamese royal household. At this time Kham Bao befriended Constance Falcon [Constant Phaulkon], a trader, adventurer and diplomat who was employed for many years by King Phra Narai of Siam. Falcon's negotiations helped pave the way for the arrival of a large French embassy, sent by King Louis XIV. Great pomp and festivities welcomed this embassy and its ambassador, Chevalier de Chaumont, when they reached the court at Ayutthaya. Within three years, however, things went sour and anti-foreign sentiment grew in Siam. The French embassy even tried to convert King Phra Narai to the Catholic faith, and this only made people angrier towards the Europeans. Constance Falcon was executed and soon after the king died.

Kham Bao became a widower and had to escape from Ayutthaya. A Burmese army soon looted and destroyed the royal city. Amid these troubles Kham Bao saved the life of Princess Gygis, the widow of a murdered Siamese prince. He proceeded to marry Gygis, then brought her, after a long journey, to Ban Talat on the Mekong River. After that he crossed the river and settled on the island of Don Hip. He gave the island its present name, Don Hip, which means 'The Island with the Chest,' so named after he buried a chest of jewels the princess had brought with her. After her death, Kham Bao cremated the body and returned to Vientiane, the city of his birth.

At one point Kham Bao unearthed a silver bowl, which was given to me along with a Buddha statue from Vientiane. Guy Cheminaud has these objects now.

It was fate that Kham Bao should be present at the destruction of Vientaine, wrecked by a Siamese army. He said to me: 'If ever you write my story, you can say I was frightened to see my dear King Phra Tiaou Anu taken in chains to Nong Khai, and from there transported to Bangkok together with a large part of the population.' Kham Bao fortunately escaped to Luang Prabang. After great difficulty, he managed to recover from the ruins of Wat Pra Keo the gilded Buddha his deceased father had made.

Kham Bao's wife at the time he told me his story was the only one to receive a 'glucose treatment.' She was a kind of fortune-teller who

correctly predicted that Cheminaud would experience several wars and later, with his wife, be thrown in jail.

Guy Cheminaud and I have searched in books relating to the history of Southeast Asia. We have found that Phra Raxat Thirat lived around the year 1570. Van Wuystoff visited Vientiane in 1641. The events surrounding Chevalier de Chaumont and Constance Falcon took place in the 1680s (Falcon was killed in 1688). The destruction of Ayutthaya occured in 1767 and Vientiane was destroyed in 1827. Piecing together these histories and their associated dates, combined with Kham Bao's own life story, we came to the astonishing conclusion that in the year 1904 he was 370 years old! I do not want to make any comment about these findings, yet at the same time I believe in Kham Bao's statements.

Recently I have discussed the story with Cheminaud (September, 1950). In light of many recent medical discoveries, we have to admit the possibility that the 'termite-sugar' might indeed contain amazing vitamins or qualities of some sort.

The Queen of the termite mound is considered by the natives to be immortal.

Getting the teak logs down the Mekong was the most important thing. Again and again, my grandfather showed his strength and courage when confronted with the dangers of the river.

Once in Ho Sadam my canoe capsized and I was left hanging on a dead tree in the middle of the current, the flesh torn off an arm and a leg. I managed to get ashore and walk to Khone, where I remained in hospital for a week. Another day one of my men was eaten by a crocodile. The great creature successfully knocked him off the end of a log he was steering. I shot the crocodile the next day; at least I hoped it was the man-eater. It was fun to paddle warily down to where a crocodile was sleeping with its mouth open, little birds flitting in and out picking at its teeth. Then, approaching as closely as possible, I would send a load of buckshot into that huge mouth. Crocodiles, ever wary, always sleep with their heads towards the water, flopping in at the least sound.

We made up small rafts at Stung Treng, having to pass several rapids at Preatapang and Sambor, and collected all the timber at the village of Kbal Phum, just north of Kratie. The river inundated the surrounding countryside and a small raft of sixteen logs was taken inland by the current. I went after it in a boat with four men, and over the next nine days we navigated among the tree tops, all full of snakes,



70. 'Floating 425 teak logs down the Mekong' at Prek Krako, near Kratie in Cambodia. De Vaux (left), Lascols (agent for Messageries Fluviales), Peter Hauff (right).

monkeys and insects struggling to survive. At one point my men asked me to kill a monkey for them to eat. I did so, but felt like a murderer, especially when I saw the little hands boiling in a pan. On the very afternoon that our food supply ran out we managed to kill a large stag that was swimming for its life. This kept us in meat for several weeks.

We finally found the errant logs and managed to rejoin the Mekong below Kratie, at Phum Chhlong. This village of brick houses was half submerged and I went by canoe to my bedroom, the water reaching just below the planks on which I slept. A cat came swimming in during the night and crept up on me to get dry.

At the important town of Kratie there is a Résident, many Europeans and a garrison of Cambodian militia. I arrived with 120 of my men, a group not of the softest type, and they went out to buy their provisions at Kratie's marketplace, a mile south of Kbal Phum where we were staying. A fight soon broke out among them and the militia, and the tension persisted until one evening I was told a Laotian had been stabbed. My men were furious and wanted to settle the score.

None had guns but they all had swords. I calmed them down and explained that we would take revenge the following evening.

Early next morning I went to see the Résident and registered a complaint. He said he knew all about it, that it was my men who provoked the Cambodians, and that I must not allow my men to go to town. I said they surely had as much right as anyone to buy provisions and that it would be easier to keep his Cambodians within their barracks for a few days. He took offense to this and was unpleasant. The Résident of Kratie was inclined to see everything through Cambodian eyes.

I became nettled, went back to Kbal Phum and called my men together at seven pm. I made them give up all their swords and knives but told them each to get a stout cudgel instead. We all marched to Kratie under the moonlight and laughed at the inhabitants who hastily ran indoors. We went straight to the militia compound and struck right and left. The Résident and others came to the scene and told me to order my men back, which I did, in Laotian. For once it seemed my men misunderstood me because the battle continued for half an hour more. I learned afterwards that a dozen Cambodians were badly injured and three went missing.

The following day telegrams to the Résident Supérieur at Phnom Penh and telegrams to the firm in Saigon flew back and forth. The firm backed me up. Besides, the rafts were ready so I cast loose and came in due time to Phnom Penh. To avoid further complications—some of my men still had smarting bruises—I stopped the rafts opposite the city. The logs were now made into two huge rafts, each fifty feet wide and solidly built, especially the 'head,' constructed of a log put straight across the front, bound with a chain. I had five large anchors and six small boats, long ropes and seventy men on each raft. Guy Cheminaud was on one and I was on the other.

I took a few men with me to Phnom Penh on business and showed them the sights. They had never seen a town built only of brick houses, never seen a motor car, but the animals at the zoo interested them little; they had seen better specimens in their daily life. My personal servant, however, stared in wonder at the monkey house and said: 'My parents never lived in such a fine house as that!'

I had taken a great liking to this boy of about twenty, who I picked up in Luang Prabang. His name was Bac-bo-pha, he was very obedient and he did all he could to please me. I remember one day he came to me at Khone and asked for an advance of eighty cents, which was an unusually large amount. I asked him what he wanted all that money

for and he said he had found a sacred banyan tree and wanted to make prayers and get news of his mother. He spent the money on fruit and flowers, arranged them nicely, knelt down and stayed so long that I went away. When he returned his face was all smiles. He told me he had communicated with his mother at Luang Prabang, who had said that she was well and happy because a brother, made prisoner two years before by marauders, had returned safely. I made enquiries and found that such was the case.

We left early one morning but the current drove the rafts too near the bank. We crashed into and swept away all the landing stages and boats for a long distance. People on shore ran and swore at us, to the great amusement of the crew. The only way to steer such huge rafts as these was to carry out anchors far ahead on one side, then let the current swing the rope taut. We lost many anchors and broke numerous ropes, but that was all in the game. I moored my raft far below Banam that evening, having had plain and rapid sailing all day. At dark an ominous, ghastly light filled the sky and the air hung oppressively. Bad weather was coming and we doubled all the moorings; the second raft was some distance away and we could not see it.

Towards midnight a terrific storm erupted and we were up all night in the drenching rain, adding more and more ropes and putting out all of the anchors. High waves swamped the raft, which, tugging at its moorings, threatened to break loose. The weather calmed down somewhat the following afternoon and I continued downstream without serious incident. A steamer nearly ran into us in a fog, though the steamer would have suffered most in a collision. Some choice swear words were exchanged and then all was serene.

I got to My Tho and there found telegrams waiting for me. Our second raft had broken loose on the night of the storm, Cheminaud had put out anchors to try to stop it, but every rope failed and the raft drove on through the night and following morning. He was helpless to do anything. In the afternoon his raft became stranded on a sandbank in front of Long Xuyen, having been driven through the Vam Nao Creek, a channel of water that connects the eastern and western branches of the Mekong. From Long Xuyen the river goes straight out to sea so it was lucky the sandbank was there to stop my friend.

I left some men in charge of my raft and took the rest with me in all available boats. We carried with us every extra rope and anchor, and raced to Long Xuyen through arroyos, canals and every possible short cut we could find. I made the men row like mad. I found my friend

Cheminaud busy securing scattered logs; all his men were there and glad to see us. To proceed we decided to use a small arroyo called Lap Vo, which leads to the Mekong's western branch at Cai Tau Ha, but immediately faced the ticklish problem of how to get the logs across this very broad eastern branch. We tied the logs together, four or five per unit, and towed them across. We had to work closely and cleverly with the shifting currents and changing tides. On the other side, we tied these many small rafts end to end because the arroyo was narrow and sinuous. Here there was no regular current so we had to travel with the tide and halt when it was against us. This meant working at any time, day or night. The Annamese were very upset at us for blocking their traffic, but dared not say much to our 140 men, who understood nothing of their language and looked rather like pirates. We had fun with the Chinese shopkeepers, who also were scared when we came along.

Once at Cai Tau Ha, we worked for some time to build a large raft. Rattan was scarce and we travelled extensively to get everything needed. I required large sums of silver money to pay for necessities and to pay the men. There were many thieves about so I went to Sa Dec and hired a splendid, solid boat, with properly constructed wood cabin, zinc roof and proper lattice windows. The boat took six oarsmen and I lived aboard it for the next several months, feeling like a prince. My men also enjoyed the life; it was easy for them to find goods, presents and food. Chinese shopkeepers everywhere displayed tempting and unknown delicacies and were happy to sell the men salted shrimps, dry mushrooms, greasy cakes, firecrackers, brown sugar, pickled onions and various multi-coloured trembling jellies. They spent their money the same day they got it.

Opposite Cai Tau Ha is a large island called Culao Gieng, owned by the Catholic Missions. On it they have hundreds of orphan girls who spin and weave silk, make embroidery and learn sewing. Before departing, Cheminaud and I were invited to a good dinner by the mayor of Cai Tau Ha, a pleasant old man. Everything was tasty, but he spoiled some dishes by pouring castor oil on them.

In due time we got to My Tho, broke up the rafts again and made ready to pass through the Canal de la Poste, which leads to Cho Lon and Saigon. The firm had the ear of the government and orders were given all along the route to let us pass, because we needed the entire width of the canal. Usually it was full of thousands of boats. All went well until we passed through Cho Lon. Here some Chinese junks barred

the way and refused to budge, but I managed to break the blockade by the use of energetic means. We bombarded them with empty bottles.

The firm had fitted up a saw mill and eagerly awaited our teak. I got lodgings near the mill and had to say goodbye to all my men, who were sent home. Bac-bo-pha cried so much and hung on to my trousers with such earnestness, saying he could not leave me, that I kept him. Some time later the firm sent me to Hong Kong with a parcel of sawn teak to sell, and still Bac-bo-pha would not leave me. He was terribly seasick and very frightened in Hong Kong. He had the misfortune to break a wash basin at the hotel and was very unhappy. When we returned to Saigon he heard that I was going to Europe and courageously faced the truth. He put on a brave face and said: 'I understand that I cannot go with you and I must return to my own village.' I was sincerely sorry to see the last of his tear-stained face and must say I have never met a truer or more faithful servant.

The firm wanted to send me to Shanghai, but I refused, wanting to have a complete change. For the previous two years I had an attack of fever every Friday unless I took a dose of quinine on Thursday, and I needed a rest. I went to England as soon as I had entered into an arrangement with the head of the Saigon firm, who was starting business for himself. His story ended unhappily, however. Due to family grievances he shot himself, and I had to reconsider my future.

Chapter 28: Return to Saigon

After six years in Laos as a trader, logger and adventurer, during which time he travelled extensively and faced every imaginable hardship, Peter Hauff decided to settle into a more secure life.

He left my grandmother Sao Boun Ma in Laos, taking with him their little daughter, Item, my mother. It is beyond my understanding that he could do this, and it will always remain a mystery. Could the reason have been the hardship of loosing his little son Bac Noi so tragically drowning in the Mekong? And the sadness of his old friend Hans Fäesch's death in Vientiane, aged 32? Or may be the fact that Sao Boun Ma said no to come with grandfather to London. 'I am Lao, I would not fit in', she said. He was at first 'disowned', these are the exact words my mother used, by his parents in London. They were shocked at the prospect of their son settling down, marrying and bearing children with a native woman in Laos. Was this pressure to heavy for him to endure?

At this time grandfather became very ill with constantly recurring dyssentry and had to go to hospital in Saigon for a while. In these calm surroundings he had time to think of the adventureous life he had been leading these last years. He writes he missed his parents and family in Europe.

Then grandfather's brother Gustav in London married Karen Høyer from Arendal, Norway. Peter Hauff knew her younger sister Thona Høyer as a child. My mother used the word: 'She was his childhood sweetheart'. Did grandfather feel he better return to western ways and take full responsibility for his two little half Asian daughters Maud and Item? He certainly did not heed his brother`s advice: 'Don`t marry Thona.'



71. Peter Hauff (right), Cambodian coachmen, Guy Cheminaud (left), the amah (*congai*), servants, Thona (sitting), Maud (left), Irene (right); in the garden, Saigon. 1907.



72. Irene and Maud in Saigon, the year before they journeyed to Europe. 1907.

He would marry Thona, 'if she would have him', I have been told. It is strange to think that he was afraid that no one would marry him with his little half Asian children! Thona could be a mother for Maud and Item—and they all could live a 'civilized' life.

In late 1905 he married Thona Høyer in Norway and brought her back to Saigon to be the mother of his two girls, now aged four and nine.

I then entered into partnership with a former colleague in the old firm and we took over an import-export business. I did not relish sitting in the office and reserved for myself all the travelling, visiting, so to speak, every town and village in Cochin-China, South Annam and most of Cambodia. It was tame work compared to what I was used to.

At first the family lived in an apartment in the famous Hotel de l'Univers. Later grandfather built a villa in Cho Lon, the Chinese district of Saigon, to the south, where he owned a mosaic and tile factory.

Life was punctuated with horses, grooms and servants, peacocks in the garden, an abundance of flowers and the ample grace and grandeur of a large house with balustrades and a sweeping balcony.

Stables, coachmen and servants abounded. My mother remembers that she had 'an Annamese nurse, called a *con gai* and a private carriage with rubber wheels which, as it drove through Saigon's streets, elicited salutes wherever it went.'

The two little girls were forbidden to associate with the servants or receive any influence from them. This was a firm rule, for fear that 'correct attitudes' might be diluted. My mother wrote in later life that 'Father was strict about this, and so was my step-mother, a very good educator and disciplinarian.'

Peter Hauff did on occasion get a taste of the old life, leaving the office and boldly starting some new enterprise in exciting, little-known places, enjoying life to the full.

I managed to break loose now and again. At that time many rubber and coconut plantations were started, so I went to these and established agents to sell all sorts of things to the workers. I journeyed several times to the island of Phu Quoc in the Gulf of Siam, looking into a plantation begun at the island's southern end.

I once stayed a month and enjoyed the finest sea fishing I have ever had. An Annamese boat took me off every morning at four am and we fished until ten am. The small sharks were a nuisance, biting off the hooks, and when we caught one we cut it into pieces at once. While at the plantation a sad thing happened. A white overseer was murdered



73. Irene and Maud with their grandfather, arriving in London. 1908.



74. Maud, Thona and Irene, Saigon. 1907.

one night and only discovered two days later; suspicion fell on the plantation's 400 Javanese coolies.

Back in Saigon, Peter Hauff could again turn his attention to his family. The marriage with Thona started well. My grandfather's early letters to her were filled with longing and ardour and he wished for nothing more than for her to be at his side. Now she was. In the letters to Thona he often refers to their innermost wish to have a child, yet early on she seems to have had abdominal ailments.

In 1908 Thona left Saigon for London with the two children, Maud about twelve years old and Item seven. Grandfather waited anxiously for news about his little girls and Thona, who was to have an operation in London in an attempt to relieve her infertility. She was away for four months. Grandfather consoled her in numerous loving letters. He believed strongly she would soon recover, return to him and make their union complete with the conception of a child.

Maud and Item stayed with their grandparents in London. Then it was decided they should cross the North Sea to go to school in Norway, a safer

and better place, away from the horrors of World War I. Thona returned to Saigon but failed to bear him a little son or daughter.

Having made a living at so many different callings, and unafraid to try anything new, my grandfather even turned his hand to film making.

A Hong Kong firm named Farris wanted to push their sale of aerated water and asked me to make a film, one of a series, showing that their water was used all over the world. I made arrangements with some professional Annamese actors and chose a nice old-fashioned house not far from Saigon. The film was to be a wedding, ending up with a big reception in the garden, during which, of course, the water in question was to flow freely. It began with a bride-to-be, who feeds her chickens, receives visits from a young man and takes part in a sentimental leave-taking. Next there are visitations and pow-wows among the relations, a procession to the pagoda, general hurly-burly *about the dinner and so forth. All these scenes worked splendidly, but when the coolies arrived carrying cases of the bottled water, things went badly wrong. The Annamese, who were to look as if they relished this drink, all spat it out with wry faces, and the film was spoilt. I shot the scene over again with ordinary water and that went all right.*

In 1923 Peter Hauff was decorated as a Chevalier of the Ordre du Dragon de L'Annam. He received a certificate and medal from the President of France for his work as Secretary of the Société Norvège-France, and for his many years of close cooperation with the French in Indo-China.

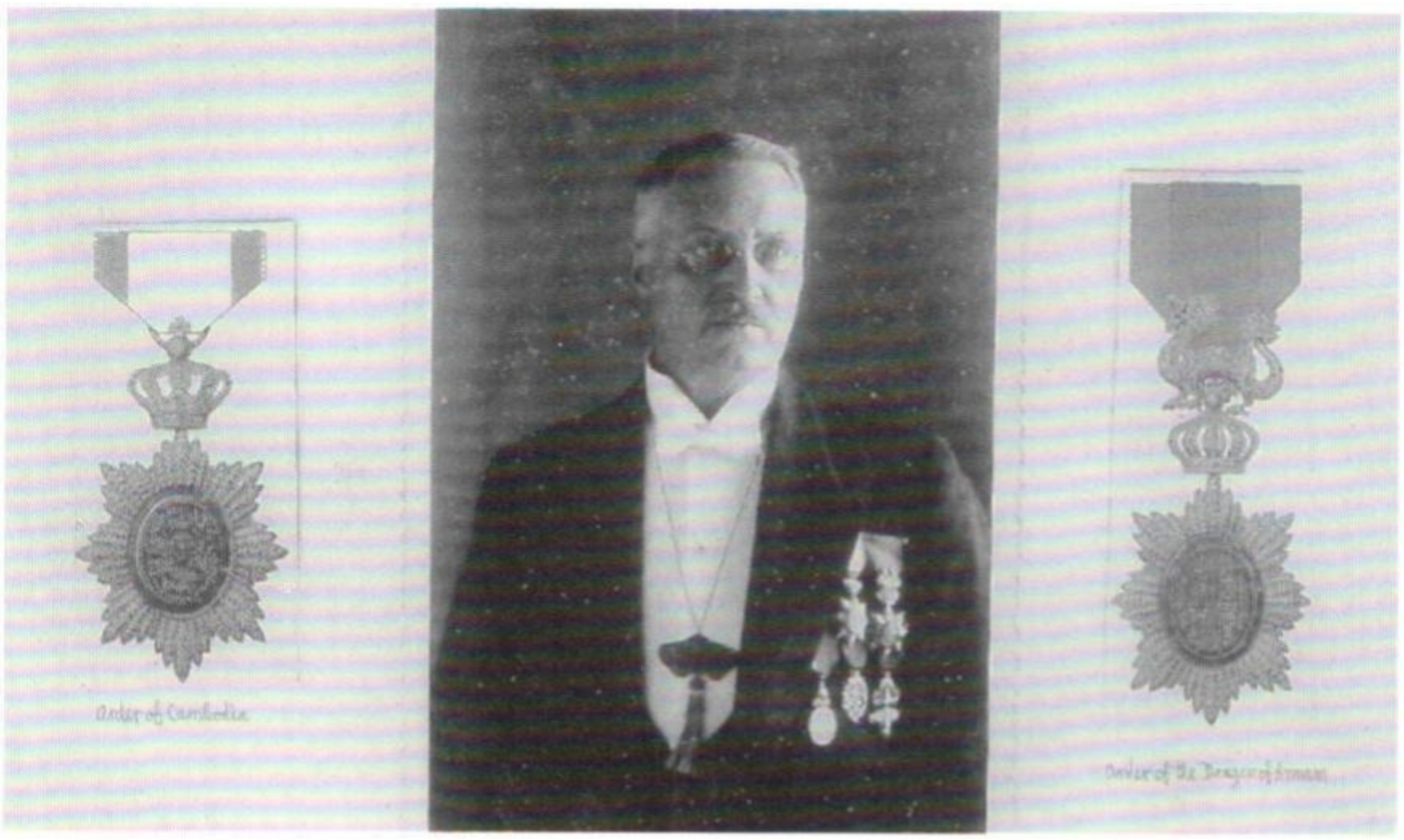
In addition to many other awards, my grandfather received a coveted decoration from the King of Siam. It is known that he was a friend of the Siamese King Chulalongkorn (reigned 1873-1910), great reformer and builder of the modern Thai state.

Peter Hauff was a man of ability and confidence, friend of the wealthy and powerful, seemingly able to tackle any problem.

And yet ...

In March, 1919 Peter Hauff, still in Saigon, wrote in rhymed Norwegian the following heartfelt religious poem. It shows his doubts and neediness, even reveals a melancholy that underlay his worldly, successful life as a businessman in French Indo-China.

A Prayer
Give me peace, give me quiet,
Strengthen my wavering disbelief.
Reach out to me, now God, your helping hand.
Give me rest and hope,

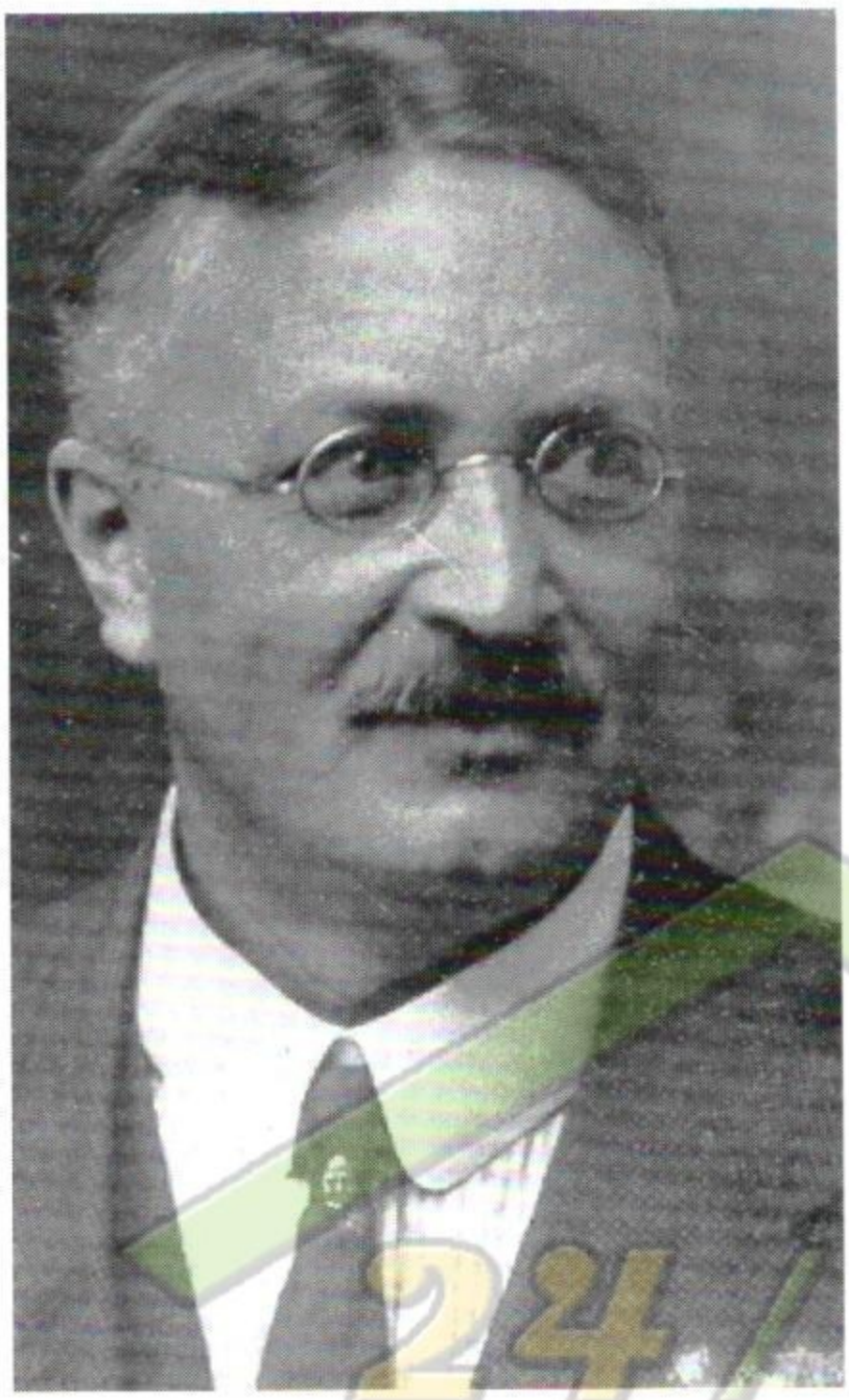


75. Formal portrait of Peter Michael Vosgraff Hauff, wearing awards and medals; (left) Order of Cambodia, (right) Order of the Dragon of Annam.

Give me an answer upon my cry,
Give new life to my dying soul.

I am a slave of time,
Only You know my soul,
Unto your grace I put my trust.
Oh, God, the road is hard
Before I reach the light
Through life's exhausting struggle.
Thank You for all things You have done,
For every stone You moved away,
For each time You smoothed my path,
For every brightened moment,
For every refreshed slumber,
For my certainty that You will stand by my side.

Thank You for the help I received
When I turned my sight
Away from earth's presumptuous demands;
That in a time of disbelief
You closed my mouth
With the sight of a waiting grave.



76. Peter Hauff, France.

I am tired, I am weak,
Help me, a sinking wreck,
To ride the threatening seas.
Give me strength, show me the way,
Lord, do not leave me.
Give me courage to live and to die.

I finally left Indo-China in 1929.

PART III

CLOSING THE CIRCLE

Chapter 29: The Circle Closes

The formal story of my grandfather's adventures in the Far East finishes rather abruptly after sixty pages of typewritten text. Still, this record has great value as a first-hand account of Southeast Asian life during three-and-a-half decades, from Peter Hauff's first arrival in Saigon in 1894 to his departure in 1929.

Years previously Grandfather and Thona had built a house in the suburbs of Oslo, Norway. Aunt Maud and my mother spent many years in that house as young girls. Even up to 1920 and beyond my mother still lived there. At that time she was a translator at the French Legation in Oslo.

She once told me the story that when in her early twenties my grandfather sent her away from the house to London, forcing her to give up her engagement to a young man in his firm who was untrustworthy.

In my keeping I have the most tender, beautiful long poem in Norwegian, written by her father after this incident to console his 'little sparrow,' unhappy and alone, starting her life anew as a translator at the Norwegian Legation in London. Once, when I was heartbroken, my mother passed on to me the very same poem.

The Gabriels and Des, Souvanni and I visited this old house in Oslo in the 1960s when my Norwegian cousin Carl Wishman and his family lived there. When his children grew up the house was sold and now there are an additional six new homes built in what was once very spacious grounds.

Here, in keeping with the period of Grandfather's return to Europe, I should recount a story told to me by my 'cousin' Lasse Hauff, whom I met in recent years in Oslo.



77. Irene Hauff in London, where she had been sent from Norway after Peter Hauff forced the end of her engagement to 'a dishonest young man.' c.1920.

Lasse, as a young man, sometimes drove grandfather's car for him. Once when driving in the car, Grandfather lost the large gold ring given to him in youth by his great friend Sir Henry Festing Jones. He treasured this ring and was desperately eager to find it. He and Lassse searched the car thoroughly but failed to locate the ring. The car was washed and driven around for a week, when suddenly the gold ring appeared in the corner of the dashboard!

In one of Grandfather's last letters to my mother, he writes in detail about this ring, asking if she remembered it. So that was the heavy gold ring in Lasse Hauff's story! 'Love Unites, Death Parts, 1761' was the inscription. But the ring has gone.

Grandfather and Thona also built a large house with a tower, called 'Sole Mio, in Parc Santa Lucia, St. Raphaël, France, overlooking the Mediterranean Sea. They spent their time both in France and Norway; Grandfather, like my mother, disliked the cold climate.

* * *

Both Aunt Maud and my mother married Norwegians. Maud, whose mother was the Vietnamese woman Thi Thin, married Carl Wishman, a doctor, and had two sons, Carl (Kis) and Erik.

Erik Wishman is now a man of seventy, and recently he tried to find out more about his family history. Presented below is a long letter written by him to the English language *Viet Nam News*. It is dated 13 October, 1996 and is preceded by a brief editorial comment.

Today, Viet Nam News *publishes the following letter to the editor from Norway. It shows how colonialism affected not one but many generations. It shows, too, that goodwill helps wounds to heal.* Viet Nam News *would like to help its author find the descendants of his Vietnamese grandmother and asks any reader who might have information to write to him. His name is Dr. Erik Wishman (address given below).*

The paper then goes on to print the letter in full.

I wish to express my sincere thanks to your national English language daily, Viet Nam News, *which I have received regularly since December, 1995 in accordance with my one-year subscription.*

I think your paper gives excellent and often very detailed reports about daily life from all parts of Viet Nam and about cultural, social and economic development of the entire country.



78. Maud Wishman, with her sons Carl and Erik, Norway. 1963.

So, I am very satisfied. I have also referred your paper to friends and people with special interest both in the general way of life in Viet Nam and about industrial development, such as the Vietnamese oil venture as well as national health care, etc.

Perhaps you know, but Stavanger, where I now live with my wife, is often called the 'oil capital' of Norway, because it was here the Norwegian offshore 'oil adventure' started.

Now, I would very much like to explain why, as a Norwegian living so far from Viet Nam, I have a special interest in your country. It is because I am myself one-quarter Vietnamese. My mother was born in Cho Lon, HCM City on 10 July, 1896. Her mother was a Vietnamese woman, Thi Thin; her father a Norwegian named Peter Hauff.

In 1908 my mother was taken to Europe by her Norwegian father. She had a rich life in Norway, but, when older, her thoughts often returned to her childhood in Cho Lon and Sai Gon. She planned to visit Viet Nam after her husband's death in 1962. Unfortunately she fell seriously ill and died in Mandal, Norway on 26 September, 1964. She was 68.

This letter is an attempt to contact possible relatives of my mother in Viet Nam or people who know of her. Perhaps her story will interest your readers or the readers of a Vietnamese newspaper in HCM City or its surroundings. Therefore, I am taking the liberty to tell my mother's story as her family and friends in Norway know it. Unforturnately, we know very little about my mother's childhood in Cho Lon or Sai Gon, or about her mother, Thi Thin. In the Norway of that time, 'illegitimate' children did not have the same status in society as 'legitimate' children, especially if the child was 'mixed.'

My mother was told by her Norwegian family not to talk about her origin and to forget her mother tongue. However, she told both my brother and me that she lived with her mother until she was ten. Her address—until 1906—was Hoa Hung, Cho Lon, Route de Thuan Kieu, pres du champ de course.

The address was taken from copies of documents following a paternity suit dated 24 February, 1909. She told her sons and friends in Norway that as a little girl, she went with her mother's family to the rice fields of Cuu Long (Mekong) Delta.

A note found after her death says she went to a French school. In 1906 she moved to her father in Sai Gon. It appears from the paternity suit documents that my grandfather Peter Hauff's address was

Rue d'Adran No. 2, Sai Gon. His business address was Rue Catinat No. 3.

A 'Certificat de Baptême' shows that my mother was baptised on 22 December, 1907 in the 'Eglise Reformée de la Cochinchine' and given the name Maud Sophie Hauff. The paternity suit documents say that Peter Hauff's daughter should be registered in the 'registre de l'Etat Civil de la commune Cho Lon, sous le nom et prenom de Hauff, Maud-Sophie' *and that he should have custody of the child.*

In 1908, together with a younger half-sister of Laotian origin, she was taken to Norway by her father. My mother admired her father very much, and I have the impression that she looked very much forward to seeing Europe.

She went first to Norway and to school here for almost a year. Later, she went to school in England and France and was given employment. Diligent and—compared to other Norwegian girls of her time—exceptionally skilled in French and English, she became private secretary to Dr Sam Eyde, the founder and director of the famous industrial enterprise, Norsk Hydro.

In 1920 she was a secretary at the Norwegian legation in Warsaw, Poland. In 1923 she married my father, Carl C. Wishman, a physician. They settled in Mandal, on the south coast of Norway, and had two children; my brother Carl was born in 1926 and myself, Erik Hauff Wishman, in 1927.

My mother planned to visit Viet Nam in 1961 to see the Cho Lon and Sai Gon of her childhood, but she died two years after my father and before she could make the journey. They are buried in Mandal.

My wife Thurid and I have two girls, aged 40 and 37. They are, of course, Thi Thin's great grandchildren. Adding my brother's two children, Thi Thin has four great grandchildren in Norway. My mother was a very sweet, kind and warm-hearted woman of exotic appearance. She had many friends wherever she travelled and left a great void for all who knew her when she died.

In Mandal, we had a garden that became famous in the town for its great variety of flowers brought by my mother. She was musical, and in my mind I can still hear her singing while looking after her flower beds. We know the great care she gave to the garden—a gift she brought with her from Viet Nam. From time to time she would tell us of the fantastic, rich and many-coloured flowers of her childhood in Viet Nam.



79. Thona, Irene, Maud and Peter Hauff. c.1910.



80. Maud and Irene, Dijon, France. c.1910.



81. Maud and Irene, Norway. 1908.

There is still a small piece of paper which may interest your readers. It is a handwritten document in Vietnamese and dated Sai Gon, 17 October, 1911. It has been translated for me, and I understand that it says a woman named Truong Thi Thiet, living in Hoa Hung, has pledged never again to ask Mr. Hauff for money. It warns that if she continues to ask for money, she can be punished. Could this poor woman from Hoa Hung have had some connection to Thi Thin?

Peter Hauff arrived in Sai Gon when he was about 20. He stayed in Indo-China almost continuously until about 1930. The paternity suit says he worked as a merchant, at least after 1905. In the 1920s, he seems to have officiated for a short time as the Norwegian—or even Russian—consul in Sai Gon.

He returned to Europe in 1930 and settled in St. Raphaël, France, where he died in 1951. After World War II, he visited Norway twice and I had the pleasure to meet him on several occasions. He often talked about his travels in Viet Nam, Laos, Cambodia and Siam (Thailand), but he never mentioned Thi Thin.

Did my mother have a happy childhood with her mother in Hoa Hung? What were her feelings when she was separated from her? She never spoke about it. As an adult, she was never marked by the changes she experienced as a child. During her first year in Norway, she told her girlfriends about the Mekong River, about flowers and about water buffaloes, but otherwise little about her daily life with her Vietnamese family. And Thi Thin—what did she feel in losing a child so sweet and kind?

At my age, one becomes increasingly interested in one's forefathers. This is why I have written this letter and tell my mother's story. My grandmother must have passed away many years ago. Did she have sisters or brothers? Are there some distant relatives living in Viet Nam who know Thi Thin's story, and about the little girl she lost to a new life in Europe?

If you think this story might interest readers of Vietnamese newspapers, I would be pleased to have a journalist translate it and have it published in a Vietnamese newspaper, perhaps in HCM City.

My family and I would be very happy if you find the story interesting, and very grateful if you find it worthwhile for a suitable Vietnamese newspaper.

My cousin´s search continues.

* * *

The Norwegian my mother married was named Einar Brofos. They met in London in 1926 while she was working at the Norwegian Legation as a translator. He was a 'self-made-man' as they say - the eldest son of 7 children. At the age of 19 he left Norway for America. There he became an engineer and a pioneer in the newly field of telecommunications. He was employed for several years as an electrical engineer at the Western Electric Research Laboratories in New York, with an advanced group of engineers, chemical engineers and physicists.

My father had a brilliant career, all work, and little time for ladies, I understand. His office and headquarters was in London when he met my mother. Her Norwegian friends told her when they were intrduced: 'Be careful, this is Mr. Electric!' She was brought up by my grandfather and her step-mother Thona, to bring her young suitors to meet her parents. I suppose she followed this, except this time when she had met my father. Her mind was made up. She was sure of her feelings. They fell in love and were after a hort engagement married in the Registry Office in London.

Immediately after the ceremony they boarded the 'Blue Train' to Paris, then sped to St. Raphaël for a church wedding and the proper introduction of my father to his new parents-in-law.

Then they spent their honey-moon on camels in the Sahara-desert. My father was at the height of his career, a man of 45 and my mother 25 years old. He always adored my mother and wanted her to have everything she desired. Later on in life he was saddened by her often too harch judgement in regards to us three children. If he tried to help us - she felt threatened. 'Is it the children, or me?' she asked him. But he faithfully and lovingly had eyes for no other. I can say we children loved our father dearly.

- Imagine if my mother had not burned the boxes with his diaries - a story from a long life! These diaries were carefully stored away in the attic of 'One Oak'. He wrote a page a day from the time he was a poor boy in Norway at the age of 12 untill he was an old man in his 70s!

This would have been a treasure! Fred and I are so sorry this took place after my mother remarried, when my father had died. Another case of her way of covering all tracks?



82. The wedding of Einar and Irene Brofos, St. Raphaël, France.
11 January, 1927.

* * *

Apart from family matters, my grandfather finally had time to reflect and write about his eventful life in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos.

Probably in the early 1930s, at the age of sixty, he set down on paper his record of tales, observations and reminiscences that appear in this book. Grandfather went at the task energetically, producing copies of the manuscript in three languages, Norwegian, English and French, some hand-written, some in typescript. The Norwegian manuscript begins with the title written large in a fancy, elaborate penmanship: 'MEKHONG: A Norwegian Trader's Experiences in Indo-China.'

As long ago as 1936 he tried to get his manuscript published in Oslo, but it was rejected. The publisher commented that the story was indeed fascinating, but Laos was much too remote a country to be of any interest!

Disappointed and perhaps hurt by the rejection, I believe my grandfather then gathered his writings, old photographs, folders, and letters and quietly put them away to be forgotten.

Much later, shortly before his death in 1951, he may have brought them out again for a last look. At this time he probably wrote the words of introduction that begin: 'I sit here an old man, far down in a small village in Southern France, paging through some yellowing notes. The Mekong River rushes again in my ears ...'

Not long after grandfather's death in December, 1951, my mother flew over to France to clear up matters with the house we all knew as 'Sole Mio.' There, in the house's waterlogged cellar, she found and saved from oblivion the manuscript, papers and photographs my grandfather had carefully put away. Later, in 1985, all these materials turned up again. Many times I have said a silent 'thank you' for letting these writings and records survive. Had they been lost or destroyed my life would have been much poorer, and I would never have been able to tell this tale.

In a long letter to my mother just six months before he died, presented in his ever-elegant handwriting, he called my mother 'his beloved Sparrow,' a name of deepest affection that he used ever since she was a little girl. This name was also a reminder and a corrective. My grandfather wanted his daughter Irene to know that she was a sparrow, and not a bird of paradise, as so many people seemed to think. She should not get any high ideas about herself.

The poverty and difficulties of grandfather's last decade weighed on him terribly. The glory days of youth in Southeast Asia were long gone, and the tile factory and other property in Vietnam were sold. His possessions



83. Grandfather Peter Hauff comes to see my mother after World War II; visiting battleships with Fleur and Bambi at Langelinie, Copenhagen. August, 1946.

and treasures had been spread to the four winds by the awful trials of World War II.

In 1946 he wrote to my mother: *'At one point I thought we should both die. I could hardly stand, weight down to fifty-two kilos. Thona lost forty-five kilos. We were chased out of Sole Mio by the Germans in March, 1944. One truckload of furniture was burnt. Then in August the house was bombarded. My idea is to sell it as it stands, for I have not the money to repair it. ... I hope things will get normal by and by, for life is not worth living as things are now. You know, I am seventy-two now and often apt to see the dark side of things.'*

My mother saw her father for the last time in 1949, two years after a stroke had slowed him considerably and added another layer of pessimism to his life. Creditors were knocking at the door and he failed to sell Sole Mio, a large, dilapadated house that had no market in the ragged years immediately after the war. A sadness and resignation crept into his life. Towards the end, after writing his last will and testament, he wrote to my Aunt Maud: *'I am not taking on any more worries. The future will bring*

what still is in store for me. The main thing is to know I have my dearest daughters' love. The rest will have to stand its trial. Be in good spirits. Bon courage ...'

And to my mother he wrote the same, with a poignant ending: *'This may be a dull letter, but you understand me. With fond love [to all]– and mostly to you, Centre of my Eye, with memory of your mother Sao Boun Ma, who I will never forget, the faithful and the honest. Many kisses and love from your old Papa.'*

Grandfather loved Sao Boun Ma dearly and never forgot her, even though they parted when he was only in his early thirties.

I barely knew my grandfather, though stories and family legends have brought to me a valuable collection of incidents and details that allow me to feel I knew him.

In 1939, as a young girl of ten, I went by myself to visit a dear lady, one of my mother's best friends, at her summer house in Norway. She was not a true relative, but I called her Aunt Ingrid nevertheless. I slept in an old-fashioned box-bed decorated with paintings, covered with a heavy quilt of feather down, and kept warm by a roaring fire that threw light and shadows around the room, bringing to life trolls and elves in the dark corners. She was a grand lady. Later in life I remember her dressed in renaissance emerald jewellery and sable furs. Fred and I are always reminded of a large rose quartz Buddha on her mantelpiece when we speak of her.

Aunt Ingrid had the world's largest private collection of Edvard Munch paintings. As a Doctor of Arts, she took twelve years to write a great book in Norwegian on the painter, Maturing Years (1969). As a young woman she had known Munch.

On holidays in Norway, Des, Souvanni and I visited Aunt Ingrid at her old summer house. One evening, as the sun set on the Oslofjord, she told us of her first meeting with my grandfather. She spoke highly of him and thought him to be a great man, so we naturally wanted to know how they met.

On a summer day long, long ago, my mother, Aunt Ingrid, family and friends were spending the holidays at Drøbak, a small village in the Oslofjord. A sudden breeze came up and blew Ingrid's straw hat off her head and far out into the water. Grandfather immediately dived into the sea, caught up with it and brought it back, swimming powerfully with the hat in his mouth. This incident revealed to us some of his gallantry and fun.

In time, as she came to know my grandfather better, her respect and fondness for this remarkable man grew ever stronger. Aunt Ingrid commented much later: 'They don't make men like him any more.'

After my mother's death in 1985, my brother Fred brought to his house in New Hampshire all the nice old furniture from 'Imbry' and her belongings from the Connecticut house. Through the years, Fred has come to see us here in Denmark and I have gone to see him and his family. During one of those visits to America we discovered, while looking at his many collections, a great many letters, papers and photographs that belonged to Grandfather, even the old handwritten manuscript of his life in Indo-China. This amazing collection turned up in my mother's old purple suitcase, a hidden treasure, as if from the games we used to play as children!

In the 1950s my mother gave us incomplete copies of Grandfather's typewritten manuscript, so we did know about his great adventures.

Suddenly, in 1992, after my own travels to find my roots in Laos, the discovery of the real, original material, hidden away for so long, absolutely inspired me to try to get it published. Fred kindly sent copies to Denmark, realizing my seriousness in this project.

Once more I flew over to Fred to make a selection of old photographs, now faded and fragile, originally made on very thin rice paper. Luckily we were able to make successful copies. Now with these wonderful old photographs and this discovered correspondence, the private loves and passions of my grandfather came to life.

The letters revealed an intimacy and youthful love for Thona, and a deep love in old age for his two daughters. Their freshness and openness have allowed me to know my grandfather more thoroughly. His sixty-page manuscript of life in Indo-China omitted a great deal. Perhaps too much of his private life was painful beyond telling, and I have only been able to accumulate patchy descriptions with the help of other sources. Luckily these letters survived under the protection of my mother.

The greatest omissions in the public life of my grandfather were perhaps the most important of all. In his twenties, in far off Asia, he fathered two girls, each from a different mother, one Annamese, the other Laotian. Yet Grandfather wrote *not one word* in that manuscript about his Laotian wife Sao Boun Ma, his Vietnamese wife Thi Thin, or either of his two daughters. It is hard to grasp the degree of shame he must have felt to hide from view the most precious things in his life.

The blanks on the life map of my grandfather are many, and aids in filling in those blanks have proven elusive. Guy Cheminaud, a close friend from early days in Laos and Vietnam, died in 1951. Unfortunately, he passed away before I was old enough and aware enough to ask the many questions that begged to be answered.

* * *

Much of the true story of my grandfather's life remains a mystery. Why did he abandon Sao Boun Ma, my Laotian grandmother, when all indications are she was the one lasting love of his life? Why, once he married Thona, did all their hopes and expectations of a fruitful, joy-filled life come to nothing? What went wrong? Their unhappy alliance may have been a result of childlessness. I never met Thona. She died, I believe, in 1966.

People described my grandfather as full of fun and a great storyteller. In my searching I recently found out I had a cousin, the Swedish painter Ulf Trotzig, who knew him well. Our grandfathers in London were the brothers Gustav and Peter Hauff.

After World War II, Ulf, a talented young artist of nineteen, with a scholarship in hand to study art and French, went to stay with Grandfather and Thona at their house in St. Raphaël.

He was, I believe, like a son to Peter Hauff. They slept in the same room. Ulf remembers vividly the photograph of Sao Boun Ma in a frame on his chest of drawers in the bedroom. Sometimes he would turn it around. On the back my grandfather kept a picture of my mother, his beautiful sparrow — he could turn the picture to his liking.

'What happened to the jewels?' Ulf asked me. He had seen Thona wearing the garland of Russian rubies and diamonds that once had surrounded my grandfather's dinner plate in Saigon. Great jewels do have a way of 'changing hands,' being stolen or sold, I thought.

Ulf brought his bride Birgitta to meet Grandfather and Thona, and they named their first daughter Irene, after my mother. Maud and Irene were the princesses of the family, Ulf said.

By talking with Ulf I learned many stories that have helped piece together a picture of my grandfather's personality and the important events which shaped his life.

I will let Ulf Trotzig tell his own story:

My first real meeting with Peter Hauff tok place in Draguignan in Provence in June 1947. He was a legend in the family, and I was sent down as a young student not only to learn French, but also to see how the old couple had survived the war years, and how they lived. The family was naturally concerned.

His small electric appliance shop, all that was left from his considerable business before the war, was located in one of the narrow streets in old Draguignan. I walked through the almost empty store, and up a dark flight of stairs, into one large room. What met my eyes was a scene out of a Bonnard painting: Wallpapers with large blooming flowers, a worn tiled floor and a ray of sunlight through a roof window against which I could see the silhouette of a hulk of a man only clad in a yellow flowery sarong, *cooling his feet in a pail of water. It was a fantastic view; as fantastic as the man himself. This room served all purposes; dining room, kitchen, bedroom, living room and on one unforgettable occasion as ballroom with aunt Thona dancing "The Swan's Death" from the ballet "The Swan Lake".*

We soon became good friends, as he needed someone to banter with about his unusual life and thoughts in the somewhat impoverished intellectual environment of Draguignan. He was a master at telling stories and made the people and milieus come alive through his turn of phrase. In writing, unfortunately, he was dry and sober, no doubt due to his Victorian upbringing. He could for example make a splendid case for the beauty of the female elephant's breasts which he would convince you were much more beautiful than those of any *young woman!*

On arriving in Saigon with an insatiable appetite on life, he would get up at 4 o'clock in the morning in order not to miss anything in the life of this remarkable world. He would then go down to the harbour to take lessons in the local language, and to meet as many local people as he could. In this he succeeded; he had friends everywhere among dock hands, fishermen, smugglers, petty traders and so forth.

His first job as a clerk did not last long; he was soon trading on his own, with varying degrees of success. One of his favourite stories was his adventures as a Russian Consul in early 1905 when the Russian fleet took on provisions in Saigon. As he knew practically everyone in Saigon, he managed the whole operation smoothly, but against payment in gold to be settled every evening. Not only gold, he also received gifts of rubies, emeralds and diamonds. A tall story? Not quite, because I myself saw some rubies still left after the war, and my mother saw the emeralds and diamonds in the 1930's.

In Draguignan he was called Monsieur Aladdin, a nick-name he earned from his Christmas marionette theatre shows in his shop windows both in his large store in St Raphael and the sub-store in Draguignan. These were great events for the local children, with scenes

from "Thousand and one nights" and "Aladdin's lamp". He was a popular figure, and at the height of his success in the 1930's, he loved to throw large parties in his villa Sole Mio, with champagne cooling in the marble fountain, named Angkor Wat, in the garden facing the Mediterranean sea. The villa was badly damaged by the US forces during the invasion on the beach of St Raphael, and resulted in an endless correspondence about war damage payments.

The house in Draguignan was situated at Grand Rue number 3, a small shop lane with an open drain in the middle. The backyard faced a small open air market, and had three separate entrances as well as the cellar access. During the war, the house and the old medieval cellar system was used for storing arms for the French resistance movement, in which Peter Hauff, by now a French citizen, was active. Once at the Central Station in Marseilles, he was apprehended by a German soldier who took an unseemly interest in his two large and heavy bags, which incidentally were full of arms and ammunition. "In such situations", he told me, there is one thing to do: "Cry". With tears streaming down his old face, he movingly recounted to the symphatetic young German how he had managed to gather enough food for his starving, half-dead and very large family. In the end, the German gallantly helped him carry his bags safely on to the train!

They both suffered greatly during the war. Uncle Peter suffered from lack of vitamins. One day, Thona was desperately searching for edible oil, with no luck. She returned home to her sick husband, and prayed a long prayer for God to help her. She went out again, and accosted a women carrying two boxes, asking what they contained. "Oil" was the answer. A boat loaded with olive oil had just been torpedoed off St Raphael, and the oil could be scooped up at the beach! She could save Peter's life with God's help, she later said, and her faith was reaffirmed.

Uncle Peter's religious faith was not quite that simple, and bore marks of his long stay in Indo-China. He once told me he really was a Buddhist. I still remember vividly these conversations under the trees at the open air cafes; the green light filtering through the foliage and illuminating his strong face. Glimpses of his business activities fascinated me. Once, he told me he rented wall spaces all over Saigon, and then sub-let the same walls for advertising purposes. Bill-board was something new and sensational at the time, and he made money on it. He also imported port wine to Norway. His many adventures are told in this book, and he then ended his active career as an electric

ÉGLISE RÉFORMÉE
DE LA
COCHINCHINE
L. J. HÉTEYER
PASTEUR

SAIGON, LE 22 Décembre 1907

Certificat de Baptême

L'an mil neuf cent sept, et le 22 Décembre
a été baptisé dans L'Église de Saigon
Au nom du Père, du Fils et du Saint-Esprit :
Irène, Louise Hauff
fille de Peter Hauff
et de Sao-Boun-Ma
Parrains : H. Jones, De Kerhor, G. Hauff
Marraines : Hoyer, G. Hauff, L. Monsey

Certifié conforme au
Registre des Baptêmes
de l'Église de Saigon
L. J. Hétéyer
pasteur
Saigon 28 Août 1912

Le Pasteur officiant,
Pierre Jarillon

84. My mother's Certificate of Baptism, dated 22 December, 1907.

appliance dealer at the Riviera, doing well before the war ruined him for the rest of his life.

In 1947 he finally settled at his dear Sole Mio, which had been provisionally restored by then, partly thanks to aunt Thona's effort; she would spend the week there painting and repairing as best she could, and come up to Dranguignan for the weekend. Towards the end of his life, he dreamed back to his life among the peoples of Indo-China, his lost paradise. On the wall in his room at Sole Mio hung a photograph of his daughter Irene, and on the back was secretly pasted a photo of Sao Boun Ma with their son in her lap.

Uncle Peter often talked with me about death. A recurring theme was how long the remembrances of a person could last; how long before the last traces would be gone. I remember him telling me: " I will soon die, but one thing I can say about my life: I have had great fun!"

So with this book, his grand-daughter Fleur has ensured that he will be remembered, and that the traces of Peter Hauff will not be lost, as he much feared.

* * *

I can imagine this tall, handsome, Nordic blond young man, arriving with eagerness in Saigon at the age of twenty-one. This was the year 1894. A photograph from that time shows a powerful young man, utterly in command and possessed of great spirit.

I learned more about my grandfather and the extended family when visiting my mother in Florida in the 1970s. She had married an elderly American gentleman in 1959, shortly after my father's death, and they spent their winters in Florida. My mother created a lovely garden around her house, which stood on a quiet, sandy lane going down to the Atlantic Ocean. We enjoyed long walks along the beach, collecting shells and drift-wood, watching dolphins glide offshore and sandpipers run back and forth at the water's edge.

On those walks and sitting in her tropical garden, surrounded by pink bougainvillea and bright red hibiscus blossoms, I gradually became friends with my mother after so many years of trouble between us. We began to accept and care for one another as two human beings that also were mother and daughter. I wish I had been able to ask her then the many questions that filled my mind, but it was not possible for me.

Once in Florida, driving home from an Indian reservation I had wanted to see, she tiredly rested her head on her husband's head in the front seat.

Souvanni, age six, was there with me sitting in the back seat of the car. My mother started to sing softly the sweetest song, like a lullaby. I asked her what it was and she sleepily answered: '*Oh, a song from Laos.*' Then she stopped singing. I was startled and amazed, but I did not dare to pursue this further.

My mother decided she wanted to visit me after hearing I had settled down in Denmark and was happily married, with husband and child. I had not seen her for twelve years.

After several pleasant stays here in Denmark and invitations to visit her in Florida, we at last were on friendly terms. Still, I could not ask my mother to tell me about herself.

The denial of her past was thoroughly ingrown. I remember once she asked a Danish friend of mine who had married a Lao and lived in Vientiane for four years: '*Elli, tell me about Laos—you know I have never been there!*' My poor mother. I think she had lost her identity.

The Oriental side of my mother strongly resented having a daughter who grew up so big and tall. I resembled my Norwegian father, while Bambi was petite like my mother. Having two tall older children—Fred and me—would have made her seem older, too, I suppose.

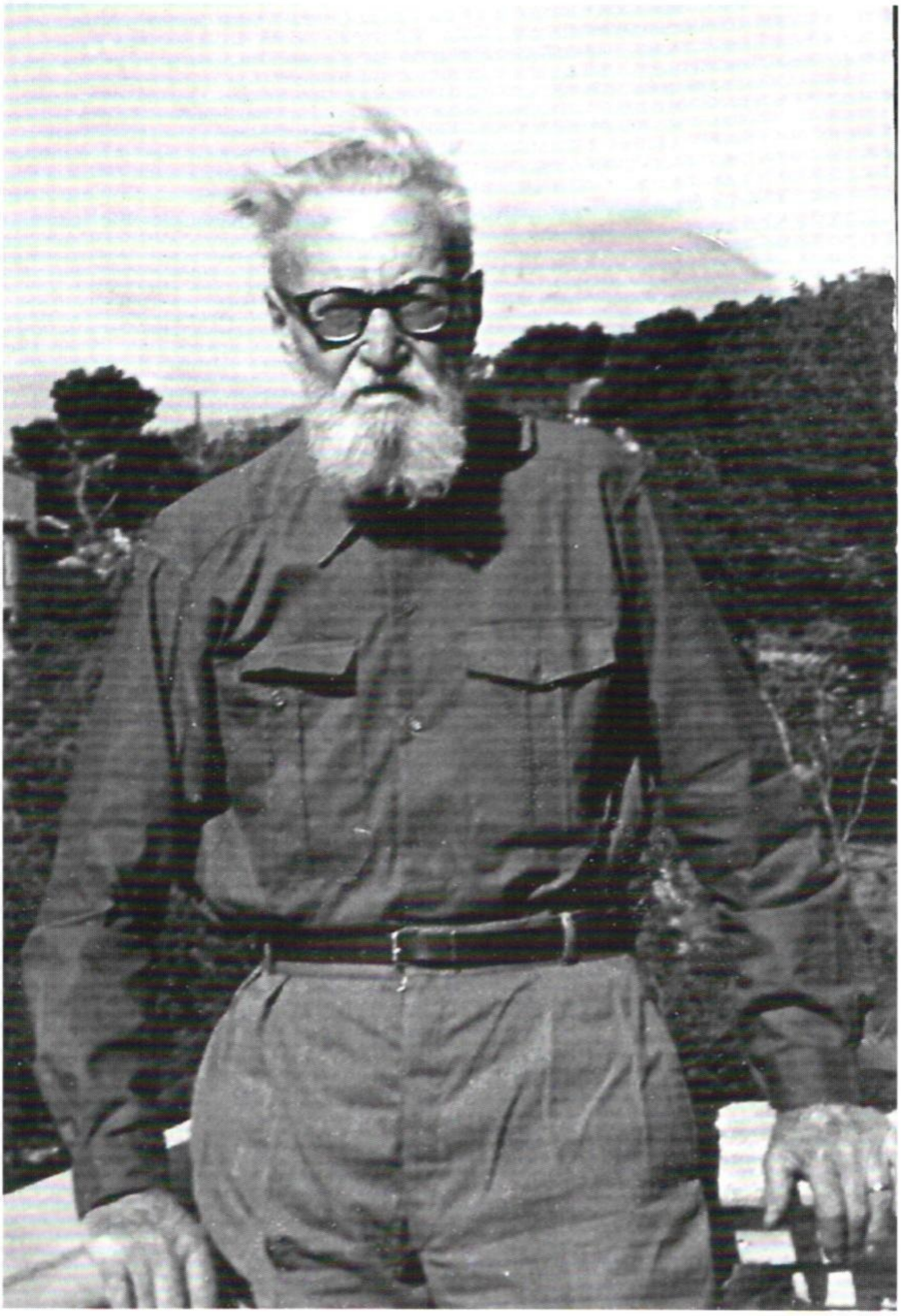
My mother kept her real age a secret. 'How old is your mother?' asked the girls at school. 'She's thirty-two,' I answered, believing that to be her correct age. I realize now she was forty-two at the time, during World War II.

Fred, the most Asian looking of us three children, is extremely handsome with black hair and long, large dark eyes. Did my mother not fear to be revealed by fostering such a child? Such facts help explain some of the inner conflicts she was facing in herself. These conflicts turned to anger and resentment towards Fred and me.

It became a sorrow and a burden for my little sister Bambi to witness this unfairness as she was growing up. She stuck up for me and consoled me at all times of trouble. Here lies the seed of love and care that grew so strongly between us.

Looking back, I feel that my mother would have liked to abandon us, as animals do if they find something wrong with their offspring.

My mother was not born with these unkind traits. As a product of the Victorian era, she found that the mixing, or joining, of East and West was unacceptable. Her strict upbringing forced her to deny her Laotian heritage, and the result was a warped attitude, especially towards her children. How sad to think that she was unable to feel the pride and gratitude belonging to a race of such gentle people.



85. 'You surely notice my good spirits.' To Erik from Grandfather Peter Hauff. 3 July, 1951. Photograph taken in southern France.

She and her sister Maud were told to forget their country and their language as little girls leaving Asia to be brought up in Europe. To conceal who she was and where she was born must have hurt my mother to the core, yet she kept up the facade throughout her life. In 1949, in her petition for naturalization as a US citizen, my mother put her correct birth date, but the place of birth was given as China!

As a final twist, my mother's official Certificate of Death, from Vero Beach, Florida, USA, states her place of birth as Norway, and her mother as Thona Høyer! Clearly her Laotian birth was a source of worry, even humiliation, throughout her life, and even into death. She tried again and again to conceal the fact of her origins. Laos, China, India, Norway. All were listed at various times as the country where my mother's life began.

After our talks and reconciliation, though, I felt I could understand what had happened to her in the past, and why she had become the way she was. For the first time I felt genuine affection and closeness to her.

A year after her husband passed away my mother died of old age in Florida, on 5 November, 1985. She was eighty-four years old. She knew she was soon to die and wrote such lovely letters to me, as never before, calling me 'my dearest Fleur,' bidding me farewell.

A telegram arrived from Fred telling me she was gone forever. Not long after her death I suddenly saw her come towards me in a white light across the lake by our house. Then in a flash she was gone. I ran down to Des in his studio in the garden to tell him that my mother had come to see me. Throughout my life I have called out for her in my heart.

And through my mother I came closer to my grandfather, too.

* * *

His life ended very peacefully at the age of 78 years in the south of France in the autumn of 1951. Those final months were a period of quiet withdrawal from the world. He would eat *råkost*, grated raw vegetables, no meat, no wine, just a little fish and fruit as accompaniment. He liked to take long walks and, when tired, stop to rest upon a favourite stone he called 'Nirvana.'

Grandfather passed away sitting on a bench in his own garden. A little girl he knew from next door came skipping along the garden path. Seeing Grandfather sitting quite still, she stopped and called out: 'Monsieur Hauff, Monsieur Hauff!' But he never answered.

In preparing this book, in trying to tell the story of my family, I have encountered both great pain and great beauty as I searched my own memory

and discovered threads and fragments of the narrative among letters, friends and relatives. Throughout this long process, the *yin* and the *yang*, the dark and light sides of our world have revealed themselves and come to the surface. I strongly feel, in fact I know my grandfather has been with me along the way, looking over my shoulder with approval. He is with me still.



86. Thona and Peter Hauff on their garden bench.
July 3, 1951.

CHRONOLOGY:
THE LIFE OF PETER MICHAEL VOSGRAFF HAUFF

1873: born 3 April, 1873, Arendal, Norway.

c:1890. business apprenticeship in London.

1893: leaves Marseille for Indo-China.

1894: arrives Saigon to begin work with trading company.

1896: birth of his Vietnamese child, Maud Sophie, 10 July, 1896,at Cho Lon, Saigon.

1898: first voyage up the Mekong. Peter Hauff reaches Don Co, above Ban Muong, in southern Laos.

1899. returns to Europe to gather supplies and prepare for trading venture in Laos.

Dec:1898. Peter Hauff, with partner Hans Fäesch, departs Saigon by river boat to begin three-month trip to North Laos.

Mar:1899. arrives Vientiane, purchases house and land in the village of Ban Wattai, outside city walls. Commences trading.

1899: Sao Boun Ma (b.1878, age 21) becomes his wife.

1901: birth of his Laotian child, I Kham Tem (Irene Louise), 10 January, 1901.

1902: Holy Men's Rebellion in Siam and Laos. Peter Hauff flees southern Laos by canoe, then on foot for over 300 miles to reach safety.

1903: great voyage down the Mekong, delivering teak from Luang Prabang to Saigon.

c:1903: birth of a son, Bac Noi.

c.1905: Bac Noi drowns in the Mekong River.

1905: Peter Hauff travels to Europe to marry Thona Høyer in Norway. Both return to Indo-China to take up life in Saigon.

1906: Peter Hauff departs Laos for good, bringing his daughter Irene Louise with him. He also brings into the family Maud Sophie, who had been living with Vietnamese grandparents.

1908: his two daughters are taken to Europe for their education.

1911: heads a tile and mosaic factory in Saigon. Makes his first trip to Angkor in Cambodia.

1919: second trip to Angkor.

1923: decorated as a Chevalier of the Ordre du Dragon de L'Annam.

1928: third trip to Angkor.

1929: fourth trip to Angkor. After twenty-five years in Indo-China, Peter Hauff leaves Asia, never to return.

1930: visits England; sees his granddaughter Fleur for the first time. Builds the house 'Sole Mio' in St. Raphaël, France.

1936: writes and submits for publication *A Norwegian Trader's Experiences in Indo-China;* manuscript rejected.

1940-45: war years in France.

1946: visits Norway and Denmark.

1949: visits Norway.

1951: dies peacefully in southern France; 12 October, 1951.

Place Names

The following geographic and place names appear in Lao Roots. All forms are based upon entries in The Times Atlas of the World and the National Geographic map Viet Nam, Cambodia, Laos and Thailand. Names not found in these sources take a conventional form or follow the text entries of Peter Hauff and Hans Fäesch.

Ai Lao
Angkor
Angkor Thom
Annam
Antwerp
Attopeu
Australia
Ayutthaya

Ban Duamakheng
Ban Kenn
Ban Mai
Ban Muong
Ban Nakhan
Ban Pong
Ban Sitan
Ban Talat
Ban Wattai
Banam
Bassac
Battambang
Bayon Temple
Ben Thuy
Bergen
Berkshire Mountains
Bien Hoa
Blonville
Borneo
Boston
Buffalo
Burma

Cai Tau Ha
Cambodia
Cammon Province
Canal de la Poste
Cape St. James
Cau Mau Peninsula
Chao Phraya River
Chicago
China
Cho Lon
Cho Quan
Chom Si, Wat
Christiansand
Cochin-China
Connecticut
Copenhagen
Culao Gieng
Cuu Long

Denmark
Dijon
Don Co
Don Hip
Don Makkeua
Don Sadam
Drøbak

Elsinore (Helsingör)
England

Falsterbohus
Florida
France
Fredensborg

Geilo
Georgia
Greenwich
Gulf of Siam

Ha Trai
Hamar
Helsingborg
Ho Sadam Pass
Hop Ham Pass
Huan Hin
Hue

Iloilo
India
Indo-China

Kamoutasai
Kbal Phum
Keng
Keng Don Makkeua
Keng Kabao
Keng Kadok
Keng Khongluong
Keng Pa
Kham Keut
Khemmarat
Kheng Keut
Khone
Khong
Kinabalu, Mt.
King's Holy Caves
King's Palace
Kompong Chhnang
Korat
Kratie

Labuan
Lai Thien
Lan Sang
Lancashire
Laos
Lillehammer
London
Long Xuyen
Lovek
Luang Prabang

Mai, Wat
Måkläppen
Malacca
Massachusetts
Mekong River
Menam River
Monaco
Monkey Market
Muong Kouk
Muong Pak Sedon
Muong Pan
Muong You
My Tho

Nakhon Phanom
Nam Hinboun
Nam Kadinh
Nam Ngoum River
Nam Passac River
Nam Theun
Nape
New Hampshire
New York City
Nong Bua Lamphu
Nong KhaiNorfolk

Normandy
Norway

Oslo
Oslofjord
Oubon
Oudong
Outhomm
Østerbro

Pa Pheng, Falls
Pak Hin Boun
Pak Lay
Pak Moun
Pak Ou Grottoes
Pak Sedon
Pakistan
Panay
Paris
Phnom Penh
Phoucy, Mt.
Phu Quoc Island
Phum Chhlong
Pi Moun
Pon Pissay
Pra Keo, Wat
Preatapang
Prek Krako
Provence

Rach Gia
Rue Catinat

Sa Dec
Sadam
Saigon
Salape, Falls
Saltsjöbaden
Sambor
Saniaburi
Sarawak
Savannakhet
Scarsdale
Se Moun
Seaford
Si Saket, Wat
Siam
Siem Reap
Singapore
Song Khone
Southampton
St. Louis
St. Raphaël
Stockholm
Stung Treng
Sulu Sea
Surrey
Sweden

Tatoum
That Dam
That Luong
That Phanom
Thu Dau Mot
Tibet
Tmochre
Tokyo
Tonkin
Tonle Sap
Tourakom
Tram Mua

Ubon Ratchathani
Udon Thani
United States

Vam Nao
Vedbæk
Vientiane
Vietnam
Vinh
Vung Tau

Watermelon Pagoda

Xieng Khouang

Map of Indo-China

(entries)

LAOS
VIET NAM
CAMBODIA
THAILAND (SIAM)
CHINA
BURMA (MYANMAR)

TONKIN
ANNAM
COCHIN-CHINA

GULF OF THAILAND
SOUTH CHINA SEA
GULF OF TONKIN
MEKONG RIVER
MEKONG RIVER DELTA
TONLE SAP
HAINAN ISLAND
PHU QUOC ISLAND

Hanoi
Haiphong
Vinh
Hue
Da Nang
Saigon
My Tho
Vung Tau (Cape St. James)
Long Xuyen

Phnom Penh
Kompong Chhnang
Angkor
Kratie
Stung Treng

Luang Prabang
Vientiane
Xieng Khouang
Nape
Cammon Province
Pak Hin Boun
Savannakhet
Don Co
Khong
Khone

Bangkok
Ayutthaya
Korat (Nakhon Ratchasima)
Oubon (Ubon Ratchathani)
Khemmarat
Udon Thani
Nong Khai

24 / VII
ข้ามจาขง่าย

The Family Tree

Father: Tiaou Muong (Chief of village)
Mother? both parents killed by the Siamese.

Sao Boun Ma

b: 1878 Muong* Kamoutasai † 3/6 1943 Ban Mai Laos (Nasay Thong)
(Laos siamais)
* Nong Bua Lamphu N.E. Thailand 25 miles west of UDORN

1. -m- Peter Hauff b. 1873 † 1951

2. -m- Thit Phoua

Peter Hauff & Thit Phoua:
- J Kham tem (called Item)
- Irene Louise (my Mother) b. 10/1. 1901 Ban Wattai † 5/11. 1985
  -m- Einar Andrew Brofos (my father) b. 23/12 1882 Norway † 1/10 1959 USA
- Bac Noi G. Ban Wattai 1903 † 1905

Thit Phoua:
- Sao Ming b. 1912 Ban Mai
  -m- Thit Thanh Sayavong
  6 children
- one boy died
- Sao Bao
  -m- Thao Thieng

Einar Andrew Brofos & Irene Louise:
- Chanchan b. in Ban Mai
  - Ammone monk (Son)
- Souphark -m- b. 6/1. 1944 in Ouan (65 km. est)
- Khambay living in Ban Mai (wife deceased)
  - Kamphay Sayavong b. 5/8. 1969 Ban Mai
    -m- Saikong Pasai b. 9/8. 1976
    - Chatchay Austin Xayavong b. 30/10. 1995 USA.

Thit Thanh Sayavong:
- Bolay Ban Mai married
- Khamphout b. 6/5. 1949
  -m- Keo Sayavong b. 1/7. 1951 (Sao Ning's daughter)
  - Thongsamouth b. 4/1. 1980 USA
- Bounnack Sayavong b. 8/3 1955
  -m- Kemkong b. 17/7. 1959
  - Seksack b. 1976
  - Chackapong b. 1977
  - Souket b. 1978
  - Phokong (Village Sapanphut in Thailand, across Ban Mai)

Thao Thieng:
- Sao Chieng Ban Kadieo
  -m- Thi Nou
  7 children
  one boy wounded in the war 1946

Peter Michael Vosgraff Hauff —m— Sofie Ulrika Hedberg
6. 21/5 1840 NORWAY † 1917 LONDON — G. 28/9 1845 SWEDEN † 1923 LONDON

Johan Frederik Gustav Hauff
6.30/4 1869
—m—
Karen Thomine Høyer
6.17/3 1872

Ragni Sofie Hauff
6.13/3 1898
—m—
Dr. Ragnar Frotzig † 1971
SWEDEN

Ulf Frotzig
—m—

Lilly Sofie Hauff
6. 9/5 1871
—m—
Johan Schandre Monsen
6.16/2 1865 † 1923

Birgit, Sofie Lily Monsen
6.12/6 1901

Peter Michael Vosgraff Hauff (Jr.)
6. 3/4 1873 † 9/12 1951 FRANCE
(my Grandpapa)

Chi-Chin
SAIGON

Maud Sofie Hauff
6.10/7 1896 † 26/9 1964
SAIGON OSLO
—m—
Dr. Carl Wishman
6. 23/4 1875 † 15/7 1962

Kis Wishman
NORWAY
10/2-1926
—m—

Erik Wishman
NORWAY
14/8 1927
—m—

Sao Boun Ma
LAOS
6.1878 † 3/6 1943
(my Grandmother)

J Khamtem Irene Louise Hauff
(my Mother)
6.10/1 1901 † 5/11 1985
LAOS USA
—m—

Bac Noi
G. 1903 † 1905
LAOS

m- 28/11 1905 OSLO
Thona Høyer
G 15/6 1883 Arendal NORWAY
† 1966 ?

No Children

Fredrikke Kystad —m— Gustav Brofos
Holmestrand NORWAY — 26/2 1856 at BROFOS LARDAL NORWAY
6. 8/7 1859 † 1944 OSLO — † 24/9 1938 (82½ yr. old)
(my Grandparents)

Einar Andrew Brofos
23/12 1882 † 1/10 1959
OSLO U.S.A.
(my Father)

Frederick Allen Brofos
(my Brother)
6. 7/12 1927 ENGLAND
—m—
1. Sylvia Rueff
2. Rosemary Ossenfort

Alexander Brofos
6. 16/8-1963 USA
—m—

Fleur Louise Brofos
(me)
6. 15/5 1929 ENGLAND
1. Spike —m— Landsman
2. Des Asmussen
6. 17/7 1913 COPENHAGEN

Souvanni Asmussen
6. 21/7 1966 DENMARK

Irene Margaret Brofos
called BABBI (my Sister)
6. 31/10 1933 ENGLAND † 7/6 1989 FRANCE
—m—
Serge Gabriel
6. 10/5 1929 FRANCE
2. Marilyn Parker

Claudette — 11/2 1959 —m—
Suzette — 9/11 1960 —m—
Maud — 9/4 1964



INDO-CHINA and the Mekong

CHINA

MEKONG RIVER

TONKIN

VIETNAM

BURMA

Hanoi

Haiphong

Luang Prabang

GULF OF TONKIN

Xieng Khouang

HAINAN ISLAND

Vinh

Ben Thuy

Tourakom

Kham Keut

Pak Lay

Vientiane

Nape

MEKONG RIVER

Nong Khai

Pak Hin Boun

Cammon Province

Udon Thani

Keng Kabao

Savannakhet

Hue

THAILAND (SIAM)

Khemmarat

LAOS

Da Nang

Oubon (Ubon Ratchathani)

Don Co

Si Saket

Attopeu

Korat (Nakhon Ratchasima)

Ayutthaya

Khong

Khone

Ban Pong

Bangkok

CAMBODIA

Angkor

Siem Reap

Stung Treng

Battambang

MEKONG RIVER

VIETNAM

SOUTH CHINA SEA

Sambor

TONLE SAP

Kratie

Kompong Chhnang

Phnom Penh

COCHIN-CHINA

Banam

Bien Hoa

Saigon

Cho Lon

GULF OF THAILAND

Long Xuyen

My Tho

Vung Tau

Phu Quoc Island

Sa Dec

MEKONG DELTA

Rach Gia

N

Cau Mau Peninsular

0

200 miles



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From 1967 onwards,
the author and her family have travelled
to Laos to trace their relatives still living there.
The search revealed this complex and fantastic story.
The authors's Norwegian grandfather, Peter Hauff, left
a long account of his experiences as a trader in Indo-China
from 1890 to 1928 with a number of hitherto unknown photographs
of Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. Nowhere did he mention the Laotian
mother of one of his daughters, and the Vietnamese mother of the
other. The energetic Peter Hauff, after the premature death in Laos
of his equally fantastic Swiss business partner, Hans Fäesch, left for
Europe in late 1905. He married a woman probably not of his choice,
and returned to Vietnam and established a household with his
new wife and two daughters. He eventually settled in France,
and died there in 1951, never having seen again his
Sao Boun Ma whom he described in a note
shortly before his death as
the honest and faithful.



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