

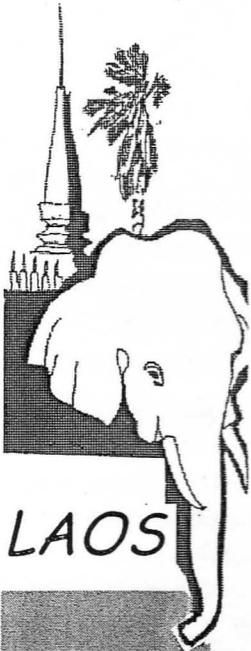
# MEKONG

CIRCLE INTERNATIONAL

DECEMBER 2005

145-60 Helma Avenue, Ohio 45013 USA

www.mekongcircle.org



LAOS

Our  
2006  
Reunion  
will be  
in  
Florida  
Aug. 11  
to  
Aug. 14.

Details  
inside  
and more  
to  
come.

## ALL'S WELL THAT END'S WELL!

Welcome to the 11th issue of our Newsletter! As we wrap up the year, Mekong Circle can talk up a number of accomplishments. Our 2004 reunion in Chicago was a hugely successful event that we will long remember. Our *Iskolars Ng Mekong* Philippine scholarship project is going fine, thank you. We did our bit in helping the Katrina Hurricane victims. We continue to maintain fraternal ties with our compatriots in Vientiane. We represented our association in the historic First International Conference on Lao Studies. Our publishing program took a big leap forward with the publication of "Goodbye Vientiane." All these while keeping our full time day jobs.

There were some sad moments. A number of veteran members passed away. An effort to send a small medical team during the ASEAN summit last November in Vientiane fell victim to bureaucratic inaction. But hey, there's the 2006 reunion aboard a cruise ship to the Bahamas that we can look forward to.



A World Bank survey released last month says that 37% of Laos's skilled citizens are living (and presumably working) outside the country. The survey says Laos is one of two countries in Asia where the brain drain affects national development because it is one of the smaller (in population), low income countries where the stock of high skills is meager. Others in the same group include Guyana (89% skilled emigration), Jamaica (85%), Haiti (83%), Surinam (47%), Ghana (46%), Mozambique (45%), Kenya (38%), Uganda (35%), El Salvador (31%), Sri Lanka (29%) and Nicaragua (29%). (You can read online the full text of the 289-page 2000 study "International Migration, Remittances and The Brain Drain" at <http://web.worldbank.org>. It has extensive references to the Philippines). We thought a reaction from a Lao graduate student on this subject would be of interest to our members. Hence there are excerpts from our interview with her in this issue.



Member reservations on our Royal Caribbean International cruise ship reunion is filling up. More members have reserved their cabins since the October 30, 2005 deadline to avail of our Mekong Circle reduced rates (see list inside). You can still reserve your cabin anytime before our August 11, 2006 sailing. But current rates, no longer our discount rates, will apply. And the closer to the sailing date, the rates go higher. So book now before space runs out. Call our travel agent Tess Papa at 1 888 278 3415 (toll free) or email her at [tesspapa@magentatravel.net](mailto:tesspapa@magentatravel.net).



### I THEE WED AGAIN...AND AGAIN

Congratulations at the renewal of their vows, 50 years later on October 1, 2005 of **Romy and Racquel Pestanas**. During the same nuptial mass at St. Joseph's Chapel in Duarte, California, their daughter **Juliet** marked the 25<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary with husband **Greg Esteban**. Celebrations continued at a reception at the Crowne Plaza Anaheim Resort in Garden Grove. Among Mekong Circle members present: **Seb and Lody Eusebio, Manding and Cecile Datu; Nards and Bella Hilario; Fely Navera; Nita Romano; Helen and Rameil Torres, Eli and Emy Trinidad Espiritu; the Orense and Padayao families; Jun and Claire Ilustrisimo, Tacing and Tony Atienza, Raquel Matila** and daughter **Christine**.

### UNDER ONE ROOF, FOUR CELEBRATIONS

At the residence of **Evelyn and Boni Alon** in Cherry Hill, New Jersey, cakes were presented (see photo below) on October 15, 2005 to Evelyn (her 60th birthday anniversary) and **Bac Bacordo** (his 81st); it was also the occasion to bid best wishes to **Vilma Valenzuela** who was returning home to the Philippines; and to welcome **Rene Mapua**, recovering from quintuple bypass at a New Jersey hospital last July and returning home to Camarines Sur on November 7. Joining them for lunch were **Lolie Sevilla, Peachy Holgado, Jun Decena** with son **Jayson** and grandson **Mike; Cora and Tony Sazon** with sons **Tony Jr. and Richie; Bambi and Gary Snyder, Becky and Tom Ciborski; Marie Aguilos, Edith and Red del Rosario, Conse Sotio, Pat Garde-Hill** and husband **David; Pete Fuentecilla; Cecile Datu** (California) and **Linda Masibay** (Illinois) phoned in their best wishes. **Joy Bacordo** brought "sin heng" and "kaoniao". **Becky** announced that she had attended the wedding July 30 of **Pinky Sabat Casher's** son **Bill** to **Jessica Lim** in Oakland, California.



*Celebrants Evelyn Alon, Bac Bacordo and Vilma Valenzuela*

### KOP CHAI TO ALL WHO SENT DONATIONS

to the Katrina Hurricane victims that we sent on behalf of Mekong Circle: **Luis and Gladys Tabano** (\$50); **Renato and Vivian Dimanunahan** (\$50); **Tony and Cora Sazon** (\$100); **Raul and Puring Dejesus** (\$150); **Tony and Fenny Victa** (\$100); **Bik and Anita Marquez** (\$100). The New Orleans disaster may pale in comparison to the 174,000 tsunami dead victims in south and southeast Asia in December 2004 but our quick response makes no such distinctions. For an account of how one Mekong Circle second generation viewed the tsunami calamity, read **Tricia Somchay Lapitan's** visit to Thailand in Northwest Asian Weekly (Oct. 15-21, 2005 issue). This is the only weekly English language newspaper serving Washington's Asian com-

munity centered in Seattle.

### IT'S NOT JUST A VILLAGE

As an architect, **Gani Bautista** was trained to take a "wholistic" view of things - not just visualizing a room in a building, but the whole building itself. During a visit to a village in Laos (where he served from 1958 to 1975), he discovered that this vision of things encompassed not just structures but a way of life. He described this in an essay in "The Volunteer" an OB Newsletter dated August 1972. We thought it is worth reprinting below. (Gani passed away on September 9, 2005. A full obituary can be read in our website [www.mekongcircle.org](http://www.mekongcircle.org) under "Member News").

The old farmer looked inconsequential and blended with his humble surrounding.

I was on a staff visit to the (Sayaboury) team and took occasion to go with the OB survey group to a remote village. But seeing that the social worker and the public health nurse were equipped with a questionnaire, a sketch of the village and a plan for a random sampling of families, I decided to "see through and feel" village life in my own way. So I detached myself from the group. I took an interpreter with me because my Lao wasn't only pidgin then. It was broken pidgin.

He was sitting on a roughly hewn wooden bench when my interpreter and I approached. He was lean but wiry and bare to the waist. He wore the "phanung" (sarong) over his shorts. I took stock of his surroundings: the typical Lao house on stilts, two roofed compartments connected by an unroofed breezeway (the large one was the bedroom and the other the kitchen); a small rice granary; a handloom under the house; a mortar and pestle contraption; an earthen jar of cold water, a dipper hanging from a bamboo pole beside the stairs.

At the rear of the house, stretching far into the horizon, a ricefield swaying with two-feet high golden stalks. The breeze smelled of ripening grain. Growing season was halfway gone; no activity in the tranquil village.

We said to the farmer that we wanted to gain some insights into his village life. What did we want to know, he said? I asked what did people do after the planting season? He replied "nothing that you would call a trade. Our life is very simple. Come I'll show you around."

"This is our lao khao (rice granary)". It was a thatched hut, raised about two meters on stilts. "After harvest, we keep in here a rice supply for one year. We buy our other needs with the surplus."

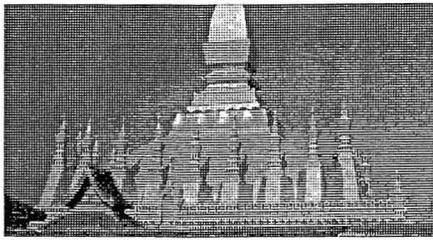
I asked "but wouldn't you want to pursue a trade in between, so that you would have extra cash to buy some conveniences in life?"

He said "you must know that Buddhist teachings say we should produce only what is enough for our basic necessities. Other than these is luxury. We believe that the world's ills are due to desire."

I said "but clothes and food, surely, you will need more than rice." He led us to the hand loom. "We weave our clothes. And over there is the fishing net. I catch fish from a river nearby. Wait...we'll cross it and I'll show you the forest. Over there is the vegetable garden, as you can see."

We boarded a boat and he paddled. At the opposite bank was the forest. He pointed a stick at the damp ground and the stumps of trees. "There are mushrooms you can pick early in the morning. Look around - bananas, other fruits, the leaves we eat. We hunt for game here."

I looked at him with respect. Call it what you may - Robinson Crusoe life or hand-to-mouth existence -- he was contented and happy.



## BIG CHANGE FOR THE BIGGEST BOUN

Organizers of the That Luang Festival, which ran from Nov. 13 to 16 this year, did something drastic this time. They banished all shops and booths from the fairgrounds. Reason: to thin the crowds. Truly, this annual combination expo-fair-religious festival has grown to gargantuan proportions. The last time we attended it in 2002, it was a shoulder-to-shoulder, foot-shuffling mass of humanity (mostly very young phusaos and phubaos) all the way from the OB House-OB Annex junction, to the temple wall. Only handicraft sellers, ping khai (grilled chicken) and other food stalls, will be allowed. All others, including private companies, government ministries, and embassies have been told to show their wares and propaganda at the new International Trade Exhibition and Convention Center that was built for the ASEAN summit in 2004. Evidently, organizers fear the growing commercialism of past That Luang bouns was swamping the religious roots of this greatest of Lao bouns. (In 2002, a huge screen projected a Disney cartoon while on an adjacent stage, phusaos swirled to a cha-cha version of the lamvong). How did they handle security in 2002? Uniformed high school boys and girls were lined up single file from edge to edge of the southern end of the temple ground. To breach this wall of giggling youngsters, they pat you up and down playfully. Those with a still or video camera were assessed the equivalent of \$ 3. It would be easy to sneak in a 2005 brand, cigarette pack size digital camera (not yet available then in 2002).

## THE DYING CONTINUES



"Legacies of War" is the name of a U.S.-based project which has began a campaign to highlight one of the most lasting aftermaths of the Indochina war. Much is known about the southeast Asian conflict of 1954-75, centered in Vietnam and how it spilled its horrors into neighboring Laos and Cambodia. The shooting has stopped in all three countries. But less known is that the dying continues in Laos. In its attempt to stop the flow of arms and North Vietnamese into Laos, and to stop the Pathet

Lao from gaining more ground, America launched one of the most sustained bombing campaigns in the history of warfare. Here are numbers compiled by Legacy: between 1964 and 1973, more than two million tons of ordnance were dropped on Laos; this averages to a planeload of bombs every 10 minutes, 24 hours a day, for 10 years, costing about \$2 million a day; that's about 1,000 lbs of bombs for every person living in Laos then. Tonnage exceeds the total dropped in Germany and Japan during all of World War II. Apart from thousands of villagers killed and hundred of thousands turned to refugees from the bombed areas, the bombing left a legacy: thousands of

unexploded live bombs buried under Lao soil. They are stepped on, triggered by a farmer's plow or hoe, or played with by children. According to Legacy, nearly 40,000 people have been killed and 65,000 injured by these leftover "bombies", as the Lao calls them. One in every 380 Lao is an amputee. We had a chance to meet one of Legacy's founders, Channapha Khamvongsa, during the International Lao Studies Conference in Illinois last May where a Bombies documentary was screened. She fled Laos when she was six years old. On November 17, 2005, Legacy held its first fund-raising event - a museum exhibition -- in Washington DC. Then, it plans to tour San Francisco, Houston, Seattle, New York, Minneapolis and Chicago. The funds will help clear away the bombies which still litter the countryside. For more information, log on to [www.legaciesofwar.org](http://www.legaciesofwar.org). Channapha can be reached at 212 764 1508 ext. 230.

## HOW DID IT ALL END?

Laos recorded history, beginning with the 13th century, describes episodes of invasions, occupations and annexations by her more powerful neighbors, notably the Thais, and more recently by France and Japan. There was a 20-year period, from 1955 to 1975, when America stepped in. By virtue of its vast economic assistance program and its Laos-based war against North Vietnam and the Pathet Lao, it was in effect, the ruling power there during those years. Then it all ended swiftly when on June 26, 1975, the Acting A.I.D. Director departed Vientiane after delivering a diplomatic note that it was completely terminating all its aid to the Lao government (which by that time was already controlled by the Pathet Lao). The U.S. Lao economic programs had cost \$896 million (and untold millions more in military aid; and by some accounts, 400 Americans had died; and more than 300 still missing today). There were an estimated 175 Filipinos who were employed by USAID Laos to help administer its economic aid. Much of what has been issued by American book publishers about Laos over the last decade focused on the so-called CIA "secret war" against the North Vietnamese there. Not one hardcover about USAID-Laos. Yet as early as 1976, its archives have kept a 366-page, single-spaced typewritten history of what it tried to accomplish there. It is an exhaustive, meticulous record, crammed with numbers and acronyms, yet surprisingly a very readable history. Each of the aid programs - education, agriculture, refugee relief, roadbuilding, public health (including OB) - is analyzed. Titled "Termination Report USAID Laos 1954-1975", it can be compared to a company annual report to its shareholders (namely the U.S. taxpayers) and as such it presents a balance sheet. The bottom line? The company tried mightily to do good but there were too many bad things in the way. The report is worth ordering from Development Experience Clearinghouse, 8403 Colesville Rd., Suite 210 Silver Spring, Maryland 20910. Ask for Document PN-AAX-021. Price: \$54.66 (includes shipping and handling).

# MORE FICTION & MEMOIRS WITH LAO SETTINGS

In our last issue (September 2005) we assumed the role of literary critic. Three novels in English with Lao settings were reviewed as well as four memoirs. Overall the novels sounded true; and the memoirs, distilled by Americans, evoked emotions we veterans of Laos can relate to. Here are two more selections. The novel "Zero Casualties" can only be dismissed as a monumental absurdity. The memoir is an

embarrassment (specifically the section on Laos). So why devote precious space to it? Because the memoir is written by a Filipino. Apart from our own history-memoir "Filipinos In Laos" and our compilation of anecdotes "Goodbye Vientiane" we know of no other Laos book written by Filipinos. - J. Pete Fuentesilla (email: fuentesilla@aol.com)

## Zero Casualties

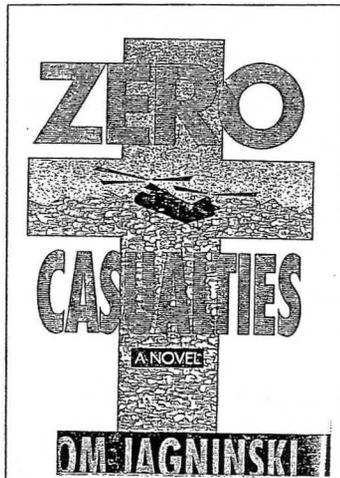
By Tom Lagninski

Publisher: Walker Company, New York  
189 pages. Published 1991

**Time frame:** 1970. The Second Indochina War (the Americans vs the North Vietnamese; the first was between the French and the Vietminh) enters its second decade in Laos.

**Plot:** Stephen Reaford, a 28-year old U.S. marine officer is assigned to turn Ban Ban, a Hmong village in the northern province of Xieng Khouang into a CIA base. Ban Ban is deep inside North Vietnamese-Pathet Lao held territory. Mario Vasetto, 33, a Catholic Italian missionary, whose soul-saving territory covers Ban Ban, aggressively opposes the project. It would, he fears, draw the Vietnamese into a full-scale attack and annihilation of his parishioners. In a duel between them to win the hearts and minds of the villagers for and against the base, a compromise is reached. In return for construction materials, medicines and relief goods for the village, Mario agrees. Within a month, Reaford has built an

airstrip, airlifted mercenaries and howitzers, armed and trained all able-bodied Hmong as guerrillas. He is assisted by a female Lao counterintelligence



agent Xana Khanti who happens to be married to a Hmong government high official. She seduces Reaford and they become lovers. From his base, Reaford launches raids against the North Vietnamese infiltrating into Laos. His successes are stepladders to his aspirations for a colonel grade. Then in one climactic battle, the Vietnamese overrun the village, capture Reaford and Vasetto. The missionary is

executed; Reaford is rescued by Lao Special Forces commandos on orders from Xana.

### Why A Laos Setting

Ban Ban is an authentic place, indeed a strategic crossroad to North Vietnam's border. (In 1957, long before it became such a base, OB had set up a Ban Ban team of health care personnel, together with nutritionists, social workers, and agriculturists). Xana, on the other hand, is as fake a Lao as a kind

hearted Imelda Marcos or a nerdy Paris Hilton. She is portrayed as a princess, an army major, "with exquisitely manicured hands", always attired in Harper's Bazaar finery, but with a pistol tucked somewhere in her clothes. Speaks French, English, Hmong. Another preposterous character is Vasetto, the Oblate missionary. During our years in Laos, we knew two real Oblates - Fathers Lucien Bouchard and Matt Menger - both still alive, by the way, and living in the USA. Vasetto is rendered as a fiery priest, driven as much by Marxist as by Christian theology. When we told Fr. Bouchard about this book, he remarked: "Fiction is not my preference. History is."

### Bottom Line

Let's allow some fiction writers their license to stretch our imagination about Laos. But because we have been there and done that, so to speak, this novel asks us to suspend even our most fevered hallucinations. The author is described as a "professional writer for 25 years and has worked as a journalist for print, radio and television in the U.S. and overseas." No word whether he actually set foot in Laos. More likely he cooked up this bizarre story from press archives.

## From Panay To Laos And Beyond

By Primo Doreza

Self-published in Manila, 1994.

224 pages (with photos)

Subtitled "A Soldier's Memoir", this volume covers, in Doreza's words "71 years of my life... from the place where I was born to where I am now, is quite a distance." Ten years of that life were spent in Laos, and covers only 31 pages of his 224-page memoir. In that slim space we get to know in some detail how one group of Filipinos experienced Laos.

Doreza was there from 1959 to 1969, first as an Ordnance Specialist with Eastern

Construction Company in Laos (more commonly known as ECCOIL), then as a Motor Pool Mechanic and Power Plant Diesel Mechanic with the U.S.



Agency for International Development. Blunt and outspoken, Doreza was not too happy with his ECCOIL years. He says so and names who are responsible. "The (ECCOIL) administration" he writes "never endeavored to make life among the technicians enjoyable. That was why after supper, each one would go on his own - nightclubbing or standing by some bars and saloon, ogling bad women and in some instances getting drunk, causing trouble and then

getting arrested."

Doreza is just as frank and detailed with his live-in local partners in Laos. There was Em Hai, his "third girl in Savannakhet, a Cambodian, a widow, 22 years old, a refugee from Phnom Penh." He then married Phasouth, a 17-year old Thai. "I had a wife at a cost of \$250 and I was happy." She bore him a son and he abandoned both after six years. Doreza already had a wife in the Philippines and four children as well as a mistress there.

From Doreza's account, one cannot avoid the impression that womanizing was the only outlet for the drudgery of work. This did not escape the notice of a Lao. In an August 28, 2004 posting in soc.culture.laos, a popular Internet "bulletin board" favored by expatriate Lao, he said: "Some Filipinos may have fallen in love with Laos, especially the young, sexy Lao girls. But they were paid there for one and only one reason: the American green bills.

were paid many times more than their local counterparts for the doing the same shit. That's why some of them even went overboard and screwed the locals' wives...Putang ina !"

Another Lao, however was quick to scold him: "C'mon, I can't believe what I read in your post! What's that rudeness for ? Let's be grateful and civilized towards those who helped us. Don't look only on the negative side of things. Whoever paid the bills, that's not the point. What I can remember is those Filipinos were physicians, dentists, nurses, and English teachers who came to help those poor Laotians...What (has) happened to us Laonorks (overseas Lao) lately? Are we just a bunch of primitive Lao or what?"

Doreza, quite frankly, revealed that it was some Filipinos who behaved as a bunch of primi-

tives during their time in Laos.

*OB Filipinos worked in Ban Ban from June to October 1957 before hostilities between Lao government and the Pathet Lao-North Vietnamese armies forced them to leave. Staying for weeks or months, the following served there: Doctors Ramon Pablo, Cesar Medina, Jose Abad, Sisinio Azul, Elias Baura, Gil Cabrera, Jesus Datu, Pedro Gonzales, Pedro Joaquin, Jose Palisoc, Juan Reyes, Felix Romero; dentists Julian Sopenia, Cesar Elizaga, Cesar Leyran; nurses Ester Tabuga, Pacita Tongacan, Gilbert Abad, Jovita Abes, Eva Altura, Teresita Brondial, Lourdes Caras, Felicidad Cruz, Crispina Francisco, Susie Gaddi, Rosalia Gorospe, Wilma Jerusalem, Lolita Lagao, Leonor Macababdad, Soledad Nepomuceno, Filomeno Ngitingit, Lourdes Reyes, Myrna Tolentino, Jesusa Yap, Germana Yamul, Amor Valiente; nutritionists Rosina Fuentes, Francisca Sadumiano; social worker Rosemarie del*

*Rio; agriculturists Casimiro Guieb, Diomedes Flores, Valentin Gallego, Felix Valera; administrator Daniel Infante. Lao interpreters Pon Chantaraj and Porn Asachai. (For a full history, see "Filipinos In Laos").*

*Filipino ECCOIL and USAID technicians mentioned in Doreza's account: Godofredo Opiana, Estacio (no first name), Julian Ocas Pablo, Pons Enriquez, Zita Arzaga, Juan Mamaril, Fedelina (no first name), Pastor Madolora, Ventura (no first name), Celso Orense, Romeo Bartolome. (We have no information on how to obtain his book).*

*If any of the above names are not in our Membership Directory and you have contact information on them, please drop a note to our Membership Coordinator Puring De Jesus (513 868 9396 or 513 295 7866; email prdejesus@aol.com) so that we can include them in our listings.*

## WELCOME TO "GOODBYE VIENTIANE"

The release of a collection of anecdotes marks another highpoint in memorializing our Lao experience. During our 1995 reunion in California, Penny Flores had remarked that it was so sad there is no written record, in a book form, of our 18 years of service in Laos. Well, we now have two volumes -- "Filipinos In Laos" -- released at our 2004 Chicago reunion and this "Goodbye Vientiane."

Almost two years in the making, the 210-page volume is worth the wait. There were 33 attendees at the book launching October 15 in the Clarion Hotel in Milbrae, California, Penny who put together the short memoirs, read "Marriage, Laotian Style." Anecdotes from the book were read by Ernie Felix of Air America and

Continental, Pete Tabor of ECCOIL, Anita Marquez of USAID/US Embassy and Bik Marquez of OB. Edwin Lozada, president of Philippine American Writers and Artists (PAWA) read Fred Mendoza's (OB)

"He Died Holding My Hand." Altogether, "Goodbye Vientiane" has 41 personal accounts by almost as many Mekong Circle authors. We reproduce one of them here.

"I never thought I would be a celebrity, not in a million years," remarked Ernie as he signed autographs on his memoir page. Penny

received an award in non-fiction for the book at PAWA's second Catalagan awards given on November 5 in San Francisco. Order your copy from Edwin Lozada c/o Philippine American Writers and Artists, P.O. Box 31928, San Francisco, California 94131. Price: \$15.

*Penny (right) with Bik and Anita Marquez during the book launching in California.*



## HOW I ELUDED THE KGB BY CASTO PINGUL

In Laos I worked for Continental Air Services. Our group has been servicing the transport and supply needs of the people. Our planes go to the most inaccessible areas of the country and thus I receive all kinds of tasks and was on the road most of the time. For this reason I bought me a brand new motorcycle to take me around my errands and responsibilities. I had complete freedom of movement and did not rely on the company vehicle.

One day as I was driving towards the road to the airport, enjoying my new motorcycle, a big black sedan car bumped me from behind. The impact threw me up and out onto the side street ditch. Luckily I was not hurt because I landed on bushes that softened my fall.

At that time my initial thought was about the loss of my new motorcycle. It was a complete wreck. Twisted and broken, it left a swath of debris radiating several yards away.

"Who hit me? Who would be interested in seeing me dead?" I said angrily. Slowly I raised my head and saw the car's hood. It carried the sickle and hammer emblems on a red background -- a Russian flag! A grave looking man came out of the car. He had a white pasty complexion and was wearing a suit with huge padded shoulders.

"Are you OK," he inquired.

"I'm fine, just a bit wobbly and disoriented," I replied as I looked at new motorcycle now reduced to a pile.

"I'll take care of replacing your motorcycle. Let me bring you to my embassy for treatment," he said as he opened the car door for me to get in."

In the meantime, a group of passersby began to mill around the accident. There was no police officer. I hesitated for a minute, but as I turned, an American onlooker accidentally brushed my shoulder and to nobody in particular and in an artful dissimulated way of speaking at the side of his mouth he said in a very low voice: "Enter that car and you'll never be seen again." Then he hurriedly left the scene unnoticed.

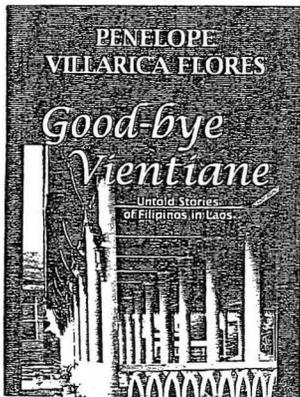
That whisper was the loudest. It got me the biggest warning scare of my life. That Russian agent will interrogate me to reveal OB, ECCOIL, AA, CASI interconnections with the rightists. I declined the Russian's offer, got into a taxi and went straight to the OB Hospital emergency room. I lost my motorcycle but I'm not foolish enough to be detained by the KGB.

I told the OB Hospital Director "Can you smudge the record so that it will not appear I received medical treatment due to a car altercation with the Russians?" I requested.

"Why so?" he quizzed me!

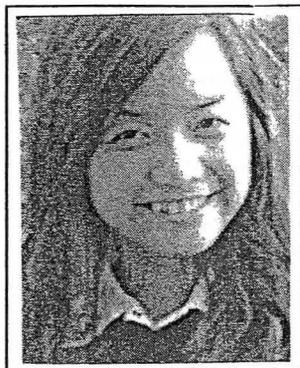
"It is a matter of life and death," I replied as I narrated the strange circumstances of my accident.

"You bet," Dr. Primo Guevarra, the OB Hospital Director winked as he treated my superficial wounds and calmed my wrought nerves.



# AN INTERVIEW WITH A GENERATION WHO NEVER HEARD OF US

Almost half of Laos' population of close to six million were born after 1975, the year that Mekong Circle members left Laos. They don't know that at one time we lived and worked in their country for almost two decades. Vivi is typical of that generation. She is also not typical, having gained one of the most coveted overseas scholarship grants and having been admitted to an Ivy league U.S. university.



Name: Vongvieng "Vivi" Saensathit  
24 years old, born in Vientiane  
Arrived in the USA: July 2005  
Studying for a Masters degree  
International Relations, Columbia  
University, New York City

***A recent World Bank survey said that 37 percent of Lao skilled persons are living outside the country. Any comments?***

I did recognize there was a "brain drain" problem in my country but not this high and that it is causing harm, and that Laos is among the top ten countries with this problem.

***Why do you think this brain drain is happening? What should be done?***

First, there is a mismatch between our output of advanced degreed students and the needs of our modernizing economy. The brain drain varies by occupations. Second, local wages for highly skilled labor are too low. Third, incentives for promotion and recognition are few. To keep our highly trained professionals and to motivate them to return from overseas studies, they need pay incentives, reasonable research budgets, some subsidies. Moreover, more job opportunities should be offered. The mismatch should be corrected. Advanced skills should address local needs. Government should induce local confidence in their abilities, promote networking, collaboration, create the feeling that they really belong in Laos. Foreign study grants should commit grantees to return and stay for at least two years.

***Have you heard reactions from Lao friends who are living or working outside Laos? What did they say?***

Some were surprised, some were not. Some believe the brain drain problems will decrease, are being solved. New job sec

tors offer more opportunities for highly talented Lao who have been trained abroad.

***After the 1975 revolution, there were many Lao students who were sent by the new government to Socialist countries to continue their studies. What happened to them when they came back?***

Unfortunately, many did not meet the economic and social needs of the country at that time. Many were unemployed, shifted their careers in order to support their families, and some left the country altogether.

***You completed your college studies in Japan paid for by the Japanese government. How does your current studies compare?***

Graduate studies are much tougher than undergraduate in almost all aspects. Columbia is very demanding, reading assignments are heavy, course works are overwhelming. Studying through the night until morning is becoming routine. But I am learning a lot.

***How does it feel to know that you represent a very small minority of the Lao who has the talent to be accepted into a very selective, elite "ivy league" school?***

Without the U.S. Fulbright scholarship I was awarded, I would never imagine myself in this outstanding and expensive institution. I feel very strongly this will open doors to my career's dreams.

***And what is that dream?***

Someday to be named Ambassador of Laos to the United Nations.

***Very few Lao of your generation know that during the 1960s and 1970s, for almost 20 years, there were Filipinos who worked in your country. Why did this happen?***

Lack of information. Our teachers never share those experiences with us. Nothing in our libraries. Our family rarely talks about it. Therefore, we the young generation have no chance to learn about these. I think those contributions should be recognized, from books, a memorial park, in our museum.

***Your parents lived in Xieng Khouang province, one of the most bombed places during the war years. Did they tell you how life was then and how they survived?***

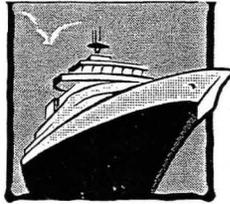
My parents always remind me about those times and how they struggled during the war. I could feel and understand how bad those times were. This topic always comes up during our dinner — living in caves, avoiding the bombs, separation from family members and friends, months and months in the jungle, hunger. My parents' war time experience is the biggest inspiration for me to study about war and peace, international politics and diplomacy. And this is what brought me to Columbia's School of International and Public Affairs.

***Did your father who is a doctor or your grandparents or other older relatives ever tell you about the Filipinos who staffed hospitals and clinics in Xieng Khouang?***

Unfortunately, this never came up in our conversations. Our parents and relatives just didn't have the chance to bring this topic up although I believe they and most of their generation are aware of the work of the Filipinos during that time.

# REUNION UPDATE

AUGUST 11-14, 2006  
FLORIDA & BAHAMAS



## CABIN RESERVATIONS AS OF OCT. 2005

Abad, Angelita  
Abad, Gilbert  
Aberin, Evangelina  
Aguilos, Maria  
Alcudio, Ma. Luz  
Alcudio, Quentin  
Altura, Lerio  
Altura, Francesca  
Bacordo, Joy  
Bacordo, Raul  
Bacordo, Rinaldo  
Bacordo, Erika  
Barcelona, Jose  
Barcelona, Josefina  
Bayani, Helen  
Bayani, Domingo  
Barsales, Pete  
Bouthavong, Bounoum  
Bouthavong, Inpanh  
Brenzikofer, Lamphoune  
Cage, David Jr.  
Cage, Thongkhoun  
Casher, Fe  
Chinyavong, Anongsinh  
Chinyavong, Chanthone  
Chomthipe, Chuang  
Chomthipe, Sameu  
Chomthipe-Sheridan, L  
Chookitngam, Malee  
Ciborsky, Rebecca  
Copoblanco, Daniela  
Custodio, Apolinario  
Datu, Angelito  
Datu, Cecilia  
Datu, Estelita  
Datu, Orlando  
Foster, Esperanza  
Frias, Anecia  
Fuentecilla, Florida  
Fuentecilla, Jose  
Gonzalez, Felicidad  
Gonzalez, Pedro  
Guevara, Ruel  
Guevara, Eva  
Guevara, Felicitas  
Guevara, Joe  
Hefferon, Penny  
Hefferon, Rosemarie  
Hefferon, Kevin  
Hillmeyer, Patricia  
Hillmeyer, Ryan  
Hillmeyer, Aidan  
Hillmeyer, Michelle  
Hillmeyer, Patrick A.  
Hillmeyer, Patrick R.

Hoyes, Julia  
Hoyes, Alexandria  
Hoyes, Maria  
Keomahathai, Adul  
Keomahathai, Phikoun  
Kittisack, Bobby  
Kittisack, Boulaphanh  
Kittisack, Doungchanh  
Kosila, Chester  
Kosila, Noi  
Ladara, Khamsaou  
Ladara, Rath  
Lapitan, Sounthaly  
Liwag, Antonio  
Liwag, Virginia  
Luangrath, Cindy  
Luna, Jose  
Luna, Lina  
Ly, Cuc  
Mak, Cynthia  
Malaythong, Sam  
Malaythong, Sue  
Malolos, Amparo  
Marquez, Anita  
Marquez, Brian  
Marquez, Shelley  
Marquez, Vicente  
Matila, Racquel  
Mendoza, Alfredo  
Mistri, Khammone  
Mistri, Thongsai  
Naranjo/Josefa  
Naranjo/Jovito  
Orense, Bouchouey  
Pablo, Josefina  
Pacson, Remedio  
Pacson, Rosario  
Padayao, Fidel  
Padayao, Wilma  
Papa, Oscar  
Papa, Teresita  
Pathammaboun, Sivay  
Pathammaboun, Viengsay  
Phengphong, Phoukham  
Puangmaly, Chantalom  
Puangmaly, Phoxay  
Quarterman, Vilma  
Ramos, Jesus  
Ramos, Nemia  
Ramos, Rustico  
Reyes, Eriberto  
Reyes, Gloria  
Reyes, Emil  
Reyes, Eriberto D.  
Reyes, Eriberto N.

Reyes, Melanie  
Ritter, Virginia  
Salarda, Patricia  
Sanguansack, Manit  
Sareerat, Dallas  
Sareerat, Dillon  
Sareerat, Simmaly  
Sareerat, Vanavit  
Sayaphone, Boone  
Sayasan, Phetje  
Saythong, Dustin  
Saythong, Lisa  
Saythongkham, Davin  
Saythongkham, Kayla  
Saythongkham, Moe  
Sazon, Antonio  
Sazon, Antonio Jr.  
Sazon, Corazon.  
Sermpongpan, Sumritza  
Sheridan, Gindala A.  
Sihapanya, May  
Sihapanya, Nhot  
Siharath, Bouadeng  
Siharath, Khamsy  
Sisouphone, Phounsou  
Sithisaiya, Khampheng  
Sithisaiya, Smith  
Sivongxay, Chantha  
Sivongxay, Sivilly  
Stark, Lolita  
Tapia, Pedro Jr.  
Tapia, Josephine  
Thongma, Phaiboon  
Thongma, Vanessa  
Valenzuela, Amelia  
Valenzuela, Nestor  
Van Lee, Jessica  
Van Lee, Justin  
Virabong, Prakiane  
Virabong, Siphanon  
Volaraph, Omsin  
Volaraph, Oudone  
Volaraph, Soonpree  
Vongphakdy, Kim  
Vongphakdy, Tayemphanh  
Vongphakdy, Thongkhiane  
Vongphrachanh, Noun  
Voungsaly, Soutsada

# ALL ABOUT CRUISING

There was a time when ocean cruising was reserved for the high, the mighty and the snobbish. Now that it has become an affordable middle-class vacation alternative, dozens of cruise lines are engaged in a fiercely competitive free-for-all to get you aboard their ships. The free part is played out on their websites. Click to anyone of them. The oceanic deluge of information and enticements can be overwhelmingly tsunami (oops! that's a no-no word for the cruising industry). But read the websites with caution. Like any hotel or airline or travel destination website, you know they are all as self-serving or inflated as your resume. So where does one go for unbiased information?

Three websites are regarded as independent, free from company sponsored puffery. Expect each one to feature the usual practical advice about the latest bargains and destinations, what to pack, how much to tip, off-shore excursions, schedules, and so forth. But what distinguishes them from cruise line-sponsored websites are the detailed evaluation of each ship's offerings. The appraisers are seasoned cruisers who have sailed on most of the major lines.

[www.cruisecritic.com](http://www.cruisecritic.com). It says it has been reviewing cruise ships for 10 years. It rates the quality of a ship's dining, entertainment, rates, public rooms, cabins, fitness and recreation facilities. Check out how the Sovereign of the Seas, the Royal Caribbean Lines' ship for our August 2006 reunion, compares with the line's 20 other ships.

[www.cruisereview.com](http://www.cruisereview.com). A posting on its website has a diary from a reviewer of the very same three-day Sovereign of the Seas itinerary that we are taking. His April 25-28, 2002 trip is three years old. Still, his lengthy narrative of pluses and minuses he encountered contain gems of perceptive experience.

[www.cruisediva.com](http://www.cruisediva.com). Click on a December 2004 review of Sovereign of the Seas. It includes a photo tour of the facilities - the spa, cabins, lounges, dining room, shops, disco, the hangout for the youngsters.

Even "cruise-ca-holics" as they call themselves admit that a cruise line's website should be the first stop for anyone contemplating a cruise. A travel writer has warned that only a handful offer passengers online booking. This is because "a cruise is a more complex product than a flight or a hotel room," writes Terry Truco in the New York Times. "The close relationship between cruise lines and travel agents is rooted in cruising's multifaceted nature. It requires choices of ship, itinerary, cabins, dining options and often flight and lodging connections, and so lends itself to sit-down sessions with an agent."

### OUR 2006 ITINERARY:

<b>August 11, 2006 Friday</b>	1 pm Board Royal Caribbean's "Sovereign of the Seas", Port Canaveral 5 pm Depart Port Canaveral, Florida
<b>August 12, Saturday</b>	11 am Arrive Nassau, Bahamas 3 am Leave Nassau
<b>August 13, Sunday</b>	7 am Arrive CocoCay, Bahamas 5 pm Leave CocoCay
<b>August 14, Monday</b>	7 am Arrive Port Canaveral, Florida

Website: [www.royalcaribbean.com](http://www.royalcaribbean.com)

Travel Agent: Ms. Tess Papa (tel. 888 278 3415 toll free;

cell 407 282 2111 Email: [tesspapa@magentatravel.net](mailto:tesspapa@magentatravel.net)

Reunion Coordinator:

Dr. Pete Gonzales (tel 407 846 3870; fax 407 846 0495)

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