

Welcome to the 46th Issue of our Newsletter



Sam Neua in the 1960s, capital of Houphanh province, nestled in a valley in northern Laos

From Our Archives: Enduring Memories

We take a deep dive in this issue to recover some experiences of an 18-year sojourn in Laos. Whether we had spent a few months or a dozen or more years in what was once a kingdom, we came up with indelible sights and sounds that produced research papers, two books, oodles of photos and a remarkable number of marriages (115 couplings altogether). Credit the unique setting and unusual circumstances of our working lives in those times that produced such lasting impressions. Operation Brotherhood (OB) volunteers lived communally, on the edges of war zones, immersed in the culture of a people so much like ours yet exotic in other ways.

“We all had our share of joy and sadness, laughter and tears, and for me, tons of memories to cherish forever,” said nurse **Enrique “Dickie” Labao**, an eight-year veteran of postings in seven provincial stations. In that time he met his wife medical technologist **Cely Isidro**. They now live in Houston, Texas, USA. In one of the following anecdotes he shares how his adventure ended.

“Memorable years. Formative. Socially enlightening. I am what I am now, the experiences galvanized my core values,” said **Sabina Fajardo-Swift**, an agriculturist in Hawaii who spent four years on the southern Bolovens plateau teaching village farmers.

The personal anecdotes draw mainly from the late 1950s to the 1970s – periods of war and no peace. When hostilities ended in 1975, the Commu-

nist victors told all foreign aid technicians, OB among them, to leave. They left us tales that illuminate the present by excavating the past.

Christmas In Sam Neua

Christmas for Filipino Christians away from homeland and family is one of those experiences Mekong Circle members remember deeply. Profoundly missed is the familiar festive air of this most celebrated of our Christian feasts when they find themselves in a Buddhist country.

*In 1959, **Rodolfo Severino**, (right) an administrative officer with the Operation Brotherhood (OB) office in Vientiane flew to visit one of our remotest field team, in the northeast province of Huaphanh, in its capital of Sam Neua. Already isolated by surrounding mountainous terrain, Sam Neua was confined in its tiny valley by roads made dangerously impassable from the outside by civil war between the government and the insurgent Pathet Lao guerrillas. From Vientiane, the only way in was by air. From surrounding villages, only on foot or by horseback. He sent this report:*

“There was one paved road through the center of town. The only two-story, stone building houses the governor’s residence. Most of the houses were made of mud,” Rod wrote, when he came to check up on its OB personnel and its 10-bed hospital temporarily housed since July 1958 in the governor’s residence.

“I flew into Sam Neua in a C-47 that had to fly around in five or six dizzying circles, with the wingtips almost touching the treetops on the mountain sides, before it could lose enough altitude to land. I alighted from the plane with a message from OB’s headquarters in Vientiane to 22-year-old **Cecilia “Cecile” Salarda**, a nurse and the only female on the team. We had thought that Cecile might want to spend her Christmas in Vientiane, where it was gayer and she would have feminine companionship. She looked at me as if I had suggested something preposterous. Half-smiling, half-indignant, she replied, “No, no, of course not. I want to stay here.”

The OB quarters is on the fringe of the town, snuggled against a hillside, so that if you put out your hand through the dining room window, you can touch the cool earth of the slope. Beside it is the white concrete-and-wood hospital, the only one for hundreds of miles around.

At the time of my visit last year, the hospital was not yet finished. It was only a roof and four walls and had an expanse of gravel for a floor. But some 25 patients were there, lying on wooden beds and plywood boards laid on the ground, some with dextrose trickling into their veins, some shaking with malaria, others with broken bones, still others with newborn babies at their breasts. When I arrived, **Dr. Pedro “Pete Gonzales**, 25-year-old physician from Paombong, Bulacan province, the Philippines and nurse **Gilbert “Bert” Abad**, 23, of Quezon Province, had been sleeping for several nights among their patients because one or two of them were in critical condition.



On the day before Christmas, Pete, assisted by Bert and two OB-trained Lao aiders, operated four hours on a young woman with an ovarian cyst the size of an eight-month pregnancy. A tub of live coals on one side of the makeshift operating room kept out the cold. Cecile of Alimodian, Iloilo, and another nurse **Filomeno Ngitngit** of

Pasay made their rounds among the patients in the unfinished hospital. Every now and then Cecile would dash into the house, wrapped up in muffler, jacket, sweater, gloves, long johns and woolen stockings, to warm herself before the fire in the kitchen stove, where huge logs burned. Dentist **Gene Aguilar** worked on his patients in the team’s classroom, where he had an old dental chair and his equipment, rubbing his hands together now and then to keep them from getting numb. Out in the yard, Engineer **Daniel Infante**, 29, of Jaro, Iloilo, took time off from supervising the construction of the hospital and attended to the roasting of the “lechon” suckling pig for the Christmas luncheon the next day.

All evening we sat in the living room while the portable record player, given by a kindly American lady, spun a record of Christmas carols, stirring in each of us private slumbering memories.

At eight o’clock, a skinny middle-aged man with a worn-out jacket and fear in his eyes burst into our little circle and, squatting on his haunches in the gesture of humility and pressing his palms together in the Lao greeting, entreated the doctor to please rush to his house because his wife was in terrible pain from a difficult delivery. Pete wrapped his muffler around his neck, put on his leather jacket over his woolen sweater, pulled on his gloves and ran out to the jeep to start the motor. Cecile, who was nurse on duty that day, put on her woolen things. The three of us, with me carrying the medical bag, rode on the jeep, following the worried man pedaling his bicycle furiously against the cold wind.

The man’s house was made of mud, and it was like a cave, and Pete and Cecile had to bend to go through the doorway. The woman was lying on a mattress-covered bamboo slat bed, and the lines of pain on her face were accentuated grotesquely by the little flame in the middle of the earthen floor. I stayed by the doorway, leaning against the mud wall, not wanting to get in the way, hugging myself against the cold. It had started to drizzle and there were no stars that night, only the star-shaped lantern at the OB house glowing through the fog. But the cold and the silence and the birth happening inside the cave-like hut among the hills reminded me of another birth in

another cave on another December, long, long ago.

Within half an hour I heard the shrill wails of a baby, and in another 30 minutes, Pete and Cecile emerged from the house, and we went back to our quarters, with the raindrops sparkling in the jeep's lights.

Back in our quarters, we went through the Christmas carols that we knew, for we had been asked to sing at the midnight Mass by an American priest **Fr. Lucien Bouchard**, of the French-based order Oblate of Mary Immaculate, one of the missionaries working among the tribes people of the mountains of Sam Neua.

When it was time for Mass we all piled into the roofless jeep, shivering in our inches-thick clothing in the wind and the rain. The stone-and-brick village church was almost filled. A few army officers in their formal uniforms and many villagers in rubber slippers or bare feet and women with babies tied to their backs. Little stars of bamboo and colored paper were strung above the altar, like those above the streets of Vientiane during the big Buddhist feasts. For such stars are of Chinese origin, and we Filipinos, who always combine the Oriental with the Christian, have taken this Chinese decoration and used it to commemorate the Star of Bethlehem.

Down in the valley, we were told. Father Bouchard's 300 Hmong Catholics were putting on a play, their imagination's version of the Nativity, and we regretted having missed seeing it. During the Mass we sang Silent Night and Adeste Fideles and the Tagalog carol Maligayang Pasko (Merry Christmas), alternating with a group of Lao who sang their own carols in throaty Oriental voices that sounded like primitive, but rever-

ent, chanting. We had *noche buena* (the good night Christmas Eve meal) at OB house, chicken and *pancit* (noodles) and chicken adobo, digging our teeth into Bert's experiment in baking bread, downing the bottle of cognac I had brought with me from Vientiane. Our sleepy Lao aides were wondering why we had to wake them up to eat a meal at two o'clock on a cold morning. And then we crawled under four woolen blankets, shivering at first contact with the sheets, despite our woolen sweaters and underclothes and the mufflers around our ears.

Out in the living room, from the record player, came the strains of The First Noel and Silent Night and Hodie, Christus Natus Est. Danny was sitting out there with a glass of cognac in his hand, thinking surely, of his wife and three small children in Iloilo, the Philippines.

Epilogue : The following OB personnel in this account have since passed away : Rod Severino, Pete Gonzales, Cecile Salarda Datu, Danny Infante, Filomeno Ngitngit, Gene Aguilar. The team served the region for little over two years, from July 1958 to October 1960 when it was withdrawn due to intensifying civil war hostilities.

Fr. Bouchard, now 91 years old and living in a retirement home in Tewksbury, Massachusetts, USA, estimates that in the two years that he was in Sam Neua, he was an invited guest to the OB House for as many as "20 times, for birthdays and other occasions. Our mission house was only about a quarter of a mile away from them". Together with another Oblate missionary, they served 16 surrounding villages.

A Visit To A Refugee Camp

By the mid-1960s, civil war hostilities intensified between the Royal Lao government and the insurgent Pathet Lao guerrillas. As one result, wave upon wave of villagers fleeing the highland battlegrounds were moved to lowland valley resettlement camps.

*One such camp was Paksap near Vientiane. Its 300 families had been uprooted several times – from their original homes in Kham Keut, then to Seung Hong, 50 kms. north of Thakhek in central Laos, then to Veun Kham, finally to Paksap where **Daisy Barawidan**, an OB administrative assistant visited in 1962. She wrote about it below in the February 1973 issue of "The Volunteer". It is slightly edited.*

Here they wait, for another place that offered real permanence. Meanwhile, they appear to be happy where they are. The men continued to add wooden planks to wooden huts. The more enterprising ones sell watermelon, candies, tamarind, etc.

OB nurses **Vicenta "Toots" Calderon** and **Petra Sismaet** staffed a van that was converted into a makeshift dispensary. Families crowded around them. The nurses dispensed medicines for gastroenteritis, malaria, upper respiratory ailments. The children were thin, pale. Plastic sheets between trees shielded makeshift shelters.

In another forest clearing, another camp looked more

miserable. No drainage, no sanitation.

The government and USAID distributed rice, noodles, cooking utensils, soap, blankets, mosquito nets, roofing sheets. A Japanese medical team came once a week to help OB. Nevertheless, these refugees are far from living as human persons.

We returned to our quarters, weary, disheveled, haggard, red-brown with dust. As warm waters cleaned me up, images of the refugees remain overwhelmingly vivid. I felt how blessed I am.



An Encounter With A Lao Grandmother

By Vicente Marquez

She was old, long past her prime. Bent. Rotten teeth. Her weathered face, all wrinkled, reflected hard times. There were faint traces that she must have been pretty when she was much younger.

Her small grandson was confined in the hospital for three to four weeks. Now he was well, happy and frisky.

She had no money. Not even for a ride home on a tuk-tuk. And perhaps hungry. A watcher told me her grandson's father was killed in the war. Her only son. She was in a kneeling-squatting position in front of me, in the crowded ward.

In the afternoon, she came back with a large bamboo basket of vegetables. Please, she said, give this to your doctors



and nurses. That night I could not sleep. It was November. Cold. The old woman.

"Vic" was an accountant with OB Administration in Vientiane from 1968 to 1971. He served as the treasurer of our U.S.-based Mekong Circle association

from 2000 to 2017 when he died at the age of 74 in California. A full Obituary section is in our website www.mekongcircle.org. This essay first appeared in the April 1972 issue of "The Volunteer", an OB newsletter published in Vientiane. It was slightly edited.

A Visit To Our Northern Most Outpost

By George Alba

Sam Neua, mountainous, "the roof of Laos" at 4,500 ft above ground level. The "Dragon Fly" is our vintage biplane, made a steep bank to our right, straightened out at 500 ft, made another right angle turn and glided for a landing. Not yet. The plane made another oblique left turn where the runway was hidden from view behind a hill, then made his landing. (To fly out, the French pilot had to spiral several times to gain altitude).

The tiny, isolated town is nestled in a valley, surrounded by high mountains. A magnificent view. With me were **Oscar Arellano** and his assistant **Angelina Esquivel**. We climbed a steep hill, topped by a dilapidated temple. A stack of bricks was piled nearby to renovate it. The team operated a soil-block making machine. Administrator **Teofilo Rivera** and physician **Jess Banzon** said two persons can produce 200 blocks in one hour. We inscribed our initials on some of the finished blocks for posterity

Two huge cargo planes appeared and airdropped two tractors and two jeeps. The chutes bloomed like giant, colored umbrellas. The tractors would improve the runway; the jeeps were for our OB team.

Nurse **Abner Jornada** turned out to be an excellent baker, producing not Filipino pan de sal but pan Americano. We exchanged some of our loaves for the wine, butter, cheese and bottled pickles with Canadian members of the International Control Commission stationed in town. They had a bar in their quarters, a small fireplace, and its piney scent of burning logs. We became their frequent visitors during these cold nights.

A paratroop captain named **Kong Le** commanded the government garrison. He had requested for our medical team to be stationed in Sam Neua. We held clinic under a tent. Our mud-walled quarters offered good insulation against the cold, so bitter, water froze in a glass left out during the night.

We accompanied a medical team to visit two villages forty kilometers away, the last four kilometers on foot. Along



the mountain passes, we met villagers leading horses laden with kettles, plates, basins, matches, beer made in China..

We flew out in the company of ducks and chickens cackling all the way to Phonsavanh. Whew! The stink! In the thick clouds, we seemed to have lost our way. The pilot descended to 300 ft, seeking a familiar river that would lead to Phonsavanh. We made it.

George was OB Assistant Project Manager. In 1960, Kong Le staged a coup d'etat in the Vientiane capital which he held for several months to protest what he claimed was a corrupt government waging a disastrous civil war. Jornada, reassigned to the adjoining Phongsaly province, died there on April 1959 during a storm that crumbled a wall of their OB quarters, pinning him.



A Visit With A Lao Farmer

By Isagani Bautista

The old farmer is seated under a tree, on his front yard.

I was on a staff visit to our OB Sayaboury team and took occasion to go with our survey group to a remote village. But seeing that the social worker and the public health nurse, armed with their questionnaire, a map sketch of the village and a plan for the random sampling of families, I decided to “feel” village life in my own way. So I detached myself from the group. I took an interpreter with me because my spoken Lao wasn’t just pidgin; it was broken pidgin.

The farmer was sitting on a roughly-hewn wooden bench when my interpreter and I approached. He was lean and wiry and bare to the waist. He wore the phanung (a cloth tube wrapped around the waist) over his shorts. I took stock of his surrounding – the typical Lao house on stilts; two roofed buildings connected by an open walkway, the large one was the sleeping quarters and the other the kitchen; a small rice granary; a handloom under the house; a mortar and pestle-like, foot-powered contraption to pound the unhusked rice; an earthen water jar; a drinking cup hanging from a bamboo pole beside it.

At the rear of the house, a paddy field of golden stalks, almost two feet high. The breeze carried the scent of ripening grain, halfway to harvest time. With no field work to be done, the village was a tranquil scene.

My interpreter and I introduced ourselves to the farmer who was resting under the shade of a tree. He was very accommodating and was willing tell us what we wanted to know. What is your occupation ? What did the villagers do after the planting season? He said, “nothing much that you can call a job, an occupation. Our life is very simple. Come, I’ll show you around.”

He took us to the lao khao, the rice granary, a thatch hut about two meters high, standing on stilts. “After harvest, we keep the rice here, a supply that can last a family for a year. We



buy our other needs with the surplus.”

But wouldn’t you want to have much surplus between harvests so that you have more cash to buy more stuff you need ?

“You must know that in our Buddhist religion, we are told to produce just enough for our basic necessities. Other than these, the rest are luxuries that lead to anxiety for more needless stuff.”

I persisted. “But surely, clothes and food, you will need more than rice.” He then led us to the handloom. “We weave our clothes. And over there is the net to catch our fish from the river nearby. Wait...We’ll cross it and I’ll show you the forest. Look there, our vegetable gardens.”

We climbed into his canoe to cross to the other bank where the forest begins. He waved a stick across the damp earth and the tree stumps. “There are mushrooms for the picking early in the morning. Look around – bananas, other fruits, edible leaves. We do hunt for game here.”

If this is hand-to-mouth existence, our farmer sounded happy and contented.

“Gani” Bautista, an architect, was Executive Assistant For Administration at the OB office in Vientiane. He supervised the building of our facilities in Sayaboury and Vientiane, including the Administration building in That Luang, distinctive for its high ceiling airy lobby, curving mezzanine balcony, and an indoor fish pond garden. He passed away in 2005 in Manila at the age of 84 (His service with OB from 1958 to 1975, is in the Obituary section of our website www.mekongcircle.org) This essay first appeared in the August 1972 issue of “The Volunteer”, OB newsletter published in Vientiane. It was slightly edited.



Illustration: Leony Arca (OB)

Our Last Day in Laos

By Enrique “Dickie” Labao

We left in batches. Days before, OB team members from the provinces came down to Vientiane. Those in the south had exited to Thailand from places such as Pakse (in the southern province of Champassac). Finally, there were just the seven of us (out of the last group of 41) waiting in Vientiane at the OB House in That Luang. Seats in outgoing Thai Airways flights had long waiting lists as more and more residents wanted to leave. The morning of May 29, 1975, **Ato (Paglinawan)**, OB travel officer) announced that we got our bookings. Time to leave for the airport.

Our belongings had been packed to leave at a mo-



ment’s notice. Only one luggage to a person was the order. Out on the street an open top army truck was waiting. I, Ato, accountant **Rey Yoro**, Dr. **Gil Cabrera**, medical technologists **Val Handog** and **Tomas Madrinan**, architect **Fruto Bingcang** exited the front door, leaving our household stuff, beddings and all, inside. We passed by the OB Hospital to bid goodbye to our Lao staff. Sad, silent faces. *Sok dee, pai dee*. Farewell, good luck, they said. They knew this day was coming. We had worked together for so long.

Meeting My Former Refugees

By Rabieb Vilayhong-Roy

Rabieb, a 1965 graduate of the OB School of Nursing in Vientiane, fled Laos in 1975, on a canoe, across the Mekong river to Thailand, clutching her four-year old daughter and a 5-1/2 year old son. After a stay in a refugee camp, they were resettled in 1976 in Chicago, Illinois, USA. She worked as a nursing aide and then was hired by the Illinois Department of Public Health’s Refugee Program. In 1985, she was sent to report on conditions at the Panat Nikhom refugee camp, 120 kms. southeast of Bangkok, where Lao, Hmong and Vietnamese were awaiting resettlement. Here are excerpts from her report. Rabieb passed away on April 27, 2011. She joined former nursing classmates at our 2004 Mekong Circle reunion in Chicago.

Their faces, men, women and children, were very unhappy. Almost all who came to me mentioned suicide. They complained of insufficient food and water. Many of the children look under-



nourished. They are having trouble coping with anxiety, depression, stress. The situation of the refugees haunts me constantly so much I almost wish I had not come back to see their living conditions. I know that few will be accepted by other countries and they will probably never be able to go back home.

I made the trip to Thailand to also visit my family whom I had not seen for ten years. On April 10, 1985, I went to Nongkhai, the Thai border town across from Vientiane. I was so close to my homeland but it hurt me deeply to see it and not be able to go there. I saw my tears dropping. Finally I turned my back and told myself that there was nothing I could do about this. I renewed my vow to make as good a life as I can for myself and my children.

Missing: A Heap of Research Papers Somewhere

Volunteers accepted by Operation Brotherhood (OB) to serve in Laos sign a seven-page Contract of Service Grant, a legal-sized document that defines the standard hiring language -- duties, compensation, sick leave, termination, and so forth. Then on page 6, under “Obligations of Grantee” it says:

“d) Term Paper – The Grantee shall submit before the end of his/her term...a paper on some particular aspects of the people therein. Within three months from arrival, the title of the term paper and an outline of the study shall be submitted for approval to the Grantee’s immediate superior. The term paper shall, upon completion, be submitted at anytime before the one year period of this service grant expires...”

More than 600 Filipinos signed up for the renewable two-year term contract over the 18 years that OB served in Laos. Some stayed a year or less; others continuously for that entire period from 1957 to 1975. At any one time, there were about 110 of them on the ground.

Almost all held college degrees in medicine, engineering, nursing, business, social

work, education, agriculture and other skills applicable to administering a development assistance project. For that was what they had signed up for – to apply what they knew to improve the lives of a poor Asian country, newly emerging from colonial rule, in the grip of a civil war and sorely lacking these skills.

“OB is an experience by which each and everyone of us will realize how important everyone of us is, how all of us are useless unless we share what we know, and learn from others what there is so much to learn,” said **Oscar Arellano** in 1964, OB founder and president. Hence the term paper was some sort of technology transfer mandate. Go and do your thing, then come back and tell us what you learned.

Surely, so much talent from so many spread over so long must have produced gems of scholarship. But alas, most cannot be found. OB’s records have gone missing since it terminated its operations in 1975 and moved its files to Manila from Vientiane. A precious few term papers have somehow turned up in surprising places. At Cornell University in Ithaca, 230 miles north of New York, its library lists “A Brief Survey of Agriculture in Attopeu”, a 24-page study written in 1965 by OB agriculturist **Agapito Gonzalvo**. The library is also the repository of a 12-page “A Brief Survey of Agriculture in Sayaboury” done by another OB agriculturist **Anacleto Paras** in 1966.

In 1960, a multi-disciplinary team of public health nurses, nutritionists and social workers compiled an 18-page manual of village practices in four provinces, covering pregnancy, birth, child care, food, marriages. A copy of the document – “Health and Other Belief and Practices in Laos” -- can be accessed online from the University of Wisconsin’s SEAIT archival collection in Madison, Wisconsin, USA. Did the ten collaborators of this study submit it as a group fulfillment of the term paper contract? See an excerpt in our September 2020 issue where they listed local beliefs about child birth.

In another collaborative effort, community development workers **Asila Palma**, **Luzbella Ramirez**, and **Josephine Flores** pooled their experiences into a village worker manual. In 1965, 23 Lao villagers in three provinces -- Sedone, Attopeu and Sayaboury – completed a six-to-nine month training in OB stations at these places. Basic skills were taught in

medical aid, public health and agriculture. We cannot trace the final disposition of the manual.

One medical study was published in the December 1964 issue of the Philippine Medical Association. To determine the incidence of urinary stones among children in four provinces, Dr. **Reynaldo Vito** gathered data from 112 patients. He discussed the “probable causes of urinary stone formations, namely, diet, water, infection, disturbance of calcium metabolism and hereditary tendencies.” He concluded that the incidence of urinary stone formations seems “very common and almost endemic in various villages in southern Laos.”

Nutritionist **Erlinda Masibay**, while assigned in OB’s Sayaboury and Ban Houie Sai outposts in 1973, did a study of the Lao residents’ dietary practices. Published in the August 1973 issue of our “The Volunteer” newsletter, she noted that “although Lao villagers do not get nutritionally adequate or balanced meals, they appear strong and healthy outwardly. But in times of sickness, the long years of insufficient food intake take its toll. The Lao’s three basic (daily) meals are composed of almost, if not all, of the needed food nutrients (but) the serving portions are not enough to meet the daily caloric requirements of the individual. Thus malnutrition and undernourishment result.”

In nine issues in 1965 of our “Balitang Laos” bimonthly newsletter published in Vientiane from 1964 to 1966, we ran a series on “The Festivals of Laos”. In



chronological order beginning with Mak-abouxa in February to the grandest of all the That Luang in November, the series described the Buddhist rituals associated with the nine celebrations. The series has been compiled into a booklet and a copy is also available from Cornell University.

Masibay’s “short study” (one and a half-pages) as she called it, is strictly more an abstract rather than a full term paper. The latter (remember those late desperate nights to submit yours by the next morning to your tyrannical Jesuit professor), demands those layers of footnoted citations – “id”, “op cit”, a bibliography and End Notes. But how in pre-industrial, pre-internet, pre-Interlibrary Exchange in the Laos of the 1960s can you manage to do a footnoted term paper? You don’t or cannot. OB artist **Bert Sobrevinas** got around the mandate by sculpting an acacia, life-size, sitting Buddha that was donated to Wat Sisake. And this writer, ducked doing one by instead composing two to three -page features on the cultural markers that make the Lao distinctive. The pieces on the “baci”, the “lamvong”, the “lau-lau”, the “boun”, the “mohlam” and “Portrait of the Lao” were serialized in Balitang Laos issues. No bothersome footnotes. Three of them --the “baci”, the “lamvong” and “Portrait” -- somehow found their digitized versions in the ISEAS library of the National University of Singapore, citing OB as the original source.

Imagine the unmatched wealth of data contained in that roomful of patient records in the OB Vientiane headquarters. Maintained at one time by Medical Records Librarian **Maria “Menchu” Domingo**, they represent, she says, a rich source, not found anywhere else, for term papers or doctoral dissertations...if they can be located.

—J.”Pete” Fuentecilla

There’s one copy of this booklet “Festivals of Laos” in a library of a university in New York. Other OB “term papers” are also found there.

MEKONG

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Mekong Circle International was organized in 1975 in California, USA. Its founding members served as technicians and advisers in education, public health, engineering and development aid. An affiliate Mekong Circle Philippines is based in Manila. Past issues of our News can be accessed from our website www.mekongcircle.org. (Click on "Resources".) Your comments are welcome. Send to fuentecila@aol.com