



JAGUAR FILMS

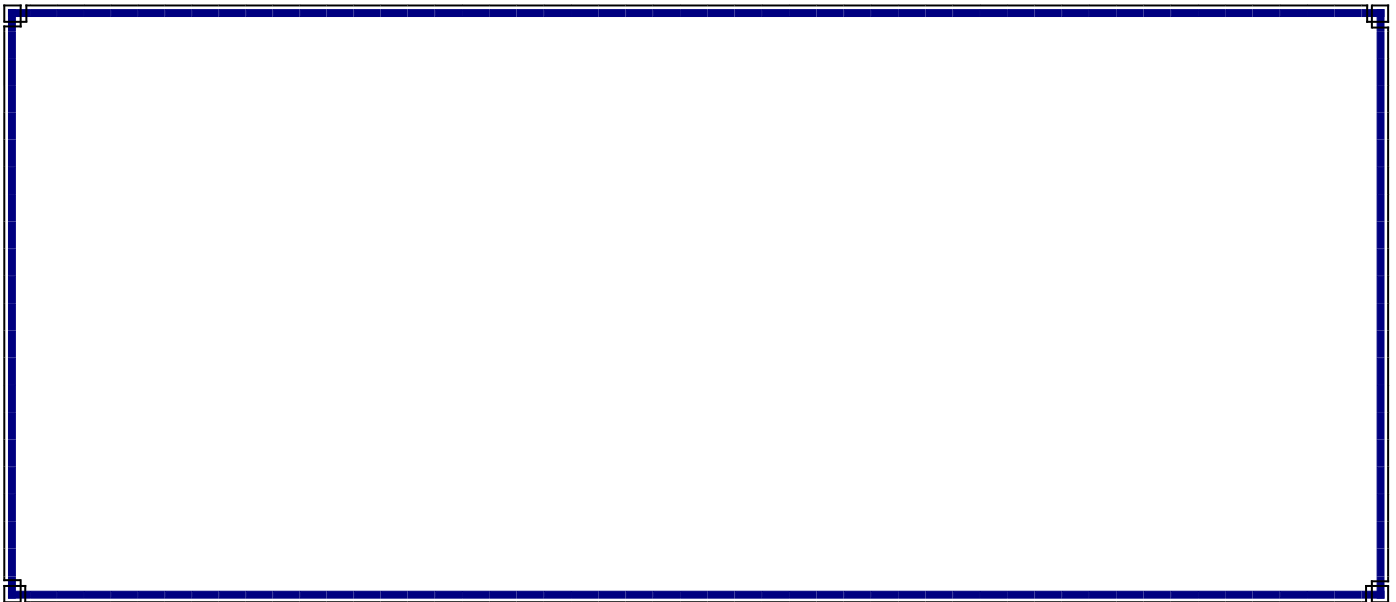
The Hazle Journal

2001 Issue (Revision 5)

It's what people are reading



***"Go to Angkor my friend, to it's ruins and to it's dreams."
- P. Jennerat de Beerski 1924***



Preview— A Sudden Decision

So there I was, sitting in my cube at AOL. The You've Got Pictures project was at its most high stressed time ever. Deadlines loomed like buzzards circling overhead. But there actually was a light at the end of the tunnel. We might make some of our critical dates and I desperately needed a little time away to breathe.

The travel bug was biting me real real *real* bad. Last year I went to see the Iditarod and had the time of my life. I played sports photographer and shot about 30 rolls of film. Since then I had been stockpiling film for the big day that I would take another trip. But where would I go? An African Safari was #1 on my list, but other thoughts were China. I've always wanted to walk along the Great Wall. Israel, Egypt & the pyramids, though the timing was very bad for that. I thought of Paris, because it's Paris. Of course there were numerous other European places from Spain to Germany to Rome.

Africa required at least two weeks, and I only had one. Also there was someplace else that was in the back mind. For years I had heard of the great temple Angkor Wat and the many other temples around it. This sounded like a great destination! I looked up "Angkor Wat" on the web and realized it was in Cambodia. Cambodia! Wait a second! Aren't there a few problems in Cambodia? Just a few minutes of research on the country will bring up words like



"For years I had heard of the great temple Angkor Wat

landmines, Vietnam War, bombings, genocide, Killing Fields.

Yet all the information I found said that Cambodia and primarily the area with the temples, a town called Siem Reap was safe and was slowly becoming the next tourist haven. And in a flash the decision was made. The flight would require going from Los Angeles to Seoul, South Korea, 12 hours, then to Bangkok, Thailand, 5 hours. I would then spend the night in Bangkok and fly to Siem Reap in the morning, which would take about an hour. That's 18 hours of flying ONE way and then the same thing back. The whole vacation was to total 1 week. Way too short, but I was going to do it anyway.

About 3 weeks beforehand I got 5 shots including vaccines for polio, tetanus, yellow fever and typhoid. Two days beforehand I started taking malaria tablets. I left copies of my passport and itinerary at work, with friends and family.

On the night of Tuesday July 26th 2001, I went to bed anticipating the adventure of a lifetime.

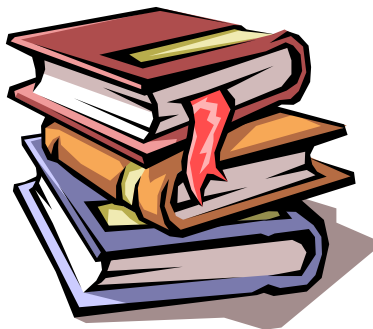
other parts of Cambodia, as well as China, Thailand, Laos and Vietnam. ...

A Brief History Lesson

So what on earth is Angkor Wat? I'm not going to bombard you with pages of history, but I will copy and paste a little from a good web site and then refer you to the rest yourself.

From <http://angkorwat.org/>

"The temples at Angkor are spread out over some 40 miles around the village of Siem Reap, about 192 miles from the Cambodian capital, Phnom Penh. They were built between the eighth and 13th centuries and range from single towers made of bricks to vast stone temple complexes. There are two main sites where the Khmer temples are located. The first is at Roluos which is about 10 miles south east of today's village of Siem Reap, where only a few of the earlier temples were built. This was the first Khmer capital in the Angkor area. In the late ninth century, Yasovarman I moved the capital to the immediate vicinity of Siem Reap. This is a much larger site, where the majority of the Khmer temples are located. It is officially known as the City of Angkor. There are other temples located in the area, some up to 20 miles away from Siem Reap. Khmer temples can also be found in many



ANGKOR WAT:

Regarded as the supreme masterpiece of Khmer architecture, it is a huge pyramid temple built by Suryavarman II between 1113 and 1150. It is surrounded by a moat 570 feet wide and about four miles long. The mass of bas-relief carving is of the highest quality and the most beautifully executed in Angkor."

For more information, see:

<http://www.Cambodian.com/Aindex.htm>

<http://angkorwat.org/>

<http://www.spin.si/robertb/Cambodia/>

Day 1—The Flight

My flight was set to leave at noon on Wednesday Pacific time and after 17 hours, would arrive in Bangkok 11:30PM on Thursday night Bangkok time, which is 19 hours ahead of California. I parked at one of those park and rides close to Glendale where I live and sat back as the bus brought me on the 20-mile trip to LAX.

My goal was to travel as light as possible. I had all my clothing in one garment bag. Two khaki pants, plus the ones I was wearing, 3 long sleeved shirts as well as t-shirts underwear and socks. The heavier part of things was all the medicines, ointments, creams, and pills, capsules, which I was hauling. You'd think I was going to a "third world" country! I also had a well stocked camera bag to hold my camera, lenses, my camcorder, tapes and all the necessary items of a wannabe professional. Also there was an empty duffle bag that would hold miscellaneous things I may pick up along the way. Finally slung around my shoulder was "Wilson" the ½ gallon canteen. (Unless you've seen the movie Castaway, this won't mean much.) Drinking water is everything out there, so I would fill up "Wilson" each morning with bottled water and drink only from that.



minority as a cornucopia of languages can be heard. "So take that you American Imperialist! It isn't your world anymore." In it's own way, that can be very exhilarating, though I could've sworn I just saw Osama Bin Laden milling around the hallway...

The takeoff was quite smooth. I must admit a fatalistic tinge overtook me as I left my house earlier that morning. Would this be the last time I would see it? Would the papers read... you could only imagine the nonsense that ran through my overactive imagination. But the takeoff and first half hour of flying was perfect. It was a huge plane. I don't remember the type. I had a dreaded middle seat yet I didn't feel cramped at all. On my right sat a woman who spoke only Spanish, on my left an Indian man (as in Hindu), with his family in front of me. I pulled out some reading material, of which I brought lots, The Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses 2000 and the Patricia Cornwell novel "**All That Remains**".

Angkor Wat here I come...

"I'm the one with the wallet, why can't they speak like me?"

I arrived at LAX more than an hour and a half before my flight. I sailed through the customs section and then sat in the waiting lounge. The international section of the airport is always fascinating. English is no longer the only language, in fact you become the

Day 2— "Am I Still on the Plane?"

When it actually switched from Wednesday to Thursday is immaterial. The moment I got on the plane I considered it Cambodia time. It was 12 hours from LA to Seoul, South Korea and then 5 hours to Bangkok. During which there was a lot of time to read, watch movies, fall asleep, eat and start over again. The Indian family had requested a Hindu meal and somehow the airline didn't have it. Man were they TICKED! The flight attendant wasn't the most religiously conscious person in the world and kept offering them the beef dinner as a replacement. *Nice going, try to force the guy to eat his ancestors!*



KOREA and say "Excuse me Sir is this your flight?"

The flight to Bangkok was also smooth and I slept through most of it. I whipped through customs in Bangkok showing my passport several more times and getting the cool stamp in it for "The Kingdom of Thailand". I booked a room at the Airport Quality Inn through the Internet and when I went downstairs their airport shuttle was waiting for me! Way cool!

The heat of the Thailand air hit me like a ton of bricks the moment I stepped outside. But within 10 minutes I was checking into the Quality Inn. Even though I had this English to Thai dictionary, that ugly American laziness overtook me. "Hey I'm the one with the wallet, why can't they speak like me?" Fortunately everyone spoke enough English that I was able to make it up to my room in no time.

We landed at Incheon Airport in South Korea where I had a two-hour layover. I felt amazingly spry, or so I thought. I made my way over to the terminal from where I would leave. No one was even around yet. I stretched out on the chairs to catch a quick 15 minutes shut eye...

I woke up, with only one eye darting around. I saw a flight attendant or two at my terminal taking tickets, then I heard "Korean Air Flight blah blah to Bangkok, this is your last call". Another 5 minutes and I would have been out of luck. I leaped up and dashed onto the plane. I mean would it have killed one of the attendants to walk over to the Black man lying on the chairs, IN THE MIDDLE OF SOUTH



The room was a pretty nice one for \$50. Two bedrooms, a living room with couches and a neat little kitchenette. I plopped myself down on the couch and watched CNN. It appeared the world hadn't fallen apart without me, so it was time for bed.

Tomorrow at 11AM I would leave for Siem Reap, Cambodia.

Day 3 “Angkor Wat and the Technicolor Yawn”

I woke up at 7:30 AM feeling surprisingly fresh. Adrenaline is awesome stuff! I got up showered and went downstairs for breakfast. At the buffet table was a sumptuous spread of the standard American fare like eggs, bacon hash browns and sausage. However, there were also many items for a Thai breakfast including noodle soup, rice and a chicken and noodle dish. I filled up my plate and sat down. I stuck my head in a copy of the English Bangkok Times.

Soon I noticed some churning in my stomach. Within a few minutes, it felt like there was a monsoon down there. By the time I was ready to get up from the table, I was nauseous and dizzy. Had some mysterious Thai insect infected me with a “fatal-within-five-minutes” unlisted disease? What a way to go, dead in some foreign low budget hotel. At least I knew I was wearing clean underwear. I leaned against the wall in the elevator and staggered to my room when the door opened.... For those easily grossed out *skip reading everything in italics.*

I took a step or two into the room and BLLGGRRPOOOBU... up came the \$4 I just spent on breakfast. I didn't make it to the bathroom, but I did make it to the sink in the little kitchenette, nearly filling it! I pondered: "Does my stomach really hold that much? Maybe I should CHEW my food next time." Somehow I knew the culprit to be the chicken and noodles. The human body is amazing, it knew that something bad was inside of me and removed the offender. An incredible euphoria came over me. MAN did I feel great. But I felt even better after some mouthwash and toothpaste.

The flight to Siem Reap was smooth and short; I even kept my eyes open for the whole thing! As we came out of the clouds I could see the jungles of Cambodia with clearings of large rice paddies! No sign

of any lost temples though. Customs was a breeze. And then I made my way to the exit. A woman I work with, who visited the area years earlier, told me that when you come out of the airport, you will be

bombarded by taxi drivers who want to give you a ride. Then they will attach themselves to you for the rest of the trip offering to be your driver, your guide and anything else they can do for American \$\$\$.

I wanted to get to my hotel and ask them to recommend a guide and not get hustled right out of the airport.

When I tried to step outside, the airport guard asked me if I needed a taxi. I told him yes and they set one up for me. A young Cambodian named Thy, (pronounced “Tea”) packed my bags in the back of his cab and we were off to Hotel Sofitel. He asked me if I was going to tour the temples. At this point I was thinking,

figured this would scare him off and he would dash back to the airport and get the next person. He thought for a second and said, “OK, I’ll wait.” I

thought “Grrrr. I’ll shake him later.” (All of you who know me too well are thinking, “There you go again Wayne, being soft-hearted and a little weak. Just tell him NO and that you already have a guide.”)

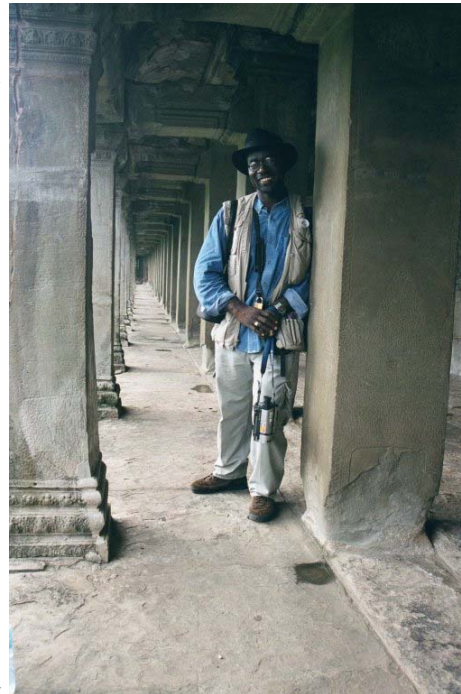
Anyhow, Thy stood with me as I checked into the hotel. At

some point he said something to me about guides, uniforms, the park and other mumbo jumbo. Another bad habit I have is when I can’t understand what someone is saying and I am too irritated to keep asking them to clarify I just answer what I *think* they said. It sounded like something about official guides are required to go to Angkor. I said, “Are you an official guide?” He said, “Yes”. So I told him I would be down in twenty minutes or less. Why wait I thought, I wanted to see Angkor Wat, it was already close to 2PM and I didn’t want to end up wasting any time. I will give the guy a shot for today and if he was bad I would say thanks at the end of the day and move on.

The hotel staff checked me in fairly quickly. Talk about luxury and service! The lobby was beautiful and spacious. One of the women accompanied me and explained all the amenities, while a bellman

(Continued on page 5)

“As we came out of the clouds, I could see the jungles of Cambodia with clearings of large rice paddies!”



Day 3 “Angkor Wat and the Technicolor Yawn” (Cont’d)

(Continued from page 4)

pushed my bags on a cart. From the Internet I knew the hotel would be clean, and relatively nice, but this was a resort! It had several large dining rooms of various themes, a huge pool with an island bar in the center, a whirlpool, a hot tub, sauna, steam room, Thai massage rooms, a weight room, Internet room, and



a small lake! When the door to my room opened, I nearly fainted. It had beautiful hardwood floors, a ceiling fan, there was a large balcony overlooking the pool and courtyard. So much for living in the “Third World”. OK, there was one thing: DON’T DRINK THE TAP WATER!! I had to remember that if I got up in the middle of the night to go to the bathroom.

I did feel a bit guilty surrounding myself in all this luxury after having driven past impoverished people. I felt like the colonial imperialist Europeans in those movies like “Out of Africa”, who sit around and drink tea while a “native person” fans them and peels them a few grapes. But enough soul searching, I was here to have a good time. I grabbed my camera bag, filled Wilson with three bottles of complimentary bottled water, grabbed my trusty Indy hat and ran down to meet Thy.

Thy and I drove to the checkpoint, where I needed to buy a 3-day pass for seeing the ruins. In less than 10 minutes we were approaching the great Angkor Wat. Then Thy began a sentence with “Remember what I was saying to you earlier?” UH OH... It turns out he was trying to tell me before that he wasn’t wearing his uniform and that without it he couldn’t go to Angkor Wat, but could only go to some of the smaller temples and that tomorrow we would do Angkor. Well my heart was stuck on seeing Angkor that day. He said it would take him about 15 – 20 minutes to drive home and return with his uniform. I said I would get out and take some outside pictures while he did this. (“OK Wayne, don’t start worrying, you’re going to have a good time.”) Thy let me off at a spot where I could

shoot some pictures, and I told him I would walk closer to the temple and meet him right at the entrance.

mosquitoes that would descend upon me any second now. As I carried around my twenty pounds of photographic equipment, and a half-gallon of water, while wearing a thick denim shirt, a photojournalist vest, and a black felt hat, it occurred to me it was *ten thousand* degrees out here!

Thy came back within a few minutes wearing a uniform and we began our adventure. Lest you think all you are going to read about is me whining, what I would see in the next few minutes alone would make the entire vacation worth it. Angkor Wat is beyond belief! For several hours we walked through hallways and labyrinths with amazing carvings and statues. We climbed steep ancient stairways. I spent most of the time with my jaw dropped to the ground in awe of what man can achieve. Within a few minutes I found myself feeling incredibly comfortable with Thy, his knowledge was excellent. He had a great sense of humor and a pleasing way about him. I could allow myself to relax and enjoy the splendor. And that is just what I did.

Monks in bright orange robes observed us in silence. Devout worshippers prostrated themselves before statues of Buddha as the pleasant aroma of incense permeated the air. I tried to imagine the scene nearly a thousand years ago as the ancient Khmer people moved huge sandstone blocks from a quarry many miles away and then somehow without cranes and other machinery, hoisted them up on top of

each other. For thirty-seven years they did this until the great temple was completed. Then I thought about the centuries of wind, rain and storm that it withstood.

After several hours we went to a hill a few kilometers away. When we climbed up to the top, there was a great view of Angkor Wat peaking out of the jungles. I gulped down all the water I had and bought more. The thought of going to the bathroom didn’t even occurring to my body. It was losing so much liquid through sweat that there was no chance it was going to let anything else go. We sat on some stones with other tourists and watched as the sun slowly started to set. I definitely was not in Kansas anymore.

Thy took me back to my hotel. Tomorrow we would start at 8:30AM for a full day of temple touring. I walked the hotel ground for a few minutes, but as it started to get dark the crickets came out, big HUGE ones. Lizards also scurried everywhere. Bullfrogs croaked in the grass. Resort or not I was in the jungle. Somehow I envisioned the Israelites and the ten plagues on Egypt. I went back to my room and filled up the whirlpool bath and thought about tomorrow.

Even from the outside Angkor Wat is a splendor of human achievement. I walked along the edges of the moat that surrounds it. I cringed in terror anticipating the legions of malaria carrying

“I cringed in terror anticipating the legions of malaria carrying mosquitoes that would descend upon me any second now.”

Day 4—"The Peaceful Journey"

The fourth day naturally began with a different feel to it. I was waking up in Cambodia! There were no big unknowns, nothing to be anxious over. I would not be flying today. I was in a beautiful hotel. The temples were fifteen minutes away. My guide was great.

I got up at a decent time and headed for the SUMPTOUS breakfast buffet. I loaded up on food and liquids. The service was excellent. This was the low season so it seemed like there were ten workers for every customer. Every time I put my coffee cup down it was refilled.

Not only was my attitude more relaxed, but so was my clothing. Gone was the denim shirt, a simple Hanes undershirt would suffice. I didn't recall a single mosquito yesterday. I watched in envy as I saw plenty of people in T-shirts and shorts. No heavy camera bag was needed. I just filled my vest with a dozen rolls of film, slung my camera across one shoulder and my camcorder across the other, filled Wilson with water, and headed out to meet Thy.

"Gone was the denim shirt, a simple Hanes T-shirt would suffice."

stone. After this we hiked around to numerous sites within walking distance including, the Terrace of the Leper King, The Terrace of the Elephants, Prah Rup, Baphoun and many other names which will mean nothing to you. Words of description won't do much. Pictures give you a sense of it, but you really just have to be there.

At lunchtime, Thy took me back to the hotel, where I filled up on food, showered, and napped. I also washed my sweaty t-shirt and hung it out to dry on the balcony. (I know, very ghetto). I took out a fresh t-shirt for the afternoon.

We picked up again early afternoon. We went to Prasat Kravan, Srah Srang, Banty Kdei and Ta Prohm.



I made my way back to the hotel, I dodged all the creepy crawlies, walking across the back courtyards with my head covered

and went back to my room. Sleep came quickly and peacefully.



Thy told me about a Cambodian Dance show that night that I could go to see. There was a show at the Grand Hotel D'Angkor, the oldest and most expensive hotel in Siem Reap. The show would be around \$40.

Thy said he could take me to one that was \$20 and included a buffet dinner. I was feeling adventurous and always appreciate a bargain so I went to Thy's show. It was wonderful. It was an outdoor stage and eatery.

In the morning we would go to Angkor Thom, the capital of the ancient Khmer Empire. The most famous part of this area is Bayon, the temple with over 200 faces carved in



Day 5—"The Last Temple Day"

On Sunday morning I got up and filled myself with another buffet from the Royal Sofitel. In the morning I would head out to Bantay Srei, "the Citadel of the women". While not as grand as Angkor Wat on a size scale, it is considered the most beautiful. And how else should it be for a temple devoted to women?

The ride out there was an extra 20 minutes or so, but it was worth it. The temple was made of breathtaking red sandstone. We also made a quick stop at Preah Rup, an ancient crematory. And yes in case you were wondering, to some extent the many many temples were starting to blend together a little... ok a lot.

For lunch, Thy said, instead of my going back to the hotel for their brunch, I should have lunch with him at a local restaurant. Maybe he sensed some apprehension on my face and he promised the restaurant was clean. I thought, "I can't leave this place without having real Cambodian food." So I decided to go for it, while little bottles of Pepto-Bismol danced in my head.

The restaurant was another outdoor place with a covering, in the shadow of Angkor Wat. We broke through the army of kids selling trinkets outside and sat down. I batted some flies away and watched as a stray dog and cat moseyed over to a corner. *This is the clean place right?*

The food turned out to be wonderful, and cheap. I told Thy that I wanted to call my parents and not to pay the \$8.00 per minute at the hotel. He brought me into town and I made a call there.

Siem Reap is a charming little town. The style is French, since Cambodia was once a French colony. I asked Thy to drop me off on the edge of town and I would walk around for an hour or so and then walk back to my hotel.

The hustle and bustle of the town is probably a "real photographer's" dream. I figured I looked enough like one to play the part. I walked the streets snapping pictures of anything that looked interesting. There were pot-holed dirt roads, families of five zipping around on ONE moped, people walking, people working, kids playing in muddy streams of water, cows relieving themselves upstream (UGH!). Guys on mopeds kept stopping and asking if I wanted a ride. I just pointed to my feet and told them that they were my ride.

I went back to the hotel for a quick nap, a change of T-shirts. And finished up the afternoon by seeing Preah Khan, Neak Pean, Ta Som and East Mebon.

As we drove past Angkor Wat, I looked at the great temple with an even greater appreciation for it's architectural splendor. No matter what else happened to me in my life, no one could take away the fact that I had seen it.

On the way home, the trip took a dark turn. We stopped by a supa, which is a small edifice, built as a shrine to honor someone, and usually contained his or her ashes. This supa contained a large pile of skulls. The skulls were of victims of the brutal Khmer Rouge regime which was in power from 1975 – 1979. This was just a precursor for what I would see when I went to Phnom Penh. More than one or two hairs stood up on the back of my neck.

Tonight was going to be my last night at the Sofitel. The bulk of the trip was over, or so I thought... The next seventy-two hours would be a blur of hotel changes and airports with lots of sights in between. So with a little sadness in my heart, I packed my things...



Day 6—“Floating Markets, Silk and Phnom Penh”

Early in the morning I arose and took my suitcases down to the lobby. Thy and I were going to go out to the floating markets in the morning and the silk farm in the afternoon. I had a 4:30PM flight to Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodia. But before all of this, I was going to brave another local eating establishment with Thy. I said goodbye to the workers at the hotel and we jumped in the car and headed to breakfast.

The place we went to for breakfast was definitely a local hangout and not a tourist trap. Men getting ready for work drank Thai noodle soup. That was the food I could recognize! Hash browns and sausage was not going to happen. I drank down my soup (“*Hey that is chicken isn’t it?*”) and nodded my head and smiled, as the locals looked me over.

We headed many miles outside of Siem Reap to the edge of the Tonlé Sap Lake to see the Vietnamese Floating Village. We passed miles and miles of beautiful jungles, hills and farmland. Thy told me that during the rainy season all of the land we were looking at, even the trees would be covered by water. The major bodies of water in Cambodia are the Tonlé Sap Lake and the Mekong River. The Tonlé Sap River connects the Tonlé Sap Lake to the Mekong River. The Tonlé Sap River is perhaps the only river in the world that reverses direction. In the rainy season (mid-May to Early October) the Mekong rises, forcing the Tonlé Sap river to flow into the Tonlé Sap lake. During this time the Tonlé Sap Lake swells from 3000 sq. km to 7500 sq km; it’s maximum depth increases from 2.2m, to more than 10m. During the dry season, the Mekong falls and the waters from the Tonlé Sap River flow back into the Mekong. This process makes the Tonlé Sap Lake one of the richest sources of freshwater fish in the world. It is estimated the lake provides livelihood for 40% of all Cambodians and the fish make up about 60% of their protein intake. (Thank the Lonely Planet Guide to Cambodia.)

After much driving, we the

reached area where our journey would really begin. The Floating Villages are what it sounds like, except more. Houseboats lined the banks of the channel as we headed out towards the lake. Vietnamese immigrants float in when the water level goes down and spend months fishing and living on the banks. When the water level rises, they simply float miles away to the new banks.

We rented a boat, driven by two teenage boys. The boat was a rickety, narrow, long thing, powered by what seemed liked by a



noisy diesel engine. For a few hours we sailed along slowly. People looked at me as I watched them live their lives. People fished, women washed their clothes or dishes in the water, kids played along the muddy banks of the river. There were floating markets, which were simply smaller boats, usually powered by women, filled with fruits, veggies, meats and anything else a person could need. They would ride up to the houseboats and do business. I was thrilled to see a floating school. Elementary aged kids, in uniforms (!) waved at me as we passed each other. The entire ride was a feast for all the senses. Nothing earth shattering happened, there were no ancient temples, it was just people living their lives as they have done for generations. Yet, it was all good.

For lunch we went back to the local place outside Angkor one last time. I finally gave in and bought a t-shirt and a pack of postcards from one of the 10 kids. The others cried “Hey you was supposed to buy from me!”

We then headed for the silk farm. On the outskirts of Siem Reap was a place where they raised silk worms. The tour guide showed me the

entire process from the cocoon, to collecting the silk, to the women working on the looms, to dyeing. Finally they showed them making scarves, bags, blouses and many other items. Gee what a surprise that the tour ended at the gift shop!

I bought a scarf for Mary Ellen and then it was time to head to the airport. I gave Thy a little extra for the day and got his card with his address. I will certainly drop him a line.

The plane lifted off smoothly and forty minutes later I was in Phnom Penh. The airport was more crowded and messy. I made my way outside where

I Assumed that my hotel, the Royal Cambodiana would have a shuttle I could simply hop on and sail to the my quarters. I stepped outside and instantly at least 20 guys were on me asking if I needed a car ride. Quite different from NYC where a Black man could walk around for an hour and not be able to catch a cab.

I called the hotel and they sent a shuttle out. The streets of Phnom Penh were a thousand times more hectic than Siem Reap. Mopeds and bicycles moved recklessly in and out between cars and trucks. Check-in was a flash and once again my room was nice, though this one didn’t have the charm of the colonial style room in Siem Reap. Once again I filled up on the buffet and went back to my room.



Tomorrow was going to be an insane day. On my “to see list” were, the local Kingdom Hall of Jehovah’s Witnesses, the Royal Palace, the National Museum, the Genocide Museum and the Killing Fields. Then I would top this off with a 6PM flight to Bangkok, Thailand. WHEW! I would need my beauty sleep...

“The entire ride was a feast for the senses.”

Day 7— “Rain, Christian Love & Genocide”

On this day I rose knowing that I had no guide, that my destiny was completely my own. Rather than being scared, I was thrilled. I arranged with the hotel to not need to check out until 4PM. I packed up my maps of Phnom Penh, lots of film and filled up Wilson with bottled water and walked outside the hotel. Somehow I was going to get to the Kingdom Hall.

As soon as I hit the curb, a teenager pulled up on a moped and asked if I wanted a ride. I showed him the address and jumped on the back. There I was riding through the streets of Phnom Penh, not knowing where I was going, being ridden by someone I didn't know, who spoke no English, weaving in and out of traffic on a moped with NO HELMET, on streets with no lines on the road in order to help traffic, in a country with medieval healthcare (at best) and yet I never felt more alive!

Within a few minutes we came to a stop and there it was, a beautiful clean building amid the crowded structures, the Kingdom Hall stood out like a beacon. As I arrived, a group was preparing to go out in the door-to-door ministry, just like we do here in America. But quite unlike America, everyone, *even the women with skirts*, sat on mopeds! I was thrilled to see my fellow Witnesses heading out to preach and they were excited to meet me, though I must have been a curious sight with my small scruffy beard, vest, camcorder and camera. I shot footage as the small group rode off. Rain had just start to come down again.

I went inside with Shawn Hubner, an Australian brother who along with his wife moved to Cambodia 8 years earlier as missionaries. On the property, there was a missionary home that housed about 8 as well as a Kingdom Hall that could seat almost 100. They told me that there would be a meeting at noon, in Cambodian. I said I would come back to hear it.

I rode with one of the brothers,

named Grant to the Bethel home, which was a few miles away on the other side of town. As we rode along, all concepts of pavement disappeared. It was nothing but rough bumpy dirt roads, with potholes the size of Volkswagens. The newly established Bethel home was beautiful. Exquisite tiles covered every floor. I met the brothers who do the translation at the facility. At this time they don't do any printing there. The Japanese branch prints the Watchtower and Awake! which comes out once a month. The work is really just starting there; we need to give them a few years. They do have their work cut out for them since the country is 95% Buddhist. However, Jehovah can open any door he chooses.



While the area the Bethel home was in didn't look so great, the brothers said it was pretty safe. Though they did say when they first

got the building, they put up barbed wire on top of the wall. When they got up the next morning the barbed wire was gone!

Grant was kind enough to take me to the Toul Sleng, the Genocidal Museum of Cambodia. This is where the trip would turn dark, very very dark. This part of the trip was important to me, yet I needed to steel my nerves for what was to come. In Siem Reap, Thy talked about the Khmer Rouge and their effect on Cambodia. His parents had to flee so as not to be killed. The little supa of skulls was nothing compared to what I would see in the next hour or so.

(Brief history lesson coming...)

Many people don't realize how much Cambodia was affected by the Vietnam War. On April 30th 1970 US and Vietnamese forces invaded Cambodia to rout some 40, 000 Viet Cong and North Vietnamese troops (Communists) who were using Cambodia as a base to overthrow South Vietnam (US Allies) In short the US failed to oust Communism and on April 17th 1975, two weeks before

the fall of Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City) in Vietnam, Phnom Penh surrendered to the dominant Communist group, the Khmer Rouge. People cheered in the streets as the victorious Khmer Rouge rode through the streets. Finally the fighting would end and Cambodia would be peaceful. Little did they know the nightmare was just beginning...

**“...the Kingdom Hall
stood out like a
beacon**

Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge wanted to transform Cambodian society into a, peasant dominated, farming society. (Think

Mao Tse Tung and China.) Within two weeks of taking power, the Khmer Rouge forced everyone in the capital and other towns, and we do mean EVERYONE, to march out of the towns to the fields to work 12 to 16 hours a day working in the fields. Any disobedience meant being killed immediately. The start of Khmer Rouge rule was called “Year Zero”. Currency was abolished, postal services stopped. Anyone perceived as an enemy of the regime was tortured and killed. This included previous politicians, any “intellectuals” i.e. people who could think outside what they wanted you to think. If you wore glasses you must be an intellectual so you had to die. The fantastic Cambodian dancers and other people relating to their culture and history were murdered. The Khmer Rouge cut off all communication with the outside world. It is estimated that as many as 3 million people died at the hands of the Khmer Rouge whether it was torture and execution or simply being worked to death in what would become known as the Killing Fields. Remember the Cambodian Boat People? This is why they were coming here. For the Cambodian people, the name Adolf Hitler means nothing, the name Pol Pot can make grown men cry.

We drove through the crowded streets of Phnom Penh and there it was, an unassuming plot of land containing a few older worn down buildings. Before 1975, Toul Sleng was a high school. When the Khmer Rouge took over Pol Pot's security forces remade it into Security Prison 21 (S-21). Over 17,000 people were taken to S-21 to be interrogated and tortured. They were then taken to the concentration camp at

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Day 7— “Rain, Christian Love & Genocide” (Cont’d)

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Choeng Ek to be executed.

The first building on the compound was the interrogation building. When the Khmer Rouge fled the city in 1979 and Phnom Penh was freed, a hideously tortured and decomposing body was found in each of the fourteen rooms. Today a photo remains on the wall of each room of the body that was found there. After this, there is a room where the walls are covered with photos of victims. Like the Nazis, the Khmer Rouge kept meticulous records. Every prisoner was photographed before and sometimes after being tortured. My heart sank as I looked at photos of disoriented little girls staring straight ahead. What could they possibly have done to deserve this? Knowing that every single person that was photographed was killed makes the weight of the room unbearable.

I could go on with further descriptions, but you probably couldn't take reading, nor could I take writing it. I shivered as Grant and I drove away from Toul Sleng. I believe that we need to learn the most horrible parts of human history so that we don't forget the victims. **Man's ability to be inhuman is hard to comprehend.** Only a world run by God will keep this from happening again and again. I was then in the mood for something positive.

We went back to the Kingdom Hall and I got to sit in on a meeting in Cambodian. They covered the book, “You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth”. Shawn Hubner conducted the study. Imagine an Aussie speaking in Cambodian. I couldn't understand a word, but I could see happiness on their faces as they read and learned from the Bible. Some of the very people in this room survived the dread of the Khmer Rouge

and now they had a hope for a better life based on Jehovah's promises in the Bible! I felt a great sense of warmth sitting with my Christian Brothers from around the world. I could speak very little with most of them, but sometimes there are things beyond words. Here I was thousands of miles away from home, with people I had never seen before and yet there was a bond between us that couldn't be broken. Truly God is Great. The gloom from Toul Sleng was starting to fade.

After more visiting, I said goodbye to the friends. Shawn hailed another moped kid and told him to take me to the Royal Palace. I jumped on the back and sailed off as the rain started to pour down. I was really glad that Shawn spoke to this kid, because he knew no English whatsoever. Every once in a while he looked back at me and would say something. I would just say “Royal Palace!” and he would smile and keep going. In my mind I thought, “He

My heart sank as I looked at photos of disoriented little girls staring straight ahead. What could they possibly have done to deserve this?

something that sounded like “HING SOY BAY MAY CHING CHOW.” And then he kept going! The thoughts

raced in my head, “But that must have been it!” Soon I noticed we were actually passing some of the buildings we had passed earlier! I continued my screaming and pointing but we just zipped along, soaking wet in the rain. Of course all my most paranoid thoughts surfaced. Maybe I was being kidnapped, albeit it was the slowest most annoying kidnapping in the world. But I figured out the plan. His job was to ride me around endlessly while his friends hurried up and dug a nice shallow unmarked grave to

throw we in once they had taken my stuff. I readied myself to go into full Bruce Lee/James Bond mode. (Yes my mind really does work this way.)

Of course it dawned on me that there was an easier way to end this nonsense. I grabbed both of his shoulders and I yelled “STOP!”. I didn't care where we were. I wanted to get off. He instantly stopped and gave me a look that said, “*Well why didn't you just say so?*” I gave him a dollar and watched him ride away as I stood in the downpour. After 15 minutes of hiking with my camera and camcorder stuffed under my shirt I reached the Royal Palace. Of course it was the gated complex I had passed. And of course it was closed for lunch. It was now 1:15 and it would reopen at 2PM.

As I stood there in the rain, another moped ride came up to me. This time it was a guy in his fifties. He told me that the palace was closed now. Gee was I glad this genius showed up to state the obvious! He told me he could take me someplace to eat. Oh great another ride. I said “No thanks. I walk!” He then said the magic words, “For free, I take you for free!” Two seconds later we were zipping down the street. He dropped me off at a restaurant a few miles away. The road ran alongside a river I assumed was the Mekong, but I really didn't care at that moment. The restaurant was on the second floor of this building. I climbed up the steps and listened to the sound of water

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does know where it is doesn't he?” That would be like living in D.C. and not knowing where the White House is. Yet we continued to ride and ride AND RIDE. We would pass building after building. I would scream out “Royal Palace!?!?” at any big building we passed. He would look back and smile and keep riding.

Eventually we were passing by an area with several buildings surrounded by large gates. Something in my mind made me think this could be it. Perhaps it was the picture of the King and Queen on top of one of the gates, the Royal Guards standing out front, or the general ROYAL, PALATIAL look of all the buildings. I screamed at the top of my lungs while pointing, “ROYAL PALACE! ROYAL PALACE! ROYAL PALACE!!!” He merely looked back at me smiling and uttering

Day 7— “Rain, Christian Love & Genocide” (Cont’d)

(Continued from page 10)
gushing out of my shoes.

The restaurant was a very cool open kind of place. How do I describe it? It had the feel of an outdoor café, except with a roof, real floors and everything else. I sat on a stool overlooking the river and ordered lunch. I dried off my photo equipment while I waited. As I sat there, a cool sensation overtook me. I felt like a Vietnam War correspondent, living by my wits, running around with my camera in pursuit of “the big story”. *Would you believe that this was actually the coolest moment of the entire trip?* Then again maybe it was just temporary insanity or dementia. What was that joke the comedian made about crawling across the desert and finding a Saltine cracker and it being the greatest thing in the world?

When I was ready to leave and go back to the palace, the older gentleman who rode me here was gone. Another kid asked me if I wanted a ride. This time I knew where the palace was, and it had stopped raining, so I was like “Bring it on!” In five minutes he dropped me off at the palace. He also said he would wait until I was ready to leave and bring me to my hotel. Jobs are scarce in Cambodia and wages are low. Most jobs pay like a dollar a day, so if I gave this guy a dollar or two to bring me around he didn’t need to do anything else for the



day.

Anyway, the Royal Palace was worth the visit. One thing that is consistent in any country is that no matter how impoverished the people are, the King will always bathe himself in luxury. In one building, called the Silver Pagoda the floor is covered with over 5000 silver tiles each weighing 1 kilo. It is also has a 90 kg solid gold Buddha made in 1907. It seemed that all the wealth of Cambodia was concentrated in this one spot. It’s good to be a king...

My rider was dutifully waiting outside and got me back to the hotel in no time. I packed my things and was checked out by 4:05. My flight wasn’t until 6PM. I was advised not to bother going to the Cheung Ek Killing Fields. It was several miles outside of the city, would take a long time

to get to, and there was nothing to see, the graves had been dug up and it was pretty much just an open plot of land. However, I had the time and I thought, I’m here in Cambodia, I should just see it.

So I got a taxi, not a moped, since I had the suitcases, and told the driver, Killing Fields and then the airport. The road leading out of town was narrow, bumpy and crowded. The moving was very very slow. As we

bounced along, kicking up dirt, a sickening dread started to creep up

from the pit of my stomach. I imagined people being marched down this road, after being tortured, heading to their doom. There was nowhere to run to.

“...this place was anything but peaceful... it was a wretched, violent memorial to man’s barbarity

Finally we arrived. My driver said he would wait outside while I went in. (I would sure be in deep doggy-doo if just drove off with my stuff! I kept my passport with me.)

This time the kids weren’t bothering to try to sell postcards. They just held out their hands for money, looking very sad. I made my way past them and then I saw it, a couple of acres of a peaceful looking grassy field. Across the field were several dozens open pits. A sign next to each pit showed how many bodies were found there, 300 here, 450 women and children there, 1000 here. Then I realized this place was anything but peaceful, the sound of thousands of voices crying out in agony reverberated through my head. I saw



the peaceful “park” for what it was, a wretched and violent memorial to man’s barbarity. In the middle of the pits was large a stupa

containing **thousands** of skulls recovered from the area. Despite the extreme heat, my skin was cold and clammy. The Cambodians say, “Hitler went to war against his enemies, Pol Pot went to war against his own people.”

My driver was waiting dutifully when I came back out. I was so glad he didn’t insist on trying to talk to me as we drove to the airport. I just wasn’t in the mood.

The flight to Bangkok was short and smooth. I was back at the Airport Quality Inn of Bangkok. Tomorrow I would do one of those guided city tours and would fly out at midnight for the five-hour trip to Seoul, South Korea. I would have a seven-hour layover in Seoul and then take the twelve-hour flight to L.A. So whatever clothes I put on tomorrow would likely stay on for the next two days.

That photojournalist vest was getting a little funky...

Day 8— “A Taste of Bangkok”

Despite my wonderful day in Phnom Penh on my own I decided to be lazy and do the tourist thing in Bangkok and do one of those all day guided city tour things. My flight wasn't until midnight, so I really had *all day*. One last time I had the breakfast buffet here. This time I steered clear of the Thai food. Hash browns, bacon and orange juice were enough.

I went upstairs and rearranged and packed my suitcases for the last time. Since the hotel was close to the airport, and far from downtown, I would do the touring downtown, as long as possible, and then return to the hotel as late as possible and then go right to the airport.

At 8ish, my driver and guide were arrived to take me downtown. We went to see the Grand Palace of the King and Queen of Thailand. The Royal Palace in Cambodia was a grass hut compared to this one. The highlight here was the Temple of the Emerald Buddha also called Wat Phra Keo. It is regarded by Thais as the most sacred of all Buddha images and is believed to guarantee the independence and prosperity of the nation.

(More history...)It first appears in history when it was discovered in Chiang Rai in 1436. Legend goes that it was encased in a painted plaster outer covering, which was damaged in a storm, revealing the splendor inside. Carved from a solid block of jadeite it was seized by the Laos in the mid 16th century and taken to Vientiane. During the campaigns of King Taksin in the late 18th century his generals brought most of present day Laos under their command. General Chakri, later to become Rama I, triumphantly returned the Emerald Buddha to the then Thai capital at Thonburi on the west bank of Bangkok. Rama I had two robes made for the Emerald Buddha, a golden diamond-studded tunic for the hot season and a gilded robe flecked with blue for the rainy season. Later Rama III added a robe of enamel-coated solid gold for the cool season.

No photography is allowed inside the temple. You must dress respectfully, remove head covering and never show the sole of your feet to the Buddha. So when you come in and sit on the floor, curl your feet behind you.

In general the grounds of the Grand Palace was breathtaking. The whole area gleamed from the sun reflecting off the gold covered roofs and statues.

We then rented a boat and cruised down the Chao Phraya River, considered the lifeline of Bangkok. In general, I found Bangkok crowded and messy.



After this the tour guide did that annoying thing where they bring you by a bunch of shops where you just might be interested in buying something. Of course the tour companies are getting kickbacks from these various stores. For the most part I resisted buying anything, though I did buy Mary Ellen sapphire earrings. Bangkok is also

famous for its clothing stores. For men, you can go to a shop in the morning, pick out material, get measured, and by the end of that day have a complete, tailor made suit and shirt delivered to your hotel! After haggling with one of the salesmen for an hour, I got measured and ordered a jacket, two vests, two pairs of pants and two shirts.

By the time this was done it was around 4ish, I had eight more hours before my flight, but I felt I had had enough of people try to milk money out of me. I asked to get taken back to the hotel and said goodbye to the guides. Now what would I do? I wasn't going to catch a bus back downtown. It was too far. Maybe I should have just told the guides to leave me in downtown Bangkok and I would find my way back, but it was too late for that. The hotel was in a not so interesting area. You know what those seedy areas around airports can be like. I asked the concierge at the front desk for a local restaurant I could eat at. He told me there was one call Mum-Say-Bai's and he gave me walking directions. So, camera in hand, I hit the streets.

Once again, I got more pleasure in

walking through the streets and being on my own than anything else. The community was poor, and a few inches from being filthy, and yet this was how people lived. It didn't have the charm of Siem Reap, but somehow in the mass of dilapidated houses, weird things being cooked out on the sidewalk, mopeds zipping back and forth and people staring at me, it was a good time.

I finally arrived at Mum-Say-Bai's. It was only 10 minutes from the hotel, but I was enjoying my photography tour. Once again it was a simple place with a covering on the outside, but it was the cleanest thing I had seen in an hour of walking. At this point if there was any bug to be gotten, I already had it. I was feeling invincible and so I dug into my beef and garlic over rice dish. The owner came out and sat with me towards the end of the meal and we had a conversation that consisted of a few English words and lots of pantomime, it was like a scene from *Dances with Wolves*.

The time now was 7ish, I went back to the hotel and got a fresh shirt and hung out for a few hours. Then they took me to the airport where I did even MORE hanging out and reading. I was *finishing*

my *second* Patricia Cornwell novel, “**Cruel and Unusual**”. As I waited, the delivery guy showed up from the suit store with the clothing that I ordered. I looked in the suit bag and it was all there. I wouldn't be able to try it on till I got home.

At a little before midnight I boarded the plane, now headed for Korea. Would I have the energy to leave the airport while in Korea or would I just sleep for seven hours on a chair? I bid adieu to Thailand as the plane rose. I wasn't overly thrilled with what I saw, but maybe one day I could come back and give it a fair chance.

I took a deep breath. Man this vest really really *really really* needs to be washed...



Day 8—"A Taste of Bangkok" (Cont'd)



Day 9—"Seoul, The Day That Went Backwards, Home"

I slept on the flight from Bangkok to Seoul. When we landed it was Thursday 7:30 AM Seoul time and amazingly I was raring to go. The funny thing is that I would leave Seoul at about 3PM their time, fly for 12 hours and reach LA at 10:30AM the same day! Time was actually going backwards as I flew. So would today be like some sort've weird Back to the Future day, where anything I did really wouldn't count since time was going backwards? (Yes, waaaay too many movies!)

When the plane touched down, I was ready to see Korea. My big bags were checked all the way through to LA, so I just needed to find the place to check my suits and photo bag where they could be held till I got back. I packed my things onto a cart and walked around Incheon Airport. Information told me where the bag check service was. Naturally it was at the furthest opposite end of the airport! So I made it to the baggage check and put special tags on the items I was leaving. All I would need was my cameras and Wilson the canteen. "Hey where is..." I looked frantically in my pile of things. There was no sign of Wilson! Now at this moment I wanted to run madly around the airport screaming "Wilson!!!!!!", but I fought the power. Somehow I hoped that it would turn up in lost and found when I came back. I had a bus to downtown Seoul to catch.

I had decided I would see the Changdeokkung Palace. I might as well finish up this Royal Palace kick I was on. It took about 45 minutes to get into Seoul. As the bus rode along, the rain picked up. By the time the bus dropped me at my stop, it was pouring. How can this keep happening? I was tempted just to get on the next bus back to the airport, but I had come too far. I ducked into a drug store and did one of the things I hate doing: I bought an umbrella. As I forked over \$7, I thought of the several unused umbrellas sitting in my garage at home, the previous homeowners left them behind. Now wouldn't you know that within five minutes of leaving the drugstore the rain stopped at a bright sun came out? Grrrrrrrr... I didn't care, now that I spent seven bucks, this umbrella was getting used.

Wandering in the rain got me a little disoriented. I stumbled into a Sbarro's Pizza (!)

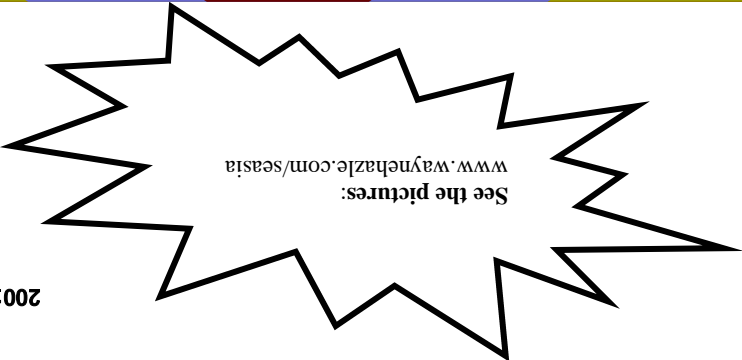
and showed the girl behind the counter the map. I asked her where we were exactly. She looked at the map and giggled in that dizzy, ditzzy way and said "I don't know!" I thought, "Wait a minute, you live here! Don't you know where you are?" LORD WAS I TICKED! I believe that all guys should know how to cook, clean and sew, and all women should know how to read a map. I mean come on, how can you not know how to tell where you are!?!?

Long story short the Palace, was built by Korean kings in the 1405. There is this fascinating history where the Japanese keep invading Korea, burning the palace down and then eventually the Koreans rebuild the palace again. The last time this happened was after WW2. The palace was impressive, but the whole time, my thoughts were on Wilson. I really believed that he would be sitting there in lost and found waiting for me. So I made a beeline for lost and found when I got back to the airport... NOTHING. I retraced all my steps from the morning. There was no sign of a gray and black water bottle. My heart was heavy as I stood in line to go through customs. I looked back over the airport one last time, "Goodbye Wilson, you served me well."



The twelve hours back to LA went very quickly. Though it had only been a few days, I felt like I had lived a lifetime. Somehow I was a different man, though I wasn't quite sure how. I quickly skipped through the LAX customs, and within minutes was on the shuttle back to the park and ride. My car was there, covered by a week's worth of dust. Driving back home on the huge, paved, moped free roads was surreal. I pulled into my driveway. Yes the house was still there! I ran in and did something I had been dying to do for a week.

I ran inside, stuck my head under the faucet and took a long cold drink! It's good to be home...



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The Hazle Journal

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Epilogue

Well it's a month later and all is good. I had to continue taking my anti-malaria medication for a month afterwards to make sure I killed anything I may have caught. It seems pretty certain that I am fine. My thirty-two rolls of film came back fantastic! I will be putting some of them on a website. Look for them on:

<http://www.waynehazle.com/seasia/>

I shot about 3 hours of video, which I edited down to 2. By all means contact me if you are interested in seeing it. The travel bug is in me even stronger than ever. Maybe the Africa Safari will finally happen.... Either way, The Hazle Journal will return.

9/21/01—Since I wrote this newsletter, the world has changed in a big way. On 9/11/01, terrorists hijacked planes and flew the into the Twin Towers and the Pentagon, thousands are assumed dead. Travel will never be the same again. A great fear has overtaken America. When I sent out this letter, I couldn't wait to get on a plane again. Only a few people even got my Osama Bin Laden reference on page 3. Now America is ready for war and all Americans are giving second thought to all of our actions. These are troubling times. May God bless us all...



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